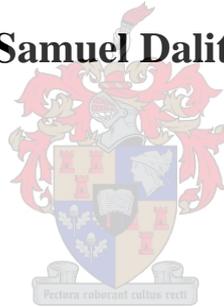


‘Christ, the Head of the Church?’

**Authority, Leadership and Organisational Structure
within the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central
Africa Presbyterian**

By

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**Dissertation presented for the Degree of Doctor of Theology at
Stellenbosch University (South Africa)**

Promoter

Prof. Robert Vosloo

March 2012

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Abstract

This dissertation has as its title: '*Christ, the Head of the Church*': *Authority, Leadership and Organisational Structure within the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian*. This study affirms the statement that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, noting that this statement of faith entails various assumptions: First, the church has only one Head, that is, Jesus Christ. Secondly, only Jesus Christ must be exalted and have the pre-eminence in the church. Thirdly, this prohibits anyone or any governing assembly to lord it over another one or exercise authority other than the authority from Jesus Christ. Fourthly, Christ is more than the head of the department or the head of any organization in whose absence the church would still be able to function.

In line with these points, in this study the thought of Christ being the Head of the church or the confession of the headship of Christ over the church refers to His leadership, highest authority, and position of superiority and sovereignty. There are many references to the concept of the Headship of Christ in the Bible, confessions of faith, catechisms, and church orders. In light hereof, the question is asked whether the affirmation of the Headship of Christ has found sufficient form in the church polity discourse and practice of the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod. The answer to this question requires an ecclesiological study including the critical examination and evaluation of the Church's Confessions, Catechism, Church Order, Constitution, Newsletter, and Minutes of its official meetings. Given this, the dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: The topic and title are introduced, then the research questions and hypothesis. At the heart of this chapter is the question of the understanding of the Nkhoma Synod of Christ's rule through office-bearers, whereas it omits in its Church Order that Christ exercises his reign and dominion through his Word and Spirit. In the discourse on the Church's polity this discrepancy has resulted in a tendency of identifying the power and authority of office-bearers with that of Christ. Consequently, the office-bearers can easily claim to have unchallengeable possession of Christ's power and authority. As a result the authority of Christ's direct rule through His Word and Spirit is excluded and transferred to the office-bearers who constitute or represent the highest ecclesiastical authority.

Chapter 2: The social-political, economical, religious, and ecclesiastical contexts are described, in which the Nkhoma Synod has found itself. Although church polity and church government are subject to what God has revealed in his Word, which is systematically

summarized in the confessions, we conclude that in the Nkhoma Synod church polity and church government are sometimes dictated by the existing social-political, economic, religious, and ecclesiastical milieus.

Chapter 3: Definitions of ‘Reformed church polity’ and ‘church government,’ are offered and then the distinctiveness of Reformed church government is described together with some suggestions for present-day Reformed church polity.

Chapter 4: This chapter studies the Church policy sources of the Nkhoma Synod, i.e. the *Belgic Confessions of Faith*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Canons of Dordt*. The question is asked whether the Nkhoma Synod used these documents as sources from which it developed its church polity.

Chapter 5: This chapter focuses on the sources for the practice of Church government in the Nkhoma Synod. Special attention will be given to the concept of the headship of Christ and how the Church’s understanding of this notion impacted on its church polity discourse.

Chapter 6: Some important church-political developments within the Nkhoma Synod from 1889 to 2007 are discussed, focusing on issues of authority, leadership, and organizational structure. The question is discussed whether and how the concept of the headship of Christ described in the *Zolamulira* negatively influenced the Church’s practice of church government.

Chapter 7 draws conclusions from the rest of the chapters. A call is made for a critical-theological examination and evaluation of the church polity discourse and practice of the Nkhoma Synod in the light of remarks made on the preamble of the *Zolamulira*, as well as in the light of the ideas of John Calvin, the Reformed Symbols of Unity, and other important sources from the Reformed tradition.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Polina Kadammanja-Zeze who has continuously stood by my side all these years of study, to my wonderful mother Christina Sajeni Nabanda, to my father Samuel Dalitso Zeze, my father- and mother-in-law Mr Ernest and Mrs Madeta Kadammanja, to my brother Aubrey Zeze, and to our wonderful daughters Chisomo, Chifuniro, son Zikomo, and to our last-born girl Naomi.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1.The Research Topic

This dissertation has as its title: *‘Christ, the Head of the church’: Authority, Leadership and Organisational Structure within the Nkhoma¹ Synod of the Church of the Central Africa, Presbyterian.*² It shows that our study affirms the statement of faith that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. We note that this statement of faith entails various assumptions: First, the Church has only one Head, that is, Jesus Christ. Secondly, only Jesus Christ must be exalted and have the pre-eminence in the church. Thirdly, this prohibits anyone or any governing assembly to lord it over another one or exercise authority other than the one from Jesus Christ. Fourthly, Christ is more than the head of the department or the head of any organization in whose absence the church would still be able to function.

In line with these points, in this study the thought of Christ being the Head of the church or the confession of the headship of Christ over the church refers to His leadership, highest authority, and position of superiority and sovereignty (cf. Coertzen 2004:91, 93).

There are many references to the concept of Christ’s headship over the Church in the Bible, confessions of faith, catechisms, and church orders. In the New Testament we read that, ‘Christ rules there above heavenly rulers, authorities, powers, lords; He has a title superior to all titles of authority in this world and in the next world: God put all things under Christ’s feet and gave him to the church as a supreme Lord over all things’ (Eph.1:21,22); ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth’ (Mt.28:18); ‘...He is Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev.17:14) and ‘He is the head of his body, the Church...’ (Col.1:18; cf. Eph.5:22-23).³

¹ Lawrence Walter Brown (2004:35) observed that in 1965 the name was still ‘Mkhoma’ Synod, but the change had come when a friend of the late President Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi went to Mkhoma Mission Hospital for treatment. When he got his bill, he crossed out ‘M’ and replaced it with ‘N’, adding a note saying, ‘Nkhoma is the correct spelling’. Because of this note, the Synod changed the spelling of its name.

² The founders of the CCAP, at the very beginning, decided that the Church should be designed as Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian. The idea of placing Presbyterian at the end of the name was intended to emphasize that the ‘Church of Central Africa’ need not to be, or remain only, Presbyterian. By putting Presbyterian at the end it could then more easily be lopped off as other denominations would join.

³ The concept that ‘Christ is the Head of the Church’ as is noted in the main text of this dissertation derives from the New Testament, particularly from the Pauline letters to the Colossians and Ephesians. Some New Testament commentators on the Pauline letters such as J. Lightfoot (1959:198-201) and J.A Robson (1904:43,103) suggest that Paul himself developed this metaphor based on the physiological conception of his time, i.e. the role of the physical head in relationship to the body. In Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman (1998:368) we read: “Perhaps stimulated by reflecting on the function of the physical head in relation to the body, many ancient and biblical writers used the term head as a symbol for leadership.” My use of the concept of the

In the Old Testament, we do not find references of the concept of the Headship of Christ but we read that God is a 'King who rules over all the nations' (Ps.22:28); He is '... a great King who reigns over all the earth' (Ps. 47:2); He is 'the Lord who has established His throne in heaven' and again He is 'King whose Kingdom rules over all' (Ps.103:19).

This dissertation, however, is not an exegetical study of the scriptural passages dealing with the Kingship of God or the headship of Jesus Christ. It rather has an ecclesiological focus and is guided by the way in which proponents of the Reformed tradition engaged questions such as: What does it mean to say that Jesus Christ is 'the head of the church'? What does the headship of Christ over the church imply in matters of church order and church government, daily leadership and practical matters of administration of a church? In particular, the emphasis will be on how the notion of the headship of Christ relates to questions of authority, leadership, and organizational structure within the Nkhoma Synod.

This study involves a critical examination of the official documents of the Nkhoma Synod. Special attention will be given to articles 27-32 of the *Belgic Confession of Faith*, questions/ answers 31, 50, 51, 83 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the appendix of the *Buku La Katekisasi* (pages 279-287), and the preamble of the *Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza*.⁴ How does the idea of Jesus Christ being 'Head of the church' function in these texts? That question will guide our inquiry.

The *Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Canons of Dordt* are the three official confessions of the Nkhoma Synod. In the *Belgic Confession* Jesus Christ is acknowledged as eternal King (article 27), Lord, a universal Bishop (articles 30, 31), Head of the church (articles 29, 31), and Master (article 32). These names are indicative for His highest authority and sovereignty. They denote that not any other person should rule the church or ever assume the position of head of the church (cf. Pauw 1980:384).

The *Heidelberg Catechism* contains references to the concept of the headship of Christ. In question 50 we read: 'Why is added, and He sits at the Right hand of God?' The answer says that Christ ascended into heaven to manifest Himself there as Head of His

headship of Christ relates the concept to the issue of leadership and authority in the church. The focus is not so much on the way the concept of the headship of Christ functions in the Bible, but more on how the Reformed tradition (especially Reformed Ecclesiologists) reappropriated this notion of Christ as the Head of the Church. The work of these theologians is of course directly or indirectly in conversation with the Bible. In this dissertation (which is not an exegetical study), however, the focus is more explicitly on the reception of the concept in Reformed Church Polity documents, particularly those from the Malawian church contexts.

⁴ Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza = Prescriptions: Agreements and Intentions. It refers to rules, resolutions, or advisory decisions.

church, through whom the Father governs all things ...' Question 51 asks, 'What profit is this glory of Christ, our Head, to us?' Answer: 'First, that by His Holy Spirit, He pours out heavenly gifts upon us, his members; and then that by his power He defends and preserves us against all his enemies.'

Considering these articles, we need to make two comments. First, the phrase 'He sits at the right hand of God' points to Christ's existence as well as to the conviction that the Church is a heavenly work performed on earth, rather than just an earthly society of like-minded people. In this understanding it is evident that office-bearers have no authority of themselves except the authority bestowed on them from heaven. Secondly, article 51 says that the Holy Spirit is involved in all the activities in the Church, including its government. One school of thought likes to stress that this means that office-bearers are not primarily representatives of the church members but of Christ. Allan Janssen (2006:143) elaborates:

'The office in the church is given to the congregation. ... The office originates in no way in the congregation but is the self-presentation of God-in-Christ in the congregation. ... The offices come to the church; they do not rise out of the church. They do not represent the church; nor do they represent the faith of the church. They represent Christ.'

Concerning the Holy Spirit, he (2006:145, 147) writes:

'While the offices represent Christ, they do so through the work of the Holy Spirit ... the work of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit ... The Holy Spirit uses the offices in this mediation, this representation. In the use of the offices, the holy Spirit appropriates to us all his treasures in order that we may be united and engrafted into Christ ... and that salvation may be worked out within us sacramentally, culturally, liturgically, confessionally, diaconically, mystically, culturally and politically.'

Given the fact that the Reformed heritage of the Nkhoma Synod resulted in many references to the headship of Christ in its documents, it's important to have a look at its understanding of this central belief. Therefore, we critically examine this notion in the Church Order (*Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza*) of the Nkhoma Synod, particularly its preamble, which stipulates that:

‘Ambuye wathu Yesu Kristu ndiye Mutu wa Eklesia ...Ulamuliro wake wa pa Eklesia uchitika ndi audindo monga abusa, oyang’anira (akuluampingo) ndi atumiki oyikidwira ntchitoyo. ... Audindo achita ulamuliro umenewu mwa misonkhano inayi Msonkhano wa oyang’anira (akuluampingo), Presbiterio, Sinodi ndi Sinodi wa Mkulu’. [Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18). ... His authority is exercised by office-bearers such as ministers, elders and deacons (Acts 6:1-7; Rom. 10:14-17; Philipp. 1:1; Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 1:5 Eph. 4:11; 16). ... These office-bearers exercise the authority in the church through four assemblies namely church council, Presbytery, Synod and General Synod or Assembly].⁵

The preamble says that Christ is acknowledged as Head of the Church and that He governs his Church through office-bearers, who associate with each other in the ecclesiastical assemblies. It fails to say that the Jesus Christ exercises his rule and reign *through his Word and the Holy Spirit* using office-bearers. What the preamble fails to stipulate can be considered a major theological shortfall that may have implications for church leadership and the organizational structure in the Church. One wonders whether this does not lead to problems in the discourse on theology and church polity in the Nkhoma Synod. It seems that leadership and authority of the church office-bearers in the Nkhoma Synod are completely identified with the rule and authority of Christ himself. There is a danger therefore that the leadership and authority of church office-bearers in the Nkhoma Synod can be identified too completely with the rule and authority of Christ because the office-bearers may claim unchallengeable possession of the power and authority of Christ. Consequently, they seem to claim the exclusive right to take into their hands the rule of Christ through His Word and Spirit. Thus they tend to take Christ’s place, by which they practically run the risk of excluding Christ’s authority and rule in the Church. Considering this danger, a Dutch Reformed theologian, Willie Jonker (1965:32) wrote:

‘For this reason Reformers rejected the idea of identity between Christ and the office-bearers as well as the idea that the office-bearers possess any personal authority to govern the church. They contend that the Word of God alone should rule in the church and that office-bearers have no other duty than to administer the Word through which

⁵ Preamble of the Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza, Volume 1, (2006:v)

Christ rules. For this reason they see church government as simply making room for the rule of the Word of God alone ...'

Coertzen (2004:99) concurs with Jonker when he stresses that

'Christ makes use of the Word to rule his church and should the Church in any way depart from the Word, then it no longer has any grounds upon which to stand for witnessing in the world ... The authority with which the Church acts in the world is also linked to the fact that the Church as the body of Jesus Christ is not merely a human association with rules for mutual communication that were drawn by the members.'

Coertzen (2004:103) argues further:

'However, it is by no means an imaginary danger that the church can emphasize its government to such an extent by mean of the Word that there is no room for the work of the Holy Spirit. Should this happen then the danger will be so great that dealing with scripture can become a mere human event.'

The main element of the service of office-bearers in the church is the ministry of the Word and Holy Spirit just like the government of Christ in His church is maintained fully through the Word of and the Holy Spirit. Thus, office-bearers are expected to persuade each other and the congregation from the Word of God, and make decisions after being convinced by the Holy Spirit.

At this point, it should be emphasized that though Jesus Christ is physically not present, He is still present, leading, guiding, directing, and ruling His Church through his Word and Holy Spirit using office-bearers in rapport with the congregation. He has a highest authority and final say in the church by means of His Word and Spirit. For this reason the Church, including particular office-bearers and other members, must listen to Christ and obey him (cf. Rev. 2:7, 11, 29, 3:6, 13, 22).

We observed that *Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza* fails to stipulate that Christ executes His rule and reign through His Word and Spirit. Considering this what is then the

relationship between Christ and church office-bearers? As already, stated, church office-bearers are supposed to be organs or means by or through which Christ govern His church.⁶ From a Reformed South African background J.M. Vorster (2003:35), following Calvin (*Institutes*, IV.VI),⁷ says:

‘Every office-bearer is an instrument in the hands of Christ and is therefore responsible to Christ. There is equality in responsibility and this principle constitutes the equality of the offices. The three offices in the church are also no subordinate to each other.’

Interestingly, in Vorster’s understanding equality in power and authority among the office-bearers is based on the concept of the confession that Jesus is the only Head of the Church as well as on the application that office-bearers are instruments which Christ uses when governing the church. Also from a Reformed South African background, Malan Nel (1980:30) points out:

‘The primary function of the office-bearers is to create both space and channels- and to be channels- for the authority and dominion of Christ. Therefore the office-bearers are above all, servants serving the loving care and the reign of Christ through his Spirit and Word ...’

We have noted the serious problem that the preamble omits the notion that Jesus Christ exercises his reign through his Word and Spirit and implies that the authority of the office-bearers is identical with the authority of Christ and that office-bearers are considered to have unchallengeable power to taken over the rule of Christ, or exclude it. I want to suggest that this problem may only be addressed or avoided or prevented if we accept and emphasize that Jesus Christ only rules the church through his Word and Spirit, using office-bearers as organs. In order to picture the context of my suggestion the study focuses on the headship of Christ over the Church and authority, leadership, and organizational structure within the Nkhoma Synod between 1889 and 2007. Not only the notions of the theologians cited above will be

⁶ Cf. Preamble of Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza

⁷ Throughout this study, we shall use the Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by John T. McNeill and translated by Ford Lewis Battles.

considered, but also those of other Reformed thinkers on Church polity, such as Karl Barth, Louis Berkhof, Idzerd Van Dellen, Martin Monsma and Richard De Ridder.

1.2. Some Ecclesiological Definitions

Three important ecclesiological remarks have to be made. First, the term ‘church and church government’ in this study is to be understood within the Trinitarian context of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The church is the Temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16), the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23; 1Cor. 12:27), and implicitly the Temple of Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:19). Through these and other texts we notice that the Church belongs to the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we say that Christ rules the Church we also mean that the Father and the Holy Spirit rule the church. Where is the Father is, there is the Son and the Holy Spirit; where the Son is, there is God the Father and the Holy Spirit, and where the Holy Spirit is, there is God the Father and the Son. The church belongs to the Triune God. The *Acts and Reports* of the Reformed Ecumenical council of 1968 present the following important comment regarding the relationship between the Triune God and the Church:

‘The church is the church of God the Father i.e. it has its foundation in the divine election. To assert in the ecclesiological field that the God of the Church is and remain God the Father. ... The Church however owes no less the church of God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. ... He gathers the church and so constitutes it. In addition, as the Head, He rules this body by His Word and Spirit. ... The Church is also the church of the Holy Spirit. The Pneumatological aspect is just as good as essential as the theological and Christological aspects. ... Through the Holy Spirit ... Christ gathers his Church. Spirit and Church never exchange places.’⁸

Each Person of the Trinity equally plays an important role in the ministry and church government. Therefore, the church is set in the position of dependence, and communion with each Person as its Sovereign Ruler because the three Persons of the Trinity are inseparable. Addition to this, I want to suggest that church polity discourse resulting from such a Trinitarian view be emphasized and maintained.

⁸ Acts and Reports of the Reformed Ecumenical Council held in 1968, p.224.

In *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Communion Statement* (1998:10) the Church is described as a creation of the Word and the Holy Spirit and that it belongs to God. It further states that ‘the Word and Holy Spirit are inseparable.’ The document (1998:10) also clearly points out that

‘The Almighty God, who calls the Church into being and unites it to himself through his Word and Holy Spirit, is the Triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In its relationship to God, the Church is related to each of these divine Persons in a particular way.’

From this, I draw some ideas that are more general. Saying that Christ rules and reigns the Church through his Word and Holy Spirit means that every Person of the Trinity participates in every aspect of church polity and church government. The rule of Christ includes the reign of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Also, the leadership, authority and sovereignty of Christ, which are exemplified in Christ, the Head of the church, imply that of the Father and the Holy Spirit. No Person of the Trinity is subordinate to the other, though each One is distinct.

My second ecclesiological remark is that ‘church’ and ‘church government’ are to be understood within the context of the Kingdom of God⁹. Jeans S. Stromberg (2001:246) wrote, ‘At the very heart of the Church's vocation in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and raised.’ This leads to questions such as: How is the Church related to the Kingdom of God? Are they essentially the same or distinct? Is there a link between the Kingdom and church government? I have searched for answers in the writings of Snyder, Ladd, Berkhof, Coertzen, Du Plooy and Vorster.

According to Howard A. Snyder (1991:67) a church is a body or an assembly of the worshippers as well as community or a communion of the faithful in heaven and on earth, while the Kingdom of God is a rule or a reign of God both in heaven and on earth. In Snyder’s understanding the Church is not the Kingdom of God, but there is strong connection between the two. Ladd (1994:109) gives his views on the same topic:

⁹ Coertzen (2004:79) suggests that the Kingdom indicates God’s sovereignty, kingship, his sphere of influence, or his subject as well as all that is related to them, covering the entire creation. Where the Kingship of Christ applies something of God’s Kingdom becomes visible. He (2004:81) stresses that ‘the Kingdom is where people bow before the Triune God, confess Jesus Christ’s kingship and live filled with the Holy Spirit in obedience to his Word, there God’s kingdom becomes visible, and God’s royal power and the royal law are maintained.

‘We must now examine the specific relationship between the Kingdom and the Church.... If the dynamic concept of the Kingdom is correct; it is never identified with the Church. The Kingdom is primarily the dynamic reign of kingly rule of God, the sphere in which the rule is experienced. In Biblical idiom, the, the Kingdom is not identified with its subject.’

According to Ladd the ‘Church’ is neither necessarily part of the ‘Kingdom’ nor synonymous to it. However, he (1994:109) is convinced that the mission of the Church is to witness ‘the Kingdom or God’s rulership’. As such both, the Church and the Kingdom of God are linked conceptually and theologically because the Church serves an agent or a channel for the reign of Jesus Christ.

Louis Berkhof (1996:579) takes a step further describing the relationship, which exists between the visible Church and the Kingdom of God on one hand, and between the invisible Church and the Kingdom of God on the other hand. He (1996:579) made the following observation worthy quoting at length:

‘While the Kingdom of God and the invisible Church are in a measure identical, they should nevertheless be fully distinguished. Citizenship in the one and membership in the other are equally determined by regeneration. It is impossible to be in the Kingdom of God without being in the Church as a mystical body of Christ. At the same time, it is possible to make a distinction between the point of view from which believers are called the Kingdom and from which they are called the Church. They constitute the Kingdom in their relation to God in Christ as their Ruler, and a Church in their separateness from the world in devotion to God and in their organic union with one another. As the Church they are called to be God’s instrument in preparing the way for and in introducing, the ideal order of things; and as a Kingdom they represent the initial realization of the ideal order among themselves.’

The key question in Berkhof’s vision is whether the visible Church and the Kingdom of God are identical, because some members of the former are also the members of the latter. Coertzen (2004:81) holds a similar view when he explains that the Church is not equivalent to the Kingdom although there is a connection between the two. He (2004:81) concludes:

‘One could say that the Kingdom also includes the Church. ... The Church is present where these citizens of God’s Kingdom meet, form a community, receive the Gospel of the Kingdom in faith, and share in salvation of the Kingdom’

Berkhof also suggests that Christ is the sovereign ruler of both the Kingdom of God and of the Church. The Church is the instrument of the Kingdom of God. With this perspective the instrumentality of office-bearers in the government of the church is realized and implicitly stated. As regards to the relationship between the visible Church and the Kingdom of God, Berkhof (1996:579) asserted:

‘The visible Church and the Kingdom ... may be identical, to a certain extent. The visible Church may certainly belong to the Kingdom, to be a part of the Kingdom even to be the most important manifestation of the forces of the Kingdom. It partakes the characters of the invisible Church ... as means for realization of the Kingdom of God. ... It is of course subordinate to this as a means to an end. The Kingdom may be broader concept than the Church. It represents the dominion of God in every sphere of human endeavor.’

What comes out strongly from the quotations above is that the visible Church is an important part of the Kingdom (cf. Ladd 1991:11). Thus, a visible church is a means of realization of God’s Kingdom. Therefore, the Church is not the Kingdom, but a means of realizing the rule and reign of God. Berkhof does not, however, relate practically how the visible Church and Kingdom are connected in the rule and reign of Christ.

Du Plooy (1997:179) commented on how the concept of the Kingdom links to church polity:

‘When we take the Kingdom as our point of departure and consider that the organizational life is primarily concerned with the obedience to Christ in his reign as the ‘Head of the Church’, it becomes evident that it embraces more than the organization of the visible, empirical side of the Church. The purpose of the Church is to study in Scripture how Christ can penetrate into the hearts of his children through the administering of the keys of the Kingdom so that the Church can truly become the body of Christ’

Du Plooy's remarks above seem to denote that the Kingdom is the starting point of church polity as a system of governance and as a branch of theology. This suggests that in church government one deals with the rule of Christ and with the Church's obedience to him as her Head. This suggests the reason why some people thinking church polity must also be practice and studies within the context of the Kingdom.

The third ecclesiological remark concerns the question how different churches interpreted the phrase 'Jesus Christ is Head of the Church' in their church polity and church government. Coertzen (1998:15) summarized interpretations of various churches as follows:

'Although all systems of church government admit that Christ is the 'Head of the Church', it has happened in history of the Church and theology that Christ's headship has been interpreted differently; For Rome Christ's Headship means that He manages by means of His deputy on earth, the pope (Code of Law 1983 and canon 331).

Coertzen (1998:15) proceeds to give an interpretation of the renowned first Protestant Reformer:

'Martin Luther also experienced Christ government as real. For him Christ was the exclusive and highly personal Head of his Church, but spiritually, so that only the invisible Church as the body of Christ lives totally from Christ as Head through His life giving Spirit. ... Luther and Lutheranism in fact greatly neglected the visible Church and left its government to the state'.

Having thus described the difference between the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran interpretations, Coertzen (1998:15) goes on to comment on the Collegial system of church government:

'Collegialism went a step further. Like Luther for them Christ is the Head of the invisible Church, while according to them the government of the visible Church is transferred to the hands of the members. .. The Congregationalists transfer the authority in the church to the congregation that primarily exists as an individualistic group of members and secondly exists mutually independent of each other as parishes.'

It is striking to note that all denominations confess and acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the Head of the Church, but they differ as to the way in which Jesus Christ is Head of Church. Coertzen (2004:95) summarizes the differences:

‘Rome substitutes the Pope for Him; Luther limits Him to the invisible Church, while Collegialism and Congregationalism, respectively regard the members and the local congregation as representatives and as a result transfers the sovereignty of the Church to those two bodies’.

Coertzen does not, however, explain how the Scottish Presbyterian system of church government interprets and applies the truth that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. According to Van Wyk (2004:164) Scottish Presbyterianism limits Christ to the invisible and substitutes Him for Highest assembly of the Church. In Coertzen’s observation of the interpretation of Reformed Church government Christ is not substituted for any person or governing assembly (2004:95), ‘The way in which Christ practices his authority and sovereignty over the church is through the ministry of the Word and through the Holy Spirit’. Coertzen’s observation is probably inspired by what the renowned 16th century Reformer, John Calvin (*Institutes* IV, VI, 1) wrote:

‘Now we must speak of the order by which the Lord willed his Church to be governed. He alone should rule and reign in the Church as well as has authority or pre-eminence in it. ... Nevertheless because he does not dwell among us in visible presence (Mt. 26:11), we have said that he uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will as by mouth as sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and honour, but only that through their mouths, he may do his work-just as a workman uses tools to do his work’

We have endeavoured to picture various opinions of different churches about Christ’s headship over the Church. These opinions have had enormous implications on the development of their church polity. They help to discover which interpretation was or is adopted by Nkhoma Synod. They may also help to trace the root cause of the problems related to church polity and church government that occurred in this church.

1.3. Research Question

The CCAP - Nkhoma Synod, previously called Dutch Reformed Mission Church, was founded in Nyasaland (today Malawi) on 28 November 1889. It was established through the missionary enterprise of the Cape Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (Pauw 1980:44). From the DRC, Nkhoma Synod inherited the following three the Reformed confessions: the *Belgic Confession of Faith*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, and the *Canons of Dordt* (cf. Pauw 1980:327,329).¹⁰ Apart from being the doctrinal standards, these Confessions explicitly and implicitly contain theological tenets useful for practicing church order and church government.

In addition, the Nkhoma Synod prepared her own Church Order, called *Zolamulira: Zolangiza ndi Zopangana*, her own Catechism, *Buku La Katekisima*, and her *Constitution*. They were meant to promote order and unity in the Church. This means that if we want to describe the ecclesiology of the Nkhoma Synod we need to examine these documents. However, this needs to be done in the light of the three Reformed confessions mentioned above. In this study, we will pay special attention to the preamble of *Zolamulira etc.*, particularly where it stipulates:

‘Ambuye wathu Yesu Kristu ndiye Mutu wa Eklesia ... Ulamuliro wake wa pa Eklesia uchitika ndi audindo monga abusa, oyang’anira (akuluampingo) ndi atumiki oyikidwira ntchitoyo [‘Our Lord Jesus Christ is the ‘Head of the Church’, his authority is exercised by office-bearers such as ministers, elders and deacons instituted for the service.’]

We already noted that the preamble of the *Zolamulira* fails to indicate, that Christ, whereas being the Head of the Church, exercises his rule and reign through his Word and Spirit. This theological deficiency might have had an implication for discourse on church leadership, organizational structure and church polity within the Nkhoma Synod. Therefore, the main research question that this study attempts to answer is: In what way is what the preamble of *Zolamulira. etc* stipulates that Christ governs his Church through offices bearers (ministers, elder, and deacons) influenced negatively the development of leadership, authority and organizational structure within the Nkhoma Synod? In order to explore the main question the following three sub-questions will be considered:

¹⁰ Article II of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod, 1956

1. What is the point of departure of the discourse on church polity of the Nkhoma Synod regarding the rule of Christ in the Church?
2. In what way has the Nkhoma Synod engaged with the Reformed confessions in its church polity discourse?
3. In its understanding of the concept of the headship of Christ over the Church is the CCAP – Nkhoma Synod more ‘Dutch Reformed’ or ‘more Scottish Presbyterian’?

It will be necessary to consider these questions seriously if we are to assess and evaluate how what is stipulated in preamble of the *Zolamulira*, etc. influenced the discourse on church polity and church government within the Nkhoma Synod.

However, although our main intention is to investigate the impact of what is stated in the Preamble, it is important also to examine the viewpoints of other churches on the same subject. Throughout history, many churches have found it difficult to live under the reality of the direct rule of Christ. Subsequently they have come up with different theories to explain how Christ rules the Church. The Roman Catholic Church takes its point of departure as the rule of Christ through Pope and bishops, whereas other Episcopal churches take as their starting point the rule through bishops (cf. Berkhof 1996:580,581,582). For Lutheran and Anglican Churches Christ’s dominion takes place through the state (cf. Vorster 2003:3). Congregational Churches went further. For them Christ exercises his rule through every member and the government of the Church is transferred into the hands of the members of the congregations (Coertzen 2004:94). Collegial Churches (including Scottish Presbyterians) stress that Christ executes his government through the representatives of church members. In this regard, they are of the opinion that the authority is centred in the ecclesiastical assemblies of presbyters (cf. Van Wyk 2004:167; cf. Berkhof 1996:582).

The Reformed tradition developed a distinct understanding probably due to the profound influence of John Calvin (*Institutes*, IV, VI, 1) who wrote:

‘Why does God need men’s service? Now we must speak of the order by which the Lord willed his Church to be governed. He alone should rule and reign in the Church as well as has authority or pre-eminence in it. ... Nevertheless because He does not dwell among us in visible presence (Mt 26:11), we have said that he uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will as by mouth as sort of delegated work not by transferring to them his right and honour but only that through their mouths, he may do his work-just as a workman uses tools to do his work’

Elsewhere he (*Institutes*, IV.IX.1) wrote:

‘Now it is Christ’s right to preside over all councils and to have no man share his dignity. But I say that He presides only when the whole assembly is governed by His Word and Spirit.’

Calvin’s views on the way Christ rules the Church is reworded by Van Wyk in his summary of the Reformed Churches’ view (2004:165), ‘The Presbyterian-synodical system of church government takes as its departure point the rule of Christ through His Word and Spirit using office-bearers in the visible church’. Coertzen (2004:95) observed as follows:

‘Reformed Church governments also confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Head of his Church. For example article 31 of the *Dutch Confession of Faith* states that Jesus Christ is the universal Superintendent and the only Head of Church, while article 29 of the same confession of faith confesses that the true Church is where people behave themselves according to the Word of God, reject all that is in conflict and acknowledges Christ as the only Head.’

Coertzen (2004:95) went on stating that:

‘The way in which Christ practices his authority and sovereignty over the Church is through the ministry of the Word and through his Spirit. This takes place directly in the heart of each believer, but also through the ministry of people who apply for this’.

We conclude that the Reformed Churches’ understanding of the rule of Christ in the Church is distinct in the sense that it is a well-balanced view on the Christological, pneumatological and ecclesiological realities. This understanding demonstrates that the Reformed discourse on church polity has been the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, in maintaining the rule of Christ through His Word using office-bearers (cf. Van Wyk 2004:165,166).

In view of this, we can also conclude that the Nkhoma Synod’s understanding regarding the rule of Christ, i.e. through office-bearers was influenced by a Scottish-Presbyterian-oriented collegial system of church government or by a combination of Episcopalianism and Collegialism.

This leads us to the question whether the Reformed Confessions have played a significant role in the church polity discourse within the Nkhoma Synod. This question will be addressed fully in chapter four when we shall be dealing with the church polity documents of the Nkhoma Synod and again in chapter five when we shall be highlighting the church-political developments within the Nkhoma Synod from 1889 to 2007.

It cannot be denied that the theological deficiency, which has been detected in the preamble of the *Zolamulira, etc.*, has had an impact on the church polity and church government within the Nkhoma Synod. However, this conclusion must not be viewed negatively only, but on a positive note it should function as point of departure in the understanding of the discourse on church polity discourse of a Malawian church and of churches in the whole southern part of Africa. As such it is an invitation to further theological discussion, in order to get nearer to Biblical truth.

1.4. Hypothesis

The research question formulated above can be rephrased as a hypothesis or a statement, which is to be proved. We state that the discourse on church polity and practice in the Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP have been negatively influenced by the understanding that Christ as the only Head of the Church exercises his rule and reign through office-bearers. There are four possible aspects to this hypothesis.

First, this understanding might have led to a tendency of identifying the power and authority of office-bearers with that of Christ. Consequently the office-bearers seem to claim unchallengeable possession of Christ's power and authority in the church. Hence Christ's direct rule through His Word and Spirit is excluded.

Secondly, as the seat of church authority is centred in the highest court (Synod), there is a tendency of regarding the local church court as the lowest ecclesiastical court without any significant right in its own affairs. Thus, in practice the authority of Christ is claimed by office-bearers who constitute or represent the highest ecclesiastical court (cf. chapters five and six).

Thirdly, the Nkhoma Synod in its church polity discourse has failed to engage with the Reformed tradition found in the Three Reformed Symbols of Unity. The following questions may be raised: Is there any congruity in matters of church polity between these Symbols of Unity and the *Zolamulira, etc* particularly with regard to how Christ rules the

Church? Do the church polity discourse and church government of the Nkhoma Synod more 'Scottish Presbyterian than 'Dutch Reformed'?

The last question is corroborated by the fact that the Nkhoma Synod had adopted the Scottish Presbyterian view on the departure point, which asserts that Christ rules the Church through office-bearers (Van Wyk 2004:165, 167). As a result autocracy, and clerocracy became the ruling systems of the Church, parity office-bearers, congregations and assemblies not being considered, church offices or ecclesiastical posts being viewed in terms of rank, status, and dignity, delegates in the ecclesiastical assemblies not persuading each other from the Word of God and voting becoming a premise for reaching an ecclesiastical decision (cf. Vorster 2003:55).

Msangaambe (2011:63); Paas (2007:8,183); Van Wyk (2004:10, 16), Brown (2004:72, 78) and Pauw (1980:393) have noted the tendencies above. For them they are the result of the profound influence of the Scottish and Malawian politics and society. Paas (2007:8) says:

'In Presbyterian and other denominations, the government of the Church has often become an imitation of the ruling structure in state and society. Depending on the prevailing culture and political climate, the minister is the principle leader. He may behave as an autocratic ruler, or he may have adopted the style of a modern manager in a more democratic way. Under him the elders are a body of executives, sometimes not much more than just counselors' .

Msangaambe (2011:63) observes:

'Approximately 70 of Nkhoma Synod members including ordained ministers have background experience of the Nyawu occult. To some extent, there is a legacy in this deeply rooted element of the Chewa culture in the Church leadership. The people in the church positions want to be obeyed unquestionably. If a subordinate dares to ask questions, even clarity's sake, this is often regarded as defiance'

Van Wyk (2004:167) says:

'The Presbyterian system of church government became characteristics of the government of the Reformed Churches in Central Africa. In these Churches, the emphasis falls on the maintenance of the institution through executive functionaries in accordance with the comprehensive law book.'

He (2004:167) further concludes that ‘the cause is found in the Scottish Presbyterian church polity uncritically accepted by the Dutch Reformed missionaries and uncritically maintained by the Africa Church.’ This study will shed more light on how such tendencies have had an impact on the church polity discourse and practice within the Nkhoma Synod from 1889 to 2007.

To summarize: It is the hypothesis of this study that the omission of the phrase “through his Word and Spirit” in the Church Order reveals and mirrors a theological deficiency in the church polity discourse and practice of the CCAP, Nkhoma Synod.

1.5. Delimitation and Methods

Multi-disciplinary insights relevant to secular fields within Malawi have to be taken into account, but since this study is an ecclesiological study, it will only touch some social-political, economical, and religious developments within Malawi that in one way or other influenced the church polity discourse within the Nkhoma Synod. As such, the study has strived to be theological, seeking to avoid any social-political, economical, religious, or ecclesiastical bias. As an ecclesiological study, this dissertation overlaps with matters concerning Christology, Pneumatology and Hermeneutics. It is also a historical study, because it describes the history of the development of church offices, assemblies and ecclesiastical posts in the Nkhoma Synod.

The questions and hypotheses described in sections 3 and 4 require respectively inductive and deductive approaches (cf. Mouton 2001:117). Besides, we need descriptive and explanatory methods, when we describe the concept of the headship of Christ as stipulated in some articles of Reformed Confessions and the preamble of the *Zolamulira etc.* (cf. Mouton 2001:54,113), and when we explain the understanding of the Nkhoma Synod regarding the rule of Christ in the Church (cf. Mouton 2001:53).

As one of the serving ministers of the Nkhoma Synod and a former lecturer at the Josophat Mwale Theological Institute, a College where the Nkhoma Synod trains its ministers, the researcher found himself in the position of using the participatory-observation method. He had an advantage to interact with fellow ministers and students, which helped him to acquire knowledge of the culture, church government, and church-politics within the Nkhoma Synod. However, he is aware that the weakness whereby he himself as insider might

have been bound by a certain perspective and therefore he might have been blinded to other perceptions and realities of church polity discourse of the Nkhoma Synod.

1.6. Motivation of the Research

The researcher is a serving minister of the Nkhoma Synod, and as such for a period of nearly ten years, he was involved in the training of ministers, and in the ministry in various local churches and presbyteries, and at the synod level. He stresses that his findings do not point to any particular person or individual in the Nkhoma Synod.

This dissertation was born out of the researcher's experience when he was lecturing Ecclesiology (Church History and Church polity) at Josophat Mwale Theological Institute from 2006 to 2010. Josophat Mwale Theological Institute is an institute responsible for Theological training in Nkhoma Synod including the offering of in-service courses for serving pastors. A course offered by the institute is Systematic Theology, Congregational Studies, Missiology, Pastoral Counseling, Christian Ethics, Christian Leadership, Spirituality, Bible Interpretation, Homiletics and Church Administration.

The researcher observed that the subject of Church polity was treated under Church Administration and there was lack of theological approach to the subject of Church Administration. The course *inter alia* covered the following areas: administering the church council, presbytery and Synod meetings, office work and keeping church records was not approached theologically. As the result student-ministers graduated before 2007 were not introduced to Church polity as a distinct subject. The approach was not theological as well.

The intention of this dissertation is three-fold. First, it seeks to make a modest contribution to the theological debate on christocracy and pneumatocracy,¹¹ facilitating an understanding of the rule of Christ through His Word and Spirit in using offices or ministries. Secondly, it contributes to a constructive development of Reformed Church polity discourse. Thirdly, it aims at providing resource materials for the training of pastors, elders, and deacons in Central Africa, especially Malawi.

¹¹ Christocracy and Pneumatocracy is the researcher's designation. The former refers to the rule or the government of Christ in the church while the latter refers to the rule or reign of Holy Spirit in the church. The two terms go together because where Christ rules the Holy Spirit also rules.

1.7. Review of the Relevant Literature

This research-project is a literary study involving critical evaluation and examinations of the following texts as primary sources: the *Belgic Confession of Faith*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, and the *Canons of Dordt*, the *Buku La Katekisma* (Nkhoma Synod Catechism), *Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza* (the Church Order of the Nkhoma Synod). The researcher endeavored to scrutinize, examine these documents, and draw conclusions from them. Special attention was paid on the articles that deal with church polity and church government. What is particularly interesting is the fact that these documents contain information concerning how Jesus Christ exercises his rule in the church. The understanding of the Nkhoma Synod is based on the preamble of the *Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza* stipulates. The researcher's main task was to investigate how what the preamble stipulates influenced the church polity discourse within the Nkhoma Synod. He drew conclusions by interpreting the data in the light of the Reformed thought contained in the Reformed confessions above.

The researcher accessed archival sources namely, *Mawu A Msonkhano* (Minutes of the Council of Congregations, Nkhoma Presbytery and the Nkhoma Synod), Constitutions and *Kuunika* Newsletters and reports).¹² The documents were accessed from the Nkhoma Synod Museum in Malawi and the Dutch Reformed Church Archives at Stellenbosch in Cape Town. The researcher found that DRC at Stellenbosch is the only Archive apparently having valuable copies of complete sets of minutes, extracts, reports, and constitutions of the Nkhoma Synod.¹³ What has been investigated is the question whether the Nkhoma Synod engaged in its practice of church polity and church government with the Reformed confessions. These sources provided reliable and trust-worthy information suitable and relevant for this study.

¹² The researcher possesses the English and Chichewa reports and (photo) copies of the Minutes of the Nkhoma Synod (previously the DRCM then the Nkhoma Presbytery), dating from 1894 to the present. In Malawi, particularly in the store-room of the Nkhoma Synod offices, in the Museum and in the Josophat Mwale Theological Institute (JMTI) Library, the Minutes are kept in bundles. They are labeled *Mawu a Msonkhano a Bungwe Lo Tsogolera* (Minutes of Moderamen meetings) and *Mawu a Msonkhano a Synod wa Nkhoma* (Minutes of the Nkhoma Synod). The researcher donated to JMTI Library photocopied copies of the Minutes, which he received as a gift from the DRC Archives in Stellenbosch. The Nkhoma Press store-room and the JMTI Library contain old editions of the *Kuunika* newsletters dating from 1918 to the 1990s. He is grateful for all the books newsletters which he was allowed to borrow from JMTI for a period.

¹³ In the DRC Archives at Stellenbosch, the Minutes and Reports are kept in the books labeled: Malawi Notules, Nkhoma Synod, KS 1031 (1903-1934, 1935-1961), KS 2487 (1962-1964); KS 2170 (1966-1971), KS 2488 (1968-1995); KS 2504 (1988-1990) and KS 2505 (1980-1984) and Reports, copies of the deeds of Agreements, Constitutions of the Blantyre Synod, Livingstonia Synod, Nkhoma Synod and the General Synod, periodicals and some editions of the Mthenga and *Kuunika* newsletters.

Apart from the above mentioned primary sources, the researcher consulted the works written by the renowned 16th century Reformer John Calvin. It is fascinating to note that Calvin's ideas have also influenced ecclesiastical resolutions about church orders and church polity in many parts of Africa and elsewhere. His ideas also stimulate scientific research in Reformed Church polity in many Reformed Churches and Institutions in Europe, America, Asia, and Africa. The researcher is of opinion that his work is perhaps also the result of such influence.

Many secondary sources were consulted, e.g. the Reformed Theologian Karl Barth, some recent Reformed Ecclesialogists namely Berkhof, De Ridder, and Dallen Monsma and the contemporary Reformed ecclesialogists namely Pieter Coertzen, Koos Jurgens Vorster, and documents of some regional and International Reformed bodies. He visited Josophat Mwale Theological Library at Nkhoma Synod headquarters in Lilongwe and Zomba Theological College Library in Zomba Malawi and Stellenbosch University Library and he used personal books. What is evident is that Calvin's ideas has had inspired lively interest in various aspects and themes of Reformed church polity which the researchers attempted to study (cf. Vorster 2003:4).

In addition, ministers and other members of the Nkhoma Synod made available to the researcher some other secondary sources, e.g. those written by Jonathan Kamwana (1997), Hellenman Kamnkhwani (1989), Attie Labuschaigne (2002), Josophat Samuel Mwale, Killion Mgawi (2009), Paas (2007), Christoff Martin Pauw (1980), W. Retief (1958), Jurgens Van Wyk (2004), Gerdien Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982), Isabel Apawo (2000), Joda-Mbewe (2002), Willie Zeze (2006), and Chatha E. Msangaambe (2011).

The findings of these authors demonstrate the problems of legalism, clerocracy, autocracy, hierarchicalism among office-bearers are real in the Nkhoma Synod. However, they differ with regards to the root cause of the problems. Many have blamed the DRC missionaries, the indigenous leaders, the political systems, and the society. Critically considering the findings of these researchers, this study suggests that the problems were also caused by the Church's failure to engage with the articles of the Reformed confessions particularly those that deal with issues church polity and church government.

It is now right at this point to discuss the work by some researchers who have published relevant information on the CCAP Nkhoma Synod in various fields and from different perspectives. A review of this literature will show the gap between existing and required knowledge, so that this study will not be a duplicate of these publication and will be an addition to existing knowledge.

W. Retief observed that the missionaries, whom the DRC sent to found and serve in Nkhoma Synod, had a paternalistic attitude towards the black ministers, elders, and deacons. This is evident in the following quotation: ‘Dr Murray laid stress on our guidance of the Natives, who should be treated as our children and we should be responsible for them’. The missionaries aimed at winning confidence of native leaders, but their paternalism may have contributed to clericalism, autocracy, and legalism.

Christoff Martin Pauw in his systematic and a comprehensive history of the mission in Malawi by the Cape Synod of the DRC from 1889, and of the Synod of Nkhoma, surveyed developments of various initial institutions, i.e. of the Mission Council, the Church Council, the Councils of Congregations. He described the emergence of Presbytery, Synod and General Synod, and of the Constitutions of the Nkhoma Synod until 1962. Thus he gives important information on the development of Church polity within the Nkhoma Synod. First he (1980:396) observes that the missionaries had a paternalistic attitude towards the indigenous people. They wanted to do too much for the people and too little with them. The DRC missionaries took a long time to hand over the Church to the local leaders. Secondly, he (Pauw 1980:392) found that the creation of the position of General Secretary as a permanent functionary was not based on the Reformed practice. It rather fitted in an Episcopalian system (Pauw 1980:392-393). This is how (1980:394) he commented on it:

‘No Moderator or General Secretary should ever assume the position of or be called ‘head’ of the Church and for one member of the church to hold a position of power and authority in a permanent or semi-permanent capacity could bring this about.’

Pauw (1980:394) suggests to distinguish the office of the Synod’s Secretary from that of an administrative officer to be appointed as a mere employee acting under supervision of the Synod. He sensed the danger that the accumulation of power in the hands of the General Secretary could replace Christ’s headship by human headship. Therefore Pauw challenged the Nkhoma Synod to acknowledge the Biblical and Reformed view that there is one head of the church, Jesus Christ (1980:396).

Gerdien Verstraelen-Gilhuis touched the issues of clericalism, and hierarchical tendencies. As will be corroborated later she showed that the type of Church polity found in

the DRCM in Zambia had the same characteristics as that of one in the Malawi.¹⁴ There were many hierarchical tendencies among the office-bearers and a situation of patronage between the DRC in South Africa and the DRCM in Zambia and Malawi. She mentioned legalism as the context of patronage between the local church and missionaries both in the Reformed Church in Zambia and in the Nkhoma Synod in Malawi (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:73ff, 100ff). Elsewhere she (1982:76) said:

‘The missionary was addressed as *Mfumu* (chief). Their authority in matters of school and church was accepted as the authority of the chief and headmen in other parts of life. This way of address was accepted without problems by the first second generation of missionaries.... The teachers and evangelists had to obey orders of the missionary-in-charge, the *Mfumu wa mission* ‘(1982:105).

The relationship between the missionaries and the native ministers in the DRCM in Malawi and the DCR missionaries in Zambia was that of a parent to a child. She (1982:106) reported: ‘Often, we find references to Africans as children and not yet able to drink more than the milk of the faith.’ Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:106) quoted Du Plessis who said that in many ways the African leaders were very childish and needed guidance, parental care and admonition and continuous prayer by their missionary-spiritual fathers and supervisors.

‘The missionary was addressed as *Mfumu* (chief). Their authority in matters of school and church was accepted as the authority of the chief and headmen in other parts of life. ... The teachers and evangelists had to obey orders of the missionary-in-charge, the *Mfumu wa mission* ‘(Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:105).

Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:196) observed that from its beginning the Reformed church in Zambia adopted a hierarchy of courts, i.e. of Church Council, Council of Congregations and the Synod. For many decades the Mission Council had full control over the Council of Congregations in practical matters (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:196). Regarding the relationship between the Reformed Church in Zambia and the DRC of the Synod of the Orange Free

¹⁴ These two churches were founded by the Dutch Reformed Church Missionaries from South Africa. They shared common confessional documents, catechism, and church order (Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza). Before 1929 the representatives of the two churches had been holding meetings together in the joint Council of Congregations.

State, she said that (1982:197-199) the latter adopted a mother to daughter attitude by which the former was under strict control of the latter (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:197-199).

Hellenman Kamnkhwani (1989:1) identified problems and offered a solution concerning the historiography of the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod. The first part of his research presented important developments, which occurred in the history of the Nkhoma Synod from 1889 to 1989. He (1990:3) explained that in the period 1889-1897 the DRC missionaries worked in close cooperation with the Scottish missionaries of the Livingstonia Mission. The Council of Congregations of the DRCM was the highest court of the Church. In 1926, when the DRCM joined the union of the CCAP, it subsequently began to function as a Presbytery of the Synod of the CCAP. In 1956, when the Presbytery of the DRCM (Nkhoma Presbytery) constituted the Nkhoma Synod, the Synod of the CCAP became the General Synod of the CCAP, the highest assembly of CCAP (cf. Kamnkhwani 1990:3). In 1962, the Nkhoma Synod obtained autonomy from the DRC of the Cape Synod. Kamnkhwani points out that the Cape Synod ceased to have authority over the Synod of Nkhoma (Kamnkhwani 1990:3). This confirms that there was a situation of patronage between the two churches. To some extent this patronage continued even after 1962. At the same time Kamnkhwani's study implies that the Church polity of the Nkhoma Synod was influenced by the Scottish Presbyterians.

Jurgens Johannes van Wyk noted that the type of the government of the Nkhoma Synod is not Reformed/Presbyterial but Scottish Presbyterian (van Wyk 2004:10). He (2004:13,166,167) implied that the Church polity of the Nkhoma Synod is characterized by a hierarchy of office-bearers i.e. minister, elders and deacons and of ecclesiastical assemblies namely Synod, Classes and Church Council. Van Wyk (2004:166) pointed out that similarly to the situation in the Church of Scotland, in the Nkhoma Synod insufficient attention is paid to parity of ministers, elders, and deacons. He (2004:165) notes that in the Church of Scotland the departure point of church government is the rule of Christ through his office bearer. This implies that in the Church of Scotland the Ecclesiology (church polity) was separated from Christology and Pneumatology. Consequently the Church and its church polity were no longer regarded as the work of the Holy Spirit. There was no place for maintaining in the Church the rule of Christ through His Word and Spirit. In his conclusion, Van Wyk (2004:167) referred to the cause of this problem:

‘The cause is found in the Scottish Church polity uncritically accepted by the Dutch Reformed missionaries and uncritically maintained by the Africa church.’

As a way forward, he (2004:166) suggested:

‘From this overview of the missionaries of the political development of the Scottish Presbyterian church the necessity for a continuous of evaluation of the ministry of offices in terms of Christ and its Reformed confirmation is clear’

Hilary Mijoga (2001:32, 36, 39) in *Reformed Encounters with Modernity: Perspectives from three Continents* blames the DRC missionaries for introducing a legalistic attitude and legalism in the Nkhoma Synod. He (2001:38) noted that there are some unbiblical laws and this caused church members to put more emphasis on these laws than on the Word of God. Mijoga’s observations illustrate our statement that the Synod tends to take the rule of Christ into their own hands. Mijoga (2001:38, 39) criticises the indigenous leaders who later replaced the missionaries for not evaluating church laws in the light of the Word of God. If Mijoga had cited from *Zolamulira etc.* he could have given more illustrations.

Isabel Apawo Phiri noted that most of the African societies including Malawi, and most of the African churches have church orders based on patriarchal patterns (2000:12). African culture and customs have heavily influenced the organizational life of the Nkhoma Synod. As a feminist theologian she suggests that there are pyramidal structure in the ruling system of African communities and African churches, including the Nkhoma Synod, which oppress those at the bottom (Phiri 2000:159). Phiri’s study implicitly confirms that the Church polity of Nkhoma Synod has been influenced by the society.

Osbornee Joda-Mbewe comments on the offices of the ministers and elders in Nkhoma Synod. Concerning the behavior of ministers, he (2002:293) says:

‘At present the ministry of the CCAP operates with the hierarchy clerical paradigm. ... The ministers see themselves as holding authority and high status roles. They see themselves as the ministry. They feel they can do anything without consulting any person.’

He (2002:296) further notes that the General Secretary is very powerful, equal to a bishop in other circles. He has the power to make independent decision without referring to any person in the Church. The authoritarian attitude of ministers and some of their General Secretaries

indicates that there are Episcopal elements in the Church polity of the Nkhoma Synod. We need to engage in critical examinations of the Church's documents to trace the root of this.

Walter Lawrence Brown (2004) points out that the identity of the polity of the Nkhoma Synod is clearly visible. In its confessional documents, the Nkhoma Synod claims to have a Reformed-Presbyterial system of Church government. However, in practice there are elements of Episcopalianism and of Scottish Presbyterianism (Brown 2004:20). He (2004:20) referred to Joda-Mbewe's remarks. Also he interviewed some ministers of the Nkhoma Synod including the contemporary General Secretary. The interviews revealing signs of autocratic leadership in the Nkhoma Synod (Brown 2004:92, 79), but Brown does not explain the theological-root cause of the problem.

Steven Paas (2007) gave important comments on several aspects of the church order and church government in the CCAP, based on his participatory research. First, he (2007:183) observed that the authority or power is in the hands of ministers. Secondly, Church Councils, Classes and Synods are organized top-to-bottom. Paas explains that the governments of the Synods are often an imitation of the Malawian state and society where ministers and sometimes elders adopt the style of a traditional chief or of a modern manager (2007:8). Thirdly, he (2007:8, 183) concludes that the current Church government of the CCAP is inherited from the Scottish Presbyterian system, and from the Malawian state and the society (Paas 2007:8, 183). Paas has not elaborated on how state and society influenced the organizational life of the CCAP and what is the theological root of these problems in the CCAP.

Chatha Msangaambe (2011) has noted that Chewa is the dominating cultural system in Nkhoma Synod. He (2011:62) says that the Nyawu cult of the Chewa tribe is autocratic and the members of the Chewa communities are submissive to the autocratic authority influenced by it. He (2011:63) eludes:

'Approximately 70% of Nkhoma Synod members including ordained ministers have background experience of the Nyawu cult. To some extent, there is a legacy in this deeply rooted element of the Chewa culture in the Church leadership. The people in church positions want to be obeyed unquestionably. If a subordinate dares to ask questions, even for clarity's sake, this is often regarded as defiance'.

Msangaambe (2011:63) observes that the understanding of a *primus inter pares* in the theory of Presbyterian leadership has little room in the Nkhoma Synod. He (2011:63) suggests that the Chewa's cultural influence must not be viewed negatively, but should become a point of departure in the church's theology. Msangaambe does not, however, take into account other influences, for example political and ecclesiastical factors, which may also be regarded as points of departure in the Church's Ecclesiology, or more precisely in Church History, Church polity and Church Law.

In a former study, the researcher (Zeze, 2006:14) note that there is little relationship between the Church polity described in the *Belgic Confession of Faith* and the one which is found in Nkhoma Synod's Church Order, *Zolamulira etc.* Here are a few examples. First, article 31 of the *Belgic Confession* acknowledges that there must be equality among all office-bearers and assemblies. However, this is not seen in the practice of church order and church government of the Nkhoma Synod (Zeze 2006:25). To be more precise, there are elements of hierarchy among office-bearers and among the assemblies of Church Council, Presbytery, and Synod. Furthermore, church offices are viewed in terms of status rather than as services. I noted that also other researchers have concluded that the some articles of the *Zolamulira etc.* do not take into account the articles of the Confession of Faith that are accepted by the Nkhoma Synod (Zeze 2005:14). The Church's Confession of Faith does not serve as a map road for the *Zolamulira etc.* It does not serve as a verification of the Confession of Faith, particularly not in areas of Church polity.

This literature review challenges our study to complement as well as to supplement the existing findings. We appreciate what they have found on the Nkhoma Synod. They touched our research question and hypothesis, but also left much to be researched. Their approaches have been conditioned by their research fields. Some acted from a point of view of Practical Theology or Missiology, Spirituality and Congregational Studies, for instance Kamwana (1997) Joda-Mbewe (2002), and Msangaambe (2011), or from Feminist Theology, Phiri (2000), or from Ecclesiology, Church History, Church polity and Church Law, Retief (1958), Pauw (1980), Kamnkhwani (1989), Mijoga (2001), Brown (2004) and Zeze (2006).

1.8. Structure of dissertation

Is Jesus Christ being acknowledged as the Head of the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod? Are authority, leadership, and organizational structure giving room to Christ as only Head? The

answer to this question requires an ecclesiological study including the critical examinations and evaluation of the Church's Confessions, Catechism, Church Order, Constitution, Newsletter, and Minutes of its official meetings.

Chapter 1: The topic and title are introduced, then the research problem, research questions, and hypothesis. The heart of this chapter is the question of the understanding of the Nkhoma Synod of Christ's rule through office-bearers, whereas it omits that He exercises his reign and dominion through his Word and Spirit. In the discourse on the Church's polity this discrepancy has resulted in a tendency of identifying the power and authority of office-bearers with that of Christ. Consequently, the office-bearers claim to have unchallengeable possession of Christ's power and authority. As a result the authority of Christ's direct rule through His Word and Spirit is excluded and transferred to the office-bearers who constitute or represent the highest ecclesiastical court.

Chapter 2: The social-political, economical, religious, and ecclesiastical contexts are described, in which the Nkhoma Synod has found itself. The chapter addresses the following questions: To what extent do contexts influence or should influence the practice and discourse of church polity and church government? We are sensible to the assumption that contexts are also able to influence churches in a negative way. Although church polity and church government are subject to what God has revealed in his Word, which is systematically summarized in the confessions, we investigate whether in the Nkhoma Synod church polity and church government are not too strongly dictated by the existing social-political, economic, religious, and ecclesiastical milieus. The chapter argues that a church must be organized in a biblical but also in a functional way, in order to be effective in the contemporary world

Chapter 3: The chapter has four sections. First, we are defining some essential terminology related to Reformed church polity. Then we are assessing certain distinctive features of Reformed church polity. This is followed by a presentation of principles of Reformed church polity as suggested by some Reformed theologians. Finally we are briefly identifying and describing the sources from which Reformed churches have developed their church order and church government. Our main concern in this chapter is the question how a Reformed church ought to be organized in order to acknowledge and experience the rule and reign of Christ.

Chapter 4: This chapter critically studies the Church policy sources of the Nkhoma Synod, i.e. the *Belgic Confessions of Faith*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Canons of Dordt*,

The question is asked whether the Nkhoma Synod engaged with these documents as sources from which it developed its church polity and church government.

Chapter 5: This chapter introduces and describes sources that express the church polity and church government of the Nkhoma Synod. The sources include the Church Order (*Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza*), Catechism (*Buku La Katekisma*), and the Constitution. Our main focus in this chapter is the concept of the headship of Christ and how the Church's understanding on this notion impacted on the church government discourse and practice of the CCAP-Nkhoma Synod.

Chapter 6: This chapter examines and highlights some important developments that occurred in the Nkhoma Synod between 1889 and 2007. These developments revolve around church offices, ecclesiastical assemblies, leadership positions and administrative posts within the mentioned church during the stated period. The chapter has three aims. First, it investigates the problems of disparity (hierarchy) among the office bearers and ecclesiastical assemblies and how these problems had crept into the Church. Second, it examines how the creation of offices as well as the ordering of assemblies influenced the exercise of church government and authority within the Church. Third and finally, it assesses how the Nkhoma Synod interpreted and applied the concept of the headship of Christ over the Church in the development of church polity discourse and practice within the Nkhoma Synod. The findings have led us to ask the following general questions: What was the identity of the church polity and church government of the Nkhoma Synod? Was it Scottish Presbyterian or Dutch Reformed? On one hand, the church polity of the Nkhoma Synod is Dutch Reformed because of the Church's historical link with the Dutch Reformed Church of the Cape Synod of the DRC in South Africa as well as because it inherited the Reformed Synod symbols of unity. On other hand, because of its association with Scottish Presbyterian Churches, as well as the hierarchical and clericalist tendencies, the Church's polity is Scottish Presbyterian.

Chapter 7 draws conclusions from the rest of the chapters – paying general attention to the research problem and the hypothesis. This will lead to a call for a critical-theological examination and evaluation of the church polity discourse and practice of the Nkhoma Synod in the light of remarks found in the preamble of the *Zolamulira*, as well as the ideas of John Calvin, the Reformed Symbols of Unity, and other important sources from the Reformed tradition.

Chapter 2: *The Malawian context and the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod*

2.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the situation of Malawi in which the church government of the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod in Malawi took on form. It presents brief information on the geographical, social, economical, political, religious, and ecclesial context in which this study is placed. The description is selective, taking into account the topic of the study.

The chapter addresses the following questions: To what extent do contexts influence or should influence the practice and discourse of church polity and church government? We are sensible to the assumption that they are also able to influence negatively.

2.2. Geographical landscape

Malawi (formerly Nyasaland) is a long, narrow strip of land along a lake belonging to the Great Rift, which is situated in the plateau area that cover the greater part of the southern-eastern part of the African continent.¹⁵ It is bounded by Tanzania in the North, by Mozambique in the South, and East and by Zambia in the West (cf. Pike 1968:7-26). From north to south the country is 900 kilometers in length, and from east to west between 80 and 160 kilometers in width (Douglas and White 2003:30). It covers an area of 118,484 square

¹⁵ The word 'Malawi' means "flames," hence Malawi can be translated as 'land of the flames'. The name may refer to the red flame like shimmer of rippled water under a low sun , thus linking it to the lake background of the Maravi/ Chewa (cf. Pike 1978:43)

kilometers, lies between 9 and 17 degrees latitudes south of the Equator and between the longitudes of 32 and 36 degrees east of the Prime Meridian.

Malawi has three climatic seasons namely: cool dry (from May to August), hot dry from September to mid-November) and hot wet mid-November to April (Douglas and White 2003:46). Its temperature ranges from 32 and 35 degree Celsius. It receives rains of not less than 500 millimeters and not over 1500 millimeters a year (Anthony and Doreen Young 1978:5-24). The central region where the Nkhoma Synod is located receives over 90 percent of the rain in from November to March (Smith 1986:8).

Malawi is administratively divided into three regions, the Northern Region, the Southern Region, and the Central Region and into 28 districts. The Nkhoma Synod is situated in the Central Region and its headquarters is at Nkhoma in the district of Lilongwe, Malawi's capital city.

The Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian, of which the Nkhoma Synod is a part, is divided into three Synods namely the Livingstonia Synod in the Northern Region, the Blantyre Synod in South Region and the Nkhoma Synod in the Central Region. Although the political boundaries do not overlap exactly with the Synod boundaries of three mentioned Synods, it is interesting to note that the geographical divisions of the Country into regions and of the CCAP into Synods resemble each other. The administrative headquarters of the Synods are situated in the districts where there are also the administrative centres of the Regions.

2.3. The Economical Context

In ancient history Malawi relied on hunting, fishing, and gathering (Tindall 1968:303). The *Akafula* or *Batwa Mwandiwonera-pati* people, short with a copper-colored skin, were the custodians of this economical system. According to Shillington (2005:9) they did not consider ranks and status as matters of ultimate concern in life.

Farming and barter were new economic systems, practiced in Malawi from the 15th century and onward. Various crops were grown and domesticated animals were reared on farms (Ott 1999:151). This contributed to the development of classes of people in a hierarchy of communities in which the rich estate owners were on top. Below them were the smallholders and finally the peasants who provided labour.

The colonial government introduced a mechanism to force Africans to work for the Europeans (Ross 1996a:15). The top class was the colonial civil servants, the planters (estate owners) and the missionaries. Their workers mainly comprised clerks and mission station workers, who formed the second class. The peasants, the casual laborers, the slaves and the *tenga-tenga* workers (who carried heavy load for Europeans) were the third class (cf. Ross 1996b:147). In 1960s, when political and ecclesiastical powers were handed over to the indigenous, these classes did not come to an end.

At first the Malawian society and communities reflected the divisions in the economical system. The Church was intrinsically enmeshed in it and a part of it. In the congregations, the ministers and the economically well-to-do church elders belonged to the first class, the deacons, and church-committee members to the second class, and the rest of the members to the lowest class. Thus, sometimes being elected as an office-bearer depended on one's economical status within the community. In a subsequent period this is exemplified by the situation in the city of Lilongwe where in the 1970s and 1980s communities and locations had emerged that were divided according to a similar system of classes (cf. Centre for Social Research 1997:21). The high-income class consisting of principal secretaries, cabinet ministers, high commissioners, ambassadors and other foreign dignitaries and traders lived in areas 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15 and 43, 47 (cf. Joda-Mbwe 2002:16). The middle class people consisting of junior officers and others lived in areas 18, 25, 23, Biwi and Likuni, whereas low-income people consisting of unskilled casual workers and laborers lived in the areas Kawale, Mchesi, Mtandire, Mgoni, Chisapo, Mphwetekere, Ngwenya and Kang'oma. There was friction when sometimes contrary to expectations high-income members of the Church were elected as deacons, whereas low-income members, i.e. cooks, security guards and junior workers were elected as elders.

To a certain extent different positions in the economical system caused frictions in the Church. It can be illustrated by Joda-Mbwe's (2002:107) study of the relationship between church ministers and elders in congregations of towns or cities, particularly where he showed that church ministers find it difficult to relate well to top class people in the cities, because most of these people 'are highly educated and hold senior positions either in government or Non-Governmental Organization offices'. He (2002:294) pointed out that 'ministers in Malawi see themselves as holding authority and high status. They feel they can do anything that they want without any objection from the laity', which does not always go well with high class members.

For Msangambe (2011:63), a Church minister, in Nkhoma Synod holds ‘a highly respectable position’. According to him ‘in general, people believe that the Church minister is extremely wise and cannot be advised regarding Church issues.’ It should be taken into account, however, that in many Malawian communities, people have been highly respected because of their economical status. Most elders who have become executive members at presbytery and synod levels originate from the middle and high-income areas of the urban the Central Region. In its Constitution and *Zolamulira* and some other church polity documents the Synod has not taken into account that such elders from urban areas can be elected or appointed on committees.

2.4. The Social Context

In Malawi various peoples have met, especially the Bantu of the Yao, Lomwe, Sena, Tumbuka, Tonga, Nkhonde Chewa/ Maravi, Ngoni, and the whites and others from Europe (in particular) Scotland), America, South Africa and Asia (Mwakanandi 1990:5,6; Labuschagne 2003: 2,3; McCracken 1977:1-13).¹⁶

We only discuss the Chewa/ Maravi and the Ngoni peoples because they have been the majority in the membership of the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod. They came to in Malawi by the end of the 15th century (cf. Tindall 1988:13). They migrated from north-west Ulaba, the Katanga province of present-day Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire), and they settled at Mankhamba (Chilambo and Liwewe, 2003:25). Pachai (1974:4) adds:

‘From Mankhamba they moved to different parts of the country, particularly the following districts within the Central region: Kasungu, Nkhotakota, Salima, Dowa,

¹⁶ The earliest inhabitants in Malawi were short, reddish-brown skinned hunter-gatherers called Akafula, also known with the following as Bantwa (the shorter ones), Mwandiwonera pati (lit.: from where have seen me?), Azimba (hunters) and Akawombwe (shorter in size like that of a gun). They originated from the south of Lake Victoria (Chilambo and Liwewe, 2003:20ff). In Malawi, the Yao, Tonga and Nkhonde peoples mostly settled along the lake in the districts of Karonga, Nkhatabay, Nkhotakota, Dedza, Salima, Mangochi. Consequently their main occupation is fishing. Because of their early contact with the Arabs the Yao became Muslims (Pauw 1980:8; Phiri 2004:73). The Ngoni people, who liked a cool climate, mostly settled in places such as Ntchewu, Dedza, Dowa, Ntchisi and Mzimba. Their occupation was cattle rearing, hunting, and beer brewing (Ministry of Education 2003:30-31). The Chewa were mainly agriculturists. They settled in fertile plains and valleys for instance Lilongwe, Kasungu, Mchinji, Dowa, Dedza and Ntchewu east, Chikwawa Mangochi. Missionaries preferred areas with cool weather, fertile soil, and political stability. For that reason in 1881 the Livingstonia missionaries moved from Cape Maclear to Bandawe, then in 1894 to Khondowe (McCracken 2000:85). The Dutch Reformed Missionaries in 1912 moved from Mvera which they described an unhealthy place of poor soil and insufficient water supply to Nkhoma which is cool, hilly and fertile (Pauw 1980:90-91). Politically, President Hastings Kamuzu Banda moved the capital city from Zomba to Lilongwe because Lilongwe has plains for economical development and is located in the centre of the country (Douglas and White 2003:55).

Ntchisi, Dedza, Mchinji, and Lilongwe. They lived in an organized matrilineal system in which an uncle was regarded as head (leader, ruler and judge) of a family and his nephews as his councilors.'

The Ngoni people migrated from South Africa to Malawi in 1835. They settled in Mchinji, Ntchisi, Dowa, Dedza, and Ntchewu. They welcomed the DRC missionaries at Mvera in 1889. In the Ngoni's patriarchal system, a father was considered as head of the family and authority rests on him. Their social-pattern was characterized by classes of inferiors and superiors (Jones 1964:84). The wives of a polygamist were graded into ranks according to the dates of marriage. The *Inkosasikazi* (the principal wife) was officially declared superior as well as her first son. If she did not bear a son, the son of the second wife was crowned the heir.

In the Ngoni villages, houses were arranged in order of seniority. The house of the chief was constructed at the centre of the village and around his house there were the houses of the *Zansi*, the Ngoni aristocracy (Mashingaidze and Bhede 1998:79). Lesser chiefs and village-headmen were building their houses following the same hierarchical order.

It can be argued that the hierarchical structures of the local societies have influenced the organization of the church. According to Paas (2007:8), the governing structures of the Malawian churches, including to the CCAP, became an imitation of the ruling structures of society and state. He (2007:8) was led to this conclusion because ministers in the local churches are considered to be the exclusive principal leaders and behave like autocratic rulers.

From a sociological point of view, it can be observed that there was no parity between the whites and the natives. It was said that 'our native pastors are not equal with European ministers.' (Thompson, 1995:178) and McCracken, 2000:290). There was a vertical social relationship between the whites and the indigenous people, which may have contributed to the development of a feeling of inferiority in the Malawian communities and society.

Pretorius (1971:366-7) described how local chiefs viewed the whites. First, white people were seen as valuable instruments that provide security and protection to the

Malawian local communities against their enemies (cf. Pauw 1980:66).¹⁷ Secondly, their presence was a valuable insurance against the plotting by civil counselors particularly against war-like tribes like the Ngoni and the Yao.¹⁸ Thirdly, the missionaries were regarded as persons who had power to manipulate supernatural forces, hence it was prudent and advantageous to have them closely.¹⁹ We can add another reason why the whites, particularly the missionaries, were not equal with the natives. That is because of their unique role as go-betweens in negotiations with chiefs who quarreled, and between chiefs and the state.

In his recent research, Msangaambe (2011:163), CCAP - Nkhoma Synod minister, concluded that the social relationship between church leaders and members is partly influenced by the Nyau cult that in its occult practices demands strict and immediate obedience by subordinates to their leaders. The Church uncritically derived from the polity of the Nyau cult,²⁰ and from the village headmen and other leaders within the Malawi society. Leadership ideas inherited from them to an extent, either positively or negatively, influenced the Church's polity discourse and the practice of church government.

2.5. The Political Context

A description of Malawi's political scene in the missionary period should include information on the governing systems in the families, villages, traditional authorities, and the (colonial) government of the state. Depending on the tribe, the indigenous families were governed by different systems. Generally, the governing power and authority rest in the hands of a single person bearing the name of *Mwini mbumba* among the *Chewa or Wabanja* among the *Ngoni* (Phiri 1997:12, 13; Tindall 1988:70).

¹⁷ Chief Mazengera at Nkhoma in Lilongwe invited the missionaries to build a station nearby so that the Yao people under the leadership of Chief Tambala would not attack him and his subjects (cf. Pauw 1980:80).

¹⁸ When a conflict arose between Chiefs Dzoole and Chiwere in Dowa district, Dzoole went to the British magistrate at Nkhotakota, asking for protection against Chiwere and this was granted (Retief 1958:38; Pauw 1980:66). The magistrate sent a letter to the A.C. Murray asking him to mediate. Eventually the two chiefs reconciled and became friends. Here the missionaries acted as go-betweens reconciling native chiefs bridging chiefs and colonial government.

¹⁹ In 1889 at Mvera the missionaries were accused of withholding rains. The Chief commanded them to pray and added that if it would not come then they would be murdered in the following day. After A.C. Murray and T.C.B. Vlok had offered earnest prayers the rain came (cf. Retief 1958:12; Pauw 1980:66). In another episode A.C. Murray, on his way to Livlezi Station, asked the carriers to remain behind and follow him later. However, the carriers firmly refused; they wanted the white missionary to accompany them (cf. Retief 1958:23)

²⁰ According to the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, 2007:356) e word 'cult' refers s to a religious group of extremes, which is not connected to any established religion. The Nyau is a cult because it is does not belong to Christianity and Islam. Msangaambe has called it occult. But according to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2005:1015) an occult is anything which is connected with magic powers and things that cannot be explained by reason or science.

Concerning governing structures above the families Rafael (1980: 54) writes about the levels of villages and districts. In the early days in Malawi a district was divided into units, usually seven, each consisting of a number of villages. At village-level rule was in the hand of a village headman. Over the unit a principle head-man, or *Gulupu* -group village headman- was appointed, chosen out of the village headmen; he was assisted by two counselors. The Gulupus were answerable to a *Traditional authority* (TA). In this order one officer was in authority; he hovered above the office-bearers were considered as his assistants Pachai (1974:8, 9) observed the similar system during pre-missionary and pre-colonial era:

‘As for the political history of the Maravi peoples, involving both local and external relations, the senior kings who mounted initially had a number of subordinate or tributary kings who owns allegiance to him locally. ... Where there was a single political structure when the settlements were close and the Karonga [title of paramount chief of the Chewa] was at the head, now there were as many political units as there were rulers.’

The Karonga, also spelt Kalonga, was the head of the Chewa/Maravi empire during its expansion. He ruled from his headquarters in Mankhamba in the Dedza district (Pachai 1975:5ff). Under the leadership of the Kalonga sub-chiefs were appointed to occupy and subdue new areas. The ruling system of Chewa/Maravi was apparently characterized by strict hierarchy.

The political system of the Ngoni was similar to that of the Chewa/ Maravi although there were some differences. Phiri (2004:12, 13, 94) says that on top of the Ngoni ruling system was the *Inkosi ya Makhosi* (King of Kings), the head of the tribe. Under him were the head chiefs, the Inkosi with a nucleus of *Induna* (senior relatives) and junior relatives. Under the head chief were the *makhosi* (chiefs), and under them the *makhosana* (sub-chiefs), followed by the *balumzana* (the nobles). The *abanumzana* were group village-headman. Each had a seat in the paramount’s *indaba*, a general council in which chiefs, nobles, village-headmen and their *indunas* gathered. Tribal matters and laws were discussed at an *indaba*. Under the *abanumzama* operated the *makhanda* (village-headmen). The Ngoni people had adopted a *patrilineal* or father-led structure, in which all governing power and authority lies in the hands of the father as head of the family, unlike in the matrilineal society of the Chewa/Maravi where the uncle was the head of the family. The *Inkosi* could claim linear

political descent from those who had led them through most of the way to the chosen land (Pachai 1975:178).

It is interesting to note that in these systems of the Chewa and the Ngoni all tribal matters and laws were discussed at the so called great council, i.e. a gathering of chiefs, nobles and village-headmen and their *indunas*. They employed a top-to-bottom system in which the great councils made the decisions. In addition, it should be noted that the Ngoni political system was characterized by a military organization with its related system of age grades, their organization under the paramount chief with his hierarchy of local office-bearers, and the system of courts, again a strict hierarchy (Phiri 2000:61ff).

In 1891 when the country became a British Protectorate a new system of ruling was introduced, called 'Indirect Rule' (cf. Baker 1971:7).²¹ In it the British used African traditional rulers to work on their behalf and help subjugate their fellow Africans. These Africans were ruled nominally, the actual decisions were taken by the British colonial officers. A British Consul or the Governor executed rule of the country through commissioners who were appointed in each district. Seniors assisted each district commissioner. From 1891 to 1961 the administrative system of the country largely consisted of a hierarchy of consul-general, district commissioner, and chiefs (cf. Baker 1971:7). In 1907 two councils were instituted. First, the Legislative Council responsibility for making laws and rules (Jones 1964:191). The council was chaired by the governor; he appointed its members, who were to advise him concerning the laws to be made. The second body was the Executive Council, chaired by the governor and consisting of provincial governors and district commissioners. This council was there to implement the laws and rules made by the Legislative council (Phiri 2004:241). Jones (1964:190) concluded that

'The Nyasaland government in its early days was autocratic. Sir Harry Johnston, the first Governor derived his authority from the British; provided, he kept the support of the government, his decision in Nyasaland was final.'

²¹ The British employed various systems of governance in their African colonies. These were through the agency of (1) trading companies, (2) indirect rule, (3) the settler rule, and (4) condominium government. It shows that in Malawi the British used both the Trading Company and Indirect Rule. It seems that the latter was more successful. More details can be acquired from this site, <http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/articles/Britishcolonial-rule-in-africa.html>

In 1912, under the name *Native Associations*, the first informal political party of indigenous people was founded. It was an organization of loose groups that were established by indigenous people who wanted to voice their concerns to the government (Rafael, 1980:72). In 1944 the first formal political party was founded, bearing the name *African Nyasaland Congress* (ANC) (cf. Pauw 1980:15; Pachai 1975:231ff). In 1959 the Federal Government banned it, but afterward it re-emerged (Pike 1974:135). In the same year the party changed its name to *Malawi Congress Party* (MCP) (Weller Linden, 1980:190). It won the general elections of 15 August 1961, and ruled the country until 1994, when the system of one-party-rule collapsed and was replaced by a multiparty system.

According to Ross (1996b:265), between 1961 and 1994 power was conditioned by the authoritarianism of the one party system.²² This influenced the Church. Ross (1996b:265) quotes Silas Ncosana, a former Blantyre Synod General Secretary:

‘The one party system certainly influenced the way the Church exercised its power ... so the Church became much more clerical than it ought to have been. ... Clearly, the Church has not been immune from the tendency to think of the exercise of power in authoritarian terms. ... Similarly, church leadership too often mirrors the corruption and graft prevalent in wider society, rather than offering a challenge to it. Clergy seek power within the church structures in order to gain access to resources, principally money and women.’

Ross (1996a:66) points out:

‘During Dr Hasting Kamuzu Banda’s regime, the CCAP clergy exercised power and authority in the same way as political leaders. One of the reasons is that most of the ministers, elders and deacons were once members of the MCP youth league, branch or area chairpersons.’

In his research regarding office-bearers, i.e. ministers and elders, Paas (2007:8) observes:

²² Banda, who was always referred to as ‘His Excellency the Life President Ngwazi Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda’, was alleged to be a dictator. Allegiance to him was enforced at all levels; every business building was required to have his official picture; no other poster, clock, or picture could be placed higher on the wall than the President's picture; it was illegal for women to wear see-through clothes, skirts which showed any part of the knee; churches had to be government sanctioned..etc. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Malawi#One-party_rule).

‘In Presbyterian and other denominations, the government of the Church has often become an imitation of the ruling structures in state and society. Depending on the prevailing culture, and political climate the minister is the principle leader. He may behave as an autocratic ruler or he may have adopted the style of a modern manager in a more democratic way. Under him, the elders are a body of executives’.

Paas does not specify which Malawian Presbyterian church and which other denominations he is referring to, and he gives no further evidence. Yet his observation is slightly supported by Brown (2004:73):

‘The evolution of the office of General Secretary bears mention, because he continues to wield considerable power like the State Clerk of American Presbyterianism, while not a dictator, he nevertheless commands great respect and the role of the Moderamen, which includes the General Secretary, wields significant power. The authoritative character of CCAP - Nkhoma Synod *abusa* (ministers) is also revealing. In some cases they appear to be similar to traditional village headman.’

In conclusion, what Brown and Paas observed regarding how the Malawian society particularly political system negatively influenced the organizational system of the Church urges us to ask the following questions: In which way was the integrity of the Nkhoma Synod endangered by the Malawian political system? Should developments in church polity be dictated by the political context?

The integrity of the Nkhoma Synod was endangered by the political system of Malawi in the sense that the country’s political system became characteristic of the government of the Nkhoma Synod. The tendencies of autocracy, dictatorship and clerocracy that can be noticed in the Church’s polity discourse and practice certainly mirror the political system of the Malawian society, although other contexts also played important role.

So far, what has been observed above should lead us to the second question: Should developments in church polity be dictated by political context? This question is answered in article 30 of the Belgic Confession of Faith which states: “*We believe, that this true Church must be governed by that spiritual policy [polity] which our Lord hath taught us in his Word...* and also in art 32 of the same Confession in which we also read that those who govern the churches should establish and set up a certain order for maintaining the body of

the church and they ought always to guard against deviating from what Christ, the only Master has ordained. It is clear from the two articles that the church polity must not be dictated by political context-because if it does its identity and essence may be compromised.

2.6. Non-Christian Religions and Sects

Malawi's religious and ecclesial contexts comprise African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam, and Christianity. ATR is Malawi's oldest Religion. It is the religious background of the indigenous people who were converted to Christianity and other religions and sects. In this section, we are investigating how they have negatively influenced the discourse on church polity and the practice of church government in the Nkhoma Synod.

2.6.1. Islam

Islam came to Malawi in 1840s through several different routes (Paas, 2006:125-133). Alan (1993:84) describes how Islam was first introduced to the country through the Jumbes, local rulers who represented the Sultan of Zanzibar, and ruled along the coast of Lake Nyasa, now Lake Malawi, for most of the second half of the 19th century. During that period, the Yao, an ethnic group, which was until then based in Mozambique, migrated to the southern tip of Lake Malawi, bringing Islam with them (cf. Bone (2000:15). When Christianity spread among Africans during the period of colonization, adopting Islam was considered by other Africans as a means of resisting colonization (Mandivenga, 1991:74)

Socially, the Yao operate a matrilineal system; they trace their family lines through their mothers, not their fathers (James, 1984:2,278). With regard to inheritance they have also followed maternal ties. The *Sufi* and *Sukuti* movements of Islam find many followers among the Yao (Alan 1993:84). The former stresses inward religious adherence, whereas as the latter stresses outward orthodoxy. In general not much attention was paid to the study of the Qur'an and the Islamic law (Alan 1993:84).

The first centres of Islam were on the lakeshore of Malawi, in the districts of Nkhotakota, Salima, and Mangochi. Considerable parts of these districts have remained Islamic up to the present times. According to Bone (2000:15), the land immediately south of Lake Malawi became the most important centre of Islam because the Yao had were in contact

with the Arabs who settled on the trading routes and because their chiefs collaborated with the Arabs in the acquisition of slaves and ivory.

Before the end of 19th century Islam spread to the districts of Blantyre, Machinga, Zomba, Mulanje in the Southern Region and in the district of Dedza in Central Region, and in the Mzuzu in the Northern Region. Intermarriages, trade and politics promoted the expansion of Islam in other districts, especially in trading centres and towns. Today, Muslims are estimated to make up around twenty percent of Malawi's nation (cf. Paas 2006c:132).

Muslims are expected to follow and obey their *Imam* in daily practice, especially in prayers. The scepter of authority is in his hand; he heads the mosque and rules over the affairs of the people (Raji 1995:58). It is believed that Allah is the supreme Ruler who governs the *ummah* (the community of Islamic believers) through the Qur'an supposed to be revealed to Prophet Muhammad, through the Hadith, which consist of examples from Muhammad's life, and through Islamic law (Paas 2006c: 50-75).

'The Quran had made it plain that ... obedience to the Prophet is ... obedience to God. By obedience to God was necessary meant obedience to the mandates contained in the Holy book that was revealed to the Prophet of Islam and by showing obedience to the Prophet was meant obedience to whatever he commanded the believers to do.'

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In the Islamic polity discourse, there is One God (Allah); no one can change Allah's law; there is no formal clergy instituted by an ordaining body, and there is no visible hierarchy.²⁴ The relationship between the individual and Allah is a direct one; no one besides Allah can declare what is lawful and what is sinful; no created being can bless another, and each individual is directly accountable to Allah.²⁵ On this Trimmingham (1980:59) notes:

'Although Islam does not have a sacerdotal body it has its clerks or clergy. As an institution, they are the specific conduits of Islamic tradition. ... The cleric stands apart from the rest of the laity as a lettered man. He performs specific religious functions. He leads in prayer, teaches the young to recite the sacred text, performs the

²³ Islam and Contemporary society, Longman in association with the Islamic Council of Europe, 1982 pp. 81, 82.

²⁴ Idem.

²⁵ Idem.

first sacrifice at the great feasts, names the new-born, conducts the marriage ceremony, washes the dead, and leads the funeral prayers.’

One can enter the ranks of the Islamic clergy with a minimum of training i.e. the merest Quran recitation together with some knowledge of the rituals and social regulations and the technique of amulet making (cf. Trimmingham, 1980:59). According to Raji (1995:58) criteria for the selection or election of a leader in Islam include the possession of some functional knowledge, which will enable him to subordinate his desires and those of his family to the sacred duties of leadership. Besides this, piety is a quality which is regarded as essential for a leader, to enable him to consider himself as vicegerent of Allah (cf. Raji 1995:58). Other qualifications include physical fitness, intellect, loyalty to people, and strict obedience to Islamic law.

It is true that that Muslims converted and joined the Nkhoma Synod and even became ministers, elders and deacons (Mnthambala 2009:48).²⁶ It is also true that the understanding of authority and government in Islam is part of the religious environment in which the Nkhoma Synod took on form.

2.6.2. African Traditional Religion

African Traditional Religions (ATR) is the term for a variety of religions indigenous to the continent of Africa. In general traditional or indigenous African religion for most of their existence has been orally rather than scripturally transmitted. In this study we pay attention to the so-called Nyau or Nyuwu cult among Chewa/ Maravi people in the Central Region of Malawi. Our focus will be on its organizational system. It is a masked and closed society (Scoffeleers that represents the cult, which is at the religious background of many Malawian people, including the office-bearers who became co-workers of the DRC missionaries and later their successors (cf. Msangaambe 2011:63; Scoffeleers, 1979:150). Rangeley (1972:257) says:

²⁶ Mnthambala (2009:42, 48) has noted that in its history Nkhoma Synod made good attempt to convert Muslims whom some were trained and become ministers. He (2009:42) has cited as examples the following ministers who originally were Muslims: James Kathumba, John Michael Kajawa, and D.T Juma. A good number of such converts served as elders and deacons (cf. Mnthambala 2009:48).

‘the Nyau is not only a system of beliefs, but also a society with all-embracing claims on its membership. The name ‘Nyau’ refers to the societies themselves, and their masks and other apparel in which the dancers perform.’

The Nyau cult is territorially and hierarchically organized. There are shrines scattered almost over the whole Central Region and some parts in the Southern Region, for instance Mankhamba in Dedza district, Kamphirimtiwa in Salima district, Msinga in Lilongwe district and Mbona in Nsanje district. There is a hierarchy of functionaries. At the pinnacle is *Mfumu Dziko* (the Chief of the land) appointed as provincial officer. A group of *eni mzinda* (owners of the city) are his assistants. Each officer supervises a centre. He is ruler of the *atsabwalo*, the local officers of each village, who on their turn mobilize and force their subjects to obey the provincial officer (cf. Schoffeleers (1979:8, 154,157).

‘In Chewa areas the heads of villages have to make an application to Nyau area-head, the *Mfumu Dziko*, for a piece of land set aside- consecrated- for the performance, called *Mzinda*. Finally there are senior women, *anankungwi*, who are in charge of the women and of female initiation’ (Rangeley, 1972:258).

A basic characteristic of ATR was a strong belief in the partly invisible and partly visible hierarchy between *Chauta /Mulungu* (God) in top position, who ruled by a hierarchy under him, which consisted of the Great ancestral Spirit, the spirits of the dead, followed by king, chiefs, rainmakers, diviners, shrine prophetesses, with the living people at the bottom (cf. Rangeley 1972:38). Thus, when worshipping, people used to approach God through both the invisible and visible hierarchy. Each being of the hierarchy demanded a certain respect by virtue of their offices. The king enjoyed the highest position of authority and power in the religion as well as in the society (Van Bruegel 2001:247, 269; Turaki, 2006: 29). Mwakanandi (1990:54) commented:

‘Sometimes, the chief was also the priest of his tribe. In virtue of his office, the people regarded the chief to have the right to approach divine powers on behalf of his people ... people did not regard the chief a deity. He was connected with the spirits by virtue of his office.’

In agreement to Rangeley (1972:258) Msangaambe (2011:62) notes that leadership in the Nyau cult is autocratic, and that members are groomed to obey instructions without asking questions out of respect for elders. He (2011:63) adds that the majority CCAP - Nkhoma Synod members, including ordained ministers have a background of experience with the Nyau cult and Chichewa philosophy of of leader-subject, and that this has influenced the relationship between office-bearers and members in the Church. '*Wamkulu salakwa*' (An elder does not make mistakes, so he should be obeyed).

We are investigating in what way Nyau has negatively influenced the church polity discourse and the practice of church government of the Nkhoma Synod. Hierarchy was real in African Traditional Religion. Together with social, economical and political context it has undoubtedly contributed to hierarchical tendencies among office-bearers, including their desire for status, rank, and dignity. Consequently the idea of the office-bearer being the first among equals does not find much support, not so practically and not so theoretically because, according to Msangaambe (2011:63) the Synod lacks 'systematic hermeneutics of its own system of Church government.' At the same time Msangaambe thinks that aspects of Chewa cultural influence can be helpful in finding new ways of church polity. Anyway the observation that the leadership of the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod has been an influenced by the Nyau cult implies that the Church has not reflected sufficiently on the Reformed confessional sources of church order and church government. The Church is called to re-evaluate its theology and church polity in the light of what it confesses.

2.6.3. Some Non-Christian Religions and Sects

Apart from African Tradition Religion and Islam, there are other religions and sects in Malawi, such as Hindus, Buddhists, Bahai, and Jehovah's Witnesses, which may have influenced the polity of the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod in one way or another. That is why some have to be mentioned. Most followers of Buddhism are Asians. A few of them became members of the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod.

The Jehovah's Witness emerged in Malawi in 1908. In the 1970s they were expelled because of their anti-government teaching. Some CCAP members joined them. They do not use titles of ministers, elders, deacons. Every member is an evangelist. Their government is

similar to that of the congregational churches although there are some elements of episcopalianism in final matters.

2.7. The Christian Ecclesial Context

The Episcopal, Presbyterian, Reformed/ Presbyterian, and Congregational systems of church government were established in Malawi in the 19th and 20th centuries.²⁷ Anglican missionaries and Roman Catholic missionaries established their respective Episcopal systems. Scottish missionaries of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland established the Presbyterian system. South African missionaries of the Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Church established the Reformed/Presbyterial system. Lutheran missionaries especially from America established the Lutheran system. Missionaries of Baptist, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Seventh Day Adventist Churches etc., either through Faith Missions or through their own denominations, established the Congregational system.

When Christian missionaries from different parts of the world had come to Malawi, they found it difficult to discuss and agree what system of church government would be suitable for the African churches. Hetherwick's (1932:140) says:

‘The question of what form such organized life should take is one that no one can or dare attempt to answer at this early stage in the history of the Church of Central Africa. Naturally, each mission will set itself to organize its converts on the lines of the system of government, which rules in the mother church of the mission. A Presbyterian Mission will order it's daughter on the Presbyterian system, an

²⁷ There are different ways of classifying the systems or theories of church government. De Ridder (1983:16-19) has suggested the following theories of systems: The Episcopal, the Lutheran, the Erastian, the National, the Collegial, the Congregational-Independent, the Presbyterian and the Reformed. The following discussion explains only the system of the church government that was not introduced in Malawi: The Lutheran is also known as territorial or synodical system. It traces its origin in Germany of Luther day where and when the principle whoever is the ruler, his religion will also be the religion of the land. Luther's rejection of the Episcopal system of church government the headship of the pope prompted him to take seriously the office of all believers though this system did not find its way into the church. The authority of the ruling class in secular society found its way in the Lutheran Churches. The ruler of the state became the ruler of the church. In this regard the principle not the pope but the King is the sole ruler was maintained. The local church had no authority and church office-bearers were instituted to implement decision of the state (De Ridder 1983:17). The Erastian system name after Erastus (1524-1583) is a theory which regards the church as the society which owes its existence and form to the rules enacted by the state. The officers of the church are merely instructors without any right to rule except that which they derive from the civil magistrates. The duty of the state is to government the church, exercise discipline, and excommunicate. This had been variously applied in England, Scotland and Germany. The National or Collegial system of church government was developed in Germany by C.P. Pfaff (1686-1780) and was later on introduced into Netherlands. It proceeds that the church is a voluntary association with equal to the state. The original power and authority resides in the national organization and this organizational has jurisdiction over the local churches. This system disregards the autonomy of the local churches (Berkhof 1996582).

Episcopalian Mission on Episcopalian lines and so on in the many forms of Christian activity in the homeland.’

This section will examine and assess if and how the Episcopal, the congregational, the Presbyterian, the Reformed systems of church government negatively influenced the Nkhoma Synod’s church polity discourse as well as its church government practice.

2.7.1. Episcopalianism

The Episcopalian system of church governance is hierarchical in structure, with the chief authority over a local Christian church resting in a bishop. is mostly often practiced in the various churches of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican Church lineage. The appearance of bishops in e.g. Lutheran, Hungarian Reformed, and African Independent Churches is not taken into account in this study as it does not necessarily mean these churches have adopted the full Episcopalian system.

A church having Episcopalian polity is governed by a bishop, whose authority hovers above the parish, the diocese, and over the conference or synod, which is referred to as judicatory. In the Episcopalian churches rituals belonging to sacramental and church political matters are emphasized. The bishop as the principal and most central figure performs the ordinations and consecrations, and he supervises the clergy within his ecclesial judicatory. The bishops in Episcopalian churches are subject to the higher-ranking bishops, called archbishops, metropolitans, patriarchs, cardinals, depending on their specific tradition. They meet in gatherings, which are called councils or synods. These gatherings are subject to presidency by a higher-ranking bishop who governs the judicatory comprising representatives from all the archdioceses and dioceses. Such councils and synods are often purely advisory.

The system of Episcopalian church government was first to touch Malawi. It arrived in its Anglican form in 1861, but had soon to leave, only to return twenty years later. In its Roman Catholic form, characterized by a monarchical understanding of the position of the bishop, it arrived around 1900. It is important to look at the Episcopalian churches of Malawi as their hierarchical system of church government may have influenced the CCAP, Nkhoma Synod.

2.7.1.1. *Anglicanism*

The Anglican Church generally called Church of England, though its Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) was the first Episcopal Church to try mission work in Nyasaland. The UMCA was founded after David Livingstone's appeal, which he made in the Senate House at Cambridge on 4 December 1857 (cf. Wilson 1936:35). Concluding his appeal Livingstone said:

'I beg to direct your attention to Africa. I know that in a few years I shall be cut off in that country. It is now open, do not let it be shut again! I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity. Do you carry on the work, which I have begun? I leave it with you.' (Blaikie, 1986:243,244).

In response to Livingstone's plea, Anglican Church members representing the Universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Durham, and Dublin joined together in a mission organization, the UMCA, in 1858.²⁸ The UMCA belongs to the Anglo-Catholic or High Church tradition the Church of England, which revived pre-Reformation practices from about 1840. As such the UMCA differed from the Reformation oriented Church Missionary Society (CMS), established in 1799 as a result of the Evangelical Awakening in the Anglican Church. Consequently the UMCA first devolved authority to a bishop in the field, rather than to a home committee. Its first missionary enterprise was led by Charles Fredrick Mackenzie, a former graduate of Caius College and Cambridge University. He was familiar with Africa because as an archdeacon he served under the South African Bishop Colenso of Natal from 1855 to 1859.

Archdeacon Charles Mackenzie was consecrated Bishop in Cape Town in 1861, just a few months before he arrived in Malawi to start mission work. After six months, Mackenzie and three others of his party died of fever. He was succeeded by Bishop William Tozer and later by Bishops Edward Steere and William Percival Johnson, finally by Bishop Charles Smythies (Mashingaidze and Bebbe 1998:105). With the failure in 1861 Tozer decided to withdraw from Malawi to Zanzibar. The UMCA was to prepare carefully for another 20 years before under Johnson it resumed mission work in Malawi (Paas, 2006a: 188,189).

²⁸ See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/> .

Consequently through the UMCA the Anglican Church established the Tanganyika Diocese, which covered the territory between Zanzibar and Malawi. Bishop Charles Smythies realized his inability to administer the vast mission and divided it into the dioceses of Tanganyika and Nyasaland (Tengatenga 2006:55). In 1892 Wilfred Bird Horny was consecrated bishop of the Nyasaland, Chancy Mapples became his predecessor in 1895.

In the framework of this study we have to pay special attention to the presence of the bishop at the inception of the UMCA mission work. Because of its High Church and strictly Episcopalian convictions it is understandable that the UMCA from the outset put their mission activities under the authority of one functionary, a bishop. Weller and Linden (1984:34) comment:

‘The story of the initial attempt of the UMCA to establish itself in the area ... had a number of features, which distinguish it from the other. ... One was the presence of the bishop from the beginning. This rose from the theological conviction, strongly held by the Anglo-Catholics, that the Bishop is the essence of the Church, so that to send a mission without him is to create a defective church.’

Oliver (1952:12) noted that the organizational preference of the UMCA was radically different from its fellow Anglican organization the Church Mission Society (CMS), on the ground that the UMCA had an Anglo-Catholic view on Episcopacy in the sense that it held the presence of the Bishop as essential to the Church.²⁹ James Tengatenga (2006:50), present-day Anglican bishop in Malawi, and one time lecturer at Zomba Theological College where he also taught Nkhoma Synod students, quoted Church Father Ignatius who claimed, ‘Where the bishop is, there is a Church.’ Essentially the UMCA was not considered a Mission but a Church. To be Church in the Episcopalian sense ‘the UMCA had to be completed with a bishop in addition to the other clergy and lay men and women.’ Tengatenga (2006:1) further pointed out:

²⁹ Henry (1888:298) quoted Bishop Steere saying that there is also another side to the practice of appointing missionaries to be bishops. Ironically he explains that it ‘had been the custom to think of missionaries as an inferior set of men, sent out, paid and governed by superior set of men formed into a home committee’. There were ‘examiners and secretaries and officers to see that inferior men are not too inferior; and you must have a set of cheap colleges in which inferior men may get an inferior education and you must provide inferior sort of ordination which will not enable them to compete in England with the Superior men.’

‘The Anglican Church is an Institutional Church, it as an Episcopal Polity. That is, it is organized hierarchically. The ordained are regarded higher than the laity and the ordained Bishops are higher still. External structures are important. In its view, if the structures are taken away then you have no visible church.’

Regarding the order of assemblies, Tengtenga (2006:12-17) explains that Anglican Church polity has a synodical government comprising the house of the bishops, the house of the clergy and the house of the laity. The bishop gives his ecclesial assent to the resolutions made in these houses and his words are considered as the words of the Church

The CCAP has a historical link with the Anglican Church. From 1978 to 2008 Anglican students for the priesthood were trained at Zomba Theological College. To their fulltime Lecturers belonged Anglican clergy, e.g. Rodney Hunter, James Tengtenga, Moses M’baya, Christopher Mwawa, and Rodney Schofield. The latter after his spell at ZTC became a Roman Catholic priest. In the exchange of ideas at ZTC, it is possible that these Lecturers imparted Anglicanism on their CCAP students.

2.7.2. Roman Catholicism

Roman Catholicism has adopted a form, of church government formally known as ‘Episcopal polity.’ It differs from Anglican Episcopalianism in that the Roman Catholic bishops are considered ‘monarchical’, i.e. have more absolute authority than those in Anglicanism. The Church is headed by the pope, who is said to be the head of the colleges of the bishops, the Vicar of Christ, the successor of Peter, and the shepherd of the universal Roman Catholic Church. He is considered infallible in defining matters of faith and morals.³⁰

The pope appoints cardinals, who constitute a body which advises him, and on his death elects a new pope.³¹ The bishops of all levels are ordained by the pope. An archbishop is a bishop of a main or metropolitan diocese, also called archdiocese.³² A bishop is a teacher of church doctrine, a priest of sacred worship, and a minister of church government. At the

³⁰ Codex of Canon Law, 1983 part II, section 1 chapter 333-335. The Pope possesses supreme, full, and universal ordinary power in the Roman Catholic Church. The expression ‘supreme power’ means that there is no appeal against a judgement of the Pope or his decree. ‘Full power’ denotes that the Pope exercises authority freely- not restricted. ‘Universal power’ stands for all authority over crowns and peoples, and spiritual pre-eminence over the state.

³¹ Idem, section 1 chapter 334-367.

³² Idem, section 1 chapter 330-367.

bottom of the hierarchy of priesthood there is the ordinary priest. His main task is administering the sacraments, especially those of mass, baptism, and marriage. He can be with a particular religious order or committed to serving a congregation. Deacon is a transitional position, basically a seminarian studying for the priesthood.³³

In Malawi the Roman Catholic Church polity was the second Episcopal polity to be established, after Anglicanism. It was founded in 1902 through the enterprise of the priests of the White Fathers and the Montfort Fathers (Weller and Linden 1984:100). The White Fathers belonged to an order founded by Cardinal Charles Lavigerie (1867-1892), based in Algiers, North Africa. They came to Malawi at the request of Bishop Antonio Barroso of Mozambique (Ott 2000:214).

The first group of priests arrived at Mponda in Mangochi, Malawi on 28 November 1889. After eighteen months, they left Mponda for Zambia and returned after three years. Upon their arrival, they founded mission stations at Likuni (1902), Mua (1903), Kachebere (1903), Nguludi (1904) Mtakataka (1908), Bembeke (1910), Kasina (1925), Nambuma (1928), Mpherere (1939), Mtendere and Ludzi (1941), Salima (1946) and Mlale (1951). The Montfort Fathers order was of French and Dutch backgrounds. In 1901 they sent their first missionaries to Malawi. They founded the first station among the Ngoni at Nzama in Ntcheu district; later stations were opened at Nguludi (1904), Neno (1906), Utale (1908).

Roman Catholicism has spread through central mission stations, vicariates³⁴ and ultimately parishes. Each parish is under the leadership of an *Abambo Mfumu* (lit.: Mr. King), who is priest-in-charge or 'father superior'. A group of parishes forms a diocese with a bishop as its head (Mullin 1985:48). In Nyasaland, all mission stations collectively attained the status of the Nyasa Apostolic Prefecture on 21 July 1889. Joseph DuPont became its head (Vezeau 157-168.). In 1897 the Prefecture was up-graded to be Pro-Vicariate of Nyasa and then full Apostolic Vicariate (diocese). The vicariate comprised the territory of Nyasaland and eastern Zambia up to Mweru in southeast Zaire.

In 1937 it was divided into Bangwelo Vicariate and Nyasa Vicariate. On 24 November 1903, the Nyasa Vicariate was portioned into the Shire Apostolic Prefecture (sub-diocese) and the Apostolic Vicariate of Nyasa. The Shire Apostolic Prefecture was officially under the Montfortians. It was based in the Southern Region and its headquarters was at

³³ *Idem.*

³⁴ A vicariate is a mission field operated by a representative of the Pope (Phiri 2004:177)

Nguludi. By then the vicariate was headed Fr. Schassin. As head of the Shire Apostolic Prefecture, he was superior to Fr. Cadoret and Brother Odilon. In 1945, the Shire Apostolic Prefecture and the Apostolic Vicariate of Nyasa were put under jurisdiction of their own parish priests. Today the Roman Catholic Church in Malawi nation has a fully empowered hierarchy, consisting of the Blantyre Archdiocese and six dioceses (Chikwawa, Dedza, Lilongwe, Mangochi, Mzuzu, and Zomba (cf. Ott, 2000:225,226; Paas, 2006a: 198-200).

Nielsen and Schoffeleers (1997:353) observe that the offices in the Roman Catholic Church are highly regarded. At every level they demand honor and respect from lower office-bearers. The hierarchical structure is centred in the priest at parish level, in the bishop at diocese level and in the pope at world level. Ott (2000:228) tells that in more recent times people who wanted to re-organize the Roman Catholic Church in small Christian communities would like to yield the Church as a hierarchy and replace it by the 'Church as people of God' in a system of 'collegiality'. In this way the top-down administrative units would change into *mabungwe* (committees), in Mangochi called *muthiko* (work groups), in Chikhwawa, Lilongwe, and Zomba called *miphakati* (mediators between people), in Dedza called *malimana* (those hoeing together)'. However, even with these communities the hierarchical structures from a grass root level to world level remain in the Roman Catholic Church.³⁵

The Roman Catholic Church in Malawi belongs to the Christian-ecclesial context of the Nkhoma Synod, and as such may have influenced it, at least indirectly.

2.7.3. Congregationalism

Congregational Church polity or Congregationalism is a system of church governance in which every local church congregation is independent, ecclesiastically sovereign, or autonomous. Akin, Brand et al (2004:157) explain Congregationalism as follows:

'It is that form of church government in which final human authority rests with the local or particular congregation when it gathers for decision making. ... This means that decisions about membership, leadership, doctrine, worship, conduct, missions, finances, property, relationship and the like are to be made by a gathered

³⁵ Codex of Canons Law, 1983, Part II section 1 chapter 1 Canons 331, 332, 333.

congregation, except when such decisions have been delegated by the congregation to individual members or group of members.’

Among those major Protestant Christian traditions that employ Congregationalism there are those that descend from the Anglo-American Puritan movement of the 17th century, e.g. the Baptist churches, and groups brought about by the Anabaptist Movement originating in e.g. 16th century The Netherlands and Germany that immigrated to America in later centuries (Cowan and Toon 2004: 49-70). The 19th and 20th century revivals and holiness movements brought about many Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches that employ a Congregational church structure or have mixed with it.

Congregationalism is distinguished most clearly from Episcopalianism, which is governance by a hierarchy of singular persons, i.e. bishops. It is also distinct from Presbyterianism, in which higher assemblies of congregational representatives can exercise considerable authority over individual congregations and persons. De Ridder (1983:18) defines the Congregational system as follows:

‘Each congregation is a complete church, independent from others even those of similar organization. ... Within the local church the elected office-bearers carry out the will of the members and receive their authority from the people only.’

Congregationalism is also an extreme form of democracy, because final authority on any question is a majority vote by the members of the particular congregation (cf. Gray and Tucker 1999:2). This means that the majority in a local church is regarded as a highest court of appeal in the church (cf. Gray and Tucker 1999:2). It has its own laws and by-laws and is sovereign in dealing matters within its fellowship. In a congregational system the local the local congregation (1) selects, appoints, and if necessary removes church leaders; (2) (helps) guards pure doctrine; (3) exercises church discipline and decides on church membership; (4) participates in major decisions affecting the entire congregation (cf. Akin, Brand et al. 2004:158).

Congregational Church polity has consequences for the authority of the office-bearers. It strictly forbids ministers ruling their local churches on their own. Not only does the minister serve by the approval of the congregation, but also committees further refrain the pastor from exercising power without consent by the entire congregation. It contradicts

congregational principle if a minister makes decisions alone without involving the vote of the whole local congregation. Other officers and offices may be called ‘deacons’, ‘elders’ or ‘session’ (borrowing Presbyterian terminology), or even ‘vestry’ (borrowing the Anglican term). These labels do not determine the nature of their authority, but rather their lay status does and their equal vote together with the pastor, in deciding the issues of the church. While other forms of church government are more likely to define ‘tyranny’ as ‘the imposition of unjust rule’, a congregationally governed church would more likely define tyranny as ‘transgression of liberty’ or equivalently ‘rules by one man’. To a Congregationalist no abuse of authority is worse than the concentration of all decisive power in the hands of one ruling body, or one person. In terms of organization a polity of Congregationalism employs different structures, such as the pastor and deacon structure, the pastor-deacon-committee structure, and the pastor-deacon committees-church-council structure (Akin, Brand et al. 2004:158). In every case, however, the units within the structure are subject to the final authority of the congregation. This is unlike the Episcopal polity, in which the units subject to the final authority of the bishop, or the Presbyterian polity, in which the units within the structure are subject to the final authority of the highest court, the Synod or the General Assembly.

In Malawi, the Congregationalism was introduced through the enterprise of Zambezi Industrial Mission, the Nyasa Industrial Mission, the Seventh Day Adventist Mission, and Providence Industrial Mission. Most of these churches arrived on the Malawian scene in the person of Joseph Booth. The largest of these was the Zambezi Industrial Mission, founded in 1892 (Phiri 2004:153). The Mission opened stations at Mitsidi, Chipande, Craig in Blantyre and Mtonda, Chirole and Dombole in Ntchewu district. Another Congregational Church was the Nyasa Industrial Mission, which established stations at Likhubula in Blantyre district in 1893, at Thyolo in 1898 and at Mkati in 1921. Again another Congregational Church was the Baptist Industrial Mission, which opened stations at Gowa and Dzunje in 1895 in Ntcheu district. Finally we mention the Providence Industrial Mission, founded in 1900 by the Malawian Baptist minister John Chilembwe in Chiladzulo district.

The mission stations of these churches eventually attained the status of independent congregations. They can confer on common matters, but together they cannot make binding decisions for all the congregations. Each local congregation is autonomous, all the decisions are made with majority of votes, and the church councils just implement such decisions. In other words, the governing power rests exclusively with the members of the local church.

Office-bearers, including missionaries, ministers and deacons are simply functionaries of the congregation. General meetings of all the congregations are organized not for making decisions or resolving matters but as conferences or general fellowship meetings for spiritual enrichment.³⁶

2.7.4. Presbyterianism

Presbyterian church polity or Presbyterianism is a system of church government by elders in their assemblies. It was introduced in Malawi by the missions of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland. The two missions founded respectively the Blantyre Mission (later Blantyre Synod) and the Livingstonia Mission (later Livingstonia Synod). In 1924 they joined them together in a federated Church, called Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), to which the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod joined in 1926. Retief (1958:157) describes the relationship between the theological traditions and the system of church government in the CCAP.

‘The name Presbyterian is added to indicate the system ..., which is followed by the Church. It is Reformed as to the Creed and Presbyterian to government as exactly the mother Church is.’

Retief’s remark implies that the church government of the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod is Presbyterian, not Reformed. Presbyterian church government, according to De Ridder (1983:20), has the following characteristics: First, there is one basic office, the eldership,

³⁶ In the Congregational system local churches sometimes have elders (as in Presbyterianism), yet there are no larger outside governing bodies. At the same time, churches adhering to congregational polity often opt to associate in form of conventions and to cooperate with outside agencies, though these hold no authority over individual congregations. This cooperation enables churches to engage in strategic ministry, demonstrating ‘in a visible way their belief in the oneness of the larger body of Christ. According to Cowan and Toon (2004: 49-70) the two major models practiced in Congregationalism in a variety of permutations are: (1) single-elder or pastor; and (2) plural-elder leadership. In the single-elder model, the church votes into office one (senior) pastor who oversees the congregation, ‘Single-Elder-Led Church,’ (cf. Akin, Brand et al 2004:157ff). Whereas theoretically the congregation retains final authority, in practice the senior pastor wields considerable power due to his public teaching office. In addition, deacons are chosen to assist, and in some cases supervise the pastor. In the latter case, deacons form a ‘deacon board’, taking the role of a body of elders. In certain cases there are two bodies - an elder board and a pastoral staff- that meet periodically to determine the direction of the church. Some churches have only lay elders while pastors comprise the full-time, paid staff of the church. In other situations elders include both pastors and ‘lay’-elders, or a church may have only pastors but no ‘lay’-elders, owing to the belief that a special divine call is required. In some cases a corporate board model may prevail where the elder-board rules the church, often without sufficient accountability to the church and without adequate congregational input into decision-making. In the plural-elder model deacons serve under the authority of the elders.

consisting of teaching or ordained elders, and ruling elders. Secondly, the ecclesiastical assemblies are arranged in a hierarchical order, a Church Council as a lower court, a Presbytery as a basic governmental unit, and a Synod or General Assembly as the highest court. These courts often function as judicatories. Thirdly, these courts emphasize the ruling power (authority) of the elders.³⁷ Fourthly, the Church Council is in many ways responsible to the Presbytery and under its control. In a subsequent chapter we will notice how these characteristics are retained and defended in all the churches that belong to the CCAP.

2.7.4.1. The Livingstonia Mission

The establishment of Scottish Missions to Malawi followed the Anglican response to Livingstone's urgent appeal through letters, articles, and through his address at the Senate house of Cambridge on 4th December 1857's (Weller and Linden, 1984:39). The Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland sent an expedition, which comprised among others Robert Laws and Henry Henderson, the pioneer missionary of the Blantyre Mission.

Initially Edward Young led the party until James Stewart replaced him. Robert Laws was head of the Livingstonia Mission. The party arrived in Nyasaland in 1875. First they founded a station at Cape Maclear, Mangochi district. Attacks by unfriendly people, unhealthy conditions, wild animals, and poor soil prompted the missionaries to transfer the mission from to Bandawe in 1888. From Bandawe the mission was transferred to Khondowe in Nkhatabay district in 1894 (Phiri 2004:119ff).³⁸

Efforts to expand the mission work resulted in the establishment of the following mission stations: Ekwendeni (1889), Loudon (1889), Njuyu (1900), Kaning'ina, etc. (McCracken 2000:109; Paas 2006a:189-193). These stations probably attained status of congregations after the establishment of Kirk sessions, which comprised ministers and elders. All the Kirk sessions were under an umbrella body, called the Livingstonia Mission Council, which consisted of all the ordained ministers, and church elders representing every Kirk

³⁷ Akin, Brand et al.(2004:148) observed that the Scottish Presbyterianism is aristocratic view. The Synod or General Synod is the highest assembly, from it authority flows downward to the lower ecclesiastical courts. In the Congregational system the highest authority is all members of the local church. This means from them authority flows upward to the higher courts.

³⁸ Livingstonia Missionaries decided to move mission station from Cape Maclear to Bandawe because of the following reasons: First, the area was unhealthy due to hot wealth and malaria. Second, many wild animals were attacking the missionaries and the people. Third, the area did not have enough land to be cultivated because it was surrounded by of mountains in the eastern part and the Lake in the west Du Plessis 1929:305).

session. Organizationally the Livingstonia Mission did not exactly reflect the church order and church government of the Free Church of Scotland. McCracken (2000:224) noted:

‘It is one of the ironies of Livingstonia that a Presbyterian Free Church Mission should have been organized on highly centralized, autocratic lines. The Free Church of Scotland was a decentralized body with semi-autonomous parishes controlled by a minister supported and to some extent degree supervised, by a committee of lay elders.’

The Livingstonia Mission has harbored strong tendencies of hierarchicalism and clericalism-providing ministers with exclusive authority similar to that of the bishop in Episcopal circles. The matter of parity between, minister, elder and deacon did not receive any attention or consideration. The situation was also the same between the indigenous leaders and the ordained missionaries and among the office-bearers in general, Thompson (1995:178) quoted the remarks made by Rev. W.A. Elmslie who sharply said about his African colleague:

‘He is an assistant to me, working under my supervision. He has no congregation of his own. He lives on the station with me and takes his work according to my guiding.’

Thompson (1995:178) and McCracken (2000:290) both quoted Donald Fraser who emphasized:

‘Our native pastors are not equal with European ministers.’

On the question regarding authority in the Church, Sindima (1992:38) comments:

‘Livingstonia was slow in appointing Africans to positions of authority even when they had attained good educational qualifications and experience in mission work. Missionaries held all positions of authority, made all decisions without even consulting Malawians. In most cases, their decision was final since they considered it “Law of Christ”. The missionaries exercised major influence on all matters, including those of the Session, even when they were a minority.’

One of the issues which must be commented on is the question concerning the seat of authority in the Church. It seems the Livingstonia Mission held the idea that the departure point in the church government is the rule of Christ through office bearers. In this regard the authority of the church is centred in the offices that constituted the highest assembly. Thus, the Synod is the highest court of the Church with a Presbytery as the basic governmental unity and the church council as the lowest court Van Wyk (2004:80,81) observed similar developments in the Church of Scotland:

‘The Presbytery was confirmed as the basic unit in the government of the church. Ministers were considered as first of all to be members of the Presbytery and only secondary related to the congregation. The replacement of the rule of Christ through his Word and Spirit using office bearers with representation of office-assembly as found in Scottish Presbyterian Ecclesiology was maintain.’

He (2004:81) also pointed out:

‘Episcopal related to individual was replaced by Episcopal exercised by Presbyters in hierarchical assemblies or courts.’

The hierarchical and clerical tendency in the Livingstonia Mission (and also later) the Livingstonia Synod cited in the fact that the eldership was a lifelong office as well as the fact that the office of the pastors was separated from the congregation because it is believed that they represent and belong to the Presbytery and Synod not to the local congregation (cf. Chilenje 2007:156).

In addition to this, the leadership of the Presbytery comprised: the Moderator and the Vice-Moderator who were appointed for a term of two years, the General Secretary who was the chief executive and custodian of the Synod’s documents and had a four year-term of office, the Senior Clerk as the Synod’s scribe, and the Junior Clerk as the Synod treasurer (Chilenje 2007:207).³⁹

The General Secretary held a semi-permanent full time appointment and was salaried by the Synod. He was not only powerful, but could not be easily dismissed, and he acted in an autocratic or even a dictatorial way or took decisions on his own without referring to other

³⁹ Article IX.4 of the Constitution of the Livingstonia Synod of the CCAP, 1956, 1972.

office-bearers (cf. Pauw 1980:393).⁴⁰ It seems the understanding was that the authority in the Church resided in the office bearers who constitute assemblies.

The ecclesiastical assemblies of Livingstonia Mission were instituted as follows, the first Kirk session in Bandawe in 1895, the first Presbytery on 15 November 1899, and the first Synod or General Synod in 1956. These assemblies are ordered hierarchically from Church Council to General Synod. This order implies that the authority of Christ is transferred to the offices who constitute and govern the church through the courts and their executive office-bearers, similar to the practice in Episcopalianism. The local church does not enjoy the direct rule of Christ (Weller and Linden, 1980:114). This means that the Livingstonia Mission later the Livingstonia Synod was organized in a top-to-bottom structure, leaving elders without any significant influence at the local church or congregational, presbytery and Synod levels.

It can be suggested that Livingstonia's hierarchical arrangements and attitudes influenced those involved in church polity discourses and church government in the Nkhoma Synod their association in the Synod of the CCAP and Zomba Theological College.

2.7.4.2. The Blantyre Mission

The Blantyre Mission,⁴¹ (later Blantyre Synod) was founded once gain as a result of Livingstone's appeal through letters, articles and addresses (cf. Ross 1995:23). It was the missionary organization of the (Established) Church of Scotland, which sent its pioneer Henry Henderson alongside the party of the Livingstonia Mission in 1875.

The first mission station was established among the Mang'anja people between Ndilande and Soche Mountains, on October 23, 1876. By 1892 the Blantyre Mission had opened the following stations, which by 1900 had attained status of congregations: Kapeni

⁴⁰ Here Pauw says that in 1972 the Nkhoma Synod ruled out that the General Secretary would be in office for six years and would be re-elected for another term. He added, 'This was a compromise in which the obvious danger could be avoided of a person holding the post permanently as was the case with the Blantyre and Livingstonia Synods, where the General Secretary had become not only extremely powerful, but also could not be easily dismissed. Thus, it could be possible for the General Secretary to act in an autocratic or even a dictatorial way or take decisions on his own which should be the prerogative of the Synod, thus, flouting some fundamental principles of the Presbyterian Church order.'

⁴¹ The name of Mission was Blantyre' was given in memory of the Scottish town where Dr David Livingstone was born (Paas 2006a:193).

(1876), Zomba (1879), Domasi (1884), Chiladzulo (1884), Mulanje (1887) development of office. Ross (1995:112) describes the first stage in the training of African office-bearers:

‘The training of Africans took more shape in 1893 with the announcement that a deacon class of seven but representative of many more who will in like manner devote themselves to service, meets every morning at 7 o’clock. They take a lively interest in Biblical Criticism, Theology, Church History, and Liturgies. The class was composed of John Chipuliko, Mungo Murray Chisuse, Thomas Mpeni, James Kamlinje, James Auldean Mwembe, John Gray Kufa and Harry Kambwiri Matecheta. All these successfully completed their training and were ordained as deacons on 4th November 1894’.⁴²

Some African deacons were posted to the satellite stations around Blantyre station, where they served in subordinate capacities. Together with the leading missionary David Clement Scott they formed a Kirk Session, as a body for exercising church discipline. In 1895 these deacons were ordained and given responsibility for the life and work of the mission, and for Church in particular groups in villages around Blantyre. Ross (1995:112) notes that this Malawian office of the deacon is not familiar in the Presbyterian churches in general. It was a creation of D.C Scott, who wanted to use the knowledge and wisdom of the Africans especially in the area of church discipline. This deaconate, however, is similar to that of the early church in which the bishop worked with a group of presbyters who often served remote churches. Ross (1996a:152) recalls that Kirk Sessions in Scotland had exercised this authority during the 17th and 18th centuries but later it lapsed. Some missionaries opposed the ordination of natives because it implied a kind of equality between the white ministers and the indigenous leaders. They thought it utterly wrong to teach any native that he is as good as the white man, because he is not. If he were, he would be on a level with the white man, but it is because he is inferior that he is under the white man.⁴³ Hierarchical tendencies among office-bearers and ecclesiastical courts of the Blantyre Mission are illustrated as follows by Hetherwick (1931:127):

⁴² The term deacon in the Blantyre Mission mean that it normally means in the Presbyterian churches in which the term refers to a lay person who is chosen by the congregation to look after property and money.

⁴³ R.S. Hynde, ex-missionary of the Blantyre Mission, and business man as well as editor of the Central Africa Times. This quotation was taken from his article in the issue of 1 September 1900. We do not know to which extent his view was personal or an idea that he shared with other missionaries during his time.

‘The Presbytery recognized the order of deacons as an office preparatory to that of the eldership-their function being not merely to deal with the finances of the church but also to assist the elders in their office. ...The deacons attended and took part in all meetings of session but had no vote. In practice after a few years on the deaconate they are advanced to the eldership.’

The establishment of the Mission Council of the Blantyre Mission as the first governing assembly was followed by the founding of a Kirk Session around 1900, a Presbytery in 1904 and the Synod in 1956. The Mission Council was responsible to the Home Committee in Scotland. Ross (1996a:172,177) observes that although in some areas indigenous structures were set up

‘...the Mission Council was always the real source of both power and authority. This was because it controlled the larger resources usually including all the building, whether schools or churches. ... The local Session and Presbytery had little or no control over major elements in the staff and property of the churches in their area’. ... ‘The Mission Council, in effect a white oligarchy, controlled the major financial resources in the field, paying for African teachers and evangelists (that is for most of the full time staff) and controlling their posting and work. Neither the Kirk Sessions formed in 1900 nor the Presbytery founded in 1904 had any authority over these vital matters. Even the matter of directions in which the Church should expand appeared on the agenda of the Mission Council.’

Between 1904 and 1924, officially the Blantyre Presbytery was the highest ecclesiastical court for Europeans and Africans in all church matters, but in reality the Mission Council was responsible for everything. In 1924 the Synod of the CCAP became the highest ecclesiastical court, although by this time the church had not yet received its autonomy from the Church of Scotland. In 1956 the Presbytery of Blantyre together with the Presbyteries of Livingstonia and Nkhoma attained status of Synods, with a the General Synod as Supreme Court of Appeal. In 1958 the church received autonomy from the Church of Scotland.

Hierarchical tendencies were engrafted in the Synod’s past. Hetherwick (1932:150) recommended that the system of church government for the CCAP should resemble the civil

government where the chief and the headman ruled over his council of elders - a system that according to Hetherwick might be represented in the true rule of the church as that of the Bishop in his Synod of Presbyters, and of the Minister in his Session of elders.

The system of church government operated by the Scottish missions, today the Synods of Blantyre and Livingstonia, has been characterized by a similar hierarchicalism than the system of Episcopalianism, in the sense that instead of a hierarchy office-bearers summiting in a bishop, there has been a hierarchy of ecclesiastical assemblies, in which the Synod or the General Synod was highest assembly and a church council or a session is the lowest court. Van Wyk (2004:166) noted that in the Church of Scotland the office of minister was separated from the congregation, the office of elders was reduced to assistants of the minister, and the authority of Christ was transferred to the offices which govern the church through courts in an Episcopal sense. He (2004:166) concludes:

‘The Presbyterian system of Church government became characteristic of the government of the Reformed churches in Central Africa. In these Churches, the emphasis falls on the maintenance of the institution through its executive functions in accordance with the comprehensive law book. The local church as a locus for the direct rule of Christ enjoys little or no attention.’

Paas (2007:183) commented on the problems of ‘clericalism’ and ‘authority’ in the CCAP:

‘The way how ministers are addressed, as *reverend* (exalted one), or *dominee* (lord) are indicative of their elevated position. ... The clericalist tendency is even strong in the churches that derive much of their Presbyterianism from the English scene. An example is the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian in the countries of Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. External and internal authority in the Church is almost completely in the hand of ministers ... The church is organized in a top-to bottom structure, leaving elders of the local congregation without significant influence at Presbytery and Synod levels. Practically, the ordained clergy take all the decisions in their respective Presbyteries and Synods. Full time clerical officials at Synod level are particularly powerful.’

The Presbyterian system of church government, which the CCAP of Blantyre and Livingstonia derived from the Scottish Missions, with its professionalism, hierarchicalism

and clericalism, seems to be a compromise with the system of Episcopalian church government. This compromise has not failed to influence the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod.

2.7.4.3. The Reformed System

Although CCAP - Nkhoma Synod originally was characterized by its Dutch Reformed origin, in reality its church polity has taken over Scottish Presbyterian characteristics (cf. Van Wyk 2004:10). The Reformed system of church government was introduced in Malawi through the missionary enterprise by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)⁴⁴ of the Cape Synod in South Africa. The first missionary arrived in 1888, Andrew Charles Murray, a year later he was followed by Theunis Botha Vlok. They set up the first mission station, at Mvera in Dowa district, on 28 November 1889.⁴⁵ From Mvera the mission work spread to many parts in the Central Region and in some parts of the Southern Region (Pauw 1980:174).⁴⁶ Early expansion resulted in the establishments of mission stations at Kongwe (1894), and Nkhoma (1896). The stations of Livlezi (1886) and Malembo (1895) were taken over from the Livingstonia Mission because they were located south of the 13th degree latitude which was considered the boundary between the Scottish and Dutch mission fields (Du Plessis 1929:307; Paas, 2006a:195-197). The work of the DRCM was under the supervision of the Livingstonia Mission until 1897, when it became independent.

By 1899 each mission station became a congregation simultaneously with the institution of Church Councils. In 1903, a governing body, the Council of Congregations was set up to be responsible for practical functions of the Presbytery. The DRCM joined the Synod of the Presbyteries of Blantyre and Livingstonia in 1926. Thirty years later, it attained the status of the Synod together with the two Presbyteries. It became an autonomous church in 1962.

What is being argued in this study is that in the course of instituting and developing its structures, the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod adopted Scottish-Presbyterian principles and practices of church government.

⁴⁴ In Dutch: Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK). The DRC missionaries were sent by the Ministers' Mission Society, an initiative of a group of the DRC ministers in the Cape, South Africa.

⁴⁵ In those early days the work of the DRC in Malawi was often referred to as 'Mvera Mission', because it was its head mission until 1913. The word Mvera means obedience.

⁴⁶ The original boundary of the mission fields was as follows: The Livingstonia Mission in the North at the 13th degree latitude and alongside Dwangwa River, the Blantyre Mission in South part of the districts of Ntcheu and Mangochi, Lake Malawi in the East and Mozambique and Zambia in the West (Bolink 1967:191).

2.8. Chapter Summary

The chapter set out to ask whether, and to what extent, the context of the Church influences or should influence church polity and church government. It was the assumption that the context can influence the discourse on church polity and practice in a negative way and that the appropriate sensitivity is required in this regard.

The Nkhoma Synod church polity was developed in the contexts of its geographical landscape, and of social-political, economical, religious, and Christian-ecclesial conditions. It was observed that certain aspects of these contexts were able to negatively influence the polity discourse and government of the Church. The CCAP uncritically imitated ruling systems of the society and those of religious bodies and of other churches, like those of the ruling system of the Malawian state, the Nyau Society and Scottish Presbyterianism. This leads to the question whether the essence of the Church's identity is compromised in the process.

Chapter 3: Principles of Reformed church polity

3.1. Introduction

This chapter identifies and describes tenets of Reformed Church polity.⁴⁷ Bouwman (1998) indicates that and dealing with issues of church polity we are not dealing with a neutral issue.

‘Is church government not simply a minister’s speciality- a field of study with which we need not to burden our brains? Is church polity not simply church politics...? No dear reader, church polity is not church politics. ... In the church of Jesus, there is room neither for politics nor for politricks. ... Yet precisely here is possibly the reason why a column on Church polity is necessary. Attention *ought*, though to be focused on God’s wish. That is: the accent ought not to be on how things have been done, but rather how things ought to be done ...what the Lord has told us in His Word about how He would have His church be governed’
(<http://members.iinet.net.au/~jvd/notes3.htm>)

There are four sections. First, we are defining some essential terminology related to Reformed church polity. Then we are assessing certain distinctive features of Reformed

⁴⁷ In this chapter the words ‘tenets’ or ‘principles’ will mean more or less the same thing and these terms will be used interchangeably in the rest of the dissertation.

church polity. This is followed by a presentation of principles of Reformed church polity as suggested by some Reformed theologians. Finally we are briefly identifying and describing the sources from which Reformed churches have developed their church order and church government. Our main concern in this chapter is how a Reformed church ought to be organized in order to acknowledge the rule and reign of Christ.

3.2. Some important terms

In the field of ecclesiology many terms are used to describe how the Church ought to be organized and governed, e.g. church government, church polity, church order, confession, canons, constitution, and acts. The meanings of some are overlapping one another, others are synonymous. Some terms can be given different meanings, depending on the ecclesial tradition, although they differ in their meaning. In this section will concentrate on ‘church polity’, ‘Presbyterian church polity’, and ‘Reformed Church polity’.

3.2.1. General remarks on church polity

In the Standard Dictionary of Religion Soanes and Stevenson (2008:1110) understand *polity* as ‘a permanent form or process of civil government or constitution or an organized society.’ For Markwardt (1965: 978) *polity* refers to a form of government of a state, a church or a society and secondly of any community living under some definite form of government. These descriptions suggest that polity has various meanings that overlap one another. Basically it is a particular form or system of government, e.g. civil polity, ecclesiastical polity. It is also a condition of being constituted as a state or other organized community or body, and also a government or administrative regulation of any institution or organization.

The terms *polity* is and *policy* are closely related; both come from the same root, and can be used with regard to organizational matters of the Church. Another related word is *politics*. However, if used with regard to church government, it has the unfavorable connotation of scheming, intended to favor some persons or a group of people.

According to Schaver (1947a:65), a policy is a plan of more limited scope than a polity, which is directed to a particular purpose. In Markwardt’s (1965:978) formulation a policy is a method of management with reference to the attainment of certain ends; each administration has a policy of its own. A *polity*, however, refers a governing principle, a plan

or course of action. Janssen (2000:227) says it shapes the particular decisions and actions taken by a body or by those subject to it.

Prior to the Reformation the word *polity* was already used in the *Canon Law* of the medieval Church. It had its origin in the twelfth century with Pope Gratian who gathered all ecclesiastical legislation of the Church Councils and Papal Decrees together into a systematic and organized body, called *Canon Law* (cf. Coertzen 2004:215). During and after the Reformation various other names came into use, e.g. *church framework*, *church right*, *church government*. Vorster (2003:3) says, ‘Calvin, influenced by Bucer, explained his views on church government in his well-known *Institutes*. He also issued his *Ordonnances Ecclesiastique*, which was accepted as a church order in Geneva in 1541.’ Calvin’s views on church government have deeply influenced the development of Reformed church orders and church government theories worldwide. His ideas inspired interests in various aspects of church polity and themes, of which this study is an example. Hanko says that the term *church polity* has become the most widely used designation for matters of church order. It was used by Wilhelmus Zepperus who was the first Protestant theologian to make a special study of church government, and called this science *Politiae Ecclesiae*. Hanko also mentioned Gijsbert Voetius, who ‘used the name in a slightly altered form *Politic Ecclesiastical*’, which was also used by ‘Richard Hoover, William Cunningham, Charles Hodge Gorge Lamb and others’ (Hanko, 2009:3).

What is *church polity*? In this section we consider definitions of secular scholars and theologians. In secular understanding church polity is a neutral field, which is segregated from theology. Schaver’s (1947a:65) definition is an example of the neutral approach.

‘By church polity is meant the extensive system by which a denomination governs itself or is governed. This system of government may be by means of the many authoritative local churches (Independentism), or through churches as gathered in the broader assemblies (Presbyterian polity), through the combined clergy (Episcopal polity), or through either the latter two in conjunction with the civil ruler (Erastian polity).’

Schaver (1947a: 66) adds that the terms *church polity* and *church government* are closely akin in meaning. Church polity emphasizes the system whereas church government emphasizes the authority in that system. Markwardt (1965: 978) says that church polity distinguishes matters related to church administration and church government from matters

related to doctrine and faith. Also in Markwardt's view church polity on the one hand and faith or theological teaching on the other hand can be considered as fields that are separate from one another, which suggests that church polity does not belong to theology. Gray and Tucker (1999:1) seem to support the idea that a church polity does not need to be theologically justified, when they define it as merely a set of rules applied to the government of the church.

It can be suggested that a church polity has profound implication for the understanding of the nature of the Church and its various functions and ministries. Church polity can be regarded as a means of manifesting the lordship of Christ in the Church. The Church functions in Christ and 'in submission to his presence vis-à-vis the Holy Spirit and his written Word.' The structure of the Church, the nature and function of its offices and relationships, its membership are expressions the faith and the teachings of the Church, in other words of its theology. Also Vorster (2003:1) considers church polity as a theological discipline. For him church polity deals with the arrangement of the ministry in the Church with the aim to build the Church in an orderly and sound fashion. Here Vorster looks upon church polity as a definition of the internal organizational contemporary situation, it describes the present internal structure of the Church and how it is governed. However, he realizes that church polity is wider, it also has an external, outward dimension, which asks how the Church ought to be governed in order to fulfill its calling and mission in the world. This leads to the historical perspective. Apart from focusing on contemporary situations, church polity can be understood in the light of its historical development.

De Ridder (1983: iii) had this in mind when he stated that in history 'events and movements had emerged to facilitate the development and govern the definitions of the church polities ... and are still regulative today in many churches.' Vorster agrees to this and connects church polity to the historical texts on the issue, including the Bible, the confessions, church orders, catechisms, resolutions of ecclesiastical-assembly meetings, liturgical formularies and writings of church jurists (cf. Coertzen 2004: 158ff). Vorster finally calls for a hermeneutical approach of church polity, implying that studying it must involve a critical analysis of the historical context of a particular source of church polity and the theological paradigm regarding the understanding and application of the Biblical principles in the discourse on church polity and the practice of church government (Vorster, 2003:5).

We conclude that church polity should be defined as the branch of theology that extracts from Scripture and the Confessions rules, regulations and procedures for the daily life of the Church, which aim at creating space and channels for the rule and reign of Christ

through His Word and Spirit using office-bearers. This definition implies that church polity cannot be just a system of governing the Church without taking into account its sources and purposes. It also implies the possible existence of systems of church government that do not aim at helping the Church to behave according to God's Word and to glorify Him, not allowing God's Word to be applied to the whole spectrum of the Church's life (cf. Coertzen 2004:201). Finally, the definition contains the necessary elements, it points to the One who rules the Church, it says how the Church is governed and it mentions the office-bearers and their function.

3.2.2. Presbyterian church polity

The meaning of the term *Presbyterian* is related to two Greek words, *presbyteroi* and *episkopoi*, which the New Testament uses for the elders as rulers of the Church. The singular words *presbyteros* and *episkopos* mean respectively the first or the elderly person (Mathew 16:21; 21:23 Acts 4:23; 6:12) the overseer (Acts 20:28 Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 2:25). The two terms are synonyms (cf. Ferguson and Wright 1997:145; Paas, 2007:49), and designate the same office-bearer, the elder. In plural the terms may refer to a body or a council of elders which govern an institution or a society. Presbyterian church polity broadly refers to church government by a body of elders, consisting of teaching elders (ordained ministers), and ruling elders, persons elected from the church members.

The term *Presbyterianism* is often used as a synonym to Presbyterian church polity. Those who call themselves Presbyterians believe that their form of church goes back to New Testament. According to Wilmore 1983:56) Presbyterian churches claim that their system was re-introduced in the 16th century Reformation by John Calvin in Switzerland, and that from there it spread to Scotland and England through John Knox, and later to America, Asia and Africa.

'Presbyterianism originates from 'the days when the apostles installed in each church a group of officials who ruled, called presbyters, or elders and a second group who performed acts of service called deacons. ... According to this practice the pastor was more or less than an elder who had been given a teaching rather than explicitly responsibilities. ... 'The sixteenth century Protestant Reformation in Europe brought this Biblical practice to remembrance when the Reformers turned to the Scriptures as sole authority for how a Church should be governed. A Presbyterian form of church

government was first introduced in Geneva, Switzerland by John Calvin (1509-1564 and spread to other Reformed churches throughout Europe.’ (Wilmore 1983:56).

Since John Calvin is generally considered to be at the roots of Presbyterianism, Calvinism is commonly identified with Presbyterianism. However, it should be born in mind that Calvinism is much more than a system of church government, but it includes practically all aspects of theology (cf. Wilmore, 193:57).

The designer and carrier of Presbyterian church polity is John Knox [1514-1572] (cf. Paas 2007:68, 69). As a refugee Knox resided in Geneva for some time, where he was a student of Calvin (). However, Knox did not exactly copy Calvin’s church order but adapted it to the more difficult ecclesiological and political situations in Scotland, where the Reformation was still in danger of failing, facing the remaining power of the medieval Church (Van Wyk 2004:34).

In order to draw Roman Catholics and Anglicans into the Church of the Reformation he used Episcopalian elements of church government and applied those to the Scottish Church (*Buku La Katekisma* 1966:282). The result of this adaptation was a new church order, dubbed as Presbyterianism, with more emphasis on exclusive authority of presbyters, especially ministers, and their assemblies (cf. Van Wyk 2004: 34, 35; Paas 2007:98).

With this in mind, let us now look more closely at some characteristics of Presbyterianism, first at the types of offices that constitute the government of the church. Presbyterian Churches recognize one basic office in the church, i.e the eldership, divided into two kinds, the ruling elders and the teaching elders. Although De Ridder’s claim that deacons are not present in the Presbyterian church order (De Ridder, 1983:20) is an exaggeration, it is true that the deacon-office seems to have not fully developed under Presbyterianism.

Deacons are often viewed as assistants to the elders and ministers. This is a weak element in Presbyterian church polity. Another weak characteristic concerns the authority of the church. The authority in Presbyterian church polity is centred not in the local church, but in the highest ecclesiastical court, the Synod or General Assembly. As a result, a local church as a locus for the direct rule of Christ enjoys little or even no attention.

The Presbyterian church policy recognizes a hierarchy of ecclesiastical courts, the Church Council the lowest court, the Presbytery the higher court, and the Synod or General

Assembly the highest court (Van Wyk 2004:166,167). Those who are appointed to serve on the higher or highest courts regard others as inferiors, and practically the authority of Christ, which is supposed to rule the Church, is transferred to them. He further elaborates on the theological consequences of these deficiencies in Presbyterian church polity.

‘An important contributing factor to the inability of Scottish Presbyterianism to arrive at a theology of the ministry of the reformed offices is the specific departure of Scottish Ecclesiology. ... Due to practical considerations (e.g. the decisive struggle for autonomy of the church against state control) and unscriptural pragmatic approach in dealing with issues the Church as an institution became the starting point of all church political considerations. The Ecclesiology was separated from Christology and Pneumatology. Neither in the formative documents of Presbyterianism, nor the different traditions that developed in the Scottish reformed church was the work of the Holy Spirit in maintaining the rule of Christ through His Word using office bearers considered in terms of the government of the church ’ (Van Wyk 2004:165).

He finally concluded

‘As the result the rule of Christ was replaced by that of man and the church was considered as an institution to be governed in accordance with its constitution and enacted laws. By neglecting the rule of Christ through both His Word and Spirit, the Scottish Presbyterianism degenerated into a comprehensive ecclesiasticism’ (Van Wyk 2004:166)

Regarding the departure point of the Scottish Presbyterianism and Presbyterian church polity he (2005:165) noted that Presbyterianism takes as its departure point in the rule of Christ in the Church through office-bearers unlike the Reformed or Presbyterian which takes Christ’s through Christ’s Word and Spirit using office-bearers’ as departure point. It is clear that the latter does not separate Christology from Pneumatology.

Van Wyk (2004:166) also claims that Presbyterian ministers belong to the Presbytery, rather than to the Congregation, which would indicate that in a clerical sense the office of the minister is separated from his congregation. This contributes to the problem of

reducing the offices of the elder and deacon to assistants of the minister, less in regard as ministries of Christ's rule.

Finally, Van Wyk points to the priority of the office of minister in Presbyterianism, which means that the offices are viewed in terms of rank and status (Van Wyk, 2004:166). The latter point is corroborated by Paas in his study of the birth of Presbyterianism.

'The insignificance role of the elders in present day classes and synods leads... to the conclusion that the danger of a new hierarchy of church-office bearers, was not warded off by the Presbyterianism of the Reformed Church but their *synodocalism* a new hierarchy of higher and lower ministers however prevented' (Paas 2007:182, 183)

He (Paas 2007:8, 182) also observed that there is a certain form of hierarchicalism which has crept into the church i.e. the relationship between the ministers and the elders which has made the former to have authority hovering above the latter and have no significance influence at the church council, presbytery and synod levels.

It is striking that in the Presbyterian church polity Jesus Christ is acknowledged to be Head of the Church but practically the Synodical or very often the office bearers who constitute the highest court replaces the rule of Christ through his Word and Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, the discussions on the Presbyterianism are an attempt to shed more light various forms hierarchicalism as well as a means of rejecting powerful hierarchical tendencies and clericalism. Therefore, if the deficiencies found in the system could be removed more space and channels would be created for the rule and dominion of Christ. Thus, discussions on the deficiencies should however not be viewed negatively, but must be regarded as a point of departure for evaluation and positive change.

3.2.3. Reformed church polity

What is *Reformed church polity*? The term has been uncritically used in many churches that trace their origin to the teaching of the 16th century Reformer John Calvin. Let us first look at the word 'Reformed.' It was first used in the 16th century to describe those involved in the movement of Protestantism to reform the Roman Catholic Church and when this was barred

to create its own churches (cf. Symlie, 1996:16). The term Protestantism is derived from a declaration (*protestation*) by a group of delegates against the Diet of Speyer (1529), which had passed laws against the Lutherans. In a later development the name 'Reformed' was especially used to designate followers of Martin Bucer, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and others, except the followers of Martin Luther (Hesselink, 1983:5). McKim (1992: xiv) says

'The term 'Reformed' arose from the emphasis of the Swiss Reformers on the being reformed of the Church according to the Word of God. During 16th century the term was applied to all Protestant churches as did the term Evangelical. ... But the Swiss Reformers, because of their through commitment to Scripture as the source of authority for the church and their emphasis on simplicity in worship and discipline both in private and public life came to be called in a particular way'.

After 1590 a distinction began to be made between Lutheran churches and Reformed churches (Calvin and Zwingli). Subsequently the name 'Reformed' came to be used of almost all the Calvinistic and Zwinglian Churches in Western Europe (especially France, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, The Netherlands), and later in America, Asia (e.g. Korea, Taiwan, China), Africa (e.g. South Africa, Kenya), and Australia. Thorough study of the Scriptures by the Swiss Reformers from which they were encouraged to reformation, coined the designation 'Reformed.' Hesselink (1983:17) stresses, 'The word 'Reformed' refers primarily to a theological tradition not to a system of church government or polity.' Although this is true Hesselink points to the close relationship between the designations Reformed and Presbyterian.

'Even so, Reformed Churches have had a Presbyterian system of church government throughout their respective histories. However, there are many variations with what is considered the Presbyterian system of church government. For example, deacons have not played a significant role in American Presbyterian and in American Reformed Churches. In the Christian Reformed Church in America, the General Assembly has more legislative power than in the Reformed Church in America, where Classes (Presbyteries) have more authority. Also, the Reformed Church in America is the only denomination which still maintains the fourth office, that of the professor or doctor of Theology, first instituted by Calvin in Geneva.' Hesselink (1983:17)

Hesselink (1983:17) strongly rejects the idea that ‘Reformed’ and ‘Presbyterian’ are distinct terms describing different churches and traditions. He explains that ‘the word Reformed refers primarily to the denominations which bear the name, especially those of Dutch origin.’ Besides, it came to be used for almost all Calvinistic churches in the world. Some churches prefer the term ‘Reformed-Presbyterian’ to Reformed. On this he says that in the United States ‘Reformed-Presbyterian’ churches is the largest Protestant group. Some of the largest Protestant denominations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are also called Reformed-Presbyterian. Consequently Hesselink warns that one should not equate the terms Reformed and Presbyterian with respectively Dutch churches and Scottish churches. (cf. Hesselink 1983: 5-7).

In summary, the term ‘Reformed’ first referred to a loose and wide group or movement of Reformation in the 16th century. Then it designated church denominations constituted by that movement, especially those that relate their reformed identity to continual reformation in accordance to the Word of God. *Ecclesia Reformata semper reformanda est!* A Reformed Church must ever be reforming itself. A church is Reformed if it is ordered according to biblical principles.

Now turn back to the question in the beginning of this section, ‘What is Reformed Church polity?’ According to De Ridder (1983:19), it is a system of church government, which is governed by a council comprising the minister(s) of the Word, the elders, and the deacons. His definition seems to be a summary of the first part of article 30 of the *Belgic Confession*.

‘We believe, that this true Church must be governed by that spiritual policy [polity] which our Lord hath taught us in his Word; namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God, and to administer the sacraments; also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the Church’ (Paas 2007:45ff).

Here the *Belgic Confession* keeps in balance the three offices -minister, elder and deacon- which constitute the government of the local congregation. The concept of the three offices is one of the important theological aspects of Reformed Church polity. Van Dellen and Monsma (1964:16) say that the offices of ministers, elder and deacons find their origin in Christ, the

Church's only Head and Supreme Ruler. The three offices are nothing but continuations and extensions of Christ's three-fold office. There is no office, which is superior or inferior to the other. There is parity among all church office-bearers in the concept of the three-fold office. They (1964:20) add:

'Elders represent Christ as King. It is their specific duty and privilege to rule. Deacons represent Christ as Priest. It is their specific duty and privilege to show mercy. Ministers represent Christ as Prophet. It is their specific duty and privileges to make known the will of God; to speak his Word.'

Osterhaven (1971:63) agrees that the three-fold office comes from Christ.

'In the Reformed Church the special offices are considered to be three in number: ministers of the Word, elders and deacons. Each of these offices is derived from Jesus Christ, the only Head of the Church and the lawgiver in Zion.'

What does Reformed church polity mean for the local congregation? It must be emphasized that each local congregation is autonomous. Vorster (2003:1) says that the church is an organized community of believers in a certain place. Church polity concerns the organization of that local congregation and the fellowship of congregations in the assemblies. For the individual congregation and for the congregations together Reformed church polity aims at 'realizing the rule of Christ as the Head of the Church according to the Word of God.' Reformed churches balance the autonomy of the local congregation with the unity with others in a denomination (cf. De Ridder 1983:19).

Although the chief principle is local autonomy, the local congregation is obliged to form a federation with other congregations because of the 'solemn injunction of Christ to express the unity of the body of Christ in the institutional form of the church' (Hanko 2009:5). Broader assemblies have some powers, clearly defined. Such powers are derived from the local congregations. There is a danger of one-sidedness. Overemphasizing the autonomy of the local congregation can lead to independentism, and overemphasizing denominational power and authority can lead to hierarchicalism. Reformed church polity rejects the extremes.

John Calvin is often identified with Reformed church polity, but historically it is the Strasbourg Reformer Martin Bucer (1491-1551) who did the ground work for it (cf. Hanko, 2009:6). Subsequently Bucer taught his ideas of church structure to Calvin, who for some time resided in Strasbourg as a refugee. Calvin put them into practice in Geneva, and they were taken over by Reformed churches in other countries, for instance by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in The Netherlands in 1618-1619. Paas says:

‘Although the Strasbourg Reformer was its architect, his attempts to put it to practice a lasting system, were not successful. The role of introducing a Presbyterian form of church government, which would endure the storms of time, was designated to the Reformer of Geneva. In general John Calvin used ideas of his Strasbourg friend and teacher. He not only worked them out to greater consequence, but also added different notions’

Bucer’s starting point for church structure, which he derived from Martin Luther, was the general office of all believers. Scripture had taught Bucer that all believers are righteous in Christ and live in a bond of faith with Christ, partaking in his threefold office of prophet, priest and king.

‘Interwoven in the whole of Bucer’s theology, a new conception arose of the priest of all believers. However, contrary to Luther Bucer fully recognized the pneumatic character of this doctrine. The congregation is a spiritual community, the body of Christ bound together by the work of the Holy Spirit (Paas 2007:45).’

In Bucer’s thought the Church is ruled by Christ through the general office of all believers, and in particular through the special office of the elders. He regarded the Word of God and the Holy Spirit using office-bearers as means by which Christ rules his Church. Bucer believed in one special office, the elder or presbyter, and he distinguished governmental and ministerial sides of it. Later Bucer’s emphasis on the general office faded away because of lack of cooperation by the city-magistracy in building a disciplined Church. The danger of anarchy because of the Anabaptist radicals and a tendency of liberalism among church-members forced Bucer to pay more attention to the organization of the Church and the need for disciplining members through the special office (cf. Paas 2007:45-50, 182,183). Bouwman (1998) described the early history of Reformed church polity as follows:

‘John Calvin built his understanding of Church government on what Bucer had learned from the Bible. Calvin ... emphasized the office of all believers, and that local believers form a church, which Christ wants governed by office-bearers. The local, visible church is all important to the work of the Holy Spirit, for He works faith through the preaching and the preaching is delivered from each local pulpit.’

Some differences between the church polity of Bucer and Calvin should be noted. Bucer accepted basically one special office, the presbyter or elder, whereas Calvin recognized four. Bucer stressed *Christocracy*, i.e. the government of the church by Christ, whereas Calvin stressed *Pneumatocracy*, i.e. the government of the church by the Holy Spirit. Both saw the Church as the body of Christ built by the Holy Spirit, but they emphasized different aspects when it came to church polity.

Calvin’s version of Reformed church polity has been widely spread. Its 16th and 17th century stages are closely related to the struggle for religious and political independence of The Netherlands and still bears many of the marks of those struggles. Some marks of struggles concern the keeping in balance of the autonomy of the local congregations and the denomination of all congregations. It implies that a local church has the right and authority to choose its leaders, exercise church discipline over its members and control its resources.

Apart from The Netherlands, already before 1800 Calvin’s ideas have deeply influenced the development of Reformed church polity in France, Switzerland, Hungary, South Africa, and America. Calvin’s influence is also apparent in resolutions about church order by early Synods, such as Wesel (1568), Emden (1571) Dordrecht (1578), Middelburg (1581) Den Haag (1586), and the important Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619). Influential Dutch theologians of early Reformed history accepted and applied Calvin’s church thought, like Voetius, Raagerds, Rutgers. In the 19th and 20th century they were followed by Bouwman, Noordmans, Jansen, Bronkhorst, Nauta Van Dellen, Monsma etc. Reformed Ecclesiologists in (South) Africa, America and elsewhere have been inspired by Calvin’s viewpoints of church government (cf. Vorster, 2003:4).

It is not easy to make a clear-cut description of Reformed church polity, distinguished from Presbyterian church polity, because the two are from the same origin, and there are many overlapping features. Believing that the government of the church is regulated by the Word and the Spirit working in the hearts and lives of believers at the grass

roots, Reformed Churches practice a ‘bottom-up’ polity, as opposed to a ‘top-down’ model of Presbyterian polity (cf. Paas 2007:183). Reformed Church polity is both anti-hierarchical and anti-independent, promoting both the autonomy of the local church and the need to cooperate within a federation, based on the church polity articles in their confessional documents, the *Belgic Confession* (also called *Netherlands Confession of Faith*), the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Canons of Dordt*, together with the *Church Order* adopted by the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619).

3.2.4. Reformed and Presbyterian church polities

There have been many debates on the question whether or to which extent Reformed and Presbyterian are synonymous terms. Reformed Church polity is sometimes uncritically equated with Presbyterian church polity, possibly by confusion of the designations *Presbyterial* and *Presbyterian* (Brink and De Ridder, 1980:1). In order to demonstrate that Reformed church polity includes the rule by *presbyters* (elders), but it is different from Presbyterianism that even derives its name from the use of *presbyters*, the Reformed system is often typified as *Presbyterial*. Another reason of confusion of course is that Reformed and Presbyterian church polities in their early 16th century histories are related to the Reformer John Calvin. Originally, all churches of the Reformation used the names Reformed (or Evangelical) to distinguish themselves from the ‘unreformed’, or Roman Catholic (Hesselink, 1983:5ff). After the Marburg Colloquy of 1529 where the Reformers Luther unfortunately failed to agree with Zwingli on an aspect of the sacraments and continued his controversy with the Swiss Reformed, gradually the name Lutheran began to be used as a specific designation for followers of Luther, whereas the name Reformed became associated with the Calvinistic churches. Most Reformed churches of today trace their origins to the early Calvinistic churches of continental Europe. The name *Presbyterian* was adopted by Calvinistic churches of the British Isles (Smylie 1983:16, 19; Lietscher, 1978: 23). Because of the role given to presbyters or elders also Reformed churches may call their church polity *Presbyterian*, but if the need of stressing the difference with historical Presbyterianism is felt, they use the name *Presbyterial*. Both the Reformed approach and Presbyterianism, are distinguished from both Lutheranism and Congregationalists (Wilmore 1983:56).

What are the differences between the Reformed approach (*Presbyterial church polity*) and the Presbyterian approach (*Presbyterian church polity, Presbyterianism*)? De Ridder (1983:20) claims the following differences:

1. In Presbyterian church polity the church order belongs to the Church's Confession, whereas in Reformed Church polity the church order is directly derived from and subject to Scripture and the Confessions of Faith.
2. Presbyterian church polity acknowledges one office in the Church, i.e the eldership (the teaching elder = minister; and the ruling elder = 'lay' leader). The office of deacon is often not present as an office involved in the government of the church. Reformed Church polity acknowledges three basic offices, ministers or pastors, elders and deacons.
3. Presbyterian church polity strongly emphasizes the ruling authority of the elder, whereas Reformed church polity emphasis is on overseeing or supervision.
4. The Presbyterian church polity believes in the lifetime whereas, in Reformed church polity there is limited tenure of office.
5. In Presbyterian church polity a minister belongs to a Presbytery, whereas in Reformed church polity a ministers belongs to a local church.
6. Ordination is the central principle of office in the Presbyterian whereas in the Reformed calling and election not ordination is the principle of office.
7. In Presbyterian church polity decisions of the General Synod are subject to ratification by the Presbyteries, whereas in Reformed Church polity the decisions of the General Synod or General Assembly are binding, although they are subject to appeal through overtures.
8. In Presbyterian church polity the Presbytery is the basic or fundamental unit of the Church, whereas in Reformed polity the local congregation is the basic unit of the Church.
9. According to Presbyterian church polity a Church Council is subject to its Presbytery, a Presbytery subject to its Synod, and a Synod to a General Assembly. In Reformed Church polity the power of the broader assemblies presbytery and synod or general synod is limited to matters of common concern of the Church, which constitutes it.
10. In Presbyterian church polity ecclesiastical assemblies often function as courts, whereas in Reformed church polity broader assemblies are deliberative and seek after

consensus and the judicial aspect of the assemblies is less emphasized and does not play a major role.

De Ridder's comparisons largely reflect Presbyterian of the church polity of the Blantyre, Livingstonia and Zambia Synods and the General Synod of the CCAP on one hand and to a certain extent the Presbyterian or the so-called Reformed church polity of the Nkhoma Synod and the Harare Synods on the other hand. Their church polity discourse and practice respectively are expressed in their church orders and constitutions (cf chapters 4 and 5).

In summary, this section has shown that Reformed and Presbyterian church polities have similarities and differences. Differences might be caused by the political and ecclesiastical context in which Reformed polity and Presbyterianism took on form. One could wonder whether this context negatively influenced the order and the government of the Church.

3.3. The Distinctiveness of Reformed Polity

Is the Reformed approach unique? A comparison of the interpretation of the headship of Christ in Reformed church polity to those in Episcopalianism, Congregationalism and Scottish Presbyterianism shows that the Reformed approach is different. In Reformed church polity there are some distinctive accents that make it different from other systems. Therefore, let us identify and briefly discuss the distinctiveness of Reformed church government.

3.3.1. Kingdom-centred

Reformed Church polity is based on concept of the Kingdom of God as context of the Church and its government. The Kingdom of God refers to God's rule, his sovereignty, his Sphere of influence, and finally to his subjects (Coertzen 2003:79, 81). God's Kingdom includes his rule and sovereignty over the entire creation, of which the Church is part. The Kingdom becomes visible where people bow before the Triune God, confesses Jesus Christ's kingship and headship, and live filled with the Holy Spirit in obedience to his Word. The Kingdom is linked to the visible and invisible Church. On the link between the Kingdom and Church and the instrumental nature of the Church Berkhof says:

‘While the Kingdom of God and the invisible Church are in a measure identical, they should nevertheless be fully distinguished. Citizenship in the one and membership in the other are equally determined by regeneration. It is impossible to be in the Kingdom of God without being in the Church as a mystical body of Christ. ... At the same time, it is possible to make a distinction between the point of view from which believers are called the Kingdom and from which they are called the Church. They constitute the Kingdom in their relation to God in Christ as their Ruler, and a Church in their separateness from the world in devotion to God and in their organic union with one another.

As the Church, they are called to be God’s instruments in preparing the way for and in introducing, the ideal order of things; and as a Kingdom, they represent the initial realization of the ideal order among themselves’ (Berkhof, 1996:579).

Vorster says that the concept of the Kingdom of God as context of the Church has played an increasingly important role in the development of the Reformed church polity. The central concern of these ecclesiologists is the reign of God, in the past, the present and the future. According to God’s Covenant of grace, this reign has already been manifested in the coming of Jesus Christ, but it will be revealed in its completeness at the end of time. Therefore, the history of the Covenant of grace and of the Church is an indication of the reality of God’s rule on earth. The church is a sign of the Kingdom of God. Just as the reign of God is realized in the coming and teaching of Jesus Christ, it is realized in the community of faith that results from the work of God in Christ i.e. the Church. Du Plooy says:

‘When we take the Kingdom as our point of departure and consider that the organizational life is primarily concerned with the obedience to Christ in his reign as the ‘Head of the Church’, it becomes evident that it embraces more than the organization of the visible, empirical side of the Church. The purpose of the Church is to study in Scripture how Christ can penetrate into the hearts of his children through the administering of the keys of the Kingdom, so that the Church can truly become the body of Christ’ (Du Plooy, 1997:179).

The essence, mission, and calling of the Church must be understood within the broader conception of the Kingdom of God. The Church is subservient to the Kingdom of God and the purpose of church polity is to determine the way in which this subservience should be arranged from a scriptural point of view (Vorster 2003:9). Thus, Reformed church polity is meant to promote the servitude of the Church to the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God approach is one of the distinctive features of the discourse on Reformed church polity and practice.

3.3.2. Based on the Scriptures

Has Reformed church polity grown out of the principles that are based on the Scriptures? The *Belgic Confession* demands this:

‘We believe that this true Church must be governed by that spiritual policy [polity] which our Lord hath taught us in his Word’ (Article 30). ‘We also believe that although it is useful and good for those who govern the churches to establish and set up a certain order among themselves, for maintaining the body of the Church, they ought always to guard against deviating from what Christ, our only Master, has ordained for us’ (Article 32).

Although the Bible nowhere provides a clear-cut and complete system of church government it still it Bible contains some guidelines on how the Church ought to be organized (Coertzen, 2004:135). In other words, although the Bible does not prescribe any specific form of church government, it does contain a good number of principles, which are to be applied when governing the church. Also, Reformed Churches do not claim that their church government is perfect, but that it is meant to be based on the principles contained in the Bible (Coertzen 2004:135). Neither do the Reformed claim that their church polity is an imitation of the Church of the New Testament.

‘It is impossible to conserve or reproduce the New Testament Church in our age and day. Those who attempt to do so must remember that a mere repetition of the New Testament formulae and regulations does not guarantee the Church’s authenticity any more than the continuation of a line of the development within a given tradition does so’ (De Ridder, 1983:4).

Janssen says that although church order and church government are not simply replicates of an order found outlined in Scriptures, the Bible should function as the norm for the Church.

‘Nonetheless the Reformed find in Scripture’s story a basic foundation for its understanding of the office and assemblies, While it cannot be claimed, and the Reformed have not claimed, that the offices have as described in their order exhausted the ordered ministry, the Reformed do discover outlines for their offices of elder, deacon and ministers of the Word in Scripture. Likewise, the Reformed detect in Scripture a communal away of decision-making, of a synodical system as for example in the Synod of Jerusalem (Acts 15)’ (Janssen, 2000: 3-5).

This leads us to the relationship between Scripture and church polity, which is defined by the fact that Christ executes his rule and authority in the Church through his Word and Spirit. The Reformed tradition, following Calvin (*Institutes* IV, VI, 1, quoted in chapter 1, section 2), insists that Christ rules through Word and Spirit using office-bearers as instruments. In line with Calvin, Vorster (2003:15) says:

‘The offices ... are instruments in the hands of Christ through which He institutes, conserves and builds the Church. ... The officers are servants (diakonia), who primarily receive their mandate to serve from Christ. ... They are organs in the hands of Christ.’

The same thought is expressed in a document of the Canadian Christian Reformed Church (2006):

‘Christ governs the Church through a spiritual order, a manner of government empowered by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. Christ uses men, men of Spirit to lead and govern his Church. These men speak from God and their authority lies only in the Word. This means that authority of assemblies is in their use of the Word of God.’

Concerning the relationship between Reformed church polity and the Scriptures we conclude that the authority invested in the Church by the Triune God and contained in the Scriptures is

exercised through the general office of all believers and through designated special church offices and their ecclesiastical assemblies not in a fundamentalistic way. Those who take leadership are directly responsible to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. The authority of the offices is the authority of Christ through Word and Spirit (cf. Nel, 1980:30, 31).

Finally, according to the Scriptures, who has the final say in the church? Although all traditions accept the headship of Christ, they differ on the representation of Christ's final authority by men. Basically there are three positions, representation of Christ by one person, by all, by a few. In the Roman Catholic tradition the Pope is the highest authority, the court of last resort implying that there is no appeal from his decision, no going over his head and he is subject to no one's judgment (The Codex of Canon Law, 1983, art. 333; cf. James A. Corriden, 2004:73). The Orthodox and Anglican Churches have also adopted systems that allow for one person in the seat of highest authority, although in a more moderate form. In the Congregational Churches decisions of all the members of the local congregation constitute the highest authority and the final court of appeal (cf. Gray and Tucker 1999).

Reformed and Presbyterian polities accept final authority by some designated members in their assemblies, though in a different way. In Presbyterian polity the Synod or General Assembly has a final say and is the final ecclesiastical court of appeal or a supreme court of the Church. Reformed church polity expresses that basically the Holy Scriptures, i.e. the Bible have the final say and are the supreme court of appeal. (Van Wyk, 2004:165; De Ridder, 1983:4). How can the Bible become the final court of appeal in the Church from a Reformed perspective? Vorster tries to answer this question by first saying that church matters must be resolved in an ecclesiastical manner. However, what is an ecclesiastical manner?

'Ecclesiastical assemblies do not work in the same way as secular assemblies which decide based on majority votes. Christ is the Head of the Church and in every assembly people should convince and convince each other from the Word of God. The Word must rule. Therefore, ecclesiastical matters should be debated until there is a consensus on Biblical principles. ... Christ is the King of the Church and rules with his Word and Spirit. Therefore the highest authority in the church and in any major assembly is the Word of God. Every decision of an ecclesiastical assembly must be based on the Word. The authority of an ecclesiastical decision lies in its foundation in the Word' (Vorster (2003:54, 55).

For Vorster the ecclesiastical manner of reaching a decision does not agree to vote.

‘Decisions are made by voting and majority of votes carries the decision. However, that should never be the premises for an ecclesiastical decision. First and foremost the members of an assembly should seek to persuade each other from the Word of God. The Word must rule. Therefore, discussions should receive ample time and attention and purpose should be to come to a mutual agreement or consensus. A division of votes is not desirable. In the case of division, the minority is not compelled to consent to the majority until they can prove that the decision is not according to the rule of Christ in the Church.’ (Vorster, 2003:55).

We conclude this section by saying that the distinctiveness of the Reformed church polity is displayed in the way the Bible is used as a source of Church polity, as a source of ecclesiastical authority and as a final ecclesiastical court of appeal. This means that office-bearers and ecclesiastical assemblies execute authority over the Church, but Word of God is the authority over the Church, the court of last resort.

3.3.3. Offices: instruments of Christ and the Holy Spirit

Who governs the Church in the name of its Head, Christ? By what means and through who does Christ rule the Church? Calvin (*Institutes*, IV, VI, 1, quoted in chapter 1, section 2) says that Christ uses ‘the ministry of men’. He also stresses that these men rule through the Word and the Holy Spirit.

‘...the Church is Christ’s Kingdom, and He reigns by his Word alone.the Church is governed by the Spirit of God’ (*Institutes*, IV, II, 4; III, 13).

De Brès works this out:

‘We believe that this true Church must be governed by spiritual polity which our Lord has taught in His Word; namely there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments; also elders and deacons who together with the pastors, form the council of the church; that by these means the true religion may

be preserved, the true doctrine everywhere propagated, likewise transgressors punished and restrained by spiritual means; also the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted according to their necessities (Guido de Brès, *Belgic Confession*, article 30).

The fact that Christ uses office-bearers in his government through Word and Spirit does not mean that office-bearers can pocket the Word and the Spirit, as if they could control them. There is a danger of hierarchicalism and clericalism, which may creep in. Let us look at some comments that may function as warnings against this danger

‘We speak of the execution of Christ’s government in the Church as something that takes place by means of the Word, the Holy Spirit, and people’s ministry, does not mean that the latter can equate to Spirit and the Word- far from it.’ (Coertzen, 2004:99).

On the same note Vorster elaborated:

‘The offices ... are instruments in the hands of Christ through which he institutes, conserves and builds the Church. ...The officers are servants (diakonia) who primarily receive their mandate to serve from Christ. ... They are organs in the hands of Christ.’ Vorster (2003:15).

He (2003:35) concludes:

‘Every office-bearer is an instrument in the hands of Christ and is therefore responsible to Christ. There is equality in responsibility and this principle constitutes the equality of the offices. The three offices in the Church are also not subordinate to each other.’

The danger threatens all three offices, including the relationship between ministers. Here is De Jong’s warning:

‘This emphasis on the equality of all ministers of the Word must be zealously guarded against another form of attack. The modern emphasis on efficiency has invaded the precincts of Christ’s Church. In its interest, numerous executive and administrative

posts have been created and assigned to ministers ordained to preach the Gospel. ... Not infrequently such men be it with the best of intentions exert influence on church assemblies which in time may undermine the principle of equality to which Reformed believers have always subscribe. Here we do well to be warned before it is too late' (De Jong, 1980:310).

Warnings against hierarchicalism and clericalism are not given without reason, because office-bearers may draw wrong conclusions from the special position of their office. Office-bearers are visible human means used by Jesus Christ to execute his government in the Church, Jesus. Calvin says that they are servants used by God, and do not receive their command from a Church Council or Presbytery or Synod but directly from God. God calls, equips and sends office-bearers to minister to His Word. The ordination, induction, and installation express that these servants are to serve under Christ in direct relation to God. For this reason they are simultaneously servants and representatives of Christ and of the Church. Executing and representing Christ's direct rule requires from the office-bearer being born again as a child of God and tender humility towards Christ and the members of his Church. The Church and its office-bearers have found it difficult to live under the reality of the direct rule by Christ, and therefore tend to neglect it and supplant it with the rule of man, thus bringing down Christ and the members of his body, the Church.

'Historically this tendency may be traced in the development of church polity of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Church stresses the power and dignity of the office-bearers of the Church whom it sees identical with Christ. The result is that man in the person of the office-bearer, who claims to be in unchangeable possession of the power of Christ to rule the Church infallibly, takes over the rule of Church, and the direct and actual rule of Christ is excluded.'" (Jonker 1965:32)

It was further asserted that

The historical development of church polity in the churches of the Reformation in the 18th and 19th centuries offered the second illustration of man supplanting the direct rule of Christ in the Church. The violation of the Reformation principles during this period has its roots in the historical position of the German Churches. These after the Reformation did not develop independent church polity along biblical lines, but were subject to the rule of the noblemen' (Jonker, 1965:32).

Wrongly understanding the term office has contributed to wrong practices. Borght says that in the Reformed tradition office refers to: (1) helpfulness, (2) service, task, ministry, and (3) duty. He thinks the second meaning is most important. 'To function as a minister implies involvement as a servant and not as a ruler' (Van de Borght, 2007:54). The term office does not mean or imply rank, status or dignity. Of course one of the functions of the servant's office is to rule, to govern, and to provide leadership. However this is not done in the way of a free human institution, but has to be carried out in accordance to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

In which way office-bearers represent and execute the rule of Christ through his Word and the Holy Spirit? Is it possible for them to allow Christocracy and Pneumatocracy to be realities in the Church, in accordance to what Calvin taught? (cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, VI, 1; II, 4; III, 13).

For Vorster (2003:55) this is only possible when delegates in the ecclesiastical assemblies persuade each other from the Word and being convinced by the Holy Spirit. He points out that every decision must be preceded by thorough discussion, and every contribution or opinion must be weighed and evaluated in the light of Scripture. Thus, appeal must prove beyond doubt that the decisions are compatible with the Word of God. The authority of an ecclesiastical assembly must be based on the Word and the authority of an ecclesiastical decision lies in its foundation in the Word. In being Leader of the Church, Christ has final authority and his Word is the final court of appeal (Vorster 2003:54, 55).

To sum up, office-bearers and ecclesiastical assemblies are organs or instruments. One of the relationships between Christ and offices is that office-bearers are organs of Christ's Church. In being organs, Christ himself acts in the Church through them. One of the reasons is that officers came from Him and that they are responsible to Him alone. Thus, Christocracy and Pneumatocracy are only possible if the offices are viewed as instruments of Christ's rule and the rule of the Holy Spirit. Office-bearers are instruments of Christocracy and Pneumatocracy. If all office-bearers including the general office accept this reality any tendency that may hinder or prohibit Christ to rule over his Church would be renounced (cf. Osterhaven, 1971: 62, 63, quoting Van Ruler).

3.3.4. Christ the Head of the Visible and Invisible Church

There are different views concerning the question whether Christ is the organic Head of the visible and invisible Church. 'Although all churches admit that Christ is the Head of the church, it has happened that Christ's headship is interpreted differently. For Rome Christ's Headship means he manages the church by means of his deputy on earth, the Pope'. Roman Catholicism looks upon Christ as the Head of the invisible Church, and the Pope as the organic head of the visible Church. The Lutheran Church claimed and maintained that the state or the King is the organic head of the visible church and Christ the Head of the invisible Church. For Luther 'Christ was the exclusive and highly personal head of the Church but spiritually, so that only the invisible church, as the body of Christ, lives totally from Him as Head through his life giving Spirit. Luther and Lutheran Church in fact 'badly neglected the visible Church' and let its government to the rulers of the civil state, who are members of the Church (cf. Berkhof, 1996:583; Coertzen, 2004:94). Under Collegialism the government of the visible Church is commissioned to its members represented by special officials.

Congregationalists transfer the government and authority of the Church to the local church. Scottish Presbyterian Churches profess that Christ is the organic Head of the Church, whereas in practice the highest assembly has become the head of the Church (Van Wyk 2004:167).

Reformed Churches have a distinctive understanding. They recognize and maintain that Christ is the organic Head of the invisible and visible Church. Article 31 of the *Belgic Confession of Faith* stipulates that Jesus Christ is the universal Superintendent and the only Head of the Church, whereas article 29 states that the true Church is where people behave themselves according to the pure Word and reject all that is in conflict with it, and acknowledge Jesus Christ as the only Head. The difference between the Reformed church polity and other polities concerns the question how Christ is the Head of the Church.

3.4. Some Suggested Tenets of Reformed Church Polity

Theologians have used different terms to describe the characteristics, guidelines, tenets or views of Reformed church government. Louis Berkhof (1996:581) and Joseph and David Hall (1992:10) use the word 'principles', Pieter Coertzen (2004:79) prefers 'beacons'. In this section we summarize views of church polity, which some Reformed ecclesiologists and

theologians have suggested, i.e. of Louis Berkhof, Richard De Ridder, Joseph and David Hall, Jurgens Vorster and Pieter Coertzen.

3.4.1. Louis Berkhof

Berkhof (1996:581-582) surveys the principles which Reformed Churches use to determine their system of church government.

1. Christ is the 'Head of the Church' and the source of all its authority.
2. Christ exercises His authority by means of his royal Word.
3. Christ as King has endowed the Church with power.
4. Christ provided representative organs for the specific exercise of this power.
5. The power of the Church resides primarily in the governing body of the local church.

Implicitly Berkhof stresses the difference between principles of Reformed and Presbyterian church polity. In the list the Headship of Christ is the main fundamental principle, which according to Berkhof has played very important role in the development of Reformed Church polity from 16th century onwards, especially in the struggle the Papacy and against state domination over the Church. Berkhof elaborates:

'The Church of Rome considers it of the greatest importance to maintain the headship of Christ over the Church. The Reformers in their opposition to the claims of the Papacy maintained and defended the position that Christ is the 'Head of the Church'. Subsequently, Presbyterian and Reformed churches had to fight another battle later for the headship of Christ in opposition to the unwarranted encroachments of the State. This battle was fought first in Scotland and later in The Netherlands. The very fact that it was fought against external powers as the Papacy and the State or King both whom claimed to be the head of the visible Church, clearly implies that they were engaged in this battle and were particularly interested in establishing and maintaining the position that Christ is the lawful Head of the Church. Naturally, they also recognized Christ as the organic Head of the invisible Church. They realized that the two could not be separated.'

Berkhof notes that the Reformed Protestants maintained and used this concept as a basic tool in their opposition claims made by the Pope and by some civil rulers who regarded themselves as head of the visible and invisible Church. At the same time he realizes that the Reformers did not entirely avoid the danger of encroachment by the State and the King over the Church. The term 'representative organs' in principle four undoubtedly refers to office-bearers and implies that because office-bearers are organs of Christ, there must be no hierarchy among them in the Church.

3.4.2. Joseph and David Hall

Joseph and David Hall (1992:10) have listed principles which the Dutch Reformed Churches in America and the Scottish Presbyterian Churches in America agreed in 18th century. They agreed that their Church polity would be based on the following principles:

1. Christ as Head of the church appointed men to govern the Church according to Scriptural principles.
2. The form of church government is the joint rule of pastor and ruling elders elected by the local congregation.
3. There is parity of elders, both ruling and teaching.
4. The churches are in unity aligned under an ascending order of church courts.

The Scottish Churches and Dutch Reformed Church in America had many things in common. They acknowledge the headship of Christ over the church, the joint rule of the church by pastors and elders, the equality between ministers and elders, and the system of ordering courts in an ascending way. However, there are differences with generally accepted Reformed polity, as to the number of offices, whether there are two offices (elder both teaching and ruling, and deacon) or three offices (minister, elder, and deacon) and with regard to the complete equality of all office-bearers, in all congregations, and in all courts. Principle four points to an ascending order of Church Council, Presbytery Synod and General Assembly. Apparently these Churches had a hierarchical system of lower and higher courts, in which the highest court, the General Assembly has a final say in church matters and its decision is regarded the will of God. In this case the local church enjoys no direct rule of Christ.

3.4.3. *Richard De Ridder*

De Ridder (1983:6-8) noted that the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in America has the following three principle of Church government, complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds, Christ is the Head of his Church, and all things must be done decently and in order (in a fitting and orderly way). The Bible is the final court of appeal in matter of church government and practice. Christ's headship over the Church means that He is in a very close and most vital relationship to the Church, and He has complete authority over its life.

'Christian authority involves service in the name of the authoritative Christ, and Christian service involves the power and authority in the name of the serving Christ. ... Jesus is the authoritative Son of God, who serves the Father and those who the Father has given Him. Christ is the only Lord of the Church and no one may presume to rule in his place. Service and authority exercised in authority are in his name and according to his Word.'

De Ridder continues and compares to his summary of the principles of Reformed church government in articles 27-32 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, together with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort, one of the Three Reformed Symbols of Unity:

1. The principles and practices of church government are subject to and derived from the Word of God (articles 30, 32).
2. Authority resides in the Church and its offices under Jesus Christ its Head (article 30).
3. There is equality of offices and churches (article 31).
4. All believers are members of one Catholic Church and must strive to maintain and express this unity (article 27).
5. All believers are duty bound to unite with the visible church (article 28).

In conclusion De Ridder says that his points are based on *Belgic Confession*, and he notes that they were the focus of severe criticism and objection by the Remonstrants in the latter part of the 16th century. This is an aspect which is too little understood, probably because of

the wide attention that has been drawn to the objections by the same Remonstrants against the doctrine of predestination, answered in the *Canons of Dordt*, i.e. the Canons of the Synod of Dordrecht of 1618-19.

3.4.4. J.M. Vorster

Vorster (2003:10, 7) suggests the following points as principles of Reformed church government:

1. Christ is the King of the Kingdom of God, and the Head of the people of God, the Church.
2. The Kingdom becomes visible in the obedience of people to the Word and the Spirit.
3. The Church as the people of God is the fruit of faithful obedience to God as He reveals Himself in his Word.
4. The Church exists for the honour of God and the coming of the Kingdom. The Church is functional and not an end itself. The Church is primarily the local church.

Vorster's principles reflect that Reformed church polity holds in high regard the supremacy of Christ in the Church and that He rules through his Word and the Holy Spirit. However, does not mention about the position of office-bearers as means or instruments or channels of the reign of Christ in the Church. Consequently, the issue of equality of all office-bearers, churches, and assemblies is not taken into account.

3.4.5. Pieter Coertzen

Coertzen (2004:79, 118, 122) prefers the term 'methodological beacons' or 'theological guidelines' for his views of church polity, including church law and church government. His points are meant as boundaries which church jurists and ecclesiologists should not transgress in order to do justice to the order for the Church in fulfilling a spiritual management as revealed in God's Word. He made the following list:

1. The Kingdom of God as context of the Church and its order
2. The Church is a unique community a unique gathering of believers with a unique order
3. Jesus Christ is the only Lord and Head of the Church
4. Christ governs the Church through His Word, Spirit, and the offices
5. The objective of church order and church government is to up build the Church
6. There is a Scriptural indicative and imperative for the practice of law and church government.

Coertzen stresses that issues of church order and government must always be compared with Scriptural principles. Moreover, in the light of Scripture they must be compared individually in their mutual involvement with each other. Every principle is wholly from God and yet wholly requires believers' responsibility. For example confessing that Christ is the Head of the Church means that God is commanding all the members of the church including office-bearers, all the churches and all the ecclesiastical assemblies to submit to Him and obey Him as their ruler.

This section shows that principles of Reformed church polity can be expressed differently. Yet among the researched Reformed ecclesiologists there is general agreement on the principle that Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church and He rules through his Word and the Holy Spirit and office-bearers as his instruments. Apparently this main principle can be used as a criterion to evaluate systems of church government and to assess whether in them Christ has remained the real and only Head of his Church.

3.4.6. The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian

The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in its 2002 Constitution laid down briefly some tenets of its discourse on church polity and church government:

‘The basic and fundamental principles of church government and discipline are that several congregations of believers taken collectively constitute one Church; that a

large part of the Church or a representative group of the Church should govern or determine matters of controversy when arisen therein; that in like manner a representation of the whole should govern and determine in regard to every part and to all parts united. That is that a majority shall govern and always in agreement with the Word of God; and consequently that appeals may be carried from lower to higher governing bodies till they be finally decided by collective wisdom and united voice of the whole Church through the representatives' (Article 3.3).

When looking at this article, it seems that the CCAP does not acknowledge the truth that Christ is the Head of the Church as one of its principles of church government, although article 3.5 stipulates that the Church is part of the universal church wherein Christ, the Lord laid the government in the hands of office-bearers. The article further states that the Church receives its government from Christ. Thus, not any civil authority is allowed to legislate and to adjudicate anything in the Church.

3.5.Sources of Reformed church polity

Having considered some principles of Reformed church polity, we are now to identify and describe the sources from which a Church may derive its principles of order and government. Sources have been grouped in various ways, primary and secondary, special and general, material and formal (Coertzen 2004:125ff). In this section we shall name the sources as primary (Scripture) and secondary (confessions, church order catechism, liturgical orders and writings of church jurists).

3.5.1. Primary Source

There is conviction (belief) among Churches and ecclesiologists that God has laid down the foundation of church order and church government in the Bible (Vorster 2003: i; De Ridder 1983:4). They generally agree that the Bible does not present a clear-cut church order and church government, but that it contains main guidelines or principles of church polity (cf. Berkhof 1996:583; Vorster 2003: i). These principles are to be applied in a certain context in a responsible and functional way.

Churches and theologians have different ideas on whether the Bible is the only primary source of church polity. Coertzen (2004:125) says that often the Confessions of Faith are allowed to have primary status.

‘A common distinction is between primary and secondary sources. Primary sources would be the Bible and the Confession of relevant church denominations, while church orders, the resolutions of church meeting, and the writings of church jurists are regarded as secondary sources’.

Coertzen (2004: 159) criticizes this division, and he stresses that the Bible in its absolute authority is the only primary source, whereas, the confessions together with church orders, other official documents and lastly the writings of theologians and others constitute secondary sources. Claiming that the authority of the Bible has an equal to that of traditions (confessions, church decrees) implies that the Bible is not the only primary source of church polity. Roman Catholic Church law is an example of this view (cf. Codex of Canon Law, 1983, article 333 paragraph 3). Other churches, although they regard the Bible as an extremely important source of church order and church government, would nevertheless claim that everything which is effective and useful and has been historically handed down is also to be considered as a primary source of church polity (cf. Coertzen 2004:130). This assertion again denotes that the Bible is acknowledged as the only primary source of church government.

In the classical Reformed tradition the Scripture has been considered the only primary source of church polity discourse and practice. We read this view implicitly in the *Belgic Confession*, articles 30 and 32, quoted in the beginning of this chapter.⁴⁸ Another Reformed document, the *Confession Gallican* or French Confession (1559) concurs with this in its article 29 particularly where it states concerning the true church: ‘we believe that it should be governed according to the order established by our Lord Jesus’. The *Second Book of Discipline* 1560) belonging to the Old Church of Scotland, stipulated as follows:

⁴⁸ Here are some Reformed confessions from the time of the Reformation, Thirty-Seven Articles of Zwingli (1523); First Helvetica Confession (1536), Confession of Geneva (1537), Gallican Confession of Faith (1559), Second Helvetic Confession (1566), Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Canons of Dordt (1618-1619), Westminster Confession (1647), Westminster Shorter Catechism (1648), Westminster Larger Catechism (1648).

‘This ecclesiastical power is the authority granted by God the Father through Jesus Christ unto his gathered Church, and having its ground in the Word of God, to put into execution by them unto whom the spiritual government of the church by lawful calling is committed’ (article 5) ‘Therefore this power and polity of the church should lean upon the Word of God immediately as the only ground thereof, and should be taken from the pure fountain of the Scriptures, hearing the voice of Christ, the only spiritual King, and being ruled by his laws’ (article 11).

Coertzen (2004:132) refers to a series of Reformed theologians,⁴⁹ who ‘have no doubt that Scripture is the Primary source of church polity discourse and practice’, although they somehow differ from each other on how the Bible serves as such. In conclusion, we may add that equating the Bible and the Confessions as primary sources of church order and church government may give people an impression that the authority of the Confessions is at the same level as the authority of the Bible. The Bible, however, is the highest authoritative source.

3.5.2. Secondary Sources

This section concerns the role of confessions of faith, church orders, resolutions of meetings, and writings of church jurists as secondary sources of church polity. The criterion of their value is determined by their relationship to Scripture.

A confession of faith is, according to McKim ‘an officially adopted statement that spells out a Church’s understanding of the meaning and implications of the one basic confession of the Lordship of Christ.’ The term may be defined more precisely as a public declaration before the world of what the church believes as well as what it ought to be doing. Confessions of faith are also called creeds, symbols, formulas, definitions, declarations of faith, statements of beliefs, articles of faith. The Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Lutheran Churches the East Orthodox Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Churches and the Reformed Churches prepared or adopted their confessions of faith for various reasons. Some confessions of faith are specifically meant as acts of praise, thanks giving and commitment in the presence of God. Other confessions have sought to

⁴⁹ He mentions P.A.E. Sillevs, A.J. Bronkhorst, G.P. van Itterzon, A.D. Pont, W.D. Jonker, E.P.J. Kleinhans, H Ridderbos, D Nauta, H Bouwman and C.J. Smit.

preserve the purity and the unity of the Church by requiring its ministers and officers to accept their teachings in order to be ordained (McKim, 1992:19, 20).

The polity of a Church is determined by its confession. McKim shows how the authority of confessions is related to Scripture according to the Reformed viewpoint. He says that ‘the Reformed tradition is unique in its understanding of the authority of its confession’. According to McKim Reformed confessions themselves provide three interrelated reasons for this unique attitude toward confessional authority:

1. Confessions have a *provisional* authority, and are also subject to revision and correction, because all confessions are the work of limited, fallible and sinful human beings and churches,
2. Confessions have *temporary* authority, and are also subject to revision and correction, because faith in the living God present and at work in the risen Christ through the Holy Spirit means always to be open to hear a new and fresh word from the Lord.
3. Confessions have a *relative* authority, and are therefore subject to revisions and correction, because they are subordinate to the higher authority of Scripture, which is the norm for discerning the will and work of God in every time and place.’ (McKim, 1992:24, 26).

Again we conclude, the Bible is higher in authority than the Confessions, implying that the Confessions are subordinate to the higher authority of Scripture. In short, other writings apart from the Bible cannot be more than the secondary sources.

What is the relationship between the Confessions and the church order? Coertzen (2004:151) says that in Reformed ranks, there has always been an awareness of the organic relation between Confession and Church, in other words, the being of the Church and its organization.’ Has the church order precedence over the Confession or the Confession over the church order? In general Reformed understanding is that a Confession of Faith that has precedence over the church order. The Confession is a systematized summary of the Word and the church order is developed from it (Coertzen 2004:151). This should remind us of the difference between the Reformed polity and Presbyterian polity. According to De Ridder (1983:20) in the latter the book of church order is part of the Confession of Faith, whereas in the Reformed church polity, the church order is subject to Scripture and Confession (see section 3.2.4).

3.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter has formulated an answer to the question what is church polity in general. It has been proposed that church polity is a system of theologically justified rules, regulations and procedures that create both space and channels for the rule and reign of Christ through his Word and Spirit in the Church. It is a theological discipline that deals with the arrangement of the ministry in the Church with the aim to build the Church in an orderly and sound fashion. It seeks to help the Church behave according to God's Word and glorify Him. It also allows God's Word to be applied to the whole spectrum of the church's life (cf. Coertzen 2004:201). Jesus Christ rules the Church through the primary means of Word and Spirit and through the secondary means of the general office of all believers and finally through office-bearers the ecclesiastical assemblies in which they are associated to one another.

Then we have also answered to the question what is Reformed church polity. It is a system of church government in which Christ executes his rule and dominion through his Word and Spirit using the three-fold system of office-bearers who associate in ecclesiastical assemblies and seek to keep in balance the rights and autonomy of the local congregations and do not accept a system of lower and higher offices and assemblies. Reformed church polity is distinct from other polities, in the first place because it takes the Kingdom, Christocracy and Pneumatocracy as point of departure and considers that the organizational life is primarily concerned with the obedience to Christ in his reign as the 'Head of the Church.' It also realizes that the Bible does not present a clear-cut and perfected system of church government, but it contains the principles from which the Church can develop its order and government.

Another question that we answered concerns some important tenets or beacons or guidelines or views in the church polity discourse and practice. There are numerous biblical guidelines of Reformed Church polity, expressed in various ways by Reformed churches and ecclesiologists. The most central principle is that Christ is the only Head of the Church and that He rules his Church through his Word and Holy Spirit, using office-bearers as his instruments.

The chapter affirms that the Bible in its absolute authority is the only primary source of church polity-discourse and practice and the final court of appeal in the Church.

Secondary sources are the confessions as systematic summaries of certain scriptural truths, followed by the church orders, resolutions of meetings, and lastly the writings of theologians and other scholars.

Chapter 4: Church Polity Sources of the CCAP, Nkhoma Synod: The Three Reformed Symbols of Unity

4.1. Introduction

Churches that have a direct or an indirect historical link with the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands subscribe to the so-called Three Reformed Symbols of Unity, the *Belgic Confession* (1561), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), and the *Canons of Dordt* (1618-1619). This chapter attempts to assess if the above mentioned documents were used as the sources from which Nkhoma Synod developed its church order and church government. Special attention is paid on articles that deal with church polity particularly how the concept of the Headship of Christ is described and connected to church government.

4.2. The Belgic Confession of Faith (1561)

The *Belgic Confession*, also called the *Netherlands Confession of Faith*, was inherited by the Nkhoma Synod from the Cape Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa (Pauw, 1980:327). One may ask whether the Confession has functioned in the practice of church order and church government within the Nkhoma Synod. Before answering this question, it is necessary to make some historical observations regarding this Confession, particularly its reception and place in the Churches that subscribe to it.

4.2.1. Historical Background

The *Belgic Confession of Faith* is the oldest of the three doctrinal standards of the Reformed Churches of Dutch origin (Beets, 1929:7). It was written by Guido de Brès, also known as Guy De Bray (1522-1567),⁵⁰ and first spread in 1561. He was a son of glass painter Jean De

⁵⁰ Guido De Brès was born in 1522 in Bergen, in Henegouwen, one of the southern provinces of The Netherlands, now located in Belgium (Gootjes 2007:48). In 1548 he went to England, where he stayed until 1558. Perhaps he studied Theology in England. When he returned home he served as a pastor in some Reformed congregations. In 1555 when persecution of the Protestants had become fiercer De Brès fled to Frankfurt, Germany, and then went to Lausanne and Geneva for further theological study, where he was influenced by Calvin (Gootjes 2007:49). In 1558 he returned home and went in hiding in Doornik. In 1599 he got married. Perhaps in his hiding he prepared the Belgic Confession of Faith, in French, his native language. He was captured and publicly executed on 31 May 1567 (Beets, 2002:9).

Brès and he became a ministers of the earliest Reformed churches of The Netherlands (cf. Gootjes, 2007:17, 19). The document was prepared when the early churches of the Reformation in the Netherlands and other countries were exposed to the most terrible persecution by the Roman Catholic Church and the civil government that was allied too it (Ferguson and Wright, 1978:155ff). Beets (1929:8) says that the Confession was written mainly,

‘... to protest against this cruel oppression, and to prove to the persecutors that the adherents of the Reformed faith were not rebels, as was laid to their charge, but law-abiding citizens who professed the true Christian doctrine according to the Holy Scriptures.’

According to De Jong (1980:26), the Confession was to some extent patterned or modeled after the *Gallican Confession* of the early Reformed church in France, and the relationship with Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* has been noticed often.

‘The life and labor of De Brès evidenced, that he was an ardent and able disciple of John Calvin, the lion-hearted Reformer of Geneva and teacher of countless thousands in Europe. ... Many phrases and much of the argument of the Confession of Faith demonstrate a large measure of dependence on this illustrious book.’ (Beets, 1980:26)

Gootjes (2007:59) points to a few other details in the Confession that betray Calvin’s influence, especially through the *Institutes*.

‘The Belgic Confession has been characterized as a Calvinistic Confession ... specific Roman Catholic and Anabaptists doctrines are identified and rejected. ... It must be pointed out that the Confession distances itself from certain Lutheran views. This is noticeable particularly in article 19, on the two natures of Christ, and in article 35, on the Lord’s Supper. And it presents the typical Reformed teaching on several doctrines such as revelation (article 2) and the Church (articles 27-29).’

The *Confession* of De Brès, in articles 30-32, and the *Institutes* of Calvin in Book IV, VII, 6, 7, 26 equally attack the hierarchy among office-bearers, and the abuse of power and authority in the Church. Both documents also turn against the Papacy and the assumed superior

authority of the ancient Church Councils contrary to the Word of God.⁵¹ According to De Jong there is a slight difference between Calvin and De Brès regarding the office-bearers, who constitute the local Church Council, hence are the government of the congregation. For Calvin the Council comprises ministers and elders, whereas for De Brès it comprises ministers of the Word, elders and deacons. He says that the French Reformed churches first decided to include deacons in their Church Council, and that in 1562 this decision was rescinded by the Synod of Orleans. The Scottish churches at first followed the pattern of the French churches, but later deacons were excluded from the governing Church Councils (De Jong, 1980:295ff.). Apparently church polity and church government of some Reformed Churches are not always in line with the Three Reformed Symbols of Unity. Their traditions must always be examined and evaluated, first in the light of the Scriptures, the only primary source, to which also the Confessions submit.

4.2.2. Outline and Structure

Every article of the *Belgic Confession* begins with such words as, ‘We believe ...,’ ‘We believe and confess ...,’ or, ‘We all believe with the heart ...’ and ‘We confess with the mouth ...’ The document has a communal character, it is not just a statement of an individual, but of a wider circle of believers, basically belonging to the family of Reformed Churches, particularly those that have a historical link with Dutch Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

The Confession consists of thirty seven Articles: They are entitled as follows: 1. There is only One God; 2. How God makes Himself known; 3. The Word of God; 4. The Canonical Books; 5. The Authority of Holy Scripture; 6. The difference between the Canonical and Apocryphal Books; 7. The Sufficiency of Holy Scripture; 8. God is One in Essence, yet distinguished in Three Persons; 9. Scripture Proof of the doctrine; 10. Jesus Christ True and Eternal God; 11. The Holy Spirit True and Eternal God; 12. The Creation of all things, especially the angels; 13. The Providence of God; 14. The Creation and Fall of Man and his

⁵¹ Both documents served as an apology to the civil rulers and false teachers and a testimony to the world as well as instructional material for church leaders and church members. The political, social and ecclesiastical contexts in which the two books emerged were similar (Battles 1980:18). Both documents were originally written in French and were born in the midst of struggle and anguish caused by hostile governments and false teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The Dedicatory parts of both documents were addressed as confessions of faith to respectively King Phillip II of Spain, some parts of Germany and The Netherland, and King Francis I of France and their peoples (Rohls 2003:17).

incapability of doing what is truly good; 15.Original Sin; 16.Divine Election; 17.The rescue of fallen man; 18.The incarnation of the Son of God; 19.The conjunction and distinction of the two natures of Christ in one Person; 20.The justice and mercy of God in Christ; 21.The Satisfaction of Christ our High Priest; 22.Our Justification through faith in Christ; 23.Our righteousness before God; 24. Man's sanctification and good works; 25. Christ the Fulfilment of the Law; 26.Christ's intercession; 27.The Catholic or Universal Church; 28.Everyone's duty to join the Church; 29.The marks of the true and the false church; 30.The government of the Church; 31.The officers of the Church; 32. The Order and Discipline of the Church; 33.The Sacraments; 34.The sacrament of baptism; 35.The sacrament of the Lord's Supper; 36.The civil government; 37. The Last Judgment.

Beets (1980:13) suggests that the Confession can be grouped into six sub-themes: Theology (The Doctrine of God, Articles 1- 13); Anthropology (the Doctrine of Man, Articles 14-16), Christology (the Doctrine of Christ, Articles 17-21), Soteriology (the Doctrine of Salvation, Articles 22-26), Ecclesiology (the Doctrine of the Church, church polity and church law/discipline, Articles 27-36), and Eschatology (the Doctrine of the Last Things, Article 37). In this division the Pneumatology (Doctrine of the Holy Spirit) is not mentioned. However, one should note that reference is made to the Holy Spirit throughout, particularly in connection with Theology, Soteriology, and Ecclesiology.

Schaff (1876:576) says that the Belgic Confession 'follows the order of the Galician Confession, but is less polemic and more full and elaborate, especially on the Trinity, the incarnation, the Church and the Sacraments. It is, on the whole, the best symbolical statement of the Calvinist system of doctrine.' Has the Confession continued to play an important role as a source of church polity discussion and practice in the Churches that subscribed to it after the 16th century? This question will be dealt with as the study progresses.\

4.2.3. Reception

Before 1566 the Confession did not function as an ecclesiastical document with binding character, but rather as a kind of pastoral letter to the civil government. During the 16th century gradually its authoritative place and function in the Church was gradually acknowledged. It was publicly adopted by the Synods of the Reformed churches in The Netherlands. Let us look at some these Synods of the Reformed churches in The Netherlands. For this survey we mainly used Gootjes (2007: 46, 93-100). The Synod which convened in Antwerp on 10 and 11 June 1565 enacted that at the beginning of each Synod meeting the

Belgic Confession of Faith will be read to affirm the unity and to detect whether there is anything to change or to amend. At the 1566 Synod of Antwerp the Confession was revised, meaning that it was looked over or reviewed and changed by the some ecclesiastical decisions. This implies that Confession had acquired authority in the church by that time, and it shows that the Synod had the authority to deal with the Confession. The Synod of Wesel (1568) enacted that every minister when being ordained or inducted would be asked to vow and agree to everything of the Confession, which would be a pre-requisite for admission to the public ministry in the Reformed churches.

The Synod of Emden of 1571 made an important regulation regarding the authority of the Confession in the local congregations. It stressed its function a symbol of unity, a doctrinal standard, or a basic statement of faith, and a prerequisite for admission to the ministry. In this regulation ministers were required to subscribe to the confession. Brandt (1979:405) notes that the Synod regulated that ‘no church should lord it over the other, no minister of the Word, no elder nor deacon shall lord it over another, but each one shall guard himself against all suspicion and enticement to lord it over others.’

The Provincial Synod of Dordt of 1574 enacted that all ministers, elders and deacons at their ordination would vow to obey the Confession and especially the articles of discipline. Also schoolteachers were to subscribe to it. This shows that the Belgic confession had been accepted as the source or standard for teaching in the Reformed Churches (Gootjes 2007:99, 103).

At the Synod meeting of Dordt in 1578 the deacons were not included among those who had to express agreement with the Belgic Confession, but it was added that if any office-bearer would refuse to subscribe, he would be deposed from his office (De Ridder 1983:64). The rule concerning subscription to the confession was enacted again at the Synod of Middelburg, 1581, now to be applied to all ministers of the Word, all elders, all deacons, professors in theology and schoolteachers. The Confession was again on the agenda of the Synod held in The Hague, in 1586. It did not official adopted again, because it was taken for granted that it had been formally accepted already by all the Reformed Synods. It was emphasized that apart from being the doctrinal standard, the Confession was a means of achieving unity of the faith within and among the congregations.

We can observe that each Synod revised certain sections of the original articles. They realized that being subject to the Scriptures, the Confession had provisional, temporary and relative authority in the Church. Finally the Confession was given its solid authoritative status in the Reformed tradition by the great Synod of Dort (1618-1619).

‘No other issue in connection with the *Belgic Confession* has been discussed more frequently than its authority. That is understandable for this, more than anything else, determines its place and function in within the Reformed churches from which it originated. ... Its authority was already in discussion before the *Synod of Dordt* convened in 1618. The main reason why this international synod was convened was to determine whether the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism should serve as the adopted doctrinal statements of the Reformed churches’ (Gootjes, 2007:93).

In South Africa, as Elphick and Davenport (1997:17) observed, the Dutch Reformed Church received the Belgic or Netherlands Confession of Faith together with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt from the DRC of The Netherlands. The South(ern) African DRC had a high regard for these three Reformed Confessions (Hofmeyr and Pillay 1994:12). In general only the churches, which were founded through missionaries sent by the DRC (The Netherlands) and the DRC (Southern Africa), adopted the three documents as their confession documents, and especially for the Belgic Confession as source of church polity and church government (Pauw 1980:337). However, the three confessions not always found easy access in the mission churches. P.E. Smith, a General Secretary of the Missions of the DRC (Afrikaans) complained:

‘Although the Reformed Church stands on the formularies on Unity as proposed by the Synod of Dordrecht, the average Xhosa member only gets acquainted with ... the *Apostolicum* and the Shorter Catechism of Westminster. The Heidelberg Catechism, the Netherlands Confession of Faith and the Rules of the Doctrine of Dordrecht are practically unknown to them’ (quoted by Oosthuizen, 1968:397).

How did the ‘three formularies of unity’, especially the Belgic Confession, land in Malawi? In article IV of the 1956 Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod and in article 200 of the *Zolamulira* volume II the Nkhoma Synod recognizes and maintains that the Belgic Confession is one of its doctrinal standards. In church polity matters, the Church develops its order and government from this source. This is what church leaders have to subscribe to:

‘Tivomerezanso za ziphunzitso za Eklesia wa Chikonzedwe zimene zimangidwa pa maziko a Mawu a Mulungu. Ziphunzitsozi ndizo ... Chivomerezo cha ku Netherlands,

Ziphunzitso za ku Dordt ndiponso Katekisma wa Heidelberg ... Zivomerezo zonsezi ndizo zonena mwa chidule ziphunzitso za Nkhoma Sinod. ... Mutani ... Inde ndi Mtima wanga wonse. We accept the doctrinal standards of the Reformed Church, which are founded on the Word of God... These documents are The Netherlands Confession of Faith, the Canons of Dordt, and the Heidelberg Catechism. ... All these documents contain the summary of doctrinal content of Nkhoma Synod. ... Will you subscribe to these? Yes, I will do whole heartedly' (Nkhoma Synod Malongosoledwe 1968:36, 40, 43).

However, in practice it seems the document is practically unknown to church members. What is the reason of the Confession's relative obscurity in Malawi? The main reason probably is that the Confession has not been translated into Chichewa, which is the language of the Church. This implies that its content has been withheld from the members. Another reason is that only ministers, not elders and deacons, are asked to vow and subscribe to the Confession and the other two documents. In practice quite a number of ministers who subscribed to the Confession, have never studied or seen it, or have a knowledge of it. Zomba Theological College, where most Nkhoma Synod ministers have received their training, does not pay much attention to specific historical documents of church polity. At Josophat Mwale Theological College, the Nkhoma Synod's own institution for training ministers, church polity is a sub-topic within church administration and the Belgic Confession is not primarily prescribed as an important source in this context.

It can be concluded that the Confession has little or no binding character in the Nkhoma Synod, despite the Church's claim that it is one of its doctrinal standards. If the Belgic Confession, despite its official status, in practice does not function as the source of church polity, one may wonder whether the Nkhoma Synod has derived its polity from sources other than the Confessions.

4.2.4. Definition and Nature of the Church

Articles 27-29 define the Church and its marks and characteristics. The definition of term *Church*, in article 27, runs as follows:

‘We believe and profess, one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, sanctified, and sealed by the Holy Ghost’ (Article 27).

The statement, ‘We believe and profess...’ implies that what follows cannot be argued but is confessed. In his interpretation of Article 27, Osterhaven (1964:152) says,

‘in our own thinking about the Church, we sometimes consider it as the sum total of the elect, or as the invisible Church and at other times as the sum total of all congregations which preach God’s Word and worship in the name of Christ or as visible Church’.

This Church is defined as plural and holy institution and organism. It is holy because it is set aside by God and for God as his own peculiar people, in whom sanctification is going on. Once again, it is holy because it has a holy Head, Jesus Christ. The Church is universal in that it is not confined to any particular nation or landscape or that it is not limited to any particular period.

‘This Church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, who without subjects cannot be. And this holy Church is preserved or supported by God, against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appears very small, and in the eyes of men, be reduced to nothing: as during the perilous reign of Ahab, the Lord reserved unto him seven thousand men, who had not bowed their knees to Baal’ (Article 27).

The existence of this Church originates in the collective work of the Triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit- each equally involved in the Church. In the first place, it is God the Father who elected to life certain persons from the whole of fallen humankind. In the second place, the Father gave the elect to his Son, for whom the Son in turn shed His blood. From amongst those given to Him by the Father, the Son gathers the Church. It is stressed that the Son (Jesus Christ) is still at work gathering his church, and will continue to do so until the Last Day. The church is not complete until that day. In the third place, God the Holy Spirit

changes the hearts of the elect, regenerating them so that among the elect there is ongoing renewal, growth, and an increase in holiness.

The article also speaks of the Church as a body that is not confined to a particular nation or is limited socially, politically, and geographically.

‘Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same spirit’ (Article 27).

The Church that knows no landscape and time boundary is invisible. Beets (1929:206) explains, ‘The invisible church denotes the Church as God sees it, composed of his people.’ This church is invisible, because human beings cannot infallibly discern who do and who do not belong to it. Furthermore, its union with Christ is invisible to human eyes. The invisible church is an organism with its own life and functioning with Christ as its Head, and the Spirit as its life.

In another dimension the Church is also visible. Beets (1929:206) says that the visible Church is a manifestation of the body of Christ in organized form, an organization with office-bearers and assemblies. As such it is a mixture of the good and the bad. The visible dimension of the Church has its organization, location, name, and office-bearers who execute the authority that they receive from Christ the Head of the Church (cf. McGrath 1956:58ff).

In article 28, with regard to the membership of the Church, the Confession says,

‘We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and that out of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be’.

Also in this respect the Church is meant as a congregation, a unified band of people, gathered by the Holy Spirit (cf. question 54 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*). The indication that there is no salvation outside it denotes that outside the body of the elect there is no salvation. Salvation cannot be given outside the body of Christ or the temple of God, because He has ordained that salvation be given through Christ who is the Head of his body, the Church. This does not mean that a church or denomination can save people, but it means that those saved by Christ belong to the Church, and must not withdraw from it. Apart from an

institutional visible Church, they belong to the invisible Church, of all the elect, the Church as God sees it (cf. Goulooze 1937:122). Article 28 ends as follow:

‘It is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the Church, and to join themselves to this congregation, wheresoever God hath established it’

The instruction of separation requires knowledge on the criterion that decides on what is the true Church. Article 29 offers explicit marks of the true Christians and of the false Church:

‘we say that the body and communion of the true Church must be distinguished from all sects, who call themselves the Church. The marks, by which the true Church is known, are these: if the pure doctrine of the Gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in the punishing of sin.’

Of the three marks of the true Church, recognized in the Article, the first two are the preaching of pure doctrine, and the pure administration of the sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Mark three is the exercise of church discipline, to keep the Church pure, which may also include good management according to the Word of God (cf. Beets 1929:221, 220; Osterhaven (1964:154). Article 29 says that the marks serve a three-fold propose:

‘In short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.

Beets (1929:221) refers to the significant purposes of the marks for today:

‘(1) For the believer they are a standard to test the Church by, as he feels duty bound to join one of the manifestations of God’s body locally. (2) They serve the Church as an ideal to strive after and to mirror itself in. (3) They enable the churches as a test or

touchstone in view of denominational or interdenominational connection or cooperation’.

Not only are the marks of the true Church offered by Article 29, but also the marks of the true members who constitute the true Church.

‘With respect to those, who are members of the Church, they may be known by the marks of Christians: namely, by faith; and when they have received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof’

The Article does not suppose that Christians can be perfect, it does not support antinomianism, but it specifically refers to the characteristics of ‘adult and mature church members’ who are following Christ (cf. Beets, 1929:222). Article 29 also presents the marks of the false Church.

‘As for the false Church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in his Word, but adds to and takes from them, as she thinks proper; she relies more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those, who live holy according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry.’

Having noted how we can determine the true church and the true Christians, the Confession turns to the following questions: How is the church governed? Who executes its authority? By what means is the Church ruled? What is the source from which the church develops its governing system?

4.2.5. Church polity

Article 30 of the Confession immediately puts church polity, including its government, in the perspective of the Word of God.

‘We believe, that this true Church must be governed by that spiritual policy [polity] which our Lord hath taught us in his Word; namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God, and to administer the sacraments; also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the Church’

Church polity is something that is to be believed or confessed but not argued. In other words, the order and the government of the Church is a matter of faith. There is a direct link between the Word of God and church government. It should be arranged according to the Bible, implying that the Bible contains guidelines for it. Beets (2002:224) comments:

‘The authority over this society [the Church] according to the Reformed conception rests with and is centred in Christ, the glorified Head of the Church (cf. *Ephesians* 1:22). He rules its members directly through His Spirit in applying the Word and the Sacraments. But indirectly the Church is governed by those who represent Christ, his deputies, the bearers of the offices existing in the church: minister or pastor, elders and deacons.’

For Beets the words *policy* or *polity* signifies arrangement. The word *spiritual* is prefixed to indicate that the government of the Church is from God’s Spirit and through God’s Spirit. Church government is to be in keeping with the spiritual character of the Church. It is not a hierarchy, nor should civil rulers be permitted to dominate the Church’s affairs, nor are office-bearers lord it over each other. The church should strive and ensure that the principle of equality among all office-bearers, all churches and assemblies is maintained and defended. (Beets, 2002:2, 225). Article 30 mentions four different purposes of ‘spiritual polity’.

First, ‘that by these means true religion may be preserved; second, ‘that the true doctrine everywhere propagated.’ Third, ‘likewise transgressors punished and restrained by spiritual means’ and, fourth, also that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities. Following this, a conclusion is drawn, ‘By these means everything will be carried on in the Church with good order and decency, when faithful men are chosen, according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy.’

Article 30 realizes that the Church does not consist of like-minded people, and that it cannot be ruled according to the personal wishes of its individual members.

It is not a democracy, where the people rule; it is not a social organization either, where the highest social rank rules; it is not an aristocracy, where the aristocrats rule or clerocracy, the governance by the clergy. But is a Christocracy,⁵² where Christ himself rules through his Word and Spirit using office-bearers (cf. Janssen 2000:29).

This means that church offices are not to be viewed according to status, rank, or dignity. They are means through who Christ rules his Church. Van der Borgh (2007:38) commented on the Here again we point to the above (chapter 1, sections 2 and 3) quoted passage in Calvin's *Institutes*, on Christ's rule and the offices of a 'ministry of men' that He uses (Calvin, *Institutes* IV, VI, 1). Van der Borgh (2007:38), in his commentary on the *Institutes*, says that the offices are gifts which Jesus Christ gave to the Church.

Article 31 of the Confession stipulates that one should not be permitted to rule the church in a self-chosen manner. When electing people to a particular office, the whole congregation is involved. In this regard, the entire congregation is to beseech the Lord to show whom they should vote, members are to implore the Lord to indicate who it is that He wishes to use as office-bearer in his Church.

In the 16th century under the hierarchical system of the Roman Church the local churches had no say in the processes of choosing leaders. Parish priests were posted by then Bishops of the Pope, and offices were often bought or sold (cf. Beets 2002:229,231). Article 31 stresses that there must be lawful election, which includes calling upon the name of the Lord and involving the whole congregation. The concept of the general or common office of all believers is demonstrated when the entire congregation has a say in certain matters.

Concerning the election of special officers, Calvin points to two ways. He thinks that a local Church can nominate names of those who may become office-bearers. The Church Council should choose out of the suggested names. Alternatively, the Church Council nominates, whereupon the congregation chooses out of these names.

⁵² The appendix '-cracy' comes from the Greek verb 'kratein' for 'to rule'. Hence, a Christocracy may be defined as a system of government where Christ rules through His Word and Holy Spirit using offices. The point of departure of Christocracy is not the offices but the Christ himself.

4.2.5.1. Origin of the three offices

Article 30 of the Confession identifies and describes three permanent office-bearers, who must govern the Church in accordance to a spiritual polity, which our Lord as taught in His Word.

‘There should be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments; there should also be elders and deacons who, together with the pastors, form the Council of the Church.

The article offers a brief job description of each office. The tasks of ministers include proclamation of the Word, administration, leading in public prayer, and exercising church discipline. There are three specific tasks for elders, supervising, ruling, and assisting the ministers. The task of deacons is to look after the Church and the needy. In order to fulfill their task, it is expedient for the deacons to visit all in the congregation, in order to ascertain which members have particular needs and to find out what gifts members have to offer for the benefit of others.

Concerning the number of offices, it seems that Article 30 De Brès, in identifying three offices, is not necessarily in line with some other Reformed thinkers. Spoelstra (1982:248) compares two passages in the fourth Book of Calvin’s Institutes, III, 8 and IV, 1, and notes that ‘it seems as if Calvin accepted two offices and then three, and yet at the same time four offices.’ He (1980:248) adds that in some contemporary thinking a distinction is made between office and services, divide the two offices into four services. However, in his opinion the ‘Scriptures do not separate office and service’, for the two terms are synonymous. In reality, ‘the concept of service qualifies the concept of office, and the office is not a dignity, or position.’ (Spoelstra 1982:248, 249).

In his comment on the origin of the three fold system of offices in the Church Van Dellen and Monsma (1964:16) wrote:

‘All authority which any ecclesiastical office-bearers possess is delegated authority, authority given to them by Christ and to be exercised by them for Christ. Christ is the chief Prophet, only High Priest and Eternal King. Consequently the offices have as they been ordained for the organized church here on earth is nothing but extensions

and continuations of Christ's three-fold offices. ... The Old Testament knew three primary offices; no more, no less: Prophets, Priests and Kings. They were representatives of Christ to come. For the same reason the New Testament period has three primary offices; no more, no less: Ministers, Elders, and Deacons representing Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King' (Van Dellen and Monsma 1964:16).

Janssen (2000:16) realizes that 'Reformed people often argued that the three-fold office derives from the three-fold office of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King.' However, he (2000:16) also observes that Reformed churches have found it possible to add other offices, for instance the early Dutch Reformed in South Africa and elsewhere created the office of the 'exhorter' whose functions were to preach, teach and visit the sick but not to administer sacraments.

Bucer basically had only one office that is the eldership office (Paas 2007:53). Calvin, in addition to ministers and deacons, had also specific 'Doctors' (Teachers). According to Van der Borght (2007:38) Bucer had a significant influence on Calvin's view of ecclesiastical offices. He (2007:60) comments:

"...Calvin interpreted the scriptural text in the light of the actual situation within the church as he knew it in Geneva. The four offices of pastor, teacher, elder and deacon are not systematically reflected until the 1543 edition on the Institutes-two years later he introduced these four offices into Church order for Geneva."

He (2007:60) further explained that:

"This new Church Order has its historical roots in his stay in Strasbourg where under influence of Bucer, he became much more conscious of the visibility of the church and the multiplicity of the Biblical offices."

In *Calvinus Reformer: His Contribution to Theology, Church and Society* Spoelstra (1982:248), it is argued stated at times it is as if Calvin accepted two offices (Calvin, *Institutes* IV,III,8) then three (Calvin, *Institutes* IV, IV,1) and yet at the same time four offices. This might be the result of the fact that speaks of the office and service as synonymous terms rather than as office as a rank or position or dignity.

There are different views regarding the question whether certain offices should not belong to the Church Council or Church Session. Some Reformed churches, although retaining the three-fold office, exclude the deacon from the discussion of certain issues; others even do not consider deacons to be part of the Church Session. Still other Reformed churches exactly maintain what the Confession says. For them the three types of office-bearers work together in governing the local churches, through preaching and teaching, through ruling and caring for the poor.

4.2.5.2. Christ's through the offices

Church order and church discipline are dealt with in Article 32 of the Confession. It follows Calvin who had compared the order and discipline of the Church to the necessity of order in general.

‘If no society, indeed, no home which has even a small family can be kept in proper condition without discipline, it is much more necessary in the Church. ... The discipline is like a bridle to restrain and tame those who rage against the doctrine of Christ; or like a spur to arouse those of little inclination and also sometimes like a father's rod to chastise mildly and with the gentleness of Christ's Spirit.’ (Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, XII, 1).

The article starts with a warning to those the office-bearers who rule the Church and are responsible for its order. They should not become unfaithful to Christ in the first place.

‘We also believe that although it is useful and good for those who govern the churches to establish and set up a certain order among themselves, for maintaining the body of the church, they ought always to guard against deviating from what Christ, our only Master, has ordained for us’ (Article 32).

Coertzen (2004:188). indicates that a church order is a systematically ordered set of regulation drawn up by skilled instances for a Church- whether a local or a unity of local churches, written down to ensure and promote that things go well in church life. Going well means that the Church obeys Christ's ordinations. The Article says that some people should be involved in composing ‘a certain order’, but does not specify officers or professionals who

can prepare a church order. He (2004:201) finally suggests that responsible office-bearers responsible for writing a church order with rules and regulations should discuss with legal scholars, sociologists, economists, hymnologists and ecclesiologist.

The Article says that formulating and applying a church order with ordinances three benefits. First the ordinances for the contributing to the 'preservation of harmony; secondly they promote of unity, and finally they keep 'all believers in obedience to God. For that reason Article 32 goes against all that does not agree to the order of the Word of God.

'Therefore, we reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind and force our consciences in any way. So we accept only what is proper to maintain harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God. To that end excommunication, with all it involves, according to the Word of God, is required.'

The Article suggests that the rules and regulations should be enforced. Their enforcement has a link to church discipline. The word 'discipline', which comes from the disciple-pupil, is censure including deprivation of privileges by a church in punishment of offenses (Beets 1929:239). It covers the enforcement of rules and regulations for the maintenance of purity of doctrine (cf. Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:13; 13:10). In the same Article the purpose of church discipline is threefold. 'It is to maintain the honour of Christ; the holy character of the Church; and the promotion of the true church.'

In summing up possible punishments, Calvin also refers to the heaviest measure, excommunication. This connects to the last part of Article 32, 'To that end excommunication, with all it involves, according to the Word of God, is required'. Here the Article mentions the steps, from minor excommunication i.e. 'deprivation of certain privileges' to major excommunication or exclusion from the church. It should be noted that excommunication is not the first resort but last resort of church discipline, if all preceding steps of discipline have failed to win the sinner back. Church discipline should be administered in line with the Word of God. It belongs is the exercise of the authority, which Christ has given to his Church to promote its purity, to benefit the offender, and to vindicate His honour. The consequences of failing to apply discipline are serious. 'Where discipline is weak, there the church will be weak also' (Osterhaven, (1964:170).

In summary, it can be stressed that the *Belgic Confession of Faith* has been very relevant for the discourse on church polity. It offers guidelines on church orders, offices, assemblies, and the administration of church discipline. Most importantly the Confession emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church, and that He executes his government through his Word and Spirit using services of church members. For that reason the Confession calls the Church's polity a *spiritual polity*. Church government is spiritual because it belongs to Christ alone not to a single person or a group of people, church committee, or Synod. It is executed through office-bearers who in assembly, persuade each other from the Word of God, and make decision in accordance with the Word of God.

However, it seems that in the Nkhoma Synod the *Belgic Confession* has not been used as such, and that several theological emphases of this Confession have not reflected in its church polity discourse and practice.

4.2.5.3. Autocracy, Clerocracy, and Democracy

Article 31 of the Confession seems to exclude governmental systems like autocracy, monarchy, clerocracy, and democracy,⁵³ because of its unique emphasis on equality and Christocracy.

‘As for the ministers of God's Word, they have equally the same power and authority wheresoever they are, as they are all ministers of Christ, the only universal Bishop, and the only Head of the Church’.

The word ‘equality’ means being on the same level. The anti-hierarchical tendency in the 16th century Reformation and its Confessions should be understood against background of protests against dictatorial forms and practices of church government in the Church of Rome (Beets, 1929:232).

‘During the long centuries between the ancient and reformatory churches Rome had developed a church polity which contradicted the spiritual freedom of believers. All congregations were regarded as merely parts of one world church. Its center and

⁵³ The word autocracy refers to a government by a single ruler. In the ecclesiastical circles autocracy is practiced in the churches that have an Episcopalian polity. In a monarchy or monarchical system the human head of the Church rules like a King, like in the Roman Catholic Church. Clerocracy is the government by ministers, whereas democracy is a form of government in the name of the majority of the people.

capital was Rome, where the chief priest bishop or Pontiff had his seat' (De Jong: 1980: 308).

Soon in the early stages of Church History the local Church at Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, had become to be considered not on the same as churches elsewhere. Its head, the Bishop of Rome, had assumed the idea of having taken Christ's place on earth, and the thought had emerged that the congregation of Rome had a special rank and status. Under Rome a hierarchy of other churches followed, descending in importance.

'One might detect ... the old notion that some Churches carried more weight; they were located in a central city or principle town of a region. ... This means that the larger Church or more prestigious Church calls the shots for neighboring churches simply by the nature of their status' (Jansen, 2003:32).

Article 31 of the Confession definitely implies a rejection of such hierarchical relationships between local Churches and Assemblies. Clearly the Article means to defend parity of Assemblies. A Reformed church polity does not know a system of lower and higher courts. Church Council, Classis (Presbytery), and Synod are supposed to resolve only those matters for which they have been given competence. However a Synod is not a super or higher structure like a central government, but it is a 'broader' structure, consisting of more churches. The Synod only deals with matters that cannot be dealt with by the Church Council or the Class is, in their interest. (Vorster 2003:54 and De Ridder 1983:12). Equality and parity are meant for all Churches and Assemblies.

However, the Article specifically refers to the relationship between office-bearers. Here we should ask whether equality was meant for all the all office-bearers. De Jong (1980: 310) only speaks of the need for 'zealously' guarding 'the equality of all ministers of the Word'. However, the concept of equality in the Article is implicitly applied not only to ministers only but to all office-bearers serving in the Church in various capacities. In principle no one-office bearer has authority over other office-bearers. It may therefore be suggested that the Article perhaps implies that there ought not to be assistant-pastors or deputy-pastors who work as subordinates under other ministers (cf. Van Dellen and Monsma 1954:79). All office-bearers derive their authority from Christ, and this authority is exercised only in the Church Council and the broader Assemblies. The authority of the office-bearers must be executed together with other officers. Of course the Article does not imply that at

meetings of office-bearers there should not be a Moderator or Secretary. The final reason argument against autocracy, monarchy, clerocracy, and democracy is that the Church of Jesus Christ knows no hierarchy except for being submitted to Him.

‘No man exercises authority over another and no office is higher than any other office. For there is only one authority in the Church namely Jesus Christ and there is only one Head of the Church, namely Jesus Christ. ... All office-bearers ... are ministers or servants of Christ’ (Osterhaven 1964:165).

The office-bearers of the Church do not receive their authority from the community, like in democracy; they can never be the one person who rules the Church like in an Episcopalian or Monarchical system; they can never become clerics founding their clerocracy in which only the ordained office-bearers take decisions, without consulting other office-bearers and church members. Office-bearers are servants in a Christocracy, because Christ is their Ruler. They also serve in a Pneumatocracy, because Christ executes his rule and authority in the Church through his Word and the Holy Spirit using them.

4.2.5.4. Christ’s Rules through Assemblies

In section 4.2.5.1 section we noted that according to the *Belgic Confession*, Article 30 a Church Council comprises three kinds of office-bearers, minister(s), elders, and deacons. They execute the government of the Church. The article implies that any local congregation as a complete Church is fully equipped with everything that is required for its government. The three offices are equally involved in the government. This plurality of offices in the governing body of the Church makes Reformed church polity distinctive. All the three offices are founded on the three offices of Christ himself. Thus they represent Christ three-fold office (cf. McKim, 1992:245, 346).

The article above refers to a form of church government in which a local Church Council is a basic governmental unit of a Church. This church government is neither by one person nor by the whole congregation (cf. Van Dellen and Monsma, 1964:133). This implies that the government of the Church is executed in its Assemblies. They control public services, keep watch over teaching, promote missions and supervise beliefs and behavior of the members of the local church; they enforce discipline, control reception of new members

and look after the poor (McGrath, 1956:61). The local Church Council or Church Session is the primary Assembly as well as court of appeal.

The Confession does not stipulate whether there should be a Classis (Presbytery) or a Synod to govern a Church. It only says that the local Church Councils should have teaching, legislative, and judicial power. They are the original location of the authority and of the unity of the Church. However, Reformed church polity believes in what is described as ‘derived authority’. The ‘broader Assemblies’, Classis (Presbytery), and Synod or General Assembly act on this derived authority, received from the Church Councils, to govern the entire Church. This does not mean that Church Councils transfer their authority to the Presbytery or Synod. Neither do ‘broader Assemblies’ replace the authority of the Church Council (Vorster, 2003:65).

It is important to note that the Confession never grants ruling authority to one person, but always to gathered body. Of course such governing ecclesiastical bodies cannot be leaderless (cf. Janssen 2000:117). In its Synodocracy the Church requires Assemblies of special office-bearers, who should be given ample time to deliberate and make decision in accordance with the Word of God.

4.3.The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

The Heidelberg Catechism is another confessional document, which the Nkhoma Synod inherited from the Dutch Reformed Church (Southern Africa).⁵⁴ At their ordination and induction ministers are asked to vow and subscribe to the content of the Heidelberg Catechism. Here we intend to examine and describe the church polity discourse and practice contained in the Catechism, and assess whether its content has been used in the development of church polity within the Nkhoma Synod.

4.3.1.Historical Background

The *Heidelberg Catechism* was composed in the German city-state of Heidelberg, by two learned theologians Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, at the request of the Elector,⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Nkhoma Synod, Malongosoledwe a mu Mpingo, 1968:36, 44.

⁵⁵ Elector: one of the most important rulers of German states who were assigned to elect a new Emperor on the death of the old one.

Prince Frederick III of the Palatinate one of the German states (cf. Pelikan and Hotchkiss, 2003:427).

‘On November 15, 1563, the Elector ... made public and put into effect a church order for his land ... and necessary for the Church to take a stand on a firm foundation in order to protect itself against the many different tendencies and movements which broke out everywhere. ... With this church order of 1563, the Elector ... in his capacity as a member of the Church wanted to provide for unity of the Church and above all of church worship. The so-called Heidelberg Catechism of Palatinate belongs to the framework of this Church’ (Barth, 1964:22).

Kamfer (1975:111) says that the Catechism was specifically prepared to end the theological controversy, which had arisen between Calvinist and Lutheran theologians over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The issue at stake was the mode of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. The Calvinists asserted that Christ is present in the Spirit, and according to the Lutherans Christ is present bodily in the bread and wine. The controversy had spread to many places throughout the Palatinate, particularly the city of Heidelberg. Elector Fredrick appointed Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587), a French Reformed theologian and a student of Calvin and Beza, and Zacharius Ursinus (1534-1583) a student of Melancthon and Calvin, and a professor of theology at Heidelberg University. He charged them with the responsibility to draw up an instructional manual for use in Reformed Congregations, Christian Schools and Colleges, and by pastors (cf. Noll, 1994:134). More precisely the Catechism was intended for the following functions:

‘(1) It should serve the instruction of youth; (2) it should serve the instruction of pastors and teachers; (3) it should be used in public worship specifically selections, which were to be read, one each Sunday, in nine Sunday cycles; (4) it should be divided into 52 Sundays and used ... as the basic theme for the alternate afternoon worship service or sermon’ (Barth 1964:23).

Although the Catechism is attributed two theologians, Barth (1964:23) argues that composing it was in fact the work of a team, described in the 1563 edition as a group of distinguished theologians, superintendents, church servants and other godly learned men. The first edition, of 19 January 1563, was published in both Latin and German with a nine-page introduction addressed to Prince Fredrick. It was made an official Catechism by the Palatinate Synod and

it replaced all other catechisms in Germany particularly in the Palatinate (Pelikan and Hotchkiss 2003:427; Buggink 1963:5).

4.3.2. Outline and Structure

The Heidelberg Catechism is structured according to the scholastic method of question and answer. The question is answered by an explanation of special words and expressions, and a short statement. Biblical proof texts are found at the end of the answer. There are 129 questions and answers, related to theological items. The Catechism portrays a dialogue or a kind of interview between a catechist and a catechumen. The catechist asks the question in second person plural whereas the catechumen answers the question in the first person singular, e.g. ‘What is your only comfort ...? (Question 1), ‘that I belong ...’ (answer 1). Who is meant by the ‘I’, who is answers the question? Of course this refers to the person who reads the Catechism, but may also have in mind a group of people or a community locally or internationally (cf. Bruggink, 1963:13).⁵⁶

The questions/ answers are grouped into 52 ‘Sundays’, to ensure that each Lord's Day has a particular set of questions to cover. They are also grouped into three main parts, Sin and Misery, Redemption and Freedom, and Gratitude and Obedience (cf. Bruggink, 1963:5). Thelemann 1959:7) says that these three parts are found in Rom. 7:24, 25 (NIV): ‘What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of this death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Thelemann thinks that the writers took the headings of their three parts from this text, and that the division itself is also based on other texts in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans

Paul first ‘convinces the Gentiles and the Jews that they are miserably wretched and are condemned sinners (Rom.1:18-3:21). Secondly, he teaches redemption through Christ (Rom.3:22; 11: 36). Thirdly, he exhorts them to gratitude through a Christian life (Rom.12:1-16,27’ ... Questions 1 and 2 are the introduction to the Catechism just as Rom. 1:1-17 is an introduction to the entire letter to the Romans’ (Thelemann, 1959:7).

The first part is intended to bring about knowledge of sin, the second a desire of salvation,

⁵⁶ Bruggink (1963:14) is of the opinion that the Catechism has a devotional, as well as an ecumenical character. The latter means that the Catechism is a catholic document.

and the third a thankful life. The topics dealt with in the 129 questions/ answers of the Catechism are derived Scripture the Apostle's Creed, e.g. Christ's summary of the Law is treated under Sin and Misery, the Apostle's Creed and the institution of the Sacraments under Redemption, the Decalogue and the Lord's Prayer under Gratitude (cf. Thelemann, 1959: X1).

4.3.3. Reception

The Catechism was adopted by early Reformed congregations in The Netherlands after approval by the Synods of Wesel (1568), Emden (1571), and The Hague (1586). Finally it was given a central place in catechumen and worship by the National Synod of Dordt in 1618-1619 (Beeke and Ferguson, 1999: x).

'The Heidelberg Catechism was declared by the Synod to be in all respects in accordance with the Word of God. ... The Synod issued directions concerning the instruction that was to be given from the Catechism, so that persons of advanced age as well as the children and youth might secure a sufficient knowledge of cardinal doctrines. But the greatest pressure was laid upon the ministry. Every pastor was required to preach the Catechism each Sabbath Afternoon. The discourse was to be short and adapted to the capacities of all whether old or young, educated or ignorant. It was added that neglect of this duty would expose the offender to ecclesiastical punishment.' (De Ridder, 1983:79).

In South Africa, the Heidelberg Catechism was introduced by the Dutch Reformed Christians from the Netherlands. It was regarded as one of the sermon books used by the sick comforters, later by the preachers. 'The official preaching was to transmit pure Reformed doctrine as contained in the Symbols of Unity and interpreted by Dordt' (Hofmeyr and Pillay 1992:15). In the Reformed Church of South Africa, of the Cape Colony and the Transvaal, the Heidelberg Catechism was held in high esteem as a confession of faith as well as a book of instruction (cf. Thelemann, 1959:492).

In the Nkhoma Synod, the *Heidelberg Catechism* is accepted as a Confession, but it does not function directly as such, because it is only considered as the basis of its *Buku La Katekisma*.

... 'ndipo pa chaka cha 1563 mfumu ina Fredrik anayitana aphunzitsi awiri omveka, nawauza kuti akonzere anthu ake buku lomwe la Katekisma lowathandiza kudziwa bwino lomwe nzeru zonse za chipulumutso. Katekisma wathuyo ayamba pa Katekisma wa mfumu ija. (In the year 1563 Prince Fredrick called two famous theologians to draw up a Catechism for his people, which would help them to know about the doctrine of salvation. Our Catechism was based on the Catechism of that King' (Buku La Katekisma, 1968:3).

The position of the Heidelberg Catechism is recognized in the liturgical formularies of the Nkhoma Synod, particularly those that deal with the induction and ordination of the ministers (see Section 4.2.3). In other words the Heidelberg Catechism receives little official attention in Nkhoma Synod. Therefore it may be difficult to speculate whether it had or has a binding character in the life of the Church particularly in church polity and church government.

4.3.4. Nature of the Church

Let us now look at what the Heidelberg Catechism says on the Nature of the Church. Answer 54 says:

'I believe that the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a Church chosen to everlasting life. And I believe that I am and forever shall remain a living member of it.'

The Son of God brings forth the Church, by his Spirit and Word, thus He continues to gather, protect, and preserve a congregation. Answer 54 says that the Church has been chosen from the 'whole human race, from the beginning of the world'. It is not limited by any race, landscape, time, or age. It is not of human origin and therefore it cannot have a human head that is limited by space, time, age, knowledge, and race. The Word and the Spirit are the means, which Christ uses when gathering, defending, and preserving his Church. The Christological and Pneumatological orientation of answer 54 characterizes Reformed ecclesiology when defining the nature of the Church. The two key notions in the Reformed definition of the Church are that Christ is the Head and that He gathers, protects and rules the Church through His Word and Spirit (cf. Thelemann, 1959:209). Also here the Catechism

sounds similar to Calvin who says that Christ executes his rule and authority in the Church by his Word and Holy Spirit (Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, 1, 9; III, 1).

Answer 54 also implies that the Church is the communion of the saints and comprises all who believe, believed and have believed in Christ. Thus, those who believe in Him are made partakers of all His riches and gifts, which must be used for the salvation of others. Here the answer corresponds with answer 55 to the question what a believer means by the communion of saints.

‘First that those believers, all, and everyone, as members of Christ have communion with Him and share in all His treasures and gifts. Secondly, that everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members.’

The communion aspect means that the Church is a fellowship of believers, locally, regionally, and universal. It also applies to an invisible body comprising living saints in heaven and those on earth. ‘The doctrine of the communion of saints ... is taken to mean the fellowship of Christians in every age, past and present and future’ (Ferguson and Wright, 1998:153).

4.3.5. Church polity

When discussing the *Belgic Confession* we have noted time and again that Christ, as Head of the Church, gathers, builds and rules his Church through Word and Spirit, and that in doing so He uses as instruments certain human offices, which gather to lead the Church (cf. Janssen, 2000:14). However, in the *Heidelberg Catechism* there are no articles that directly stipulate about the church government. Nevertheless, certain questions/ answers imply conclusions for church polity, especially the information on the rule, reign, and authority of Christ that can be derived from his ascension.

4.3.5.1. Christocracy

In order to have a proper understanding of the rule and dominion of Christ in the Church, it is necessary to examine the three offices of Christ as described in answer 31, to the question why it is said that Christ is anointed?

‘Because He has been ordained by God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption; our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body has redeemed us, and who continually intercedes for us before the Father; and our eternal King, who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in the redemption obtained for us’.

‘The three-fold office, to which Christ was appointed and anointed by the Father, consists of the offices of (1) Prophet or Teacher, (2) Priest or Mediator, and (3) King or Ruler.’ These offices were prophesied in the Old Testament and they were manifested in the life and work of Christ (cf. Thelemann, 1959:119). Here we especially consider Christ’s kingship. We note that the Catechism agrees to the Belgian Confession where we saw in Articles 27 and 29 that Christ is an eternal King, appointed by God. His is the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of heaven. Being King, he has subjects. He administers his kingly office into three directions, He governs by His word, He protects and preserves his subjects, and He strengthens them. The rule and dominion of Christ over the Church is further explained in answer 50 to the question why it is added that after his ascension He sits at the right hand of God.

‘Christ ascended into heaven to manifest Himself there as Head of His Church, through whom the Father governs all things.’

Specifying the last sentence of answer 31, Christ’s sitting at the right hand of God means that He himself is an eternal King, who governs believers by His Word and Spirit. It is clear that the government of Christ in his Church takes place by His Word and Spirit, in all respects. This means that for members of the Church the headship of Christ’s reign and rule is identical with the Word of God.

‘His reign is exercised inwardly and directly through special gifts of the Spirit in his Church, but also outwardly and indirectly in his determination of the general and particular history. Jesus Christ is the hidden King of the whole Kingdom’ (Barth, 1964:79, 80).

Thelemann (1954:186) in his comment on answer 50 says that the sitting at the right hand of the Father of the ascended Christ means three things.⁵⁷ It refers to Christ's place of honour or to the highest mark of honour given to Him both in the Church and in the whole universe.⁵⁸ It also refers to the highest power and authority of Christ over the Church. Finally, it refers to His highest rank, status and dignity in the Church and the whole universe (Thelemann, 1959:186,187). Bruggink (1963:107) stresses that his sitting at the right hand of the Father signifies the omnipotence and majesty of God and the continuous activity of Christ. 'Christ does not sit about in perpetual idleness, but is continually engaged in the exercise of his divine power and majesty. He does this as Head of his Church but at the same time as one through whom God the Father administers his universe and every one on it' (Bruggink, 1963:107).

Answer 50 clearly shows that Christ alone has sovereignty and supreme authority over the Church. He alone governs the Church, which is his body. It means that others cannot share Christ's honor and power. When governing the church, He does so through the means of the Word and the Spirit, using as instruments the servants who He appoints. Although He is not physically present in the Church, He uses means and instruments to execute his government. He is the King, the Ruler, the Governor, the Lawgiver, and the Leader of the Church. The members of the Church are governed through understanding his will, which is given in the Scriptures. Thus' Christ's will is His Word. On the similar note Bruggink comments: 'Since Christ is the 'Head of the Church', all those working in it are his assistants.'

4.3.5.2. *Pneumatocracy*

The notion of Pneumatocracy is expressed in answer 51 to the question how would 'the glory of Christ, our Head, benefit us?'

⁵⁷In various cultures, if a person sits at the right hand of the King, it means that he or she is honoured. In 1Kings 2:19 when Bathsheba came to King Solomon, she sat at the right hand of the King. King Solomon honoured his mother. In Mt 20:21, the mother of Zebedee's children made the request of the Lord, 'Grant that my two sons may sit, the one on your right hand and the other on the left in your Kingdom'. The writers of the Catechism may have derived this concept from Biblical and contemporary contexts when they wrote about sitting at the right hand of God.

⁵⁸ Annenberg (1972:124) says that 'sitting at the right hand of God' does not mean to indicate the place where the risen Jesus is at the moment but rather that He is in exalted participation in the almighty power of God, to exercise divine rule over the Church and the entire creation. It means that He is partaker of everything which belongs to the God including the its mighty power.

‘First, by His Holy Spirit He pours out heavenly gifts upon us, His members. Secondly, by His power He defends and preserves us against all enemies.’

Although Christ is invisible, He is present by the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt. 28:20). Through the Holy Spirit He builds his Church by bestowing gifts that benefit the members of his body. He gives to members his grace. The grace is mediated by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in Christ and in the members. There are two kinds of gifts by the Holy Spirit, the extraordinary gifts, for instance speaking in tongues, prophesying and working miracles, and also the ordinary gifts, knowledge, faith, love, hope, etc. These gifts of the Spirit are necessary for serving and honoring the Head of the Church, his position of reign, His place of honor, status, dignity, and rank (Thelemann 1959: 190, 193ff). The Holy Spirit helps us to realize that no one by any means can substitute Christ in being the Head of the Church. By the Holy Spirit Christ defends and preserves the members of his Church, of which He is Head.

‘Many other things might be said about this Headship of Christ over his Church. Perhaps the best thing to do is for each one to let Christ govern all service and work of the local Church and in the denomination, in all activities and programs. If Christ is exalted in all of this, his Church might be blessed and enabled to do his work in the world’ (Bruggink, 1963:109).

Christ has power to overthrow the enemies of church members and of the Church as a whole. These enemies according to are sin and tyrants (Thelemann, 1959:192). Therefore nothing from any source can happen to members without the will of Christ (cf. question/ answer 1 of the Catechism).

4.4.The Canons of Dordt (1619-1619)

The decisions taken in 1618-1619 by the National Synod of Dordt (brief for Dordrecht), on five main points of doctrine in dispute with the Arminians in The Netherlands are known as the *Canons of Dordt*. It is another confessional standard, which the Nkhoma Synod inherited from the DRC (cf. Pauw 1980:32). The Canons do not deal directly with the question of how the Church is to be ordered and governed. However, the content of the Canons reflects the teaching, governing, and legislative authority of the ecclesiastical assemblies, and the significance of the concept of Christ’s rule through his Word and Spirit using office-bearers.

4.4.1. Historical Background

The Canons of Dordt are a product of the first and only National Synod of the Reformed Church in The Netherlands. It was called ‘national’ because it assembled at the instigation of the government of the Dutch Republic, the States-General. The delegates included fifty-eight ministers and elders drawn from the Dutch Reformed Congregations and five theologians e.g. Franciscus Gomarus, from the Dutch Academies, and eight delegates sent by the States-General to protect government interest. Actually it was an international Synod because participants came from various parts of Europe.

‘Also to the representatives belonged twenty-six Reformed theologians from eight foreign lands, Great Britain, the Palatinate, Hasse, Switzerland, Nassau-Wetteravia, Bremen, Geneva, and Emden, giving the Synod an international character’ (McKim. 1992a:108).

The Synod was convened to address the objections that had been raised against Reformed doctrine, summarized in the *Heidelberg Catechism* and specifically in the *Belgic Confession* (cf. De Ridder 1983:73). A group of theologians formulated a *Remonstrance* (1610), a form of protest against aspects of these confessions. They were called *Remonstrants*, also *Arminians*. Some of the doctrines in the *Belgic Confession* disputed by the Remonstrants concerned providence (Article 13), creation, and fall of man (Article 14), depravity of man, original sin (Article 15), election (Articles 16, 34, 35), good works (Article 14, 21, 24), the Church (Article 27), and the true Church (Article 29), the role of the government (Article 36).

At the Synod the questions at stake whether the Dutch churches were justified in using the Belgic Confession as a standard for preaching and teaching in the church and whether or where the text needed revision. The foreign delegates were asked to scrutinize the Confession and state whether there was anything in it that was contrary to the Scriptures. Almost all found that everything in it agreed with this truth and with the Confessions of Faith of other Reformed churches. The Dutch theologians were urged ‘to stand by this orthodox, pious and straightforward till the day of Christ’s return.’ However, the leader of British delegation, the bishop of Llandov, objected to the equality of the ministers as expressed in article 31 and also his colleagues Davenant and Goad argued that they approved of the

Confession with the exception of this article on church government, particularly where it states that all ministers are equal in power and authority wherever they may be.’ However, the Synod did not change the Article 31 (cf. Gootjes, 2007:149).

The *Canons of Dordt* were formulated not only because of issues of church government, but because of objections against the Calvinistic and Reformed teaching on aspects of salvation theology. Writers of the *Remonstrance* had derived their objections from the teachings of Jacob Arminius, a professor of theology at Leiden University, who had died about a decade before the Synod took place. The Synod was convened to settle controversies initiated the teachings of Arminius, which were soon indicated as *Arminianism* (Douglas 1974:310).

Arminius questioned the teaching of Calvin and his followers on a number of important points, mainly the teaching on predestination. The *Remonstrance* was written after the death of Arminius. It has four sections, two directly concerned the revision of the *Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*, one section was a summary of five theses of the Remonstrants or Arminians on election, atonement, forgiveness acquired by Christ’s death, resisting the Holy Spirit, and the perseverance of the saints (Douglas 1974:310).

The Arminians taught that election is based on foreseen faith. They also taught universal atonement, partial depravity, resistible grace, and the possibility of lapsing from grace. The Synod rejected these views and set forth the Reformed doctrine on these points, unconditional election, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of saints. The debates that had started in 1611 came to a head in 1618-19, when in the *Canons of Dordt* a Reformed answer to the *Remonstrance* was formulated. Various delegates had been appointed to work on the response. Finally, based on reports from all nineteen delegations, a committee of nine drafted the document that became known as the *Canons of Dordt*, which condemned Remonstrant views and affirmed:

‘God elects and reprobates, not on the basis of foreseen belief and unbelief but by his sovereign will, though the reprobate perish by their own fault, Christ’s death was sufficient for all but effective for the elect; by the fall, humanity was totally corrupted, though it remained human; God’s grace works effectively to convert the unbeliever, though not by coercion; and God preserves believers so they cannot totally fall from grace’ (McKim, 1992a:108)

The Canons were signed by all delegates. They allowed room for considerable theological diversity among the Reformed, and represented the triumph of a balanced Calvinism. The delegates decided on doctrines of salvation in adopting the Canons of Dordt, the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. They also took decisions on church polity, partly included in the three confessions, and in a separate document. This has defined the Reformed church in The Netherlands and elsewhere for centuries, and it continues to shape churches of the Reformed tradition.

4.4.2. Outline and Summary

The Canons contain five main points of doctrine, each addressing a particular Arminian error. Each point is sub-divided in confessing articles, and ends in some other articles that reject the specific errors raised in the concerned point. Each response ends with Scripture references. Here is an outline and summary:

I. Divine Election and Reprobation, containing 18 confessing articles, followed by 9 rejecting articles. Predestination is not based on human faith or unbelief.

Unconditional election and faith are gifts of God.

II. Christ's Death and Human Redemption, containing 9 confessing articles, followed by 7 rejecting articles.

While the death of Christ is abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world, its saving efficacy is limited to the elect.

III and IV. Human corruption, conversion to God, and the way it occurs, containing 17 confessing articles, followed by 9 rejecting articles. All are so corrupted by sin that they cannot affect their salvation; in sovereign grace, God calls and regenerates them to newness of life.

V. The Perseverance of the Saints, containing 15 confessing articles, followed by 9 rejecting articles. Those thus saved He preserves until the end; hence, there is assurance of salvation even while believers are troubled by many infirmities (Pelikan and Hotchkiss, 2003:571-600; McKim, 1992a:108).

Many theologians summarize the five points by using the acronym TULIP, meaning Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. The Canons end with an appeal urging to deal with the teaching in a godly and reverent manner, in the academic institutions and in the churches. The five points should be

referred to -in their speaking and writing- with the intention to serve the glory of God's name, holiness of life, and the comfort of anxious souls. One should think and speak on Scripture in faith and refrain from ways, which go beyond the bounds set for us by the genuine sense of the Holy Scriptures, and which could give impertinent sophists a just occasion to scoff at the teaching of the Reformed churches or even to bring false accusations against it.

4.4.3. Reception

The Nkhoma Synod adopted the *Canons of Dordt*, together with the *Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*, to be a symbol of unity with other Reformed Churches, and as a doctrinal standard (cf. Pauw 1980:327). At their induction ministers in Nkhoma Synod are asked to vow and subscribe to the Canons. However, they have not been translated into Chichewa, the Church's official language, and the knowledge is very limited. See further our remarks in the end of section 4.2.3.

Although the Canons of Dordt do not contain articles that deal with church polity, the document has been incorporated in this study especially regarding the Nkhoma Synod. The Canons denote the confessional and doctrinal context of Reformed church polity, not only because it was inherited from the South African DRC. The main reason for paying attention to it is that the Canons were formulated at an international Synod, which as a whole wanted to remind us that only ecclesiastical assemblies have the authority to teach, to govern, to legislate and to 'judicate' in the Church, and that they are only allowed to do this in accordance with the Bible. As an articulation of Reformed beliefs in direct rebuttal of Arminianism, the Canons cannot be isolated from the subject of church polity documents.

4.4.4. The Significance of the Synod of Dordt in Church Policy Matters

The Canons of Dordt themselves do not contain articles that explicitly deal with church order and church government. Yet it is important to examine the type of authority that the 1618-1619 Synod of Dordt as such used, and assess where the authority came from and how it influenced the Reformed Churches afterward. We will look at the three aspects of authority.

Although the Synod is also known for authorizing the adoption of the *Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*, it is best remembered for its authoritative response to teachings of the Remonstrants, particularly on the themes of predestination and reprobation (cf. section 4.2.3.3) (cf. De Ridder, 1983:73). Apparently the Synod was given the authority

to determine with regard to important points of faith and order (cf. De Ridder, 1983:73). Synodical authority is in line with Reformed thinking in so far it submits to the Word of God. Spoelstra (1982:249) says that in order to teach and to determine and explicate doctrinal content, Synods are necessary, but under this condition.

‘The Synod, however, is exclusively determined by the question of whether its decisions tie with the Word of God. ... not have any authority from themselves. Utterances ... therefore have to be weighed continually on the same scale of the Word.’

The Synod of Dordt had in its authority to teach affected the government of all the local churches, Presbyteries, and Synods. Such authority had a binding character, not because it came from a meeting of high profile ecclesiastical officials, but especially because the delegates apparently convinced and persuaded each other from the Word of God (cf. Vorster 2003:54, 55). The Synod made clear that ecclesiastical assemblies have teaching power in the Church, including the right to train, examine, send, support, and appoint ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons and through them Christ rules through his Church. The governing authority of a ‘broader’ assembly is ministerial to the Word (McGrath 1956:63). The Synod also exercised authority to legislate, when it laid down some rules and regulations for the order of the Church, later published as the Church Order of Dordt. The Synod tried to heed Calvin’s instruction that ecclesiastical rules and regulations should remain limited, be useful, and should clearly be aimed at the promotion of the well-being, religion, unity, order, and peace within the Church (Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, X, 27, 28, 32; De Ridder, 1983:76).

Most Reformed Churches, particularly those that have historical links with the old Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands, have modeled their church orders to the Church Order of Dordt (cf. Van Dellen and Monsma, 1964:VIII; Pauw, 1980:327; De Ridder, 1983: iii); Janssen, 2000:5, 6; Vorster, 2003:5). The Synod enacted that all ministers, elders, deacons, and essentially all Christians ought to subscribe to the Three Reformed Symbols.

‘A form of subscription was composed by which ministers, professors of theology, regents and under regents of colleges, and all teachers should solemnly promise to set forth diligently and faithfully maintain the doctrine contained in the Confession, the Catechism, and the Canons of Dordrecht’ (De Ridder, 1983:81).

The Synod of Dordrecht, by its by general, national and international character, demonstrated the unity of the Church as demonstrated of the Synod Dordrecht.

‘The Synod was of primary importance for the Dutch Reformed church. After 1619 there could be no doubt about the clearly Calvinist character of the church. The unity and uniformity of the church was maintained at the expense its broader character: two hundred ministers were dismissed.⁵⁹ On an international level the Synod was a showcase of Calvinist strength, and it intensified the international coherence of the Calvinist movement’ (Douglas (1974:310).

On the same note, De Ridder (1983:76) commended:

‘The Synod of Dordt was a prestigious assembly and its work was done so well that it served as an example for Westminster Assembly which was held in Britain less than three decades later. The course of the Reformed Churches was set for centuries to come’

The Synod had complied with the three aspects of authority indicated by Calvin. It demonstrated that a broader assembly has a derived authority to teach, legislate, and speak for justice. The broader assemblies derive this authority from the Head of the Church Jesus Christ, through local churches. This authority needs to be exercised and continuously weighed on the scale of the Word of God, as summarized in the Confessions.

4.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter is set to address the following three issues: What were the church polity sources which the Nkhoma Synod inherited from the DRC and from which it could develop its church polity and church government. Answer: the *Belgic Confession* (1561), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), the *Canons of Dordt* (1618-1619).

Did the Nkhoma Synod practically use these documents as sources for practice church government? If the answer is no, is there evidence to support the answer? Answer: It seems the Church did not consider these documents as its church polity sources. This is evident

⁵⁹ According to Douglas (1974:310) in addition to being ousted from the pulpits, the Dutch government ousted the Remonstrant leaders from the country for being disturbers.

because the Church did not translate these documents into its official language. Furthermore, ministers vow that they will subscribe to the documents yet they are not familiar with their contents.

Does the Reformed Symbols of Unity explicitly and implicitly contain a specific church polity and church government? What form of church government is found in the documents? What are prominent tenets or principles? Answers: Yes, they contain a specific form of church government called a Reformed or Presbyterian system. One of the fundamental tenets of this system of church polity is that Christ is the Head of the Church and that he rules it through His Word and Holy Spirit using offices.

Noting that the Three Reformed Symbols of Unity contain sources from which the Nkhoma Synod could develop its church polity and church government and yet the Church did not make use of these documents, the next chapter identifies, examines and describes the sources of church government which the Church used.

Chapter 5: Sources for the Practice of Church government in the Nkhoma Synod: Buku La Katekisma, Zolamulira and the Constitution

5.1. Introduction

The CCAP Nkhoma Synod prepared its own church order (*Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza*), Catechism (*Buku La Katekisma*), and constitution which became sources of its church polity and church government. In this chapter, attention is given to the documents above that express the church polity and church government of the Nkhoma Synod. Our main focus is the concept of the headship of Christ and how the Church's understanding on this notion impacted on its church government discourse.

5.2. Buku La Katekisma

The *Buku La Katekisma* and the *Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza*. Both are important documents, published by the CCAP - Nkhoma Synod. Here we look at the *Buku La Katekisma*. The structure and content of the former was modelled after the *Heidelberg Catechism*. The first edition of *Zolamulira* (abbreviated as *Zolamulira*) contained translations of parts of the Articles of the Church Order of the DRC in South Africa (cf. Pauw, 1980:327). We are investigating whether the *Buku La Katekisma* and the *Zolamulira* have been binding on the church polity discourse and practice in the Nkhoma Synod, and also whether there is congruity between the two documents and the *Three Reformed Symbols of Unity*. Key issue is how the headship of Christ is presented in the two documents, and how has had an impact on the church polity discourse and practice within the Nkhoma Synod.

5.2.1. History

The *Buku La Katekisma* came into being through Mission of the Dutch the South African Dutch Reformed Church (DRCM) in Malawi. Its first edition was prepared by Andrew Charles Murray in 1892. It was called *Nsonga* (literarily means tip, top, summit). The name also means the abridged version or small.

The first edition of *Nsonga* was printed by the Livingstonia Mission at Bandawe in 1892. In 1898 the Rev A.C. Murray drew up another version based on the *Heidelberg Catechism* and its abridged version in Dutch language to which a few questions and answers from the *Shorter Catechism* of the Church of Scotland were added (cf. Pauw, 1980:329).

In 1916, the Council of Congregations of the DRCM in Malawi (then Nyasaland) appointed a committee of three to enlarge the *Nsonga* (cf. Pauw, 1980:329). To it new questions and answers were added.⁶⁰ In 1922 the Council approved an abridged version of ten articles for use by elderly people and by those who lacked sufficient intelligence to cope with the larger catechism.⁶¹

In 1966 the Catechism was revised and extended and were combined into a single book with chapters on Bible stories and General Ecclesiology [a brief history of the Church from the 1st to 19th century and the brief History of Church polity of the Nkhoma Synod) and practical theology: Spirituality and liturgical formularies for confirmation and baptism of Catechumen members (cf. *Buku La Katekisma* 1968: ii). In this study we are using the 1968 edition and is also the current text.

5.2.2. Outline and Structure

The content of the current *Buku La Katekisma* (1968: ii) has the following outline and structure. Gawo I. *Katekisma* (section 1.Catechism), Gawo II. *Mbiri Yopatulika* (Section II. Bible Stories), Gawo III. *Mbiri ya Eklesia* (Section III. Ecclesiology: General Church History), Gawo IV. *Za Eklesia* (Section IV Ecclesiology: Church Polity), Gawo V. *Chiroma, Mipatuko ndi Zipembedzo*, (Section V. Roman Catholicism, Sects and other Religions), Gawo VI. *Malangizo ena pa Moyo Wachikristu*, (Section VI. Other guidelines on Christian Life), Gawo VII. *Chionjzero* (Section VII. Additions).

Special attention in our discussion is paid on section IV which deals with the following subtopics: *chikhalidwe chake cha eklesia* [The marks of the true Church](p.280, *maweruzidwe* [church government] (p.282), and *ulamuliro ndi mphamvu za eklesia* [church government, authority and power in the church] (p.286-287).

⁶⁰ Minutes of the Council of Congregations, 1918 p.3 (hand written).

⁶¹ Minutes of the Council of Congregations, 1922 p.3 and 1923 p.5.

A comparison of the specific *Katekisma*, to be found in Part (Gawo) I of the *Buku La Katekisma*, with the *Heidelberg Catechism* reveals that the two are similar in their structure and slightly different in some teachings. Both are arranged in 52 questions and answers, followed by proof texts. Both are divided into three sets, (1) Sin and Misery, (2) Salvation and (3) Thankfulness. Both are divided into fifty-two weeks according to the number of Sundays in a year. This was to ensure that each Lord's Day has a particular question and answer for devotions and sermons. Like the *Heidelberg Catechism*, 1 and 2 introduce the Catechism. The first set, 3-20, discusses sin and misery; the second set, 21-46, deals with salvation and the third set thankfulness, 47-52.

The questions and answers can also be grouped into dogmatic themes: Theology: Doctrine of God (25-28, 33-34), Anthropology: The Doctrine of Man (1-2, 17-20), Christology: The Doctrine of Christ (29-31), Soteriology: The Doctrine of Salvation (3-16, 21-24, 29,35, 38-39, 47-52), Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church (36-37, 40-46), and Eschatology: The Doctrine of the Last Things (32). It should be noted that the Catechism has not reserved a separate question and answer for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Pauw compares the *Buku La Katekisma* with the *Heidelberg Catechism*. He (1980:330) notes that the former only has only 52 questions and answers, whereas the latter has 129. Then he points to a difference concerning the place and position of the Law:

‘The most significance difference lies in the fact that in the *Heidelberg Catechism* the law is dealt with briefly under the first section concerning the knowledge of sin, by referring to the summary given by Christ in the Gospels (3-5). ... ‘and later in length in the third section where detailed exposition of the Decalogue is made in the context of the life of thankfulness to be led by a saved sinner, thus in an ethical context (92-115). On the other hand *Buku La Katekisma* ... deals with the Decalogue in detail only in the first section (3-16), while nothing is said at all about the law as a rule of thankfulness in the third section’.

Pauw (1980:330,331) concludes that the place of the Law in the *Buku La Katekisma*:

‘leads to first of all an imbalance between the first and the third sections’. The resulting weakness is that there is an overemphasis in *Katekisma* on law and sin, leading to the greater danger of developing a legalistic attitude, with an accompanying

lack of ethical emphasis. Pauw also pointed out that the *Katekisma* is weak in ‘insufficient teaching concerning liturgy and the Kingdom of God’

On a positive note Pauw (1980:330,331) observes that the *Katekisma* is an improvement in comparison to the Heidelberg Catechism in that it places more emphasis on the duty of believers to serve God and to help spread the Gospel through personal witness.

5.2.3. Reception

The *Buku La Katekisma* was originally introduced to serve as instructional material for new converts.

(1) *Kuthandiza ofuna kulowa Mpingo (am’klasi) kuti polandiridwa mu mpingo akhale okonzeka kulandira zokoma zonse za Mpingo, komanso kunyamula maudindio onse a mpingo mwanzeru ndiponso ndi mtima wonse* (To equip the new converts, so that they are ready to receive all the benefits of the church and be ready to be appointed to any church office and serve diligently and wholeheartedly).

(2) *Kuthandiza amene adalowa Mpingo kale (Akhristu) kuti nawonso akule m’chizindikiritso kuti akhale odziwa okha ndi okonzeka kuthandizanso ena* (To help those who already joined the Church, the Christians, so that they grow in their understanding, and so that they themselves know and are ready to assist others).⁶²

This was also confirmed at a Synod meeting of 1961:

‘All Christians must have a copy of the *Buku La Katekisma*, because it contains all the teachings of our Church. The Synod informs all Christians that the *Buku La Katekisma* is intended for all of them, not catechumen members only.’⁶³

It should be noted that the *Katekisma* is given a high status, although is not one of the confessional documents of the Nkhoma Synod. It may be asked why did it not also include a ruling that in addition to the *Buku La Katekisma*, at least every member should have a copy

⁶² The Preamble indicates that the *Buku La Katekisma* was introduced to help both ordinary members and church leaders of the Nkhoma Synod and other churches (cf. *Buku La Katekisma*, p.282).

⁶³ S.7b Minutes of the 1961 Synod meeting of the Nkhoma Synod; cf Z.II-23 of the Zolamulira of the Nkhoma Synod.

of the Synod's confessional documents, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt?

5.2.4. Definition and Nature of the Church

Does the Buku La Katekisma contain a church polity and church government congruent to the one described in the Three Reformed Symbols? This leads to the issue of how the *Katekisma* looks at the Church. A definition of the Church is found in question and answer 36 (*Buku La Katekisma*, 1968:74).

'Kodi Mpingo wa Ambuye uli chiyani? 'Mpingo wa Ambuye ndiwo gulu la anthu a mitundu yonse amene anasankhidwa kale ndi Mulungu nakhulupirira Khristu nabatizidwa (What is the Church of the Lord? The Church of Lord is a group of all kinds of people who have already elected by God; and who believe in Jesus Christ and were baptized').

Detailed information regarding the Church, its marks, and organizational structure is given in Part (Gawo) IV, *Za Eklesia* (On the Church) of the Buku La Katekisma (1968:279).

'Eklesia kapena Mpingo litanthauzira gulu la anthu amene anayitanidwa ndi Yesu Khristu kuti awatume kwa anthu anzawo kuti nawonso apulumutsidwe akhale ake a Khristu (The Church is a group of people called by Christ, to be sent by Him to their fellow human beings, so that they too be saved and become of Christ' .)

It is further stated in section IV of the Buku La Katekisma (1968:279-280). that *'Dzina lakuti Eklesia lipezeka m'Chipangano Chatsopano monga pa 1 Akorinto 12:28, Aefeso 1:23 ndi Akolose 1:18'* (The name Eklesia occurs in the New Testament, for instance in 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 1:23, and Colossians 1:18). The Church is [a] *akhristu okhala pamodzi ku malo amodzi monga pa mudzi* (Christians gathered at one place, for instance a village); [b] *gulu la akhristu osonkhana m'nyumba ya mmodzi wa iwo* (group of Christians gathering at the house of one of them - a house church); [c] *mipingo yosiyanasiyana yonse pamodzi m'dera la dziko* (all different churches of a district of the country - a union or a communion of churches) [d] *gulu lonse la Akhristu a mitundu yonse yokhala pa dziko lonse la pansi* (the group of all Christians of all kinds of the world - the universal church), [e] *thupi lonse la Ambuye Yesu Kristu* (the whole body of Jesus Christ).The last mentioned designation is

repeated under [e] and other Biblical imageries of the Church are added. They are not further explained, but the writers of Part IV *Za Eklesia* apparently have realized the role of biblical imageries in the understanding of the concept, the nature, the function, and the organizational life of the Church.

‘Eklesia ya Ambuye imafanizidwa m’Chipangano [Chatsopano] ndi mayina osiyansiyana. Apa tingotchula owerengeka okha (In the [New] Testament the Church of the Lord is represented with different names). e.g.

1. *Thupi la Khristu, Aef. 1:23; 1 Akor. 12:7* (The Body of Christ, Eph. 1:23; 1 Cor. 12:7).
2. *Kachisi wa Mulungu, 1Akor 3:16* (The Temple of God, 1 Cor. 3:16).
3. *Khola la nkhosa, Yoh. 10:16* (The kraal of the sheep, John 10:16)
4. *Yerusalemu wa Tsopano, Agal. 4:25* (The New Jerusalem, Gal. 4:25).
5. *Mkwatibwi, Chibv. 21:2* (The Bride, Rev. 21:2).
6. *Mtundu wa Mulungu, 1 Pet, 2:9* (The People of God, 1 Peter 2:9).
(*Buku La Katekisma* 1968:280).

On the same *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (1998:12) speaks about how the images related to Truine God:

‘Among scriptural images of the Church, some became particularly prominent, referring to Trinitarian dimensions of the Church. Among these, the images of the people of God, and the body of Chris are particularly important, accompanied by the imagery of ‘temple of house of the Spirit.’

It is finally asserted that

‘... none of these images is exclusive but all of them implicitly and explicitly include other Trinitarian dimension as well’ (*The Nature and Purpose of the church* (1998:12)

The *Buku La Katekisma* (1968:279), in Part IV on the Church (*Gawo Za Eklesia*), also mentions marks or characteristics of the members of the Church. First, those who constitute the Church are defined as follows. *‘Ndiwo gulu la anthu a mitundu yonse amene anasankhidwa kale ndi Mulungu nakhulupirira Khristu nabatizidwa* (They are the people of

all races who have been elected by God; they and who believe in Jesus Christ and were baptized). They have a close relationship with Christ, because they believe in Him and are the true members of the church because they are baptized. It is striking that the *Katekisma* also omits that members are gathered by Christ, and that they enter into fellowship with Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit (cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, 1, 4).

The second mark by which church members are characterized is that the Church is not the sum of congregations but a community of persons who believe in Jesus Christ. This description in *Za Eklesia* seems to ignore that the Church is also an institution with orders of offices and assemblies as tools, which Christ uses when executing his government. In other words, the definition apparently points to the invisible church only rather than the visible Church. Question and Answer 37 of the *Katekisma* part of the *Buku La Katekisma* (1968:76) describe the marks or characteristics of the members of the Church as follows:

‘Kodi Ambuye afuna kuti anthu a mu Eklesia wake akhale otain? (What type of behavior does the Lord require from members who constitute His Church? Ambuye fauna kuti anthu am Eklesia wake akhale adzipatule kwa zoipa zonse, natsate chiyero, nakondane ndi anzawo, nabukitse mbiri ya Yesu (The Lord wants members of His Church to separate themselves from all unrighteousness, and strive for holiness, and love fellow men, and become his witnesses of Jesus’).

Part IV of the *Buku La Katekisma* (1968:280, 281) offers a detailed discussion on some attributes of the church: *umodzi* (unity), *chiyero* (holiness), *kukhala kwake kwa Eklesia ya kwa anthu onse* (its catholicity), *kukhala kwake kwa Eklesia ya chiphunzitso cha Atumwi* (its apostolicity). One of the interesting things explained in the Part IV is the fact that *umodzi weni weni wa Eklesia uli mwa Yesu Khristu Mutu wake*, Aef. 4:23 (The true unity of the Church is in his Head of Christ, Eph. 4:3-5).

Part IV of *Buku La Katekisma* (1968:28, 282), mentions three marks or characteristics that distinguish the true Church from the false one:

‘Kodi Eklesia yoona ya Ambuye Yesu idziwika bwanji ndi Eklesia imene ili yosokera? Muyeso weniweni wa Eklesia yowona uli patatu popeza kumene kuli wa Eklesia yenyeni ya Khristu zizindikiro zitatu izi ziyenera kudziwika (What distinguishes the true Church of the Lord Christ from the erring church? The true measuring stick of the Church is divided into three and where the three marks are is where the church is).

The three distinctive marks of the true Church are:

‘(1) *Kulalikira koona kwa Mawu a Mulungu*; (2) *Kugawira Masakramento a Ubatizo ndi Mgonero monga mwa Mawu a Mulungu*; (3) *Maweruzidwe a Eklesia ayenera kuchitika monga mwa Mawu a Mulungu* (True preaching of the Word; Pure administration of the Sacraments, Baptism and Lord’s supper; Church discipline has to happen according to the Word of God’ (*Buku La Katekisma* 1968:281ff).

The *Buku La Katekisma* does not explain how these marks serve the believers and the Church as a whole. If we can recall, Beets (1929:221) notes that the marks serve the following purposes: First, they are a standard to test the Church that one feels bound to join. Secondly, they serve the Church as an ideal to strive after and to mirror it in. Thirdly, they enable the Churches as a test or touchstone in view of denominational or interdenominational connections or cooperative efforts.

5.2.5. Church polity and practice

Because the *Buku La Katekisma* was also introduced as an instructional text for training office-bearers (see section 4.3.1.2 above), it is a matter of course that it contains explicit discourse regarding church polity in the Nkhoma Synod. The *Buku La Katekisma* is one of the important sources of church polity for the Nkhoma Synod. Here we are highlighting the details on church polity discourse and practice in the *Kateksima*, and assess its congruity with the one stipulated in the Church’s Confession.

5.2.5.1. The number of Church Offices

According to section IV of the *Buku la Kateksima* (1968:282), the church government of the Nkhoma Synod is modeled after Presbyterian church polity.

‘*Pali maweruzidwe osiyanasiyana a Eklesia, koma Eklesia yathu itsata maweruzidwe a Chiperesbyterio. Ndiku kuti chiweruzo chitika mwa oyang’anira (kapena akulu) a Mpingo* (There are different systems of church government, but our Church adopts

Presbyterial church polity. This is the church government by overseers {or elders}]’ (Buku La Katekisma 1968:282).

The *Buku La Katekisma* knows one governing office, the elder, which shows that it follows Presbyterian Church polity, which acknowledges the eldership as the office that constitutes church government. The office of the deacons is not explicitly mentioned as an office that constitutes the governing body of a local Church.

Apart from this, there little or is no consistence in the *Buku La Katekisma* concerning the question whether there should be one or three kinds of office in the Church Council. At times, the *Katekisma* (1968:283ff) accepts one office and then again three offices, namely *udindo wa utumiki* (the office of the deacons), *udindo wa oyang’anira* (the office of the elders), ndi *udindo wa ubusa* (the office of the minister).

Pamene udindo wa utumiki ndi ulaliki unatha, ntchito yakuyangánira mpingo inalowa m’manja mwa akulu amene anasankhidwa’pakati pa midzi yonse kumene kunali a Khristu. Monga tikumva umo m’mene akulu anasankhidwira kupitiriza utumiki ndi ndi alaliki (When the offices of the deacon and evangelist fell away, the overseeing task was handed over to the elders who were appointed among the villages where there were Christians. As we, so far hear, the elders were appointed to carry on the ministry of the deacons and evangelists] (*Buku La Katekisma* (1968:284).

Critically speaking, the remarks above may indicate that in the history of the Christian Church, the offices of the deacons and of the evangelist were at first introduced and then dissolved followed by the establishment of the office of the elders which took over the responsibilities of the two offices. Perhaps this passage is meant to canonize situations Church History or the history of the Nkhoma Synod.

Most interestingly the church polity discourse of the *Buku La Katekisma* bans all hierarchical tendencies among the offices of ministers and elders and among the local churches.

‘Palibwe kusiyana ukulu pakati pa oyang’anira mpingo ophunzitsa (=abusa) ndi oyang’anira mpingo oweruza - onse afanana ndithu. Chimozimodzi palibe kusiyana akulu pakati pa mipingo yosiyana - yonse ndi yodziweruzira yokha ndi yofanana ukulu. [There is equality between teaching elders (= ministers) and ruling elders –

they are really all equal. Similarly, there is no difference between the various congregations in power and authority’] (*Buku La Katekisma* 1968:282).

Also it is interesting that in the Nkhoma Synod it known that Scottish Presbyterian church polity contains hierarchical tendencies, which rooted in its political and ecclesiological history of the 16th century. This is explained in the following statement:

‘Ku Scotland Chikonzedwe sichinayende monga chikadayendera chifukwa cha Mfumu ya pa nthawi ija Henry wa chisanu ndi chi chitatu. Chiphunzitso cha Eklesia chinakonzeka, koma mmaweruzidwa ake anasunga zina zolingana ndi za chi Roma, ubishopu ndi zotere’ (In Scotland the Reformation did not go well, because of King Henry VIII. The teaching of the Church was Reformed, but in matters of polity, it retained certain tendencies of Roman Catholicism, the episcopacy and many more] (*Buku La Katekisma* 1968:265).

The *Katekisma* however does not give concrete examples or specific tendencies to illustrate the claim that the Church of Scotland had retained some Episcopatism. Van Wyk however, has observed tendencies of hierarchy of offices and a system of lower and higher assemblies.

‘The development of Scottish Reformed Ecclesiology, though it acknowledges the headship of Christ over His Church reflects the consistent result of man’s taking into hand the rule of Christ. ... This happened in the Church of Scotland where the office of the minister was separated from the congregation in a clerical sense, the offices of elders reduced to assistants of the ministers, and authority of Christ transferred to the offices which govern the Church through courts in Episcopal sense.’ (Van Wyk, 2004:166).

When comparing Scottish Presbyterian polity and the church polity of the CCAP, Van Wyk (2004:167) notes that the Scottish Presbyterian system of church government became characteristics of the government of the Reformed churches in Central Africa. He (2004:167) blamed the DRC missionaries and the African Church for uncritically adapting and maintaining Scottish Presbyterian church polity. It is evident that Presbyterian church polity is nurtured and maintained in and through the *Buku La Katekisma*.

5.2.5.2. *Government through Assemblies*

The *Buku La Katekisma* (1968:285) acknowledges a three-fold system of assemblies, i.e. *Msonkhano wa oyang'anira* (Church Council), *Presbiterio* (Presbytery), *Sinodi* (Synod) and *Sinodi wa Mkulu* (General Assembly). The *Buku La Katekisma* (1968:285) seems to reject clerocracy, i.e the government of the church by the clergy when its teaches that

'Mpingo uli wonse uli ndi ulamuliro wakewake ndipo akuluampingo pamodzi ndi abusa ndiwo amene akhala bwalo la msonkhano wa akulu kumene akambirana zonse zolinga ku moyo wa uzimu wa mpingo (Every local church has its own government and elders together with the ministers constitute a Church Council to deliberate all issues that deal with spiritual life of the local Church'] (1968:285).

The *Buku La Katekisma* (1968:287) indicates that the local churches assemble in a ruling body called *Presbiterio* (Presbytery), comprising all ministers and one elder from every established congregation.

'... ku Msonkhano wa Presbiterio kukhala abusa onse ndi oyangira mmodzi wopatsidwa ulamuliro wonse wa Presbyterio imeneyo [At every Presbytery meeting, there are all ministers and one elders who is given the authority of that Presbytery'] (Buku La Katekisma (1968:286).

By saying that only elder is given authority may have the following implications: First, on a positive note, it means that local church is the original seat of the authority in the Church. Second, negatively it also means a minister do not belong to the local churches, but is separated. Third, it also shows that in the *Buku La Katekisma* only ministers who serve in congregations have authority at the Presbytery and Synod meetings. One would ask whether the *Buku La Katekisma* contradicts what article 30 of the *Belgic Confession of Faith* stipulate particularly that all the office-bearers are equal in power and authority wherever they may be..

The Synod as the highest Assembly of the Church is defined as follows:

'Mnsokhano wa Sinodi ndiwo msonkhano waukulu umene uli ndi ulamuliro wochulukwa. Msonkhanowu umapanga malamulo onse a Eklesia. Ndipo msonkhanowupakhala abusa onse a mipingo pamodzi ndi woyng'anira mmodzi wa mpingouli wonse [The Synod meeting is the highest court with supreme authority. It possesses a law making authority. The Synod is constituted by all ministers serving in a congregation and one elder from each established congregation]' (Buku La Katekisma 1968:286).

With regard to the leadership of the Synod, we read in Section IV of the *Buku La Katekisma* (1968: 286):

'Mtsogoleri wa Sinodi ndiye Mtsogoleri wa Msonkhano koma sakhala Mutu wa Eklesia ngati Papa kapena Bishopu wa mkulu ayi'. (The Synod Moderator is the chairman of the meeting, but he is not the Head of Church, like a Pope or the Archbishop).

Here it seems the *Buku La Katekisma* follows the Reformed understanding precisely the Belgic Confession on the truth that that Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church and its implication. In his comment on the same notion, Pauw 1980:394) affirms:

'...from a Biblical and Reformed point of view-there is only one Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. Hence one of the most fundamental motives in the Reformation had been to do away with a human Headship as exemplified in the Pope. No Moderator or General Secretary should ever assume the position of or be called head of the Church and for one member of the Church to hold position of power and authority in a permanent or semi-permanent capacity could, bring this about'

On the General Assembly of the CCAP and its authority, the *Buku La Katekisma* (1966: 286) says:

'Ku Malawi kuno kuli Eklesia imodzi, koma kuti Sinodi zinayi izi: Sinodi ya Nkhoma, Blantyre, Livingstonia ndi Salisbury. Komweko Sinodi ili yonse ili ndi ulamuliro

wakewake [Here in Malawi there only one Church but there are the following four Synods: The Synods of Nkhoma, Blantyre, Livingstonia and Salisbury. Each Synod is independent to govern itself].⁶⁴

It is important to examine and described briefly the question of authority of the General Assembly of the CCAP before 2000. Its *Policy and Strategic Plan* (2000-2010:5) the General Synod observed that before 2000 it did not have the final say but the individual Synod, i.e. each had power of veto over the resolutions of the General Synod. It (2000-2010) further stated that it was this veto power that had greatly contributed to the problems of disunity among the Synods. In the same document (2000-2010:6) was asserted that from the year 2000 and onward, the General Synod would possess power of veto over all its decisions and over the decisions of the Synods. However, this has not been practically applied.

Let us summarize what was found in the *Buku La Katekisma*. It bans hierarchy among office-bearers. The anti-hierarchical character is highlighted where the *Buku La Katekisma* says: (1) that there must be equality in power and authority among all office-bearers and all the churches, (2) that the Synod Moderator is not the Head of the Church, (3) that the Scottish Presbyterian system retained the Episcopalism. At the same time it should be noted that the *Buku La Katekisma* is inconsistent. It defends and maintains hierarchy among ecclesiastical assemblies. This also negatively affects parity of offices. Here to a certain extent The *Buku La Katekisma* is not congruity with Article 31 of the Belgic Confession, where it states that all the ministers of God's Word have equally the same power and authority, wheresoever they are, as they are all ministers of Christ, the only universal Bishop, and the only Head of the Church.

5.2.5.3. Authority of Christ

According to the *Buku La Katekisma* (1966:286ff) the Church has the following kinds of authority: first, *mphamvu ya kuphunzitsa* (authority to teach), secondly, *mphamvu ya kuweruza* (authority to judge, discipline rather than governing), thirdly, *mphamvu ya*

⁶⁴ The 1966 version of the *Buku LaKatekisma* doesn't reflect the present situation: -In Malawi there not three Synods namely Blantyre, Livingstonia and Nkhoma and the Synod of Salisbury is in Zimbabwe (the Synod of Harare today). If the article wanted to indicate all Synods of the CCAP (five in number) it should have added the Synod of Zambia.

kulongosola (authority to put things in order, organizing rather than legislating] , and fourthly, *mphamvu ya kuchita za chifundo* (ministry of mercy). Here we are commenting on first three points.

The authority to teach includes the right to teach and determine the right doctrine for church members and leaders (cf. Spoelstra 1982:248).

‘Eklezia ayenera kusamala kuti Mawu a Mulungu aphunzitsidwe moyenera, ndipo chowonadi chisamalidwe koma ziphunzitsa za chinyengo ziyenera kutsutsidwa’ (The Church must be careful so that the Word of God is preached rightly, pure teachings preserved and defended against false teaching) (Buku La Katekisma, 1868:287).

It says that the authority of the Church is reduced to the one that Christ gave to it.

‘Ambuye Mfumu ya mafumu onse anapereka ulamuliro wake wa ufumu mmanja mwa Eklezia kuti atchinjirize ndi kusamala Akhristu. ... Chifukwa chake Eklezia ayenera kusamala ndi kuyang’anira moyo wa Eklezia ndi kuweruza olokwa. Koma Eklezia alinso ndi mphamvu ya kulandiranso wochimwa ... atalapa [The King of kings gave his rule of his Kingdom in the hands to protect the Christians. ... For this reason, the Church is expected to look after, and oversee the life of the church, and censure offenders. Yet the Church has also authority to receive back those who have repented’] (Buku La Katekisma 1968:287).

The Church has the authority to lay down rules and regulations that promote the well-being, religion, unity, order and peace within the Church. This authority includes:

‘...kupanga malamulo a Eklezia,; kuyitana misonkhano ndi kulongosola zonse zolinga ku moyo wa Mpingo ... kusankha ndi kukhazikitsa audindo (to legislate, to convoke meetings, to order all matters that concern the life of the church, to elect and induct leaders’ (Buku La Katekisma 1968:287)

The *Buku La Katekisma* does not explain explicitly whether the authority to teach includes the right to train, examine, and send missionaries and ministers to places of work. It does not

also not say whether this authority needs to be tied with the Word of God or all utterances be weighed continually on the same scale of the Word.

5.3. *Zolamulira* (2001).

The central questions in this section are whether the *Zolamulira*, which is the formal church order of the Nkhoma Synod, has had a binding character on church polity discourse and practice, and whether it is in congruity with the *Three Reformed Symbols of Unity*. In the discussion the issue at stake is how the concept of the Headship of Christ over the Church is presented in the *Zolamulira* and how this has had an impact on the church polity discourse and practice within the Nkhoma Synod.

The church order is published in Chichewa under the title, '*Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza*'. Mijoga translates it as, *Prescriptions, Agreements and Intentions or Pronouncements* (Mijoga 2001:33).⁶⁵ The name *Zolamulira* is plural, and as such it is a set of rules, mutually agreed, synodically adopted, and binding for all the members, all congregations and all presbyteries within the Nkhoma Synod, or more formally expressed, it is a body of rules, laws, and regulations prepared for the maintenance of good order in the Church.

5.3.1. *Historical Background and Character*

The history of the *Zolamulira* dates back to 1903. The first edition is said to be a mixture of translated articles of the Church Order of the DRC and revised resolutions and responses to some important overtures i.e. questions that are sent to the church council or presbytery or synod (cf. Pauw, 1980:327). The Minutes of the Council of Congregations say:

'Popeza tsono magulu a Akhristu achuluka, tsono tiyenera kuti tidzapangane ndi kuthandizana za machitidwe oyenera kusungira nawo anthu amene ali nkutsata Ambuye Yesu' (As the groups of Christians have grown, we need to act and assist followers of the Lord Jesus to have and keep a good behaviour)⁶⁶

⁶⁵ The word *Zolangiza* can be translated as 'advices' rather than 'intentions or pronouncements.

⁶⁶ Minutes of the Council of Congregations, 18 July, 1903, p.1.

The researcher has not found the above mentioned translations in Chichewa of Articles of the DRC Church Order, and consequently have unable to compare them to *Zolamulira* and asses to what extent they have influenced its formulations. It is quite understandable that in those early years DRC missionaries had a desire to arrange the church order according to their own views.

The first edition of *Zolamulira* probably appeared in 1904, soon after the first meetings of the first Council of Congregations, in December 1903 (cf. Pauw, 1980:327). It contained stipulations on minimum age of admission to Catechumen classes, church discipline, the division of work between the Mission Council and the Council of Congregations.⁶⁷ The current edition (2001) retains some elements of the DRC Church Order, and of the resolutions of the Council of Congregations, the Presbytery of Nkhoma, and later of the Synod of Nkhoma.

The Synod, in its assembly of 1970, enacted that after every Synod meeting *Zolamulira* would be supplemented by new regulations or amendments, and that after every ten years a new edition would be published incorporating all the supplements.⁶⁸ The Synod of 1970 also ruled that the book of *Zolamulira* would contain two types of laws, *genuine laws* and *ordinary decisions*.⁶⁹ Genuine laws are laws and regulations that cannot be speedily changed. Ordinary laws are regulations, which can be changed or deleted at any meeting, they are provisional, relative, and temporal, subject to revision and correction.

5.3.2. Outline and Structure

The current edition of the *Zolamulira* consists of two volumes and contains 813 articles. Here is a survey of the content of the first volume: 1-39, *Zolamulira ndi Zopangana za am'kalasi*; (Rules on Catechumen) 40-60, *Ubatizo wa ana* (infant baptism), 61-67, *Maleredwe ana* (Parenting), 68-89, *Chilangiza cha ana* (Counseling of Children); 90-111, *Sukulu za Pa Sabata* (Sunday School), 112-138, *Sukulu ndi Aphunzitsi* (Schools and Teachers); 139-174, *Abusa ndi maitanidwe*] (Calling of ministers), 175-215) *Oyang'anira Mpingo ndi Atumiki* (church elders and deacons), 216-256 *Presbiterio* (Presbytery), 257-261 *Sinodi wa Mkulu*

⁶⁷ Minutes of the Council of Congregations, 11 December 1903, pp. 48-53.

⁶⁸ S. 612 Minutes of the Synod meeting 1970, p.9 (English Version).

⁶⁹ *Idem*.

(General Assembly), 262-291 *Sinodi* (Synod), 92-296 *Misyoni* (Mission), 297-306 *Sukulu ya Ubusa* (Theological College), 307-311 *Chitsitsimutso ndi Kufalitsa* (Revival meetings and Evangelism), 312-329 *Maperekedwe ndi Zopereka* (offering and Stewardship), 330-338 *Ma Eklesia ndi Mipatuko* (Church and Sects), 339-357 *Chigwirizano* (Women's Guild), 358-369 Lay Training Centre, 370-407 *Ukwati* (Marriage), 408-423 *Mlozo ndi Kuunika* (Daily Guide and *Kuunika* Newsletter), 424-437 *Milandu* (Discipline), 438-442, 526 *Ulendo* (Disjunction Certificate), 443-462 *Chipembedzo* (Service of Worship), 463-479, 528 *Maliro* (Funeral), 480-481 *Zolamulira* (Church Order), 482-485 *Kalasi* (Catechumen class), 486-491 *Ubatizo wa ana* (infant Baptism), 492-495 *Sukulu* (Proprietorship of schools), 496-499 *Masankhidwe a Langiza* (Election of counselors) 500-514 *Abusa* (Ministers), 527 *Malire* (Boundaries), and 532-605 *Zina* (Other Stipulations).

The second volume contains the following sections: 1 *Umodzi wa Eklesia* (church union), 2 *Evangelism*, 3 *Moyo wa Tsopano* (New Life), II-4 *Bungwe la Tsiku lo Pempherera akazi* (Women's Day of Prayers), 5 *Mpatukuko ku Zambia* (Breakaway in Zambia), 6 *Maputo ku South Africa* (Breakaway in South Africa), 7 *Mpatuko wa Free Church of Livingstonia ku Bulawayo* (Breakaway of the Free Livingstonia in Bulawayo), 7 *Mipingo yovomerezana nafe* (Sisters Churches), 8, *Ndale za Dziko* (Politics), 8 *Thumba lo Yendera* (Transport Fund), 9 *Kusintha kwa Makeyala* (Change of Addresses), 10 *Mapasipoti abusa* (Pastors' Passports), 11 *Thandizo la Abusa opita ku Maphunziro Ap Mwamba* (Ministers' Further study Fund), 12, 44 *Ndalama za Pocket money* (Pocket money), 13 *Buku La Katekisma*, 14 *Masiku Opumula* (Public holidays), 26 *Mbiri ya Buku Lo Patulika kwa ana* (Children's Bible), 27 *Mavalidwe oipa* (Unacceptable Dressing), 28 *Mayina a Chibwana* (Childish names), 29 *Malongosoledwe amu Mpingo* (liturgy), 30 *Kugulitsa Zitupa ndi Makalata ena a Sinodi* (sales of Cards and Headletters), 31 *Ntchito za Uzimu pakati pa ma Detainees* (Ministry among the Detainees), 32 *Zolamulira* (Rules and Regulations) 33 *Makalata Osindikizidwa* (letterheads), 34 *Zivomerezo za Chi Reformed* (Reformed Confessions), 35 *Thandizo Lo Pita ku Bile Society* (Financial Assistance to the Bible Society), 36 *Scripture Union*, 37 *Atsogoleri a m'dziko muno pa ntchito za Sinodi* (Native Staff), 38 *Malipiro* (Salaries), 39 *Bungwe la Ndalama* (Finance committee), 40 *Kusunga Makalata* (Filling), 41 *Ntchito za Sinodi* (Synod Projects), 42 *Antchito olakwa mu Mpingo* (Workers Under Discipline), 43 *Kubzyala Mitengo* (Tree planting), 45-63, *Nyumba ndi Zomangamanga* (Houses and Building Projects), 64-79, *Chipatala* (Hospital), 80-90 *MEMA*, 91-103 *Maiko a Sinodi* (Synod land), 104-115 *Nkhalango ndi Malimidwe* (Forestry and Agriculture), 116-138 *Ntchito ndi Mtengatenga* (Works and Transport), 139-144, *Shopo ya Matabwa* (Carpentry shop), 145-159 *Mabuku ndi Print* (Literature and

Printing Press), 160-182 *Thumba la Pakati ndi ndalama* (Central Fund and Finances) 183-187 *Pogona* (Housing), 188-196 *Nyumba ya Chkumbutso* (Memorial Hall) 197, *Makalata* (official Letters and Certificates), 198 *Chikhalidwe cha Sinodi wa Mkulu* (Constitution of the General Assembly), 199 *Chikhalidwe cha Sukulu ya Ubusa* (Constitution of the Theological College), 200 *Chikhalidwe cha Sinodi ya Nkhoma* (Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod), 200, *Utumiki* (Diaconship); 201, Christian Council of Malawi, 202, Christian Literature Association; 203, World Alliance of Reformed Churches; II-204, Federal Church of Dutch Reformed Churches; 205, Council of Reformed Churches in Central Africa; 206, Reformed Ecumenical Synod; 207 World Council of Churches; II-208, *Chikhulupiro cha Nikaya* (Nicene Creed).

The preceding immediately brings the question to the fore whether a church order may thus contain numerous stipulations. We can respond this question by saying that a church order may become a mere law book or a mere volume of regulations if it may contain too detailed, numerous and lesser important stipulations. But too few stipulations or vagueness in church order again may lead church members to consider a church order as unfair ruler. Coertzen (2004:192) quoted De Vries who argued that a church needs to be vigilant against turning a church order into law book or a volume of regulations next to Scripture. De Vries was also quoted arguing that to regard and deal with church order in this manner is detrimental to Christ's sovereignty and his church the victim of human sovereignty (Coertzen 2004:192).

5.3.3. Reception

The previous section reveals that *Zolamulira* contains 813 articles which inter alia are laws and regulations. For Mijoga (2002:32ff) a good number of such laws and regulations are unbiblical. It is interesting that the Preamble of *Zolamulira* claims and backs that the laws and regulations are ecclesiastically founded and are Scriptural.

'Zolamulira za Eklesia ndizo Zopangana za Eklesia (Mach. 15:25) zotuluka m'misonkhano ya audindo, zovomerezeka ndi Mawu a Mulungu' (Laws are stipulations of the Church (Acts 15:25), born out of ecclesiastical assemblies of office-bearers, and are in accordance with the Word of God.

The *Zolamulira* certainly contains sections that are in accordance to Scripture, i.e. those that organize church government in a proper way, so that the Church follows its proper Biblical course. On the other hand, however, *Zolamulira* is a collection of numerous rules and regulations that sometimes tend to restrict the freedom of church members, particularly office-bearers. For instance, Z. 598 regulates that elders and deacons cannot have an official Church Session without the presence of the minister.. Article 596 orders that when an elder or a deacon refuses to be put on a badge, they must be disciplined.

In his analysis of the *Zolamulira*, Mijoga (2001:32-38) wondered why the Synod had come up with this set of regulations, and how it functions in the Nkhoma Synod. He came to realize that it was introduced as guidelines for the activities of the Synod, and said that perhaps in it the Synod itself intended to arrange everything down to the finest details. Without giving examples and concrete evidence, he added that some laws in *Zolamulira* are unbiblical, stressing that this has had a negative impact, and that today these rules and regulations have acquired salvific importance; for that reason he says the Nkhoma Synod can be 'described as legalistic' (Mijoga 2001:36). If Mijoga is right, we may ask whether the Nkhoma Synod's church order, formulated in *Zolamulira* has reached beyond its Biblical boundaries.

For Coertzen (1998:56) a church order is necessary and that it should be instrumental to:

- *help the Church to fulfill its task and calling as well as possible;
- *help the Church to behave in all respect in accordance with God's Word and to glorify Him in everything;
- *create space for the government of Christ in his Church;
- *allow God's Word to speak over the whole spectrum of the Church's existence;
- *protect and maintain the Confession of the Church;

This means that a church order is meant for a smooth process of running the affairs of the Church. One would ask whether *Zolamulira* really creates space for the reign of Christ in the Church, and allow God to speak over every aspect of human life, and protect the Confession of the church.

By the way of conclusion, it is clear from the discussions above that the *Zolamulira* was prepared to promote order in the Church. The *Zolamulira* might have helped the Nkhoma Synod Church to fulfill its task and calling as well as possible and at least to behave in all

respect in accordance with God's Word-although to a certain extent it attained a salvific role and contains some unbiblical laws. Therefore, we need to ask whether *Zolamulira* creates space for the government of Christ in his Church; allows God's Word to speak over the whole spectrum of the Church's existence and protect and maintain the Confession of the Church.

5.3.4. Christ's Government through Office-bearers and Assemblies?

We now turn to the question regarding the departure point of *Zolamulira* with regard to the rule and reign of Christ in church government, and how has this impacted on the execution of authority and the development of leadership and organizational structure within the Nkhoma Synod. The discussion revolves around the Preamble and a few articles of *Zolamulira*.⁷⁰ The Preamble says:

'Ambuye wathu Yesu Khristu ndiye Mutu wa Eklesia (Aef 1:22; Akol 1:18). Ulamuliro wake wa pa Eklesia uchitika ndi audindo monga abusa, oyang'anira (akuluampingo) ndi atumiki oyikidwira ntchitoyo (Mach. 6:1-7; Aroma 10:14-17; Afli. 1:1; Ates. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:2; Tit. 1:5 Aef. 4:11; 16' (Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18. His authority is exercised by office-bearers such as ministers, elders and deacons, Acts 6:1-7; Rom. 10:14-17; Philipp. 1:1; Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 1:5 Eph. 4:11; 16).

As already been noted the Preamble of *Zolamulira* positively reflects the Reformed understanding of the three-fold system of offices namely the minister, elder and deacon that constitutes a Church Council. But, negatively it is silent on the question whether Christ governs the Church through His Word and God and Holy Spirit using office-bearers. This implies that *Zolamulira* minimizes or ignores the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, who though distinct with God the Father is fully God, co-exists and is co-equal, and one God with the two other Persons of the Trinity (see section 1.2 of chapter 1). In just stating that Christ's government takes place through office-bearers, *Zolamulira* makes the authority of office-bearers equal to the authority of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit (cf. Coertzen 2004:99). It seems the church polity discourse of *Zolamulira* separates Christocracy from

⁷⁰ Cf article 7 of the Nkhoma Synod Constitution, articles 30-31 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, and Articles 139-174, 175-214, 215 of *Zolamulira*, 2001

Pneumatocracy (see sections 4.3.5.1 and 4.3.5.2). Coetzen shows in various publications the serious consequences of separating the Church from its foundation.

‘Christ makes use of the Word to govern his Church, and if the Church in any way was to abandon the Word, then it no longer has any foundation from which it can give witness to the world’ (Coertzen, 1998:21) ‘However, it is by no means an imaginary danger that the church can emphasize its government to such an extent by means of the Word, that there is no room for the work of the Holy Spirit. Should this happen then the danger will be so great that dealing with Scripture can become a mere human event’ (Coertzen, 2004:103). ‘We speak of the execution of Christ’s government in the Church as something that takes place by means of the Word, the Holy Spirit and people’s ministry’ (Coertzen, 2004:99).

These points will be conclusively dealt with in chapter six and in part of chapter seven, when we shall identify and describe some important developments in the Nkhoma Synod from 1889 to 2007. However, the preliminary concluding remarks of this section clearly show that *somehow* the Nkhoma Synod has been aware of the content of other church polity documents in its attempt to develop church polity discourse and church government. That makes it even stranger why the Nkhoma Synod omitted that Christ’s government takes place through his Word and Spirit. Apparently the Nkhoma Synod has not followed the Reformed tradition, where the Reformed Confessions acknowledge that Christ exercises his reign and dominion through his Word and Spirit using office-bearers. By equating the authority of office-bearers to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit (cf. Coertzen 2004:99), the Preamble may have paved the way for other tendencies, such as paternalism, patronage, hierarchicalism, autocracy, clerocracy and legalism as well as the problem of viewing church offices or ecclesiastical posts in terms of rank, status, and dignity.

5.4. Constitutions)

In this section, we shall examine and describe the church polity and church government as stipulated in the Constitutions of the General Assembly of the CCAP (2002) and of the 1972 revised Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1972). Special attention will be given to articles that deal with church polity and church government. The discussion will not be an exhaustive commentary of the mentioned Constitutions. Nor is it intended to be a detailed survey of the

constitutions. It will be a brief summary of its details on church polity discourse and practice within the Nkhoma Synod.

5.4.1. Terms of Union (1926)

In 1924, the two Presbyteries of Blantyre and the Livingstonia formed a Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian. This was done after a drawing up of the *Terms of Union*, which later became a basis of the first Constitution of the CCAP Synod. When the Presbytery of Nkhoma joined the Synod of the CCAP in 1926, some articles were amended and revised. We now highlight a few of such articles.

Article III of the Revised Terms of Union stipulated that

‘...Each the Presbytery will be charged with the responsibility (a) To establishment of new congregations and appointment of their first officials, the holding of regular church visitation, exercise of discipline over native ministers, evangelists, members of sessions, and the care of religious instruction. (b) To resolve cases brought before it by way of appeal from church session. (c) To train, license, ordain, and appoint of native ministers to various congregations within the bounds of Presbytery.’

Part of the same article gave mandate to each presbytery ‘to retain its constitution’ which it either inherited from the mother Church or prepared implying that each Presbytery had to maintain its system of church government. Here it shows that the Synod of the CCAP which later became a General Synod was a loose federated organization without a binding character in matters of church government.

Article IV enacted that the Synod would consist of ordained ministers whether Europeans or natives and an equal number of elders and deacons, delegated by presbyteries and it would resolve cases of discipline brought before it by way of appeal and promulgate rules for governing the Church. This article denotes that the Church employed both the bottom-to-top and top-to-bottom systems

Article VIII stipulated the Word of God shall be the Supreme rule of faith and conduct, discipline and the government of the church be Presbyterian. Here it should be understood that in the CCAP in matters of faith, teaching, discipline and church government the Word of God had a final say and final authority.

5.4.2. The Constitution of the General Assembly of the CCAP (2002)

The Constitution of the General Assembly or General Assembly of the CCAP came into being in 1956, thirty years after the Presbytery of Nkhoma Synod had joined the Synod of the CCAP. Each of the three Presbyteries, later Synods, has had its own Constitution. According to Minute 13 of the Nkhoma Presbytery meeting of 1945, a committee was appointed to scrutinize and harmonize the constitutions of the three Presbyteries and formulate a Constitution for the Church.⁷¹ Consequently the three constitutions were harmonized and a first draft for a General Constitution was prepared and then sent to the respective Presbyteries, the Foreign Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland, and the South African DRC, for scrutiny, additions, and amendments. By 1949, another draft of the Constitution was ready. 'It was based on the Constitution of the *Presbyterian Church of East Africa* and had the approval of the Nkhoma Presbytery'⁷² (Pauw, 1980:351). On 27 April 1956, the Constitution was put into vote⁷³ and was unanimously approved by the whole Synod meeting attended by one hundred and thirty delegates.⁷⁴ The approval of the Constitution gave birth to the General Assembly of the CCAP, representing the Synods of Blantyre, Livingstonia, Nkhoma and Harare as well as their respective Presbyteries.

It was enacted that all the Synods are required to prepare their own Constitutions in conformity with the approved Constitution of the General Assembly of the CCAP and to decide how they would relate with their mother churches.⁷⁵ The Constitution contained the following ten issues.

⁷¹ Draft Minutes of the meeting of the Synod of CCAP, 1945 p.13

⁷² According to Oosthuizen (1958:331) the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (Kenya), previously known as the East Africa Scottish Mission, was started in 1889 by James Stewart. Being a Scottish Church, it inherited the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Shorter and Larger Catechisms from the Church of Scotland. If one compares its Constitution with that of the CCAP (1956), one may notice that that their wording and the arrangement of articles are almost the same. This supports the findings of Pauw.

⁷³ Minute 33 of the Synod, 1956.

⁷⁴ Draft notes of the Minutes of the Synod of the CCAP, 1956.

⁷⁵ Idem.

Article II.1 of the Constitution stipulates that the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian is Article of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, who ascended into Heaven, as Head of all things, to who it owes obedience .

Article II.4, says that the Church has ‘appointed’ a government in the hands of ‘church office-bearers, who receive from its divine King and Head and from Him alone, the right and power, subject to no civil authority, to legislate and educate’ and finally govern and ‘discipline in the Church.’

Article V.5, identifies and describes the church polity which the CCAP practices, that is the Presbyterian church government committed to the ministers and elders duly associated in ecclesiastical courts, namely Church Council, Presbytery and Synod. Article IV article 19A enacts that the Church recognizes one order of one ministry, that is, the eldership (*Presbyterate*).

Article IV.7, states that the rule in Church is exercised through ecclesiastical courts, Session, Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly, arranged in a hierarchical order. The article adds that appeal can be made to from the lower court to the supreme court. It also adds that the General Synod will become the government of the CCAP only after agreement by all the Synods (Article VII. 30).

Article VII.8, stipulates that the General Synod has a standing committee or executive committee comprising Moderator, Vice-Moderator, a senior Clerk and a Junior Clerk as treasurer and interpreter. The article contains a list of other committees, financial committee, committee of procedure, committee of life and work, records committee etc.

The Constitution was revised in 2002; the following articles were added and the previous ones were amended. Article 3.3 stipulates that Christ appointed the church government in the hands of church officers namely ministers (teaching elders) and elders (ruling elders). It is not clear whether the verb ‘appointing’ means He works through them or He transferred to them.

Article 3.9 states that the church government of the CCAP is ‘Presbyterian’ i.e. a church government by democratic courts namely Church Council, Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly comprising the two offices mentioned above. This system does not recognize a hierarchy of office-bearers but of church courts (article 6.1), which does not agree to Reformed church polity. Compare to Van Dellen and Monsma (1964:138):

‘Reformed Church polity does not know a system of lower and higher courts in the sense of the word.’

Article 9.3, stipulates that the CCAP Synod has the following office-bearers: Moderator, the Vice Moderator, Senior and the Junior Clerk and Treasurer. Its administrative posts are the Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director and Treasurer. These officials are to be ministers and elders (cf. Article 9.5). It is interesting to note that the revised Constitution of 2002 does not mention the title General Secretary as an administrative officer as was the case in the unrevised Constitution of 1956.

Article 10.1 states that there shall be a standing committee comprising General Synod Moderator, Vice General Synod Moderator, Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, Treasurers who are to be ministers and two elders from each established Synod. It further states that the members of the standing committee would be called commissioners and would be in offices until the next elections. Interestingly Article 17:1 of 2002 the Constitution of the General Assembly reversed Article 30 of the 1956 Constitution of the same body. The latter said that each individual Synod is Supreme Court of appeal, while the former states that ‘the General Synod or General Assembly shall be the highest court of appeal for the Church’, which means that its authority will not be subject to any discussion or appeal or reversal.

In general the CCAP acknowledges a system of lower and higher offices, assemblies and courts, of which the General Synod or General Assembly is the highest. It shows that the government of the CCAP is modeled after the central governments in the secular world. It is not fully arranged according to Reformed church polity (cf. Van Dallen and Monsma, 1954:138; cf. Vorster 1999:54).⁷⁶

5.4.3. The Revised Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1972)

The Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod like those of other Synods was an adaptation of the Constitution of the General Assembly. The first version was prepared in 1956 and was revised after sixteen years. Our examination of the revised Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod focuses on the Articles that deal with church polity and church government. We will try to find an answer to the question whether, in its church polity discourse and practice, the Nkhoma Synod has developed along the line of Presbyterianism or the line of the Reformed tradition from which Presbyterianism deviated in terms of church polity.

⁷⁶ Cf. Article 31 of the Belgic Confession of Faith

As indicated above the Constitution of every individual Synod that constituted the General Synod of the CCAP was too be modeled after the Constitution of the General Synod of the CCAP. Article III of the Nkhoma Synod Constitution decrees that the Synod accepts the Constitution of the General Assembly as part of itself implying that Nkhoma Constitution is in agreement with the General Constitution.

Article IV of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod stipulates:

‘The Creed of the Nkhoma Synod is founded on the Bible as the Holy and infallible Word of God. Its doctrine is contained in the three formularies of unity namely the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession (Netherlands Confession) and the Canons of Dordt. It also accepts the Articles of Declaratory of Fundamental Principles as contained in articles 1 to 7 of the Constitution of the CCAP.’

Although the Church says that it accepts the fundamental principles as contained in the mentioned articles of the Constitution of the CCAP, it does not say explicitly give briefly the so-called principles or say whether the Confessional documents of the Synod of Livingstonia and Blantyre are part of its own Confessions.

Article V of the Constitution says that the rule and the discipline of the Nkhoma Synod are exercised by Church Councils, Presbyteries, Synod, and the General Synod of the CCAP, in accordance with powers delegated to it by the Constitution of the CCAP. Interestingly, the article adds, ‘the Synod of Nkhoma is, however, the final court of Appeal, except in so far as itself shall decide.’

Article VII defines a Church Council as a ruling body of a congregation comprising minister(s) of the Word and elders. However, it does not mention whether the office of the deacon forms part of the office-bearers in the Church Council. Another interesting observation is that a Church Council has authority in matters under its jurisdiction, and that its duties are to assist ministers in the arrangements for public worship, supervise finances, elect elders, exercise church discipline, evangelize the unreached areas, and submit reports to the Presbytery.

In article VIII.5 a Presbytery is a governing body comprising all the serving ministers of the Word who are ministers in a congregation of the respective Presbytery, and one representing elder from each congregation. The Executive Committee of the Presbytery is constituted by three ministers (Moderator, Clerk, and an additional minister) and two elders.

Furthermore, the article enacts that the Presbytery has the power and authority to supervise all congregations, Church Councils, and ministers within its resort. Specifically, it establishes congregations, ordains, inducts and demits ministers, exercises discipline over elders and deacons, and submits reports to the Synod on behalf of the congregations.

Article IX.1 defines a Synod as a formal meeting of all ministers serving in the congregations, and of one representative elder from every congregation. In other Reformed churches a Synod is an assembly comprising all serving ministers and elders delegated by each Presbytery within its bounds. The Nkhoma Synod definition implies that the Synod may ignore the authority of Church Council and Presbytery.

Article IX.2 says that the Synod has a Moderamen [the executive committee appointed to deal with urgent matters), consists of Moderator, Vice-Moderator, Senior Clerk, and Junior Clerk. Above the Moderamen, there is the Synodical Committee, composed of the all the members of the Moderamen and one minister and an elder per Presbytery.

Article X.I decrees that the Synod in meeting has authority to promulgate rules, regulations and procedures in conformity with the constitution of the CCAP as well as amending them after discussion by all Presbyteries and the Synod, and in conformity with the Constitution of the General Synod.

Regarding the question from which tradition of church polity the Nkhoma Synod has derived its own, Presbyterian or Reformed, it can be answered that the Constitution has both Scottish Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed elements. Bolink (1967:208) is of opinion that in the period 1945-1956 the Nkhoma Synod compromised its church polity with the Scottish Presbyterian approach. The compromise developed because there was a great desire to bring about uniformity and unity among the member Synods. The main consequence was a tendency of clericalism and hierarchicalism, in which the authority of the Church no longer is located in the local Church Council but in the highest assembly.

5.5. Chapter Summary

Right in the beginning of this chapter we noted that the Three Reformed Symbols of Unity, i.e. the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt, are important sources for church polity. In addition, the following are also important church polity

documents for the Church: The Catechism (Buku La Katekisma), Church Order (*Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza*) and its *Constitution*.

The Buku La Katekisma is modeled after the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Zolamulira* was fed by the Church Order of the South African DRC and the Constitution on the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. The latter has nurtured some Scottish Presbyterianism tendencies. Again we wonder whether in the process of adapting itself to Presbyterianism, the Nkhoma Synod consulted its confessional basis in the Three Reformed Symbols of Unity.

We observe that there is only relative congruity as to church polity discourse and church government between the Three Reformed Symbols and the Buku La Katekisma and the *Zolamulira*. For instance, the Buku La Katekisma acknowledges two church offices constituting a Church Council, whereas the *Belgic Confession* acknowledges three offices. The question regarding the root and cause of the difference of church polity remains important.

Another observation is that according to *Zolamulira* Christ executes his rule and authority through the office-bearers. Nothing is stated regarding the question whether Christ governs the church through His Word and Spirit. According to the Belgic Confession, however, Christ rules the Church through His Word and Spirit using offices bearers. We therefore wonder whether the Nkhoma Synod consciously used other sources for developing its church order and church government

Chapter 6: Church Political Developments (1889-2007): Offices, Administrative Posts and Assemblies

6.1. Introduction

This chapter examines and highlights some important developments that occurred in the Nkhoma Synod between 1889 and 2007. These developments revolve around church offices, ecclesiastical assemblies, leadership positions and administrative posts within the mentioned church during the stated period. The chapter has three aims. First, it investigates the problems of equality (hierarchy) among the office bearers and ecclesiastical assemblies and how these problems had crept into the Church. Second, it examines how the creation of offices as well as the ordering of assemblies influenced the exercise of church government and authority within the Church. Third and finally, it assesses how the Nkhoma Synod interpreted and applied the concept of the headship of Christ over the Church in the development of church polity discourse and practice within the Nkhoma Synod.

6.2. Church Offices: Church Political Developments

The concept of office will be central in this section. The term will be used not necessarily in an attempt to describe the ministry of the church office bearers but rather in terms of their governmental duties and responsibilities. It may however be accepted that in common understanding the offices do not exist for the sake of the officers but for the sake of ministries. In this section we shall pay attention to the church offices as well as to church office bearers in terms of governmental arrangements and responsibilities.

There are conflicting views as to how many types of offices should constitute the government of a local congregation as well as to whether the church offices should be viewed in terms of ranks, status and dignity. Interestingly, articles 30 and 31 of the Confession of the Nkhoma Synod (see section 4.2) speaks of the three types of offices as well as the fact that there should be parity among all offices, while article 1V of the Constitution of the same Church mentions only two of the church offices and nothing is said regarding the parity

among offices.⁷⁷ For a proper understanding of the root cause of this conflicting views and their impact on church polity discourse and practice, a brief history of the offices within Nkhoma Synod are called for.

6.2.1. The Office of the Minister: The Highest Church Rank?

The office of the minister of Word was the first office to be introduced in the Nkhoma Synod (previously DRCM). It was introduced in 1888 in the personage of Rev. A.C. Murray, a former student of Stellenbosch Theological Seminary, South Africa. He was a medical student of Edinburgh, Scotland and the first Secretary of the Student Missionary Movement at the Stellenbosch Theological Seminary, as well as a grandson of Rev. John Murray (Bolink 1967:82).

He was joined by the Rev. T.C.B. Vlok, a former theological student at Wellington Missionary Training Institute in Cape Town, South Africa (Smit 1986:73).

‘When the second Dutch Reformed missionary the Rev. T.C.B. Vlok arrived in Nyasaland in 1889, the two pioneers set out together on a tour of exploration, this time into Central Angoniland at the south west end of the Lake. This led to the opening of their first mission station near Chief Chiwere’s kraal on November 28, 1889.’ (Bolink 1967:82)

The two ministers were also joined by the Rev. Robert Blake who arrived in 1892, the Rev. William Hope Murray in 1894 and the Rev. J.F. du Toit in 1895 and several others who also arrived afterwards (Bolink 1967:84).⁷⁸ Due to the high growth rate of the mission work more stations were established and ministers were located at mission stations. During this time the Rev. A.C. Murray was posted at Mvera station, the Rev. Robert Black at Kongwe Station, the Rev. T.C.B. Vlok at Nkhoma station and those who came later were posted to new stations that were founded afterward.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Some Reformed Ecclesiologists are of the opinion that the three-fold system of church offices can be traced back to the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. Van Dellen and Monsma (1964:16) assert “The Old Testament knew three primary offices: no more, no less: Prophets, Priests and Kings. They were representatives of Christ to come. For the same reason, the New Testament period has three primary offices; no more, no less: Ministers, elder and deacons, representing Christ respectively as Prophet, Priest and King of his Church.”

⁷⁸The Rev. J.F. du Toit in 1895 died after two years (Bolink 1967:84)

⁷⁹ The Rev A.C. Murray left Nyasaland (today Malawi) for South Africa in 1901 due to his ill health and that of his wife. He was replaced by the Rev. W.H. Murray as Head of the Mission.

In 1925, the DRCM ordained indigenous ministers and were posted to what was described as *abusa* stations (satellites). It is quite interesting to note that none of the European ministers be it a newly ordained one was placed at the *abusa* station. Concurrently as the number of the European ministers was going down, the number of the indigenous ministers was rapidly increasing from three ministers in 1926, to 20 in 1956 and 29 in 1961, 50 in 1971 and 126 in 2006 and finally 134 in 2007.

Figure 1: Number of European Ministers and Malawian Ministers 1889-2007 (five -year period) ⁸⁰

Year	Congregations	Presbyteries	Malawian ministers	European Ministers	Total no. of Ministers
1896	4	-	-	6	6
1901	4	-	-	6	6
1906	5	-	-	6	6
1911	4	-	-	11	11
1916	16	-	-	11	11
1921	11	-	-	16	16
1926	13	1	3	11	14
1931	13	1	6	12	18
1936	13	1	9	9	18
1941	17	1	8	8	16
1946	20	1	12	9	21
1951	25	1	22	10	32
1956	32	3	26	12	38
1961	49	3	29	12	41
1966	55	7	41	14	49
1971	59	7	50	6	56
1976	77	7	62	3	77

⁸⁰ The table is compiled from the Minutes of Council of the Congregations (1903-1924), the Nkhoma Presbytery (1924-1956 and Nkhoma Synod (1956-2007). Additional information was compiled from the Year Book 2005 (Nkhokwe ya Nkhoma Synod) by Rev. Dr W.R. Kawale, the former General Secretary of the Nkhoma Synod and a Book called Hundred years of Grace: A Brief Survey of the History of Nkhoma Synod CCAP 1889-1989 and finally from the thesis by Martin C. Pauw on Mission and Church in Malawi The history of the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (see pages 284-291).

1981	84	10	73	4	84
1986	89	10	84	2	86
1991	102	10	90	2	92
1996	105	13	96	1	97
2001	112	13	105	3	108
2006	118	14	126	1	127
2007	120	14	134	-	134

The table above shows that the number European ministers had increased from two in 1889 to four in 1896; to eleven in 1926, to twelve in 1956 and to fourteen in 1961 and decreased to sixteen in 1971, back gain to one in 2006 and finally zero in 2007.

What comes to the fore from the table above is that from the early years on the DRC, and the DRCM (later the Nkhoma Synod), had a high regard for the office of the ordained minister in the congregations. They might perhaps be influenced by the words of Calvin (Institutes of Christian religion, IV, 1, 1, 2, 4) who wrote,

‘...the church can never be without shepherds and teachers (doctors) because the Word they minister must keep the church. God calls a shepherd into and to a specific congregation where he represents God in the Word he preaches and the holy sacraments he serves.’

We must now examine the attitude of the European ministers toward indigenous ministers and its converse during the stated period. The following question will be important in the discussion: How did the ordained missionaries relate to the indigenous ministers? And how did the latter relate towards the former? The answer will verify the existence of hierarchy between the offices of the European and the indigenous ministers.

At this point a brief look at the attitude of the missionaries towards the natives is called for. In her observation Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:106) wrote,

‘The attitude of the missionaries versus the African Christians can be characterized at best by as a parent-children relationship. Often we find references of Africans as children and not yet able to drink more than milk of the faith. The missionaries had to be strict and just father of children of his children; his behavior had to inspire the African with confidence and respect.’

As regards to the attitude of the African towards the missionaries, Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:105) also noted that

‘The missionary was addressed as *mfumu* (chief). Their authority in matters of school and church was as authority of chief and headmen in other parts of life. This way of address was accepted without problems by the first and second generation of missionaries.’

In his observation on the same approach Retief (1958:151) wrote: ‘Dr Murray laid stress on our guidance of the Natives who should be treated as our children and we should be responsible for them.’ On a positive note, the parent-children relation between the European and native ministers played an important role in the development of indigenous ministers because it seems there was an intimate relationship between the European and native ministers. It *inter alia* gave the opportunity for indigenous ministers to learn what the European ministers were doing by interacting with them and finally practicing whatever they learned in this regard.

However, this approach also led to some problems: First, the temptation arose to view church offices in terms of rank and status. Second, it created disparity among office bearers contrary to equality in power and authority among office bearers as stipulated in article 31 of the Belgic Confession of Faith. Third, it might have contributed to the development of hierarchical tendencies in the church polity discourse and practice within the Nkhoma Synod. Fourth and finally, seemingly the scriptural truth that Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church played little or no significant role in the ordering of church offices and this might have negatively contributed to the church polity discourse and practice within the Church.

6.2.1.1. The Office of Assistant Ministers: The Lower Class of Ministers?

‘Were the African ministers to be a different class of ministers?’ (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:153).

It has been noted above that the DRC missionaries aimed at developing indigenous leadership. What will come to the fore in this section is that their approach (besides developing intimate relationship between the European and the native ministers) contributed to the development of paternalism among the Europeans toward indigenous ministers, as well

as that it created the order of the Assistant minister within the office of the minister of the Word.

The creation of the office of Assistant was done as a result of the fact that the DRCM had kept in mind the idea of a native ministry. Pauw (1980:257) explained that after ten years of it was emphasized that the young Church could not always be served by European ministers, but that time had come when the Church would have its own ministers from its midst. He (1980:157) further stated the main reason given for this was the fastest rate at which the work was growing.

At its meeting of 1913, the Mission Council of the DRCM in Nyasaland proposed to ordain some outstanding natives and forwarded its proposal to the Cape Synod of the DRC in South for approval. In 1921, the request was approved and the matter was referred back to the Mission Council of the DRCM in Malawi for possible arrangement. The Council finally referred the matter to the Council of Congregations of the DRCM for a further discussion.

In 1923, upon receiving the approval from the Cape Synod of the DRC, the Council of Congregations resolved:

*'Msonkhano uno unakambirana nuzindikira kuti nkoyenera ndithu kulola alaliki ena kuti apitirire kuphunziranso ndi kuwakira manja kuti akhale abusa. Chifukwa chake Msonkhano uno utapemphera ndiponso utafunsana bwino unasankha awiri ndiwo Namoni Katengeza ndi Andreya Namkumba kuti alowe udindowu (After the deliberations, this meeting noted that it is desirable that some evangelists must further be trained and ordained for the ordained ministry. Therefore, this meeting, after praying earnestly and making some inquiries, has selected Namoni Katengeza and Andreya Namkumba is trained for the ministry).'*⁸¹

The training of indigenous ministers started in 1924 and was placed in the hands of the Mission Council (Nthara 1964:37, 39).⁸² The first class comprised of two long serving teacher-evangelists, Namoni Katengeza and Andreya Namkumba. The training of the first class ended a year later. After completing their training, Andrew Namkumba was ordained on 8 July 1925 in his home Congregation, Malembo, where he served as assistant minister for

⁸¹ Minutes of the Council of Congregations (1923:5). These two candidates were selected out of the following: Isaki Kapologulani, David tsirizani, Amoni Ndiwo, Ashani Malenga (Nthara 1964:34).

⁸² Minutes of the Council of Congregations (1923:5). Candidates for the ordained ministry were trained in Biblical subjects, Church history, Systematic Theology, Christian Ethics and practical subjects such as Homiletics, Evangelism, Church Administration and Liturgy.

many years. The Rev. Namkumba's classmate, Namoni Katengeza Mwale was also ordained a week later in his home Congregation of Mvera in Dowa district (Nthara 1934:7-20). Pauw (1980:261) wrote:

'Katengeza served as assistant minister at Mvera from 1925 to 1933 when he was transferred to Machentche near Mponera then still part of Kongwe. Under his ministry Machentche progressed extremely well... In 1937 he was transferred back to Mvera where for long periods he very successfully managed the large congregation without the assistance of a European minister.'

A third indigenous person to be ordained was a former Livingstonia Mission teacher-evangelist, Lameki Manda. He was received together with the Kasungu Congregation in 1924. '*Tapanganso kuti tifunse ku Livingstonia atipatse Lameki Kalata wololera (licence), aikidwe manja ku Kasungu.*' (We have agreed to request the Livingstonia to give Lameki a letter of license so that he would be ordained in Kasungu)⁸³

The training of the second class comprising of Amoni Ndiwo, Petros Kachingwe and Ashani Malenga started in 1928 and ended in December of the following year (Kamukhwani 1989:68).⁸⁴ All these candidates were ordained on 14 August 1929 in Nkhoma Church. They were once again posted to the satellites of the home congregations where they also served as assistant ministers for several years.⁸⁵

Regarding the supervision of the Assistant ministers, Pauw (1980:280) explained:

'These congregations remained linked to mission stations and ministers continued to work under supervision of a missionary. Regular reports had to be submitted to the mission and the missionary had the right to attend any session meeting in any congregation under his supervision. This was to enable the missionary to maintain as much contact as possible with such congregation.'

It is clear from this that the DRC missionaries used what could be called as 'guardian approach' to develop indigenous leadership. This approach had some advantages. First, it gave the opportunity for the indigenous ministers to have ample time to observe what the

⁸³ Minutes of the Council of Congregations (1925:17-19).

⁸⁴ Kamukhwani 1989:67 c.f Nthara 1964:46, 47) have pointed out that Davide Tzirizani and Isaki kapologulani were among the chosen candidates but the former died before the final decision was made and the latter was had been found guilty of an offence shortly just afterward. Isaki kapologulani was restored and became a strong Christian until his death in 1936(cf. Mthenga Magazine November-December 1936:12).

⁸⁵ Amoni Ndiwo was posted to Mtongola Satellite of Malingunde Congregation, Petros Kachingwe to Khola the satellite of Livlezi and Ashani Malenga to a satellite of Mphunzi Congregation (cf. Minutes of the Council of Congregations, 14-17 September 1929:5).

European ministers were doing; to interact with them and immediately practice whatever they had learned from their supervisors. Second, it developed intimate relationships between the European and the native ministers. We must mention that this the approach had disadvantages. First, it contributed to the problem of paternalism among the Europeans toward the indigenous ministers. Second, it created a new order of office within the office of the minister of Word in the Church. In other words, the approach created classes of ministers, i.e. ministers of mission stations (ministers of big congregations) and *abusa* stations or ministers of satellite congregations (ministers of small congregations). Pauw (1980:304) pointed out:

‘... It should be kept in mind that the concept of the *abusa* stations or satellites congregations manned by African ministers working under the supervision of a missionary was originally developed by the Mission Council and hence introduced to Presbytery.’

The system of *Abusa* stations also impacted negatively on the church polity and practice. It contributed to tendencies of hierarchy among offices in the Church, influenced by a superiority and inferiority complex.

‘...But was this supervision of black ministers by white ministers not a deviation of the classic Reformed church law? The *Confessio Belgica* its article 31 states that ministers, you are all brethren in defence of the statement that no minister is to exercise power over another ministers’ (Gerdien Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:155)

The hierarchical tendencies were seen in the way in which the ministers were addressed. Mgawi (2009:28) observed that all European ordained ministers were addressed as *Mfumu* (chief) *Bwana* or *Msati* (Sir or Master) in the same way as all Europeans were called. These titles had connotation of hierarchy, rank and status or elevated positions in the society. In is quite interesting that such titles were uncritically accepted and maintained in the DRCM and later the Nkhoma Synod. One could argue whether it was right for the Church to use such titles that have elevated connotations when addressing ordained missionaries.

This may be regarded as an alien practice that might have negatively impacted on church polity and church government within the Nkhoma Synod relates to the probation of the newly ordained ministers. It seems there was no fixed period for probation of the newly ordained ministers. Gerdien Verstraelen-Gilhuis compared what he saw in his Church with other Presbyterian Churches in Central Africa:

‘In other churches, like the Scottish Presbyterian church each minister-white or black was on probation for a couple of years. Such system did not exist within the DRCM... For no time limit was indicated for an African minister had to act as assistant – minister’ (Gerdien Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:155)

Verstraelen-Gilhuis’ observation is important as far as parity among office bearers within the Reformed church circles is concerned. The parity is based on three theological grounds. The first one stems from the concept that Christ is the only Head of the Church. Vorster (2003:43) cites an example from the Church to which he belongs (The Reformed Churches of South Africa [GKSA]):

‘The confession of Christ as the Head and King is a very important Reformed ecclesiological premise. In view of this fact the equality of the office bearers in the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA) is obvious.’

The second ground for parity concerns the instrumentality concept of the church offices derived from Calvin’s ideas of office bearers as instruments. At this point, there is need to repeat in detail what was said in section 3.2.4 of this study. Calvin (Institutes of Christian Religion IV, VI, 1) wrote:

‘Now we must speak of the order by which the Lord willed his Church to be governed. He alone should rule and reign in the Church as well as have authority or pre-eminence in it...Nevertheless because he does not dwell among us in visible presence (Mat 26:11), we have said that he uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will as by mouth as sort of delegated work not by transferring to them his right and honour but only that through their mouths, he may do his work-just as a workman uses tools to do his work’

This is also echoed in Vorster (2003:15)’s own words:

‘The offices...are instruments in the hands of Christ through which he institutes, conserves and builds the Church...The officers are servants (diakonia) who primarily receive their mandate to serve from Christ... They are organs in the hands of Christ.’

He (2003:35) also went on stating that

‘Every office-bearer is an instrument in the hands of Christ and is therefore responsible to Christ. There is equality in responsibility and this principle constitutes

the equality of the offices. The three offices in the church are also no subordinate to each other.’

Therefore the description of ministers (metaphorically speaking) as ‘tools’, ‘instruments’ or ‘organs’ in the hands of Christ, shows that Reformed church polity puts under ban the conception that being a minister is a matter of rank, status and dignity. It also implies that the office of the minister is not the highest office in the church but rather it is one of the offices or ministries serving the rule of Christ in the Church. Finally it also affirms the assertion that the local, the regional and the universal church has only one Head, and that is Jesus Christ.

6.2.1.2. The Office of the Deputy Ministers: Ministers without Power and Authority?

The office of Deputy Minister was another new order created within the office of minister in Nkhoma Synod. It was instituted in 1970 as response to a request which came from Mvera Presbytery which requested the Nkhoma Synod to clarify its policy regarding the position of minister serving in synodical posts.

‘..Chikhalidwe cha ChiPresibiterio chikuti’ Ulamuliro was Synod uchokera ku mipingo. Motero mipingo itumiza abusa ndi akulu oyang’anira awo ku Msonkhano wa Sinodi ndi kuwapatsa makalata a ulamuliro. Bwanji Chikhalidwe cha Sinodi wa Nkhoma chilola abusa onse opanda mipingo kuti akhale ziwalo za Msonkhano wa Msonkhano wa Sinodi. Abusa otere, ulamuliro wawo wukuyimirira pa Sinodi uchokera kuti? (The Presbyterian tradition states that the authority of the Synod is derived from congregations. In view of this, congregations send the minister and an elder to the Synod meeting and give them credentials. Why the constitution of the Nkhoma Synod allows all ministers who have no congregations to be full member of the Synod meeting. Where does the authority of such ministers in the Synod meeting come? (Article 1X.2b cf Article 1V of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod 1956).

As part of its response the Ad-hoc Committee was appointed to investigate the matter and submit its report to the Synodical Committee which would report it to the next Synod meeting in 1970.⁸⁶ In discussing the report at its meeting in 1970, the Synod resolved:

⁸⁶ S. 469 Minutes of the Nkhoma Synod 1968 cf Ks 1548 Minute of the E Moderamen 1967

‘(a) All Synodical officers must be inducted as Assistant-ministers of the Congregations where they reside; (b) their names must appear on the credential of that congregations when going to Presbytery or Synod meetings.(c) Synod agree that article 1X.2b of the Constitution must be deleted, by first being discussed by the Presbyteries in accordance with article XV111.’⁸⁷

The Synod further enacted that

‘Ministers not holding any post congregations in Nkhoma Synod will be treated as follows at Synod meeting meetings: A. They may attend the meeting, without voting rights. B. They may speak if the Synod may give them permission.’⁸⁸

The decision was not effected until the 1972 Synod meeting whose resolution stipulated:

‘From now onwards all minister with no congregation will not be called Assistant Ministers but Deputy Ministers and will have no voting right at all at the official meetings of Synod.’⁸⁹

This resolution was not fully effected until 2007 when the Synod responded to the researcher’s overture in which he requested the Synod to interpret article 31 of the Confession of Faith particularly where it says that: ‘...*all the ministers are equal in power and authority wherever they may be*’ in the light of what it has been practicing regarding the position of the ministers who served in the Synodical posts.⁹⁰ After a careful scrutiny of the overture and the article 31 of the Confession the Synod resolved:

‘*Polingalira za Ziphunzitso zathu... Sinodi yawona kwatsopano ndipo itsimikiza kuti: abusa onse osanjikidwa manja ndi Sinodi yathu azikhala ndi ulamuliriro pa misonkhano ya Sinodi.*(In reflecting on our confessions/doctrinal standards... the Synod resolves and affirms that all the ministers must have power authority at the Synod meetings.)’⁹¹

⁸⁷ S. 569, Minutes of the Nkhoma Synod 1970.

⁸⁸ S. 562, Minutes of the Nkhoma Synod 1970

⁸⁹ S. 586, 569, 570, Minutes of Synod 1972

⁹⁰ S. 3978, Minutes of the Synod 2007

⁹¹ S. 3978 Minutes of the Synod 2007.

The researcher's argument was based on the following points: First, the Nkhoma Synod did not apply what it confesses, namely that '...all the ministers are equal in power and authority wherever they may be.' Second, it seems that the Church did not consider critically the danger that what it practiced might have a negative impact on its church polity discourse and practice, particularly as this resulted in creating new order within the office of the minister.

In his personal view, Rev. Killion J. Mgawi (2009:59), the first Malawian General Secretary of the Nkhoma Synod, wrote:

'Ndi cholakwika kuti abusa amene akutumikira ku ma Dipartment azidziwona ngati anthu awudindo wapamba namakhala ngati mabishopi kapena makadinolo (It is wrong for the ministers serving in departments to look at themselves as high ranked office bearers or behaving like bishops or cardinals.)'

It seems that Mgawi's remarks does not only demonstrate his conviction as one of the former General Secretaries and as a retired minister of Nkhoma Synod, but that he had in mind that the office of the minister is not the highest office in a clerical sense or that it should be classified or divided into other orders.

5.2.1.3. The Office of 'the Athandizi': A Bishop?

Another order of offices created in the office of the minister of the Word and sacrament within the Nkhoma Synod around 1962 was the office of *Athandizi (Assistants)*.⁹² It happened that when the DRCM was become an autonomous Church, the fourteen European ministers whom the Nkhoma Synod received from DRC, each of them was assigned to one or more congregations as inspector.⁹³

According to minute 13 of the 1960 Synod meeting, the allocation of the European ministers was as follows: The Rev H. D. R Blok-Mchinji and Kapiri Congregations; the Rev. J. Van Genesis- Malingunde, Nsambe, Chileka and Chiwe Congregations; the C.J. Burger-Lilongwe and Balang'ombe Congregations; the Rev A.S. Labschaign-Dzenza, Mpando, Mang'a, Chimwang'ombe and Mdika Congregations; the Rev J Londt-Thumba, Machentche, Kasungu, Kawerawera, and Chamkango Congregations; the Rev A Viljoen-

⁹² Cf. Minute 13 of the Synod 1960. The Chichewa word given to the inspectors is 'athandizi' and could be translated as assistants in English. However when one looks at their position and their relationship to the congregation, one could conclude that they were more or less inspectors or bishops in the episcopal circles.

⁹³ Minute 16 Nkhoma Synod 1952 cf. minute 159 of Synod 1960

Chinthembwe, Kadedwa, Kanjiwa, Mphongwe Congregations, the Rev. P.R. Smit-Mvera, Mpatsa, Matenje, Kongwe, Chibanzi, Kolowiro Congregations, the Rev. J.D.H Steytler-Nkhoma, the Rev. G.F. Hugo Nyanja, the Rev. J.S. Minnar-Chitundu, Mphunzi, Chikoma and Livinza Congregations; the Rev. B.H. Groenward, Malembo, Khola, Mtakata, Golomoti, Livilzezi Congregations, the Rev. A.C. Human Mlanda and Dedza Congregations; the Rev. M.S. Daniel-Salisbury (Harare) and Highfield in Zimbabwe and the Rev. A.M. L. du Toit: Bulawayo ndi Gwero. The creation of this office was in accordance with what was stipulated in the following minute

*‘Sinodi atakambapo atsimikiza mtima kuti mapangano onse a kale 16/1952 asungike osasinthapo. Amisyoni akhalebe ngati aphungu olangiza ogwrizana pa ntchito zonse (After deliberations, the Synod has decided heartedly that the last Deeds agreements of 16/1952 should be maintained. All the missionaries should remain as Assistants and co-workers in all endeavors.’*⁹⁴

Section ii.d of the 1962 Deed of Agreement between the Nkhoma Synod and the Cape Synod of the DRC in South stipulated:

‘Considering the stage of maturity reached by the CCAP and the DRC consent to the request of the Nkhoma Synod of that Church that all ordained ministers from the DRCM shall now be formally transferred to the ministry of the Nkhoma Synod and, they will therefore, fully be members of the CCAP.’

However the problems viewing the office as a rank and status continued prevailing in the Nkhoma Synod. In his general comment regarding the office of the Malawi ministers of the Word and sacrament, Joda-Mbewe (2002:294) noted

‘The ministers in Malawi continue to see themselves as holding authority and high status roles. They see themselves as a ministry. They feel they can do anything that they want without any objection from the laity.’

Brown 2004:313) made it clear that the polity of Nkhoma Synod however appears to be a modification of the Reformed tradition... Ministers behave as village headmen.’ In other words Brown seems to assert that very often ministers make decision without consulting members in their respective congregations.

⁹⁴ Minute 16 Nkhoma Synod 1952,

Although both Joda-Mbewe and Brown might be too critical in their remarks regarding developments in the office of the minister, what comes to the fore is that they noticed certain tendencies in the development of this office within the Nkhoma Synod. Such tendencies are not in line with the Reformed tradition which recognizes an office of the minister as an undivided office in the Church. It also recognizes the truth that there is parity among the ministers and other church offices.

6.2.2. The Office of Church Elder: The Left hand of the Minister?

The term *Mkulu/akulu or oyang'anira* in Chichewa is semantically translated as 'Elder' in English and it refers to an old or senior person. When it is qualified, it has different meanings. For instance *Mkulu wa Polisi*, is translated Inspector General of police, Thus, '*Mkulu wa Mpingo/ Woyang'anira*' is translated as elder of the church.

In the Bible the plural term, 'elders' denote a leading body among the Israelites who were making political decisions (2 Samuel 5.3; 17:4, advisors of the king (1 Kings 20:7), and representatives of the people on spiritual matters (Exodus 7:17; 24:1,9; Number 11:16;24-25). The New Testament refers a number of times to elders who served in the role of church leadership (Acts 14:23; 11:30; 15:2; 20:11; 1 Timothy 5:1,19; Titus 1:5; Acts 11:11, 30 and 1 Timothy 5:17). Very often church elders are a group of lay leaders (to those who are ordained). Their main job is to censure the morals of church members. They are not assistants to the ministers of the Word and sacraments.

In the DRCM in Malawi, the office of the elder was instituted simultaneously with the establishment of the congregations. In his research Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:59) wrote, 'With the establishment of the congregations a new type of leadership came to the fore: the *akuluampingo*, church elder as offices within the Church.' It became a practice that elders were to be appointed from church communicant ranks.

'... we see that in 1897 after baptizing the first group of twenty-one converts in Nyasaland, the missionaries immediately elected six men to assist them in the supervising of the initial congregation. Four years later, the Missionary Council decided that church elders should be elected according to the rules of the Presbyterian system' (Bolink 1967:92ff)

Regarding the exact year when the first elders were established in the Nkhoma Synod, Pauw (1980:238) wrote

‘By 1899 elders and deacons were being appointed and church council instituted... By 1900 similar developments were reported for Nkhoma as well as for Livlezi which Vlok visited in June 1900 to form a church council of three elders and three deacons.’

He (1980:239) went on explaining the sources from which the DRCM had developed an order of church elders and deacons as follows:

‘Up to that stage it appears that appointment of elders and deacons was done informally, but in 1901, the DRCM Council decided that members of the Church Council would be elected according to the rules and procedures of the DRC in South Africa.’

Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:77) has noted that the elders were mainly appointed to assist European ministers especially in matters involving local customs. She further stated that the tasks of the churches described in the Constitution of the Council of Congregations of the DRCM were

‘...(1) to watch over the spiritual life of the congregations; (2) to decide together with the minister about admission to baptism class and baptism (3) to visit all church members especially the sick, the age and backsliders,’ (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:77).

In addition to these tasks, other duties of the church elders include to discipline church members who breached church rules and regulations, to supervise teachings and the moral life of the ministers of the Word. Some of them were also appointed as delegates to Presbytery, Synod, and General Synod and appointed as executive committee on the presbytery committee and Moderamen. However they could not be allowed to compete for the position of Moderator and Presbytery or Synod clerk or General Secretary.

At this point we need to examine whether the European ministers were appointed or elected as elders in the local congregations. Pauw (1980:243) explains:

‘At Kongwe Rev. JJ Ferreira had been elected to this office [church elder] and the minister in charge Rev. Liebenberg, requested authorization from the subcommittee of the Mission Council explaining that it was done in view of his (Liebenberg’s) expected absence on furlough.

He further narrated:

‘The matter was referred to the full Council which subsequently ruled out that it was not desirable to choose whites as members of the church councils of...Mission congregations... In other words, this was not an outright ban but in view of the purpose of developing an indigenous Church which would be totally self-governing, it was felt undesirable for expatriate to serve on the church councils thus, jeopardizing the African representations....only missionaries in charge of congregations would have right of session’ (Pauw 1980:243).’

In concurring with him on this, Bolink (1967:93) said

‘In order to allow the widest possible opportunity for African Christians to develop into church leaders, it became a rule in the DRC that lay missionaries could not be allowed to be elected church elders.’

These two quotations clearly show that the office of the elder was to a certain extent an inferior office in the church. Verstraelen-Gilhuis, (1982:105) pointed out that from the early missionary era, ‘in the church councils the elders often just follow the missionary as they see they would like them to act.’

According to Hetherwick (1932:125), in the Presbyteries of Blantyre Presbytery, the ordained missionaries (from Scotland) were appointed as church elders although according to him it seems that they were not elected as deacons.

Another important question is whether the office of the elders was equal in power and authority with the minister of Word. Mgawi (2009:11) is of the opinion that

‘Paja Mbusa ndi mkulu wa mpingo wophunzitsa ndipo woyang’anira paja ndi akuluampingo woweruza. Motero, kuti ngakhale pali kusiyana pakati pa oweruza ndi kuphunzitsa ntchito yawo ndi imodzi (A minister, a teaching elder and overseers are ruling elders, although there is distinction between the two offices, their ministry is one)’

Mwale shares the same conviction as Mgawi, particularly when he compares the duties of the ministers and elders with the two legs of a person:

'Mkuluwampingo ndi Mbusa ndiwo ziwalo, Zochita zawo pamodzi monga dzanja lamanja lichita ntchito ndi lamazere lichita. Pa ntchito zambiri pamene dzanja lamanja lichita lamazere ligwira. Ntchito zonse zomwe Mbusa sangachita popanda mkuluwa mpingo (A church elder and the minister are like parts of human body. They do their duties like an acting right hand and a supporting left hand. All ministers cannot take on all the responsibilities without assistance from the elder] (Mwale 1979:28).

Although the central issue in the quotation above is the mutual dependence between the church elder and minister, it is also clear that the elder is conceived as the weaker hand. This also shows that in the Nkhoma Synod the office of the elder was that of an assistant to the office of the minister.

Another remark should be made regarding the tenure of the office of the elders. According to the 1904 meeting of the Council of Congregations the tenure of office for the elders (and deacons) was two years but would be legible to be re-elected for another term and after that retire.⁹⁵ The 1970 Synod meetings decided to prolong the tenure of office to three years minimum and six years maximum.

'This arrangement was in line with the established practice in all (Dutch) Reformed Churches in South Africa, the Netherlands and elsewhere in the world but differed from the practice in the Scottish Presbyterian Churches where elders were elected and ordained in office for life' (Pauw 1980:244).

On the tenure of the office of church elder, Vorster (1999:48) explained that the purpose for a fixed retirement period is to prevent hierarchy and to promoted growth in ideas. He (1999:48) further elaborated his point as follows:

⁹⁵ S. 476 Minute of the Synod entry for 1970; cf. S. 576 Minute of the Synod entry for 1972

‘A Church council consisting of the same people for a long time may lead to tyranny and stagnation. To avoid domination of the church by a few experienced office bearers and periodical retirements may be introduced. However, periodical retirement may not be seen as a Biblical principle.’

In conclusion, we need to emphasize that church elders within the CCAP Nkhoma Synod were conceived as assistants (the left hand) to ministers. The church elders and the ministers thus were not seen as co-workers. They could not hold session without the presence of the minister (cf. Z. 598 of Zolamulira) or held any position such as moderator or secretary, even if they were qualified for such positions. This should remind us of our guiding question: Does the issue of parity also apply to the equality in power and authority between ministers and elders or all the offices in the Church?

6.2.3. The Office of Deacon: Assistants and Stepping stone to the High Office?

The office of the deacon is equally one of the three offices, which is stipulated in articles 30 and 31 of the Nkhoma Synod.

‘We believe, that this true Church must be governed by that spiritual policy [polity] which our Lord hath taught us in his Word; namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God, and to administer the sacraments; also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the Church...’ (Art. 30 of the Belgic Confession).

We read about the office of the deacon/s in Romans. 16:1ff; Acts 6; Philippians. 1:1; I Timothy 3:8-13. At the outset of this section we need to point out that the task of the deacon in the New Testament Church was probably not limited to financial matters but also to spiritual matters. In addition to caring for the poor, they preached (cf. Acts 8:16, 40).

The first deacons in DRCM congregations were appointed soon after the baptism of the first converts in 1897. They were full members of the church councils, although they were not involved in the discussion of church disciplinary cases except affairs that dealt with their departments (cf. Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:77).

It seems that in 1920s the Nkhoma Presbytery decided to drop the office of the deacons and had to combine it with those of elders.⁹⁶ Toward 1964 the Synod received many overtures from Presbyteries requesting it to restore the office of the deacon in all congregations. At its meeting held in 1964 the Synod decided to appoint the Committee to investigate the possibility of re-introducing the office of the deacon in its congregations.⁹⁷ Upon receiving the report from an Ad-hoc Committee, the 1966 Synod meeting stated,

‘Synod accepts the report about the work of deacons as explained in the Bible. According to this, it is clear that the main task of the deacons is to receive pledges and offering from those in the Church and distribute these according to the rules and also give to the poor and widows and orphans. .. The Committee must set down clearly the duties of the deacons...’⁹⁸

At its 1968 meeting the Synod decided to restore the office of the Deacon in all its congregations but this could not be effected until the next Synod meeting in 1972. At its 1968 meeting the Synod said:

‘In view of the fact that this responsibility is recognized by Scriptures and the constitution in Protestant churches and it is also recognized by the Constitution of General Synod of the CCAP, part V1. Par 21, we shall have deacons...’⁹⁹

The decision was not effected because some issues needed to be sorted out and clarified first. One of the issues was the question whether deacons could hold sessions at the major assemblies and whether they would have a full right to deliberate at the church council meetings.

Can deacons be allowed to attend some meetings of the ecclesia, such as Presbytery and Synod? Can they have power in these meeting? People did not agree on this question. Some said deacons may attend meetings but can only be allowed to vote in discussions which affect their work. Others said they must attend Kirk Session, ...

⁹⁶ Minute 157 of the Synod 1960

⁹⁷ S. 14 Minutes of the Nkhoma Synod 1964

⁹⁸ S. 250 Minute of the Nkhoma Synod 1966

⁹⁹ S. 476 Minute of the Nkhoma Synod 1968

Session. Some Reformed Churches do not allow deacons to be members of the Kirk Session.’¹⁰⁰

The remarks above clearly indicate that the Nkhoma Synod was in a difficult situation particularly with regard to duties and authority of the deacons in the church and the government of the church. It is interesting to note that even the members Ad-hoc committee did not agree on the authority of deacons in the congregations. It shows that the members were of the opinion that the deacons were at least to be full members of the church council.

‘As this post is instituted by the Word of God, deacons may attend Kirk Sessions and they have the right to vote in the election of church elders. They must have the right to vote especially in cases of which deal with money and alms,’¹⁰¹

The office of the deacon was restored by the decision of the 1970 Synod meeting but on condition as the statement reads,

‘The Synod accepts the report of the Ad-hoc Committee and agrees that time has come to re-introduces the office of the deacons as described in *Zolamulira* 231-234. The Synod appoints another Ad-hoc Committee to differentiate between the tasks of elders and deacons, and write a chapter for inclusion in the book of ‘Life and work of Church elder. The Committee must report to the Synod Committee.’¹⁰²

At its 1972 meeting, after a careful scrutiny of the report from the Ad-hoc Committee on the Office of the Deacon, the Synod resolved to effect its previous decision of re-introducing deacons in all congregations.

‘Synod accepts the report on how the office of the deacon can be introduced...and agrees to differentiate ...between the work of elders and deacons (Elders have been combining both offices in one up to now.’¹⁰³

As regards to the authority of the deacons at the church council meetings, the Synod enacted:

¹⁰⁰ Addendum 3 of the minutes of the Synod 1968

¹⁰¹ Addendum 3 of the minutes of the Synod 1968

¹⁰² S. 576 Minute of the Nkhoma Synod 1970.

¹⁰³ S. 821 Minutes of the Nkhoma Synod Meeting 1972

‘(a) Deacons shall have session on the Church Session when affairs of the Congregations are discussed, but they have no authority when cases of discipline are discussed. (b) Deacons will not have session of Presbytery and Synod.’¹⁰⁴

In his opinion regarding the relationship between deacons and ministers, the Rev. J.S Mwale (1979:52) stated:¹⁰⁵

‘Ntchito zonse za Atumiki zikhudza Mbusa. Mtumiki sangathe kugwira ntchito yake moyenera popanda kudziwana ndi Mbusa pa chuma cha mpingo. Pa ntchito wina sangathe kuchita kathu pa yekha. Ntchito zonse za Mtumiki zili pansu pa ulamuliro wa Eklesia. Atumiki ayenera kuchita zones momvera ulamuliro wa Eklesia. Mkuluwampingo nayenso sangathe kuchita kathu padera ndi Mtumiki (All the duties of deacons are directly related to the offices of the minister. A deacon cannot carry out his duties on finances of the church correctly without consulting a minister. At work each one of them cannot do anything without the other. Deacons are under authority of the Church. They need to do everything in obedience to the rule of the Church. Likewise, a church elder cannot discharge his duties without consulting a deacon).

For him (1979:53) *‘Atumiki sakhala anyamata antchito akuluampingo... (Deacons are not tenant or servants of church elders).* Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:77) observed that in the DRCM in Zambia and also in DRCM in Malawi the office of the deacon was a preparatory stage for next office in the church. She (1982:77) further explained that

‘Besides the elder, there were deacon, to collect the funds and to look after the church building and orderly and edifying course of the service. They attended church council meetings, but constitutionally they could do that only in regard to affairs dealing with their department. They were just assistant to-elders and their udindo (office) was never very much developed in its own right; it was a stepping stone to the highly respected and more influential office of church.’

¹⁰⁴ S 821 Minute of Nkhoma Synod 1972.

¹⁰⁵ The Rev Josophat Samuel Mwale was the first indigenous minister to be appointed as Nkhoma Synod Moderator in 1958. He was assigned to write a book on “Moyo ndi Ntchito za Akuluampingo” (Life and Work of Church Elders). Later the Ad-hoc Committee’s report on the differences of the tasks between the elders and deacon was added to the book. The book is still in use now in the Nkhoma Synod, the Reformed Church in Zambia and Harare Synod of the CCAP in Zimbabwe.

It shows that the place and duties of the deacons in the Nkhoma Synod were almost the same as those in the Old Church of Scotland particularly the fact that deacons were regarded as mere revenue collectors in the congregations (cf. Van Wyk 2004:132). They could attend sessions and serve on the Lord's table but could not be allowed to attend the Kirk have but could not have decisive voice in the calling of ministers and in the exercise of church discipline. Spoelstra (1982:246) observes that

'Today there are conflicting views as to what constitutes service of deacons. In some South African churches, he is involved in the church council as an overseer, in the capacity of an office bearer a kind of auxiliary elder, while the elder is merely an assistant to the minister. Perhaps lack of clarity in Calvin's ecclesiastical polity led to this situation.'

In summary, it is noted that in the Reformed tradition the office of the deacon as a permanent, distinct and important ministry instituted to serve the rule of Christ through His Word and Spirit (Van Wyk 2004:166). On the contrary in the Nkhoma Synod, this office was temporal and subordinate to the higher offices (i.e. the offices of the elders and ministers). This is evident because the Synod dropped the office of the deacon for half a century (1920s-1972). Although the deacons were not allowed to speak on certain matters, some of them might have a decisive voice that could help congregations to carry out their mission and calling.

6.2.4. The office of Evangelist: Temporary Office?

At the outset of this section, it should be made clear that the office of evangelist in the history of Nkhoma Synod was not a fourth or part of the offices which constituted the church order and church government; rather it was a temporary development that occurred only in the context of mission work.

The office of evangelists was born out of practical situations of mission work in the DRCM. Initially the pioneer missionaries had a tendency of recruiting native people to the position of evangelist. According to Retief (1958:51) the missionaries emulated and acted on the Scottish slogan that reads, 'Africans must be evangelized by Africa... natives had to be evangelized by natives'

According to Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:59) the office of evangelist was divided into 'itinerant evangelists' and 'Senior-evangelists.' The former referred to evangelists who had to travel around in the villages to hold services; to make initial contacts with chiefs and village headmen to pave the way for the coming of the school-church with a teacher.

The formal training was usually rudimentary but their Christian commitment had grown throughout the years due to the nature of their involvement in the mission work. Senior evangelists initially were those who received formal training and were full time workers of the mission. They were recruited from the best of the teachers; were better trained and relatively better paid and were responsible for a number of school-churches within a certain area of a mission stations' outreach. Most of those who were recruited as senior evangelists and had once served as spokespersons, *machila* bearers (homolock), housekeepers, cooks, messengers and garden-boys of missionaries (cf. Pauw 1980:260).

The history of the office of the evangelists may be traced back to 1899 a year, which the Mission Council resolved to have formal training for evangelist-teachers. According to Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982:49) the formal Evangelists school was founded in 1913 at Mvera; short afterward it was moved to the new head station Nkhoma. The candidates who completed their training as evangelist were employed as full time workers and were salaried by the Mission council.¹⁰⁶

In 1907, a two-year formal training course for those who would apply directly for the post of full time evangelists began at Mvera. After the completion of their training, candidates were addressed 'senior evangelists.'¹⁰⁷ The title was used to describe the outstanding and long experienced evangelists who complete two-year long course. Their work included supervising satellite stations; overseeing schools going people and evangelizing the non-Christians (Retief 1958:92).¹⁰⁸

The evangelist-teachers were neither full members of the church council, Council of Congregations (Presbytery) nor Synod. According to Bolink (1967:94) it was custom in the DRCM to have all the senior evangelists attending Presbytery and Synod meetings as observers but later they were not even allowed unless if they would be elected as elders.¹⁰⁹ He (1967:94) further added that

¹⁰⁶ Minute 5/1899 of the Executive of the Mission council (translation)

¹⁰⁷ Minutes 22-25 /1906 of the Executive of the Mission council, page 82 (translation)

¹⁰⁸ Minute 12/1904 of the Mission council

¹⁰⁹ S. 93, Minute of the Synod meeting, 1964

‘African-evangelist who as mission-paid workers fulfilled only temporary function in Africa Church, were welcome to the meetings of Kirk sessions and Presbytery but did not have a vote. They could however be elected as church elders and in that they could represent the congregations.’

In his appreciation of the role played by the evangelists Pauw (1980:250) wrote,

‘It should be stressed that the role played by these men trained as teacher-evangelist was of utmost importance. The bulk of responsibility for training the thousands of new converts rest upon their shoulders, while the village school centres where they labored were the real source of growth of the Church.’

According to Kamnkhwani (1989:68), this office was to come to its close in 1964 when a number of the ministers outnumber that of the missionaries. It is evident that office of the evangelists was a temporary one because it is not mentioned in the Church’s Confession of Faith. Murayama (1978:187) recalls that in the New Testament era this office is simply an accidental office in the church.

6.3.The Assemblies and Leadership Positions: Church Political Developments

In this section, we shall identify and describe important events occurred in the institution and developments in ecclesiastical assemblies and leadership positions within the Nkhoma Synod from 1889 to 2007.¹¹⁰ The discussion will be guided by the following questions: Which were the formal ecclesiastical assemblies instituted to govern the Church in the Nkhoma Synod? Which assembly has been the Church’s governmental unit? Has Nkhoma Synod employed a system of lower and higher governing assemblies? Or Has the Nkhoma Synod been

¹¹⁰ In 1894 the DRC missionaries established the Mission Council to coordinate all the activities and report them to the General Mission Council in South Africa. In 1903 the Council of Congregations was established to deal with all matters relating to the running of the Church. The Mission Council however continued running the departments (auxiliary services) namely education, medical work, literature and printing, maintenance, building and transport, agriculture, industrial work, training of ministers and teachers, empowerment of girls and women, etc. In 1962 when the Nkhoma Synod became an autonomous Church, the running of the Church and all the auxiliary services were handed over to the indigenous leadership. This is, perhaps, where things went wrong. The presumed powerful position of the Mission Superintendent was transferred to the Secretary of the General Administration Council (GAC) [a body founded to replace the Mission Council]. By then the Secretary of the GAC was also the Synod Secretary. In 1972, the GAC was dissolved and the running of the Church and departments were drawn together to the General Secretary.

organized in a top-to-bottom or bottom-to-top structure? Where is the church authority located? Is the system of arranging assemblies more Scottish Presbyterian or Dutch Reformed?

6.3.1. The Church Council: The Lowest Ecclesiastical Court?

This section is divided into two parts. The first part defines the term church council or consistory and states its leadership positions. Second, it describes the general functions of the church council, the nature of its authority as well as its relationship with other assemblies such as the Presbytery and Synod.

The Chichewa words *Msonkhano wa oyang'anira* (literary a meeting of overseers) or *Bwalo la akuluampingo* (a court of elders) refers to a court or a body or a meeting of office bearers chosen to rule a local church or a congregation. According to Van Dellen and Monsma (1964: 4) the word 'consistory' is derived from the Latin *consistorium* meaning place of meeting. In the Scottish Presbyterian tradition a 'church council' or a 'Kirk session' is a governing body of a church comprising a minister/s and a band of elders which meets to govern the local church (Vorster 2003:51).

According to Janssen 2000:34) 'a consistory' as a ruling body of a local church comprising installed minister/s of that church serving under a call and the elders and deacons currently installed in office.

In article 30 of the Belgic Confession, we read the definition of the church council as follows:

'We believe, that this true Church must be governed by that spiritual policy [polity] which our Lord hath taught us in his Word; namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God, and to administer the sacraments; also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the Church...'

In general, without considering whether one stands in the Reformed or Presbyterian traditions, a church council is a governing body of a congregation comprising office bearers. Thus, in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, a consistory is a governing body made up of ministers and elders while in the Reformed tradition a church council comprises of a minister, elder and deacon (cf. De Ridder 1983:20). This difference will help us to conclude whether the church polity of the Nkhoma Synod is more Reformed or Scottish Presbyterian.

In the DRCM (today the Nkhoma Synod) the first council was instituted at Mvera, Kongwe, Nkhoma, and Livlezi congregations before 1903 (Retief 1958:57. Pauw (1980:238) commented, 'By 1900 small Christian communities existed at Mvera (33) communicant members, Kongwe (32), Nkhoma (31), and Livlezi (92).' He (1980:238) went on stating

'By that time these communities had already begun to function as congregations. At Mvera the first overseers were Simon Gola (Mgola), David Tsirizani, Isake Kapologulani, Solomon Chimchere and Jonathan Molambola... By 1899 elders and deacons were being appointed and a churchy council were instituted... By 1900 similar developments were reported for Nkhoma as well as for Livlezi which Vlok had visited in June 1900 to form a church council of the three elders and three deacons.

Pauw's remark provides an answer to the question regarding the kinds of offices that made up the church council in the DRCM. However, as we have already stated above, between 1920 and 1971, the church council was constituted by the two offices namely the office of the minister and elder as article X.2b of the 1956 of the Nkhoma Synod stipulates: 'A session is constituted by (a) its minister or ministers (or his or their legal representative (s); (b) four or more elders...' The same thing is stated in the following article 7 of the 1956 constitutions of the Synods of Blantyre and Livingstonia respectively: 'Each congregation is controlled by a session consisting of its minister or ministers (or his or their legal representative and of the elders of the congregation.'

A brief look at articles 30 and 31 of the Nkhoma Synod Confession, the preamble and the articles Z-275-214 of its *Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza* on one hand shows that there is congruity in the number of church council offices but on the other hand there is a difference between the stated documents and the Church's Constitution, in spite an assertion that from the early year (i.e 1901) the Nkhoma Synod (by then DRCM) 'decided to elect its office bearers according to the rules and procedures of the DRC in South Africa' (Pauw 1980:239).

The difference regarding the kinds of offices that constitute a consistory can be looked on as evidence of the conclusion that Van Wyk (2004:10) had made, namely that although in

its ministry the Nkhoma Synod considered 'to be Dutch Reformed, in reality it is Scottish Presbyterian.'¹¹¹

At this point it is noteworthy to examine the officers of the church council although the *Zolamulira: Zolangiza ndi Zopangana* and Constitution do not clearly stipulate such officers. However according to an oral tradition there are two officers of the church council namely the *Mtsogoleri* (the Moderator) and *Mlembi wa Bwalo la akuluampingo* (the session secretary). If a congregation was without a minister, a presbytery committee appoints a visiting minister among the existing ministers within its bounds. The visiting minister is intended to chair all church council sessions until the permanent minister was installed. Mgawi's (2009:62) writes:

'Monga mwa chikhalidwe chathu, Mtsogoleri wa misinkhano yonse yochitika ndi akuluampingo mtogoleri, wapampando ndi Mbusa. Popanda Mbusa akuluampingo sangachite msonkhano pa wokha. Ngati ku mpingoko kulibe Mbusa, Mbusa woyendera mpingo ndiye amakhala mtogoleri wa msonkhano (In accordance with our tradition the moderator of all meetings of the elders is a minister. Without a minister, elders cannot hold sessions alone. If a congregation has no resident minister a visiting from a neighboring congregation becomes a moderator of the meeting.'

Mgawi's remark indicates that only ministers by virtue of their induction or appointment by the Presbytery have the right to chair all church-council meetings if there can be capable elders or deacons. This is also evident in article 598 of the *Zolamulira Zopanga ndi Zolangiza* which stipulates:

'..Sinodi inenetsa kuti ncholakwika kupanga msonkhano popanda Mbusa ndipo chitsutsana ndi chikhalidwe cha Nkhoma Sinode. Motero Sinodi ichenjeza kuti mpingo uli wonse akuluampingo asapange msonkhano pawokha popanda mbusa. Popeza Mbusayo ndiye Mtsogoleri wa misonkhano yonse ya mu mpingo (The Synod stresses that it is not according to the Church Order to have session without a minister and this contradicts the constitution of Nkhoma Synod. In this regard, the Synod warns any congregation that elders must not hold session without a minister. The Moderator of all the official church meetings is a minister.'

¹¹¹ Van Wyk's refers to ministries or offices although later particularly the concluding remark of his book he also speaks about assemblies of the church.

The article above presumes that a consistory must not meet without the presence of the minister as its moderator or president. One might argue that such requirement shows the following things: First, that there is an office which is more important or superior to the other. It may also give a picture that the offices of the elders and deacons are inferior or assistants to the office of the minister (cf. Van Dellen and Monsma 1964:169). On the contrary Janssen (2000:77) said, 'The consistory as gathered offices of elder, deacon and minister presents the fullness of Christ's leadership. If any office is absent, the consistory no longer exists in its fullness.' Second, other office bearers are prohibited from taking leadership position (moderation) on the church council.

The main duty of the moderator is to regulate the proceedings of meetings of the church council. The church council gathered is not intended to assist a president (minister) but to act as a body where issues are discussed and decisions are taken in an orderly manner. The moderator in this regard is merely presiding officer and has no special status or authority because being a chairman of a meeting is not an office in its own right (Vorster 2003:61).

The second officer of the church council is the session clerk chosen from the ranks of elders or deacon. In the absence of the clerk an elder or a deacon is appointed to do the work. The session clerk is not an office in its own right. The clerk is more or less a scribe of the consistory meeting. He records and keeps the actions and decisions of the church council meeting. Van Dellen and Monsma 1964:155) names three reasons for the necessity of a session clerk:

1. So that the congregation may know with precision what has been decided in any given instance.
2. To avoid needless duplication of accurate records are necessary.
3. To present decisions for the benefit of posterity.

We now examine and assess the function and authority of the church council. The primary function of the church council was particularly to exercise generally oversight and discipline over its members as well as holding election of office bearers (cf. Pauw 1980:252, 256). In article V11.4 of the 1972 Nkhoma Synod Constitution, we read, 'The Session has authority in the Church matters over the whole district appointed to it by the Presbytery.' The same article further states,

'Its duties are to assist the minister in the arrangements of public worship and sacraments; to supervise the congregational finances for which it is responsible and to

submit an annual statement of accounts to Presbytery; to approve suitable persons for appointment to eldership and deaconate; to exercise church discipline; to arrange for the instruction of the young in spiritual things and for the evangelization of the district allotted to it. To carry out decisions of the Synod and Presbytery; and to fulfill other duties as may be laid upon it by a superior Court.'

The sentence 'to fulfill such other duties as may be laid upon it by a superior court' is important evidence to confirm that the assemblies were ordered in a hierarchical way in which the church council was inferior or the lowest ecclesiastical court within the Nkhoma Synod, although it is asserted that

'Reformed Church polity does not know a system of lower and higher courts in the usual sense of the Word. It does not as is done particularly by the Roman Catholic Church and to a certain extent by some Protestant bodies attribute a small and limited measure of authority to the governing body of the local congregation, somewhat greater and more extensive measure of authority to groups of neighboring Churches convening together and a still greater and still more extensive measure of authority to assemblies next in order and finally the greatest and most more extensive measure of authority to gathering representing all the Churches' (Vorster 2003:54).

The article of the Constitution indicates that the Nkhoma Synod employs a top-to-bottom structure system in which a church council is conceived as a lowest court or assembly and the presbytery and synod as higher or highest courts in which the ecclesiastical power and authority is centred. This system might result in a danger in which the higher assembly lord it over lower assemblies by dictating them in various matters. Van Wyk (2004:167) also observes the similar practice as stated:

'The Presbyterian system of Church government became characteristic of government of the Reformed churches in Central Africa...The local church as locus for the direct rule of Christ enjoys little or no attention.'

He (2004:167) further explained that 'The cause is found in the Scottish Presbyterian Church polity uncritically accepted by the Dutch Reformed missionaries and uncritically maintained by African Church.'

In conclusion, it has been shown that a church council or a consistory is the lowest ecclesiastical court and the authority is not located in it as a complete unit. It seems then that the authority is located in the highest ecclesiastical courts. Thus, in the Nkhoma Synod a

church council is a lower court. Such understanding has the following implications. First, a church council does not enjoy the direct rule and reign of Christ. Second, broader assemblies lord over it.

6.3.2. The Presbytery: Higher Court of Appeal?

Of the four ecclesiastical assemblies that the Nkhoma Synod acknowledges the Presbytery or a classis is the second one. It is the first greater or broader assembly to be established in the Church. In this section we shall highlight a few important things that occurred in the development of the classis. Our main focus will be on the history, function, authority and relationship between the Presbytery and other bodies such as the church council and Synod and the Mission Council.

The word ‘classis’ is derived from the Latin word which means ‘fleet’ (Janssen 200:104). This means that as an ecclesiastical term a classis is a fleet of churches. The word ‘classis’ and ‘presbytery’ are synonymous terms and generally refer to a gathering of a minister-in-charge plus one elder from each established congregation. According to (Van Dellen and Monsma 1964:181) a classis is

‘...a summoned gathering of churches or a group of churches called together for a meeting and secondarily a group of churches meeting together at a regular intervals in a major assemblies.’

For Janssen and Van der Broeke (2010:9) the ‘presbytery’ or ‘classis’ is a group of congregations within the geographical region. By stating that a presbytery is a group of churches should be understood not in a literal sense. In his understanding Janssen (2000:104) writes, ‘The classis is not churches gathered but offices from the church gathered.’ In this section, we shall use Janssen’s definition when highlighting important developments that had occurred in the history of Nkhoma Synod during the period stated in section 5.1 above. We begin with a brief history of the Nkhoma Presbytery.

The first meeting was convened in 1903 in the name of *Mnsonkhano wa ma Eklesia* (Council of the Congregations) or *Mnsonkhano wa Akulu amipingo yonse* (the meeting of all the Congregations). In his remark regarding this name, Retief (1958:146) pointed out that

‘The name given was not Presbytery however, but a Council of Congregations, i.e a council on which the congregations are each represented by a pastor and an elder (just as in the case of the Presbytery) and which makes resolutions on behalf of the congregations.’

Pauw (1980:240) rightly argued

‘The reason why the designation Council of Congregation was chosen was that it would not be meaningful to speak of a Presbytery if there was no Synod as well. On other hand it was regarded that the Church was not yet ready and did not have enough experienced leaders for the establishment of the independent church courts.’

For Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:75)

‘The Council of Congregations was in fact, a kind of advisory committee for church affairs to the Mission Council who had to approve all its decisions. The Mission Council itself dealt with all matters pertaining to church organization and the spiritual interest of the work, as well as all material and personal affairs of the mission and missionaries.’

The first meeting of the Council of Congregations convened in 1903 and was attended by ministers and elders from all the established congregations. Pauw (1980:241) elaborates,

‘On 18 July 1903, the Council of Congregations convened for the first time ... at Mvera. Four out of the eight ordained missionaries in the field were present-WH Murray, Vlok, AJ Liebenberg and AL Hofmeyr- as ministers of the four congregations, respectively Mvera, Nkhoma Kongwe and Livlezi.’

He (1980:241) went on

‘Also attending was Rev. du Plessis. While six elders attended: Samuel Kongwe, Petros Gamazi) of Mvera, Petros of Nkhoma, Yohane of Levlezi as well as Albert (Namalambe) from Malembo and David (Tsirizani) from Mtsala on the Lake shore near Mvera.’

From Pauw’s explanation, it can be emphasized that the Council of the Congregations was a gathering of representatives from neighboring churches. Such gathering prevented one local church from assuming to itself all power and authority. It was also a reminder that the congregations need to live mutually in communion with each other (cf. Janssen 200:103).

The principle underlying this is that a governing body of presbytery comprises a good number of offices representing congregations and a presbytery itself (cf. Van Dellen and Monsma 1964:190).

According to Bolink (1980:93) and Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:75) the Council of the Congregations in the early years was formed for the following motives: First, to make the work of the Mission Council easier; second, to use the wisdom and advice of the African elders with regard to customs and moral life; third and finally, to educate the native Church up to the right conception of its responsibilities. Pauw (1980:241) pointed out that

‘The aim of the Mission Council in forming a Council of Congregations was partially to have it function as a Committee of Council, advising it concerning the ecclesiastical affairs of the Mission.’

He (1980:241) further wrote

‘The purpose was thus, further defined in the constitution: To ease the burden of the Mission Council; to enable it make use of the knowledge and advice of native elders in matters involving native customs; and to educate the native Church towards a correct understanding of her responsibility and duties.’

In 1924 the name Council of Congregations of the DRCM was dropped and was replaced by the name Nkhoma Presbytery of the DRCM and it was constituted by ministers who served in congregations and one elder from each established local church. In article viii of the 1956 Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod, a Presbytery is constituted by all the serving ministers who belong to the congregations of the respective Presbytery of the Nkhoma Synod as well as one representative elder from each established congregations which belong to the respective presbyteries of the Nkhoma Synod.

Two comments must be made here. First the article above does not clearly state whether the presbytery is constituted by an equal number of elders and ministers may mean that at time they may be more ministers than elders or the obverse may also be possible. Second, it is evident from what the article states that the only the elders represent congregations. This implicitly denotes that a minister belongs to the presbytery and not to a local church.

The earliest committee structure of the Presbytery (by then a Council of Congregations) comprised of two ministers (Moderator, the Clerk) and two elders.¹¹² In article viii of the 1956 Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod, we read that

1. There shall be an executive Committee of Presbytery elected to annually by Presbytery.
2. The Executive Committee of Presbytery shall consist of the Moderator and clerk of Presbytery an addition minister and two elders.
3. The Executive Committees of Presbytery shall act as determined by the Nkhoma Synod.

Once again, the Executive Committee of the Presbytery is a kind of assembly. That means, first that the Nkhoma Synod is aware that a Church is not to be governed by a person. Second, it denotes that the Church is to be ruled by those offices that gather from a variety of localities.

The discussion now turns on the power and authority of the Council of Congregations (1903-1924) and secondly of the Presbytery (1924-). As regards the authority of the former, Pauw (1980:241) translated the Afrikaans section II of the constitution of the Mission Council, which reads:

‘The decision and recommendation of the Council of Congregations will soon as possible be sent by its clerk to the Secretary of the Executive Council in order to have them approved or disapproved by this foresaid Council at its next meeting. Only after approval by this Council will the decision have legal power.’¹¹³

In view of the article of the Mission Council Constitution, we need now to ask the following questions.¹¹⁴ Did the Council of the Congregations have authority over its affairs?

¹¹² Minutes of the Council of Congregations 1903-1924 and of the Nkhoma Presbytery 1924-1956.

¹¹³ The Mission Council held meetings immediately after the annual meeting of the Council of Congregations with the purpose of ratifying its decisions. On contrary, there was a clear division of work between the two Councils in the sense that the Council of Congregations was responsible for all arrangements concerning Sunday school, catechumen class, baptism, Holy Communion, parenting, responsibilities of members of congregations, discipline, the Synod marriages, the Synod funerals and establishment of the Synod council. Matters regarding staffing, finances, discipline of white missionaries were in the hands of the Mission council.

¹¹⁴ The Mission Council of the DRCM was founded in 1894 as a subcommittee of the Livingstonia Mission (Pauw (1980:77). The Council remained an arm of the Livingstonia Mission until 1897 when it became separate and independent body, it was formed under circumstances. One of them was the DRCM wanted some kind of autonomy from the Livingstonia Mission council. Subsequently it wanted to have a final say and a control over

Why did it not have power to veto over all the affairs in the congregations and specifically the authority to appoint first elders of the newly established congregations and post evangelists and ministers to their respective places of work? Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1982:76) noted that sometimes the Council of Congregations could not handle matters which it was supposed to do, such as the posting evangelists and appointing elders and deacons of a congregation.

The powers and authority of the Presbytery is described in article VIII.8 of the 1956 Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod particularly where it says:

‘It belongs to Presbyteries to see that the Word of God is purely preached within its bounds, the sacraments rightly administered, to maintain, and enforce the existing laws and usages of church in matter connected with the performance of public worship and administration of ordinances, to supervise church visitation.’

What becomes clear in this article is that the Presbytery was mandated to carry out the same duties that were assigned to a local church council, i.e. authority to preach the Word, authority to administer Sacraments and authority to exercise discipline. This implies that there was no clear demarcation between the powers and responsibilities of the local church council and a presbytery except the stipulation that the presbyteries must supervise all congregations, sessions and ministers within its resort.’ (article X.7 of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod.

In conclusion that in the Nkhoma Synod, no power and authority is granted to a moderator or clerk of the Presbytery or ministers alone but to the gathered body, a presbytery. Its authority lies in the mutual agreement of the neighboring congregations. One of the problems is that that presbytery is considered as a lower court to the synod and a higher court to the Presbytery which implies that the assemblies are ordered in a hierarchical way. The arrangement that all ministers of a defined are belong to the Presbytery only creates two extra

its financial and material resources. The main cause was the poor relationship existed between the DRC missionaries and the Livingstonia missionaries (Pauw 1980:78). Addition to this, according to McCracken (1977:175) explained there were some frictions among the two sides over business arrangements and difference of opinion on the question of church development. Bolink (1967:83) wrote, “After five years by which time the Dutch had nine missionaries in the field, the Livingstonia agreed to have a division of the field and the 13th degree latitude was decided upon as the boundary. This meant that roughly the whole of the Chewa people fell under the area of the Dutch Reformed and the Ngoni-Tumbuka fell within the area of the Livingstonia.” The Executive of the Mission Council comprised of European ordained ministers of the DRC. The chairperson was traditionally the Head of the Mission or Mission Superintendent and the secretary and committee members were appointed at every annual meeting to serve for at least three years (cf. Bolink 1967:84; Retief 1958:131).

problems, they do not automatically represent the interest of their Congregation, and in some areas they can easily outnumber the elders at the meetings thus waging overwhelming clerical influence.

6.3.3. The Synod: Highest Ecclesiastical Court?

‘The Nkhoma Synod is however the final court of appeal except in so far as itself shall decide...’¹¹⁵

This section aims to assess and critically evaluate the authority of the Synod with respect to other assemblies. The first part examines the term ‘Synod’ and its leadership. The second part will describe the functions of the Synod and its authority with respect to other assemblies. The conclusion will be drawn on the following questions: Did the Synod have power and authority that is distinctly different from the one that resides in the local church? Was it regarded as a higher or broader assembly?

Vorster (2003:51) further states that the word synod comes from the Greek *Sunodos* which means ‘a coming together’. The word ‘synod’ is ecclesiastically defined in many ways. Janssen (2006:210) defines a ‘synod’ as a gathering of ministers and elders who are delegated by each of the presbyteries within the bounds determined by itself. For Vorster (2003:83) again a ‘synod’ is a meeting of an equal number of delegates drawn from each presbytery within the bounds of the church. Vorster’s definition implies that all the congregations are represented indirectly in the synod. In this regard the synod is further removed from the particular local congregations.

In article IX.2 of the 1956 Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1956) we read that ‘The Nkhoma Synod is constituted by (a) all the serving ordained ministers of the Congregations which belong to Nkhoma Synod. (b). All ordained serving ministers who are not connected to congregational ministry yet they serve under its jurisdiction (c) One representative elder from every congregation.’

The Article IX.2 of the revised Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1972) stipulated: ‘The Synod is constituted by: (a) All the serving ordained ministers of the established congregations which belong to the Nkhoma Synod... (b) (c) One representative elders from every established congregation.’

¹¹⁵ Article V of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1956).

This definition of the term means that the Synod in the Nkhoma Synod is not further removed from the particular local congregations and this might contribute to the following implication in the church-polity discourse and practice within the Nkhoma Synod. First, it was in conflict with article 31 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, which stipulates that ‘...all ministers are equal in power and authority where they may be.’ Second, it denotes that a synod is a gathering of all congregations not a meeting of representatives from presbyteries within its bound. Third, in being not further removed from the congregations meaning that the Synod lord it over the local congregations and the congregation becomes not a basic governmental unit of the Church where authority is originally located.

With respect to the structure of the Synod, article 1X of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1956) stipulated that that there would be two governing committees namely the Moderamen and the Synodical Committee. In the same article the composition of the Moderamen was follows: the Moderator, Vice Moderator, General Secretary and Junior Clerk. The same article further stated that the Moderator and Vice Moderator and Junior Clerk would be elected by the Synod and would remain in the office until the next meeting of the Nkhoma Synod.

As regards the composition of the Synodical Committee, article 1X.4 of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1956) enacted that

‘There shall be a Synodical Committee of the Nkhoma Synod. The Synodical Committee will consist of the Moderamen of the Nkhoma Synod and one minister and elder elected from by each Presbytery from its reprehensive members at a meeting of the Nkhoma Synod.’¹¹⁶

The Moderamen and the Synodical Committee are intended to not to have legislative powers and authority or become policy makers but implementers of the decisions of the Synod. However sometimes they have any legislative power and authority and make policies and decided on behalf of the Synod.

The Synod Moderator is the presiding officer of the Executive Committee, Synodical Committee, Theological Training Committee..., etc.¹¹⁷ One can ask whether there is equality in power and authority between the moderator and other ministers within the Nkhoma Synod as stipulated in article 31 of the Church Confession for one moderating all these committees.

¹¹⁶ Article IX of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1956)

¹¹⁷ Cf Mawu a Msonkhono wa Sinode 1956-2007

First we find reference regarding the authority and power of the moderator with respect to other ministers in the Nkhoma Synod's own Newsletter called *Kuunika* (September/October 1962: 4).

*'Chipresbiterio chikuti..abusa onse afanana kapena alingana ulemu ndi ukulu wawo; palibe kusiyana konse-konse ulemu wa abusa wakale ndi woyamba ubusa teretere; palibe kusiyana konse-konse ulemu ndi ulamuro wa Mtsogoleri (Moderator) wa Sinode kaya Presbiterio ndi mbusa wina wosakhala ali ndi ulamuro wa pa mpando chabe wa Msonkhano. Koma alibe ulamuro kapena ulemu wina woposa abusa anzake. M'chi Latini amati Moderator (Mtsogoleri wa Sinode ndiye Primus inter pares: ndiko kusanduliza kuti woyamba mkati mwa olingana kwenikweni {the first among the equals} (The Presbyterian system says that all ministers are equal in honor and authority; there is no difference in honour between the old ministers and newly ordained ministers; there is no distinction between the Presbytery or Synod moderator and other ministers who are not moderators. No one has authority over other ministers. In Latin we call the moderator *Primus inter pares* meaning the first among the equals).'*¹¹⁸

This should also lead us to question whether the moderator was considered to be the 'Head of the church. *'...Mtsogoleriyo (Moderator) monga mwa Chipresybiterio sali Mutu wa Eklesia ayi; koma ndiye wapampando chabe Presiding officer wa msonkhano basi (... Moderator according to the Presbyterian tradition is not the 'Head of the Church', but he is the presiding officer of the meeting only).*

The Synod moderator like the Presbytery moderators is expected to (1) convene and chair the Moderamen, Synodical and Synod meetings; (2) to state and explain the business to be transacted; (3) to see to it that delegate observes due order; the guard against any delegate monopolizing the discussion and to summarize what has been transacted and (4) to prepare a report on the state of religion (church) and present it to the annual or biannual meeting (cf. Janssen 2000:217ff).

In order to prevent the Moderator ascending to the position of being the Head of the Church his duration of the office was defined. We find in article 1X.4 of the 1956 Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod that 'The Moderator and Vice Moderator...shall be

¹¹⁸ Kuuinka October 1962 page 4.

elected by the Synod and will remain in the office until the next meeting of the Nkhoma Synod.’

*‘Msonkhano wa Sinode utatha basi, Moderator akhalenso mbusa chabe monga anzake mpaka akhalenso msonkhano wa Mabungwe ka Sinode kapena kotsogolera ka Sinode. Chifukwa cha ichi m’maeklesia a chipresbiterio sakonda kusankha mtsogoleri yemweyo kachiwiri asanyambe kupuma pakatipo kulewa ganizo lakuti mbusayu anganiziridwe kuti ndiye Mutu wa Eklesia...When the Synod meeting ends the moderator becomes like other ministers until the next meetings of the Moderamen and Synodical committee. In view of this, the Presbyterian Reformed tradition does not consecutively elect the same person on the position of the moderator without a periodical retirement to avoid developing the idea that the moderator is the ‘Head of the church’.*¹¹⁹

The Constitution does not state number terms should one serve as moderator. In other words, there is no restriction in the article regarding the number terms of the office of the moderator. Interestingly, the Kuunika acknowledges that in the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition the same person is not be elected on the same position for many terms ‘to avoid developing the idea that the moderator is the ‘Head of the church’.¹²⁰ If one looks at figure 1 below, one will find that some moderators consecutively served for more than one or two terms.

Figure 2: Ministers who served as Synod Moderators 1956-2007¹²¹

Name	Year elected	Year Retired	Tenure of office (Years)	No. of Terms
1. Rev. A.S Labschaigne	1956	1958	3	One
2. Rev. J.S. Mwale	1958	1964	6	Two
3. Rev. A.S Chalungama	1964	1966	5	Two
4. Rev. J.S. Mwale	1968	1972	6	Two
5. Rev. K.J Mgawi	1972	1980	12	Four

¹¹⁹ Kuunika October 1962 page 4

¹²⁰ Kuunika October 1962 page 4

¹²¹ This data was collected from the minutes of Nkhoma Synod and was compared with the one in the Year Book (Nkhokwe ya Nkhoma Synod) compiled by Rev. Dr W.R. Kawale in 2005. There are slight differences regarding the year of election in the Year Book. This table is based on the Minutes of the Synod 1956-2007

6. Rev. L.J Kamtambe	1980	1987	7	Two
7. Rev. LK R Matanda	1987	1989	2	One
8. Rev. S. P Chalera	1989	1997	8	Four
9. Rev. E.N Kamunga	1997	1991	2	One
10. Rev. CL. Chimkoka	1999	2003	4	Two
11. Rev. S.S. Sande	2003	2005	2	One
12. Rev. CEJ Msangaambe	2005	2007...	4	Two

The danger for presiding more than one or two terms may be that one may ascend to a position of the Synod bishop or even being the head of the church in-disguise. Although serving more than one or two consecutive terms is sometimes done for the purpose of continuity, it creates a higher office within the Reformed church tradition. Thus, in order to protect a church from hierarchy, the same person must not be elected or preside for two successive meetings of the same ecclesiastical meeting. In other words, the moderatorship must be rotated.

According to the quotation, the moderatorship is not an office in its own right. The work and charge of moderator are temporary-appointed for the length of the assembly only. The moderator is elected mainly to see to it that matters on the agenda are in order. He is there to advise and direct them in the light of Scripture and see to it that that the Word of God rules.

However, it should be pointed out that the moderator may erroneously use his prerogative of being chairperson of a synod meeting to dominate. The truth about the matter is that the office of the moderator is terminated as soon as the meeting of the assembly comes to an end. On the contrast in Nkhoma Synod, the office of the moderator continues between synods, i.e. from synod to synod. Vorster (2003:63) pointed out that

‘In some cases in Reformed churches the chairman acts as a moderator between synods i.e, from synod to synod. Although this is usually done for the purpose of continuity, it creates in practice a higher office.’

Another point to be raised is the question whether that the moderator should be called the ‘Head of the church’.

'...Mtsogoleriyo (Moderator) monga mwa Chipresybiterio sali Mutu wa Eklesia ayi; koma ndiye wapampando chabe Presiding officer wa msonkhano basi (...Moderator according to the Presbyterian Reformed tradition is not the 'Head of the church', but he is the only presiding officer of the meeting.' (*Kuunika*, October 1962:4).

It is further asserted that

'Msonkhano wa Sinode utatha basi, Moderator akhalenso mbusa chabe monga anzake mpaka akhalenso msonkhano wa Mabungwe ka Sinode kapena kotsogolera ka Sinode. Chifukwa cha ichi m'maeklesia a chipresbiterio sakonda kusankha mtsogoleri yemweyo kachiwiri asanyambe kupuma pakatipo kulewa ganizo lakuti mbusayu anganiziridwe kuti ndiye Mutu wa Eklesia...When the Synod meeting ends the moderator becomes like other ministers until the next meetings of the Moderamen and Synodical committee. In view of this, the Presbyterian Reformed tradition does not consecutively elect the same person on the position of the moderator without a periodical retirement to avoid developing the idea that the moderator is the 'Head of the church' (*Kuunika*, October 1962: 4).

Another leadership position which we need to examine briefly is stated in article IX.4 of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1956) i.e. the Synod Scriba (Synod clerk and Junior Synod clerk). In the article the Synod clerk chosen one for unspecified period is recognized as such until his successor is chosen at the next Synod meeting. It seems that there was no restriction in the article regarding the number terms of the office of the Synod clerk.

Towards 1970 the Synod received many overtures requesting it to introduce the office of the Synod clerk. There some suggestions that post of the General Secretary was to be divided into Synod secretary and Administrative officer.¹²² This was rejected and it was instituted that all the duties of the Secretary of the Synod and Administrative officers would continue to be combined in the office of the General Secretary. The duties of the Senior and junior clerks were not clearly defined although in the Constitution of the General Synod a junior Synod clerk shall become a treasurer and office-care taker when the General Secretary was away.¹²³

In its response to other requests, in 1977 the Synod said.

'In accordance with the circumstance and to follow the Reformed line it is required that the Synod should amend its constitution article XI as follows:...There should be a

¹²² S. 612 Minutes of the Synod 28 August-4 September, 1970 page 16

¹²³ S.790 Minutes of the Synod entry for 1972 page 2.

Senior clerk and Junior clerk of Synod elected at each Synod meeting eligible from voting ministers at Synod meeting i.e. ministers serving in congregations.’¹²⁴

Although the Synod had necessitated this, the matter was not finalized until 1981 when this was affected. The office of senior clerk was instituted and terms of references to distinguish the duties of the Synod clerk and the General Secretary were drawn up. It was decided that recording Secretaries would be appointed at each synod meeting.

The Synod or Senior clerk would be a full member of the Joint Finance Committee, the Moderamen, the Synodical and Synod until the next Synod meeting. He was charged with tasks of recording and editing minutes at meetings of the Moderamen and Synodical Committee. In 1983, the Synod gave mandate to the Senior Clerk along with Junior Clerk to appoint members for all Synod Committees and board of governors of departments and institutions (Brown 2004:75).¹²⁵

Figure 3: Ministers who served as Senior Clerks 1956-2007¹²⁶

Name	Year elected	Year retired	Tenure of office (Years)	Terms
1. Rev. P.R Smit	1956	1958	2	One
2. Rev. J.B.Kamwana	1958	1960	2	One
3. Rev. J.B Kamwana	1960	1962	2	One
4. Rev. S.P Chalera	1981	1985	4	One
5. Rev. Dr Y.H Hara	1985	1987	4	Two
6. Rev. Dr J.J Kamwana	1987	1993	4	Two
7. Rev. E.N Kachipanda	1993	1995	2	Two
8. Rev. G.A Kachaje	1995	1997	2	Two
9. Rev. C.L Chimkoka	1997	1999	2	Two
10. Rev. K.C Kalebe	1999	2001	2	Two
11. Rev. H.J.C Masina	2001	2003	2	Two

¹²⁴ S. 1169 Minute of Synod entry for 1977 pa 8.

¹²⁵ S. 1972 Minute of Synod entry for 1985 page 3

¹²⁶ This data was collected from the minutes of Nkhoma Synod and was compared with the one in the Year Book (Nkhokwe ya Nkhoma Synod compiled by Rev. Dr W.R. Kawale in 2005. There are slight differences concerning the year of election in the Year Book. This table is based on the Minutes of the Synod

12. Rev. S.P.G Chirwa	2003	2005	2	Two
13. Rev. Dr A. Katani	2005	2007	2	Two

The office Synod Actuary is another important position that had been created in the Nkhoma Synod in principle in 1960s. In responding to some overtures from Presbyteries which requested the Nkhoma Synod to consider introducing the office of an actuary, the Synod decided to appoint an Ad-hoc Committee to investigate further the possibilities of instituting the office.

In 1968 the Synod accepted the proposal of the Ad-hoc Committee to introduce of the position of the actuary and added that the actuary would help the Synod in investigating issues relating to church law and advise the Synod on the ecclesiastical affairs.¹²⁷

With respect to the function and duties, in 1968 the Synod meeting defined the duties of the actuary as follows:¹²⁸

1. To write and determine all the agreements of the Synod meeting that would be included in the edition of *Zolamulira: Zopangana ndi Zolangiza*.
2. To give license letters to the probationers who have completed their ministerial training and ordained ministers.
3. To keep all the letters and records of his work in order
4. To inform all the congregations about the new ministers who have been ordained.
5. To interpret church rules, regulations and procedures in consultation with the *Zolamulira* Committee.
6. To study articles of the Constitution of Malawi so that he advises of the Synod on legal matters.
7. To report to the Synod about his work

In addition to this it was stipulated that the actuary would be the member of the Moderamen, Synodical Committee, as well as the Secretary of the following Committees: Theological College, the Church Order Committee, and General Advisory Committee.¹²⁹

Figure 4: Ministers who serves as Actuaries in Nkhoma Synod 1999-2007¹³⁰

¹²⁷ S. 209 Minute of Synod entry for 1966 page 221

¹²⁸ S. 473 Minute of Synod entry for 1968 page 535

¹²⁹ S. 473 Minutes of Synod entry for 1968 page 535

¹³⁰ This table is based on the Minutes of the Synod 1956-2007

Name	Year Elected	Year Retired	Term
Rev. J.G.M Maseko	1999	2001	One
Rev. K .J Mgawi	2001	2003	One
Rev. C.C.S Chenjerani	2003	2005	One
Rev. R.A Matandika	2005	2007	One

Regarding the position of the ruling elders in the Nkhoma Synod, before 1956 the three elders were appointed as executive members of the Council of Congregations, and later the Presbytery committee. It is interesting that it became an oral tradition that a church elder could not be appointed to a position of either a moderator or a clerk even if an has all the necessary qualifications to the work.¹³¹

Between 1956 and 1964 two elders were appointed on the Moderamen Committee as executive members.¹³² Article 1X.4 of the 1956 Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod stipulated that

‘There shall be a Moderamen of the Nkhoma Synod. The Moderamen will consist of namely Moderator, Vice Moderator, General Secretary and Junior Clerk. The Moderator and Vice Moderator and Junior Clerk will be elected by the Synod and will remain in the office until the next meeting of the Nkhoma Synod.’

Before 1964 the Synod rescinded its decision to appoint church elders on the Moderamen members.¹³³ It was after nearly 26 years when the Synod started appointing elders as members is the Moderamen.

‘Elders on the Moderamen: The Synod rules that in accordance with that article IX.4 members of the Moderamen are chosen from their various duties. There is nothing which prevents elder from being chosen on the Moderamen.’¹³⁴

¹³¹ Minutes of the Council of Congregations 1920 page 7

¹³² S. 200 Minute of the Synod c.f article IX (4) of the constitution of Nkhoma Synod

¹³³ S. 200 Minute of the Synod 1964

¹³⁴ S. 1024 Minute of the Synod 1991

The Nkhoma Synod did not effect this minute until the early 1990s, meaning that the notion of clerocracy was not hereby structurally avoided. Thus, at its 1991 meeting the Synod resolved to have elders appointed on the Moderamen again.¹³⁵ At its next meeting in 1993 the Synod enacted:

‘The Synod indicated that a decision had already been made that any person with authority could be elected on Moderamen. Therefore there is no prohibition for church elders to be elected for this post. The Synod decided that the church elders should be two.’¹³⁶

At the same the Synod meeting Mr. M. Chiusiwa, an elder from Chinthembwe Congregation, was elected Vice Moderator and Mr. G. Sadyalunda Junior Clerk.¹³⁷ In 1997 the Synod decided that elders could not be elected to any position except as Executive members.¹³⁸ Since then elders have not been appointed to any position of the Moderamen, Synodical Committee and Synod, except being an executive member.

From what has been written above, it becomes clear that in its church polity discourse and practice particularly on the assemblies and leadership position in the first place, the Nkhoma Synod was conscious that the priority must be given to church government in assembly meaning that the church must make an attempt to ensure that no office as well as office bearer governs the church by himself or herself.

In the second place, although it seems several efforts were made to ensure that all form of personal hierarchy was prevented and avoided, although structurally there has been clerocracy and hierarchical tendencies. The discussion above has demonstrated that at a certain time the Synod tried to distance itself from the government of the church by the clergy (ordained leaders). But at another time the Church had a ‘clerocracy-the government by the ministers.

Article V of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1956 revised 1972) stipulates that ‘The Nkhoma Synod is however the final court of appeal except in so far as itself shall decide ...’ and this is an indication of the presence of hierarchy in the Church. Thus, the concept of parity which embraces equality in power and authority among all offices, all churches and all assemblies, no longer stand as one of the principles of Reformed church government. One

¹³⁵ S. 1024 Minute of the Nkhoma Synod 1991

¹³⁶ S. 2758 Minute of the Nkhoma Synod 1993

¹³⁷ S. 2758 Minutes of the Nkhoma Synod 1993

¹³⁸ S. 3015 Minute of the Nkhoma Synod 1997

could thus ask whether in its church polity and church government the Nkhoma Synod is more Scottish or Dutch Reformed.

6.3.4. General Synod: 'A Toothless Bulldog'

This section pays attention to the history of the General Synod of the CCAP particularly the nature of its authority. It concentrates on whether decisions of the General Synod had a final say and final authority over its own decisions.

We begin by defining the term 'general synod' or 'general assembly.' Vorster (2003:51) defines 'Synod Assembly' or 'General Synod' as a gathering of all churches. According to article 1.1.1 of the Constitution of the General Synod of the CCAP (2002), a General Assembly is a meeting of an equal number of representatives from all the established synods under the jurisdiction of the church.¹³⁹ Some Reformed Churches prefer to term major assembly from general synod (Van Dellen and Monsma 1964:207; Vorster 2003:51). The word General Synod is understood as if the major assembly has highest authority over other assemblies.

In Malawi, the first gathering of representatives from the synods was instituted in 1956 spontaneously with the formation of the Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma. In 1965 the General Synod comprised Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma and Harare following the entry of the latter joined the union. In 1984 the membership grew to five following the entry of the Zambia Synod of the CCAP (cf Chilenje 2007:2, 198).

With regard to organizational structure of the General Synod of the CCAP, its article VI.19 of 1956 Constitution stipulated,

'The Government of the Church in accordance with Presbyterian usage is committed to ministers and elder, dully associated in the courts of the Church. A. The Church recognizes one order of Ministry, the Presbyterate.'

Section 29 of the same article stated that the General Synod would consist of one minister and one elder representative of each 5000, or part therefore of the communicant membership of each Synod. The Executive or Standing Committee comprised The Moderator, the Vice Moderator, the Senior Clerk, the Junior Clerk (as Treasurer) and Deputy. The offices of the

¹³⁹ The CCAP General Synod renamed the General Assembly in 2002 (article 1:1.1 of the General Assembly of the CCAP (2002).

Junior and Deputy clerks were open for both the ministers and elders. Additions to these, there were also two ministers who represented each Synod.

According to article 10 of the Revised Constitution of the General Synod (now General Assembly (2002) the Executive Committee (the Standing committee) comprises of the Moderator, the Vice moderator, General Secretary, the Deputy Secretaries, ‘who shall be accounted as commissionaires of their Synods.’

At this point we now examine whether the General Synod had a veto of power over decisions of the Synods. The weak points of the authority of the General Synod (1956-2002) can be noted based on what was stipulated in the Constitution. To illustrate this point, it is important to start with the authority of the Synod of the CCAP starting from 1926. Article 2 of the 1924 Terms of Unions between the Blantyre Mission and Livingstonia stipulated, ‘That each Presbytery shall retain its present constitution.’ The article remained as it was when the Nkhoma Synod was joining the Synod of the CCAP in 1926.¹⁴⁰

Article V11 of the Constitution of the General Synod (1956) stipulated that Decisions of General Synod shall become acts governing the Church only after they have been agreed by all Synods, while article V of the Constitution of Nkhoma Synod (1972) clearly stipulates that ‘The Nkhoma Synod is however the final court of appeal except in so far as itself shall decide.’

Article 6.6 of the 2002 Constitution stipulated that

‘This highest Court of the church shall be called assembly which has authority to formulate policy for the church and to oversee and direct synods and lower courts.’
However General Assembly Synod as the Supreme Court of the Church, its decision will be final and will not subject to review by any other courts or body.’

The aimed at making a General Assembly a higher authority with a binding authority on the churches although this could not be possible. In its 2000-2010 Church Policy and Strategic plan document, the General Assembly admittedly stated that for a period of forty six years, i.e. from 1956 to 2002, it experienced many difficulties that challenged developments. In matters of church-polity discourse it was stated,

¹⁴⁰ Terms of Union Between the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian and the Presbytery of Nkhoma of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (1926)

‘In this period however, the Church has experienced conflicts and divisions between the Synods as well as frictions in mission work, boundary disputes and other problems. As a result of these conflicts the General Synod has surfaced lack of support from the Synods... lack of Constitutional power to resolve those conflicts... ‘

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It was further stated

‘...it is not the General Synod which has the final say but is the individual Synod i.e. each has vet of power over the resolutions of the General Synod. It is this veto power that has greatly contributed to the problems of unity and cooperation among the Synods...’¹⁴²

Stating the weakness of the General Assembly, the Document went on explaining:

‘what it means is that if a resolution is passed censuring one Synod or directing one Synod to do certain things, if that Synod is not happy with that resolution by simply withholding its ratification and that resolution becomes null and void. It is the Synods therefore which Supreme Courts are for the Church and not the General Synod.’¹⁴³

What is interesting in this is that although for four and half decades the General Assembly was legally considered as the only Supreme Court of appeal for the entire CCAP, it remained a weak governing body in the Church for the above given reasons. One of the root causes might be that there was lack of confessional-like minded unity among the Synods which constituted implying that the General Synod had been a mere federation of churches without confessional unity or a body without a binding character.

In the same Policy (section 8), the decisions of the General Synod did not have a binding character on the life of the Church. As the result it became what it described as ‘a toothless bulldog’ implying that its decision did not have a binding character in the CCAP or its decision did not have authority on the Church.

In conclusion, it may be noted that the main reason for the installment of the General Synod later the General Assembly was the emphasis on the concept of unity and diversity. On one hand the General Assembly was meant to express the unity of the churches that trace

¹⁴¹ The 2000-2010 Church Policy and Strategic Plan for General Synod page 5

¹⁴² The 2000-2010 Church Policy and Strategic Plan for General Synod page 5

¹⁴³ The 2000-2010 Church Policy and Strategic Plan for General Synod page 5

their origin to the 16th century Reformed churches and above all the cultural and ethnic differences as well as to express the diversity between the Scottish tradition and Dutch Reformed tradition. However, this negatively affected the power and authority of the General Assembly because it did not have a veto of power over decisions of the Synods. In other words, it remained what it is described as a toothless bull dog (see the previous paragraph above).

6.4. Administrative Posts and Leadership Positions: Church Political Developments

Having highlighted some developments that occurred in the history of church offices, assemblies and positions, in this section we continue examining some historical developments that took place in the administrative posts within the Nkhoma Synod. We shall pay out attention to the leadership and authority which these administrative officers had over matters of the Church (the Nkhoma Synod).

6.4.1. The Mission Superintendent: Head of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission?

The post of Mission Superintendent was a full time appointment in Nkhoma Synod (Pauw 1980:393). The Mission Superintendent was addressed as *Mutu wa Misyoni ya Adachi* (the Head of DRCM). By virtue of being in this position he was the Chairman of the Mission Council. The Mission Superintendent was charged with the duties and responsibilities as summarized below:

1. To coordinate the work of all the activities of the stations, institutions and departments (extracts of the Minutes of Nkhoma Presbytery 17-20 August 1927:7)
2. To be a link between the GMC of the DRC in South Africa and the Mission Council of the DRCM in Malawi (c.f. Bolink 1967:90, 191)
3. To place missionaries and teacher-evangelists at their places of work (Labuschagne 2002:61)
4. To implement policies of the Mission Council of the DRC in South Africa (Bolink 1967:91).
5. To prepare and send regular reports on the progress of the mission and send them to the Cape Synod of the DRC in South Africa (cf. Pauw 1980:162ff).

The post of the Superintendent of the Mission was a full time and permanent job salaried by the Mission Council of the DRCM and later the Cape Synod of the DRC in South Africa. When the post was fully established, the Superintendent was allotted the biggest house at Nkhoma Mission Headquarters (cf. Pauw 1980:394). He was neither a member of the Council of Congregations, the Presbytery of Nkhoma nor the later the Synod of Nkhoma. This implies that the Superintendent of the Mission could not hold any voting executive or legislative powers in any assemblies although he could attend the meetings as ex-official. Mainly he was an administrative officer of the DRCM.

Three remarks must be made regarding what has been stated above on the post of the Superintendent. First the figure below indicates that the Head of the Mission was not appointed for a period of time. It however seems that the office of the chairman of the Mission ceased when the meetings had ended. Perhaps the understanding was that one was the chairperson during the meeting meaning that the post was not a rank or status or an office in its ordinary sense but a function.

Second being addressed Head of the Mission some might think that he carried out his duties in dictatorial or autocratic way or sometimes taking decisions without consulting any person or any governing body like the office that came after the office of the Superintendent was dropped (see below).

6.4.2. The Liaison Officer: An Ambassador of the DRC in the Nkhoma Synod?

‘The Synod said that there is difference. An Ambassador works for a government and a Liaison officer is responsible for the work (correspondence) in the office of the Church. In the past there was a Mission Superintendent at Nkhoma. When the work done by the Mission was transferred to the indigenous Church, General Secretary was appointed who also took the place of the Superintendent. But it is still necessary that there should be a Liaison Officer who would help and guide the missionaries who came to work here in our Country.’¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ S. 1411 Minute of the Nkhoma Synod 1979. In seems this minute was enacted to respond to reactions or misunderstanding within the Nkhoma Synod.

The post of the Liaison Officer was created in 1962 alongside the following events: the institution of the post of the General Secretary as well as establishment of the General Administrative Committee 1962 and the handing over of the leadership to the indigenous leadership.¹⁴⁵

This post was established following the approval of the Agreement between Nkhoma Synod and the DRC in 1962. Part of the Agreement read, 'There would be Liaison Officer, who would be a missionary and a member of the personnel supplied by the DRC in South Africa appointed in consultation with Nkhoma Synod.'¹⁴⁶

The first Liaison officer was Rev. Gawie Hugo and was succeeded by his brother-in-law the Rev. Christie Barger who was also succeeded by the following Rev. J.D.H. Steytler, Rev. A.C. Human and finally Rev. Dr. Hennie Van Deventer in 1991.¹⁴⁷

The Liaison Officer was a mediator between the DRC in South Africa and Nkhoma Synod in Malawi. It was a permanent and full-time job and charged with the following functions:¹⁴⁸

1. To promote relations between Nkhoma Synod and the DRC in South Africa
2. To arouse interest of Christians in South Africa in the Work done by Nkhoma Synod
3. To help and guide new missionaries who came to Malawi.
4. To serve as co-opted member of all executive Committees of Nkhoma Synod
5. To be a channel of communication between the personnel from the DRC and Nkhoma Synod in matters of concern by the two Churches

¹⁴⁵ When the Mission Council was dissolved in 1962, it was replaced by another committee called General Administrative Council. The Committee comprised the General Secretary, the Senior Clerk, and the Education Secretary, all heads of departmental committees, Liaison Officer, and Synod Treasurer as representatives of the Cape Synod of the DRC. It was founded to act as a channel through which Nkhoma Synod and the DRC in South Africa would carry out their joint missionary work and to administer all the operations of departments and institutions and also to provide auxiliary services on behalf of Nkhoma Synod (Pauw 1980:391). Its Executive Committee was constituted by the chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, vice-secretary, and committee members. Pauw (1980:392) observed that, "...the GAC was such a strong committee with so much influence and power that there was a danger of it dominating even Synod itself, thus undermining the authority of the later." It was dissolved in 1972. Some of its responsibilities were given to the Synodical Committee and to the new Committee to be formed to replace it. ves of the DRC were to be integrated into the new Committee (cf. Pauw 1980:392).

¹⁴⁶ In 1979, there was a debate on what should be the right name for a person who was to be appointed as mediator between Nkhoma Synod and the Reformed Church in South Africa. Some thought that Liaison officer would be the most suitable one others were of opinion that the person should be called ambassador. In its Minute 1411, Nkhoma Synod noted that an ambassador works for government and the Liaison Officer works for the Church.

¹⁴⁷ Minutes 5582, 5625 of the Synodical Committee,

¹⁴⁸ The Deed of Agreement between Nkhoma Synod and the DRC, 1971.

6. To act as chairman of the Personnel Committee
7. To send regular reports to the DRC and Nkhoma Synod

From this, it can be seen that the Liaison officer was not a governmental post although in being the mediator between the Cape Synod of the DRC in South Africa and the CCAP Nkhoma Synod in Malawi, the officer was more or less an ambassadorial officer involved in governmental responsibilities. In other words, it may be stated that the Liaison Officer was an eye and ear of the Synod of the DRC in the Nkhoma Synod although he was a spiritual father among the DRC missionaries in Malawi.

6.4.2.3. *The General Secretary: Administrative Officer?*

‘...from a Biblical and Reformed point of view-there is only one Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. Hence one of the most fundamental motives in the Reformation had been to do away with a human Headship as exemplified in the Pope. No Moderator or General Secretary should ever assume the position of or be called head of the Church and for one member of the Church to hold position of power and authority in a permanent or semi-permanent capacity could, bring this about’ (Pauw 1980:394)

Another important post which was created in 1962 was the post of the General Secretary. The post was created in accordance with article 1X.3 of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1956) which stipulated, ‘There shall be a Moderamen of the Nkhoma Synod. The Moderamen will consist of the Moderator, Vice Moderator, General Secretary and General Secretary and Junior Clerk.’

The creation of the post of the General Secretary was not effected immediately after the Synod of Nkhoma was established in 1956. It was after seven years (1962) when the Superintendent of the Mission was dropped that the post was created. The 1962 Deed of the Agreement between the DRC in South Africa and the Nkhoma Synod in Malawi read, ‘...When the work done by the Mission was transferred to the indigenous Church, General Secretary who also took the place of the Superintendent.’¹⁴⁹ In his comment on the post, Pauw (1980:394) writes:

‘This development came about partly because of precedent already set by the other two Synods in the CCAP and partly because the erroneous notion existed that this

¹⁴⁹ S 1141 minute of the Nkhoma Synod 1979.

General Secretary was to replace the former Superintendent of the Mission which has permanent and full time appointment (even the house former occupied by the Superintendent of the Mission at Nkhoma was allotted to the new general Secretary.¹⁵⁰

Perhaps what Pauw intends to say is that it was a mere coincidence that the last few Superintendents occupied the particular house which later became the house for the General Secretary. Prior to this, he (1980:393) made a general comment about the nature of the post of the General Secretary:

‘... an interesting aspect of the new order which was introduced in 1962 was the creation of the post of the General Secretary. This was the semi-permanent full time appointment replaced the former Clerk or Secretary of the Synod.’

An addition to being a semi-permanent full time post article 1X of the Constitution of the Nkhoma Synod (1956) clearly stipulated that the term of office for the General Secretary would be two years while article 1X.4 of the Revised Constitution (1972) of the same Church stated that ‘The General Secretary will be elected by the Nkhoma Synod and will remain in office for six years’ meaning after that he would retire after the stated period.

Figure 5: Names of Malawians who Served as General Secretaries¹⁵¹

Name of Office bearers	Year elected	Year retired	Duration (years)	Number of Terms
1. Rev. KJ Mgawi	1962	1968	6	One
2. Rev. Y. A Chiyenda	1968	1979	9	One and half
3. Rev. I. M Kainja	1979	1981	2	One third
4. Rev. H.A Kankhwani	1981	1987	6	One sixth
5. Rev. C.L Chimkoka	1987	1988	1	One sixth
6. Rev. Y A .Chienda	1988	1992	3	Half

¹⁵⁰ In 1962, the time came for Church and all these auxiliary departments to be handed over to the Church. This is, perhaps, where things went wrong. The presumed powerful position of the Mission Superintendent was transferred to the Secretary of the General Administration Council (GAC) [a body founded to replace the Mission Council]. The same person accidentally happened to be the Synod Secretary as well. In 1972 the GAC was dissolved and the running of the Church and the running of all departments and institutions were drawn together under one powerful General Secretary and one body, the Synod and its Synodical Committee.

¹⁵¹ This list has been compiled from an unpublished copy of ‘Moyo ndi Ntchito za Abusa ndi Kayendetsedwe ka Mpingo’ by Dr K. Mgawi (1996:14).

7. Rev. I.M. Kainja	1992	1995	3	Half
8. Rev. A.A. Sasu	1995	2001	6	One
9. Rev. Dr W. R. Kawale	2001	2007	6	One

The purpose for limiting the period of service for the General Secretary was probably to prevent or avoid the hierarchical tendency or a dictatorial behaviour of those who would be appointed to the post although this tendency was not avoided as far as the history of this office is concerned. We read that the General Secretary replaced the former Superintendent of the Mission which has permanent and full time appointment and the house former occupied by the Superintendent of the Mission at Nkhoma was allotted to the new general Secretary (Pauw 1980:393).’ The General Secretary occupied the most spacious house in which the Superintendent lived at Nkhoma Synod headquarters. Occupying the house which used to be of the Head of the Mission, the General Secretary might have an implication in the Church Polity and Church government of the Nkhoma Synod. Pauw further stated

‘... It perhaps also satisfied a more deep seated desire in the Church within the Africa traditional context for a figure they could regard as their leader and to whom power is more less willing delegated. This desire to create an office akin to that of a bishop can be appreciated especially in the context of the Church in Africa, but perhaps not as a permanent appointment and with the emphasis on pastoral and spiritual functions of such an office-a kind of spiritual father figure’ Pauw (1980:394)

The most important difference between the Superintendent of the Mission and the General Secretary was that unlike the latter, the former held no legislative or voting right on the Moderamen, Synodical Committee or Synod while the latter. Pauw (1980:393) concluded that

‘As a matter of fact, this office of General Secretary combined with Synod Secretary was, from a Reformed as Presbyterian point of view, something an alien. In neither the DRC nor in the Church of Scotland does this exist. The rudiments of the Reformed and Presbyterian order do not provide for any such permanent or semi-permanent office, which is akin to Episcopal.

In his comparison with the Church Polity of the DRC, Pauw (1980:393) recalled that for the administrative side of the Church the Reformed Churches usually appointed an administrative

officer which is a permanent and a full time post-as an employee does not have session with voting powers on either Synod or Synodical Committee meetings. There must be a reason why such an employee could not have session on the Moderamen Synodical Council and Synod. Probably he can dominate or wield power and authority similar to that of the bishop in other Episcopal circles

In 1971 Mvera Presbytery sent the overture to the Synod requesting it to consider dropping the word General Secretary and replace it with Administrative Officer.

*'Mlembi sayenera kuyitanidwa a asamatchedwe mlembi wa zonse koma Administrative officer amene adzakhalenso wopanda ulamuliro pa msonkhano wa Bungwe lo Tsogolera (The Secretary must not be called General Secretary but administrative offer who would not have any right and authority on the Moderamen.'*¹⁵²

The Synod rejected the Mvera Presbytery proposal. At its meeting in 1977, the Synod decided to amend its Constitution and introduced the office of the Senior Clerk and junior clerk admittedly said:

*'In view of changing circumstance, the Synod amends the Constitution article 1X as follows: The post of the General Secretary shall be a permanent appointment and not an open election. (2) there must be (in addition) be a Senior Clerk and Assistant Clerk (Scriba) of Synod elected at each meeting of Synod, eligible from voting ministers at Synod (i.e all ministers with congregations).'*¹⁵³

In 1985 it defined the roles of the General Secretary and added that 'the General Secretary shall be carrying out duties under the instruction of the Senior Clerk and will attend meetings of Moderamen, Synodical Committee and Synod only in advisory capacity; all correspondences will be addressed to the Senior Clerk of the Synod not to the General Secretary.'¹⁵⁴

Some researchers (i.e. including those cited above) have been very critical of the role and authority of the General Secretary in the Nkhoma Synod. In his continued comment Pauw (1980:394) wrote:

¹⁵² MV. 261 Minute of Mvera Presbytery 1971.

¹⁵³ S. 1169 minute of the Nkhoma Synod 1977.

¹⁵⁴ S. 1828.2 minute of Synod 1985.

‘Perhaps here the Mission is more to blame for so long having remained a powerful and authoritative structure, independent of the Church. When the Mission was dissolved and the Church took over work, the powerful and influential status of Superintendent was assumed by the General Secretary on assumption that the Church had now taken over the Mission. ... It would have been easier to avoid such an unfortunate development since the Church would have been in a position of greater authority and would have required the status symbol of a General Secretary to prove its newly acquired power.’

In addition Joda-Mbewe (2002:296) pointed out that the ‘...role of the General Secretary was very powerful, equal to that of bishop in other quarters: He had ad powers to make decisions, without referring them to any person in the church.’ He (2002:296) was of the opinion that the General Secretary must be that of coordinator – providing a wider view of mission, making connections to resources, and making technical assistance available for launching new ventures.

Here we see that although the post of the General Secretary was instituted to imitate the post in other Synods within the CCAP, as well as for the purpose of continuity, it created the practice of a higher office in the Nkhoma Synod. Thus, by the virtue of being called the ‘General Secretary’ the one occupying this post might have a feeling that he possessed power and authority hovering above other officers and the Church as a whole. Similarly, by constitutionally elected as a full time worker with power and authority on Synodical Committees, the General Secretary was more or less a Head of the Church. To solve the problem the name General Secretary could have been changed to Administrative officer, thus signifying the fact that the person is an employee of the Church.

6.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed the following questions: Which kinds of offices formally constituted the government of the local church in the Nkhoma Synod? There are two answers: According to the Confession the government of the local church comprises the offices of the minister, the elders and deacons while the Church’s constitution stipulate that there is one office, i.e. the office of the elder divided into teaching elder and ruling elders. The conclusion has been that although there is such a difference there is some congruity between the Church’s Confession and Constitution. It has been noted, however, that there are

tendencies of clerocracy and clericalism within the Nkhoma Synod because church elders and deacons would not be allowed to hold meetings without the presence of the ministers.

A second question: Were the assemblies arranged hierarchically? If the answer is positive the further question may arise whether there has been an impact of the hierarchy of assemblies on church polity discourse and practice within the Nkhoma Synod? It was observed that the Nkhoma Synod had adapted the Episcopalism of assemblies in which the Synod had the highest authority and was considered the final ecclesiastical court of appeal implying that the decisions of the Synod were not subject to any appeal and the authority of the Church was central in the Synod. As the result, the local churches were not directly governed by Christ through His word and Spirit but by the Synod through office bearers.

A third question: Were the orders of the offices of the assemblies and administrative posts in line with the Reformed tradition? The answer is partly *yes* and partly *no*. It is partly *yes* because in the chapter it has been discovered that there was ‘no distinction between the Presbytery or Synod moderator and other ministers who are not moderators. No one has authority over other ministers.’¹⁵⁵ The answer is *yes* because of some Episcopal tendencies that characterized the administrative system of the Church in which the General Secretary acted in dictatorial or autocratic way.

The findings may lead us to ask the following general questions: What was the identity of the church polity and church government of the Nkhoma Synod? Was it Scottish Presbyterian or Dutch Reformed? On one hand, the church polity of the Nkhoma Synod is Dutch Reformed because of the Church’s historical link with the Dutch Reformed Church of the Cape Synod of the DRC in South Africa as well as because it inherited the Reformed Synod symbols of unity. On other hand, because of its association with Scottish Presbyterian Churches, as well as the hierarchical and clericalist tendencies, the Church’s polity is Scottish Presbyterian.

The next chapter will draw some conclusions from the previous chapters of this study. It will point a way forward toward critical examination and evaluation of the Church government in the light of the scriptural truth that only Jesus is head of his church, and in being the head of the church Christ executes his rule and authority through his Word and Spirit using offices of the people.

¹⁵⁵ Kuunika October 1962 page 4.

Chapter 7: Concluding Remarks

7.1 Introduction

The means by which Jesus Christ exercises his headship, i.e. his leadership, rulership and sovereignty in and over the Church, and what the *Zolamulira* stipulates regarding the position of Christ in the government of the church, have been key issues of concern through this study. This chapter draws some concluding remarks from the pervious chapters.

7.2. How Christ rules the Church

We have noted with Calvin (Institutes of Christian Religion IV, Ill, 1) that Jesus Christ alone must rule the Church, and that He must hold the highest authority in the Church through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit using the services of office bearers. What is interesting is that in the Reformed tradition there is a strong emphasis on the interconnectedness of the Word of God, the Holy Spirit and the government of the Church.

Christ governs the Church through His Word when office bearers persuade each other in the assemblies on the basis of the Word of God, taking decisions in accordance with the Word of God after being convinced by the Holy Spirit. Christ's leadership and reign in the church takes places first of all directly in the heart of believers and through the service of the office bearers who obey the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Thus, the function and the role of the church office bearers as they associate in the assemblies of the church is not to rule the church but to create space and become channels for the rule, reign and dominion of Christ in the Church. This is perhaps the reason why Reformed church governments take as their departure point the rule of Christ through his Word and the Holy Spirit using services of office bearers.

On the contrary, in separating the Christ's government from the Word of God and the Holy Spirit has the implications in church polity discourse and practice that the Church is merely a human institution and its government takes places by humans in the name of Christ. In this regard, the authority with which the office bearers in the assemblies act is not closely

linked to the Word and the Holy Spirit and that the government of the church does not take place in obedience to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ.

7.3. Christ's Government through office bearers: A Theological Deficiency and its Implications

Theologically speaking the fact that the preamble omits the truth that Christ governs the Church through the Holy Spirit can imply that the Holy Spirit is no longer seen as Sovereign Ruler in the Church as well as a co-equal and co-worker with the Father and the Son in the Church. Therefore there is the danger that the ecclesiology of the Nkhoma Synod separates Christology and Pneumatology.

Ecclesiologically speaking, omitting the fact that Christ governs the Church through the Word and Holy Spirit denotes that Pneumatocracy is separated from church polity and church government and implies that the organizational life of the Church is a mere human affair. Furthermore it is an indication that on the one hand the Christocracy is separated from Pneumatocracy and on the other hand the ecclesiology is not linked to the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

From the overview presented in this study, we can conclude that the Church needs to be ordered following the principles that are found in the Scriptures, and that the delegates at the official meetings of the Church need to persuade each other from the Word of God and that decision should be made in accordance to it.

7.4. Church Office Bearers are not to be equated with Christ

In stipulating that Jesus Christ executes his government through office bearer without mentioning the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, the danger also arises that in the church polity and the church government of the Nkhoma Synod, Jesus Christ is equated with the office bearers implying that the rule and authority of Christ becomes that of the office bearers. Sometimes it is uncritically understood as if Christ fully transfers his authority to the offices which govern the church.

The direct result that comes out of the view above is that the church offices are viewed in terms of status, rank and dignity; the priority of one or of some offices and the

conviction of lower and higher offices are held unto and the lower office are reduced as assistants to the higher office. Subsequently no room is left for the development of other offices as full ministries to serve the reign and the rule of Christ. This can result in a situation where those who claim to hold high office claim the possession of unchallengeable power and authority in the church and behave ecclesiastically as bishops or secularly as chief executives of companies, often taking decisions independently without consulting any person or responsible committee within the Church.

There is also a danger of clericalism in the Nkhoma Synod because the office of the minister is separated from the congregation and is regarded as the representative of the presbytery and synod which are considered as higher ecclesiastical courts. Subsequently the Nkhoma Synod is organized in a top-to-down way, implying that the church council has no significant right in matters of church polity and church government. Thus, in the understanding of the Nkhoma Synod, the seat of the church authority is centred in the highest court (synod), a tendency that has made the local church court to be regarded as lowest ecclesiastical court without any significant right in its own affairs.

7.5. The Church Polity of the Nkhoma Synod: Dutch Reformed or More Scottish Presbyterian?

We need to make a concluding remark on the identity of the church government of the Nkhoma Synod. It has been noted that the Church hardly engaged sufficiently with the Reformed tradition in its church polity discourse, as found in sources such as the Three Reformed Symbols of Unity. The fact that the Preamble of the *Zolamulira* fails to stipulate or omits that Christ's rule in the Church takes form through his Word and Spirit is an indication that the church government of the Nkhoma Synod is not strictly Dutch Reformed but more Scottish Presbyterian.

There are four important factors that influenced the Nkhoma Synod to adapt the Scottish Presbyterianism and not to maintain the Dutch Reformed Church Polity. First, the DRC missionaries who founded and worked in the Nkhoma Synod, and later the Church's indigenous leadership, had uncritically accepted and maintained the Scottish Presbyterian system of church government. Second, the Church did not make use of the sources of Reformed church polity which it had inherited from the DRC. Third, the CCAP, which the

Church joined in 1926, was and is dominated by Scottish Presbyterianism, hence it was difficult for the Church to retain the identity of its Church polity and church government. Fourth, the Church did not have time to examine and evaluate critically its church polity discourse and practice.

7.6. Toward Revisiting the Church Polity Discourse and Practice of the Nkhoma Synod

Having made some remarks on the church polity discourse and the practice of the Nkhoma Synod from an ecclesiological point of view, the conclusions above must not be viewed negatively but should be used as an eye opener as well as departure point in calling for a critical assessment, examination and evaluation of the Church's polity documents and church political developments in the light of the tenets or principles of Reformed church polity – particularly the ones which asserts that Christ is the Head of the Church and that his rule takes place through his Word and the Holy Spirit using the services of office bearers.

Appendix 1: Showing the neighbouring countries of Malawi



(Downloaded from <http://www.unmalawi.org/images/malawi-map.gif>)

Appendix 2: Map of Malawi showing three Political Regional boundaries



(Downloaded from <http://www.africaguide.com/country/malawi/regions.htm>)

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