LAITY EMPOWERMENT WITH REGARD TO THE MISSIONAL TASK OF THE CCAP IN MALAWI

by

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DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof and that I have not previously in its entirety, or in part, submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents the empowerment of the laity in the church as a strategic key activity to bring transformation within the Malawian Church and its context. It is an attempt to answer the question: How can the laity of the CCAP Nkhoma Synod be empowered to become missional agents of transformation? The researcher contends that, if the clerical leadership can engage faithfully in the task of equipping all members for service in the Church and community, a phenomenal improvement in the quality of life in Malawi can take place.

The first chapter serves as an introduction to the whole work. It describes the problem in three related questions, all of which demand a practical theological response to the described scenario. Along with other introductory essentials, this chapter establishes the epistemological framework for doing theology in congregations as overarching for the study. It basically defines theology in a practical way.

Chapter 2 describes the physical features of Malawi, as well as a historical background of the Church in Malawi. While it presents a general historical background, it pays special attention to the contributions of the laity in the development of the Malawian Church. The role of the laity in Church development and growth throughout the Church's history is quite remarkable, must be appreciated, and actually deserves a special study.

Chapter 3 deals with the analysis of the context in which the Malawian Church exists and ministers. It exposes the suffering caused by poverty and HIV/AIDS, that people in the Church and society experience. The situation, as described, provides the motivation and driving force for this study.

The identity analysis of the Nkhoma Synod dominates Chapter 4, which discusses the influence of identity on the way the Church equips its members. The picture that it portrays proves that identity should be used to promote empowerment of the laity.

Chapter 5 discusses the Church's missional nature and explains the Church's position in the society, as well as its biblical mandate to serve.

This discussion is taken further in Chapter 6, which deals with the specific role of the Church in sustainable development. The Church, with its missional nature, is viewed as a capable catalyst and participant in community development.

Chapter 7 develops a detailed explanation of the laity's empowerment as a key activity of the Church in its practice of theology. This empowerment is approached from different perspectives and also receives an African view. This chapter prepares the research with the basic theory used in the case study that Chapter 8 presents.

The final chapter summarizes the whole discussion as a way of commenting on the findings that climax in the case study. This study asserts that, if the clerical leadership in the Malawian Church in the Nkhoma Synod can empower the laity and utilize their spiritual gifts, then the missional identity of the Church can come to the fore.

OPSOMMING

Die tesis handel oor die bemagtiging van lidmate as 'n strategiese sleutel tot transformasie binne die Malawiese Kerk en sy konteks. Dit is 'n poging om die vraag te beantwoord: Hoe kan die lidmate van die CCAP Nkhoma Sinode bemagtig word om missionêre agente van transformasie te wees? Die navorser beweer dat, indien die leierskap getrou die taak kan uitvoer om alle lidmate toe te rus vir diens in die Kerk en die gemeenskap, 'n merkwaardige verbetering in die lewenskwaliteit in Malawi kan plaasvind.

Die eerste hoofstuk dien as 'n inleiding tot die hele werk. Dit beskryf die probleem in drie verwante vrae wat al drie 'n praktiese teologiese reaksie tot die scenario wat beskryf is, bied. Tesame met ander inleidende noodsaaklikhede, verduidelik hierdie hoofstuk die praxis metodologie van praktiese teologie.

Hoofstuk 2 beskryf Malawi en vertel die geskiedenis van die kerk. Terwyl dit 'n algemene historiese agtergrond bied, skenk dit spesiale aandag aan die bydraes van lidmate in die ontwikkeling van die Malawiese Kerk. Lidmate se rol in die Kerk se ontwikkeling en groei is werklik merkwaardig, moet waardeer word, en verdien eintlik 'n spesiale studie.

Hoofstuk 3 handel oor die analise van die konteks waarin die Malawiese Kerk bestaan en dien. Dit toon die lyding, veroorsaak deur armoede en MIV/VIGS, wat mense in die Kerk en samelewing verduur. Die situasie is die motivering en dryfveer vir hierdie studie.

Die identiteitsanalise van die Nkhoma Sinode is die inhoud van Hoofstuk 4. Die stelling wat dit maak, is dat identiteit gebruik moet word om die bemagtiging van lidmate te bevorder.

Hoofstuk 5 bespreek die kerk se missionêre wese en verduidelik die kerk se posisie in die samelewing asook sy Bybelse mandaat om te dien.

Hierdie bespreking word verder gevoer in Hoofstuk 6 wat handel oor die rol van die Kerk om volhoubare ontwikkeling te verseker. Die Kerk, met sy missionêre wese, word gesien as 'n belangrike rolspeler in gemeenskapsontwikkeling.

Hoofstuk 7 verduidelik hoe lidmate bemagtig word om die *missio Dei* te volvoer. In teologiese teorie en die bedieningpspraktyk behoort dit tot die wese van kerkwees. Bemagtiging kan vanaf verskillende perspektiewe benader word, maar 'n kontekstuee, eie, Afrika benadering, word voorgestaan. Dié hoofstuk is voorbereidend tot die beskrywing van die proses wat die navorser gevolg het om die teorie in die CCAP gemeente Nkhoma toe te pas en te evalueer: Hoofstuk 8.

Die slothoofstuk som die hele bespreking op as 'n manier om kommentaar te lewer op die bevindinge wat hul klimaks in die gevallestudie bereik. Hierdie studie bewys dat waar kerklike leierskap lidmate bemagtig en hul gawes benut, die missionêre identiteit van die Kerk daadwerklik sigbaar word.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father Eneya Msangaambe whose enthusiasm to serve the Lord and the church as a layman, has inspired me as an ordained clergy to admire and respect the role of the laity in my ministry over years. He represents many such laypersons in the church.

Glory be to God!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE:

AN INTRODUCTION TO, AND LAYOUT OF, THE RESEARCH

1.1   Preamble

The laity forms the major part of the church world-wide. Therefore an early presupposition can be made that, if the church is to make any difference in the world, it has to depend on committed and informed lay people. While the church's clerical members are recognized and respected for determining the direction of the church, especially in Africa, the church's life depends mostly on the quality of the laity. An African proverb says that *it is not the one who beats the drum that makes the dance but the one who sends the dust into the air*.[1] The point is not to belittle the trained ordained clergy who *beat the drum* and set the rhythm in the church, but it emphasizes the laity's significant role in the faithfulness of the church.

In connection with the above significant role, Congregational Studies have insisted that our challenge today is to move from being a church with a mission to being a missional church (Guder *et al.* 1998:6). The church's missional character should take its course in the activities of lay people who easily interact with society at large. This underlines the fact that, when lay people are empowered to become missional, the church becomes missional.

In the global ecclesiastical search for an answer to the many sociological, theological and economic questions, the Malawian Church is not spared. It exists amid day-to-day human suffering caused by poverty, hunger, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, moral decay, diminishing spirituality and many other problems. Today, there is a need for the church to engage a multiple approach in the work of its mission, as Pauw (1980:146) notes:

> It is a *sine qua non* that the task of the church in the world cannot be limited to a mere verbal proclamation of the Gospel. Taking incentive from the work and teaching of Jesus Christ, the church should

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[1] *Mwini gule ndi uyo apalasa fumbi osati wang'oma*. A Chewa proverb which literally means that the most entertaining person in any dance is the one who is dancing, not the drummer, regardless of the fact that both are needed for the dance.

approach man not as an isolated individual, but as a person who is rooted in a particular and complete life situation. This situation cannot be ignored when proclaiming the Gospel to him. The problem lies in defining the relationship between proclaiming the Gospel and dealing with [people] and [their] needs.

To address these problems and needs, or part thereof, there is need for a practical theological approach in which an inquiry should be made to establish the direction of the Church in Malawi. Of course, in their invitation to Congregational Studies, Carroll *et al.* (1986:8) remarked that, in the broadest sense, everyone does "research." That is, everyone gathers information, tests it against experience, and acts in a way that seems appropriate to the information gathered. Carroll *et al.* (1986:8) assert, "This kind of research is so frequent and natural that it is part of our taken-for-granted routines." This dissertation calls for a deliberate and focused research on the possibility of the lay people's systematic empowerment in the Malawian Church.

1.2 MOTIVATION

In the light of this need to empower the laity, the rest of this dissertation will focus on grassroots research within the Church in Malawi. To begin with, it is important to offer a brief explanation of what influenced the undertaking of this research. What is the researcher's motivation that led to his decision to do this study?

1.2.1 Why undertake this study?

Firstly, the quest to undertake this particular research developed through the researcher's exposure to Congregational Studies. The motivational story that led to the research started in 1999, when the researcher was introduced to the field of Congregational Studies at a seminar organized in Malawi by Nkhoma Institute for Continued Theological Training (NIFCOTT) and facilitated by the Faculty of Theology of Stellenbosch University. For a full week, a module in Congregational Studies, based on Nancy T. Ammerman *et al.*'s book, *Studying congregations* (1998), was presented. It inspired the researcher to take a further interest in this field of study. He discovered a

way of doing theology that makes sense in the lives of the ordinary members of a congregation, and with direct relevance to the Malawian setting. Since 1999, the researcher has developed both a theoretical and practical interest in Congregational Studies.

Secondly, the researcher's exposure to Malawian life at grassroots has been a primary reason to undertake this research. This exposure has motivated the researcher to search for answers to common problems that an average Malawian experiences within, and outside of, congregational experience. The researcher has been an ordained minister in the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) for more than ten years. He was born and raised in a rural setting in Malawi and grew up in a society where people die of hunger and are deprived of their humanity due to poverty and suffering in general. As the son of a CCAP Church elder, he was raised in a strict Reformed Christian family and grew up watching, from within, the activities of the Church and its leadership. Moving to semi-urban and later to urban areas increased his interest in the life of the Church and its calling. The researcher once was a member of an urban congregation, Masintha CCAP in Lilongwe. As an "ordinary" lay member of the Church, he participated in the life of the Church as a Sunday school teacher, a choir member and a youth leader. For a period of four years, he was part of the lay leadership in a rural congregation, the Chawa CCAP in Dedza, where he served as a deacon and later as a Church elder. These experiences taught him that it is due to poor lay leadership that the laity are being underutilized in both rural and urban congregations. After his basic theological and pastoral training, the researcher served as a Church minister in a rural area, the Chiwe CCAP Congregation, Lilongwe West Rural, for some years. During this period, he developed a keen interest in training lay leaders for specific tasks within a congregation and also took a special interest in developing various ministries among the laity that led to the development of a successful youth ministry in that congregation within two years.

As an employed Christian in both urban and semi-urban settings, and through ministerial training and pastoral experience in a rural area, the

researcher gradually became aware that the Church could contribute effectively towards the alleviation of suffering. With his teachers' training background, he has been able, throughout his post-college experience, to make reasonable evaluations of his surrounding circumstances and beyond. Since 1999, the researcher has been training candidates on a full-time basis for the ministry in his Church (the Nkhoma Synod). Part of his work has been to organise in-service training and refresher courses for ministers who serve in congregations. This gave him a chance to attain feedback on the current trends in the life of congregations in both urban and rural areas. The researcher once was the Chairman of the Nkhoma Synod Education Committee and was also privileged to serve as a Synod Moderator for two successive terms. These positions assisted him greatly in his continuous reflection on what is happening in congregations and what they expect in terms of the laity's involvement. Against this background, the researcher became convinced that the Church could contribute more towards the development of participatory life in the congregations and to the alleviation of suffering. It all resulted in this attempt to design a practical theological theory aimed at empowering the laity in the Malawian Church, as a means of its missional role to address suffering.

1.2.2 The role of Congregational Studies

At this stage, it is important to motivate why Congregational Studies are crucial to this research. Carroll *et al.* (1986:8) mention the following:

- Congregational Studies can confer a balance and sense of proportion often absent from a congregation's spontaneous self-description.
- Congregational Studies can also help congregations to solve multiple, seemingly unrelated problems by uncovering *structures* and *patterns* in the apparent confusion (i.e. the systematic review of a congregation's past successes and failures, the illumination of its values, and the mapping of the styles of behaviour that hold it together may help it to make decisions consistent with its proven strengths and real priorities).

- Congregational Studies reveal what the congregation does not want to see. (While such revelations may be painful, being aware of the undesirable patterns enables the congregation to deal with them in a constructive fashion.)
- Congregational Studies open the quest for congregational self-understanding of corporate participation.

Carroll *et al.* (1986:8) conclude that, through methodical study, the congregation has access to a procedure conducted in broad daylight, and, whatever such study reveals is the shared property of the community. In the broadest sense then, one can conceive of disciplined Congregational Studies as a way to confess corporately what God has done in the congregation's midst and how the congregation has (or has not) responded to God's gifts.

It is common knowledge that the Malawian society has socio-political, economic and religious problems. These problems require deliberately searched answers offered by individuals and groups of common interest, of which the Church should be in the forefront. The researcher believes that the influence of the Church in the society must be developed. A missional church, of necessity, will influence its society in a positive way. Browning (1998:94) asserts:

> …The action dimension of practical theology concerns the concrete enactment of Christian faith in the ongoing course of worldly events. At issue are appropriateness and effectiveness. The relevant theoretical studies provide us with resources for reflecting on these matters and their crucial conditions.

In this, Browning (1998) developed the zeal to indulge in a relevant inquiry that would bring about a certain extent of change. This researcher shares Browning's view, and undertakes this research as a concrete enactment of his Christian faith. At this stage, it is important to analyse and establish the problem that underlies this research.

1.3   PROBLEM STATEMENT

This research will focus on the Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP in general and the Nkhoma congregation in particular, as a case study. The problem in this study will be investigated from three angles namely; *pneumatological, ecclesiological* and *diaconal.*

1.3.1   The pneumatological problem

The work of the Holy Spirit initiates the formation of any congregation by calling individuals to personal commitment to Christ Jesus. This underscores the fact that the church is first and foremost a spiritual entity with its members fully committed to the life of Christ. Nelson (1988:87) denotes,

> A congregation is filled with power as it acknowledges that its power comes from God…. The congregation which is filled with power is clear in its belief about this, and understands that church practice is framed by God's power.

Such a stance creates a vacuum in understanding the life of a Malawian Church. Like in most of the local churches in Africa, commitment to a new faith membership is usually rendered unsatisfactory. In African Christianity today, church membership is growing very fast (Oduro *et al.* 2008:4), but the depth of spirituality and commitment is still shallow, which can be the influence of African traditionalism on the one hand, and secularism on the other. Croft (2002:70) uses an Old Testament metaphor of "dry bones" in Ezekiel 37 to explain the need for spirituality in the congregation. He says that the bare bones, assembled in the valley of Ezekiel's vision, had no life in them until the Spirit was given to them. Yet, he warns that this does not mean that the bones are unimportant to the body. It merely explains the un-tapped potential of the idle dry bones.

Therefore, this calls for a quest to understand the inverse proportion of the growth of membership, against the diminishing openness to the Holy Spirit evidenced in the members' passiveness. *What are the probable causes of this scenario and what is the practical and achievable remedy?*

1.3.2 The ecclesiological problem

Grassroots theology requires that every part of the body of Christ should be functional. The life and survival of the church depends on each member's use of the spiritual gifts. There should be no room for observers among church members. The church is supposed to be a band of serious disciple-makers working around the clock. Yet, in the mainline churches in Malawi, most of the work is either left in the hands of the stipendiary ordained clergy or depends on the clergy's ability and knowledge of the work. As a result, many skilled and gifted lay people and leaders are spectators in their local Church. Take, for example, the task of evangelism in the Nkhoma Synod: most Church lay members are not confident enough to lead public worship services, such as funeral services while the clergy is present. Sometimes, when circumstances force them to lead, they do so with an inferiority complex that causes them to do sub-standard work. The situation is even worse when a congregation does not have their own church minister. Regardless of good traditional structures of operations that are in place, the lay people struggle to function as a Church, because they feel they are not as special as the Church minister.

The scenario is contrary to the notion of the priesthood of all believers. Neither is it in line with Reformed traditions where personal involvement in the life of the Church is high on the agenda. One may consider this to be a simple psychological deficiency that is about determination and courage. Yet, it goes far beyond that. Generally, the struggle has its seed in the lack of self-understanding and intuition in the role of each member of the body of Christ, which is more of a theological than a psychological weakness. As Carl S. Dudley (in Nelson 1988:89) puts it, "People participate in churches – or they stay away – based on what they believe the congregation stands for, or their image of the church …" As regards this situation, another related enquiry should be made in the search for an answer to the question: *How can the Malawian Church be guided to be all-participatory?* This task of capacity building should lead to a survey of ways and means that can work for the Malawian Church. Why should the growing Church membership retrogress in its work capacity?

1.3.3 The diaconal problem

The church should be known as a community of people who were saved to serve. The Apostle Paul writes:

> *It is he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ* (Eph. 4:11-13 [NIV]).

Here, Paul makes it clear to the Ephesians' church that all the skills and talents that God gave to the various church leaders, are meant to equip other members of the church for service. He further indicates that it is this act of *diakonia* that balances our faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ; and enhances Christian maturity. This emphasizes the importance of service in the life of any congregation. If the church loses its role of service to its members and non-members alike, it loses its own identity within the Great Commission. Today, the church in Africa exists amidst various social problems (O'Donovan 2000:143) that require its immediate attention and services. The Malawian Church, specifically, is challenged with perennial hunger, concomitant with gross poverty. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has become a major problem and threat also to the Church in Malawi. National efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and care for those suffering have drifted slowly from the state to the Church that seems to be ready for the responsibility. But why does the Malawian Church (constituting about 80% of the population) seem to make no difference? *What can be done to mobilize the Church to maximize its diaconal role to make an impact in society in general?*

1.3.4 A summary of the problem

The main problem of the Church in Malawi is not its resources. The Church has enough human resources that can solicit needed material resources to enable it to make a difference in society. The central question is methodological - one that demands discovery of a way to inspire, activate and equip. The inquiry points to what can be done in the life of the Malawian Church to maximize its spiritual manifestation, participation of all, and service to the society at large. The overall question is*: What should be done in the Malawian Church to lead the laity and lay leadership towards a holistic ministry relevant to the contemporary situation, in an effort to develop congregations into being self-reliant, spiritually mature, all-participatory, social service-providing and striving to act as signs of the reign of God?*

1.4 THE STUDY GOAL

It has often been said that the church is the only organization that does not exist for itself; it has a missionary calling. The Church in Malawi has been called and sent into the world to represent God's reign - it has a missional identity. Guder *et al.* (1998:109) remark:

> The calling of the church to be missional – to be a sent community – leads the church to step beyond the given cultural forms that carry dubious assumptions about what the church is, what its public role should be, and what its voice should sound like.

On that note, this research is an attempt to develop a theory, strategy and process by which the Malawian Church can contribute towards arresting the apparently increasing theological, social, economic and moral degradation of society. As the vehicle of God's Kingdom, the Church in Malawi should be able to put into operation a holistic ministry in which its members play a very important role. They should develop a sense of self-understanding and assume a missional responsibility in their own context. The entire church should obediently seek to discern God's will in the world. Therefore, its transformative actions must be an act of obedience to God. Stackhouse *et al.* (2000:213) say:

> Every local church is called to a global future. Local congregations will effectively exercise this global ministry and respond to a *kairotic* opportunity the Lord has set before them by demonstrating a trans-cultural community, a trans-economical significance, and a transnational security.

The "*kairotic* opportunity" mentioned here refers to the present challenges that the believers receive to make a difference by serving as true representatives of God's Kingdom. This research will seek also to establish what input the Malawian Church could make to truly represent God's Kingdom.

This research seeks to evaluate the current levels of laity participation and motivation in the Church. It wants to survey how strong or weak the lay people are being equipped. By underlining the theological significance of the laity in the Malawian Church, the intended product of this research will be a workable theory for empowering the lay members in the Malawian Church. A strategy for an empowerment process for lay leaders will be a necessary tool that must be developed in the course of practical interaction with the congregations. Consequently, this work should enable the local Church to attain characteristics of a healthy Church, rather than just a growing one. In listing characteristics of a healthy church, as developed by Janet Hodgson and Robert Warren, Croft (2002:60) writes,

> A healthy church:
> 1. has an energizing faith;
> 2. has an outward-looking focus;
> 3. finds out what God wants it to do;
> 4. faces the cost of change and growth;
> 5. practices an enabling style of leadership;
> 6. has a participative laity;
> 7. is a loving community;
> 8. sees discipleship as a lifelong journey of faith;
> 9. practices what it preaches;
> 10. does a few things well.

Basically, this study aims at a practical result-oriented goal that will enhance the spiritual health of congregations.

The discussion will now focus on the hypothesis.

1.5 THE HYPOTHESIS

This research has been undertaken from, and within, a Reformed point of view. It should be noted, as McGrath (1994:53) puts it, "Central to Reformation spirituality is the recovery of the notion of the laity as the *laos* – the people of God." Church leadership holds the key to any congregation's transformation and health. Nelson (1988:195) says:

> The distinctive role of the clergy is the provision of spiritual direction for the persons entrusted to their care. This is done through preaching and teaching, leadership in worship, and by giving consistent and explicit leadership to the task of enabling laity to claim and enjoy their own potential for ministry.

The clergy in the Malawian Church should guide the laity into full participation in a holistic ministry. Through the laity, the Church must reflect God's presence and make a difference in society. To enable a holistic ministry in the Malawian Church, the laity must be empowered to do theology, to discern God's will, and develop their gifts to make a difference. Such empowerment will further enable the congregations to play a part in addressing the many facets of poverty. In recapping his thesis, Nelson (1988:195) further states:

> Laity need their ordained leaders to teach them how to experience and express God's love as they are led in worship, instructed and led in Bible study, hear the Gospel claimed and participate in the sacraments. Equally important, they need their pastors to teach them how to give God's love away through their participation in the pastoral care and teaching of the congregation, and in the missional activities of evangelism and social concern.

This line of thought corresponds with the central ideas of this research. It does not mean that the teaching of lay leaders does not take place in the local Church in question; it has been there throughout its history, but it is a question of relevance and effectiveness. Those responsible for the empowerment of the laity should learn from history. The strengths and weaknesses of the strategies used by the early missionaries in Malawi to

empower the laity should be assessed. The church leadership should implement what can be applied effectively and successfully if the church is to be relevant in the present Malawi. The Malawian Christian community (the Church), which currently represents over 80% of the Malawian population, must utilize their God-given resources. O'Donovan (2000:164) summarizes his discussion on *The problem of poverty in Africa* with the assertion, "Poverty is one of the greatest problems in Africa. This problem can be overcome within a local church. The church can even be the means of helping many poor people outside the church."

To begin with, the Church must analyse and interpret the present situation in order to set a new vision for its ministry. Joda-Mbewe (1999:18) notes,

> Understanding the context of a congregation is part of theology. And because of this fact, the church must indeed seriously seek to proclaim the gospel in such a way that will articulate the issues prevailing in the environment in which the witness is being implemented.

Unless the church realizes its own potential, launches a deliberate critical review of its structure and mechanisms (operations), and strategically dedicates itself to a move towards transformation, its ministry will have little impact. At this point, the challenge demands a paradigm shift. A need exists to disengage the old orders and mindsets, and engage a contextual theological point of view (Hendriks 2004:20). A deliberate empowerment of God's people is likely to make an impact on the Church and society. As a practical theological move to enhance the Kingdom of God, the body of Christ – the Church – should be equipped for service. The lay leaders, women and the youth in the Malawian Church are some of the important groups to be empowered. Simply put, the hypothesis of this study is:

> ***If the clerical leadership of the Malawian Church in the Nkhoma Synod can empower the laity and utilize their spiritual gifts, then the missional identity of the Church can come to the fore.***

This statement poses a challenge to the trained and ordained clergy to take theology to grassroots level. In Buchanan and Hendriks (1995:73), Peter

Storey warns, "Empowerment within the church will not come unless the clergy learn servant leadership and discover that their task is to equip and empower the laity." The present structure in the Nkhoma Synod is adaptable enough to address this basic goal.

1.6   THE METHODOLOGY

Dawson (2009:14) defines a research methodology as the philosophy or the general principle that guides a research. It focuses on individual steps in the research process and the most objective procedures to be employed (Babbie & Mouton 2001:75). As such, this research requires a proper strategy for collecting and testing information. A multidisciplinary empowerment approach is even necessary. The empowering methodology will be featured in the following forms:

1.6.1   Studying congregations as a methodological framework

This study will use a practical theological methodology, based on the process of doing theology at a congregational level, in which each member participates and all take combined responsibility for God's mission. The process can better be explained by using what Hendriks (2004:24) calls, "The eight steps through which the tenets of a practical theological ecclesiology unfold." These steps form a framework for a methodology that leads to the evolvement of a relevant and faithful missional church.

The *first step* indicates that theology is about the missional praxis of the Triune God. The study will primarily emphasize the importance of the presence of the Triune God, who should initiate and lead us. This step will be traced throughout the dissertation, as the study begins and ends with God.

The *second step* that will mainly be used in Chapters 2 and 4 is the awareness of the identity of the church. Theology is about discerning the implications of the fact that the faith community is the body of Christ. It implies that the church must be seen as a living body created by God, reflecting his love and care.

In the *third and fourth steps*, the methodology will accommodate the fact that theology should take cognisance of the context. The study will outline the specific context of the Malawian situation in relation to the global context. The study will be hermeneutical, as theology is all about interpretation. In an effort to establish the reliability of the discussion, facts will be viewed from different perspectives to gain more insight on certain issues. These steps will be employed jointly in Chapters 3 and 4.

The fifth step advocates the use of Scripture and tradition and will be dominant in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. The study's approach will pay attention to the importance of the Bible and church traditions simply because it outlines our faith, values, principles and spirituality. From time to time, the views from Scripture on certain issues will be sought along with how the faith community interprets it. Theology is also about discerning the will of God in the present situation.

This *sixth step* will be the essence of the argument and the study's goal – discerning God's will. A critical correlating interpretation will be applied for the sake of establishing the appropriate solutions to specific problems and will be reflected in Chapter 6 that deals with the church's involvement in development. This study seeks to establish whether the present and eschatological Kingdom of God is reflected in God's missional praxis in, and through, the CCAP Nkhoma Synod.

Chapter 7 that deals with the theory and practice of empowering the laity, will dwell on the *seventh step,* which will guide the research towards the end goal of the process of doing theology – the manifestation of God's Kingdom on earth.

The *eighth* and last *step* states that theology is about transformative action. Throughout the research process, the study will attempt to develop a practical philosophy of ministry as well as a strategy that will lead to the congregation's participation at all levels. Such action is considered to be a

way forward in the empowerment of the laity, and will be reflected in the case study presented in Chapter 8.

In summary, the epistemological framework to be used will develop the process of doing theology that is relevant to Africa, and Malawi in particular. It is the current cry that theology, that is destined to work in any context, should not be foreign. For a practical theology meant for any African context, Musopole (in Fiedler *et al.* 1998:8) notes, "What is needed is an African theological recipe and the cooking done in an African pot."

One can also describe the character of this methodology as Participatory Action Research (PAR).It is defined as a research process where people involved in the situation being studied are enabled (in partnership with researchers and other role-players) to become actively involved in collective efforts to address and solve their social problems (De Vos 1998:408). Furthermore, PAR is recognized in literature as an alternative system of knowledge production, based on the subjects' involvement in decisions regarding the questions to be asked, who the respondents will be, how the questions will be asked, what role the subjects will play in data gathering, how the data should be interpreted, the development of models, programmes, etc. and the evaluation of development efforts. PAR makes use of qualitative and quantitative research designs, data gathering, data analysis, etc. However, the actual research takes second place to the emergent processes of collaboration, mobilization, empowerment, self-realisation and the establishment of community solidarity (De Vos 1998:414). This epistemological framework has been carefully and purposefully chosen to give this research a natural flow in a particular context of doing theology. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:314),

> PAR is one of the most widely used research approaches that are characterized by a participatory element. It is a commonly used approach to "grassroots development" interventions and is encountered especially in the underprivileged rural settings in the so-called Third World countries.

In the context of this presentation, the focus is a theological, rather than a mere socio-political interpretation.

This researcher is also aware that, as Osmer and Schweitzer (2003:1) put it,

> Contemporary practical theology is viewed as carrying out four distinguishable but mutually influential tasks: the *descriptive-empirical*, the *interpretive*, the *normative*, and the *pragmatic*. Attention to all four of these tasks allows practical theologians to construct action-guiding theories of contemporary religious practice.

Therefore, a consideration will be made upon proper analysis of the data to be sourced during this research.

1.6.2 Ethnography

The researcher, as a practising minister in a congregation, will not avoid an ethno-methodology (cf. 8.2). It is an informal kind of research that demands the researcher to be with the people and experience them while making intentional observations and recording the stories being told in the congregation. According to De Vos (1998:80), observation (participant observation) and description of a small number of cases characterise this strategy of enquiry. When combined with phenomenology,[2] the aim is to understand and interpret the meaning that the subjects impart to their everyday lives. In order to accomplish this, the researcher should be able to enter the subject's life world and place himself in the shoes of the subject. De Vos (1998:80) observes, "This is mainly done by means of naturalistic methods of study, analysing the conversations and interaction that researchers have with subjects." In discharging his normal duties as a minister, the researcher will collect data that will be analysed in the final process.

1.6.3 Literature survey

The research also intends to do a comprehensive review of the available literature on the meaning and life in a congregation. The literature to be

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[2] Phenomenology has to do with investigating the meaning of several people's experiences around a specific issue or phenomenon (Hancock & Algozzine 2009), such as poverty or natural disasters.

reviewed will include theological books from the libraries of the Universities of Stellenbosch and Malawi, Zomba Theological College and the Josophat Mwale Theological Institute (JMTI) (formerly known as Nkhoma Institute for Continued Theological Training [NIFCOTT]). A special interest will be taken by concentrating as much as possible on practical theological books written in an African context. Published and unpublished works on Sociology and Practical Theology about Malawian issues will also be reviewed. In order to illustrate certain attitudes and practices, the available minutes of the Nkhoma Synod's General Assemblies must be referred to. The use of internet information will also form part of this literature survey

However, the researcher is aware that the congregational lives reflected in rural and urban settings differ. As a result, a continuous comparison of both these congregational contexts will be done.

1.6.4 Case study[3]

A simple observation in the field of Congregational Studies is that scholars have studied congregations better by using congregations' images and life stories. A story told of a congregation should not necessarily be taken in isolation, because it presents an important representation of others. This method combines well with ethnography and will also feature highly in Chapter 7. The Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP will be a sample and testing field for the Malawian Church in this research. Reasons for the choice of the Nkhoma Synod are the following:

➢ It is the largest synod in CCAP General Assembly with a membership of over a million people.
➢ It is geographically significant for the purposes of this study, because it covers the central region of Malawi, where one finds the backbone of the nation's economy.
➢ It accommodates a cross-section of Malawians due to the Capital City, Lilongwe, that is geographically within the Synod.

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[3] A detailed explanation of the case study is presented in Chapter 8 below.

➤ It has the longest history of a self-supportive indigenous church in the country.

The Chairman of Word and Deed USA, Peter van Kempen, in *Word and Deed Magazine* (2004:18) observes,

> There is a strong Presbyterian presence in Central Malawi. It has its basis in the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. The central area of Malawi is under the CCAP Nkhoma Synod. The presbyteries are each formed with a large church in the centre and several (10-200) preaching stations, or prayer houses, in the surrounding villages. An elder is responsible for the religious care of the prayer houses.

This provides a good picture of what the Nkhoma Synod considers to be a congregation. For detailed examples of congregational life, this study will often refer to the Nkhoma Congregation.

As PAR, this study will take the form of deliberate experimental activities in which theories on how to empower lay leaders and the laity will be tested. An initial strategic planning session for the Nkhoma CCAP Congregation will be conducted. It is expected that, during this workshop, the laity representative will draw an exhaustive plan of action for the congregation. Several training sessions and workshops are planned in this congregation over a period for the laity to execute some of the strategic issues. Within this period, there will be feedback sessions at stipulated intervals to evaluate the progress of the trial activities. Eventually, there will be an analysis of the collected information with visible and measurable facts that reflect the results of the given activities. (See Chapter 8).

While restricting the focus of the study to the CCAP Nkhoma Synod, the researcher will, at several points, discuss the national perspectives of the Church in Malawi. This will be for the benefit of creating a balanced representation of the Malawian Church.

1.6.5 Consultations and interviews

Consultations and interviews will also be conducted. The CCAP Nkhoma Synod's Church and Society, Youth, and HIV/AIDS Departments will be consulted as a means to establish the depth of the previous involvement of the Church in social issues. Governmental and non-governmental organisations that currently deal with various social problems on different levels will also be consulted. The basic aim of these consultations will be to find out to what extent they have worked with the church in different communities. Along with these consultations, a cross-section of people will be interviewed especially during the case study. They will include members and non-members of the church, rural and urban dwellers, church and government officials, as well as some other people. Different questionnaires will be listed for different groups of people at different levels.

1.7 TERMINOLOGY (CONCEPTUALIZATION)

According to Babbie & Mouton (2001:111), conceptualization refers to the process through which the meaning of a particular term used in a research is explained. A brief explanation of the key terminology used in this paper will now be presented. The terms, congregation, empowerment and laity, are important to clarify. Having explained these three key terms, one can easily understand the description of the situation being studied. Other important terms will be clarified within the context in which they occur.

a. Congregation

In this case, "congregation" refers to the local grouping of confessing Christians from the same denomination. Theologically, this is a grouping of people called by God within a local setting. Hendriks (2004:19) writes, "A congregation is a local manifestation of the church in society. Congregations are faith communities that endeavour to be faithful effective witnesses and God's servants in this world where they proclaim the Good News in word and deed." Basically, the life of the people in a congregation should reflect the presence of God and his acts in the world today. They struggle to

interpret their environment in order to be missionally involved. Hendriks (2004:70) also notes,

> A congregation can be perceived as both a sacred and a social institution. In a mysterious and wonderful way, it is the body of Christ that lives by his grace. It is a unit of society that interacts with other units of society such as other congregations, organisations, people, institutions, etc. As such, it is subject to all social mechanisms to which all institutions in society are subject.

In short, congregations are expected to do theology in their own context.

In the case of the Nkhoma Synod, a congregation entails a cluster of several prayer points better known as "prayer houses." Each of these prayer points is a mini-congregation that runs its affairs in line with the others. A range of one to twenty wards (areas or groups of people under a Church elder) constitute a prayer house. The average membership in a Nkhoma Synod congregation is approximately 7000. In such a congregation, there would be approximately 20 prayer houses. In August 2010, there were 146 congregations being served by 106 ordained ministers.

b. Empowerment[4]

"Empowerment" has become a very important term in both theological and economic/social development studies, especially in the Third World. In Black and Liberation Theologies, the term has become almost synonymous with Practical Theology, in the sense that it is crucially important for the life of a congregation. Empowerment is more than a method of Practical Theology; it is a theological imperative for being a missional church. However, it is also simultaneously an activity and a process. The *Cassell compact English dictionary* (1998:360) defines the verb "empower" as "to authorize" or "to give self-determination." Simply put, it is a way of establishing an awareness of the potential that is unused or not properly used in a group of individuals that will provoke them into action. For the purpose of this study document, the cutting-edge definition for "empowerment" is:

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[4] More details on this term are found in Chapter 7.

> … the process of increasing personal, interpersonal and political power, enabling individuals or collectives to improve their life's situation. Empowerment increases community members' energy, motivation, coping and problem-solving skills, decision-making power, self-esteem, self-sufficiency and self-determination (Hendriks 2004:219).

This definition provides the researcher with a general guideline for his work, which is aimed at proposing the positive effects that laity empowerment in congregations can bring to the life of the church and its environment. The definition is also of special interest to the methodology used in this research, because of its emphasis on making an impact in the community. As such, empowerment is not viewed only as an end result, but also as a tool in research methodology to guide the whole process.

Empowerment can also be viewed from the perspective of pastoral care. Lartey (1997:41) notes:

> The term "empowerment" is used in more recent discussions to point to the process of re-valuing self and personal characteristics together with finding and using available resources outside oneself, in such a way as to enable and motivate persons and groups to think and act in ways that will result in greater freedom and participation in the life of the societies of which they are a part.

In this case, Lartey views empowerment as a communal affair. He ultimately indicates ways in which empowering expresses itself. These include working together with people in an attempt to restore a community spirit; trying to make governments more responsive to people's needs; encouraging groups based on some or other identity issue; political education and conscious-ness-raising; organizing user or service groups; and encouraging groups to develop their own alternative economic power base.

In this document, the term is used to refer to the deliberate provision of skills to promote the maximum use of spiritual gifts in a congregation. It connotes the church leaders' role of disciple making, training and mentoring where necessary. If lay people can be guided to actively discern the will of God in a process of doing theology, they will be empowered spiritually.

c.   The laity

The word "laity" is a collective noun referring to the ordinary members of a congregation, apart from the clergy. They are the congregation and should be part of the process of doing theology in that particular congregation. Kalilombe (1999:64) notes, "The church is first of all the Lay People. The tonality of church life and work is determined by the tonality of the lay people's presence in the church.… Any plan for the church has to take the laity into first-place consideration." In fact, to try to define a congregation without the laity, or vice versa, is a vain effort. The laity are people – the *laos* of God. They constitute the church as a covenant people. God has founded the church on his people, whom He has called to serve Him. From the Reformed perspective, Richards and Martin (1981:14) observe:

> Each of the people of God is called to ministry. No clergy-laity distinction exists in the mind of God. Every believer is part of the *laos* (people of God). Everyone is to find personal significance in understanding what it means to be one of God's called-out people. Everyone is to shake off the shackles clamped on by past and present distortions. Everyone is to find freedom to be who he is through affirming that identity that is shared by all the people of God.

In an effort to put the meaning of "laity" in the right perspective, Heitink (1999:307) notes:

> The concept of "laity" is tainted by the contrast of clergy versus laity, which regards a non-ordained status as deficiency. In popular usage, the word often has a negative undertone. The "layperson" is non-expert, the one without specific training. However, the Greek word *laikos* refers to membership of the people *(laos),* in biblical terms of the "people of God." As such, it is a title of honour.

Therefore, here, it is proposed that congregations, through the guidance of their clerical leaders, have the responsibility to empower all Church members into full participation. If all the members of the Malawian Church were to do theology, empowerment is a necessity. The fact must be emphasized that the task of equipping (empowering) the laity is of practical-theological relevance. It is about those activities that equip Christians to perform their task in society.

The researcher uses the term "laity" to describe all the members of a congregation except the trained clergy. This includes the church elders (lay leaders), deacons, members of both women and men's guilds, the youth and the rest of the church members. All these groups have their significant roles. From this study's Presbyterian background, lay people are viewed as the so-called "ordinary members" who do not have any academic theological training, yet are extremely available and eager to serve God with just as much dedication as the ordained ministers. 'Lay leadership' in this study refers to church elders, whose leadership role is outstanding.

1.8   VALUE OF THE STUDY

The Church in Malawi, along with other non-governmental organizations, fights ceaselessly for better living conditions. As a paradigm and trend shift in the African church, lay leaders in the Church should continuously set themselves goals for finding means to allow people to participate in solving their own social problems. In discussing the topic of the empowerment of the laity, this researcher has, as his goal, the development of a theory that will lead to enabling and inspiring of every Church member towards spiritual growth and maturity, active participation, and responsible social service. This is intended to be a valuable contribution towards the Church's effort in the alleviation of suffering caused by poverty and HIV/AIDS, and also finding ways of being less dependent on foreign financial assistance, by creatively using local resources. Therefore, this research study is aimed at developing a praxis methodology and strategy for the Church in Malawi to be used in the congregations and theological training institutions. It will also help the government departments and some non-governmental organizations, especially those involved in social work, for use in their efforts to deal with the ever-growing social problems in Malawi.

The research and its findings are also likely to challenge and provoke action in the general Malawian society that is subject to the dependency syndrome. The goal is to promote an all-participating church that is well empowered.

For the purpose of Practical Theology, in terms of praxis, this paper will act as a guide in the reflection on inadequate ministry practices that need to be replaced by faithful and effective practices. Gibbs and Coffey (2001:47) point out, "[churches] must always look beyond numbers. The issue is not 'Who can attract the biggest crowd?' but 'Who is making the biggest impact on society?'" In all this, the overall value should be to promote the Kingdom of God in the Malawian setting. This becomes clear in the appeal that Croft (2002:146) makes:

> We are called to build small communities of God's grace, affirming and accepting people, as God has called them, bound together into one Body in which each feels the joy and pain of the other and empowered by God's Spirit for mission and service in God's world.

When a congregation attains such levels of self-understanding, it begins to feel the relevance of its existence in terms of God's mission for his people both in, and outside, the church.

As a point of departure for a detailed discussion on empowerment of the Nkhoma Synod congregations' laity, a brief survey will now be presented on the topic.

1.9   PREVIOUS SCHOLARLY INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PROBLEM

Many have undertaken to work on the problem of the lack of empowerment in the church. However, most of the available literature addresses the Western church. Nevertheless, the basic principles of congregational life are the same. Regardless of the contextual character of each congregation, the element of lay involvement as an essential strategy for invigoration remains immutable. Along this sentiment, Craig L. Nessan, a Lutheran pastor in America, wrote a book on the theology of the congregation. In concluding his book, Nessan (1999:125) says:

> Although each context is unique, the central foci of identity and mission deserve nurture in every congregation. Therefore, the components serving identity (worship, education, fellowship, and stewardship) and those serving mission (evangelism, global

connections, ecumenism, and social ministry) are proposed as essential dimensions of every congregation's life.

This underlines the common understanding that every congregation is a local manifestation of Christ's universal church. Regardless of each congregation's unique features, the basis of its identity remains the same. Bruce Birch (in Nelson 1988:22) provides a helpful contribution in the biblical formation of congregational life. He mentions at least three features that this discussion finds valid in the biblical understanding of the uniformity in congregation formation. These are:

1. *"A congregation is formed in response to God's initiative of grace."* He explains that, in the Old Testament, Israel was established as God's people by his deliverance of the Hebrews from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 14-15). Here, God opens up the future in unexpected ways. The dynamic is virtually the same in the New Testament. It is God's grace through Jesus Christ that initiates and calls us to response as being the church. The earliest Christian congregation in Jerusalem immediately set to work to organize its life in patterns consistent with the grace they had come to know in Jesus Christ. Birch concludes his point with a challenge that it is important in the modern church's congregational life to regard a faithful community as a response to this grace that comes from God, and not as the source of God's grace itself.

2. *"A congregation is formed around the qualities of memory and vision."* On this point, he explains that memory is oriented to activities of remembering what God has done and how a faithful response has been made to God's action. Vision is oriented to activities of anticipating what God is still doing in the world, and aligning congregational life to serve that action of his grace. Both the Old and New Testament attest that both memory and vision are necessary for an adequate theology of the church for every congregation.

3. *"Congregations have a distinctive character and are called to model life as alternative communities in the midst of their prevailing cultural settings."* Birch says that those who have received and acknowledged the gift of God's grace could not simply reflect the surrounding cultures'

patterns of life. The model of the congregation's own life, as an alternative community in the covenant model, is one of the significant ways in which the mission of mediating the grace of God to a broken world in need is carried forward.

These features of congregations worldwide set a proper platform for the argument that congregations must learn from one another regardless of their context, because they have a common root in Jesus Christ.

After outlining these features, Birch focuses on the role of memory in congregational life. Here, several aspects important for an understanding of the role of memory in congregational life are mentioned. He indicates that, in the congregation, the most important function of memory is in the formation of identity and character. The main point is that a congregation is shaped as a community by what it recalls from its biblical and historical tradition. Many of those most committed to the renewal and effectiveness of the church in the world have focused on the questions of the church's "doing" (what must the church do?) and the church's "being" (what must the church be?). The concern for the church's being ranges from the needs for spiritual wholeness to the formation of a supportive community, to the witness of reconciliation in a world still divided by poverty, injustice and oppression.

On the enhancement of memory in congregational life, Birch (in Nelson 1988:38) minces no words as he writes:

> Serious attention must be paid to the empowerment of the laity for roles in nurturing congregational memory. Clergy are not the principle guardians of faith memory. Yet the feeling is widespread that serious appropriation of Scripture and tradition requires skills that are principally available to the pastor or other church professionals with seminary training .… Lay persons with opportunity and training for leadership in all arenas of the church's life can be the needed leaven in the loaf for generating seriousness about the role of memory in congregational life. This will not happen if the role of the laity is seen primarily in terms of serving institutional structures or providing the personnel for various missional activities. They also must be intimately involved in knowing and articulating the faith vision that comes from our biblical and historical memory. Lay persons must be

involved in areas often left to the clergy alone (e.g. the teaching of adults; the shaping of congregational worship life; and the giving of pastoral care).

This understanding of the power of empowering the laity in congregational life is universal. When those members of a congregation who have not attended any formal seminary training are equipped and given room to serve, they contribute effectively towards a full-leavened congregational life.

Ben Johnson, a former Professor of Spirituality at Columbia Theological Seminary (U.S.A.), makes another important contribution. He writes from a Presbyterian Church perspective and targets mainline churches, which is relevant. He critically establishes the beginnings of the New Testament church and traces the negative developments. Johnson (1995:17-18) writes:

> The first century church involved all of its members in ministry .… Each had a gift, a place, and a role in witnessing for Christ .… The church that emerged in later centuries all too often encouraged a passive laity. The common vision of church members extended no further than attending worship, giving money and living as good citizens. This misunderstanding of mission and lay involvement reduced ministry to the role of professionally trained clergy. If ministry remains the sole responsibility of professionals, the mission of Christ will be doomed to failure.

In the 21st century world, this kind of warning is timely for most of the mainline churches in the doing of theology in congregations. The creation of classes within the congregational operations has done many churches more harm than good. The metaphor of the body of Christ must be taken seriously if the church has to match the fast moving world. Johnson (1995:29) remarks:

> Renewing the church for ministry in today's world not only must take into account the inner life of the church, but effective ministry must also look honestly at the world, that is, the particular place in which the church carries out its mission. The world in which the church ministers, has changed drastically and rapidly. Secularization, globalization, the communication and information explosion, the multiplication of special interest groups … have fuelled contextual changes unthinkable just a few decades ago.

Johnson also asserts that the context of ministry has changed and that change cannot be reversed. So, the church must adapt its vision and methods of outreach to a new situation. Like Nessan (1999:125), he presents a challenge that most mainline congregations need while moving from a "maintenance" mode to a missional mode. The change in mind-set regarding mission will deliver these congregations from their fixation on the past and engage them with the new demand for their present environment. Therefore a reconsideration of a clergy-laity relationship within the congregation is an inevitable exercise for any healthy congregation.

Finally, Johnson submits a proposal for a transitional church. One of his suggestions is the "liberation of the laity." He writes:

> Future church cannot continue to function as the domain of the ordained minister but must find ways to liberate the laity to participate fully in the ministry of Christ. In these days of transitional congregations, churches in the "former" mainline should begin setting laity free to participate in the leadership of the congregation, to show ministries of compassion, to provide mentorship, and to embrace their "worldly calling" as the call of Jesus Christ to minister through their daily work (Johnson 1995:76).

Johnson's use of the word "liberate" in this context has a similar meaning as "empowerment." People who are not liberated are powerless and always work under someone's directions and close supervision. To be liberated is to be equipped and entrusted. This point is reaffirmed when he says that liberating the laity requires first a vision and then equipping. In concluding his discussion, Johnson (1995:150) stresses:

> Only when the laity receives empowerment for ministry, can the church move out powerfully in mission. Although we do not propose to offer a training manual for each role, we will set forth fundamental principles for empowering a liberated laity. These principles have application to small group development, lay training, mission outreach, and evangelism.

This discussion recapitulates the general principle of laity empowerment. It first highlights the faults in church history that led to many mainline churches

inclining towards the present scenario. Then it develops into underlining the importance of reorienting the church from maintenance to mission.

Thomas R. Hawkins is another author of numerous books on congregational life. In one of his books, *The learning congregation*, he agrees that, today, congregations exist in a fast moving environment. He calls this "a white-water society." Hawkins (1997:1) writes:

> We no longer experience the river of time as a slow, peaceful stream with quiet eddies and calm pools where we have ample opportunity to regain our equilibrium or to recoup our energies. We are instead white-water rafting through the rapids of social, technological, and demographic change. We are shooting down a foaming river filled with unexpected whirlpools and turbulent, rock-strewn channels.

This idiomatic description of our times is a very important global phenomenon. Quantum changes are taking place everywhere in, and around, the church. This white-water speed of the church's ecology and mission field - the world - should promote a re-visitation of the church's doing and being. Elsewhere, Mead (1978) calls for a reconsideration of how we currently teach and learn in the church to keep abreast with the fast moving world. Again, as a way of evaluating past trends and focusing on the future, Hawkins (1997:11) says:

> Church leaders traditionally gave attention to teaching Christians the proper doctrines and beliefs. In the emerging information era, they equip Christians with tools and strategies that allow them to learn continuously by reflecting on their everyday ministry experiences.

Hawkins advocates the shifting of the leadership paradigm and focus of the ministry itself. When responsible people re-align their focus to fit influencing factors, their goal is achieved regardless of the speed of change and influence. Hawkins (1997:11) continues his argument as he writes:

> In the past, church leaders were recognized for their ability to grow churches. In the future, the ability to "grow" people becomes the key characteristic of effective and faithful leaders. The focus shifts from getting once-in-a-lifetime decisions for Christ to making lifelong disciples who continue to learn, grow, and serve.

Here, the major contribution that Hawkins makes is the empowerment of the laity as a response to changing times. The church and its leadership are urged not to pretend not to see the fast speed of life in our own surroundings. The organization of an all-participatory church should be of high priority in order to qualify a meaningful manifestation of the body of Christ in each community. A new vision of leadership in the church is required. Hawkins (1997:66) asserts:

> The ministry of the laity is a rich resource for educating people for ministry through ministry …. church leaders foster learning that is public when they cultivate the laity's ministry in the world as crucial content for practical theological reflection. The learning congregation, built around a renewed ministry of teaching and learning, equips the laity for their proper role as those who bear public witness to the gospel in their daily lives and work.

Osborne Joda-Mbewe made the first attempt to tackle the empowerment of the laity from a Malawian perspective. In his doctoral research on "Urban poverty as a challenge for ministry within the Malawian context," he discovered the need for empowering the laity in all categories as a way forward to a holistic ministry of the Church in Malawi. With a strong focus and emphasis on the urban church, Joda-Mbewe (2002:22) presents one of his four relational hypotheses: "At present, the ministry in the CCAP operates within a hierarchical, clerical paradigm and, as such, is unable to equip and empower laity to address the problems and challenges of urban ministry." This statement holds water, not only for the urban setting of the Malawian Church, but in its entirety. In actual sense, the situation is stronger in the rural, than in the urban areas That is why the urban church is easily influenced by rural church trends, as Joda-Mbewe (2002:42) puts it, "Its rural background and theory of ministry prevent the C.C.A.P. from developing an effective urban ministry that adequately addresses the problems of the poor." This research is not an exhaustive inquiry into the overall praxis of the CCAP, as it focuses on the minor, yet important, part of the church – the urban setting. Its credibility lies in the fact that it sets the scene for further theological research work that can call for a fully coordinated approach for reclaiming the missional nature of the Church in Malawi. Nevertheless, Joda-

Mbewe (2002:305-307) upholds the equipping and empowering of ministers and laity as an essential process in the doing of theology in the CCAP.

From Episcopalian circles, some Malawian theological scholars have made contributions on the laity's role and importance in the church. With reference to the 1974 Synod of African Bishops, Father Clement Majawa, a Malawian Roman Catholic priest who lectures at The Catholic University East Africa, gives a clear impression of the attitude towards the laity in the Malawian Roman Catholic Church. Majawa (2005:368) writes:

> The Council clearly stresses the importance of the lay people for the life of the Church. The Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. For the Gospel cannot become deeply rooted in the mentality, life and work of a people without the active presence of lay people. The lay people exercise their triple function: prophetic, priestly and royal, participating in the mission of the Lord.

The introduction of the African Synod in the Roman Catholic Church has truly increased the recognition of lay leaders in the Episcopal setting. They are now free to organize Bible studies, evangelism and other church related meetings in their wards. As such, Majawa (2005:381) stresses, "The laity alone is able to carry out the mission of the Church in all that zone of the Church's influence on culture, legislation, civilization secular human creative work, outside her strictly sacral order." The lay leaders are mandated to create programmes independently in their small groups as long as they inform the priest in charge of the particular parish. About the Roman Catholic view on the participation of the Church in social action, from an African perspective, Majawa (2005:381) observes:

> Lay people should take on themselves as their distinctive duty the renewal of the temporal order. Among the various tasks of this apostolate Christian social action is pre-eminent. … Africans have highest regards for charity and hospitality. Thus the laity should be encouraged in the activities of social action.

When Pope John Paul II visited Malawi in 1989, he addressed a youth rally at Kamuzu Stadium in Blantyre. He said the following:

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The laity in matters of assisting the poor, eradicating hunger and poverty, and promoting human development, social reforms and peace are in a special position to assume roles of service and leadership. The involvement of the laity in such an apostolate will be a public witnessing to the dynamism of the Gospel message. The laity should be guided in such a way that the true Evangelical vision and prayerful discernment be the principles in holding at all costs the dignity and rights of the human person as the greatest values in political and social life (Majawa 2005:382).

The Episcopalian circles in Malawi have created enough space for the laity to engage with society as a continued process of interpreting the value of Christianity in the world around them. Bishop James Tengatenga of the Malawian Diocese of Upper Shire has been in the forefront in promoting the liberation of the laity in the Church. He writes:

The priest hears the Gospel in one way and the laity in another. It is only when the two meet that a fuller picture is perceived and conceived. The institutional church has a difficulty in hearing the gospel from the laity but it has to hear it from them or it will never know it well (Tengatenga 2006:202).

Thus, he asserts that a deliberate dialogue in the Gospel should be initiated if the Church has to be fulfilled. Such notions have elevated the Anglican lay leadership to a status in the Church worthy of recognition. It has been demonstrated recently in Malawi that lay leaders in the Anglican Church for example, have the powers and rights to veto even the appointment of a Bishop. For example, in May 2006, the lay leaders of the Anglican Diocese of Lake Malawi rejected the Archbishop's appointment of a new Bishop. All this is growing evidence that the role of the Church's lay leaders cannot be undermined at any cost.

Of special interest is the recent work of the Network for African Congregational Theology (NetACT) in a book titled, *Studying congregations in Africa.* In a nutshell, the purpose of NetACT is to empower congregations to address their multiple problems, challenges and sufferings in sub-Saharan Africa as they manifest, among others, in the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, sexism, abuse of power, corruption and economic justice, (Hendriks 2004:11).

NetACT's notion forms the basis of this research. This book explains that the doing of theology in congregations is a practical theological endeavour. Hendriks (2004:19) provides a simplified definition: "Practical Theology is a continuing hermeneutical concern discerning how the Word should be proclaimed in word and deed in the world." Then, he asserts that African theologians must find a way of doing theology in which they disengage the old order and paradigm, and engage in doing theology from a contextual point of view.

One of the motivations for NetACT to write this book is illustrated in the very analogy of the empowerment of the laity. Hendriks (2004:14) writes:

> Clericalism and denominational hierarchies, where the ministry and the witness of the church take place from the top down, in the long run, always lead to the laity becoming mere receivers of whatever the church, as an institution, provides for them.

In the process of a church's growth or decline, two points related to the empowerment of laity are mentioned. Hendriks (2004:38) records: "Positive lay leadership is needed for the transformation process to succeed. … Transformation can only succeed if the laity is empowered and committed to deal with new realities." The book refers more to the epistemological framework for doing theology in an African congregation. Its depth and strength lies in its simplicity and variety of examples that depict the grassroots of sub-Saharan congregational life. Doing theology at grassroots is its main focus.

Another study worth mentioning is the work of Ka Mana, a West African theologian. Mana (2004:3) made a study, the focus of which includes:

> Identifying the areas of African quests for salvation and meaning, from which a Christology for overcoming the crisis, for social transformation, and for the rebuilding of a new society can be established and take root in our [African] spirits, our consciences and our creative imagination.

Mana's work brings to the surface the contemporary need for doing theology in Africa without it being detached from African common views. His methodology of investigating the problems of self-understanding in African theology fits well into the process of doing theology. He begins from acknowledging the missional role of the Triune God in salvation, by establishing perspectives through which salvation in Jesus Christ can be viewed. From this point of departure, Mana outlines three important fields of research and study with which even practical theology should engage in contemporary Africa. Mana (2004:3) writes:

> The first area of research and study concerns the fundamentals of our existence and life in Africa, and the basis of our culture and vision of the world. The problem Africa faces in this quest for salvation is how insignificant we seem to be in today's world, how great are the shortcomings that hinder us, and the extent to which we debase ourselves in our own eyes as individuals, as a culture and as a society ….
> The second area is that of vital mechanisms which we employ in order to fight against both socio-economic and political situations and our dire material straits; against our moral decay, our existential despair and our spiritual collapse in the face of supernatural forces that oppress us, and which make our societies cry out fervently to God for deliverance and healing ….
> The third area of our quest for salvation in Africa is our perception of the future: the wellspring of our ideals and the building up of a new society. Men and women everywhere in Africa are looking ahead to the future and seek to move creatively in the direction of a cultural rebirth, economic, political and spiritual revival, as a basis for the new society in our countries ….

What Mana presents is required for an analysis of the context of the African Church that has the task to initiate and promote transformational transition among its people. If the Church is to offer hope to the society, the will of God in the world should be taken into account and be interpreted into action. Africa requires a progressive theology free of disorientations. Mana (2004:106) believes:

> If Christ is perceived, in the spirit which he extends to the heart of the world, as the very substance of the ethics of our relationship, it is not only African life which will be completely transformed, but also humanity as a whole in its political, economic, social, moral and spiritual relationship.

An outline of selected previous scholarly interpretations of the topic being discussed has been presented. The bottom line is that there is a need to take a further step to establish an overall contextual hermeneutic of the Church in Malawi. As a research and ministry style of doing theology, participatory action should foster a new practical theological praxis in the Malawian Church today.

What follows is an overview of the research plan.

1.10   AN OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

This research seeks to address the question of the laity's lack of empowerment in the Malawian Church. The missional identity that the Church in Malawi should have, will be possible only when the lay people are empowered and participate fully in God's mission. The aim of this research is to develop a theory for the Malawian Church, as the vehicle of the Kingdom of God, on how to develop a holistic ministry in which its members play an important role. The central thought guiding this research is that the key to addressing the problems and challenges that the church faces in Malawi lies in the empowerment of its laity.

Since this is theological research, the researcher engages the framework described above (cf. 1.6) by using the eight steps in doing theology (Hendriks 2004:24). This PAR methodology has been chosen, because the nature of the study focuses on the grassroots level. Babbie and Mouton (2001:314) say, "PAR is often employed when working with and for grassroots groups, communities or social classes and their organizations in rural areas in the Third World." They also state that PAR is not an end in itself, but a means through which action should be planned and implemented.

Bearing this in mind, the order of discussions takes the following sequence:

Chapter two concentrates on presenting a careful analysis of the church's life in Malawi. A historical background of the Christian Church in the country, an identity analysis and a resource analysis that involves statistics of the contemporary Malawian Church is offered. Here, the emphasis is on the Reformed/Presbyterian cross-section of the CCAP Nkhoma Synod. The purpose of presenting this background sketch is to understand the context of the problem, which involves doing theology in a specific time and place. At the same time, it provides evidence of lay empowerment in the past and reaffirms the challenge to rediscover and improve the church's empowerment strategies. The evidence gathered in this section is used to ascertain the possibility of developing a theory for lay empowerment - a key to the missional praxis. It also requires a presentation of the geographical and historical information for a better understanding of the Church in Malawi. The chapter includes the following descriptive topics:

> *The general physical features of Malawi*
> *The historical background of the Malawian Church*
> *A statistical resource analysis: A church profile*
> *Church government and leadership styles*
> *Cultural identity in church leadership*
> *Lay leaders in the Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches in Malawi*
> *The influence of lay leaders in the Nkhoma Synod.*

Chapter three describes the ecology of the Church in Malawi. As far as the framework is concerned, this chapter continues to describe the contextual situation by using methods developed for this purpose (Hendriks 2004:69-104). It focuses on the congregations and their environments as viewed from different perspectives. The previous chapters having established that there is little participation of the laity in the Church, this contextual analysis is appropriate and helps to analyse systematically the shortcomings of a congregation that does not seem to be interested in the needs and challenges that it should address. In the Malawian context, the poverty and HIV/AIDS situations are dealt with at length. The literature used is mainly recent demographic data from different organizations who are involved with social work in Malawi. The available academic research dissertations within the

context of the church and society are also consulted. This chapter discusses the following:

- Contextual analysis and its structure;
- Poverty: the challenge for the Malawian Church;
- HIV/AIDS in the Malawian perspective;
- Traditional culture, sexual morality and the Church;
- Urbanization;
- Politics and the Church;
- The attitude of the Church on suffering.

Chapter four presents a critical reflection on the current practices in the Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP in Malawi. To further establish the extent of the problem of lay empowerment, a specific analysis of the culture and power structures is presented here. This relates to the missional challenge that the Church has to address and a few proposals are made for its operations. In the following chapters, these are developed further into an operational theory. Issues of identity and process analyses are also presented from various perspectives. This chapter aims at describing the present scenario that requires new theories for an effective holistic ministry. To supplement the written documents, random observations are made and interviews conducted on congregational activities. The following sections are included:

- Identity analysis of the Nkhoma Synod;
- Power structures and Church governance;
- SWOT analysis;
- Attitudes and practices;
- Women and the youth;
- The present challenges: an African perspective.

Chapter five presents a theological description of the Church and its missional nature. The Triune God has called the Church in Malawi to carry out its missional praxis in the society. Therefore, as an apostolic faith community, the Church should be the community, servant and messenger that represents God's reign. Bosch (1991:78) states, "If Jesus is indeed Lord of all, this reality just has to be proclaimed. Nobody who knows of this can

remain silent about it. He or she can do only one thing – help others also to acknowledge Jesus' Lordship." As such, an effort is made to address the question of the place of the laity in the church's mission. This chapter examines a biblical understanding of the Church as a community of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ and fulfil his mission to the world. In the process of developing the argument in this chapter, the issue of Church and society in Malawi is discussed in order to establish the prophetic and priestly role of the Church. The following topics are tackled:

> Understanding the Church.
> The missional task of a local Church.
> Doing theology at grassroots level.
> A theology of the Church's societal involvement.
> The Church and leadership.
> Strategic planning in the Church.

Chapter six dwells on how, through its local manifestations (congregations), the Church can participate in making societal life meaningful. Methodologically, this will be a step in transformative action with a focus on the concept of sustainable development. This calls for an interdisciplinary study on literature about community development. Such a survey is aimed at making the Church acquainted with theories that address developmental issues, in order to address the social ills of society effectively. The challenge is to design a theological strategy for a holistic ministry in circumstances where there is critical human suffering. Gone are the days of drawing a line between theological issues and real life issues. A call for a paradigm shift in the way the church functions is underlined. Empowerment of the laity is described as a means for sustainable development in the Church. The analysis serves as a guide to discern God's will in today's Church in Malawi. The following points are discussed:

> Defining development;
> The need for the Church's intervention: a theology of "salt and light";
> The church and community development;
> The Malawian Church and the national development schemes;

- ➤ The church and public affairs;
- ➤ People first.

Chapter seven offers a detailed picture of empowerment using different perspectives. In the process, it establishes the theology behind the empowerment of the laity. A biblical understanding of the laity, as the people of God, is presented with reference to the Church in Malawi. To link up with the hypothesis of this study, this chapter also examines critically the meaning of "empowerment" and its use in the Malawian Church. The discussion narrows down to treat the term from the perspective of practical theology. Necessary tools are designed to enable the inclusion of different groups in the Church, such as women and children who have often been marginalized. The traditional view of women's roles in the society is also debated, which reveals the paradoxical fact that the significant position of women and children in an average Malawian community is not reflected in their position in the Church. The chapter includes a survey of how the African way of communal living is a much more favourable condition for empowerment than the Western world's individualism. The discussion follows the following order:

- ➤ A scholarly review of empowerment
- ➤ A theology of empowerment
- ➤ Trends of empowerment in the Malawian Church
- ➤ Empowerment as a natural process in Africa
- ➤ Empowerment and the marginalized – a biblical view
- ➤ The need for Christian empowerment in Malawi
- ➤ Principles of empowerment.

The **eighth chapter** presents a report on a case study done in the Nkhoma CCAP congregation. It reveals how different individuals and groups have made an impact in the society through planned efforts. The task is to test the theories and strategies developed on empowering the laity at various levels. To come up with this case study report, the researcher had to organize some training sessions and workshops in the Nkhoma CCAP congregation to test the designed theory on laity empowerment. Selected literature and docu-

mentary reports were used to guide the development of these case studies. The report section includes the following issues:

- ➢ A theoretical case study overview
- ➢ An outline of the case study
- ➢ Qualitative study dimension
- ➢ Data development
- ➢ Data analysis and interpretation
- ➢ Case study validity and evaluation.

Chapter nine concludes this dissertation. It summarizes the practical theological discussion in this research on laity empowerment in the Church; and calls for a hermeneutical, as well as a correlative way of doing theology at all levels. The need to empower the lay leadership and members is further expressed in line with concluding reflections drawn from all the chapters. It presents a synthesis of the findings obtained during the research, while maintaining that an empowered laity can make an internal and external difference to the church. The presence of the church in the world and in a particular society represents the presence of the body of Christ. Both men and women; old and young; rich and poor; when empowered, have the potential to take up the command of the Great Commission and effect it holistically in the world. Some practical recommendations are offered. This concluding chapter includes the following points:

- ➢ A reflection on the research discussion;
- ➢ Doing theology is working with God;
- ➢ Self-understanding of the Church and its leadership;
- ➢ Serving, empowering, and transforming;
- ➢ Recommendations for a theology that addresses life situations;
- ➢ Final remarks.

This preliminary outline was designed to address the problem of laity empowerment that seems to affect the missional identity of the Malawian Church. It requires PAR to investigate the ideas further, and action in the Church as part of doing theology. The framework used in the development of this outline has taken the shape of the eight steps of doing theology that

Hendriks (2004:24) proposes. This methodological framework takes into account the fact that theology is about: the Triune God; the church; a specific time; interpretation; Scripture and tradition; discernment; the Kingdom of God and transformative action. Therefore, the problem, the goal and hypothesis for this dissertation were also formulated within the same framework.

1.11   CONCLUSION

The situation in which this research study was done, reveals that, like everywhere else in the world, the Church in Africa continues to wrestle with its context in an ongoing interpretation process. We need to make an effort towards actualizing the Kingdom of God. As the Church, we represent God and his mission. Guder *et al.* (1998:102) state:

> Therefore the church's own mission must take its cues from the way God's mission unfolded in the sending of Jesus into the world for its salvation. In Jesus' way of carrying out God's mission, we discover that the church is to represent God's reign as its community, its servant, and its messenger.

The researcher wishes to make a contribution towards efforts to discern God's will for the Church in Africa today. Various economic, sociological and ecclesiological problems confront Africa. Malawi is one of the sub-Saharan African countries that struggle with such problems. These problems affect the Church. One of the problems inherent in the Church in Malawi is the prolonged adherence to a clerical paradigm that emanates from a deductive way of doing theology. Therefore, in line with this, the desired end of this research is to offer a practical theological theory and strategy that can address the problem of why the majority of the lay members in the Church are not fully involved in the daily life of their congregations. This will help the local Church in its struggle against poverty, HIV/AIDS and suffering in general.

There is a need to create awareness at grassroots level for the missionary task of a 21st century church that can faithfully discern God's will in Malawi.

The scenario focused upon is that of the Malawian Church that continually addresses ever-present problems, questions and challenges in its context, for the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. The Church in Malawi should seek to make deliberate efforts to analyse its context and identity, and interpret them within a missional hermeneutic. In this paper, the hypothesis is that, if the clerical leadership in the Malawian Church empowers the laity and promotes spiritual gifts so that each member takes part in the life of the Church, then its missional identity can come to the fore. Wherever Jesus Christ was in his human form, He made an impact through teaching and healing. That is why this researcher strongly believes that the existence of a congregation, as the local body of Christ, should always make a difference in the surrounding community. It is also argued that current Church leaders should borrow a leaf from the strategies of the early missionaries in empowering the laity. In this case, the analogy is that, wherever the early missionaries planted churches, they affected a spiritual, social and even economic impact in the surrounding area. This is what the present "missionaries" – the congregations – can easily emulate and even improve, but the development of a practical theological ecclesiology is required (Hendriks 2004:26). Today, it has become important to emphasize the role of faith communities and the laity who constitute the church.

This introductory chapter sets us on a faith-seeking-understanding journey that starts from the Triune God. There is no theology without God. At the same time, theology requires people who do this in their own context, in obedience to the Triune God. Since theology is also about a faith community, an appropriate ecclesiological input to this study will now be considered as a milestone in the methodology of doing theology.

CHAPTER TWO:

AN ECCLESSIASTICAL SURVEY OF MALAWI

2.1   INTRODUCTION

In the previous introductory chapter, a brief outline of this research was presented. This chapter now concentrates on giving a careful analysis of the Church's life in Malawi. Firstly, it allocates the area of study and briefly describes other essential features relevant to the focus of this study. Secondly, a historical background of the Malawian Church is presented in passing. Thirdly, a Church profile with special interest in the Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP is also offered. These three steps engage the part of this study's methodology that deals with ecclesiology. Doing theology is about an understanding of the faith community and the place of the laity.

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear picture of the context in which the call to do theology at a specific time and place originate. In this section, this information is of great importance for the design of a workable theory for the empowerment of the laity in the Church, as suggested in the hypothesis. If the clerical leadership in the Malawian Church empowers the laity in their congregations and utilize their spiritual gifts, the missional identity of the Church will develop and the prevalent problems of the Church and society can be addressed.

2.2   THE GENERAL PHYSICAL FEATURES OF MALAWI[5]

How relevant is the articulation of Malawi's geographical, economic, historical, and many other features at this stage? The general physical features are likely to influence the Church's internal and external activities.

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[5] All statistical facts in this section were taken from CIA – The World Fact book – Malawi on the following website: http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world. Accessed on 18 March 2010.

2.2.1 Physical features

Malawi is a landlocked country situated in Central Africa, south of the equator in sub-Saharan Africa. Its neighbouring countries are Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique. Specifically, it is within the geographical coordinates of 13 30 south and 34 00 east. Malawi covers a total area of 118,484 square kilometres, of which 20% is covered by Lake Malawi, Africa's third largest fresh water body. This lake has one main outlet – the Shire River from which Malawi generates its hydro-electric power.

One of Malawi's most striking topographical features is the Rift Valley, which runs the entire length of the country, and passes through Lake Malawi in the Northern and Central Regions, to the Shire Valley in the south. The Shire River drains the water from Lake Malawi into the Zambezi River in Mozambique. On both sides of the lake, lie fertile plains and mountain ranges whose peaks range from 1700 to 3000 metres above sea level. Malawi has a tropical, continental climate with maritime influences. Rainfall and temperatures vary depending on altitude and proximity of the lake. From May to August, the weather is cool and dry, and from September to November, the weather becomes hot. Under normal circumstances, the rainy season begins in October or November and usually continues until April.

Administratively, the country is divided into three regions namely, the Northern, Central and Southern Regions. The Northern Region has six districts, the Central Region has nine, and the Southern Region has thirteen districts. The districts are subdivided into traditional authorities (TAs), over which chiefs preside. Each TA comprises villages that are the smallest administrative units and are presided over by village headmen.

2.2.2 Malawi's population and economy

The official estimates approximate Malawi to have a population of about 15,000,000 people at a growth rate of 2.75%. Life expectancy at birth is slightly above 50 years. Related to this low life expectancy is the 11.9% HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate. Chewa is the largest of the more than ten ethnic groups found in Malawi. Chi-Chewa is the official indigenous language

beside English. Malawi has 80% Christians, 13% Muslims, 3% of other religions, and 4% of Malawians are said to have no religious affiliation.

Economically, Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world. Over 55% of Malawians live below the poverty line. Its economy is based largely on agriculture that contributes approximately 40% to the GDP, and accounts for an estimated 85% of the total employment and 90% of export earnings. The main agricultural export product is tobacco, which contributes up to 60% of the total Malawi exports. Performance in the tobacco industry is a key to the short-term economic growth or decline in the country. The other export commodities in Malawi include tea, sugar, cotton, coffee, peanuts and wood. Malawi's economy depends on a substantial inflow of economic assistance from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and other individual donor nations. In 2006, Malawi was relieved of about MK2.5 billion debt under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) programme. Malawi's currency is the Malawian Kwacha (MK) with an average exchange rate of MK154 to US$1 (in October 2010).

Here, the implication of the picture portrayed is that the Church in Malawi is a church among the poor. It has been presented with the intention of guiding the reader to establish a mental picture of the church being studied.

2.3   A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CHURCH IN MALAWI

The discussion will now focus on the selected important historical elements of the Malawian Church that have been deemed to be of relevance to this study. Brown (2005:21) observes:

> The understanding of one's origin and of one's history is absolutely essential to self-understanding today. To be unaware of how one got to the present state is to consign oneself to a perpetual state of amnesia. The transplanting of Christianity into what is today Malawi required self-sacrifice and great tenacity; the efforts of those responsible for this transplantation must be forever preserved and treasured.

2.3.1 The genesis of Christianity in Malawi

The known traces of Christianity in Malawi were pioneered by a lay person in the name of Dr. David Livingstone, a Scottish explorer under the British government's sponsorship, who went on several expeditions from the coast into Africa's little known interior. A scientific investigation of the geography and resources of the region, and opening up legitimate trade to replace the slave trade was in the interest of the British Government (Pauw 1980:11). Due to his experiences during his first trip to Africa, Dr. Livingstone changed his mind as to what his focus should be. As he sailed along the Zambezi River (according to Weller & Linden, 1984:13-14), he included the following words in one of his letters home: "*The end of the geographical feat is but the beginning of the missionary enterprise. May God grant me life to do some good to this poor Africa*." When he returned home on recess, he related his experiences in a book and addressed many meetings. Of special importance to the introduction of Christianity in Malawi is the appeal that he made at the Senate House of Cambridge University on 4 December 1857. His famous words were: "*I go back to Africa to make an open path for commerce and Christianity; do you carry out the work I have begun. I leave it with you*" (Weller & Linden, 1984:13-14). In 1874, Dr Livingstone died at Chitambo, Zambia. In April 2009, the Church in Malawi celebrated 150 years of the arrival of Christianity, in memory of David Livingstone.

Livingstone's appeal steered a missionary passion in Great Britain that, in turn, initiated the formation of The Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA). Bishop Charles Mackenzie, of the Church of England, led this group of lay people – mostly university students. They accompanied Livingstone on his return trip to Africa and, in 1861, established the first Christian mission station in Malawi. After a failed attempt, they withdrew to Zanzibar and, in 1888, resumed their work in Malawi at Likoma Island on Lake Malawi. From that time, they developed into what is known as the Anglican Council in Malawi that covers most parts of Malawi in four dioceses.

Meanwhile, the Free Church of Scotland made another response to Dr David Livingstone's appeal. In 1875, under the leadership of a lay man, Lieutenant

Edward Young, the Free Church of Scotland started a mission centre at Cape Maclear, at the southern tip of Lake Malawi. They named their centre Livingstonia Mission after Dr Livingstone, who had died in 1874. The original purpose in the formation of the Livingstonia Mission was that it should grow into a town, and afterwards a city, to become a great centre of commerce, civilization and Christianity. Later, they moved to the north and settled at Bandawe, their new headquarters, which eventually, in 1894, moved to the plateau west of Bandawe at a place known as Khondowe.

The establishment of the Blantyre Mission closely followed that of Livingstonia. Again, it was opened in response to Dr Livingstone's appeal. This mission was named Blantyre, after Livingstone's birthplace in Scotland, and was established in October 1876 under the sponsorship of the Church of Scotland. The aim of the mission was stated as follows: "The mission is industrial and evangelical, designed to be a nucleus of advancing centuries of Christian life and civilization to the Nyasa and the surrounding region" (Paas 2006:195).

The first team leader was a lay man, Dr Macklin. He took charge of every missionary pioneering aspect and, only in 1878, the first clergyman, the Rev Duff Macdonald, was sent to take charge of affairs. At the outset, Blantyre Mission was not successful, until a new beginning was made in 1881 when the Rev David Clement Scott took over this mission. Among his outstanding achievements, Rev. Scott is remembered for his dedication in the training of African helpers as evangelists, who were to form the nucleus of a future Church. By the time he retired, he had laid a strong foundation for the African Church (Pauw 1980:26). The re-founding of Blantyre Mission accelerated the growth of the enterprise of the Scottish Christians in Malawi. They introduced legal trade on a large enough scale to become a practical alternative to the slave trade. It soon became much too great a task for the missionaries, in addition to their other duties. Accordingly, the African Lakes Company was established (Weller & Linden 1984:45-46). Like their fellow Scottish Mission in Livingstonia, the Blantyre Mission's strategy was holistic - it intended to take care and develop both body and soul. Unfortunately, there

was more emphasis on the body than on the soul. When one side is emphasized at the expense of another, mission work is prone to face problems.

Next on the list of pioneers of the Gospel in Malawi is the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) of South Africa. With Blantyre to the south and Livingstonia to the north, the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) was established in the Central Region of Malawi in 1889. Rev AC Murray and Rev TCB Vlok jointly established the first mission station at Mvera. As regards the aim of their mission, the DRCM missionaries differed slightly from the Scottish, especially on civilization. A.C. Murray was quoted as having written the following in his diary:

> We are not sent out, I think, to civilize peoples, but to convert them. Not to give them a high secular education, but to "teach them to keep all things' which our Lord and Master commanded. Let those who will be our helpers as evangelists, catechists or teachers, learn what is necessary for their work, but as far as the people in general are concerned, let us impress the Word of God upon them in all possible ways, and furthermore teach them to read the Bible for themselves in their own language (Pauw 1980:60).

The headquarters was moved from Mvera to Nkhoma 23 years later. The missionary venture that started at Mvera has, over the years, grown into what is today known as the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP). This Church is referred to as "a sample and testing field for the Malawian Church in this research" (cf section 1.6.4. above).

Right from the beginning, the two Scottish missions showed interest in merging to form an indigenous African Presbyterian Church. Their discussions took a long time, but eventually, in 1924, they formed the CCAP. The DRCM, under the leadership of William Hoppe Murray, who was of Scottish descent, joined the CCAP in 1926. By that time, each of the three missions had grown into Presbyteries that developed into Synods in 1956.

2.3.2 A short account of laity development

(i) In the two Scottish Missions

The historiography, common in presenting African church history, empha-sizes the role of white missionaries, but says little about the African lay pioneers. However, one can assume that, behind every successful mission venture, there must have been lay leaders who complemented the success. As the Free Church of Scotland's missionaries travelled to Cape Maclear to open their first station, they recruited two Malawian assistants, namely Tom Bokwito and Sam Sambani. These men proved to be very useful, as they acted as interpreters (Paas 2006:191). Their interpreter's role was not insignificant, because the breakthrough of every mission venture depended on communication. Many of Livingstonia Mission's early evangelistic successes were initiated by a lay person named William Koyi. He was one of the Xhosa men who were recruited in South Africa to help with mission work there. Paas (2006:191) makes a point as he comments on these Xhosa lay men, "… James Stewart brought four Xhosa missionaries from Lovedale: William Ntusane Koyi, Mapas Ntintili, Shadreck Ngunana, and Isaac Wau-chope. They played an important role in the development of Livingstonia Mission." Paas (2006) elaborates on the importance of the mediatory role that William Koyi played in negotiating with resistant local tribal chiefs. As an example, he notes:

> Chief Mbelwa at first did not fully welcome the missionaries, but William Koyi, having a Zulu background and being able to speak the language of the Ngoni chief, opened communications. In 1886, Mbelwa wanted missions in all of the Ngoni area (Paas 2006:191).

God used the laity to pave the way for Christianity in Malawi.

In the Blantyre Mission, it was clear that the pioneer white missionaries placed great emphasis on local leadership, especially after the failed attempt to control the natives with a heavy hand. Paas (2006:195) points out that Clement Scott encouraged local leadership in the hands of people, such as Joseph Bismarck, Harry Matecheta, John Gray Kufa and Harry Mtuwa. At a later stage, some of them received theological training and were ordained as

pioneer ministers of the Blantyre Synod. According to Pauw (1980:27), on 9 March 1911, Harry Matecheta (1870-1962) was one of the first two Africans to be ordained as ministers. He eventually became the first African to be elected as Moderator of the then Blantyre Presbytery.

Some well-groomed lay people from Blantyre Mission became extremely important in the remarkable work of translating the Holy Bible into Chichewa. The outstanding two were Thomas Maseya and Jonathan Sande. In the version that received national acceptance, their contributions helped to mix and balance the implemented Chichewa dialects.

(ii)   In the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM)

The DRC's pioneer missionaries became successful right from the beginning, because of their use of lay people who had just been converted. In literal obedience to the Great Commission,[6] as indicated above from Andrew Charles Murray's diary, the missionaries not only aimed to convert people, but to make them disciples. In assessing the DRCM's approach to mission work, Pauw (1980:220-221) observes:

> Furthermore, certain very important and fundamental principles were established in the work of the DRCM. The first of these was to apply the principle of what used to be called "Native agency." The fact had already been recognised by David Livingstone that Africa could only be won for Christ by extensive use of the African himself. Apart from a few helpers loaned from Livingstonia Mission in the beginning, the policy was all along that local converts should be trained and sent out to surrounding villages to introduce the Gospel and to evangelize.

Even those who were recruited as mere cargo team leaders were equipped with simple training to share the Gospel during resting intervals with members of the team (who were mostly unconverted). All willing converts, regardless of their age, were given basic preparation and sent out to be itinerant evangelists. Pauw (1980:221) continues:

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[6] Matthew 28:19-20: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (NIV).

> Above all, it was the group of men known as teacher-evangelists who really performed the greatest task in evangelizing their own people: these men [and women] were posted to the village schools which over the years proved [to be] the most fruitful method of all in evangelizing.

The introduction of a village school system was one of the breakthroughs to share the Gospel with the multitudes. The white missionary could identify some interested Africans and organize classes for them on reading, writing and biblical knowledge at the Mission Central School. They were then sent out to different villages to organize and teach learning groups whatever these people had learnt during the mornings, which led to the development of village schools. Kamwana (1998:27) says:

> Those who were able to read and write were trained as monitors to open more schools in their villages … Some were trained as evangelists. Both monitors and the evangelists evangelised the people in different areas. Missionaries used them to proclaim the Gospel and teach converts to live in a traditionally related context.

Right from the early groups of baptized members, there were outstanding Christians, such as Simeon Mgoola, David Tsirizani, Isaac Kapologulani and Solomon Chimchere, who served for many years as evangelists and lay preachers. Later, in 1901, The DRCM established a training centre for teachers. Unlike the Livingstonia Mission, the DRCM had no interest in providing converts with long and extensive training in order for them to participate in missions. The DRCM principle was:

> Provided men were given basic training and were well-grounded in the Scriptures and the principal briefs of Christianity, they could for the present serve effectively in evangelistic and even pastoral work (Pauw 1980:152).

The graduates from the DRCM teacher training centre were commissioned to be teacher-evangelists. As in Blantyre Mission, some of these teacher-evangelists were identified and trained to become ministers, the first two of whom were Andreya Nankumba and Namoni Katengeza, who were ordained into holy ministry in November 1925. Ever since that time, the teacher-evangelist training offered preparatory ground from which most theological candidates were taken and then trained for holy ministry. Even those

teacher-evangelists, who did not enter ordained ministry, were figures to reckon with in the life of the Church's mission.

(iii)   In the Nkhoma Synod

Lay people, mainly those in the field of teaching, were useful not only in evangelization but also in setting workable administrative strategies for the entire missionary venture. In 1960, just before the DRCM terminated their control over the young missionary Church in Malawi, a group of indigenous teachers formed themselves into what they called the Nkhoma Synod Teachers' Association (NSTA), which became a wing of the lay people who had the courage even to point out some of the Church's weaknesses. Labuschagne (2003:331) says, "The teachers and ex-teachers consequently started the Nkhoma Synod Teachers' Association with the purpose of getting the Synod out of the stranglehold of the missionaries so that people could be free ...." The positive criticisms that the NSTA raised helped the re-organiza-tion of some strategies that, in turn, helped the young Church's smooth transition into autonomy. In the time of the Synod's attainment of autonomy, the cream of the Synod came from this pool of teachers. Some outstanding figures, such as Hardwick Kachaje, Allison Nyanda, Eneya Msangaambe, AE Thomas, and many others, became prominent Church elders who contributed effectively in Synodical Departments and Committees.

Soon after the Nkhoma Synod received autonomy from the DRCM in April 1962, a Lay Training Centre was opened on 1 July 1962 for the Synod at the foot of Mount Chongoni. It was a farm building previously owned by a Mr. Dirk du Toit, a South African farmer (Labuschagne 2002:109-110). Originally known as Chongoni Church Lay Training Centre, the Centre is expected to offer a variety of short courses to lay people at different levels. They cater for congregationally instituted responsibilities, such as Sunday school teachers, catechumen teachers, *alangizi* (moral instructors/instructresses), session clerks, congregational treasurers, music leaders and other groups. Since the centre can host more than 250 people at a time, the facilities are sometimes hired by various organisations for meetings and retreats. The Nkhoma Synod's Bi-annual General Assemblies are also held there. Since the early

1990s the Centre has been officially known as the Namoni Katengeza Church Lay Training Centre (NKCLTC) in memory of Namoni Katengeza, one of the first two Malawian ministers to be ordained in the Nkhoma Synod. Sometimes, the facilitators at the NKLCLTC visit different congregations to offer courses upon invitation. This method helps to reduce costs, because participants provide their own meals and sleep at home. The Centre is also responsible for coordinating a course in Basic Christian Leadership and Theological Training under the Nehemiah Bible Institute.

2.4 STATISTICAL RESOURCE ANALYSIS: A CHURCH PROFILE

The entry point to any church resource analysis is the presentation of the most basic information concerning that particular church or denomination. This is technically known as the "church profile" (Hendriks 2004:175). Therefore, this section will present a brief resource analysis of the Nkhoma Synod and of the Nkhoma CCAP Congregation, as a study focus of this research.

2.4.1 The Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP

The Nkhoma Synod is one of the five Synods of the CCAP. The others are the Blantyre, Harare, Livingstonia and Zambia Synods. The Nkhoma Synod covers 10 of the 27 Malawian districts; thus the whole of Central Region and one district in the south. The Synod has 144 (August 2010) congregations divided into 15 presbyteries. Its administrative offices are at Nkhoma, a mission station 50 kilometres south of Lilongwe City. The official postal address for the Nkhoma Synod is: P.O. Box 45, Nkhoma, Malawi; telephone: +2651 754 446 and e-mail: nkhomasynod1@globemw.net . The Nkhoma Synod has experienced a steady numerical Church growth throughout its history. While writing on the high priority that The Nkhoma Synod places on evangelism and its impact on church growth, Brown (2005:317) observes, "The Synod between 1962 and 2002 posted growth that is totally unthinkable in the West. In 1963 it had 76,000 members; in 2003 it has grown more than five-fold," which is evident in the 2008 year-end Nkhoma Synod statistical summary report on data collected from its Presbyteries. This report indicates that total membership in the Nkhoma Synod has grown to just over a million

-, the total membership being the sum of the number of communicant and catechumen members. According to Mr. Kagwada, the Senior Administrative Assistant in the Synod Office responsible for the update of records, the membership could reach 1.2 million if regular seekers and affiliates were included.

According to the *Jaarboek van die NG Kerke* (2010:423), there are approximately 120 Church ministers with approximately 10,980 Church elders. (The number of Church elders reflects the number of wards available, as each elder represents a ward, which is the smallest unit of congregants. In the Nkhoma Synod, each ward has a Church elder, a deacon, one male and one female moral instructor/teacher.) In this book (2010:332-334), detailed information on ministers reveals that only 106 of the ministers are engaged in congregational work. The rest are either engaged in full-time office work or full-time studies, which can be interpreted that the ratio of ministers in the Nkhoma Synod to the members who need their pastoral care is only 1:10,000! On average, each Church elder must take care of more than 100 members. The statistical figures in the *Jaarboek van die NG Kerke* (2010) might not be very accurate and reliable, but they present a close reflection of a minister's workload in the Nkhoma Synod.

2.4.2 The Nkhoma CCAP Congregation

The Nkhoma Congregation that harbours the Synod headquarters, is one of the Nkhoma Synod's 141 congregations and one of Nkhoma Presbytery's 10 congregations. Its postal address is The Nkhoma CCAP Congregation, P.O. Box 68, Nkhoma, Malawi; telephone No. 00265 1 752 463; and e-mail nkhomaccap@gmail.com . Its history dates back to 31 May 1896, when two South African missionaries started their mission work in the area at the invitation of a local chief. Geographically, the Congregation is in Lilongwe District and extends into Dedza District within the Central Region of Malawi. It covers a radius of about 20 kilometres with a hilly topography. In this area of about 10,000 people, more than half are members of this Congregation, or they are involved in some or other way in the activities of the Nkhoma

Congregation. The main station has a big hospital, four schools and other institutions that are a source of employment for the surrounding community. As an old missionary Congregation, the Nkhoma CCAP has the following characteristics:

- Old members would like to maintain the classical form of worshipping.
- Members are not accommodative to any new ideas in the Church.
- Members are extremely proud of being the "headquarters" congregation.
- Members are not keen to initiate development projects.
- There are some symptoms of a missionary dependency syndrome.
- The community that surrounds the congregation's mission station is generally xenophobic.

2.4.2.1   *The Nkhoma Congregation's statistics*

The Nkhoma CCAP Congregation has approximately 6500 members spread over 76 wards that form 19 prayer houses. For administrative purposes, these prayer houses are divided into five zones, each with a Holy Communion Centre. On average, each Church elder is responsible for about 90 members. At the time of this study, the researcher was the only minister responsible for this congregation.

The table below provides more information on important statistics that describe the Nkhoma CCAP Congregation, as extracted from the 2009 Congregational Annual Report.

Table 2.1: The Nkhoma Congregation's important statistics

Holy Communion. Centre (Zone)	No. of P/ Houses	Com. Members	Cat. Members	Cat. Teachers	Ch. Elders	Deacons	09 Ad. Baptism	09 Inf. Baptism	S.S Children	S.S Centres	S.S Teachers
	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k
Station	3	1,660	530	10	24	24	78	90	408	11	27
Mkundi	8	980	370	15	17	17	49	62	286	8	9
Chigodi	1	610	170	4	8	8	21	38	145	4	8
Chipala	4	740	260	8	13	13	36	47	202	7	12
Chipamphale	3	890	290	7	14	14	62	68	327	6	13
Totals	19	4,880	1620	44	76	76	246	305	1,368	36	69
Registered Membership	**6,500**										

Note:

(i)   Apply the alphabetical codes in the table above:

a = Number of prayer houses;
b = Number of communicant members;
c = Number of catechumen members;
d = Number of catechumen teachers;
e = Number of church elders;
f = Number of deacons;
g = Number of adults baptized in 2009;
h = Number of infants baptized in 2009;
i = Number of registered Sunday school children;
j = Number of Sunday school centres; and
k = Number of Sunday school teachers.

(ii)   In columns **b** and **c**, figures have been adjusted to the nearest 10.

2.4.2.2   Nkhoma congregational ministries and resources

The Nkhoma Congregation has both traditional and special ministries in its programmes. In traditional ministries, we refer to those ministries that form part of the identity of the Church as a whole. These are ministries that can be traced in every The Nkhoma Synod Congregation and are part and parcel of the Synod's rules and regulations. Special ministries are those peculiar ministries that are created, and can only be found within a particular Congregation. Traditional ministries in the Nkhoma Congregation include:

Evangelism; Children's Ministry that is responsible for Sunday School and the Kindergarten; Women's Ministry (under Women's Guild); Youth Ministry; Men's Ministry (under Men's Guild) and Christian Education Ministry. The special ministries undertaken in the Nkhoma Congregation are HIV/AIDS, Compassion and Training Ministries. The HIV/AIDS Ministry involves discerning information and home-based care programmes. The Compassion Ministry includes Orphan Care and such activities as visiting and caring for the sick at the big hospital and helping the patient's guardians if in need. In the Training Ministry, the congregation works hand in hand with the Theological Training Institution (JMTI) that uses the Congregation as the practical training field for its student ministers. The Congregation organizes various training sessions for members, as well as non-members, in which the student ministers participate as a way of doing practical work.

Hendriks (2004:177) says, "A congregation's basic resource is its members." The previous paragraphs have already shown that the Nkhoma Congregation has sufficient human resources to survive and thrive. Nevertheless, its current financial capacity is below the average expectation. Like many other Malawians, people around the Nkhoma Congregation are generally poor. Many of the Church members (eligible for monthly pledges) are either in low-paying jobs or unemployed. The majority of these members are seasonal subsistence farmers who, basically, live from hand to mouth. Some rely on piece-work employment at the mission station and other people's farms during the growing season.

Having presented a general profile of the Nkhoma Synod and Nkhoma CCAP Congregation, it is equally important to explore other elements of the Church that could also help to guide this study. The role of leadership in the Church will now be mentioned.

2.4.3 Leadership as a key to engage the laity

Many congregations have failed to progress in their missional roles, due to a lack of proper visionary leadership. There are numerous potential members with a cross-section of spiritual gifts to be used in the Church today; but are

not motivated into maximum use of their gifts. It all depends on the leadership skills and styles. The combined knowledge of context and human resources can build in-roads into understanding congregational life, which is a key to any effective planning process. To illustrate this point, a short survey of modes of classifying leadership styles in the Church will now be presented.

The first is based on the leader's degree of commitment to basic leadership concerns, namely relationship and task effectiveness. It is about matching leadership styles to fit the group. Stevens and Collins (1993:62) explain:

> A person who is highly task-oriented, but has a low concern for maintaining interpersonal relationships is usually viewed by others as a controlling or directive leader, while the leader having a high concern for relationships but a low concern for programs and tasks is viewed as a relational or person oriented leader. But people may complain that the relational leader "doesn't accomplish very much and hardly ever finishes a job." The leader having a low concern for both relationships and task effectiveness is seen as a passive leader. The leader having a high concern for both is viewed as a participative or total-involvement leader.

The table below captures the four leadership styles explained above. It is presented in the form of a graph that indicates the level of involvement caused by the leader's orientation.

Table 2.2: The four basic leadership styles[7]

PEOPLE

Concern for People (High)(Low)	9 8 7 6	**PERSON-ORIENTED** High Relationships and Low Tasks	**TOTAL INVOLVEMENT** High Task and High Relationships
	5 4 3 2 1	**PASSIVE INVOLVEMENT** Low Task and Low Relationship	**TASK ORIENTED** High Task and Low Relationships

→ TASK

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

(Low)   **Concern for Task**   **(High)**
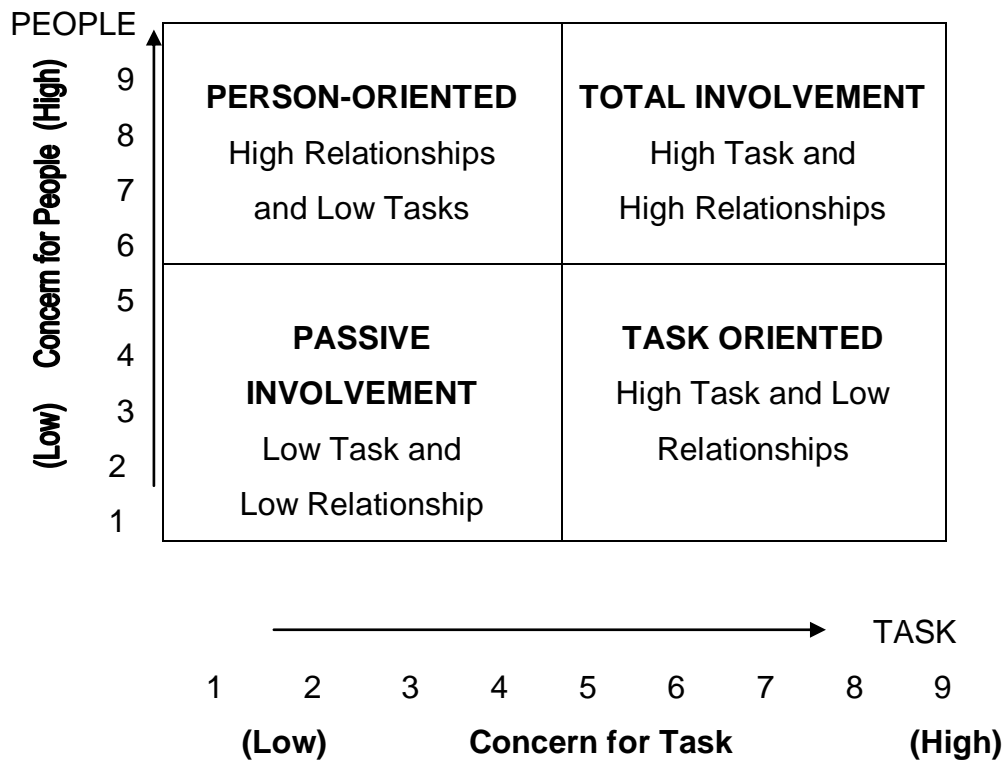
(a)   The task-oriented leadership style

A task-oriented leader places major emphasis on programs. The typically hard-driving leader's motto is "produce or perish." He makes sure tasks are accomplished at the expense of everything else. Leaders who use this type of leadership rarely ask for advice - usually the weaker side of task-oriented leadership.

(b)   The person-oriented leadership style

A person-oriented leader considers viewing people's concerns and feelings of primary importance. He tries to arrange conditions so that personal and social needs can be satisfied, both on the job and in terms of the follower's desires. The disadvantage of this type of leadership is that appeasement takes an upper hand and tasks hardly ever finish.

(c)   The passive involvement leadership

This leadership style experiences little or no contradiction between comple-tion of the task and the people's needs. Passive involvement leadership will conform to the job description, but do its best to stay out of the limelight. The

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[7] The graph was adapted from Robert B. Blake and Jane S. Mouton, *The managerial grid.* (Houston: Gulf Publishing Co., 1964).

leader creates a leadership vacuum intentionally so that group members will assume leadership roles and carry on with the work themselves. The weakness is that it usually works on a short-term basis.

(d)   The total involvement leadership style

A total involvement leadership style integrates a high concern for getting the task completed as well as a high concern for good human relationships. For this leader, effective integration is possible by involving people and their ideas in establishing sound and mature relationships among the members, as this is essential to accomplish an organization's task. In this leadership style, crisis intervention is slow, without in-depth personal counselling, thus on the weaker side.

It is important to note that none of the above listed leadership styles are better than others. Each of them can work effectively in a particular situation and each needs the other. Leadership does not happen without a situation. A leader learns to lead/heed? the group's characteristics and respond to them with a style of leadership appropriate to them (Stevens & Collins 1993:56-74).

Another mode of classifying leadership styles is based on a congregational planning process. The central focus of this study is to survey the situation and establish means of promoting or maximizing the laity's role in the Malawian Church. For that purpose, only the more participative styles that foster the empowerment of the laity are presented, as outlined in Hendriks (2004:158):

(i)   *"Received or delegated style*: The decision-making body gives people specific tasks. This is often the case with a congregation's programmes or ministries." In the case of the Nkhoma Synod, the leadership style is evident in the role of *Alangizi* (Church moral teachers), Sunday school and catechumen teachers, and even deacons and Church elders. Church members usually elect persons in such leadership positions by casting votes at a meeting.

(ii) *Autonomous leadership style*: In this type of leadership, a group of Church members, usually volunteers, "are given spheres of authority in which to act independently." These are ministries with specific objectives to be accomplished within the main denominational set-up. Common examples in most denominations in Africa are *Chigwirizano cha Akazi* (Women's Guild) and Youth movements. Of late, the Nkhoma Synod has seen the Men's Guild and HIV/AIDS Home-based Care Groups developing under this type of leadership.

(iii) *Assertive leadership style:* This is characterized by "frequent and intensive interaction between persons or bodies." It is a kind of aggressive leadership that was generally noticed in those congregations with a Western background. With the fast growing urbanization in Africa instigated by globalization, a more frequent consultative leadership style is evident in many African congregations. One can easily detect such a relationship between the youth and the Church elders in a Church Council.

(iv) *Integration leadership style*: This denotes "a teamwork style, where everything is shared and done together." Common in a congregational system of church government, the views of all members are respected and considered in decision-making within the congregation. This style is accommodative in a way that involves all members and engages them in a congregation's life. It has the potential to empower members and to equip and motivate them to take part in the congregational mission and ministries. Involvement and trust lead to commitment, meaningful co-operation and spiritual growth.

In establishing the type of church government and leadership style for a congregation, a close observation of the congregation's grassroots life is most important. Regardless of being known traditionally as belonging, for instance, to a Presbyterian system of church government, some congregations behave more or less like Episcopal ones. Over time, congregations drift away from their identities due to circumstances

surrounding them. Leadership styles have their influences too. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that the above descriptions are not exhaustive; neither are they fixed canonically. The cultural orientation of each congregation, and sometimes denomination, plays the upper hand in what determines the congregation.

2.5   CULTURAL IDENTITY IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP IN THE NKHOMA SYNOD

Chewa is the dominating cultural system in the Nkhoma Synod. In many aspects of their lives, the Chewa people are submissive to authority. Women, especially those from the royal families, are the decision-makers when it comes to choosing leaders, such as village headmen. But, once they have chosen and inducted one, the women are disregarded. They are not even allowed to take part in highly powered village caucuses. The Chichewa tradition has a common cult practice in the form of a dance for masked men called *nyawu*. One must undergo a special initiation in order to become a member of this cult. In his brief description of *nyawu*, Brown (2005:296) notes, "The Nyawu is a secret men's society in which, during the dances, they become wild animals that incarnate the spirits of the dead or *mizimu*. It is thought necessary to become a part of this society for a man to be regarded as an adult." Lessons attended during initiation are highly secretive and are not to be shared in any way with the uninitiated. Among the Chewa people, those who are not initiated in the nyawu cult are regarded as ignorant children regardless of their age or a high level of education. The initiated are technically called "*Wometa"* (literally meaning: the shaved ones), while those not yet initiated are called "*wosameta"* (the unshaven) and other sarcastic names, such as "*chalunda*" (bitter), "*chomwera*" (a cup). The "unshaven" are not allowed to come close to the masked dancers, as they are "children." It should be noted that the *Nyawu* cult has opposed Christianity ever since the latter was introduced in the Central Region of Malawi. Leadership in the *Nyawu* cult is autocratic and members are groomed to take instructions without questions – out of obedience and respect for elders. They are forced to propagate the lie that the dancing masked men are not human beings, but animals.

Approximately over 70% of the Nkhoma Synod members, including ordained ministers, have a background experience of the *Nyawu* cult. To some extent, there is a legacy of this deeply rooted element of 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. The philosophy behind such motives has its roots in the Chichewa view of leadership and subjects – *Wamkulu salakwa (An elderly person does not make mistakes, so he should be obeyed)*. In the opinion of this researcher, the sense of *primus inter pares* in Presbyterian leadership theory has little room in the Nkhoma Synod because of the lack of systematic hermeneutics of its own system of Church government. The authoritative spirit perceived in traditional leaders is also evident in Church leaders. The communicant members' submissiveness must be checked to avoid the establishment of the Church's version of a village community leadership style. The people of Malawi in general, have a culture of respecting leaders. That is why to be a Church minister is to adopt a highly respectable position. In general, people believe that the Church minister is extremely wise and cannot be advised regarding Church issues.

The argument above suggests that the Chewa cultural influence in the Church should not be viewed negatively. It should be a natural starting point to empower the laity and enlighten them about their own practices with a theology that will impart more meaning to their participation in the Church. As they do theology, people should start from the known to the unknown. The clergy should make a deliberate effort to use the situation to reinforce the biblical church metaphor of the body of Christ. Christ is the only head and each of the members should participate according to the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to them. When the clergy accept "blind" respect uncritically, the tribal traditions take root in the Church traditions and deprive the Church of biblical principles. Hendriks (2004:161) believes:

> To understand people's needs, how to communicate with them and get them involved and committed, requires something that may well be described as an intuitive art! Congregational leadership must stay

in touch with the people on the ground. However, this is not for selfish reasons of survival. This is the cost of truly loving and caring for people who live in a fast and furious world and implies that ministers and congregational leaders must be willing to leave their comfort zones and reach out to listen and understand.

The danger of creating a chief-subject relationship in the church is that it always creates a gulf between a Church minister and the entire laity. In summary, Buchanan and Hendriks (1995:43) point out:

> The old authority of the church, vested in its hierarchical structures and its ways of appointing its leaders, has gone forever …. The ethical issues of the day, for instance, make it imperative for leaders not only to reassess the traditions of the church, but also to consult and work with the laity in order to find common biblical solutions acceptable to all. Leadership is a team effort requiring a great deal of listening and prayerful consultation. The leader has to learn how to serve again, how to be powerless, even though he or she is the person responsible for prophetic guidance.

2.6   THE CHURCH LAY LEADERSHIP IN MALAWI

The fast growth of Christianity in Malawi, as in any other country in sub-Saharan Africa, has emphasized the importance of the laity. Both in Presbyterian and Episcopal circles, lay leaders bear the very important responsibility of caring for the church where it exists. Traditionally, clerical Church leaders are housed in isolation from the rest of the congregation, but lay leaders "sleep with the flock." In Malawian Presbyterian circles, lay leaders are chosen democratically. For instance, in the Nkhoma Synod, members in their wards choose lay leaders, such as Church elders. Usually, the members in the ward propose two or three names and the congregation's session confirms one to serve in that position for a period of three years.

2.6.1   The Influence of lay leaders in the Nkhoma Synod

Throughout the history of the Nkhoma Synod, lay leaders have been influential.

Firstly, in the field of evangelism and church growth. The secret behind the fast growth of a church is that lay leaders are mandated to be creative by

sharing the Gospel with fellow members of the community in a natural way. African communities respect any kind of leader in his or her own right. So, once lay leaders are recognized as Church leaders, they command high respect in the community and what they share is easily credited as long as they live by what they say. With that cultural opportunity, lay leaders have been influential in leading their kinsmen to Christ and Church membership.

Secondly, lay leaders in the Nkhoma Synod have shown prowess in the organization and building up of members. Apart from the known principles of Church administration in the Presbyterian system, the lay leaders have been able to find ways and means to influence members to cooperate and build themselves up. For instance, instead of asking members for donations towards or a church project, they identify piecework on a farm, or elsewhere, then they mobilize members to do the work as a group, and their wages go directly to the project.

Thirdly, the influence of lay leaders is evident in the field of Christian education. While the clergy take responsibility to train Sunday school and catechumen teachers, the role of monitoring the actual teaching lies in the hands of lay leaders. Their influence can be traced in their choice of the right people to teach. Some of the Church elders even volunteer to teach. Again, the influence is evident in the recommendations that they make for a catechumen member to advance from one level to the next. Among the five Synods of the CCAP, the Nkhoma Synod is the most outstanding with their emphasis on, and seriousness about, *chilangizo* (moral instructions) as part of the Christian education. Lay leaders - both male and female - do all this work.

Fourthly, Church elders in the Nkhoma Synod are influential in the area of the Church and society. Since the Church always interacts with society in its activities, the Church lay leaders (unlike the clergy) have been skilful in negotiating with traditional leaders on behalf of the Church. During funerals, weddings, and other public functions, lay leaders are always in the forefront to communicate and make the arrangements. Here, it should be noted that,

at functions, such as weddings and funerals, Church and tribal traditions usually confront one another (*Zolamulira* 1996:z.187-188).[8] Lay leaders apply their wisdom and knowledge of both traditions to negotiate peacefully.

Fifthly, lay leaders in the Nkhoma Synod are influential in maintaining Church discipline. Since 1994, the change in the Malawian political climate has made an impact on members' lives. Many of them misinterpreted freedom of speech and other rights, by trying to do whatever they want in the Church. But, here, the lay leaders have lived up to their calling and allowed order to prevail. In isolated cases, lay leaders dutifully disciplined even the clergy. The calling system in the Nkhoma Synod gives the Church elders a mandate, as ruling elders, to monitor discipline even among ministers as stipulated in the Church's book of rules and regulations (*Zolamulira* 1996:z.186; Malongosoledwe 1968:48).

Finally, lay leaders in the Nkhoma Synod have great influence in organizing ministries in the Church. A list of ministries in the Nkhoma Synod has already been outlined. Basically, they are lay ministries, because the lay leaders themselves sustain them. An outstanding example is the women's ministry, commonly called *Chigwirizano cha Amayi*, which is a powerful wing of the Church, faithful to its objectives and result-oriented. It was initiated more than 50 years ago by female lay leaders and has grown amazingly due to the efforts of the lay leaders. Despite the fact that the Nkhoma Synod not yet allows female members to be in Church leadership positions, women have excelled constantly, and have contributed significantly to the financial and infrastructural development of the Synod.

2.6.2 An example of influential laity

It has been shown that, when lay leaders receive the appropriate freedom, they can extend their influence beyond denominational borders. A brief biography of Mr. Hardwick Kachaje, a prominent Church lay leader and local traditional leader, may serve as a good example. He was a teacher in the

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[8] In The Nkhoma Synod rules and regulations book known as *Zolamulira,* references are made to the articles (Z followed by article number) rather than book page number.

Church and also a wonderful preacher. In 1960, he was among the pioneer teachers who formed the famous Nkhoma Synod Teachers' Association (NSTA) that played a significant role in the Church's transition to autonomy. Being a teacher-evangelist, he became so influential in the community that his constituency elected him as their representative in the first post-independence Malawi Parliament. Later, when he was imprisoned on false political allegations, he initiated an evangelism ministry among fellow prisoners and won many to Christ. Two of them became ordained ministers after their terms in prison. Labuschagne (2002:103) says:

> Hardwick Adamu Kachaje was a very able teacher who later was elected to be a Member of Parliament. He was a real evangelist and a black unpaid missionary. At his village he had a Sunday school for little children under the trees. … we were touched by the Scriptural knowledge of these little children.

Mr. Hardwick Kachaje is on record as a pacesetter in bringing to Malawi several Christian organizations, such as World Vision International; Trans World Radio; Life Ministry (Campus Crusade); Keswick Convention; Evangelical Association of Malawi; and International Bible Society. In 1997, he initiated a Bible translation project through the International Bible Society. Later, he handed over leadership of the project to a younger person but he continued to be part of the editing team. In 2003, the International Bible Society produced a new version of the Bible in contemporary Chichewa. These are remarkable achievements that highlight the influence of lay leaders within the Nkhoma Synod and beyond.

2.7   CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the Church in Malawi's general physical features in the area of influence. It also briefly surveyed the historical background of the Church and explained why some elements of the Church are what they are. The Nkhoma Synod and Nkhoma Congregation's Church profiles have been outlined with a special focus on exposing the place of the laity in the Church, and this chapter has brought a clear picture of the faith community into focus.

The geographical setting of Malawi was presented as an indicator of both the potential and limitations of the Malawian Church. The good neighbours, rivers, valleys and mountains with fertile lands reflect the glory that Malawi enjoys, together with many other natural resources. Can these resources suffice for starting a transitional process to improve the livelihood in Malawi? On the other hand, the growing population, prevalence of adult HIV/AIDS, and the staggering economy have suggested the urgent need for the Church to regard its prophetic role seriously. It must read the signs of the times and discern God's will for such a situation. Both local and global points of view should help the Church to respond hermeneutically to God's demands for our time. The historical perspective outlined in this chapter bears witness to a struggle for identity that is necessary for doing theology today. If our efforts for self-understanding in theology have to make any sense, we need to know where we come from in order to discover why we do what we now do. It also encourages any serious practical theologian to follow the route of meaningful paradigm shifting.

When the hypothesis suggests the re-engagement of early missionary strategies, such as the village school system, it does so in appreciation of the effectiveness that this system had as a method of empowering the laity. It has been established that the early missionaries were able to achieve surprising figures of literacy, because they were swift to empower their "helpers" to share what they learned in the style of literal obedience to the Great Commission. In this researcher's opinion, the application of this strategy initiated the Church's rapid growth during the "white missionary period." Upon attaining autonomy from the white missionaries, the indigenous Church leadership failed to implement it. A strategy renaissance is necessary.

The statistical analysis above established that the Nkhoma Synod has ample human resources in its congregations. The Nkhoma Congregation, specifically, stands a better chance of responding to a call for all-participatory membership, because of its strategic position in the Synod. This

Church profile provides evidence of the need to stimulate and put the available resources in Malawi to maximum use. In order to achieve that, a good knowledge of the nature of congregations, the leadership styles needed, and the culture that influences them, is important.

This chapter has helped to underscore the fact that theology is about the Church. Its history, structure, nature and role should be viewed as a means of understanding faith seeking. It has also shown that the place of the laity in the Malawian Church is noticeable, but requires new impetus to maximize its potential. In doing theology, one should seek to understand that the lay people are part of the body of Christ that bears his identity today.

Now, it is important to study the ecology of that faith community as a means to be implemented towards establishing the laity's practical empowerment.

CHAPTER THREE

A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHURCH IN MALAWI

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The objectives of this chapter are, firstly, to take the analysis of the previous chapter further by presenting an appropriate ecological description of the Congregation whose resources have been analysed and have been defined as poor. A definition of poverty will be established before the discussion proceeds. Secondly, the chapter considers relating the facts to be outlined in the contextual analysis with the factors that retard the active participation of the laity in the Malawian Church. To avoid "analysis paralysis" (Hendriks 2004) a short discussion on urbanization, church and politics is treated separately to consolidate the data provided.

Theology is done in a specific time and place, which means that it is about context. Effective ministry demands that proper enquiry be done on the ecology of any congregation in question as a methodology towards doing theology. Therefore, a contextual analysis deals with establishing the congregational facts and conditions that influence the life of that congregation. This information may guide its missional objectives. Hendriks (2004: 69) believes:

> Contextual analysis is necessary when a congregation is self-centred, or to such an extent focused on its own institutional well-being that it loses sight of its missional character and the needs and challenges that must be addressed in its community.

This methodological task of analysing the context is very important for this study as contexts differ. For example, the way theology can be absorbed in Milton Keynes; a suburb in London, cannot be the same as in Chinsapo, a suburb in Lilongwe. These two settings and their problems, world-views, cultures, literally everything - even their understanding of God - differ. Consequently, the theological interpretation of their missional calling will also differ. In analysing the context, a Malawian understanding of the relationship between theology, in general, and its local manifestation is made clear. The

theological questions that the African, and specifically the Malawian Church, ask today are initiated and influenced by the circumstances that surround it. To recap the comment once made by Johannes Verkuyl, a Dutch missiologist, Kwame Bediako (1995:129), an African theologian, says:

> African theology does all the things which theology in general does, but in African theology (as in Asia) all these other functions are embraced in a missionary or communicative function. It is not primarily an intra-ecclesiastical exercise, but a discipline whose practitioners keep one question central: How can we best do our theology so that the Gospel will touch Africans most deeply?

This calls for imparting a meaning to theology that intelligibly occupies an African mind with all its relevance. In an African context, Practical Theology should seriously be engaged with contemporary African issues, such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, civil and tribal conflicts, political unrest, corruption and environmental degradation.

3.2 WHY CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS IS NEEDED

Hendriks (2004:69) states, "A contextual analysis is intended to be one step in a process to remedy the sickness of an ingrown church and congregation," meaning that this methodological step - a tool in the diagnosis of any congregation - is necessary to create a wider picture of related factors that shape a congregation's life. A need exists for an empirical examination of a congregation's environment together with the society's global and local demographical facts. With the sub-Saharan African context in mind, Hendriks (2004:76) rightly captures the need for contextual analysis, as he writes:

> Whether a congregation is in the rural or urban Mozambique, Malawi, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia or South Africa, a congregation's environment must be explained in more detail. Congregations increasingly recognize their shared conversations, common practices and structures of co-operation. In the African continent, even within the same denomination and country, we find that congregations differ substantially. Each congregation needs to find its place within the religious ecology. It is also crucial that all congregations, regardless whether rural or urban, understand that their local practices, values and habits are shaped by a great number of environmental influences. No congregation can escape being influenced by its environment. In

order to understand a congregation, its environment should be analyzed.

If the lay people are to be empowered, what must be taken into account within the church ecology? Doing theology is about discovering those elements and relating them to God's will for the world.

3.3 POVERTY DEFINED

Both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund regard and classify Malawi as one of the poorest countries in the world.[9] Does that mean that everybody in Malawi is poor? If this is true, then in what sense? Actually, the question of poverty is complicated. It is difficult to tackle this from the view of the poor; and it is often exaggerated and misunderstood from the observer's viewpoint. For instance, this researcher was invited to represent his Church at the 2006 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh. During the course of the assembly, he was asked to address a certain group of commissioners to the Assembly on the situation of poverty in Malawi, but was informed that the audience had never been outside the United Kingdom and do not understand what poverty is about. They see pictures and stories about it on television, but fail to understand why people are in that condition. Having been born and grown up in a situation of poverty, the researcher was at a loss about what to tell such an audience. So, he chose to just tell stories of daily life in Malawi, only to discover that every detail was considered to be horrible and unbelievable. This was evident when the audience received the opportunity to ask questions about the situation of poverty in Africa.

In September 2007, the researcher made an informal survey on what ordinary rural poor people in Malawian villages consider poverty to be. Chatting with ten people in the Kachiramadzi village,[10] seven said that a poor person is one who does not have food, clothes and shelter. Individually,

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[9] http://www.imf.org/external_malawi and http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/mwi_aag.pdf Accessed on 2010.08.09.
[10] Kachiramadzi Village is within the Traditional Authority Chilikumwendo in Dedza (West) District of the Central Region of Malawi.

all mentioned food, clothes and shelter in that sequence. However, one respected old man, Sekuru Mulauzi,[11] said that, in most cases, poverty is in the eyes of the beholder. Sometimes, you only start to realise that you are poor when you compare yourself with other people who have more. Therefore, it is important to find a working definition of poverty that can be used in this research without losing its focus.

3.3.1 An outline of definitions of "poverty"

For ages, defining poverty has not been easy, because the word can have a different meaning for different groups of people. It also has a bearing on the social interpretation of the person who wants to explain it, especially from outside the poor themselves.

3.3.1.1   *Bryant Myers's definition of poverty*

In the researcher's opinion, among many who have made efforts to define poverty, Myers (1999:57-81) provides a more elaborate coverage. In his presentation, he surveys five opinions from different sources on what poverty could mean. He gives a balanced critique to each. Myers's five views are as follows:

(i)   *Poverty as deficit*: This view that was prominent in the early days of development thinking, considers poverty to be a lack. It emphasizes that people are deemed "poor" when they do not have enough food, a place to sleep, or clean water; their land is poor with no water for irrigation, roads are inadequate, no schools for their children and no health facilities exist. Another kind of deficit or lack is evident in the absence of knowledge and skills that people need to improve their lives.

However, this definition is too simplistic. Myers argues that if poverty was merely the absence of things, then the solution to poverty would simply be to

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[11] This man is considered to be well-off in the village, because he once worked in Zimbabwe and has a brick house with an iron-sheet roof and a cement floor. He has an ox-driven cart with three spans of oxen, has two bicycles and a big grain store. His five children are all educated and are employed in the government away from their village. These things qualify him for a status of respect in the village, as he is a role model.

provide the poor with what they lack. The rich would play the role of "Santa Claus" and poverty would end. He criticizes this view as reducing the poor to passive incomplete beings who can be fulfilled only through supplies. So, to limit one's understanding of poverty by this framework can create some serious problems.

(ii)   Poverty as entanglement: In defining poverty as "entanglement," Myers presents Robert Chambers's[12] view of using the household as a point of departure. Poverty is when a household lives in a cluster of disadvantages that cause it to be short of assets, physically weak, isolated, vulnerable and powerless. These dimensions form what is called a "poverty trap" in an interactive system. In material poverty, the household has few assets; inadequate housing and sanitation; and little or no land, livestock, or wealth. In physical weakness, household members lack strength because of poor health and inadequate nutrition. In being isolated, the household lacks access to services and information, often is far from the main roads, water lines, and even electricity and lacks access to markets, capital, credit and information. In its vulnerability, the household has few buffers against emergencies or disaster. Its members have no choices or options. They cannot save, and are vulnerable to cultural demands, such as dowry and feast days, that soak up savings. On powerlessness, the household lacks the ability and knowledge to influence life around it, or the social systems in which it lives.

In addition to the Chambers explanation of poverty dimensions, Myers adds "spiritual poverty" in the interest of being holistic. In this entanglement, a household suffers from broken and dysfunctional relationships with God, each other, the community, and creation. Its members may suffer from spiritual oppression – fear of spirits, demons, and ancestors. They may lack hope and be unable to believe that change is possible. They may never have heard the Gospel or have responded only to a truncated version of the

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[12] Robert Chambers is a respected development professional who works at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex in England. He is a champion of Participatory Rural Appraisal (now called Participatory Learning and Action).

Gospel that lacks transforming power. On this, Myers concludes that no systematic account of poverty is complete without a holistic view of the people's spiritual and material aspects and the social systems within which they live.

(iii) *Poverty as a lack of access to social power*: The definition of poverty, as a lack of access to social power, was coined by John Friedman.[13] Like Chambers, Friedman starts from a household. He regards a household as poor when it is so powerless that it cannot have access to social power. As a social unit of the poor, a household is embedded within four overlapping domains of social practices: the state, political community, civil society, and corporate economy. Each of these domains has a distinctive type of power: state power, political power, social power, and economic power. There are eight bases of social power that are available to the poor as avenues for creating social space and influence. These are: social networks, information for self-development, surplus time, instruments of work and livelihood, social organization, knowledge and skills, defensible life space, and financial resources. "Absolute poverty" is when the values for these eight dimensions are too low for a household to be able to move out of poverty on its own.

(iv) *Poverty as disempowerment*: Extending from Chambers and Friedman, a new more insightful term, "disempowerment," is employed in the process of defining poverty. Jayakumar Christian,[14] another development thinker, elaborates this and emphasizes the spiritual side of the poor as he regards poverty as disempowerment. Christian also sees the poor household embedded in a complex framework of interacting systems. For him, these systems include a personal system that includes psychology; a social system; and a spiritual/religious system that is both personal and social; and a cultural system that includes a worldview. The poor find themselves trapped inside a system of disempowerment made up of these interacting systems. Each part of the system creates its own particular contribution to

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[13] John Friedman is a professor of Urban Planning at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and a promoter of what is called "Alternative development."
[14] Jayakumar Christian is a long-time Indian practitioner. He attained his vast knowledge of transformational development through his involvement with World Vision International.

the disempowerment of the poor, including what Christian terms "captivity to god-complexes of the non-poor, deception by the principalities and powers, inadequacies in worldview, and suffering from a marred identity." Poor people are spiritually weakened by the web of lies that make them feel non-existent, valueless and humiliated. Their identity as God's creation is lost in themselves. Augustine Musopole (1997), the former General Secretary of the Malawi Council of Churches, calls this "a poverty of being." This poverty of being is where Africans feels their poverty most, because poor Africans have come to believe they are no good and cannot get things right. Their only hope is the *mzungu* who comes from the West with a bag of solutions for poverty. So, poverty is the world that tells the poor that they are God-forsaken.

(v)   *Poverty as a lack of freedom to grow*: Ravi Jayakaran's argument is presented on this view of poverty. Jayakaran perceives the poor as wrapped in a series of restrictions and limitations in four areas of life: physical, mental, social, and spiritual. He develops his argument from the Scriptures where the boy Jesus is said to have grown in "wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men" (Lk. 2:52 - NIV). The poor fail to attain full growth in life because of some external influences.

Nevertheless, Jayakaran adds to our understanding on poverty in two ways: He locates the cause of poverty to people; there is no need to blame systems that are only made by people. If the people – the poor and the non-poor – can change, everything will change. He also alerts us to the fact that there is a hierarchy of oppression within systems and above systems.

In conclusion to his poverty defining marathon, Myers (1999:81) states, "Poverty is a complicated social issue involving all areas of life – physical, personal, social, cultural, and spiritual. At the same time we must also conclude that poverty is in the eyes of the beholder." Myers warns that it is doubtful whether there is, or will be, a unified theory on poverty and that there is more to see and learn. So, the corrective is to keep applying a variety of views to research all the things that we need to examine. Myers

(1999:81) ends with a penetrating appeal to all those concerned with the poor, including himself, "We must work hard to be as holistic as we can be for the sake of the poor."

3.3.1.2   Other views on the definition of poverty

In keeping with the suggestion to examine different views on poverty, other short definitions are necessary at this point.

In November 2000, the Malawian government produced a report on the profile of poverty in Malawi. This came as a result of the Malawi Integrated Household Survey (MIHS) that was conducted from 1997 to 1998 with the aim to understand the conditions under which Malawians live. In "a very broad definition" (as the report indicates), the Malawian government (2006:6) writes:

> Poverty is that condition in which the basic needs of a household (or individual) are not met. In order to determine whether or not a household is poor, one must do two things. First, one must establish a level of welfare for the household. That level, whether defined subjectively or objectively, will be compared to a level of welfare above which one assumes the basic needs of a household can be met. Establishing this poverty line is the second step needed to ascertain the poverty status of a household.

While considering this working definition to be more specific and less holistic, the Malawian government (2006:6) clarifies the point:

> Using consumption and expenditure data from the 1997-98 Malawi Integrated Household Survey, a set of daily basic food and non-food requirements of individuals for four geographical areas of Malawi – poverty line areas – were identified. The poverty lines for each area are simply the cost in Malawi Kwacha of acquiring this "basket"of basic items. The total consumption reported by a survey household is then evaluated against the poverty line: If the reported per capita total daily consumption for a household is above the poverty line for the region in which it resides, that household is considered not to be poor (or non-poor); if below, the household is classified as poor.

This definition is a sociological explanation of how the recent statistics of the poverty situation in Malawi were determined. In its simplest form, the definition is based on the basic human needs for a standard Malawian lifestyle.

In his article, "The human face of God for the poor,"[15] Hennie Pieterse (2001:75) of the University of South Africa addresses the problem of the church's service to people who live in poverty, from a South African perspective. In his short definition of poverty, Pieterse comes close to the notion of the Malawian government when he says that poverty is understood as the inability of individuals, households, or entire communities, to command sufficient resources to satisfy a socially acceptable minimum standard of living. These minimum standards to determine a poverty line are set by careful calculation in empirical research. Pieterse (2001:75) explains, "This poverty line, which is a cut-off point above which people can maintain a minimum or higher standard of living, and below which this is not possible, is expressed in monetary terms" - a working definition that emphasizes an important dimension in social research.

Another definition worth noting is that of Manuel Castells (2000:69) who says:

> Poverty is an institutionally defined norm concerning a level of resources below which it is not possible to reach the living standards considered to be the minimum norm in a given society at a given time (usually, a level of income per a given number of members of household, as defined by governments or authoritative institutions).

Castells further proposes to use the term "misery," referring to what is commonly known as "extreme poverty." He defines extreme poverty as the bottom distribution of income/assets, or what some experts conceptualize as "deprivation," introducing a wider range of social/economic disadvantages. For instance, in the United States of America extreme poverty refers to those households whose income is below 50% of the income that defines the poverty line. Then Castells (2000:70) concludes:

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[15] This article appeared in the journal, *Practical Theology in South Africa* (Vol. 16 [1] 2001).

It is obvious that all definitions (with powerful effects in categorizing populations, and defining social policies and resources allocation) are statistically relative and culturally defined, besides being politically manipulated. Yet they at least allow us to be precise about what we say when describing/analyzing social differentiation under informational capitalism.

To some extent, Castells's definition fails to deliver a concrete reality by reducing poverty to a mere "norm concerning a level of resources." One is left with the impression that he focuses on the "norm" and "resources," not the condition or situation that affect people first and foremost.

3.3.1.3   A summary of poverty definitions

The above discussion on definitions of poverty provides a wide range of concepts that contributes towards a clear understanding of the term, "poverty." An important notion that has become clear is that poverty is a human condition - it is about people. One must be sensitive to the fact that, whatever definition of poverty may be preferred, there are suffering human beings at its centre. As such, it is important to view poverty as a sociological, as well as theological problem that deprives God's people of what they are meant to have. Another common concept in the above discussion is "house-hold." Poverty must not be considered as an individual's problem. At its core, poverty is relational (Myers 1999:87). As shown in the discussion, a household, being the smallest economic unit, represents the collective responsibility that the world has on human suffering, which affects part of it.

The report of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) on rural poverty in Malawi, as updated in March 2007,[16] states, "For the poor people of Malawi, poverty often means hunger." This probably concurs with what this researcher found from the informal survey (cf. section 3.3) that food, clothes and shelter were determining factors of poverty. The IFAD report also tries to answer the question: *"Who are Malawi's rural poor*

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[16] http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/english/regions/africa/mwi/index.htm Accessed on 2007.04.04.

people?" The answer given is that poverty affects people who are in one of the following three different groups:

- The economically active poor, who are able, of working age and in good health, but who lack productive assets.
- The transient poor, who are at risk of becoming poor because of periodic or transitory shocks, but who are also capable of rising above the poverty line.
- The core poor, who have no capacity to generate income and who face chronic poverty. These include the elderly, the sick, the disabled and children, especially orphans. About one third of Malawi's people are classified as core poor.

Thus, here it has been established that poverty is a complicated and wide topic to be dealt with. Yet, for the purpose of this research, poverty will be considered as a redeemable situation in which basic needs for survival are lacking in a household or community, caused by scarcity of, or deprivation by internal or external factors. Basic needs in a Malawian context prefer to prioritize food, clothing and shelter before other essentials for life, such as transport, health services, and technology. Of course, the basic needs are interrelated and therefore difficult to be separated without a loss of balance. For instance, if the community experiences starvation, it is likely to suffer nutrition-related diseases that require immediate health attention.

3.3.2 Causes of poverty

Another important element directly related to the mere definition of poverty is the cause of poverty. An understanding of global causes of poverty in general, and in Malawi in particular, will help in the development of a workable theological strategy for combating poverty - the direction of this study. Myers (1999:82) writes:

> Like our understanding of the nature of poverty, our understanding of the causes of poverty tends to be in the eyes of the beholder. If care is not taken to understand our unwitting biases, our understanding of the causes of poverty tends to be an outworking of our place in the

social system, our education, our culture, and our personality. Our understanding of causes of poverty also depends on where we start looking at poverty, and more important, where we stop looking.

Indeed, many scholars of both Practical Theology and Sociology have viewed causes of poverty from diverse angles. A brief summary of the causes will now be presented.

3.3.2.1   According to Bryant Myers

As in the definition of poverty, Bryant Myers provides an important contribution to the general causes of poverty. Myers (1999:83-86) categorizes the causes of poverty as follows:

(i)   *Physical causes of poverty*: These are causes that afflict physical pain on the people due to absence of physical assets needed for survival. For example, due to natural disasters, people may be deprived of money, land, livestock, food stuffs and housing.

(ii)   *Social causes of poverty*: Social causes refer to those causes created by the social structure that promote oppression, injustice, unequal distribution of wealth and gender discrimination. There are large-scale social practices and a whole system of social roles, often firmly approved by the members of society generally, that cause or perpetuate injustice and suffering among the marginalized.

(iii)   *Mental causes of poverty*: Mental causes may include a lack of knowledge and technical information. They may also include health conditions that may lead to damage one's mental ability as a result of poor nutrition, illness, and alcohol or drug abuse. But above all, this is the internalization and acceptance of their condition by the poor themselves. This renders a situation of hopelessness that is so deeply embedded in the minds of the poor, establishing at a high and dangerous degree a poverty of being. This is a deeper and more insidious cause of poverty.

(iv)   *Spiritual causes of poverty*: The spiritual causes of poverty are often overlooked or undeclared by development academics. The spiritual influence in some households and communities has had a negative

impact in making and keeping people poor. Beliefs in the spirit world and witchcraft have made some people resist improvements in their lifestyle even when they have resources to do so. For example, there are some small scale tobacco farmers in Malawi who have over years been making a lot of money from their tobacco sales. Yet they have resisted building a good house or acquiring any modern machines for fear that they may be bewitched. Sometimes, instead of spending money to improve nutrition and sanitation in their households, they pay a lot of money to a traditional medicine man to protect them from spiritual forces.

The category of mental causes is of great relevance to the empowerment of the poor (the laity in this study's application). The mental causes have brought a serious pitfall in many rural areas where the Church in Malawi has its major task. Here, the poor have been easily assimilated into a culture of poverty. In defining a culture of poverty, Monty Roodt (in Coetzee *et al.* 2001:477) writes:

> This is a sociological concept that argues that the poor, oppressed people live in conditions (hunger, ill-health, lack of education, lack of access to political power) which prevent them from being able to understand and change their lives. It is argued that poverty engenders a fatalistic and apolitical attitude, where people accept their position in society as God-given and natural. In this situation people are often unwilling to take the initiative to improve their lives and resort to escapist solutions such as alcohol and drug abuse to address their problems.

As such, a "culture of poverty" can be implemented interchangeably with "poverty of being," which requires a theological approach in order to address it adequately.

3.3.2.2   *According to the Malawian government*

The Malawi Government Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (Malawi Government [c] April 2002), contains a long list of causes of poverty in Malawi. Only three are mentioned here.

The *first* probable cause of poverty in Malawi is the lack of modern skills and knowledge that could help in the production of food and other essential products for human life. Many average Malawians choose to use traditional farming methods that are not very success0ful in food production. As a result, people tend to work hard, but produce little. Most traditional Malawians lack good skills to ensure sustainable food production. Although food production is so low, the little that is produced is usually not used economically. For example, much food is always left over during communal gatherings, such as weddings, funerals and other functions. Unnecessary feasts are a common sight. This touches on the question of stewardship.

The *second* factor that is implicitly present and is considered as one of the main causes of poverty, is the common people's lack of empowerment. Many Malawians seem to accept the conditions in which they live. This is in direct agreement with "the poverty of being" concept mentioned above in the mental causes of poverty. In any case, the dependency syndrome has settled in both the church and society, because the people are not taught that they do have the potential to be self-sustaining. They lack change agents to guide them into a paradigm shift that could help to create ways of solving their own problems.

The *third* main cause of poverty in Malawi is the lack of good governance. This cause of poverty is in line with what Joda-Mbewe (2002:139) calls "marginalization, exploitation and oppression" that are about social injustices created by either negligence or the inability of the authorities. Corruption has become the norm of the day. Nepotism and regionalism leave many people without benefit, while others get the lion's share of the country's economy. In such a situation, the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer.

Myers (1999:83) remarks, "At the end of the day, people are the cause of poverty, and it is people who must change for things to change." This is important to note because what becomes clear in the above discussion is that there are both internal and external causes of poverty among people. Both the poor and the non-poor can be agents of poverty.

3.4 POVERTY ANALYSIS

This section will outline general statistical and analytical data of poverty at global, regional and national levels.

3.4.1 A global perspective on poverty

According to the World Bank statistics of 2006,[17] the world population was estimated at 6.5 billion and growing by 1.2% per annum. By the end of 2006, the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP),[18] as converted to US dollars (using the average official exchange rate reported by the International Monetary Fund [IMF]) was approximately US$44,385 billion. The IFAD Rural Poverty Report (updated in March 2007)[19] reveals that 1.2 billion people – one fifth of the world's inhabitants – cannot fulfil their most basic needs on a daily basis, let alone attain their dreams or desires. More than one billion people in the world live on less than US$1 a day; while approximately 2.7 billion struggle to survive on less than US$2 per day. More than 800 million in the world go to bed hungry every night, including 300 million children. Every 3.6 seconds, one person dies of starvation, most of whom are children under the age of five. As such, six million children die from malnutrition before their fifth birthday.

The segment of the world's poor comprises 800 million poor women, children and men who live in rural environments. They are subsistence farmers, herders, fishermen, migrant workers, artisans, and indigenous people whose daily struggles seldom capture the world's attention.

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[17] http://www.worldbank.org/statistics Accessed on 2008.04.05.
[18] According to UNDP Human Development Report (2004:268), GDP is defined as the sum of value added by all resident producers in the economy, plus any product taxes (less subsidies) not included in the valuation of output. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated capital assets for depletion and degradation of natural resources. Value added is the net output of an industry after adding all outputs and subtracting intermediate inputs.
[19] http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/english/topics/index.htm Accessed on 2007.04.05.

On the other hand, there is an indication that, in the past generation (30 years), the average living standards have improved on the global scale. Castells (2000:78) writes:

> However, if the contribution of wealth between countries continues to diverge, overall the average living conditions of world's population, as measured by the United Nations Human Development Index, have improved steadily over the past three decades. This is due, primarily, to better education opportunities, and improved health standards, which translate into a dramatic increase in life expectancy, which in developing countries went up from 46 years in the 1960s to 62 years in 1993, and 64.4 years in 1997, particularly women.

According to the UNDP 2005 Human Development Report,[20] the extraordinary success of East Asia, particularly China, has largely driven the reduction in global poverty. At the other end of the spectrum, in 2001, sub-Saharan Africa had almost 100 million more people living on less than $1 a day than in 1990. Southern Asia reduced the incidence of poverty, though not the absolute number of poor people. Latin America and the Middle East registered no progress, while Central America and the CIS[21] experienced a dramatic increase in poverty. The number of people living on less than $2 a day in Central America and the CIS rose from 23 million in 1990 to 93 million in 2001, translating from 5% to 20%. The table below summarizes the trends of increases and decreases in poverty in the world's poverty affected regions between 1981 and 2001 (20 years).

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[20] http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR05_complete.pdf (UNDP Human Development Report [2005:34]) Accessed on 2008.09.04.
[21] Commonwealth of Independent States (formerly under the Soviet Union).

Figure 4: *Decline in income poverty, 1981–2001*[22]

Share of people living on less than US$1 a day (%)

Region	1981	1984	1987	1990	1993	1996	1999	2001
East Asia & Pacific	56.7	38.8	28.0	29.5	24.9	15.9	15.3	14.3
Europe & Central Asia	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.5	3.7	4.4	6.3	3.5
Latin America & Caribbean	10.1	12.2	11.3	11.6	11.8	9.4	10.5	9.9
Middle East & North Africa	5.1	3.8	3.2	2.3	1.6	2.0	2.7	2.4
South Asia	51.5	46.8	45.0	41.3	40.1	36.7	32.8	31.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	41.6	46.3	46.9	44.5	44.1	46.1	45.7	46.4
World	40.4	33.0	28.5	27.9	26.3	22.3	21.5	20.7

The UNDP Human Development Report (2005:34) confirms:

> In a military metaphor, the war against poverty has witnessed advances on the eastern front, massive reversals in Sub-Saharan Africa and stagnation across a broad front between these poles. The worrying trend for the future is that the overall progress is slowing. Much of the success in pushing back poverty over the past two decades as shown in the table above, was achieved in the 1980s and first half of 1990s.

Unfortunately, the same period of time has witnessed an increase in the inequality and polarization in the distribution of wealth worldwide. For instance, in 1993, only US$5 trillion of the US$23 trillion global GDP was from the developing countries despite them accounting for nearly 80% of the world population. While the share of the richest 20% world population has risen from 70% to 85%, the share of the poorest 20% of world population has fallen from 2.3% to 1.4% in the past 30 years (Castells 2000:78).

3.4.2 A sub-Saharan African perspective on poverty

This study has been carried out in Malawi, which is part of sub-Saharan Africa. The term "sub-Saharan Africa" refers to the African countries found to

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[22] Adapted from http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR05_complete.pdf (UNDP Human Development Report [2005:34]) Accessed on 2008.09.04.

the south of the Sahara Desert.[23] Geographically, the demarcation line is the southern edge of the Sahara Desert. About 48 countries comprise sub-Saharan Africa, including the islands of Madagascar, the Seychelles, Comoros, Cape Verde and Sao Tome and Principe. These countries are commonly grouped with Central Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa and West Africa. According to World Bank statistics,[24] sub-Saharan countries cover a total land area of 24.3 million square kilometres and, by 2005, had a total population of 741.4 million.

The sub-Saharan region contains many of the least developed countries in the world, which translates into sub-Saharan Africa being generally the world's poorest region. Reporting on the state of human development, the UNDP Human Development Report (2004:132) shows that massive human deprivation is still rife in sub-Saharan Africa, despite impressive progress in the alleviation of human suffering during the past three decades. Among the world's developing countries, the sub-Saharan African countries have per-formed the least economically. Thus, the human poverty index has reflected high levels of poverty that have failed to decrease in the past decade in this region. By 2004, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe had the highest human poverty levels in the world.[25] All these countries belong to the sub-Saharan African region. The table below gives a simplified 2004 comparative picture of deprivation in sub-Saharan Africa to the global level.

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[23] http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub-Saharan_Africa Accessed on 2008.09.04.
[24] http://www.worldbank.org/external/CPProfile.asp Accessed on 2008.09.05.
[25] http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr04_complete.pdf (UNDP Human Development Report 2004:129) Accessed on 2008.09.05.

Figure 5: *Sub-Saharan Africa populations in deprivation, as compared to the rest of the world (millions)*

Region	Living on less than US$1 a day	Total population under-nourished	Primary age children not in school	Primary age girls not in school	Children under age of 5 dying each year	People without access to improved water sources	People without access to adequate sanitation
Sub-Saharan Africa	323	185	44	23	5	273	299
World	1,100	831	104	59	11	1,197	2,742

The above table reveals that out of all the poor (people living on less than US$1 a day) in the world, about 30% are in sub-Saharan Africa; 22% of the world's more than 800 million hungry people are in sub-Saharan Africa; 42 of every 100 school-going children in the world not attending school are found in sub-Saharan Africa; nearly half of the children dying before their fifth birthday in the world are from sub-Saharan Africa; of all the people in the world who have no access to safe water, 22% are in sub-Saharan Africa.

As to how sub-Saharan Africa will be able to achieve some of the Millennium Development Goals, the UNDP Human Development Report (2004:132) records:

> At the current pace Sub-Saharan Africa will not meet the goal for universal primary education until 2129 or the goal for reducing child mortality by two-thirds until 2106 – 100 years away, rather than the 11 called for by the goals. In three of the goals – hunger, income poverty and access to sanitation – no date can be set because the situation in the region is worsening, not improving.

Such assessments can be dangerously prophetic unless total war can be cooperatively declared against poverty and the retrogression of human development in the region. A need for sensitization, awareness campaigns and the initiation of transformational activities is an imminent reality. Sub-Saharan Africa requires both internal and external efforts to redeem the dehumanizing situation that is becoming the identity of the area.

The church forms about 46%[26] of the total population in sub-Saharan Africa. The research question of this dissertation applies to this situation: *What roles can the Christian Church*, *play to improve the living conditions in sub-Saharan Africa?* What if all the Christians were empowered to be missionally sensitive to the deteriorating living conditions and be committed to the fight against suffering - could they make any difference?

3.4.3 A Malawian perspective on poverty

The poverty situation in Malawi is one of the highest in the world with more than half of the total population living below the poverty line. According to the 2007 IFAD Report on Rural Poverty, the Southern Region of Malawi has the highest level of poverty, followed by the Central, then the Northern Regions. Like the general global patterns of poverty, more poor people are found in the rural than in the urban areas of Malawi. The report also indicates that women head 45% of the households in the Southern Region, whereas this region has the lowest literacy rates.

The food supply in Malawi has recently improved. In the 2005 to 2006 growing season, Malawi produced enough maize to feed the nation with, at least, a surplus. This was mainly accredited to the Malawi government's subsidy of the price of fertilizers to enable the poor to buy and produce their own maize. It was estimated that Malawi could produce a surplus of more than a million metric tons of maize. Despite the achievement in food security, Malawi is still a poverty-stricken country. There are insufficient health facilities, inadequate safe water supplies, high rates of primary school dropouts, a poor transport network and high infant mortality rates.

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[26] This is according to Chidi Denis Isizoh in his 2006 article "*Religions in sub-Saharan Africa: Working and walking together. A Christian reflection.* (http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/religions-inafrica.htm) Accessed on 2008.09.05.

3.5   A GENERAL SURVEY ON HIV/AIDS

In a 2005 report on rural poverty, the Millennium Project[27] indicated that HIV/AIDS causes 6000 deaths daily and that there are 8200 daily new HIV cases in the world. Today, HIV/AIDS has become a global social, economic and even a theological concern. All the multi-national and national groupings are aware of their role and responsibility to combat this threat. Faith-based organizations (FBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are not doing anything towards fighting against HIV/AIDS, are of little value to the people, especially in the heavily affected areas.

Since it was diagnosed in the mid-1980s, HIV/AIDS has claimed more lives than was initially estimated. According to the 2009 UNAIDS Report,[28] sub-Saharan Africa is the most HIV/AIDS affected region in the world. By the end of 2008, the average adult (age 15-49 years) HIV prevalence was 5.2% in the entire sub-Saharan Africa. The UNAIDS Report (2009:21) states:

> Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region most heavily affected by HIV. In 2008 sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 67% of HIV infections worldwide, 68% of the new HIV infections among adults and 91% of the new HIV infections among children. The region also accounted for 72% of the world's AIDS-related deaths in 2008.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the general trend is that HIV/AIDS is growing, regardless of declining and increasing patterns in the HIV prevalence of individual countries in the region. For example, according to UNAIDS,[29] indications are that adult national HIV prevalence declined in Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe; while the adult national HIV prevalence in Mozambique and Swaziland is growing. In 2007, Swaziland had the highest adult HIV prevalence in the world, i.e. 33.4%. The 2006 UNAIDS report states,

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[27] The Millennium Project is the research initiative of the UN Secretary General that brings together nearly 300 experts from academia, civil society, international organizations and the public and private sectors around the world. http://www.unic.un.org.pl/hdr/hdr2003/hdr03_complete.pdf (UNDP Human Development Report 2003:32).

[28] http://data.unaids.org/pub/Reports/2009/JC1700_Epi_update_2009-en.pdf Accessed on 2010.08.28.

[29] http://www.unaids.org/en/Regions_Countries/Regions/SubSaharanAfrica.asp Accessed on 2008.09.20.

"Southern Africa remains the epicentre of the global HIV epidemic: 32% of people living with HIV globally live in this region and 34% of AIDS deaths globally occur there."

In Malawi, more than 940,000 people live with HIV. This figure represents a 14.2% adult HIV prevalence that has been maintained over the past six to eight years. Due to AIDS-related deaths, the number of orphans increases every year. Many orphans immediately assume the responsibility of heading their families and caring for their terminally ill parents. As a result, many school-going orphans' educational lives are disturbed.

Both the Malawian government and other non–governmental organizations have made efforts to cooperate in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Malawi, where the major coordinating body on HIV/AIDS issues is the Malawi National AIDS Commission (MNAC). In prevention campaigns, Malawi focused greatly on the prevention of mother-to-child transmission. This programme has effectively been implemented in major health centres in the country. Through MNAC, the Malawian government has provided training for facilitators in both government-operated and private health care centres. Another focus in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Malawi has been the accessibility of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs. Firstly, an awareness campaign for the need to know one's HIV status was intensified through every possible public media in Malawi. Secondly, volunteer counsellors were trained in pre-testing and post-testing basic counselling skills. According to UNAIDS, antiretroviral drugs were made available to at least 85,000 people by the end of 2006.

3.6 CHALLENGES T0 THE MALAWIAN CHURCH ON POVERTY AND HIV/AIDS

Poverty and HIV/AIDS have become interrelated problems in Malawi and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. This means that the poverty situation has contributed to the rise of HIV/AIDS and, on the other hand, HIV/AIDS has promoted the intensity of poverty in Malawi. The interrelatedness can be clarified in the following points:

- Because of poverty, unprotected "commercial sex" has grown, as many women indulge in casual sex to finance their needs. This includes the promotion of child prostitution.

- Because of poverty, many people have no access to good health facilities to check their HIV status regularly, therefore, HIV/AIDS has continued to grow in silence.

- Because of poverty, people do not have easy access to good food and ARVs, although they know that they are HIV positive, and

- Because of HIV/AIDS, the society has lost skilled and potential bread-winners and leaves many too weak to fight poverty.

- Because of HIV/AIDS, people are spending much on essential drugs and highly balanced food to lengthen their lives.

When the society is poor and sick, the church is implicitly also poor and sick. In the context of poverty and HIV/AIDS, the first challenge that the Church in Malawi faces is that of clerical man-power. Pastors are out in the field daily, not to increase the flock, but to attend to HIV/AIDS related issues, such as visiting the sick and conducting funeral services. For example, it can be estimated that, on average, every Nkhoma Synod minister conducts a funeral service at least once per week. A good number of these deaths are AIDS related.

The church's second challenge is the need to design a relevant and effective missional strategy that can make a difference in the lives of the people who live in constant pain caused by poverty and HIV/AIDS. A theological and sociological interpretation of the situation should not only provide informa-tion, but inspire the masses to transform spiritually and socially. The Church in Malawi is already a recognized institution of influence and should start from such a point of advantage together with the secular economic profession, to move towards holistic transformation. The government and other non-governmental organisations should not be alone in the fight against poverty and HIV/AIDS.

The Church's third challenge in facing poverty and HIV/AIDS is to lay a foundation for a recovery and healing process of the society. Usually, a rise in the moral decay of the society happens in such a situation of human suffering. The Church should challenge corruption, nepotism, sexual immorality, xenophobia, gender inequality, injustice, the disregard of human rights and other symptoms of moral decay. Society needs to be healed of these cancerous elements for any proper transition into new life to be real. The Church's holistic approach to humanity should set the pace in the restoration of human dignity.

With the focus on sub-Saharan Africa, Wiid (2002:112) says, "The desperate socio-economic conditions of Africa make it obvious that something has to be done to rectify the situation." That is why there is a general consensus that Christians in Africa have the task of combating these desperate conditions. In a special way, the Church in Malawi is in a position to spearhead the war against poverty and HIV/AIDS.

3.7   TRADITIONAL CULTURE, SEXUAL MORALITY AND THE CHURCH IN MALAWI

This section continues with the contextual analysis as a step in the process of doing theology today. It departs slightly from the main line of thought to survey the aspects that the Church already addresses in its present approach to poverty and HIV/AIDS, namely traditional religious beliefs and sexual morality. From as early as 1929 (Pauw 1980:333), the Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP has, in its context, been engaged in addressing some of the deep-rooted traditional beliefs that contradict the Gospel. One has been the Chewa initiation ritual for young girls called *Chinamwali*. The Chewa's cultural belief is that, once a girl has attained puberty, she is ready for marriage and must be trained as a wife. During such a ceremonial training that may last a week or more, elderly women, called *A Nankungwi,* demonstrate and instruct the young girls mainly on sexual practices. In the course of this period, an elderly man is invited to have sexual intercourse with the young girls as a practical test for their being well trained sexually.

Right from the beginning, the church condemned such practices and, not only confronted *Chinamwali* with condemnation, but introduced a Christian alternative called *Chilangizo* (Brown 2004:81). Instead of *A Nankungwi*, the church introduced volunteer Christian moral instructors and instructresses, called *Alangizi*. A handbook, *Mau Othandiza Alangizi* (lessons for *Alangizi*) was published and distributed in all the congregations. Topics in this handbook include: salvation (how to be saved); the body as a spiritual entity; self-reliance and work ethics; boy-girl relationships; HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; choosing your life's partner; and general cleanliness. The handbook has had several revisions to include contemporary ethical issues, and is still in use today.

This *Chilangizo* is a unique feature, as the Nkhoma Synod differs from the rest of the synods in the CCAP. Through *Chilangizo,* the Nkhoma Synod has made a significant contribution to reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS in Malawi. According to a survey on HIV prevalence by the Nkhoma Synod AIDS Department in 2003,[30] it was established that the Central Region of Malawi had the lowest HIV prevalence, compared to the South and the North. One of the contributing factors to this low prevalence was listed as the influence of *Chilangizo* in the Nkhoma Synod's congregations. The survey revealed that boys and girls, who had gone through the Nkhoma Synod's *Chilangizo,* were more likely to avoid HIV/AIDS propagating practices than those who had not. This is because of the holistic approach to humanity in *Chilangizo* that focuses on life's spiritual, moral, cultural and social aspects.

In this context, the Church is perceived as having more room to operate and more avenues to survey for its missional task. There are many other aspects of culture that promote poverty and HIV/AIDS that mere Sociology cannot eliminate. Such aspects of culture that regard women as mere properties, not human beings with full rights, require a spiritual approach. The Church, whose approach is multi-dimensional, must deal with even the domestic violence, in the name of traditional culture, that is escalating in Malawi. For

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[30]This is found in the unpublished 2003 Annual Report released by the Nkhoma Synod AIDS Department Secretariat.

example, in 2006, there was a case in the Dowa District of Malawi where a man chopped off both his wife's hands because of jealousy. Could this be a social, spiritual, psychotic or cultural problem? The Church's continued struggle with questions in the society is its special responsibility to see beyond the community's visible elements. As the Church continuously analyses its context, more revelations surface and guide it into relevance.

3.8   URBANIZATION IN MALAWI

According to Joda-Mbewe (2002:10), one of the visible trends that pose a challenge in developing countries, such as Malawi, is the mass migration of people from rural to urban centres. This trend, commonly known as urbanization, not only affects big cities in Malawi, but even the growing towns. Today, every trading centre in Malawi is becoming a settlement area. People want to move from their villages into urban areas. Some of the reasons for the growth of urbanization can be:

- People want a better life in which they can meet their basic daily needs through employment and business.
- Some may be escaping from socio-relational problems common in the villages due to a scarcity of resources, such as land.
- Some are just looking for a way to make easy money in towns, so that they can invest it in the rural areas.
- The failure of the government and other stakeholders to develop the people in their rural contexts.

In July 2006, Frank Phiri presented an article to Inter Press Service News Agency titled, "Development-Malawi: Rapid urbanisation looks irreversible."[31] In this article, Phiri reports:

> The latest United Nations Centre for Human Settlement (UNCHS) study on urbanisation shows that the city of Blantyre and other trading centres in the northern and central regions of Malawi are becoming noisier … The study, which was released this month [July 2006], says Malawi a tiny, landlocked and impoverished southern African nation of

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[31] http://www.ipsnews.net/interna.asp?idnews=24810 Accessed on 2007.09.22.

about 13 million has emerged as the fastest urbanising country in the world with an urban population growth of 6.3 percent, compared to 0.5 percent in the rural areas. According to the study, three million people now live in urban areas compared to 260,000 in 1966, something which represents a 25-percent growth.

Urbanization has exposed a good percentage of the national population to modern facilities and viable markets. Small businesses do thrive better in the urban areas than in the rural villages and service jobs do pay better in the towns and cities than in the rural areas. However, Joda-Mbewe (2002:6) writes, "Urbanization is accompanied by a number of negative implications, such as secularisation, disorientation, poverty, and pollution" - an accurate observation. The list can be extended to include shortages of land and housing; unbearably high population density; the high crime rate; HIV/AIDS infection; and unemployment. Disorientation arises because the lifestyle that is experienced in the urban areas, especially in the squatter settlements, falls short of its true identity.

With reference to the situation described above, Joda-Mbewe (2002:6) concludes, "This situation creates and prepares an opportunity for a holistic hermeneutic practical approach to urban ministry." This is a call for the Church to be on the alert to address urbanisation as an opportunity to do effective ministry. In the urban areas, congregations have the task to reformulate their approaches to the ministry. If "rapid urbanisation looks irreversible," there is a need to put strategies in place that will contain the situation and maintain the relevance of the Church.

So far, the CCAP Nkhoma Synod's urban congregations have formed a forum that mainly focuses on evangelism, charity, and development. Representatives from 16 urban congregations meet on a monthly basis to discuss issues about their congregations. Sometimes, during specific events, they are assigned to do fundraising for the Synod. Another development in the Nkhoma Synod's urban ministry is the establishment of the Nkhoma Synod CCAP Youth Ministry (CCAPYUM) in 2006. The CCAPYUM developed under the leadership of Rev Vasco Kachipapa, an American trained Nkhoma

Synod youth director. This youth forum aims at reaching out to the fellow urban youth for Christ in a multi-faceted approach. They are also involved in ministry development among the Christian youth. Their programme includes providing the youth with opportunities to develop their special gifts for the ministry. So far, there are three major groups of ministry in which the youth are groomed: the music ministry, preaching and sharing ministry, and pastoral ministry.

The urban context and its fast growth must be taken into account as the Church in Malawi draws its full-scale plan. The Church should not leave the urbanisation challenges to only town planners and politicians. A detailed analysis of urban life will help the Church to make a difference in the urban dwellers' world.

3.9   POLITICS AND THE CHURCH IN MALAWI

In doing contextual analysis of a congregation, it is important also to analyse the political situation, as a thin line between church and politics always exists. The very people involved in politics are those who are involved in the Church. The good governance needed in the Church is the same as what the secular world needs. Above all, the political secular world needs the prophetic voice of the Church. Yet, the question is: "*To what extent has the Church in Malawi contributed to the country's politics?*"

Malawi now has its third regime since it received independence from the British government on 6 July, 1964. Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda was the first State President and ruled Malawi for 30 years in a one-party system. After Banda, Dr. Bakili Muluzi ruled Malawi for 10 years since 1994. In the period between Banda and Muluzi, Malawi turned to a multi-party system of government. Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika is the current (2010) State President and is also the current Chairman of the African Union (AU). Throughout these regimes, the Church in Malawi has played a significant role in guiding national politics with a prophetic voice and has tackled political issues mainly through ecumenical para-church organisations, such as the Malawi Council

of Churches (MCC), Episcopal Conference in Malawi (ECM) and the Public Affairs Committee (PAC). The Nkhoma Synod is a member of both the MCC and PAC.

Towards the end of Kamuzu Banda's regime in 1992, the Roman Catholic Bishops wrote a pastoral letter titled, "*Living our faith.*" On 8 March 1992 (the first Sunday of Lent that year), it was read in every Roman Catholic Church in Malawi. In this letter, the Bishops criticized the evils in Dr Banda's government and challenged the Roman Catholics and all Malawians to unite in defying the evils and to choose a better future for Malawi. Ross (1996:203) comments on this pastoral letter: "The importance of the letter, however, lies not only with the immediate impact but also in the Gospel-based agenda which it sets for Malawian social and political life in the 1990s." This letter marked the beginning of a multi-party democracy in Malawi. Almost simultaneously, the MCC also produced a document that echoed the Roman Catholic Bishops' sentiments in their pastoral letter. This put pressure on the government that, in 1994, called for a referendum on whether or not people wanted a multi-party government. The referendum ended in the majority opting for a multi-party democracy, which, in Malawi, is regarded as the brain-child of the Church.

The Public Affairs Committee was formed in 1992. At first, it comprised faith-based organisations and pressure groups. In 1993, all pressure groups re-organized themselves to form parties that competed in the 1994 general elections. Now the PAC acts as a political umbrella mouthpiece for faith-based organisations in Malawi, including the Episcopal Conference of Malawi, MCC, Evangelical Association in Malawi (EAM), Muslim Association of Malawi, and the Quadria Muslim Association of Malawi. The PAC is also a national chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP).[32] According to a 2006 PAC brochure, its mission statement is: "To mobilise the general public through the religious community and other stakeholders in promoting democracy, development, peace and unity through civic

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[32] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_Affairs_Committee_(Malawi). Accessed on 2008.09.16.

education, mediation and advocacy." The brochure also outlines the PAC objectives as follows:

- To encourage religious bodies to fulfil their prophetic role and respond to the social and political affairs of the Republic of Malawi.

- To enter into and maintain dialogue with the government of the Republic of Malawi, and with Opposition and other political parties and organisations regarding issues of concern to the nation.

- To promote unity, peace and tranquillity in the Republic of Malawi.

- To safeguard the rule of law and human rights in the Republic of Malawi.

- To do all such things as may be deemed incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects.

As such, the PAC has been involved in a number of issues, which include conducting voter education during general elections; organising workshops on good governance for religious, traditional and government leaders; and distributing more than 60,000 copies of the Malawi Constitution as part of their human rights campaign.

The PAC and other individual member Churches, such as the Nkhoma Synod, have conducted a number of mediations between the ruling party and opposition parties. Sometimes, mediation takes place between two individual high-profile political leaders. This proves that the Church in Malawi is trusted and has a great opportunity to achieve its being the *salt* and the *light* to the nation. This researcher was once privileged to lead a Church team on mediation between the State President and the Leader of Opposition in Parliament.

In 2004, the Nkhoma Synod established the fully-fledged Nkhoma Synod Church and Society Department, to be responsible for all matters concerning politics and general public affairs. It has its secretariat in the capital city, Lilongwe, but operates in all the Presbyteries of the Nkhoma Synod. By 2007, the Nkhoma Synod Church and Society Department had projects on Human Rights Awareness; Good Governance; Advocacy; and Civic

Education on Democracy. The Department networks with a chain of other NGOs with similar objectives.

3.10 THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH ON SUFFERING

The Church's attitude on suffering matters much, should it be effectively involved in the alleviation of human suffering. The one-sided negative attitude usually blinds the Church and it fails to assume its role in society. As the body of Christ, the Church should emulate Christ in being driven by compassion to offer a hand to the suffering multitudes. Addressing a Pan-African Christian Leaders' Assembly (PACLA) in Kenya in 1976, John Stott, a renowned European missiologist and theologian, said:

> Authentic Christian compassion forbids us to turn a blind eye to any human need. If Jesus did not restrict His mission to the preaching of the gospel, or even to dying for our sins and rising again in order that there might be a gospel to preach, then we have no right to limit our mission to evangelism alone (Cassidy & Osei-Mensah 1978:2001).

As Jesus Christ is the model of the Church today, it must bear Christ's attitude. Human suffering should be the Church's concern. Writing from within a situation of pain and suffering in Sudan, Dau (1998:39) observes, "The church is, by and large, no longer in the margin. It is in the people and with the people in their daily struggles and afflictions to care for them and to comfort them." This statement expresses volumes about what the church's attitude should be towards the suffering masses in whose context the Church exists. Dau maintains that suffering people need a warm community of faith to absorb their suffering and comfort them. So, Dau (1998:45) remarks, "The church must be the community that absorbs the suffering of the people of God. It must guard itself from falling victim to individualism by being a shelter and protector of the suffering and the needy." It is clear that the Church's involvement in the suffering community is not a choice, but a responsibility. It might not provide the necessary material things, but its very presence, where there is suffering, brings hope and relief.

In the case of the Nkhoma Synod, a Relief and Development Department has been constituted as the church's arm in dealing with all suffering. This Department concentrates on perennially disaster-stricken areas, such as the Lake Malawi shore area, which often is a victim of floods and droughts. From 2000, the Nkhoma Synod Relief and Development Department embarked on an anti-malaria campaign that reached out to more than 10,000 families. During the campaign, basic anti-malaria drugs and mosquito nets were distributed or sold at subsidized affordable prices. In the first half of 2002, through the Relief and Development Department, the Synod concentrated on the fight against famine. Since this Department was established in the 1990s, it has spread its activities to all the Presbyteries.

3.11 CONCLUSION

Since doing theology is about context, this chapter has noted that the need to do theology in Malawi is vast. Yet Hendriks 2004:27 says:

> In doing theology in Africa, we must be realistic about our situation in Africa…. Theological honesty about the contextual realities that face Africa would help the church to be a public church that actively witnesses to all spheres of life about the way, the truth and the life.

While empowering the laity in their participation in the Church, one should consider their surrounding conditions of poverty, HIV/AIDS, illiteracy and politics. A practical theologian should take all these into account to conceive a proper methodology for effective empowerment of Church members.

As a transit stage within the framework used in this dissertation, this chapter described poverty in general, as both theologians and sociologists regard it. As a special note, the views of Bryant Myers have been taken into account because of the details that closely represent the Malawian understanding of poverty and its causes. It ultimately becomes clear that poverty is not a mere contextual reality in Malawi, but is one of the main challenges to the Church today. As if poverty was not enough, HIV/AIDS has also become another giant threat to the Church in sub-Saharan Africa. The doing of theology in this area that neglects the ever-growing pandemic, misses a point. While it

has become a point of concern for both governmental and secular NGOs, the struggle against HIV/AIDS will not be successful without the Church's participation. So, the analysis of the HIV/AIDS situation in Malawi is important to determine the Church's missional role of bringing comfort and hope to the suffering. In this chapter, the discussion has shown that, while the Church needs people and exists for them, the people themselves need the Church that holds the key to a better future for Africa. The Malawian Church has a prophetic status that should be utilised to change Malawi significantly for the better.

The people involved in cultural traditions are also members of the Church and are in the political arena. Some are even leaders in both the Church and traditional communities (villages), or in both the Church and politics. The Nkhoma Synod has many Church elders who are Members of Parliament and numerous Church elders who are Chiefs or Village Headmen. The Church, traditions and politics need each other and co-exist at the centre of human life, which should help the Church to exercise special wisdom to coordinate these into purposeful tools for God's people. Only when the context is put in the right perspective, will there be room for the Church to make a difference. Sanneh (2003:50) writes, "Contexts, after all, are strategies. As such, a context-sensitive approach should be responsive without being naïve." That is why the right attitude is called for in setting the pace for social transformation in a community. The understanding of the context equips all the stakeholders to do theology to fit naturally into meaningful participation.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE ROLE OF IDENTITY IN EMPOWERING THE LAITY IN THE NKHOMA SYNOD

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Having established the context in which the Church in Malawi exists, the research leads further into a critical reflection of specific features of this church. As such, the Nkhoma Synod is used to analyse the Church's identity in Malawi. The analysis, which is presented in this chapter, is a general reflection on the identity and values of the people in the Church. The aim of this chapter is to establish how the identity of the Malawian Church has influenced the way lay people are involved. Along with this aim is also the effort to expose the alternatives of how the laity could be involved towards building a steady missional identity.

In *Chambers concise dictionary*, Davidson *et al.* (1988:477) define identity as, "*who or what a person or a thing is."* Therefore, identity, with reference to the Church, would describe the outstanding and unique features of the community of believers. The identity of the Church is better seen from a theological, than a sociological perspective. Louw (1998:208) states:

> In a theological anthropology "identity" means that people discover that God calls them to respond to their destiny: to love God and their fellow human beings… But identity is also about people being called: the principle of vocation.

Such a calling should always drive a congregation into asking questions, such as "Who are we?"; "Why do we exist?"; "What is our ultimate goal?"; "How does God use us?" etc. Since this paper focuses on congregational life, an appropriate definition could be: "The identity of a congregation is the perception of its culture by either an observer or the congregation itself" (Carroll *et al.* 1986:22). Yet, unlike a mere sociological approach, the identity of a congregation begins with God. That is why the wholesome identity of a congregation should be missional by nature. Closely connected to this is the

fact that a congregation's identity analysis is an entrance into doing theology in a particular congregation. Robert J. Schreiter (in Ammerman *et al.* 1998:24) observes, "First, and most frequently, a congregation takes up the task of doing theology because it seeks a better sense of its identity." As a congregation begins to take interest in self-understanding by asking questions about its own essence, it starts to articulate its relationship with the Triune God. Usually, in the task of seeking to understand their identity, congregational members begin to see the realities that their Church traditions prohibited them from seeing. Through his Spirit and Scripture, God reveals to them what they should be like and what they should do.

This chapter now surveys key elements of what forms the identity of the Nkhoma Synod in general and the Nkhoma Congregation, in particular. Then the result of the analysis will be further critically evaluated by doing a SWOT analysis.

4.2   IDENTITY ANALYSIS OF THE NKHOMA SYNOD

The identity analysis of any congregation is done by means of studying its life components, such as its demography, contextual influences, worldview, history, activities, artefacts, rituals, theologies, etc. (Hendriks 2004:115-138; Ammerman *et al.* 1998:84-100). This researcher spent more than six years as an inside listener and participant to the stories that form the Nkhoma Synod's identity. Another extra three years were spent in a specific congre-gation, the Nkhoma CCAP, which helped the researcher to attain a better understanding of the identity of the Nkhoma Synod. From this exposure, the identity of the Nkhoma Synod in general, and the Nkhoma Congregation in particular, will be explained.

4.2.1 The Nkhoma Synod's story

In August 2005, the Nkhoma Synod compiled a five-year strategic plan, which became the first ever document that presents the Synod's self-description. It is known as the Nkhoma Synod Strategic Plan Document (NSSPD) and begins with outlining its vision, mission statement and core

values. At this stage, it is important to review these before telling the story. According to the NSSPD (2005:6), the vision of the Nkhoma Synod is:

> ***To be a church that is responsive to the spiritual and social needs of its members and outsiders, which maintains the highest standards of accountability, transparency, fairness and impartiality in the conduct of its affairs.***

In this vision statement, it is clear that the Nkhoma Synod exists to be a missional Church, keen to respond to its surrounding needs. It is an outreaching body not only interested to respond, but also to maintain its operational standards at the highest possible levels. To attain this, a need for a thrust in the form of a mission exists. The NSSPD (2005:6) states that the mission statement for the Nkhoma Synod is:

> ***To serve God by reaching out to the community through evangelism, effective discipleship of its members and providing social services as mandated by our Lord Jesus Christ.***

Here, the intention is to be of good service to God and to humans. This service is driven by the Church's obedience and responsiveness to the Great Commission. In outlining the core values of the Nkhoma Synod, the NSSPD (2005:6) records:

> ***In delivery of its services, the Synod aspires towards:***
>
> o ***A belief that all activities of the movement must be led and empowered by the Holy Spirit.***
> o ***A belief that teamwork and collaboration must underlie all Christian work for the maximum impact.***
> o ***A passion for excellence must drive all activities of the Church.***
> o ***A belief that personal integrity and selflessness should guide all Church activities.***
> o ***A belief that all human beings are of equal value deserving equal attention.***
> o ***A belief that a human being has both spiritual and social needs thereby necessitating a holistic approach if his/her needs are to be effectively addressed.***
> o ***A belief that catering to the psycho-social needs of vulnerable members of society is a part of our Christian heritage.***

A faith community should be driven by what it believes. The Nkhoma Synod holds on to these outlined beliefs in the full knowledge of what God wants his people to do and to be, as revealed in his Word.

The Nkhoma Synod has a Reformed identity with a strong emphasis on the centrality and transforming power of the Word of God. This is why the "*tcheni pa kalanka*!" phrase is a common slogan among the ministers of the Nkhoma Synod. It literally means that the bicycle chain must be on the sprocket! It is a kind of warning to one another that if the Church is to move on, they need not derail their way of life from the Scriptures. In the slogan, a bicycle sprocket symbolizes Scripture. When the bicycle chain is off the sprocket, one cannot pedal the bicycle! One of the most outstanding functions where the Nkhoma Synod articulates its identity is during a minister's ordination and/or induction ceremony. The presbytery chairman, or whoever presides over the function, is customarily clad in classical clerical vestments. In front of the usually attentive and curious congregation, he takes time to read through the formulary with dignified emphasis on what the Church believes, accepts and stands for. Similar to many African tribal initiation functions, when initiates are told the secrets and symbols of the tribe, here, the new minister is told what he should cherish and defend as a leader in the Church. At this point, a quick summary of what is said and done during an ordination and/or induction ceremony in the Nkhoma Synod will be an important tool to establish its identity.

Reading from the Nkhoma Synod's *Malongosoledwe a za mu Mpingo* (The Nkhoma Synod liturgical order and formularies booklet that was last revised in1968; hereafter referred to as *Malongosoledwe*), the service leader first establishes the question of authority for the Nkhoma Synod's actions. *Malongosoledwe* (1968:35) states, "We do this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King and the Head of his church. He ascended into heaven but left us with the responsibility to build up the church – his body." According to *Malongosoledwe*, the CCAP describes itself as a branch of the universal holy church that worships the Triune God. (*Eklesia wa Pakati pa Africa M'chiperezipeterio ali nthambi ya Eklesia Wopatulika, wa kwa anthu*

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onse, amene apembedza Mulungu mmodzi: Atate, Mwana ndi Mzimu Woyera.) This statement declares the Nkhoma Synod's recognition of other Christian communities worldwide. What follows now is an outline of three issues that form the doctrinal identity of the Nkhoma Synod. The first to be noted is the belief in the Triune God. The Synod declares itself a worshipper of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The second is the belief in the centrality of the Word of God. This is presented with repeated emphasis (*tibwereza kutsimikiza*) that the church believes in the Gospel of God's grace. The third doctrinal issue is on salvation: out of grace God gave his only begotten Son, our Lord, who became human, was crucified on the cross, rose from the grave and ascended into heaven. Because of his Son, God forgives sins, gives new birth through the Holy Spirit and everlasting life to all people who believe in Him and repent their sins (*Malongosoledwe* 1968:35-36).

Another important thing worth mentioning is the confessional documents that are recognised and used by the Nkhoma Synod. In *Malongosoledwe*, the Synod declares, "We uphold that the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament is the Word of God. This is the main standard measuring stick of our faith and morals" (*Malongosoledwe* 1968:36). The Nkhoma Synod also accepts a number of classical traditional confession documents within the Reformed traditions and theology. The condition for acceptance of these documents is their being based on the Holy Scriptures. *Malongosoledwe* (1968:36) records:

> *Ziphunzitsozi ndizo Zivomerezo zija zakale zimene zitchedwa Chikhulupiriro cha Chichikristu (chimene chitchedwanso chikhulupiriro cha Atumwi), ndiponso chikhulupiriro cha ku Nikeya, Chivomerezo cha ku Netherlands, Ziphunzitso zaku Dordt, ndiponso Katekisma wa ku Heidelberg amene ali gwero la Katikisma wa Nkhoma Sinodi.*

Here, the list includes the Universal Christian Creed – also known as the Apostle's Creed; the Nicene Creed; the 1561 Belgic Confession; the 1619 Decision of the Synod of Dordt on the five main points of doctrine in dispute in the Netherlands (popularly known as the Canons of Dordt); and the Heidelberg Catechism - the main source of the Nkhoma Synod Catechism.

These documents contain the teachings that form the summary of the core teachings of the Synod.

In solidarity with other synods within the CCAP General Assembly, the Synod of Nkhoma also accepts the Brief Statement of Faith. The two main Protestant missionary groups (Livingstonia and Blantyre Missions) adopted this statement in 1924 when they merged to form the CCAP. When the Nkhoma Synod joined the CCAP in 1926, it accepted the Brief Statement of Faith on condition that its first article should be put clearly in line with the articles on the same topic in the Larger Catechism of 1648. According to Pauw (1980:270), the first article of the CCAP Brief Statement of Faith states, "*The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the supreme rule of faith and conduct*." The Nkhoma Synod's stance is that this article that speaks about the Word of God, should be interpreted in line with answers to Questions 3, 4, and 5 of the 1648 Larger Catechism of Westminster. These questions and the answers of the Larger Catechism are as follows:[33]

Question 3: *What is the Word of God?* Answer: The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience.

Question 4: *How does it appear that the Scriptures are the Word of God?* Answer: The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God, by their majesty and purity; by the consent of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God; by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation; but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very Word of God.

Question 5: *What do the Scriptures principally teach*? Answer: The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

These questions and answers dismiss the doubt over the meaning of the phrase "*which is contained in the Scriptures of …*" as stipulated in the Brief Statement of Faith. It does not mean that some content of the Old and New

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[33] This version was Accessed from http://www.reformed.org/doucuments/wlc on 10 March 2008.

Testaments are not the Word of God. As the Word of God, the entirety of the Bible is emphasized. The picture drawn here is that the Nkhoma Synod's identity is strongly connected to the Word of God in all its operations. Throughout its history, the Synod is known for its focus on the Bible's teachings and traditions. It is the Synod 's wish that there should be a Bible in every home of its members. From as early as 1934, the Synod already encouraged Church elders to monitor the availability of Bibles in the members' homes and encourage those who did not have one to buy one (the Nkhoma Synod's *Zolamulira* 2006:Z.189).

Strictness regarding Christian morals is another well-known characteristic of the Nkhoma Synod. Members are expected to demonstrate their Christian values through their way of life. Hillary Mijoga (in Hendriks *et al.* 2001:33) observes: "The Nkhoma Synod is known for its strict discipline and church law observance.... That is why this Synod is described as legalistic." Those who are found to practise any immoral behaviour are suspended from immediate full church membership. The disciplinary actions are mostly based on the Word of God and the church's rules and regulations (*Zolamulira)*. The disciplined are immediately suspended from their congregation's full membership list. They are expected to appear before the Disciplinary Session of their congregation for confession of their sins. Here, they are given an observation period of a minimum of three months before they will be considered to return to full membership at the recommendation of the immediate Church elder and the approval of the Church's session. During such sessions, common disciplinary cases include: beer-drinking, sexual immorality, un-Christian marriages, association with *nyawu* (an cult group among the *Chewa* people), fighting, stealing, failure to produce a Church membership disjunction certificate, usage of obscene language and the misappropriation of Church money. The rules and regulations of the Nkhoma Synod are compiled in a book popularly known as "*Zolamulira.*" The decisions, which were made at the Synod's general assemblies over years, became rules and regulations that were added into the *Zolamulira.* Many Nkhoma Synod critics have tended to demonize this reference book by misunderstanding it as a tool for legalism in the Synod (Hendriks *et al.*

2001:38-39). In its essence, this book is an important asset towards orderliness, and is not a legal book containing a compilation of laws and penal codes. It contains references of how things should be done in the Church life, as agreed in previous assemblies. It guides the Church against repeating errors and self-contradictions. It is also a symbol of uniformity and order in all the Nkhoma Synod Congregations. Unfortunately, the common observation is that many Church leaders (ministers and Church elders) have, in many instances, used the *Zolamulira* to victimize others or to twist it for personal interests. But, this book is an important tool that guides the Synod in its outstanding characteristics of uniformity, orderliness and consistence.

The Nkhoma Synod is also known to be conservative in its theology and traditions. From its DRC roots, the synod considers itself a steady and well-grounded institution in its theological teachings and Church governance. While holding to the Calvinistic notion of *ecclesia reformata ecclesia semper reformanda* (the Reformed Church must be a Church that always reforms itself), the Church believes that change in a Church institution should not come just for the sake of changing. There should be an element of the Holy Spirit's guidance in any reformational and transformational endeavour. The Synod is always sceptical of new or strange teachings and forms of worship that come from nowhere. The basic rule is that, if any change in doctrine and tradition is to be effected, a concerned group or individual should send an overture to the Synod General Assembly. After discussions and amendments, the Synod endorses the change. A study of previous Synod Minutes has shown that the most common response to most overtures that were intended to bring changes is: "*Zibakhala monga zililimu*" (let things remain as they are). One of the many examples of overtures that took a long time to be considered, regardless of its frequent appearances, was a question on the preaching role of women in worship services. Since the Nkhoma Synod became autonomous in 1962, the issue had been discussed until the 31st General Assembly of October 2007, when it resolved that women were allowed to preach during Sunday services. The 2007 Nkhoma Synod's Bi-annual General Assembly Minute (*S.3975*) records:

> S*inodi ikuti nthawi yakwana tsopano kuti amayi azitsogolera chipembedzo ndi kulalikira pa tsiku Lamulungu atakwera ku gome. Motero kuyambira msonkhano wa October 2007 Sinodi ya Nkhoma yavomereza chimenechi. Mipingo yonse mu Sinodi ya Nkhoma itsatire chimenechi koma mochitira Mulungu ulemu.*[34]

> (The Synod declares that the time is ripe enough for women to lead and preach during the Sunday service from the pulpit. Therefore, with effect from the October 2007 Synod's General Assembly, the Nkhoma Synod has accepted this. All the congregations in the Nkhoma Synod should abide by this with due respect to God.)

The Synod is usually reserved in its own rights and does not easily sway or bow to external pressures. This is regardless of a lack of regular theological reviews of its policies to examine whether it is in line with Reformed principles and developments.

In summary, the biblical theology of the power of the Word (*Logos*) and the practical aspect of holiness form a core characteristic of the CCAP Nkhoma Synod. Kamwana (1998:20) observes:

> The Malawian Evangelical-Reformed concepts of holiness are related to the Old Testament concept of complete separation from the unholy objects to avoid pollution. In the theology and practice of the Nkhoma Synod this fact is evident. Purity of the church and of the individual must reflect the purity of God, "Be holy since I am holy" – I Peter 1:16.

The Nkhoma Synod is known for its Reformed identity with a strong emphasis on *sola Scriptura – tcheni pa kalanka*! The Word of God is held in high esteem and is considered to be the nucleus of all operations under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is a Church with strict discipline and orderliness; but slow to accept changes.

4.2.2 The Nkhoma CCAP Congregation's story

The Nkhoma CCAP congregation is the fourth oldest congregation in the Nkhoma Synod after Mvera, Kongwe and Livulezi. It was established in 1896 and, in 1912, became the DRCM headquarters for Malawi. When the

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[34] S.3975. Minutes of The Nkhoma Synod General Assembly held at Namon Katengeza Church Lay Training Centre from 18 to 23 October 2007.

mission became an independent Synod, it took its official name from the place where it had its secretariat – Nkhoma. The centre was named after the beautiful Nkhoma Mountain, i.e. the eastern foot of the mountain. This congregation prides itself in being the "headquarters" Congregation because the Synod Secretariat is within its geographical jurisdiction. It also harbours offices for most of the Synod's departments, including the Theological Institute and the Synod's main hospital. Although it has only one minister in charge of the Congregation, it has several ministers, members of the Congregation, who serve in various Synodical capacities. It also has the advantage of student-ministers from the theological institution who are allocated for practical work in the Congregation every year. Even in Presbytery functions, the Nkhoma Congregation usually hosts the other nine congregations of the Nkhoma Presbytery, because of its central position and the availability of facilities. This element adds more to the pride that is evident in the Nkhoma Congregation.

Social diversity is an outstanding description of the Nkhoma Congregation; its members include a very wide spectrum of social status ranging from illiterate to Ph.D. holders, and from the poorest of the poor to semi-millionaires. Within the mission station, which is rapidly growing into a commercial site, members have the privilege of experiencing typical urban life. Essential utilities, such as electricity, running water and communication facilities are readily available. Yet, on the periphery of the station, members live in dire poverty, surviving on daily grace. English and Chichewa services are held every Sunday to cater for the diverse interests of the worshippers. Generally, all the members of such diversity are under one roof for a worship service with each expecting the satisfaction of being ministered to.

The Nkhoma CCAP is one of the "missionary" Congregations. The South African missionaries established and developed it over years. The missionaries solicited funds from their home Church in South Africa to develop the mission station. There was little or no involvement of local people in raising funds for the mission's development activities. If anything, they employed the local people as labourers who could benefit from the mission projects. Only

converts to Christianity could be employed and associated with the missionaries. This became "fashionable" for the masses around the mission station, and a Congregation was formed in that way. This history still has some implications namely:

1. Congregational members in the outstations prefer not to be detached from the main station to become autonomous Congregations. Regardless of the distance and other geographical areas that can persuade them to be independent, they find it hard to be disconnected from the old mission centre.

2. The ownership spirit that creates zeal in giving towards church activities is uncommon among the members. The Congregation has a background of being at the receiving end, or having projects being done for them. Unlike younger congregations that were established recently, the Congregation has problems to initiate building projects.

3. Similar to the lack of a development initiative is the dependency syndrome. This Congregation's members lack healthy self-confidence. They do not see themselves as potential resources for development funds. They prefer to depend on other sources from outside the congregational membership.

These may be common tendencies in many mission-founded congregations in the Nkhoma Synod.

Another significant element in the identity of the Nkhoma Congregation is based on its size. It is a long outstretched Congregation with hilly and rough physical features. Its membership of about 6500 people covers more than 100 square kilometres. It is very difficult for members of the same Congregation to know each other by name or face, as is expected from members of the same family of God. As a result, each of the five zones (cf. section 2.4.2.1) act in their own way. As a matter of fact, the geographical physical features make mobility difficult from one side of the Congregation to the other. The Congregation's vastness causes disorientation and a loss of coordination for congregational activities. Nevertheless, the zones in the

Nkhoma Congregation have resisted detachment from the main mission station, or to be autonomous, alhough they are loosely related.

In summary, the Nkhoma Congregation has both urban and rural descriptions. It boasts of being the "mother Congregation" as it harbours the Synod Secretariat. It is too vast for proper management and coordination of events; yet members avoid considering the establishment of a new congregation. Lack of self-confidence and determination to start small and then develop has apparently retarded autonomy in prayer houses.

4.3   POWER STRUCTURES AND CHURCH GOVERNANCE IN THE NKHOMA SYNOD

The Nkhoma Synod is Presbyterian in its system of government, which means that its leadership authority resides in both its ruling and teaching Church elders.

4.3.1   The issues of identification and roles

a.   Ruling Church elders:

The process of identifying ruling church elders starts from the grassroots. In their particular wards, members nominate the ruling Church elders for their wards. The local Church session then assesses and approves (sometimes turns down) the nominated candidates' names before they are trained and inducted. They choose a leader from among the members to serve them for a three-year term of office. One can be re-elected if the ward members choose to do so. According to the Nkhoma Synod (*Zolamulira* 2006:40), a ruling Church elder's main responsibility is to oversee and be knowledgeable about how the Church operates in his own ward. As such, he must organize door-to-door visitations to his members for a full acquaintance of the ward's status quo. The Church elder should do this with the full pastoral mandate that the Church bestows upon him. He is an immediate shepherd responsible for his flock (Z.179) and is expected to do door-to-door visits of church members within his ward (Z.180). Along with this main pastoral responsibility, a ruling Church elder should:

- Encourage, assist and cheer up marginalized members (Z.181).
- Arrange and monitor everything concerning worship services (Z.182).
- Monitor the different ministries that take place within the ward, such as youth ministry, women's ministry, mission work and evangelism (Z.183-185).
- Arrange and participate in Church disciplinary sessions (Z.186).
- Organize and coordinate activities during wedding and funeral services in the ward (Z.187-188).

In all these responsibilities, ruling Church elders are advised to involve all members as far as possible. They are encouraged to identify volunteer lay members to participate in intercessory groups, local mission outreaches, Sunday school teaching, Sunday worship logistics and many other groups that they deem useful (the Nkhoma Synod's *Zolamulira* 2006:42/Z.190). This is another important aspect of the empowerment and involvement of lay people at grassroots level. The ruling elders are mandated to initiate putting every member of their ward on board in both kerygmatic and diaconal assignments. Unfortunately, as a case study in this research (Chapter 7) revealed, they receive inadequate training to satisfy their roles.

b.   *Teaching Church elders:*

The teaching elders are theologically trained and ordained ministers. They are commonly known by their Chichewa title, "*Abusa*" (singular = *M'busa*), which literally means "shepherd." Within its ecclesiastical powers, the Synod identifies, trains and licenses them. The genesis of such a process requires individual members of the Church, who have specified qualifications and feel called to full-time Church ministry, to apply for theological training. It also requires the approval of the local lay leaders who recommend the prospective candidates. The chosen candidates are sent for a minimum four-year theological training with the Synod's sponsorship. When the Synod's Training Committee have trained and certified the ministers, the Synod either assigns them, or specific congregations call them to serve under specific presbyteries. A teaching elder's chief responsibility is to provide a leadership

role through teaching and training. He has to interpret the Synod's policies and convey viable information to the lay leaders within the theological and ecclesiastical framework. The *Abusa* have both liturgical and administrative roles in the Church. On the liturgical stratum, they are the only ones mandated to administer holy sacraments; confirm church members; induct fellow ministers and ruling Church elders; and officiate at marriages. On the administrative stratum, the *Abusa* have the duty to preside over all levels of Church courts; train new Church elders, deacons and all established congregational officers; and mentor individual members in their voluntary congregational assignments.

4.3.2 A shortfall in the training of lay leaders

The overall assessment of the order of power and structure in the Nkhoma Synod reveals that, in principle, the laity is at the centre of the liturgical and administrative mechanisms. The lay leaders do the initial approval of all the important processes. They have a say in the type of minister they want for their congregation. A *M'busa* in a Nkhoma Synod Congregation is expected to facilitate the process. But, in practice, the teaching elders dominate in the decision-making forums by misusing their leadership roles (cf. section 4.4.2 below). Some lay leaders are kept ignorant of their ruling mandates, due to incomplete interpretation of Church policies, which is a most important task of the *Abusa*, thus limiting the lay leaders' roles in decision-making processes. The usual underlying element in the failure to train and empower effectively is in the obsession with power. Many teaching elders have refrained from maximizing the teaching levels for fear of transferring more power to the laity because "knowledge is power"! Rutoro (2007:183) exposes this, saying, "Many clergy have questions in their minds today. In a fellowship of believers in which all are ministers, what role is left for leaders? If laymen in our churches today take this teaching seriously, what will happen to pastors in the local church?" The *tingafanane (*fear of having equal knowledge) spirit that dominates the responsible mentors' perceptions, relates to their worldview of power and control.

This leadership weakness of being power-hungry has retarded the church's useful members' progress in their creative training. Since trained people are empowered, and empowered people can train others too, many lay leaders come and go without a clear understanding of their roles, other than what they have seen other leaders before them do. This has jeopardised the disciple-making process in the Synod and, to some extent, has denied the evidence of a Reformed identity to a significant measure. It is even evident in the way the Nkhoma Synod ministers have regarded the training of new lay leaders. The Reformed culture demands that a teaching elder should take sufficient time to teach and train lay leaders to such levels that they can run Church affairs on their own. Ndhlovu (2008:155) declares, "Opportunities should be created for lay people to be prepared and equipped to think out the relationship of their faith to their daily work." Implicitly, lay-leaders who are deprived of appropriate training are disempowered to perform their duties knowledgeably and effectively. Yet, in the Nkhoma Synod, teaching elders apparently take the lay leader's training exercise lightly (cf. section 7.6.4 below).

4.3.3 The issue of corporate governance

The General Assembly that meets bi-annually acts as the main decision and policy-making body for the Nkhoma Synod. This Assembly is constituted of all active (not retired) ordained ministers and a lay representative from every congregation in the Synod. In fact, in every assembly meeting, there are always more lay church leaders than ordained leaders. This is so, because there are fewer ministers than the number of congregations, but each congregation is always represented by a lay leader. For example, in the 2009 General Assembly, there were 116 voting ministers as compared to 139 voting lay elders.[35] All the policies made or reviewed are immediately communicated to all instituted congregations. Whatever is agreed at the General Assembly is binding on all congregations in the Synod, as they are all are represented there.

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[35] This is according to the Minutes of the CCAP Nkhoma Synod's 33rd Assembly held at the Namoni Katengeza Church Lay Training Centre from 22 to 27 October 2009 (pp 1-8).

In between the two Synod General Assemblies, the Synodical Committee deals with all the issues that require the General Assembly's attention. This Committee comprises all members of the Executive Committee (*Moderamen)* and two members (a teaching and ruling elder) from each presbytery. According to the Nkhoma Synod's *Zolamulira* (2006:59), the roles of the Synodical Committee include:

- Implementing everything as agreed and assigned by the General Assembly.
- Monitoring progress in the execution of what the General Assembly planned for the Church.
- Deciding and responding on behalf of the Synod to all issues that require emergency attention.
- Settling all disciplinary issues involving even the immediate re-allocation of personnel.
- Replacing members of the Synod's working committees where a need arises.

The *Moderamen* in the Nkhoma Synod acts as the Board of Governors in any corporate body. Members of the *Moderamen* deputise on behalf of the General Assembly and the Synodical Committee in monitoring the actualization of all matters related to policies of the Church. The management of the Synod is left in the hands of the Synod Secretariat, which is headed by the General Secretary. The General Secretary's office does all the communications on behalf of the Synod, in line with policies that the Synod lays down, and the decisions that either the *Moderamen* or the Synodical committee make. The Deputy General Secretary's office is specifically assigned to oversee the operations of the Synod's various Departments, which include: Education, Health, Theological Training, Lay Training, Mission, Church and Society, Relief and Development, HIV/AIDS, Environment, Works and Water Supplies, Transport and Building, Printing, Youth, Women's Desk, and Finance.

Meanwhile, each congregation is at liberty to plan for its yearly activities. For the sake of co-ordinating the main Synod's activities, the Secretariat draws up an outline of activities[36] and sends it to all congregations. So, the congregations formulate their programs, based on the synodical activities. All cases from congregations that require the Synod's attention are first channelled through the Presbytery Committee that oversees issues of policy at presbytery level. Only when there are issues that demand a change or re-visitation of Synod policies, the Presbytery Committee refers them to the Synodical Committee through the *Moderamen.* Each ordained minister of the Nkhoma Synod has the right to present an overture to propose changes in the policies at any General Assembly.

The power relations within the Synod's operational structures will always depict its identity. Who is responsible for what? Are the laity meaningfully employed? Are the lay people empowered adequately to participate in decision-making and other church activities? To clarify this, the following paragraphs examine a recent important survey that the Nkhoma Synod did for a clearer picture on this and other issues.

4.4   SWOT ANALYSIS FOR THE NKHOMA SYNOD

The SWOT analysis is a powerful tool for assessing and analysing institutions. It involves evaluation of an institution by analysing its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The Nkhoma Synod used this tool to do self-evaluation as part of the process of formulating its strategic plan. In August 2005, through the Synod's General Assembly, it appointed a 38-member group that included both ordained and non-ordained Church leaders from its presbyteries and departments. This group, which included both men and women, received the task to honestly evaluate the life of the Synod as the first step in developing a five-year strategic plan. Sitting at Chongoni Church Lay Training Centre for four days, the group participated in the workshop for strategic planning while basically using SWOT analysis as

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[36] This annual outline is commonly known as "*Kumbukirani izi*" that literally translates as "*Remember these.*"

the main tool. From the workshop, the group compiled a long list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The Synod leadership left the compilation of the outcome in the hands of a special strategic plan task-force Committee of experts in different fields who are members of the Church. Under the leadership of Mr Francis Perekamoyo (a former Reserve Bank of Malawi Governor but a Church elder of the Lingadzi CCAP Congregation), from the SWOT analysis, the Committee drew some strategic issues that formulated the Synod's strategic plan, which is currently (2010) valid. This strategic plan is commonly referred to as the NSSPD. The Synod leadership (with the researcher as the Moderator) used each of the four parts of the tool (SWOT) to analyse five aspects of the Church's ministry designed for effective evaluation, i.e. governance, management/service delivery, spiritual, social and financial issues. By doing so, they were able to cover most important areas of the Church's life, which contributed more elaborately to the self-understanding exercise.

4.4.1 An outline of the Nkhoma Synod's SWOT analysis

This section takes a special interest in the points that would be linked directly to identity and the process of empowering the laity in the Congregations of the Nkhoma Synod. The following is a summary of the final result of the SWOT analysis, which the Synod compiled for use in its five-year strategic plan (NSSPD), with special focus on strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

On governance

o *The existence of a constitution that provides for proper governance and a basis for the Synod's activities.*

o *The provision of open elections and appointments to various governance bodies that guarantee continuity of activities in the Synod.*

o *The availability of boards and committees for each of the Synod's institutions.*

On management / service delivery

o *Each functional area, such as health or education, has an officer who is accountable for results.*

o *The reporting relationship for each head of department is clear.*

o *Congregations are easily accessible.*

On spiritual issues

o *There are good biblical teachings based on Reformed Presbyterian theology.*

o *There are well-trained ministers.*

o *Instructional and liturgical materials are available by means of the Church's printing press.*

o *There are well-established ministries for women and the youth.*

On social issues

o *The Church has a forum that allows fellowshipping of all walks of life (men, women, the youth and children).*

o *The Church provides pastoral care among its members and beyond.*

o *The Church has a significant number of educational establishments at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.*

o *The Church has Relief and Development, Health, HIV/AIDS and Education Departments that are directly concerned with social issues; and offer services directly to the community.*

On financial issues

o *The Church has steady resources from Church offerings, income-generating activities and partner Churches.*

o *There is a reasonably active financial committee.*

o *There are established financial policies, procedures, and systems for the Synod.*

Weaknesses

On governance

o *There is a lack of clear demarcation in the roles of the Executive and the Secretariat.*

o *The absence of direct youth and women's representation in corporate governance bodies.*

o *The Church lacks a system for regular performance monitoring of its governance bodies.*

- *The domination of ministers as leaders in all the institutional boards and committees regardless of their technical ability.*
- *Inadequate handover and orientation arrangements for governance bodies and committees.*

On management/service delivery

- *A lack of a professional administrator and human resource officer to assist the General Secretary, who is an elected clergyman.*
- *The absence of a common planning and budget framework.*
- *Inadequate coordination mechanisms for service delivery that leaves the Secretariat ill-equipped to deal effectively with business and investments decisions.*
- *The Synod Secretariat's unsatisfactory administrative support for the work of presbyteries and congregations.*
- *The location of the Secretariat (away from the useful facilities) that hampers effective service delivery.*

On spiritual issues

- *Many congregations lack trained teachers, which compromises the delivery of catechetical classes.*
- *At present, the Involvement of lay people in Church activities at grassroots level is weak.*
- *Women are excluded from Church liturgical leadership activities and key decision making positions.*
- *The Church services are said to be generally routine and boring, lack creativity and imagination, making them unattractive especially to young people.*
- *The gap between leaders and the flock is reportedly very wide, making it difficult for the flock to access personal guidance easily on a number of challenges that confront them.*

On social issues

- *Christian interaction among members is unsatisfactory.*
- *The departments involved in social work lack the skills of getting the communities involved, rather than being at the receiving end.*

On financial issues

- *Lack of committed stewardship on Church finances.*

o *Lack of professional and creative personnel to update financial systems within the Church.*

o *The absence of a central fund system creates an imbalance in the packages offered to the clergy who make the largest personnel column in the Synod.*

According to this document, the Nkhoma Synod established that it has opportunities to make a nation-wide impact. The people's trust and allegiance and the existence of established governing systems and infrastructure provide an opening to carry out missional plans and activities effectively. There is room to improve the governance systems and the financial resources because of the availability of devoted human resources, both on a full-time and part-time basis. The Synod also examined the political and economic environment in Malawi for providing a conducive and receptive atmosphere for spiritual advancement. On the other hand, there are threats that may lead to disaster or dwindling of the Church if time and space for the present opportunities are not fully utilized. The global cultural dynamism proves to be a delicate danger as long as the Church fails to interpret and accommodate it within the parameters of the Great Commission. There is a need for continuous assessment and engagement of the local and global theological changes.

4.4.2 A critical assessment of the Nkhoma Synod's SWOT analysis

In the Nkhoma Synod's SWOT analysis, its identity manifests mainly on the basis of strengths and weaknesses. The strengths confirm that the Synod can be described as formal, democratic and corporative. As a Christian movement, its focus on Bible-based teachings classifies it to belong to a strict Calvinistic category. Its traditions are imbued in Reformed Presbyterian theology, which accommodates the use of spiritual gifts for all members in a congregation. Each congregation is given partial autonomy to design and implement their own missional tasks within their own environments while being mindful of its corporative mandate as a Synod. It seems there are more of the operational weaknesses than those that touch the very nature of

the church. Evidently, failure to use the available resources and systems to maximize the output has been described as one of the outstanding weaknesses. The dominant ordained ministers disregard the potential that is in the laity. They lack the keenness to engage men and women to whom God has given various abilities through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Instead, the people look to the ministers for everything, including the things they would have done better than the clergy. The whole ministry of the Church at a congregational level has become a one-man show. Even at high-level decision-making forums, the clergy in the Nkhoma Synod dominate to such an extent that the ruling Church elders are rendered almost voiceless. When examining the points in governance weaknesses in the SWOT analysis, one of them (the last but one) clearly shows the dominance of the clergy in decision-making. "*The domination of ministers in all the institutional boards and committees regardless of their technical ability [or inability]*" is noted as a weakness.

Evidently, many Church elders who attend Synod General Assemblies, Synodical Committee meetings and even Presbytery meetings, usually are new. Unlike the clergy who are mandated to attend the Synod General Assemblies, the ruling Church elders are chosen from time to time to represent their Congregations. A good example can be taken from the list of congregational representatives to the Synod Assembly in 2005 and 2007. Of the 118 Church elders who attended in 2005, only six (5%) represented their Congregations again in 2007. This statistical fact is clear evidence that the participation of ruling elders in the decision-making forums is somewhat crippled. They lack experience of the nature of meetings that decide directions for the Synod.

Of special interest to this research is that one of the Nkhoma Synod strategic plan's five objectives is to build the capacity of lay leaders in all sectors of the Church's life (NSSPD 2005:8). The identity elaborated by the SWOT analysis above, helps to enrich this research's argument based on the opportunities and enhanced by the threats. If the Church in Malawi can make

use of the opportunities as outlined above, to empower the laity to utilize the Church's strength, the missional impact can be significant.

4.5   ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

In order to understand the identity of the Church in Malawi the attitude and practices of both the leaders and the members in the Church should be described in greater detail. While "attitude" defines why people do what they do, "practice" defines how they do what they do. People are easily persuaded to participate when they perceive a positive attitude towards circumstances around them. If, for example, members of the Church begin to ask why they should regard the community's poverty reduction as their missional task while they themselves are poor, it means that any project or communal work designed along communal poverty reduction will receive weak participation, as the people have a wrong attitude that overshadows their Christian values of bearing one another's burdens. The syndrome of being at the receiving end has created wrong attitudes as to how they should benefit from the Church, rather than how the Church should benefit from them. As such, the Christian spirit of giving has been tainted with greed that cares for oneself rather than being the brother's keeper. When, in good faith, some members propose to start a Church-based charity group, the attitude of either the Church leaders or other members towards the initiator can promote or demote the work. Many of the wrong attitudes of the Nkhoma Synod's Church leaders have been influenced by fear of the unknown. For instance, the attitude towards any change has been negative for fear of it harbouring strange ideas that might derail the Church from its traditional values. Yet, many of the changes that have taken place have enriched and refreshed the very values that might be losing their meaning. Wrong attitudes lead to mistrust, which is a tool of retrogression. Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:139) point out: "Without trust, missional transformation can never occur because it is the glue that enables a community to move forward in difficult times." Therefore, proper attitudes should be cultivated in the Church if it is to make headway in a missional identity-building process.

Attitudes influence practices, and vice versa. The way people worship is rooted in their knowledge of, and attitude towards, God. The Church leadership should understand people's attitudes and practices in order to offer the needed empowerment, which will promote the missional life of a congregation, because members will make informed decisions to serve God and others. The understanding of one's own identity in Christ, the mission Author, adds to the zeal of living by the Great Commission vision, even in our fast-changing age.

4.6   WOMEN AND THE YOUTH

The presence of any Nkhoma Synod Congregation in a locality easily manifests in the women and youths' activities. Women are the majority in almost every congregation in the Synod, seconded by the youth; and men are in the smallest category. Women and the youth are the two most active groups in the Nkhoma Synod. Women are always in the forefront and represent the Church's image in the communities' charity and caring work. The youth do good work in evangelism and community social services at grassroots level, especially among their peers. As a result, women and the youth have become a symbol of what the church stands for and is meant to be in the community.

4.6.1 Women's ministry and the Church's identity

Today, all over Africa, women's central position in the Church cannot be undermined. Rutoro (2007:211) observes, "The Christian women of Africa love the Lord with a great zeal and commitment that surpasses that of men... If women were to be removed from the church, pews of many churches would be empty." Very much aware of such an observation, the Nkhoma Synod has a well-developed women's ministry that started way back in the 1930s, and was the initiative of the women themselves that impacted Church and society in no small way. As indicated in *Zolamulira I* (2006),[37] the Synod accepted the women's ministry in 1940. About 50 years later, a full-time

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[37] *Zolamulira, Zopangana ndi Zolangiza* : Book 1 (2006:81); Z.339 under the Chigwirizano Section.

women's desk was established to coordinate all women's activities in the Synod at all levels. Within the women's ministry, there is an outstanding women's guild section, which is locally known as *Chigwirizano cha Amayi*, which is a group of women who devote themselves to doing special ministries within the Church. For identity's sake, at specific times, they wear a special uniform comprising a white turban, a long-sleeved blouse, a black skirt and black shoes. The objective of the group is to encourage Christian women to be true witnesses of Jesus Christ, and to unite with others in service to God among fellow women; hence their name *Chigwirizano* that means unity or union. Their activities include evangelism, Christian education, Bible study circles, caring for the sick, comforting the bereaved, cheering the lonely, helping the aged, counselling the fallen ones, and promoting family life. They meet regularly twice a month for prayers and to report on activities for that particular period.

These women have shaped the identity of the Church because the Church:
o is to carry out evangelism seriously; and they do.
o must be concerned with society's daily problems and tackle them holistically; and they do.
o has to take prayer seriously; and their prayer life is outstanding.
o must be incarnational in its social services. They manifest the life of Christ in every community through their activities.
o must be visible in the community. *Chigwirizano,* women's participation in community functions, such as funerals, is outstanding. In many cases, their sole participation has been an instrument of evangelism.

Furthermore, *Chigwirizano* has revealed the Church's character and its concern for women. They are recognized as an essential part of the body of Christ and receive the space to use their spiritual gifts within the Synod. Commenting on the introduction of *Chigwirizano* in the Nkhoma Synod, Phiri (1997:84) writes,

> It becomes clear that the introduction of Chigwirizano gave African women a status in the church which they did not have before. The women saw themselves as co-workers with the Lord Jesus. That

knowledge brought them the realization that Christianity was offering them a special kind of respect.

Contrary to what many critics have said about the Nkhoma Synod as a male dominating entity, the women's involvement has been one of the outstanding characteristics of the Church.

The Nkhoma Synod recognizes the important role of women in development projects. *Chigwirizano cha Amayi* is the Church's one independent group whose developmental achievements are evident in many parts of the country. The Executive Committee of every *Chigwirizano* branch has a Development Treasurer, a position that is not present in the Synod Executive Committee – the *Moderamen*. This just emphasizes the women's concern for development, about which they aim to do something and report at the end of the year. As a result, the Church is viewed as being development-minded through the women's initiatives. Notably interesting is the fact that all the development projects they embark upon are locally funded. The women have designed a system of raising funds in their meetings through regular contributions; they contribute very small, but regular, consistent amounts of money. In the history of the Nkhoma Synod, *Chigwirizano* was the first ministry of the Church to have an office, employ a full-time worker and buy a vehicle using funds locally solicited from its membership.

All this is evidence that the Nkhoma Synod cannot fully describe its identity without referring to women in its key activities and decision-making forums. Rutoro (2007:211) underscores the point when he says, "Financially, spiritually and socially, in Zimbabwe and Africa at large, women are the backbone of the church." Ultimately*, Chigwirizano cha Amayi* has become a significant symbol of the presence of the Church in the Nkhoma Synod.

4.6.2 Youth ministry and the Church's identity

Brown (2005:159) says, "The Nkhoma Synod clearly has a profound commitment to meeting the spiritual needs of the youth. This can be seen in the creation of such posts as congregational, presbytery, and synodical

youth directors.…" Here, Brown makes a point in as far as youth work forms the stronghold and warehouse of the Synod. Through the well-structured youth network in the Synod, these future leaders are formed and mentored. If one wants to forecast what the Synod will be in the next decade, one should observe what the youth are doing today. This imparts hope for the future of the Nkhoma Synod, because the Church has a high proportion of its membership among the youth. Its open policy on who should be in youth groups encourages participation in the Church. According to *Zolamulira* (2006:118/Z.569d), anyone from the age of ten years can be in youth groups and there is no retirement age. One can participate in youth work until one is old!

Today, the youth's contribution to the life of the Church in the Nkhoma Synod forms much of what the Nkhoma Synod is known for. For example, in evangelism, the youth of the Nkhoma Synod have a diversified approach. They use drama, music, sport, Y2Y (youth to youth, i.e. a method of peer influence), camps and open-air revival rallies. These methods of evangelism are an initiative within the youth to target their fellow youth. Adults often find it difficult to accept some of these methods. In the Nkhoma Synod, more group Bible study takes place among the youth than among adults, including the church leaders. Like the *Chigwirizano cha Amayi*, the youth have regular meetings twice every month, where group Bible discussion is a common activity. As such, they demonstrate the identity of the Church's focus on the Word.

In August 2008 in Lilongwe, as part of the investigation, the researcher visited the Youth Office and spoke to the then Nkhoma Synod's Youth Director, Rev Vasco Kachipapa. The following questions were used to guide the conversation:

- Tell me the background story in the development of Youth Ministry in Nkhoma Synod.
- What is the current operational structure of Youth Ministry in the Synod.
- What are the main activities in the ministry? What about CCAPYUM?
- Why are the youth considered to be more Pentecostal in their activities than Presbyterians?
- What are the challenges of Youth Ministry in Nkhoma Synod?

- Can the youth be part of the Church's identity? Explain.

During the conversation, he described how, within their network, the youth have created different ministries, which are meant to enhance the participation of all the Church's youth. For example, one of these ministries is the CCAP Youth Urban Ministry (CCAPYUM), which focuses on reaching out to their fellow youth in the urban areas. In addition, they work in collaboration with other youths in rural areas to facilitate revival meetings. Another highly commendable ministry within the youth network of the Nkhoma Synod is their fight against HIV/AIDS. The youth are within the category of high HIV prevalence (ages 14 to 25 years). So, they make a positive contribution when they speak to fellow youths about HIV/AIDS in line with Christian values and attitudes, other than when the same work is done by an older person. As in evangelism, the youth in the Nkhoma Synod use a variety of methods to reach out to their fellow youth with the message of prevention, of living a positive life with AIDS, and of care. The use of drama, music and sport has shown good results in how the youth have been able to put across the message of anti-stigmatization for HIV positive people within the Church.

The Nkhoma Synod is aware of the importance of continuity in the Church's life. It has always struggled to make sure that there are students in the theological college who are drawn from the congregations' youth circles, in order to be prepared for Church leadership. Despite the limited resources, various measures have been put in place to sustain the training of new ministers. This is part and parcel of the nature of the Nkhoma Synod. So, the youth circles have been the pool of aspiring future ministers. More than 70% of the ministers who have been ordained in the Nkhoma Synod were involved in some or other way in youth leadership activities before they joined the theological seminary to be trained for the ministry. Now, the youth have taken the initiative to raise support for theological students to augment the Synod's efforts. For example, the urban youth make regular visits to the Josophat Mwale Theological Institute to chat with theological students and bring them various gifts for material and moral support.

So, the women and the youth in the Nkhoma Synod are not merely available, they also form an integral part of the Church's identity. Their stories are part of the Church in Africa's success story, because they are in the forefront of the mission that the Church intends to fulfil.

4.7   THE PRESENT CHALLENGES: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

What is the situation of Christianity in Africa? Since 1978, the percentage of church growth in Africa has been much higher than in the rest of the world (http://www.lightplanet.com/mormons/daily/history/africa.html).   Oden (2007:10) writes,

> There soon may be almost a half billion Christians in Africa. Now estimated at over four hundred million …, and rapidly growing, a significant proportion of global Christian believers at this time are residents of the continent of Africa.

Malawi, like many other African countries, is experiencing rapid church growth proportional to the national population's growth. Even the mainline churches are still on the increase in terms of membership figures. Yet, the many challenges that the Church in Malawi faces are likely to deform the Church's true identity. Firstly, the incapacity of the Churches in Malawi to raise their own funds has influenced them to still look to the rich countries for financial support. As a result, the strings that are attached to the donations deny the African churches the development of their own contextual identity - they must dance to the tune of the donors for survival. Many Malawian Churches have drifted away from being Malawian. They prefer to be foreign in the Church, and be Malawians outside the Church. Many of the mainline Churches have clung to the congregational culture and identity of the missionaries who founded those denominations (Hendriks 2004:117). The CCAP Nkhoma Synod is an example. The liturgy that the Nkhoma Synod uses to this very day (2010) is almost a carbon copy of that which the DRC missionaries introduced in the 1890s. Despite attaining autonomy in 1962, very little has been changed in the liturgy to give a Malawian meaning to the Malawian Church's sense of encounter with God. If anyone wants to

discover the identity of the Nkhoma Synod in view of its worshipping style, one is likely the see the Dutch worshipping mood. Here, the problem is more than mere solidarity with donor partners; it reflects a lack of own initiative and the confidence to be oneself. Tite Tienou (in Larsen & Treier 2007:221) observes, "African Christian theology is not about crafting new doctrines; it is rather about stating Christian teaching in language and thought forms understandable to Africans in their contemporary situations." The need to be African in many church traditions on the African soil poses a great challenge. Chuba (in Fiedler *et al.* 1998:48-60) demands "a theology cooked (or boiled) in an African pot." If African theology is to be "cooked in an African pot," then an African church should be built by African builders using African building blocks. Bediako (2004:23) challenges, "We need to meet God in the Lord Jesus Christ speaking immediately to us in our particular circumstances, in a way that assures us that we can be authentic Africans and true Christians." In that way, an African identity will be visible in an African worship service.

The second challenge to the identity of an African church in this generation is growing secularism, which is in competition with the fast growth of Christianity in Africa. Shorter and Onyancha (1997:14) describe "secularism" as: "a world view which in theory and/or practice, denies the immanence of God." As such, it is a way of thinking that renders Christian religiosity to become a non-dominant force in society. Secularism has even displaced some cultural values that would give the African church its identity. Due to this, the faith-seeking understanding embedded in theology is becoming a distant element in the church's core life. By nature, Africans are religious. From birth through all rites of passage, there are activities and concepts of religion in nature. Some of these imparted good background knowledge for Christianity to be easily understood and accepted in Africa. The common danger of secularism in Africa is that it has led many African Christians into either liberalism or syncretism. But, the outburst of information technology has become a carrier of secularism to remote areas, thus retarding the rooting of Christian values. Urbanization has also contributed to the growth of secularism in the present-day Africa. O'Donovan (2000:53) says,

> Living in the city and being surrounded by godless people with godless values can bring temptation to adopt materialism, secularism, greed, individualism and selfishness instead of the Christian values of generosity, self-sacrifice, humility and support for the community.

The third challenge is the suffering caused by AIDS, poverty and war. AIDS and poverty have already been addressed in the previous chapter. The church's identity has been affected because these two agents of suffering have deprived many people in the church of their dignity. Church members have been reduced to objects at the receiving end of social work groups. Malawi has not experienced any physical war that has displaced people from their homes, but the kind of war that even the church experiences is verbal, propelled by tribalism and nepotism. In its Christ-like nature, the church that is expected to be accommodative and united has often been an instrument of division. Over years, an outstanding example has been the conflict between the Nkhoma and Livingstonia Synods over their ecclesiastical border. Much of what is evident in this long-standing border conflict is the division of these Synods along tribal lines. Instead of settling down to resolve the issues using Christian values, Churches have based their arguments on tribal sensitivity. This has deterred the Christian identity formation that is expected to be clearly eminent in the Church.

Yet another challenge is the lack of confidence in our very identity as Africans. Many white missionary-initiated churches in Africa have always had problems to replace the Christianity, that was carved from Western wood, with a Christianity that is clad in African colours. The phenomenon of considering anything African in the church to be un-spiritual has been so deep-rooted that even this century's new Bible translations have problems to be accepted. For example, the very versions that the white missionaries produced in broken Chichewa are considered to be authentic and faultless. As such, even when the wording and theology in the old translations of formularies seem to be out of order, they are almost canonized and churches refuse to revise or replace them.

4.8   CONCLUSION

The critical reflection on the Nkhoma Synod's ministry, as presented in this chapter, has led to a meaningful analysis of the Church's identity. In summary, it has been established that the Synod is, in its nature and origin, based on developing its identity from the Holy Bible. Its authority and direction are always connected with a faithful interpretation of the Bible. It is also noted that the Church's identity is in line with the Great Commission. Deduced from its vision statement, the Church wants to reach out to others, and takes accountability as a norm for its existence. As a responsive Church, it takes its missional responsibility seriously in dealing with spiritual and social issues of the day. Clearly, its mission emphasizes service to God and humans as the central mandate from its Lord Jesus Christ. Believing in the leadership and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the Church aspires to involve all members to participate in the delivery of its services. This aspiration requires that the Church must take the involvement of the laity seriously in order to live up to its vision and mission. A need exists for the Holy Spirit's fresh engagement in the unfolding and execution of the entire strategic plan that is currently on table. Empowered leadership can effectively empower the rest of the Church's membership.

On analysing the governance in the Nkhoma Synod, it seems that there is a problem that has been created by the fear within the clerical leadership of losing control, or sharing power with the ruling elders. The space that exists between the teaching and ruling elders widens as the former want to use the latter rather than equip them. Even the standard of training that the clergy offers, leaves much to be desired. Many ministers prefer the induction to the sharing method; thus creating the danger of passivity on the part of the ruling elders who are the key persons at grassroots level. The call is not to re-invent the wheel, but to maximize the use of available people and resources. Leaders and the laity should be doing theology. As the SWOT analysis has shown, the parts of strength and weakness revealed an honest self-reflection in the Nkhoma Synod. It eventually established that the Synod has the potential to grow further because its strengths are more concrete than its

weaknesses. The right attitudes and practices among members can uphold the values stipulated in the Synod's strategic plan. It will help the Church to engage in a meaningful missional venture that will provide a true picture of God's manifestation and rule among his people. The women and youth have already proven to be a force to reckon with in the whole strategic plan of the Synod. What remains in the process is to equip them further.

A missional and contextual identity is a key in the process of empowering people. While the Church is not clear what it exists for; it will not focus on the real issues and ends up majoring in minors. Empowerment can be neutralized if people cannot dream of, and imagine, a new future and their role in making it possible. For example, if a congregation's members do not consider poverty alleviation their Christian responsibility, they will shun whatever the Church suggests to fight poverty. One's own identity requires the correct interpretation of what forms that identity. Since theology is about interpretation, a constant interpretation of what it means to be a contextual church is needed. The formulation of identity within a congregation should have its basis in the church's ecclesiology and ministry.

CHAPTER FIVE:

A MISSIONAL CHURCH'S PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

5.1   INTRODUCTION

The question of ecclesiastical identity addressed in the previous chapter, now leads to a further investigation of the nature of the missional church in the light of its calling to participate in God's mission. This chapter seeks to present an outline of some of the important elements of a missional church. It offers a Bible-based theological description of the church and its missional nature as a vessel for God's mission within an African context. Since this study is practical theological by its very nature, it requires a constant hermeneutical sensitive correlation between the world and the Word. What biblical reflections appeal to the Malawian context? What does Scripture and the way it was interpreted in the Reformed tradition say about the church's identity? To answer these questions, the investigation will consider the fact that theology is about Scripture and tradition. It is Scripture – the Word of God - that presents an outline of our faith, values, principles and spirituality to the world. Church traditions affirm what God, in the Scriptures, reveals to human beings.

From the very outset, the researcher will use theological literature that emphasizes the church's missional nature. As such, this chapter is part of a discernment process that seeks to address the central question and quest of the research, i.e., "*What should be done in the Malawian Church to lead the laity and lay leadership into a holistic ministry relevant to its contemporary situation, in an effort to develop congregations to be self-reliant, spiritually mature, all-participatory and providing social service in order to strive to act as signs of God's reign?* In the process of searching for probable answers to this question, one needs to correlate it with a hermeneutically sensitive understanding of the church's identity. Who a person is, has much relevance to what a person is supposed to do in a specific situation. As such, in this chapter, a further task will be to establish the theological relationship

between the notion of empowering the laity and the practical situation at the grassroots of the area under study. Scripture and tradition should pave the way as to how the Malawian Church should re-define its activities and being. This will also require establishing the place of the laity in the mission of the Church in Malawi. This research germinates in the assumption that the Church is missional in its very being. Fubara-Manuel (2007:141) believes, "The church lives for mission as the sun exists for radiance. But the mission for which the church lives is God's and not the church's." The Church takes its missional mandate and nature from God who created it. Speaking from a Reformed perspective, Alston Jr. (2002:19) argues, "The Word of God is not a book. It is God's creative and redeeming activity that makes things happen in the world, calling into being that which is not and making old things new." This confirms the centrality of Scripture and its inseparability from the life of the Church that is clothed in tradition.

With this introduction that sets a pivotal base for the rest of the discussion in this study, this chapter will proceed as follows:

- Understanding the Church.
- The missional task of the Church.
- The Church and theology at grassroots.
- A theology of the Church's social involvement.
- The Church and its leadership.
- Conclusion.

5.2   UNDERSTANDING THE CHURCH

The quest to define "the church" might sound like explaining the obvious. Yet, defining the church for a practical theological purpose helps to balance the general meaning of the word with specific people's interpretation of it. This section forms part of the on-going effort to draw a clear meaning of the church in order to accelerate participation in practical theology in our world and contexts. The meaning will be drawn from contemporary theological

literature and missional church literature, in particular. Frequent biblical reflections will be noted.

5.2.1 A general explanation

The word "church" (*kirche* in German; *igreja* in Portuguese; *kerk* in Dutch; *ecclesia* in Latin and *mpingo* in Chichewa) is generally thought to have its roots in the Greek word that means "belonging to the Lord" or "the Lord's house."[38] Historically, what stands out in this word is a sense of belonging that was associated with a group of servants (slaves) under one master. Later, it took the Christian meaning of belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ. In secular Chichewa, the word "*mpingo*" means basically a group of people with a common agenda, gathering or moving together. But, over the years, the meaning of the word has become more religious than secular. In the ordinary language of Chewa-speaking Malawians, when one uses the word *mpingo,* it always refers to ecclesiastical issues - a direct translation of the word "church" in its common use. Therefore, the Chichewa common concept of the church is a group of people who gather regularly to pray and do church business. It is the same word that can be translated as denomination, congregation or parish.

The classical definition of the term "church" has its origins in the Greek word, *ekklesia.* The Greek-speaking Christians are known to be the first users of this word that basically meant an assembly. In common language, it referred primarily to a legal assembly of citizens in a self-governing city during the Roman rule. A biblical example of this meaning is seen in Acts 19:39 (NIV), where the text refers to a "legal assembly" of the citizens of the city, Ephesus. Nevertheless, in Matthew 16:18, Jesus Christ Himself introduces the word in the Bible: *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church* (ekklesia) *and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."* The Old Testament word, which the Septuagint rendered synonymous with *ekklesia,* is "*kahal.*" However, in the Hebrew context, the word meant more

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[38] *Dictionary of historical ideas,* (Volume I, page 413) Accessed from http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/cg-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dvl-50 on 2008/04/13.

than just a physical gathering; it signified the nation of Israel as the elected people in a covenant relationship with their God, Yahweh.[39]

Many have tried also to understand the church by explaining what it does and how it is organized as a human body. This creates a vacuum in the process of clearly defining the church. Van Gelder (2000:24) warns:

> Functional and organizational approaches to understanding the church rely heavily on the social sciences. While insights from the social sciences can be helpful, these perspectives tend to give primary emphasis to human dimensions of the church life.

As such, Van Gelder suggests that it is critical to first analyse the nature of the church before proceeding to examine its ministry and organization. At this stage, a brief survey of the nature of the church will be appropriate.

5.2.2 The nature of the church

What is the nature of the church? It must be pre-empted immediately that the nature of the church gives it its theological basis. The effort to discover "the nature of the church" must start with God and end with the anthropological part of it; not vice versa. In many secular debates, the church has been commonly mistaken for a socio-religious group that pursues the interests and beliefs of its members (O'Neill *et al.* 2006:94). But recent theological studies have come up with a new approach of defining the church by analysing the essence of its own existence. The study of God's mission (missiology) has contributed very useful insights to the understanding of the church (Smith 1996:352). Numerous books and e-books on the missional church are available in all major theological libraries. Two selected examples of literature will now be cited. They have been chosen on a representative scale. The first represents a North American or global picture, while the second represents an African view.

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[39] *Dictionary of the history of ideas.* Accessed from http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv1-50 on 13 April 2008.

(i)   Craig van Gelder

In his book, *The essence of the church*, Van Gelder writes with a North American setting in mind, but offers an approach that fits a universal understanding of "the church." Van Gelder (2000:14) begins with a confession that "the word church carries many meanings." Along with this remark, he establishes that the church is more than:

- A physical structure;
- A programmed event that we attend at a certain time of the week;
- A set of policy choices that define how resources are allocated;
- One's personal relationship with other believers;
- A historical denomination;
- A particular type of organizational structure;
- A set of confessional beliefs.

These are just church related meanings but do not exhaust them all; not even all of them combined. Then Van Gelder (2000:24) says,

> The church is more than what meets the eye. It is more than a set of well-managed ministry functions. It is more than another human organization. The church lives in the world as a human enterprise, but it is also the called and redeemed people of God. It is a people of God who were created by the Spirit to live as a missionary community. As such, the church is both a social organization and a spiritual community.

In this explanation, three elements that can be more helpful for further understanding of the church emerge: (a) its creation, (b) its duality and (c) its uniqueness. A quick look at them follows.

(a)   The church's creation

The church is the creation of the Spirit of God and, therefore, has its roots in God Himself. As such, the church is the manifestation of the Triune God in the world. The church exists through God and for God. Whatever the church exists for, is God's mission. The church is a spiritual entity because the Spirit of God created it. Van Gelder (2000:14) points out, "When we encounter the

church, we move into a spiritual territory that occupies earthly terrain. We encounter the living God in the midst of our humanity." The church can adopt different forms, but its nature is in God Himself. This is what qualifies the church to be missional – not because it is involved in mission programmes, but because it has its DNA in the missional God. Beyond the visible church, there is God who called it into being for his own purpose.

(b)   The church's duality

The duality of the church is also worthy of attention as we try to understand the nature of the church. Van Gelder (2000:25) says, "The church is God's personal presence in the world through the Spirit … the church also exists as a social reality with human behaviours organized within human structures." In understanding the nature of the church, it is important to keep this duality in balance as one proceeds to examine the ministry for which the church exists and the way it organizes itself for the task. The church should be seen in its nature as both holy and human, spiritual and social. It is holy because the holy God created it. Van Gelder (2000:118) notes,

> The holiness of the church is a work of the Spirit. It is the Spirit's power that indwells the community and its members. It is the Spirit who draws, leads, guides, teaches, counsels, and provokes the church into living by a redeemed set of values.

(c)   The church's uniqueness

The church has a unique nature. It does not exist for itself but for its Creator. All other communities are formed from human interest, but the church has its unique character as the community of God's people (Van Gelder 2000:25). So the church's creation, duality and uniqueness prompt a theological study of its nature, ministry and organization. Both missiology and ecclesiology must be taken on board in order to develop a missiological ecclesiology. Van Gelder (2000:37) believes:

> In developing a more full-orbed missiological ecclesiology, three aspects of church life must be defined and related to one another: what the church is – its nature; what the church does – its ministry; and how the church is to structure its work – its organization.

In conclusion, Van Gelder's work is an invaluable contribution in the contemporary quest to understand "church" in a practical and intelligible way. It hinges its emphasis by beginning with understanding the nature of the church, before its ministry and organization. The church, as the Spirit's creation, does what it does as it is always focused on God's mission. Van Gelder (2000:99) says, "The church is missionary by nature because God has sent it on mission in the world under the leading of the Spirit. It is to bear witness to God's redemptive reign." Van Gelder's explanation of what it takes for a church to be missional provides the North American and the global Church with a standpoint for rethinking in doing theology today. The church has to do what it is. So, it must first understand its nature. In a summarized outline of the nature of the church, Van Gelder (2000:128) says,

> The nature of the church is defined by the mission of God in the world.
> The nature of the church is the result of the redemptive work of Christ.
> The nature of the church is holistic in relating this redemption to all of life.
> The church exists as a social community that is both spiritual and human.
> The church exists as a full demonstration of a new humanity.
> The attributes of the church's nature determine the church's ministry.

(ii) Benebo Fubara Fubara-Manuel

Fubara-Manuel is a Nigerian church minister with a vast leadership experience in the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (Onwunta 2006:viii). He writes from an African perspective and, in all respects, represents the African ecclesiological voice in this discussion. Like Van Gelder, Fubara-Manuel asserts right from the very beginning that the church does not live independent of God. In his book, *In the missio Dei*,[40] he articulates the idea that the nature of the church has its bearing in the nature of God Himself, who is a missional God who forms and sends the church into the world. Its essence is God's initiative, and its ministry is only a participation in his

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[40] This concept is well articulated in David Bosch's classic book, *Transforming mission.* The classical doctrine on *missio Dei* (mission of God) as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, was expanded to include yet another "movement," Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.

ministry. There is a strong connectedness between the nature of God Himself and the nature of the church. Fubara-Manuel (2007:6) points out,

> The church, therefore, has no mission of its own but is called to participate in the one mission of God to the world. The church cannot, then, fold its arms to watch God work but must work as its God works in mission of its God in the world of its God.

Central to Fubara-Manuel's debate on the meaning of the church is the concept of *missio Dei*. This concept speaks of the Trinitarian God as having a mission in the world; it emphasizes the fact that God's nature is mission. He is a missional God who creates, calls, and sends the church to the world in mission. So, the church should draw its self-understanding and purpose for its existence from the nature of its Author. Fubara-Manuel (2007:16) says, "Missio Dei, therefore, holds potential for a true self-understanding as it forces the church to take into consideration and admit without shame its earthliness, worldliness and heavenliness all at the same time."

In further explaining the nature of the church being inseparably connected to God, Fubara-Manuel brings in the community concept. It should be borne in mind that the concept of community is very important in African life (Mbiti 1975:12-13; Chikakuda 1994:153). Fubara-Manuel takes his time to make detailed descriptions of facets of the church as a community, based on the biblical story of the call of the prophet, Isaiah (Is. 6:1-8). He describes the church as an encountered community, a cleansed community, a listening community, and an available community.

(a)   For the church to live to its essence and calling, it must encounter God's glory - always a life-transforming encounter. Fubara-Manuel (2007:142) asserts, "It is this encounter with God's glory that would open the eyes and hearts of the people of God to the God they serve and enable them more adequately testify to this God in the world." The glory of God to be encountered in the life of the church is necessary for its mission in the world.

(b)   As a cleansed community, the church needs God's forgiveness. Being a vessel in God's mission, the church must be detached from sin.

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Only on being cleansed, it can best represent the truth of the Gospel (Fubara-Manuel 2007:184).

(c)   Viewed as a listening community, the church has the responsibility to listen beyond itself and the world. It has to attentively hear the voice of God in and through Scripture. On this Fubara-Manuel (2007:206) writes, "In listening to the world, to our God and to ourselves, we truly show that we are a church for mission... The church for mission must listen."

(d)   As an available community, the church must always prioritize God's mission. It must plan well for its activities as a participant in the mission of the Sovereign God. The availability of the church should also involve the right coordination of its planned work. Attached to this availability is the sacrificial commitment, which is demanded of the church in its missional assignments.

In his conclusion, Fubara-Manuel (2007:216) says,

> If mission is indeed the church's being and if a church is for mission, then it must see the glory of God … recognize its own sinfulness and seek the cleansing of God, which comes from God's very presence alone. It must listen – to the world, itself and above all, its God until in all its being it truly recognizes and appropriates the voice of God for its living. Finally, a church that is for mission must be available through making God a priority, through planning well, through right coordination and through sacrificial commitment.

5.2.3   A summary of the church's theological perspectives

The two works of Van Gelder and Fubara-Manuel cited above, agree to the fact that the church is God's initiative as a means to achieve his overall missionary plan in the world. It is the creation of the Spirit for the purpose of being used in the *missio Dei*. This can be summarized in the words of Chikakuda (1994:103), "The church is what it is because of God's work and His work and His presence in the church through the Holy Spirit. As He is in the church, He speaks, acts, controls and guides the church." The church finds its appropriate meaning in its theological expression mainly because it is Theo-centric by nature. God created it and it lives for God. The theology of the church restrains the thrust, content and direction of its dynamism. In

theology, the church finds its spiritual substance, shape and ethos, the language in which it has its identity and understands itself. Like in the Greek concept of *ekklesia*, the church, its theological meaning does not depart from the sense of the church being a gathering. It is a gathering of people who respond to God's call both globally and locally. Theologically, it should be considered that the church is an assembly of people who accept their belongingness, in one person who is, at the same time, God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In simple terms, the church is a community of believers who exist in a redemptive relationship with God and fellow human beings. Kung (1971:325) observes, "The church is holy by being called by God in Christ to be the communion of the faithful, by accepting the call to his service, by being separated from the world and at the same time embraced and supported by grace." The element of being separated underscores the holiness of the church as a spiritual institution. This is also clear in the Chewa understanding of the church. Among the Chewa people of Malawi, the church is seen as an extraordinary community – separated from the ordinary – that one has to "enter into" if you wish to be associated with it. To become a Christian and be a member of a church is literarily regarded in Chichewa as entering (*kulowa chiKhristu, kulowa mpingo*). This has little to do with the physical formulation of an isolated body of believers. Rather, it emphasizes the notion of the church being under divine authority, apart from the secular world. In the Chewa theological understanding, one has to go through a type of rite of passage to be a member of a sacred community – the church. This is all the more reason why the church should be understood as the body of Christ with Jesus Christ Himself being the head.

So far, we have affirmed the church's theological nature. Its origin, its essence, its ministry and its organisation are all deep-rooted in the Triune God. The church is Trinitarian by nature, because it is linked directly with all three Persons of the Godhead. Out of grace, God elected the church and made it his own. As a post-resurrection fellowship, Christ founded it to advance the work of the kingdom of heaven. The church exists in, and

through, Christ, its head. The Holy Spirit created the church and continues to fill and empower it with special gifts to build it up. The Triune God has provided the church with the powerful weapons of his Word and prayer (Smith 1996:330-331). God initiates all concerned with the church, and reveals it through Scripture.

5.2.4 Some New Testament metaphors of the church

The church is mentioned in Scripture more in an implicit than explicit way. The New Testament has many metaphors or images that refer to the church. Some New Testament scholars can identify as many as 96 images and analogies that appear in the New Testament and refer to the church (Van Gelder 2000:106). Among the outstanding is when the church is called "*The Body of Christ*" (1Cor. 12:12-27). Paul generally refers this metaphor to the total community of Christians as interdependent in a single entity headed by Jesus Christ. Other metaphors are: *Family of God the Father* (Eph. 3:14-15; 2Cor. 6:18); *Brothers and sisters with each other in God's family* (Mat. 12:49-50); *Bride of Christ* (Eph. 5:31-32); *Branches on a vine* (Jn. 15:5); *An olive tree* (Rom. 11:17-24); *Field of crops* (1Cor. 3:6-9); *Building* (1Cor. 3:9); *Harvest* (Mat. 13:1-30; Jn. 4:35); *New temple and new priesthood with a new cornerstone* (1Pt. 2:4-8); *God's house* (Heb. 3:3-6); *Pillar and foundation of the truth* (1Tim. 3:15); *Temple of the Holy Spirit* (2Cor. 6:16); and *House of prayer* (Jn. 2:16). Perhaps, each of these metaphors and even many more cannot suffice to give an exhaustive description of the church. They only guide in highlighting its various characteristics. Van Gelder (2000:107) says,

> This diversity of images reflects the truth that the church's nature, ministry, and organization are multifaceted. Some of the biblical images, such as "people of God" and "temple," relate mostly to the nature of the church. Others, such as "body of Christ" and "communion of saints," relate to both the nature and ministry of the church. Few, however, suggest much about the organization of the church.

5.2.5 Other metaphors

The context of this research is an agrarian society. Probably, an extra-biblical metaphor that can help is that the church is *God's demonstration*

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garden. Van Gelder (2000:99-100) coined this metaphor.[41] He describes it as a chosen strip of land, usually along the main roadway, where a new farming method, seed, or fertilizer was used to raise a crop. Regardless of the farmers' possible scepticism, they still keep a keen interest to see the outcome. When, by the end of the growing season, the garden performs better than those surrounding it in terms of production, the farmers adopt it. This is a common scenario in Malawi. Van Gelder (2000:100) concludes,

> The church is God's demonstration plot in the world. Its very existence demonstrates that his redemptive reign has already begun. Its very presence invites the world to watch, listen, examine, and consider accepting God's reign as a superior way of living.

This signifies that the church acts as a model of God's mission in the world, as well as a foretaste of God's realisation of his kingdom. A demonstration garden depends on the one who initiates it and the objective to be achieved. It is not an experimental plot where the planter is curious to find out whether it will work or not. The church is a "demonstration plot" in the world because the all-knowing God creates it. He wants to tell the world who He is, by means of his revealed Word that the church uses.

Another metaphor of the church worth mentioning is the *pilgrim people of God*. Probably made famous by John Bunyan's classical literary work, *The pilgrim progress*, the metaphor shows that the church is a delivered community on its way to its promised destination. God delivered it and sustains it through his Spirit who leads it towards the realisation of God's own full glory. Shaw (1990:2) says,

> Basic to the pilgrimage metaphor for the People of God [church] is the implication that the community has not yet reached its goal. It is still on the way, in process; it must respond to the leading of God and not count itself as complete or perfect.

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[41] In his book, *The essence of the church,* Craig Van Gelder explains that he himself grew up on a farm in rural Iowa (USA), which provided him with an object lesson for understanding the church being missionary by nature. This researcher has a similar background and finds the metaphor very relevant in the explanation of the church's missional role in the Malawian context.

In this the church is reminded of the on-going struggle of the people on the move; and, at the same time, it is reminded of the necessary dependence on the Triune God. Shaw (1990:234) also observes,

> The pilgrim people [of God] cheerfully travel forward, not possessing secret knowledge of the future, but pursuing the journey in the confidence that beyond the relative attainment of worthwhile earthly goals there awaits the final fulfilment of God's purposes for creation and for humanity. God, not the people of God, will bring that fulfilment.

5.2.6 A summarized definition

The church is God's initiative. Therefore, it is important that all efforts to define "a church" should derive from God's own nature and ministry. But, in summarizing the many definitions of the church, it becomes clear that the church is missional, as it participates in God's mission in the world. It is both a spiritual and human institution; it is both universal and local; both visible and invisible; both holy and sinful; both historical and eschatological. Therefore, it is important not to divorce social sciences when defining the church within theological parameters; neither should theology be divorced when engaging the church within the social science framework. Van Gelder (2000:24) affirms,

> The church is more than what meets the eye. It is more than a set of well-managed ministry functions. It is more than another human organization. The church lives in the world as a human enterprise, but it is also the called and redeemed people of God. It is a people of God created by the Spirit to live as a missionary community. As such, the church is both a social organization and a spiritual community.

This dual nature of the church should be kept in focus in order to investigate its functional dynamics. Ecclesiology deals with the church's being, function and organization. It has now been established that the church, in its being and functions, is missional. The interpretation is that the church is a mission field as well as the missionary in its own making. Jon M. Huegli (in Van Gelder 1999:283) sums it up, "In such a setting, the church's role is to bridge the gap between God's kingdom and context of the culture in which it finds itself."

At this point, It is helpful to examine the missional task of the church in its local manifestation commonly known as a "congregation."

5.3   THE MISSIONAL TASK OF A LOCAL CHURCH

This section will deal with a few, among the many, missional tasks of the church. These have been deliberately selected to guide the quest in this study into its practical theological objective. This section identifies compassion as a task, not a mere characteristic within the parameters of the *missio Dei*. It also lists witnessing, incarnational *diakonia*, prophetic living and transformational initiatives as part of the church's missional tasks today. According to Gibbs and Coffey (2001:55), a missional church should have a clear understanding that it is God's mission to call, prepare and send the church, created by grace through Jesus Christ, to be a missionary church in its own context. Wherever the church manifests itself in its local context, it has to keep in mind its missionary characteristic of being sent. Every congregation has its environment and context as its missionary field where it has to carry out the following tasks:

(a)   *Compassion*

Being founded on Jesus Christ's redemptive act, the church starts its missional task from *compassion*. The element of compassion stands out throughout the mission that God Himself undertook in the life and works of Jesus Christ. God demonstrated his unconditional love out of compassion - his grace - for the world, by sending his Son to redeem it. The apostle Paul indicates this missional mystery in Romans 5:8 (NIV): "*God demonstrates his own love for us [the world] in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us.*" Therefore, the church should not reach out on the basis of anything else but compassion drawn from its foundation – Christ Jesus. Chikakuda (1994:74) asserts, "The church must proclaim this saving power of God in Jesus Christ to the people and to the world." All sorts of suffering characterize the church's missionary field, a situation in dire need of intervention. Compassion deals with healing, caring and reconciliation. This is the common understanding of the church's mission (task) in the African context. Oduro *et*

al. (2008:77) remark, "It is impossible to understand AIC [42] mission of compassion apart from their emphasis on the fact that the spirit of God is able to empower, protect, deliver, purify and heal anyone seeking help." A compassionate spirit that interprets the situation with divine wisdom and offers a holistic ministry is needed more than mere humanitarian services. The driving force in this should be an understanding that the church only participates in a mission that the Triune God designed and initiated.

(b)   *Witnessing*

Along with compassion, the church should be driven into mission by its mandate *to be witnesses*. Chikakuda (1994:124) says, "The work of the church is to witness to God's love in Jesus Christ and to share this love with the world." Any reasonable exegete will draw a clear missionary theme from Acts 1:8 (NIV), as an example among many other pericopes of Scripture. [*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*] Witnessing is given the right position because the Holy Spirit's coming precedes it. As a spiritual institution, the church requires the presence of the Holy Spirit to carry out its missional task of being a witness to the surrounding world. Guder (2000:67) says, "The witness to Jesus Christ is made by the community called and equipped for that purpose, and it entails inviting others to become part of that community to join in the obedience of witness." To be a witness is an act of being obedient to God that the church has to accept without calculating the cost. The biblical sense of a witness is where the English word "martyr" gets its root meaning; which means that witnessing becomes a sacrificial risky business. But, the church must share the Good News and instil hope in the suffering community. The message of a perfect God who wants to make the world perfect (Mat. 5:48) is what the suffering world needs. Guder (2000:67) asserts, "The church as a witness does not regard itself as its own purpose, but rather as God's Spirit-empowered means to God's end." The church should know the culture of its context in order to witness effectively. And witnessing has to be carried out

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[42] AIC is an acronym for African Initiated Churches.

in word and deed, focused on addressing the real needs of the context. Today, both kerygmatic and diaconal approaches are needed for the global church in order to engage effectively. The proclamation of the Gospel should accompany a sense of care and service to the needy.

(c)   *Identifying with the context*

As it witnesses to the world, another missional task of the church is *to identify itself with its context* in a practical way. The following should be noted: "The church's particular communities live in the context of the surrounding culture, engage with the culture, but are not controlled by the culture" (Guder *et al.* 1998:114). An incarnational approach to the whole missional assignment to the world is needed. The church is not an island and it does not exist in a vacuum. In many instances where a church exists as a body of elites with only a "divine" agenda, it misses an important aspect of the Great Commission (Mat. 28:20) – "*Go into the world.*" Yet, the peculiarity of this "going" of the church "into the world" is its non-conformity and humility. In a Christ-like humble style, the church is destined to display its kenotic nature. In Christ, God became a human being to reach out to human beings in a human culture. This was a gesture of selflessness that the church should emulate, especially in its style of leadership. The call to humility, as recorded in Scripture (Phil. 2:5-8), remains fresh for the church to incarnate into the world today. In doing that, the missional church should be sensitive to the culture(s) of the context in which it finds itself. Interaction of the church and the community is even necessary because it promotes the inhabitable conditions for co-existence. Guder *et al.* (2001:109) asserts, "The calling of the church to be missional … leads the church to step beyond the given cultural forms that carry dubious assumptions about what the church is, what its public role should be, and what its voice should sound like." This missional call makes the church a sent entity into the world. As many ministries as possible should be created as means and tools to infiltrate the immediate mission field.

(d)   *Being prophetic*

Today the church has the missional task *to be prophetic* in its own environment. Roxburgh (2000:132) writes, "The prophet's role is about the recovery of a world. The prophet's passion is the reforming of common life around the rhythm of God's story." This is what the missional church should be. It has to represent the reign of God by basically engaging itself with the daily problems of this world. It has to offer a biblically interpreted meaning of the conditions in which it survives and then mobilize communities into the right response. There is nothing that affects the community that cannot concern the church. The missional prophetic role of the church should be applied from individual and family issues to global, political, and economic issues. In all these issues, there is an expectation that the church will display its Christ-centred values.

(e)   *Transformation*

Finally, the missional church should aim at *transforming communities* through the empowerment of ordinary people. Stewart III (2003:88) declares, "Mission should empower people to health and wholeness by helping to see themselves as positive agents of self and global transformation." Then he warns that mission should not end with just supplying foodstuffs to people. It should teach people how to develop the confidence and resources from within, and without, towards self-sustenance. This is a remarkable notion and the direction of this investigation. It will be dealt with at length later.

In conclusion, the tasks of the church further reveal what the church is. The above five layers, presented as tasks, shed more light on the church's nature, ministry and organization. Van Gelder (2000:44) says, "This nature gives expression to full character of what the church is to do in fulfilling its ministry and how the church is to organise itself." The compassion and witnessing explained in this section are the very nature and foundation of the *missio Dei*. *Diakonia* (service) and prophecy are central aspects of the whole ministry of the church. Transformation will only take place depending on how the church organizes itself to participate in God's mission. Smith (1999:352) points out,

The church is called to extend [participate in] the mission of Jesus Christ on earth. It does this in four basic ways: through witnessing to the saving grace of God in Christ (*martyria*), through modelling Christ's love by serving fellow believers and the lost world (*diakonia*), through mutual fellowship with believers (*koinonia*), and through regular worship (*leitourgia*).

The outline of tasks now leads a discussion as to how the church should do what God calls it to do at its basic level.

5.4   THE CHURCH AND THEOLOGY AT GRASSROOTS LEVEL

For the missional church to effect transformation and self-sustenance, it has to start by doing theology at grassroots level. In grassroots theology, people begin to see God act in their midst, and then their response. The church needs a bottom-up theological approach. Hendriks (2004:52) says, "The church should follow the leadership of Christ who came into this broken world to serve and heal it by carrying a cross and working from the bottom upwards." With a missional bearing, the church must make deliberate and strategic efforts to develop theology at grassroots; otherwise it will be mistaken for any other NGO working merely for humanitarian purposes. Christ's incarnational kenotic gesture (Phil. 2:5-7) to include the lowly in the society is called for in doing theology at grassroots. In the same vein, Barker (2009:129) writes, "When people, groups, and systems [at grassroots] start to live like Jesus, then all can have Jesus' authority to live out God's intended shalom together."

This section seeks to survey the connectedness of the church and the public in doing theology at grassroots. It also presents the need to create a place for the laity in doing theology at grassroots.

5.4.1 An approach to grassroots theology

Doing theology at grassroots is a faith-seeking process that engages ordinary people in a local context to analyse and interpret their situation while discerning God's will (Hendriks 2004:24). This does not mean that the people involved in doing theology at grassroots level should detach themselves from the global understanding of their situation and the powers of the Triune God. But, the eventual achievement of such a theology should be the transformation of the theologizing community in their very context. In his articulation of grassroots theology, Kalilombe (1999:169) writes,

> Doing theology demands encouraging and giving room for the constant look at and careful study of the situation within which the theologising communities are immersed. Such a study entails the courage to engage in a serious analysis of society. The real life experience on which reflection and praxis are to be based must involve the whole community, and not only a few people.

This basically affirms the contextuality, interdisciplinary and ecumenical nature of such a theology. Although this poses a challenge to contemporary congregational leaders globally, due to denominational adherences, it is a proper starting point for realistic theological practices. Reader (1994:14) asserts, "A local theology will take as its starting point the stories and accounts of those who are deeply and seriously affected by the contemporary social changes." As such, this means that the construction of a theology that makes sense in a community, involves listening to both Christian and secular stories, which reflect the experiences of that particular community in their own worldview. Since theology is about transformative action, Hendriks (2004:32) points out, "A missional praxis theology does theology by first focusing on local and particular issues with the purpose of doing something about the reality and problems that confront the faith community, as well as society." When a good and balanced, action-oriented theology is purposely and jointly developed, it is likely to serve as a tool for community transformation. It is easily accepted and immediately becomes effective because the people own it.

5.4.2 The place of the laity in doing theology at grassroots

In doing theology at grassroots, the laymen in the church are not mere assistants to the clergy, who are the only labelled theologians at that level. They are participants, as well as facilitators, in the development of theology. Chester and Timmis (2007:60-61) note,

> Major events have a role to play in church life, but the bedrock of gospel ministry is low key, ordinary, day-to-day work which often goes unseen. Most gospel ministry involves ordinary people doing ordinary things with gospel intentionality.

This underscores the point that the laity has the social advantage that is commonly missed by the clerical fraternity, because they read the community stories from ground level. Their analysis of the situation often reflects the ordinary common ideas that are an essential ingredient in grassroots theology. The laity is required to be exposed to the necessary skills in the process of missional fulfilment and of doing theology in their own right. Messer (1989:67) observes, "The challenge of the church is to encourage and empower lay persons to challenge the Goliaths in their working midst…" The essence of the doctrine of the laity's ministry is that all Christians are called into ministry. So, the laity's place is as valuable as that of ordained ministers in the roles of a missional church.

It is said that there were approximately nine million Christians in Africa by 1900 but, by the year 2000, Africa had 380 million. It is further projected that Africa will have 633 million Christians by 2025.[43] With such a phenomenal numerical growth of Christianity in Africa, the need for lay leadership skills at grassroots is also growing. If the laity adopts a passive role in doing grassroots theology, then the whole missionary venture is likely to collapse. For instance, in the CCAP Nkhoma Synod, Malawi, there are cases where one ordained minister is expected to preach at more than 20 prayer points on a single Sunday; a task that is literally impossible, so lay leaders perform such

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[43] Data extracted from: http://www.enwikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Africa on 28 August 2010.

tasks locally. They fulfil God's calling of his church to be a mission in its own context.

In short, the laity's place in doing theology at grassroots is central. This is clearly evident in a simple analysis of a layman's responsibility at that level. In his summary of the laity's responsibility in the local church, Doohan (1986:41) points out three aspects.

- The first is that, basically, lay people have the responsibility as being the church to the world and its development through their daily work and socialization.
- The second aspect is that they have the responsibility to build the foundational churches that consist of their own families or local groups.
- The final aspect mentioned is that of evangelism explosion. The lay people have the responsibility to bring their Christian commitment in support of the congregation, diocese or presbytery, and universal church.

As such, the responsibility of grassroots mission entrusted to the laity does not end at the initial ground. It extends in the pattern of the Great Commission to the ends of the world. Doohan (1986:41) remarks, "In each case, the responsibility of the laity are challenging to themselves and to the wider church."

Here, the highlighted pattern reveals the required system of doing theology from inside out. The missional church should first engage with the world and, together, draw the agenda for the society. Then, parallel to this agenda, is the manifestation of the Christian identity in the daily life. With the many challenges that the local church encounters, it needs a commitment to its missional task that can be the characteristic of the empowered laity. Eventually, theology at grassroots does not end up at grassroots level. It flows like a river to far away places, with its source at grassroots.

Therefore, today, the missional church should give more significant roles to the laity in order to keep its relevance and vitality fresh. The place of the laity

should be strategic in such a way that the church will continue to pursue its Great Commission zeal in any context. The church should use the laity to relate well with the society in all its missional endeavours.

5.5   A THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH'S SOCIETAL INVOLVEMENT

God created the world and He sustains it. From the beginning, He was concerned with the world and the well-being of humans in it. Out of his love for the world, he gave his Son to redeem the world (Jn. 3:16). So, when the church is involved in the society's activities, it only carries forward God's love for the world. The church is the body of Jesus Christ, whose earthly life and works identified with the society. He spoke their language, using their metaphors and traditions. He ate their food and heard the society's stories. He was one of them and dwelt among them (Jn. 1:14). The whole of God's plan for the salvation of the human race through Jesus Christ was carried out within a society's parameters. This connectivity of Christ to a society portrays the mandate that the church has today to co-exist with, and within, the society. In fact, to try to separate the church from the society is to deprive it of its mission.

At another level, the church is like a pilgrim who passes through the land of the society towards God - its destination. Any encounter of the church, as it sojourns through the society, will have a record there. At the same time, if something happens to the society as the church passes by, it will affect the progress of the pilgrimage. Alston Jr. (2002:132) notes, "The image of the pilgrim continues to be suggestive for the existence of the church today … To be a pilgrim is to be at home in the world yet at the same time to be a stranger to it." The body of Christ - the church - has this dual citizenship. In the society, citizenship is temporal and looks forward to the permanent one (Heb. 13:14). Nevertheless, the church and society should interrelate.

5.5.1   Why should the church and society interrelate?

At the same time, people who form the church are also members of a society. In a biblical paradox, members of the Body of Christ are in the world

but do not belong to the world. But, while they are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), they are directly involved with the issues of this world on a daily basis. They are affected and infected by political unrests, social injustices, natural disasters, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and many other social evils. So, what happens in the society has a direct impact on the church's life and vice versa. The church that turns a deaf ear and a blind eye to what happens in the society, forfeits its missional responsibility and ceases to be relevant.

Consequently, such a church loses its prophetic value in the society. In summary, the church and society should interrelate, because (i) they co-exist; (ii) they share membership; and (iii) they are both God's creation.

5.5.2 Trust in church and society relations

The church needs to exercise its faithfulness and trustworthiness in its delivery of diaconal responsibilities. Even more, the church must be sensitive to what the society learns from it. In any setting, trust is the keyword for a mutual working relationship between church and society. Chester and Timmis (2007:118) say,

> The local church is the context in which we can faithfully obey the King's commands and so demonstrate the potency of his gracious rule.... This is where the effects of the fall are reversed as by grace we become lovers once more of both God and others.

Where injustice becomes evident in the church's engagement with the society, there is always a sense of mistrust. This is not new in the life of the church. Acts 6:1-7 relates a story of the early church that showed signs of favouritism, which brought ethnic divisions between the Grecian and Hebraic Jews, because the former complained that their widows were neglected. The solution was to choose special people called "deacons" to monitor the impartial distribution of foodstuffs and commodities. When service to the people becomes the core passion of the church, it successfully represents the mind of Christ.

Today, the danger is that when such complaints of unequal distribution of privileges are made, they cause many cracks in the church. In most cases, the divisions that are evident in the church are either those of society itself, or they can lead to divisions in society. For example, ethnicity[44] is deeply embedded in many African societies. Therefore, it is important that the church should exercise high-level sensitivity to ethnic divisions in any of its diaconal activities in African societies. Onwunta (2006:54) states,

> Ethnicity plays some positive roles in human society. It also has to be observed, however, that ethnicity has some fearsome and destructive potential within any given society. Ethnicity does not only humanize people, it also dehumanises.

When the church fails to impart a good hermeneutic to the Word of God before it is applied in the society, it is likely to mislead them and even cause disorder. In some countries in Africa, the church is on record to have promoted tribal and racial divisions. Apartheid in South Africa, genocide in Rwanda and political violence along tribal lines in Kenya are some examples of evils either implicitly, or explicitly, promoted by the church. As a community created by the Holy Spirit, the church should display a life full of "the fruit of the Spirit" namely love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). In interrelating with the society, the church should adhere to its Kingdom values of justice and impartiality. As an evangelical and missional tool, these values make the church a living model in society.

Sometimes, the church falls prey to social injustices when its leadership is caught in a financial snare. The love of money is the root of all evil (1Tim. 6:10). If church leaders begin to focus on money as a means of enriching themselves, they often lose a balance in their prophetic role in the community. The items that people of goodwill entrust to them to be donated to the needy, often do not reach the needy. Politicians easily influence and misuse money-loving church leaders at the expense of the poor.

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[44] Here, the concept of ethnicity should be understood as ethnocentrism, as elaborated by Onwunta (2006:55). He says, "It is important to emphasize that ethnicity *per se* is not evil; but ethnocentrism is."

5.5.3 Is the church an oppressor or the oppressed?

To further establish the church and society's tenets of interrelatedness and co-existence, the critical question should be asked: Is the church oppressed or an oppressor, as it shares the world with the society? This question can be tackled by briefly looking at the mandate, authority and identity of a church. One of the means of oppression is the exclusion of certain classes of people in the society, such as the poor, from the church's life. The church is mandated to go to all and create a place for all to be saved and serve God. Chester and Timmis (2007:79) observe,

> The poor need a welcome to replace their marginalization; they need inclusion to replace their exclusion; to replace their powerlessness they need a place where they matter. They need community. They need the Christian community. They need the church.

Under any circumstance, the church begins to practise oppression when it favours certain social groups at the expense of others.

Furthermore, the church's mission has a biblical authority, which is derived from Christ Himself in the Great Commission (Mat. 28:18-20). Christ shares his authority with the church as He mandates it to go into the world. But, at times, the church blows this divine authority out of proportion when it tries to bring the Good News without calculating the compatibility of the News to the targeted context. Guder *et al.* (1998:79) observes, "The church may fit well into its social environment, but unwarranted accommodation may cause it to lose touch with its biblical warrant." Christ's approach to mission is meek and incarnatory. So, the church, whose authority is in Him, should create room for dialogue without necessarily compromising the truth of the Gospel. Sometimes, as Guder *et al.* (1998:79) write:

> The church may adhere too strictly to scriptural forms of expressing its faith that were intelligible to the cultures of biblical times, and in the process neglect to translate the biblical warrant into incarnation relevant to the church's current time and place.

At this juncture, the following case story will help to elaborate the point. When the white missionaries arrived at most parts of Africa to establish churches, they established Christianity clothed in a Western culture, foreign to the evangelized society. Regardless of the headways they made in missions, they planted churches that had little of the society's cultural values. Such a legacy, for instance, can be noticed in almost all mainline churches in Malawi. Take, for example, the CCAP Synods of Blantyre, Nkhoma and Livingstonia and the Anglican Council of Malawi; in spite of the autonomy that they claim, they still bear the marks of their original white missionaries. These churches have maintained the same hymns, liturgical orders and approach to issues that they inherited from the early white missionary personnel. In describing such an element evident in the Nkhoma Synod, Brown (2005:308-309) says, "[The Nkhoma Synod] can be described as being evangelical, calling on people to repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ, clinging to a traditional form of orthodox Protestantism that it inherited from its DRC founders."

In a sense, the imposition of traditions becomes oppression, because people are dragged into doing, or following, customs in which they cannot identify themselves. This is a point where mentoring and empowerment should come into the agenda. People who are not empowered are usually oppressed psychologically, and the message of the Gospel is liberating. If the church does not design a relevant approach to liberate and empower the society, it becomes an oppressor. A practical missional ecclesiology should be the intended outcome of the church's activities in the society.

On the other hand, the church has been a victim of the society's unstable political structures and policies. During the one-party political system in Malawi, the Church was kept as an underdog. Its prophetic voice was put at low volume and it could only raise its voice on issues that pleased the then government. Any suspicious act of the church in word or deed was strongly controlled. Among many examples of church leaders being threatened and sometimes harassed, is a White Father, the Catholic Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, who was exiled because he tried to develop small Christian

communities (*miphakati*) in his diocese, as an ecclesiastical strategy to empower the laity. The Malawian government immediately suspected this to be a Marxist move. Top government officials summoned him for a six-hour interrogation. Then, his fellow bishops were summoned for a meeting with the State President, where they were forced to condemn their fellow bishop (Kalilombe) unconditionally. Kalilombe (1999:37) narrates his story, "Following that meeting, I was soon instructed to leave the diocese and Malawi … to go to Rome where my 'case' would be heard and decided upon." This bishop was exiled for many years simply on the grounds of suspicion. In such political situations, the church becomes oppressed, as it cannot freely express its Kingdom values.

The preceding story illustrates why the church, sometimes, fails to be a good partner of the government in socio-economic development. In its Christ-like character, the church does not use force to pave its mission way. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it searches for receptive ground for its establishment. Therefore, the church should act as an agent for the recovery of the *imago Dei* among the people, not to gain power and control. Whether one considers the church as an oppressor or the oppressed, all depends on the approach and style with which the church operates. In dealing with the society, the missional church does well to operate from the bottom up where dialogue takes place, which then leads to cooperation. The prevailing circumstances in the environment should not diminish its prophetic role. The danger arises when the church fails to point out social evils created by governments for the sake of maintaining its privileged position. Guder *et al.* (1998:113) warn,

> Whenever the church has a vested interest in the status quo – politically, economically, socially – it can easily be captivated by the powers, the institutions, the spirits, and the authorities of the world. And whenever the church becomes captivated by the powers, it loses the ability to identify and name evil.

Like its head Jesus Christ, the church identifies itself with the oppressed. When social injustices prevail in the country, the church should speak out like the prophet Amos who addressed the evils of the day. If governments

oppress the people and the church keeps quiet, it is always a sign that the church is part of the oppression. In typical African style, Bishop Desmond Tutu (in Messer 1989:135) says, "If you are neutral in a situation of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has his foot on the tail of the mouse, and you say you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." This might sound like a mere wisdom saying, but it has an essential message for the African church in the 21st century. The church must bridge the gap between the oppressed and the oppressor by challenging the oppressor and so give hope to the oppressed.

5.6   THE CHURCH AND ITS LEADERSHIP

This section connects the church's position and integrity in its public life with the role of church leadership, in pursuit of its missional mandate. A desirable practical theological ecclesiology is when the church maintains its relevance in the world, while continually seeking God's mandate for specific situations. The discussion will now turn to the significant roles of leadership in any practical theological ecclesiology. Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:16-17) write, "An important role of a missional leader is cultivating an environment within which God's people discern God's directions and activities in them and for the communities in which they find themselves." But, how is this possible?

5.6.1   An available church with an available leadership

The church of God is his mission to the world. By virtue of its nature, it must be readily available for this mission. Not only should the church be available, but should also continually check its legitimacy to be used, in which Church leadership plays a vital role. According to Roxburgh (2005:145), the role of leaders is the cultivation of an environment that releases the missional imagination of God's people. If they do not guide all members into assessing the church's usefulness and strategical planning for progress, the church becomes more of a liability than an effective tool in God's hands. With this assessment, the church makes a self-rediscovery that the global church, equally, also needs. All missional church leaders should evaluate their

missional stance in the modern dispensation with its quantum changes. In an effort to urge the mainline church leaders to set the pace, Stewart III (2003:97) says,

> Mainline churches can again become vital places of power, energy, and joy, but they must reprioritise the importance of spiritual transformation and praxis. Churches can become vital again by daring like their predecessors to become radically Christ-like. They must have the courage to take a long hard look at themselves and to admit where change is needed.

The vitality that the church needs to reclaim is not a position of power and influence, but the element of being missional in a practical sense. The church and its leaders should assess themselves by asking questions, like:

- Does our public integrity still give us the authenticity to represent God in our society?
- Is our ecclesiastical structure still relevant in the modern political and social dispensation?
- Are our theological principles still comprehensible to our own members and the general public?
- Which elements of our church practices require immediate attention and re-orientation?

Today, these, and many more evaluative questions, are needed, as the church is slowly drifting away from the centre of the public arena.

The effectiveness of the church's self-rediscovery process lies in the hands of church leaders. Through prayer, teaching and preaching, the leaders are expected to make a difference in guiding the church in informed choices that, in turn, will call for paradigm shifts. To do this, leaders have to accept the roles of a poet, a prophet, an apostle and a pastor/teacher (Roxburgh, 2005:163-176). Poets listen to people and their stories while helping them to understand themselves better. They take the trouble to see things differently from the rest, so as to give contextual issues a theological interpretation. Prophets guide people into rediscovering the Word of God and lead them to

act on the acquired knowledge. An apostle's role is to lead people in God's mission. Pastors or teachers have the role of coaching and equipping people through a process of becoming what God wants them to be. Church leaders should combine forces from different leadership styles to set an agenda for a focus to rediscover its being and doing. Hendriks (2004:203) emphasizes that church leaders need not be myopic for their ecclesial horizons. They must make efforts to groom a new breed of leaders who can lead the church into the future by refocusing on the missional God and his Word. The church needs leaders who can facilitate re-orientation and guide it to focus on its vision and mission.

5.6.2 Missional leadership in an African context

The fast growing church in Africa (Osei-Mensah 1990:60) should learn from the background of the declining Western church. The church in Africa must put strategies in place to accommodate the inevitable change and prepare for the transition. There is a simple distinction between change and transition. Roxburgh (2005:41) says, "Change is what happens to us from the outside and over which we usually have no control," while "Transition is our inner response to the change we are experiencing and over which we do have some control." Since change cannot be avoided or stopped, church leaders should adopt prophetic roles on how the church can respond to change. Priestly leadership should constantly remind the church of its missional nature. Hendriks (2004:203) says, "Leadership has the responsibility to do theology and to invite and empower a faith community to do likewise. Doing theology is a praxis process; it means thinking, doing and evaluating, as a process of reflective involvement." This means that, especially in the African church today, the leaders' role is crucial when developing a practical theological ecclesiology. Van Gelder (2007:97) believes that part of the challenge that faces Christian leaders today, is learning to engage diverse perceptions of reality by drawing on a variety of methods that can inform discernment and the decision-making process. Leaders are expected to motivate various gifts within the church into new forms of missional life, regardless of the difference in approach. Roxburgh (2005:155) notes:

Leaders must cross tribes and discover one another in *communitas*. Within *communitas* is the potential for Liminals and Emergents to discover: a) the power of one another's gifts in leadership; and b) the need to overcome forms of solitary, single-person leadership in forming teams of leaders in communities and geographic areas. Leadership groups must develop and work together across tribal lines as communities.

5.6.3 Strategic planning

The church requires a systematic arrangement of its flow of work in order to participate effectively in the *missio Dei*. The process of converting the church's vision into action is one of the crucial responsibilities of leadership in a Spirit-led church. Van Gelder (2007:119) says emphatically, "Developing a Spirit-led process for discernment and decision-making and bringing this into the practices of leading in mission in a congregation are complex but essential tasks for Christian leaders." This does not mean putting other members in a straight-jacket, but guiding them into making informed choices for action so as to be more effective and accountable.

In recent years, the church has adopted some technical terms from organizational literature that helps it to focus, just like any other corporate governance body. One of them is "s*trategic planning,*" which is an organization's process of defining its strategy, or direction, and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue a strategy, including its capital and people.[45] Such a process should involve as many stakeholders as possible with a wide range of views. It normally starts by analysing the current situation of an institution, a company or small business, let alone a congregation. Then goals and objectives are set, before mapping a possible route to the desired end. Therefore, a strategic plan can be regarded as the formal consideration of an organization's future course. In general, strategic planning deals with at least one of three key questions: (i) "What do we do?" (ii) "For whom do we do it?" and (iii) "How can we excel?"

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[45] Accessed from Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_planning on 21 September 2008.

While different frameworks and theoretical approaches can be employed to develop a strategic plan for the church today, contemporary missional church advocates recommend what is commonly known as a "*missional approach.*" According to Van Gelder (2007:140), this approach "considers a Spirit-led congregation in relation to an open systems perspective where biblical and theological foundations are utilized to reflect on social science insights from organizational theory." He lists the following six advantages of a missional approach over others:

(i)   It allows for an examination of the congregation as a whole and provides a framework within which to consider every dimension of the congregation's life and ministry.
(ii)   It provides a way to integrate biblical and theological perspectives with the dynamics of the organizational life of congregations.
(iii)   It provides helpful concepts and tools for describing the complexity of a congregation while seeking to understand the dynamics of life within this complexity.
(iv)   It allows for taking seriously the world as God's creation and the purpose of the church in participating in God's mission in the world within the framework of understanding the relationship between an organization and environment.
(v)   It allows for thinking about congregations as both always "forming and reforming" in relationship to a changing context while stewarding a congregation's identity within the historic Christian faith.
(vi)   It allows for utilizing both core organizational metaphors and biblical metaphors for understanding the life and ministry of congregations (Van Gelder 2007:140-141).

The onus is on church leadership to put in place the essential dimensions required for a successful strategic plan. Outstanding dimensions in the organizational endeavour are vision, mission and core values.

5.6.4 Vision, mission and core values

In strategic planning, vision often refers to the desired or intended future state of a specific organization in terms of its fundamental objectives or strategic direction.[46] The church should be able to visualize what it intends to be after analysing what it is now. Van Gelder (2007:147) says, "Vision in a congregation is a Spirit-led discernment process of coming to a shared understanding of what God is doing and what God intends to do in its

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[46] Ditto.

particular context. There is an eschatological dimension to vision." The vision is futuristic in the sense that it sets today's agenda and action plan, but which targets tomorrow's state. So, a vision statement is used as a tool to describe what will be achieved if the church, as an organization, is successful. For example, the CCAP Nkhoma Synod must assess itself to find if it has achieved *"To be a church that is responsive to the spiritual and social needs of its members and outsiders, which maintains the highest standards of accountability, transparency, fairness and impartiality in the conduct of its affairs."*[47] There and then, it can measure its success. A vision usually is a source of inspiration and provides clear decision-making criteria as long as it is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

"Mission" describes the fundamental purpose of an organization; basically explaining why it exists. From an ecclesiological point of view, the basic question to be answered should be in the light of the missionary nature of the church, namely, "W*hy has God called the church into existence*?" Van Gelder (2007:147) illuminates, "The answer to this question comes from Scripture. Spirit-led congregations do not start from scratch in trying to figure out their purpose. God has already made clear what congregations are to be and to do." Since this is the immediate practical part of planning, it has to be worked out clearly. It marks the path of an organization in pursuit of its vision. If a vision can be likened to a spearhead, then the mission is the shaft of that spear. The two cannot be divorced from one another and yet they should not be mistakenly be considered the same. "Vision" describes a future identity while "mission" serves as an ongoing and time-independent guide.[48]

Together with a vision and a mission come core values, which are beliefs that are shared among an organization's stakeholders and point out the organization's culture and priorities. Van Gelder (2007:147) calls them "*missional practices*." He warns that this is where most disagreements within

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47 The Nkhoma Synod Vision Statement.
48 Accessed from Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_planning on 21 September 2008.

a congregation take place because of stakeholders' differences over issues of style and preferences. Nevertheless, Van Gelder (2007:147) suggests, "A Spirit-led congregation needs to inform this discussion with the understanding that the church is always both *forming* and *reforming*." In the church's strategic planning, the stakeholders should reflect on their Christian values in line with the church's missional nature.

When the above-mentioned elements are seriously established at the beginning of a church's strategic planning process, a prophetic stand of a missional church also takes shape. It is the priestly role of the church leadership to guide the process as they continuously strive to discern God's will for his people. Hendriks (2004:209) states,

> The final task of leadership is that of embodying and institutionalising the mission, vision and values. The vision is … the place to start since it focuses the congregation's energy and resources at something specific. It should however be in line with its long-term mission and enacted according to its values.

These elements (vision, mission and core values) are crucial for the church to understand its purpose, its ministry and how the Spirit appears to lead into the future (Van Gelder 2007:146). For the church to move from understanding why it exists, towards full realisation in the Triune God, its congregations must be engaged in doing theology, which is about discerning God's will. According to Hendriks (2004:209), "A congregation should work on its mission and values before engaging in realising its vision."

5.7   CONCLUSION

This chapter helps to consolidate the major premise in this study, that is, the church has to empower the laity if it is to participate effectively and efficiently in God's mission to the world. But, the church cannot see the serious need to empower the laity if it does not re-discover its essence and ministry. Therefore, this chapter's effort to present a focused practical theological ecclesiology has led to the inclusion of a host of other related issues as well. The chapter has shown that there is a need for the church to map out a

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deliberate search for self-rediscovery in line with what God has already revealed in Scripture. A biblical and theological description of the church has been presented regarding its nature, ministry and organization. The church is shown as being missional, serving God's missional purpose. In its entirety, the church exists because God calls it to carry out his mission in the world. Its dual nature of being both spiritual and social makes it an appropriate participant in the *missio Dei*. The crucial idea is that the church should create space for a practical theological ecclesiology where discerning God's will becomes a guiding factor.

It has also been established that the involvement of the empowered laity at grassroots manifests the presence of the Triune God in his mission to the world through the people whom he has called. Empowering the laity stirs the missionary zeal required to be God's true representative and herald in the society. From its definition, it has been established that the church is both theological and sociological. It starts and ends with God, yet it is closely connected to its worldly context. It was emphasized that the church and society are, and should remain, interrelated right from grassroots. The laity has a significant role to play in doing theology at grassroots. The interrelation between the church and society should provide justice that is needed for all.

The question of church leadership has been discussed. It pointed out that the church leadership today shoulders the decisive task to discern the direction for the Spirit-led church and, if it is challenged, to rediscover itself by asking self-evaluative questions, but who will formulate those questions? The church's visionary leadership should take the initiative. They have to guide the church into self-discovery and renewal of its prophetic and priestly roles through the empowerment of the laity. Where it is necessary, strategic planning should be effected immediately. A well-formulated strategic plan that is biblically based, theologically framed, and theoretically informed will result in strategic action (Van Gelder 2007:111-113).

Therefore, those responsible to initiate effective practical theological practices in the church require to be well informed theoretically. There

should be practical orientation towards strategic action in a congregation. The church is required to go beyond its walls in an effort to address both the spiritual and physical needs of the society. The church must find its place in the activities and living conditions that surround it.

The discussion will now proceed to link the contribution of the church, through its laity, to community development in the context of congregational life.

CHAPTER 6

THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

6.1   INTRODUCTION

The discernment process in the previous chapter now leads the discussion to a step in transformative action in doing theology. The context of this study has been discussed in depth. Furthermore, a hermeneutical correlation between the congregational situation and the entire Church in Malawi, as well as the broader Malawian society in its global setting, has been dealt with. At this stage of doing theology, the discussion dwells on the missional church's participation in God's work in redeeming and transforming the broken reality, as described in the previous chapters. Does the church have any qualities or a mandate to participate in sustainable local and national development? This researcher presumes that a missional church should engage in transformative action and address local and national poverty, low self-esteem, and other social issues. August (1999:38, 2010:51) argues, "…the church can be a valued catalyst for community development within the social development paradigm due to its incarnational nature, which is complementary to the people-centred social development paradigm."

This chapter deals with the church's people-centeredness as a practical means of participation in development through its empowered laity. In this discussion, the introduction of sustainable development is not meant to make it a subject matter of the discussion, but is treated as a means of formulating a praxis methodology for making the Kingdom of God visible. It is seen as a way of realizing the church's vision, mission and values in its God-given vocation. The aim is to establish, in a practical sense, what and how the church can contribute towards local and national issues of development. Where necessary, some concepts of development are clarified for the sake of avoiding ambiguity (August 2010:xii). The contextual analysis of the Malawian Church, as above (Chapter 3), has portrayed a vivid picture of the alarming situation on the ground. This is a situation that a missional church cannot evade or ignore. Hendriks (2004:33) asserts, "… a missional praxis

theology does theology by first focusing on local and particular issues with the purpose of doing something about the reality and the problems that confront the faith community, as well as society." Theology is also about transformative action. The church should respond to the challenges of its environment with a theologically informed and hermeneutically sensitive vocation. Eventually, the social challenges that confront the church become its opportunity to make a difference and, as such, reflect the reign of God.

To begin with, this chapter clarifies the meaning of "development" from several angles, which leads to an investigation of the church's mandate and obligation to participate in community development. Since the church is not an isolated entity, the investigation will also compare the church's develop-ment agenda with that of the government of Malawi. Ultimately, strategies to ensure sustainable development are suggested to confirm that theology is about transformative action.

6.2   DEFINING "DEVELOPMENT"

As a concept, development attracts a very wide spectrum of views and arguments. Nadine Bowers du Toit (in Swart *et al.* 2010:262) comments: "Development as a complex dynamic concept gives rise to many varying interpretations and schools of development thought." Nevertheless, the underscoring point is straightforward and clear in the sense that all ideas on development point to change and transformation within individuals and communities. It is not meant to describe an event leading to temporal advancement of social status; but a permanent acquisition of a desired livelihood that comes with capacity building. As a social discipline, its main focus is on people. In theology, the idea is similar, but motivated by being sensitive to God's love for his creation and all of its people.

6.2.1 Four perspectives on development

Vilanculo (1999:16) observes that their emphasis on people-centredness characterizes all perceptions of development. This indicates that development becomes real when it has a positive affect on individuals or communal living. Vilanculo (1999:16-17) sites four perspectives of development:

(i)   *Development as political change*: In this view, development is considered to be an evolutionary phenomenon whereby people are empowered for political mobilization to attain their corporate objectives. As such, development denotes transformation in economic, political and social life. To clarify this point, Vilanculo cites the example of the former Tanzanian President, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, and his *Ujaama* concept of developing rural communities.

(ii)   *Development as movement*: This perspective views development as the execution of action plans, strategies or programs aimed at improving the situation of the underprivileged. As such, development is evident when people experience favourable progress from poor conditions, to a better life.

(iii)   *Development as planned change*: This view regards development as planning and engaging specific intervening variables, such as industrialization, urbanization, large-scale education and others, in order to improve a specific society. Planning is viewed as a tool to accelerate advancement from primitive life to modernity as a standard of living.

(iv)   *Development as method of technocratic control*: In line with the modernization[49] paradigm, development is perceived to be a method for social transformation. It is regarded as an appropriate tool to control the transformation of the social structure in the course of moving from a situation of restriction or dependency to that of self-sufficiency.

In Vilanculo's view, a need exists for a new understanding of development. He believes that a good definition of "development" should include components that allow for the personal growth and self-esteem of every

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[49] The ultimate goal of modernization is to increase production and economic growth, which will raise the standard of living and provide a good life for as many as possible (Samuel & Sugden 1987:22).

individual, as well as the right to live a meaningful life. Such a concept calls for community empowerment. So, Vilanculo (1999:20) proposes, "To conceptualise development in terms of empowerment is to emphasize the defining criterion as the process by which the community is empowered, not primarily the manner (plan/method) in which this occurs."

Each of the above perspectives can be criticized. None of them has an exhaustive description of what development really is. They are just different lenses with which to examine development; discussion of the real definition of development is ongoing. Each academic discipline, let alone generation, must review its meaning. However, there are some key words in development that can be highlighted for the sake of balancing the meaning and guiding the central discussion in this section – i.e. the church's role in sustainable development. The selected terms are *transformation, community development* and *sustainability*, which are interwoven in the church's approach to development.

6.2.2 Transformation

In his contribution to the on-going debate on the proper meaning of the term "development," Wayne G. Bragg (1983)[50] suggests an alternative framework to understand human and social change from a Christian perspective, which he calls "transformation." According to Bragg (in Samuel & Sugden 1987:39), "Transformation is to take what is and turn it into what it could and should be." He believes that "transformation" is theologically more fitting than mere "development," because it is biblically sound and shows God's active role in human development. Bragg concludes that the transformation to which the Bible inspires humans, is transformation of both individuals and communities. It makes people move toward harmony with God, fellow human beings, the environment and oneself (Samuel & Sugden 1987:47). In a Christian framework, the prioritization of transformation comes with its characteristics that put it above other elements of development. These are: life sustenance

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[50] Wayne G. Bragg presented his paper "From development to transformation" at The Wheaton '83 Consultation, which was the consultation on the Church in Response to Human Need that met in Wheaton, Illinois (USA) in June 1983.

that is about meeting people's basic needs; equity; justice; dignity and self-worth; freedom; participation; reciprocity; cultural fit; ecological soundness; hope; and spiritual transformation (Myers 1999:95; Samuel & Sugden 1987:40-48). This kind of understanding of development can begin to open avenues for the church to create appropriate strategies for intervention in community development. The missional spirit of the church, in itself, is transformational, as August (2010:63) puts it

> The idea of transformation is not posed as an alternative development strategy but as a Christian framework for looking at human and social change. As such, it contains a set of principles against which any theory of development may be measured.

6.2.3 Community development

The church is a visible faith community and is community-based by nature. Its involvement in development with, and through, the community has much relevance to its being. In the words of Rubin and Rubin (1986:6), "Community development involves local empowerment through organized groups of people acting collectively to control decisions, projects, programs, and policies that affect them as a community." This translates into building the capacity of the people, collectively, to tackle their own community issues as opposed to offering them handouts. As a development strategy, community development is identified with second generation strategies.[51] Since the members of a local congregation are the very members of the local community, the church cannot refrain from being concerned with community development.

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[51] The idea of development *"stages"* or *"generations"* was coined by David Korten in his book, *Getting to 21st century: Voluntary action and the global agenda,* and was fully articulated by Ignatius Swart in *The churches and development debate: Perspectives on a fourth generation approach.* They mention four development generations of strategic orientation. The first is about giving relief and welfare to the poor and victims of natural disasters. The second, deals with "developing the capacities of the people to better meet their own needs through self-reliant local action" (Korten 1990:118). The third looks beyond the individual community and seeks changes in specific policies and institutions at local, national, and international levels (Swart 2006:101). The fourth generation approach goes beyond the third, to popularize people's movements.

6.2.4 Sustainability

In a sense of transformation, development intends to instil a living legacy in people's lives, as well as preserve resources for future use. Sustainability is considered central, as the development process meets the community's present needs without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. August (2010:12) declares, "In essence, sustainability deals with the continuous flow of benefits." As such, the term "sustainable development" joins the concern for the carrying capacity of natural systems with the social and environmental challenges that face humanity. Generally, the field of sustainable development is approached in environmental, economic and socio-political constituent parts. [52] While placing people as a focus in development, sustainability should be attached more to the community than to mere systems. Hendriks (2004:218) writes, "A sustainable community should have a much higher priority than sustainable development and should be guided by a set of moral norms."

6.3   THE NEED FOR THE CHURCH'S INTERVENTION: A THEOLOGY OF *"SALT AND LIGHT"*

Having established the different developmental aspects of both theorists and practitioners, it serves well to explore the reasons why the church should participate in community development.

Firstly, the church is both an institution (organization) and organism, the structures and practices of which should be well coordinated to make it meaningful and relevant. Bass (2004:3) explains, "Practising congregations weave together Christian practices – activities drawn from the long Christian traditional – into a pattern of being church that forms an intentional way of life in community." As a spirit-led community, it is organized on the basis of identifying gifts and abilities to make its structures work in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the church is known to be an experienced stakeholder in development and community uplifting. Not all organizational principles of

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[52] Sourced from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
http://en.wilkipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development Accessed on 22 August 2009.

the church can be applied to society, but much of it can be of great assistance. So, the local church, which is part and parcel of the local community, should be instrumental in contributing towards community development.

The second reason relates to the church's transformational missional nature. Nadine Bowers du Toit (in Swart *et al.* 2010:269) observes, "The challenge, however, remains for the church to embody and appropriate its identity as a transformative agent in society." The church is ordained and commissioned to carry the truth of God's redeeming powers into people's physical and spiritual life. A secular approach to development can effectively engage well-researched social techniques, but usually misses the ultimate purpose of human life being in a relationship with the Creator. As such, a danger exists of turning the so-called "development" into exploitation and economic imbalance. The church is the primary bearer of God's story of being involved in the community as an eschatological event. Myers (1999:112) says, "Transformational development takes place within the larger story of creation, fall, redemption, and the second coming of Christ, at which the final judgement will be made." For the faith community, the church can articulate this undisputable truth only in the development arena.

Thirdly, the church has sound Kingdom values. Christian values, such as love, justice, integrity, faithfulness, compassion, etc., form the components of effective human development. For example, selfishness and greed have been stumbling blocks for most development endeavours. Korten (1990:168) writes,

> The human spirit must be strengthened to the point that greed and egotism play a less dominant role. This is perhaps the most central of religious missions, and a far worthier challenge for religiously oriented voluntary development organizations than the distribution of charity to victims of the failure of spiritual teaching.

This further reveals the church's unique and significant role, which gives it space on the social development platform to deal with the human inner being. In fact, any community development starts within an individual. If individuals are corrupt, the community will be corrupt. The church's intervention

to effect such values and virtues can restore communal identities and individuals' dignities. Among other development agencies, the church has the task of demonstrating the necessary justice and love, without reducing people to objects in order to improve production. Batchelor (1993:2) writes, "Our priority as Christians is not the amount that can be harvested nor the profit that a person or a group can make. It is the total welfare – spiritual, social, mental, economic – of the greatest number of people." This is what makes the church the salt and light[53] in community development. As a key community partner in development, the church is expected to develop and practise the theology of salt and light. Hendriks (2004:70) writes, "A missional congregation is called to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13-14); thus it should also influence its context." The church exists to display Kingdom values.

6.4   THE CHURCH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The church cannot be detached from community development. As a faith community, the church should consider the scope of development as part of God's very mission in reconciling with his creation. Robert Moffitt (in Samuel & Sugden 1987:236) suggests that development should be defined as "*every Biblically based activity of the body of Christ, his church, that assists in bringing human beings toward the place of complete reconciliation with God and complete reconciliation with their fellows and their environment."* Such a theological definition suggests that the church and community are partners in development in specific contexts, such as Malawi. The current situation in Malawi is that the church's position in both urban and rural communities is still influential. Most communities in the cities are organized based on the rural patterns of having chiefs and counsellors (Joda-Mbewe 2002). In both settings, the church is recognized in the organization of community functions, such as funerals and weddings. For example, the Church is the only institution outside the government that is entrusted to issue the Malawi government marriage certificates. All community leaders first consult the Church, or other religious groups, before they make any funeral arrange-

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[53] Here, the metaphor is based on the biblical metaphor that Jesus used in Mat. 5:13-16.

ments. This can be viewed as part of the evidence that the voice of the Church in Malawi receives public attention and respect, even on issues of a socio-political nature.

If the presupposition here is that the church is more equipped to participate in community development than many other players in this field, then the question is "*How should the church do it*?" A few ways of how the church can be involved in community development are suggested.

i)   The church as a researcher: discerning God's intention

In any locality, the church is involved in doing theology in its life and programmes. Theology is all about discernment – a quest to discover God's intention for his created world. Hendriks (2004:24) writes, "Theology is not a noun; it is a verb. We believe that it is in discerning the will of God, in the process of obediently participating in his mission, that we learn to under-stand that faith makes sense." The local congregation is charged with this responsibility of discerning God's will in its context. As both a sacred and social entity, it has an ethnographical advantage in the community. It is informed of the grassroots needs of the local community. While discerning God's will for its social context, the church is involved in designing programmes to address social problems, which usually affect the operations of the church itself. August (2010:58) writes, "... the church has to take steps to produce an objective understanding of the complex problems involved in development and therefore actively enter the process of development research." Here, it is assumed that the church should be committed to develop a data base for its own use and for other stakeholders in community development. In its natural PAR, the church collects stories that clarify the degree of suffering among the people in its context. In most cases, the church becomes a consultant for other development stakeholders, as it is usually equipped with the context's facts and figures. In its role as researcher, the church continues to learn and share information for transformative action (Hendriks 2004:33).

ii)   The church as a contemporary prophet

The church can play the role of a prophet to analyse the context with spiritual lenses, and sound a warning when necessary. Some of the social evils are generated from within a society, because of moral decay. The church should use its missional mandate to address these by means of evangelism and disciple-making. Robert Moffitt (in Samuel & Sugden 1987:238) says,

> If God has called the local church to a primary ministry of evangelism, that church must also at same time take advantage, either directly or in collaboration with others, of every opportunity to minister to the social and physical needs of those being evangelised.

As a faith-based organization, the church has a strategic position in the community and should detect what is not pleasing to God. It should address the root causes of problems and mobilize people to do something. The church's spiritual and human understanding of issues is in addition to this position. The church is in a unique position to respond to both spiritual and material matters, but is more concerned with people than things (Batchelor 1993:156).

iii)   The church as an agent of change

The church has the capacity to be an agent of change in community development. As part of its missional outreach to its social context, it can promote awareness of the community's problems and sensitize the community for action. The presence of a local congregation in a community gives it the responsibility to act as a community worker, whose primary concern is to assist the community to make informed decisions in dealing with pertinent issues in their community; to help them to take initiatives to address their problems and plans; to enable them to participate in their own development projects; and help them to discover their resources (Swanepoel 1992:17). The church is mandated to take this role, not because it has more knowledge than the community, but because of its missionary calling to serve the people. Change, or transformation, of any community is God's mission, and the church only participates in this mission. Myers (1999:127) comments, "The role of the church in transformational development is ... to be a servant

and a source of encouragement, not a commander or a judge." To be an agent for change is a humbling role that the church plays without withdrawing itself from the community. It is important that, where the church exists, it demonstrates its concern for the community's social and spiritual needs (Batchelor 1993:133). People will not participate effectively in development until they have established their problems and discovered that they are part of the solution. Therefore, the church should be a pacesetter in community development.

iv) The church as an empowerment activist

Redemption in Jesus Christ is one of the central themes in the life of the church. Only a redeemed and empowered people have a hope to continue living. This redemption and liberation can be the driving force for the church to advocate empowerment in a community. The hermeneutics of empowerment go beyond superficial religious connotations. In its social context, the church should share God's story in relation to the people's story. The church's interpretation of the evils, which dehumanize and disempower the community, should be the driving force to mobilize people into activities that, eventually, will empower them in their realization of God's will for his people. This is typical of a fourth generation development strategy (Korten 1990; Swart 2006). The various social empowerment programmes that the church can initiate are vital as part of its mission to the larger community. Activities, such as adult literacy classes, home management and handcrafts, contribute towards empowering people to be self-sustaining. In these activities, the church is able to engage the participating community in critical pedagogy.[54]

The church has a role as an empowerment activist in initiating self-help. For example, in March 1999, a rural congregation of the CCAP Nkhoma Synod, known as Chiwe, took the initiative through its Youth Ministry to rebuild a three-kilometre section of a gravel road that rain had badly damaged. When the local traditional leaders saw what the church youth had done, they

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[54] According to Ledwith (2005:102), "Critical pedagogy is a process that begins in personal empowerment and extends to critical, collective action, from local projects to movements for change."

mobilized their village members to join the youth. Thus, the remaining seven kilometres of the road was repaired! To some extent, it was a self-help message to the community by means of demonstration. Many congregations in the Nkhoma Synod have performed such demonstrations through their projects, such as the building of manses or churches, and care for the disabled and others. The ability of congregations to plan, work on, and finish church projects through the work of groups of ordinary local members, demonstrates to the community that self-help by locals is possible.

6.5   THE MALAWIAN CHURCH IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORKS

The Church in Malawi is not an isolated player in national development. In so many respects, it works with the government, NGOs, para-government and para-church organizations. Historically, the Church has been the forerunner in developing schools, health centres, social welfare centres, agricultural industry and other developmental facilities, before the state took over. The Church still has an important role in implementing national development plans. The Malawi government is open and supportive of all stakeholders to participate freely in achieving national development goals. The challenge that remains for the Church is to find its place and role in the overall national developmental plans, so that it can contribute effectively to community development within the national scheme.

6.5.1 National development schemes in Malawi and the Church

The Malawian government has major developmental policy documents. This section examines two major documents, namely: the Malawi Vision 2020 and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS). In this section, a review of these documents leads to a new understanding of the areas in which the Church can be involved significantly in national development.

6.5.1.1   The Malawi Vision 2020

In 2000, the Malawi government launched a document of policy framework that contains the long-term development plans for the nation. This was named "*Vision 2020,*" as it portrays how Malawians want their country to

appear by the year 2020. The vision statement of this development plan proclaims:

> By the year 2020 Malawi as a God-fearing nation, will be secure, democratically mature, environmentally sustainable, self-reliant with equal opportunities for and active participation by all, having social services, vibrant cultural and religious values and a technologically driven middle-income country.[55]

The main objective of *Vision 2020* is to help the government, the private sector and Malawian people to embark on a development path that the National Long-term Perspectives Study (NLTPS) process had launched. This vision provides a framework for national development goals, and outlines policies and strategies to achieve them.[56]

The theological description of Malawi as a God-fearing nation comes to the fore in the vision statement. "God-fearing" can be an inspiring and a guiding national characteristic to achieve developmental plans. It points out the needed morals that help to stamp out enemies of development, such as corruption, gender inequality, misappropriation of funds, jealousy and other evils. For such a national description to reflect in the life if a nation, the church has to regard its missional role seriously. A God-fearing element is religion, and the church has to promote it first and foremost among all the development stakeholders in Malawi. The church's missional task is to share with the nation that this biblical revelation is a key for wisdom for successful development – "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (Prov. 9:10).

The *Vision 2020* document's whole Chapter 4 speaks of achieving vibrant culture. It stipulates that one of the stepping-stones towards the realization of what is contained in the document is that the nation should achieve a vibrant culture. The *Vision 2020* document (section 4.1) states,

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[55] Accessed from http://www.sdnp.org.mw/~esias/ettah/vision2020/chapter-1.htm (Chapter 1.4) on 31 August 2009.
[56] Ditto.

> Malawians aspire to have vibrant cultural values that support socio-economic development. In order to achieve this, the following issues should be addressed: developing a positive work ethic; strengthening self-reliance and community participation in local development programmes; restoring self-confidence and pride in being Malawian; reducing gender inequality; enhancing a spiritualism that provides an ethical and moral base for a vibrant culture; and reducing disparities between population groups in the economy.[57]

All the stakeholders, including the church, should jointly address the national development issues mentioned above. To address them successfully, a need for moral and spiritual discipline exists on the side of the stakeholders. Moral and spiritual discipline is an element that the Church in Malawi is supposed to pioneer and articulate. For instance, if we take "*enhancing spiritualism that provides an ethical and moral base for vibrant culture,*" it is clear that the Church must be in the forefront to address this challenge. With the freedom of worship, or the freedom of conscience, that is enjoyed in Malawi as a nation, the Church's role is to propagate the transforming spiritual power of the Triune God over any nation. Already, *Malawi Vision 2020* (4.2.5.2.iv) refers to the following as some of the strategic options towards enhancing spiritualism as an ethical and moral base for a vibrant culture:

- Intensifying civic education by religious leaders on major social evils that threaten the very survival of the nation;
- Promoting religious education in all government and private educational institutions;
- Increasing the role of religious institutions in promoting morality and ethical behaviour; and
- Promoting religious tolerance.

This puts the Malawian Church in a strategic position to make a significant contribution within the national long-term plan. In the process of national development, the Church should promote a hardworking spirit and faithfulness. For example, with such roles, the Church can effectively participate

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[57] Ditto.

in the fight against corruption, which is one of the enemies of development in growing economies.

6.5.1.2   *The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS)*

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) is a five-year over-arching national strategic development policy document for Malawi, to be implemented from 2006 to 2011. Derived from the long-term national development policy goal, as stipulated in the *Malawi Vision 2020*, MGDS seeks to be a medium-term strategy for achieving the same goal. According to the executive summary of the MGDS (2006:xii), the document was designed with strong links with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in an attempt to translate the MDGs into a contextual Malawian under-standing. This means that all the MDGs have been included and given a Malawian compatible nature for the sake of the nation's achievement of its development plans within the framework of the MDGs. The Malawi government (MGDS 2006:1) states, "The main thrust of the MGDS is to create wealth through sustainable economic growth and infrastructure development as a means of achieving poverty reduction." The theme of the document, "*From poverty to prosperity,*" is an ambitious guideline that focuses on six priority areas, namely:

- Agriculture and food security;
- Irrigation and water development;
- Transport infrastructure development;
- Energy generation and supply;
- Integrated rural development; and
- Prevention and management of nutrition disorder, and HIV/AIDS.

These define the direction of the intended national development within the stipulated five-year period.

Such a national development plan is an open chance for the missional church to contribute towards national development. In his presidential

statement on MGDS, the State President of the Republic of Malawi, Dr Bingu Wa Mutharika writes:

> Government will spearhead the implementation of the MGDS. However, the strategy calls for active participation of all stakeholders in the implementation process, political will, change of mindset, and cooperation among the stakeholders will be paramount for the successful implementation of the strategy (Malawi Government, MGDS 2006:ii).

This open invitation by the State President creates more opportunity for the Church to participate in national development by using the MGDS. The call to political will is important to the Church, as a faith community and a social entity in daily contact with the people. The call for a mind-set is equally important, as the Church itself is a hermeneutical body that seeks continued reformation and embracement of change. Participation in development is a vital Christian responsibility connected to stewardship in obedience to God's will. McKim (ed.) (1992:369) comments: "In Reformed thinking, theology is a 'practical science,'" - not an end in itself. It serves a greater purpose, "the formation of human life and society in conformity to the will of God." The Church is in a position to contribute effectively in almost all of the six priority areas of the MGDS. Many denominations have the capacity to develop their own projects on Agriculture and food security; Irrigation and Water Development; Integrated Rural Development; and Prevention and Management of Nutrition Disorders, HIV and AIDS. For instance, the Church in Malawi is already involved in various HIV/AIDS activities at different levels. Many denominations have their own AIDS/HIV related projects, but work hand-in-hand with Malawi's National AIDS Commission. In addition, churches work together through Malawi Interfaith AIDS Association (MIAA).[58]

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[58] MIAA is an inter-religious group committed to work together in HIV/AIDS prevention, and the care and support of those infected and affected in Malawi. It is composed of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM), Malawi Council of Churches (MCC), Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM), Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM), Quadria Muslim Association of Malawi (QMAM), Seventh Day Adventist Church and Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM); (visit www.interfaithaids.mw/resources).

The above discussion on *Malawi Vision 2020* and MGDS reveals that, through its empowered membership, there is an opportunity for the Church to contribute towards current governmental development plans. The Malawian Church has the important responsibility to also take part in national development by designing its own missional projects within the framework of the over-arching national development goals. The Church is at liberty to design and try out various development activities in the small communities where it exists, even before the government can do so. Batchelor (1993:66) believes:

> The church is particularly suited to try things out; she is able to experiment with new ideas, on a small scale, and the loss of face, that may occur if there is a failure, is less of a problem to the church than it would be to a government or international organisation.

This is true of the Church, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where many poor people survive at subsistence level and always look out for new ideas that can help to improve their livelihood. Therefore, the Church should partner other stakeholders in taking the responsibility to address social issues at whatever level or scale.

6.6 EVIDENCE OF THE CHURCH'S CAPACITY TO PARTICIPATE IN NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES

To some extent, the Church in Malawi has always been involved in social issues on a national scale. For example, in 2007, the Church leaders in Malawi teamed up to intervene in a row between the government and the opposition parties in Parliament. The issue was about the passing of the 2007/2008 government budget - an issue of national interest that badly affected ordinary people, and that had a direct negative impact on the Church and society. After several mediation and negotiation dialogues, the two sides adopted the Church's proposals to end the conflict. This researcher, as a member of the negotiating Church leadership team, observed from inside that the Church has the public trust to mediate where a need arises. A key factor towards the successful negotiation was that very many cabinet ministers and members of parliament involved in the row were

members of various churches whose leaders formed the negotiating team. Tengatenga (2006:202) says:

> The church is made up of people who come to church and worship together and during the week, go to work in their sundry occupations and stations in life. Some of these are politicians both in government and without, and thus have the responsibility over the running of the polis.

So, with such a scenario in Malawi, the government and political party leaders were able to respect their church leaders' views. This explains the interrelatedness of church and society in the networking of daily social issues.

The Church in Malawi, like everywhere else, is much involved in social activities in the fields of health, education, gender, justice, development, etc. It always networks with the Malawi government to provide people with adequate and standard social services. In the health sector, the Church operates mainly through their arm called the Christian Hospital Association of Malawi (CHAM). Through its 152 health units, CHAM provides more than 35% of the health services in the country. Of these, the Nkhoma Synod alone has a big hospital and nine other health centres. The mission of CHAM, in collaboration with the government of Malawi and other health providers, is committed to follow the healing ministry of Jesus Christ by providing curative, preventive and uplifting health services, and to the people's development and empowerment at community level, without discrimination and a preferential option for the poor.[59] Its specific objectives are:

(1)   to improve communication and cooperation with the Ministry of Health;

(2)   to improve the quality of health care delivery;

(3)   to stimulate development and training, and

(4)   to increase the sustainability of health services.

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[59] This was Accessed on http://www.pcusa.org/health/international/profiles/cham/.htm on 15 September 2008.

In partnership with other churches, the Nkhoma Synod has several projects that reflect its collaboration with the society. It has a fully-fledged HIV/AIDS Department, Relief and Development Department, Church and Society Department, Women Desk, and runs two big orphanage projects. Also, in the education sector, the Malawian Church has formed the Association of Christian Educators in Malawi (ACEM). Among its several objectives, one is to promote high quality education. For other fields in general, the Church operates through the MCC and the ECM.

In preparation for the 2009 Malawian general elections, the Malawi Electoral Commission included several church-based groups (accredited NGOs to help in civic education). The Commission was convinced that the Church has the capacity to handle such an assignment because of its established channels of discerning information. During the registration and election process, the Church in Malawi is always asked to be part of the monitoring and distribution of election materials, because of its trustworthiness. Just before the May 2009 general elections, the Nkhoma Synod produced a very powerful pastoral letter titled, "Choosing a good leader." The Synod guided its Church members with Christian principles on the qualities of a good national leader. The letter appealed to all members of the Synod to take their intercessory role seriously to promote free and fair elections.

Thus, the Church and society's cooperation confirms the interdependence that exists between them on issues of national interest. Nevertheless, at this point, caution is necessary.

6.6.1 Caution for the Church in development partnerships

The preceding number of sections (6.5-6.6) dwelt on how the church participates in development at both local and national level, through net-working with other major players. They described the roles of the Church in the national development plans; and established evidence on its ability to impact significantly on social issues of national interest. However, a need exists for the church to be sensitive of its position in partnering with the state

in order to adhere to its theological mandate to participate in development. By partnering with the state, which is driven by its political passions, the church finds itself in a comfortable and advantaged position. Yet, along with the development agenda, the state uses the church for its political gains. This calls for the church's critical interpretation of its own roles and levels of involvement in the development network. A temptation exists for the church to indulge in power and control at the expense of being prophetic. Guder (1998:113) warns:

> Whenever the church has a vested interest in the status quo – politically, economically, socially – it can easily be captivated by the powers, the institutions, the spirits, and the authorities of the world. And whenever the church becomes captivated by the powers, it loses the ability to identify and name evil.

History has shown that, when churches are too close to government machinery, they become myopic and fail to deliver prophetically. The CCAP in single-party Malawi and the DRC in apartheid South Africa are examples of such a weakness of the church. These Churches failed to point out the current evils, as perpetuated by the governments, because of their privileged position beside the government. In its participation in national development together with other stakeholders, the church can become the public conscience as it confronts the society's evils. Swart *et al.* (2010:250) says,

> For the church the way to authentic development consequently calls for *metonia*, conversion, directed first and foremost to the rich and powerful. It is ultimately also a question of the conversion of the church. It points to the responsibility of the churches in both the rich and poor countries to confront the local and global corruption and exploitation.

6.7   A RECAP: THE THEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE BEHIND DEVELOPMENT

So far, the meaning of development and its component has been explained from a theological perspective. It has also been established that there is a need for the church to be involved in community development, while wearing its different hats as a researcher, contemporary prophet, agent for change and empowerment activist (6.4). Furthermore, the place of the church in

national development plans has been allocated, but not without a warning of danger. Therefore, at this point, it is important to draw a theological imperative behind development and the church's participation.

6.7.1 Ministering to the people of God

The church is composed of people and exists for people in pursuit of God's calling and mission to the world. Guder (1998:189) comments:

> Located always in particular places, the church inevitably sits between the gospel and a specific cultural context. Therefore, the church's leadership seeks to express the gospel in ways that speak to realities of their socio-cultural setting.

The missional calling of the church is to discern God's will and participate in his mission of world restoration. God reconciles the broken world to Himself through Christ, in order that it should bear his desired status of perfection. The mission is to reclaim the intended perfect condition out of the evil-dominated world, characterized by injustice and greed. The church's participation in development indicates, theologically, God's concern for the devastated world in need of redemption and transformation. Robert Moffitt (in Samuel & Sugden 1987:235) explains that God's purpose is that redeem-ed human beings demonstrate, as Jesus did, the wonderful nature of God's plan for the world's future by telling the unredeemed about the Good News. He continues by arguing that, if this is God's purpose for humanity, then growth into God's purpose is the highest level of human development. Therefore, it is a prerequisite that, in all its development endeavours, the church should focus on people in view of its missional mandate. While other stakeholders in national development might have political, economic or mere humanitarian motives, the church works as God's vessel for the recovery of people created in his own image. A Christian approach to development seeks not only material prosperity; it targets a person's whole being. Batchelor (1993:157-158) states, "Development must include deliverance from all that prevents a person from reaching his or her potential in the sight of God. True deliverance includes being freed from the bondage of jealousy and of fear." This translates into the church's holistic approach to develop-

ment. The agents of development themselves, in the name of church members, should be empowered to empower others. When the whole person in the whole church membership is empowered to participate in development, then notable achievements at both local and national levels are possible.

In developing any project for the community, the people should be involved right from the beginning. Hendriks (2004:216) emphasizes, "People should covenant and be involved in naming problems and in finding solutions. Their voices should be honoured." The role of the church and its leadership should be to encourage people to assess their situation and decide what to do about it. Thus, the church is called to participatory learning and action. The people's needs should form the main agenda - their reality counts (Chambers 1997). Their indigenous knowledge is most essential in determining strategies for development plans. Myers (1999:45) agrees, "One of the recent discoveries among development professionals is how much local communities actually know that is true and valuable." The community has the aptitude to discern what can, and what cannot, work within their environment. They have natural knowledge of their climate, ethnical values, geological limitations and other conditions that a foreigner would take a long time to discover.

6.7.2 *Theological studies and development*

Therefore, it is imperative that the church should re-organize itself to equip all its members for meaningful participation in development. Church leadership should be equipped with organizational skills that enable them to mobilize church members and the civil society to address issues of development in their own context. As such, the call to develop a relevant curriculum for theological seminaries should be taken into account. The introduction of Development Studies in African theological seminaries is an appropriate strategy for the church's outreach to the society with a development agenda. August (2010:96) says, "The program for theology and development studies has as its focus the equipment and empowerment of the church and its workers to become catalysts for (community-)

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development within the sphere of nation-building..." When church leaders are appropriately exposed to Development Studies during their formation period, they are likely to make commendable contributions in the contexts in which they minister. Even of more importance is to mainstream Development Studies in the theological curriculum, than to make it a mere study course.

Here, the mention of Development Studies in theological training is to emphasize the fact that the church should be theologically informed of its mandate in developmental issues. For the church, participation in development, at all levels, is part of its doing theology, which is about the Kingdom – concerned with vision, mission, hope and eschatology; and it is about transformative action – creating joy and hope (Hendriks 2004:32-33).

6.8   CONCLUSION

The role of the church in sustainable development is extremely vital at local, national and global levels as there are always Kingdom values attached to the concept of development in Christian thinking. Sustainable development is part of the church's task of doing theology. From the church perspective, Hendriks (2004:215) asserts,

> We are engaged in an ongoing process of discerning God's will as He speaks and leads us towards realising signs of his kingdom. In the process of obediently participating in transformative action, we engage different communities ....

Development is part of the transformational roles, inseparable from the intended outcomes of Christian witness. Somehow, development is about a change in culture that translates into a change of values and worldviews. So, if the role of the church or religion in development is denied, then the success of any development initiative is denied of one of its most critical factors (Myers 1999:242-243). As such, the church participates in community development as an integral obligation in its missional calling to God's mission to the world. The common temptation that the church should avoid is to control and dominate to the extent of missing out the community's real needs.

The fact that church participation in development is proven to be a mandatory missional responsibility, suggests that all church members should be involved. At any level of Christian involvement, development is taken as a ministry of the church to which all members are called to participate, in obedience to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Robert Moffitt (in Samuel & Sugden 1987:241) says, "Laity should be involved in ministry in the most direct way possible. It is the laity's birthright, which carries with it certain responsibilities." It has already been stated that the church is even at a rightly placed position within the larger communities in Malawi to accelerate its participatory activities. The point is that the laity forms a larger part of the communities involved in development. The church can be a benefactor, as well as a beneficiary, when the laity's zeal and initiative in development is mobilized into a missional spirit to be witnesses to the world.

In this chapter, development has been discussed as a broader application and strategy to address the ministerial as well as social problem that the Malawian Church has internal and external to its congregations. So far in this discussion, it remains clear that the empowerment of the laity is a key to address the issues at stake in Malawi. The following chapter discusses issues of empowerment in a broader approach, but from a practical theological perspective.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EMPOWERMENT IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

7.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter articulated the role of the church in development as part of doing theology. The discussion revealed that doing theology at congregational level calls for continued research as a means of self-discovery in the process towards transformation. Such a revelation is directly linked to the central quest in this study, which is to find what can be done in the Malawian Church in order to groom the laity and lay leadership for a holistic ministry, missional by nature, and meaningful to the contemporary social environment. The extension to the study's question focuses specifically on the Nkhoma Synod, "*Are the available resources in the Nkhoma Synod of the CCAP enough to develop congregations into self-reliant, spiritually matured, all-participatory and social service-providing ones that can act as a sign of the reign of God?*" This chapter deals with the theory and practice of the empowerment of the laity in the Church. Empowerment in Practical Theology is, in its essence, an integral part of the discernment process, as faith continues to seek understanding within the congregation. This falls under the last step of the epistemological framework for doing theology (addressed in 1.6) – theology is about transformative action. This chapter serves as a beacon to recap the hypothesis in this paper, which exerts much weight on the synopsis that the clerical leadership in the Nkhoma Synod should make a deliberate effort to empower the laity if the Church is to participate effectively and relevantly in the *missio Dei*. But, one could seriously ask, "*What exactly is empowerment?*" and "*What has it to do with the life and the mission of the church today?*" The discussion will now pay attention to the term "empowerment" as a way of providing more elaborate guidance in the usage or implementation of such an action. This chapter aims at:

a) Further clarifying the term "empowerment" as conceptualized earlier in section 1.7b.

b) Establishing its dynamic transformational role in the life of the Church, with special reference to congregational operations.

c) Relating the theory and practice of empowerment within the Church as a spirit-led, yet human organization.

d) Showing the need and urgency to embark on empowerment in the Malawian Church.

In a study of congregations such as this, one must bear in mind that doing theology is about discerning God's will. The missional God is at work to re-establish his Kingdom in the world. It remains a challenge for that missional praxis of God to be reflected in, and through, the life of the Church in Malawi.

To unpack the theory and practice of empowerment coherently, the discussion will start with a literature review of the term "empowerment" in a wider perspective. Then, the formulation of the theology of empowerment and its biblical perspectives will follow. After that, the chapter will survey the trends of empowerment in the Malawian Church before presenting empowerment as a natural process in Africa. Reflection will also be presented on empowerment and the marginalized. Finally, this chapter will conclude with the need for Christian empowerment in Malawi and its principles.

7.2   LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE MEANING OF "EMPOWERMENT"

"Empowerment" is a key word in this dissertation. As already alluded to in the conceptualisation section above (1.7.b), the term has become a very commonly used, yet important one across different fields of study. In its general sense, empowerment may refer to an increase in the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities in order for them to develop confidence in their own capacities. In short, empowerment is the process that allows one to gain the knowledge, skills and attitude necessary to cope with the changing world and circumstances in which one

lives.[60] Theology, economics, sociology, development and business studies have all engaged "empowerment" in some or other way. Albertyn (2000:32) says:

> Empowerment theory and practice with roots in diverse disciplines such as community organization methods, adult education techniques, feminist theory, economics and political psychology, all emphasise different aspects of the concept of empowerment.

Disciplines may differ in what they emphasize and how they apply the term "empowerment," but, basically, they have the same meaning. For the sake of keeping the focus on the use of the word in this research, it has been limited to mean the deliberate provision of skills to promote the maximum use of spiritual gifts in a congregation.

A review of the meaning of empowerment from three perspectives: business leadership, education and development now follows. These perspectives have been carefully chosen because of their relevance in enlightening and enriching the usage of the term in this research. The relevance of these perspectives to this practical theological study with congregations in mind, is as follows:

- The leadership principles and roles in business leadership are almost the same as in Practical Theology. They can be related with minimum adjustments.
- The use of empowerment in education is a relevant and needed methodology in Christian education, which can be a very useful tool in the empowerment of laity in a congregation.
- The field of development targets transformation, which is also the ultimate goal for the process of empowerment advocated in this study and which focuses on the life of a congregation.

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[60] Accessed from http://en.wilkipedia.org/wiki/Empowerment (9 September 2008).

Each of these perspectives needs to be treated separately before they can be bundled in the Trinitarian theological perspective that is compatible with Practical Theology.

7.2.1 Empowerment from a business leadership perspective

In business leadership, empowerment is considered as the task of institutional management in giving employees principles that will help them to govern themselves and increase the use of their potential. Covey (1990:256) elaborates, "Management's job is empowerment, and empowerment basically means, 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.'" The use of this Chinese adage illustrates not only a definition of empowerment, but goes further to assert the permanent impact that empowerment has on an institution or organization. Employees, whom the management empowers, have a sense of stewardship and require a minimum or no supervision. In due course, production increases to the benefit of individual workers and the entire organization. In the same vein, when the clerical leadership empowers the laity, everyone in the church becomes a missionary. As a result, ministerial diversification takes place and congregations become the salt and light of their communities.

Also from a business leadership perspective, Kinlaw (1995:7) believes that empowerment is by far more about development and deployment of competence in people than it is about merely the distribution of power. Thus, Kinlaw (1995:11) carefully formulates the following definition of empowerment:

> Empowerment is the process of achieving continuous improvement in an organization's performance by developing and extending the competent influence of individuals and teams over the areas and functions, which affect their performance, and that of the total organization.

According to Kinlaw (1995:21), the two key words in this definition are "competent" and "influence." As in Kinlaw's definition of empowerment above, being competent gives bearing to the potential that people must have to exercise influence that improves service delivery. On the other hand,

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"influence" means the act of moving people and events in a direction that improves performance. In short, influence is competence in action.

Kinlaw (1995:20) argues that empowerment is not compatible with the traditional control model. The reason is that true empowerment entails being open to the unexpected brilliance that people demonstrate when given a chance. In his summary, Kinlaw (1995:68) notes, "Competence describes the potential side of empowerment and influence describes the action side of empowerment."

Still others in business leadership prefer to explain the term "empowerment" in terms of what it delivers, rather than constructing abstract definitions. Stewart (1994:6) says,

> Empowerment is, quite simply, a highly practical and productive way to get the best from yourself and your staff. It goes beyond delegation to place real power where it can be used most effectively; close to the customer. This means devolving not just tasks but decision-making and full responsibility too.

This definition is truly remarkable in terms of its focus on the ultimate goal. In empowerment, the role of authority changes as managers begin to share and entrust all workers towards achieving a corporate goal. In business management, the question of authority and decision-making is critical. Therefore, empowerment becomes a necessary tool for the redistribution of power and decision-making responsibilities. This is usually oriented towards employees, where previously such responsibility and authority was a management prerogative (Kelly & Booth 2004:55). Furthermore, some consider empowerment as a process of passing authority on to others to make decisions in the organisation. It requires that all employees take responsibility for the quality of their work, and act in the best interest of the customer (Heery & Noon 2001:102). In a congregational setting, it is the same. When a clerical leader releases the power and authority in the spirit of trusting the laity, initiatives are taken at grassroots level. Empowerment creates such a bottom-up operation and enables the laity to maximize the use of their spiritual gifts.

7.2.2 Empowerment from an educational perspective

In the field of education, and more specifically adult education, it is commonly agreed that empowerment cannot be defined in a single way. It requires those concerned to conceptualize empowerment in a way that is consistent with the intended goal. Albertyn (2000:32) suggests that the guiding definition of empowerment for adult educationalists should involve a psychological sense of personal control and concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights. It should include both individual determination and community participation. Empowerment concerns both one's perceived and actual ability to determine the course of one's life and community. Therefore, two perspectives of empowerment are proposed:

- A micro–level perspective that refers to site-specific struggles, which involve challenging the existing structures of power by devising alternative ways of doing things. Such a perspective is reformist by nature, yet very individualistic.
- A macro-level perspective, which refers to an approach that calls for liberation resulting from a social movement that begins with sensitizing powerless people, and later engages corporate efforts on the part of the powerless to gain power and to transform those structures that are still oppressive.

The former perspective is equally relevant but, due to its individualistic nature, it has problems with viability in a rural context, such as the one being studied. Rutoro (2007:13) notes, "Although individualistic theology is accepted in the churches of the West … in the church in Africa, where the society has strong ties of communalism, the approach faces resistance from traditional rural congregations in particular." This entails that the inclusive way of looking at what empowerment does is likely to be more profitable than focusing narrowly on individual empowerment.

As an adult educationalist, Albertyn (2000:34) says,

> All people possess empowerment. It cannot be bestowed on others, it does not simply mean giving the disenfranchised more responsibility without additional support or resources, it should include both individual and collective actions, it is not assertiveness training, it is not just feeling good about oneself and it cannot be limited to personal change.

This remark is not intended to isolate the individual empowerment from that which is communal. It advocates that empowerment is a process that includes the aspects of personal agency, social interaction and action to bring about change for all. Empowered individuals and groups can achieve self-determination.

7.2.3 Empowerment from a development perspective

Empowerment in development is commonly linked to the improvement of the way of life or welfare of marginalized societies. The term usually becomes a tool for dealing with social dangers, such as poverty, gender inequality, political injustice and oppression. From a development point of view, August (2010:11) writes, "Empowerment must therefore enable people to express and assert what development means to them; otherwise, social development in terms of the manipulation of resources cannot take place." As such, empowerment is considered to be the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions that both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context that govern the use of these assets.[61]

Those in better living conditions often render poor individuals and communities to be powerless. Sometimes, they are made to believe that they are incapable of doing anything that would improve their living standards. So, in the field of development, "empowerment" would mean the process of giving hope to the hopeless by helping them to discover their untapped potential, as well as unlocking their skills and abilities. In such a sense, empowerment

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[61] Accessed from http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY… on September 16, 2008.

should not be confused with handouts or starter-packs that are usually once-and-for-all. It refers to the movement of encouraging and developing skills among the needy, towards self-sufficiency and the elimination of any future need for charity. Empowerment not only provides better living conditions for individuals and among communities, but also guarantees sustainability. Hendriks (2004:219) says, "Empowerment increases community members' energy, motivation, coping and problem-solving skills, decision-making power, self-esteem, self-sufficiency and self-determination."

In rural poor communities, the role of development workers is not only leading, but empowering. According to Swanepoel (1992:17), where there is a development project for the community, a community worker should be concerned primarily with helping an action group to make rational decisions that enable them to participate fully in the project, and assist them in taking initiatives, help them to discover their resources, and help them to plan and act. In such a way, the people own the project and acquire self-confidence to do better and more.

7.2.4 Common points in the above empowerment perspectives

Several common points can be drawn from the empowerment perspectives discussed above. They can be summarized as follows:

First, empowerment is a process, not an event. It must be planned and worked out strategically. The proper setting of goals and timing should be considered carefully in the empowerment process.

Second, empowerment concerns people, not objects. People are rational, have their own views and interests. In this case, empowerment involves advocacy – the selling of ideas and making aware; not the imposition of a "how-to-do. "

Third, empowerment has a sense of emancipation from some mental and physical captivity. Disempowered people are implicitly made to believe that they lack the potential or capacity to solve their problems. So, empowerment

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sets them free from such a mental assumption and inspires them for the necessary performance.

Fourth, empowerment not only benefits an individual, but often initiates a cooperative achievement. Empowered people are sharing people. A factor that starts in an individual's life and activities becomes machinery that propels others into also releasing their potentials.

Fifth, empowerment brings about a permanent change that opens a new worldview for individuals and organisations. As an ongoing process, it continues to improve creativity and delivery of services.

These common points from various non-theological lenses can enrich a practical theological approach to empowerment of the laity in the church. In Trinitarian theology, God is at the centre. "Theology" is to know God's will and direction in the way people should participate in his missional praxis (Hendriks 2004:24). Therefore, at this point of discussion, it is appropriate to examine empowerment from a Trinitarian theological perspective.

7.3   A THEOLOGY OF EMPOWERMENT

The construction of a theology of empowerment has its roots directly in biblical theology. God revealed Himself in the Bible by showing who He is and how He relates to human beings. There is more than enough evidence throughout the Bible that the Triune God is a God of empowerment. From the Genesis creation narratives to the apocalyptic projections of the book of Revelation, God is seen at work in transformative acts with the human race. The understanding that all human beings are created in God's image - *imago Dei*[62] - is probably central to the theology of empowerment. This idea has its roots in Genesis 1:26 to 27. Migliore (1991:122) contends that *imago Dei*

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[62] This researcher is aware that the concept of *imago Dei* is widely debated in theology. For centuries, theologians have continued to discuss, agree and disagree on its biblical intended meaning. According to www.theopadia.com/Image_of_God , some have interpreted *imago Dei* in terms of spirituality, others in terms of original righteousness (Luther), and even sexuality (Barth)! Therefore, the researcher will not dare to go to an in-depth debate for the sake of keeping the focus on the subject matter of this discussion.

explains human life in relation to God and other created beings. By being created in the image of God, humans are moral and spiritual creatures.[63] With us, God shares his image, his authority, as well as his responsibility for creation. He empowers his human beings for service to the created world.

God's broader empowering act within the debate of *imago Dei* is evident in his restoration of his image after the broken relationship. "The story of the image of God, then, is one of creation, loss, and what we may term the greater-than-restoration" (http://www.theopedia.com/Image_of_God). God's reconciliatory process with human beings is on-going. Migliore (1991:128) notes, "Being created in the image of God is not a state or condition but a movement with a goal: human beings are restless for a fulfilment of life not yet realized." Theologically, God is concerned with the fallen nature of the *imago Dei* and continues empowering in order to restore the intended human status. In a human being, sin has negated the qualities of being the true image of God. Hall (1993:223) says,

> If our being in God's image is understood to mean that we are rational, then, sin, within this same mode of thought, must imply the diminution of our rationality; it is that which detracts from our full potentiality for reasonable thought and behaviour.

When human beings begin to discern God's will, they begin to understand God in themselves, as revealed in the Word and the world.

7.3.1 Some of God's biblical empowerment acts

Nurnberger (2002:3) believes that a theology of biblical witness is meant to empower us to do, for our times, what the biblical authors did for theirs: i.e. formulate God's redemptive response to human needs. Therefore, biblical theology guides us into understanding the theology of empowerment as we reflect on what God's involvement has been with human beings. The Bible presents the story of God's work in the world with a wide coverage of his empowering acts through creation, re-creation (redemption) and final consummation (Van Gelder 2007:26). This confirms the fact that, through his

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[63] Accessed from www.enotes.com/science-religion-encylopedia/imago-dei on 2010/10/13.

Word, God empowers humans to live a life that is acceptable to Him, and to participate in his mission for the world. God empowers all his people, the church, to participate in his creative, redemptive and emancipative acts. He shares his roles with his chosen people for his own sake. In the life of the church, God not empowers only the clergy, but all the saints who are called in his name. Therefore, a few selected biblical reflections will serve to further establish the theology of empowerment.

(i)   Empowerment in the creation story

In the creation narrative (Gen. 2:7), God created a human being and shared his own breath (life) with him. Wanak (2008:55) points out,

> Even though "empowerment" is not a term used in the Bible, the concept is not foreign to the biblical material. The basic idea of setting a thing in motion is present in the Hebrew word *ruah,* which is translated as wind, breath, or spirit. The working of the spirit specifically gives people the ability and the strength to carry out special tasks. Thus, the spirit of the Lord endows individuals with strength so that they can fight the foreign oppressors of Israel.

This act of empowerment demonstrates primarily God's will to enable a human being to live. Secondly, it demonstrates his willingness to relate with human beings whom He created in his own image (Gen. 1:27). Another element of empowerment attached to the creation of human beings is evident in them being entrusted with the responsibility to care for, and use, the rest of all creation. The activities in the creation story flow from God's own character as a selfless Initiator of empowerment. Migliore (1991:85) observes, "But to confess that God is a creator is … to say that the free, transcendent God is generous and welcoming. God was not compelled to create the world. It is an act of free grace." God's sharing of his powers is an act of empowerment par excellence, demonstrated for human beings to emulate.

(ii)   Empowerment after the Fall of man

Further to creation, comes the Fall of man. Genesis 3 introduces the turning point of the God-human relationship. When human beings chose to disobey God and do what was prohibited, they severed the relationship with Him, and were found naked. "Within Genesis 3 itself we see the first glimmerings of hope, with the promise of the seed who will crush the serpent's head, and the mercy of God in providing a covering to our naked, ashamed first parents.[64] It was the very same empowering God who stooped low for the sinners and made garments of skin to clothe them (Gen. 3:21). "God covered their shame with a more substantial clothing" (Birch *et al.* 1999:57). "God himself clothes the guilty pair, enabling [empowering] them to live with their shame" (La Sor *et al.* 1982:85). This is a symbol of restoring their dignity, which, in most cases, is what empowerment does to people. Adam and Eve were empowered to continue living and were given a second chance to build their relationship with God.

(iii)   Empowerment in forming God's own people

The same empowering God is seen in Genesis 12 as developing his own people through Abram. He brought Abram from a polytheistic community to form the monotheistic nation of Israel that emanated from him. Characteristic of God's empowering nature, he promises Abraham*, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing"* (Gen. 12:2). God keeps this promise and Abraham's descendants cherish it. In short, "The existential source of meaning, identity, right of existence and empowerment for the Israelites is Yahweh," the God of their Fathers (Nurnberger 2002:143). Throughout the Old Testament, God deals with the Israelites in a most compassionate and empowering manner, regardless of the weaknesses and rebellious characteristics of his chosen people, Israel. The same picture is reflected in the New Testament in how God was involved with the church.

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[64] Http://www.theopedia.com/Image_of _God (2010/10/16).

The theology of empowerment goes beyond the people's willingness to be empowered; so much depends on the person who is willing and determined to empower others. Of course, the process of empowerment demands a mutual effort from both sides, but the initial steps should be shouldered on the empowering side. Otherwise, the theology of empowerment is prone to be overshadowed by the liberation theology if it has a stronger drive in the empowered, than in the empowering. According to Castillo-Cardenas (1987:88), liberation theology is commonly a "theology from below," because it is associated with reaction against oppression and domination. Empowerment should focus more on reclaiming, than reacting. In Old Testament theology, God takes the lead in the direction towards Israel's own well-being. In commenting about the role of the people of Israel in the Old Testament, Wittenberg (2007:105) writes,

> The people then are the participants of God's work in history, they are the objects of his love, the receivers of his promises and they can be addressed and admonished to keep his commandments because they ultimately are the responsible agents of their own destiny.

This clearly indicates that God's empowering process does not leave people idle or turn them into robots. They have to contribute an input towards the realization of God's promises to them.

(iv) *Empowerment in redeeming and reallocating God's people*

The Old Testament (from Exodus to Joshua) also accounts how the empowering God of Israel delivered his people from oppression and slavery in Egypt, and brought them to the promised land. Throughout the exodus and re-settlement in the land, God guided, provided and involved his people. He was ever-present in their midst - a symbol of his concern for the people's affairs (Ex. 13:21-22). Adeyemo *et al.* (2006:104) comment, "God manifests his permanent presence with his people in a pillar of cloud that guides them by day and a pillar of fire that guides them by night." This reveals that God remained in close proximity to his people, the Israelites; this indicates his special relationship with them (Carson *et al.* 1994). Empowerment demands this presence and concern in any society or group.

(v)   Empowerment in salvation through Jesus Christ

The New Testament presents Christ as the chief source of empowerment for the world's salvation. The soteriological perspective of the account of Jesus Christ leaves the believing world with no doubt that God revealed his plans and acted in the appropriate way to redeem the human race. Yet, He gave options to the empowered world for the pursuance of his grace. O'Donovan (1995:125) says,

> In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, God pleads with people to call to him to be saved (Isa. 45:22, Rom. 10:13). It is not possible for man to save himself. Only God was able to make a way of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This explanation points to the fact, which the Bible reveals, that God is very much aware of the most important need of the world – salvation. He then opens up to the helpless world to respond. As a result, all those who received Christ receive the power to be called his children (Jn. 1:12). God's parental sense in the world's empowerment comes by his grace, through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Such is the favour that the world does not deserve, but is offered by the Triune God as a way of empowering the world to live in the right relationship with the very God, its Creator.

(vi)   Empowerment and the Holy Spirit

In biblical theology, probably the most elaborate act of empowerment is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In his manifestation to the world, God's Spirit further enhances his love and keen interest to empower people. Van Gelder (2007:27) observes, "This outpouring or descending of the Sprit 'makes God's power knowable' through creating an intersection between heaven and earth. It brings into play the dynamics of the intent of creation with the possibilities of redemption." From its creation to the end, the Triune God is always present in the world through his Spirit. He works with, and empowers, individuals at a personal level and also in the church. The Holy Spirit helps individual believers to understand God's plan for them to become like Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2Cor. 3:18) and empowers God's people with gifts and

abilities. Tangeman (1996:226) says, "The Holy Spirit is also at work – leading, guiding, empowering and enabling people to serve with great effectiveness." For unbelieving individuals, the role of the Holy Spirit is to convict them for their sins, pleads with them to be righteous and warns them against punishment (Jn. 16:8). There is much biblical evidence that asserts the nature of empowerment theology through the Holy Spirit's works. Through the Spirit, God empowers his people, to participate in the continued empowerment process that the world needs today. As a brief picture of a biblical theology of empowerment, the Holy Spirit is noted to do the following, as Van Gelder (2007:28) puts it:

- Demonstrating God's creation (Gen. 1;2; John 1:1-3)
- Affirming God's intention for creation so that all of life might flourish (Gen. 9:1-17; John 10:10)
- Confronting the principalities and powers and restraining evil (Gen. 3:15; Eph. 6:10-12).
- Reconnecting people and restoring community by helping them come to clarity in their identity as God's people (Gen. 6-8; 1 Peter 2:9-10).
- Empowering leadership to guide faith communities into redemptive action (I Sam. 17:41-47; Acts 19:11-20).
- Extending mercy and establishing justice (Isa. 58:6-14; Acts 6:1-6).
- Engaging the world (often referred to as "the nations") through witness (Isa. 42:1-9; Acts 1:8).

7.3.2 A summary of the theology of empowerment

These reflections point to the conclusion that empowerment theology has its concrete biblical base in the Triune God's dealings with people as the *imago Dei*. In creation, He shares his power with the world which He created *ex-nihilo*. He empowers his creation to progress towards his own plans, but to the benefit of the created world. In Christ Jesus, He saves the fallen and disempowered world and provides it with the needs for advancing towards its final consummation. Through the Spirit, God created and empowered the church to participate in his mission for the world. When, in Acts 1:8, Jesus declared and promised, "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,*" it was a perfect symbol of God's

empowering Spirit over his church to do what He created it for. To further the empowerment in the operations of the church, God created various offices (Eph. 4:11-12) in order to equip every member of the church to participate according to different gifts and abilities.

As such, the practical theological yearning to empower the laity in the church today is not a foreign or humanly created idea; it is in God's nature and, therefore, should be in the church today. It is a commonly discerned truth that God cares for, and renews, his church in his own way. Jesus Christ, the Owner of the church, empowers believers to go and empower others. Nurnberger (2002:277) explains, "Faith in Christ does not lead to disem-powerment of the laity, as the priesthood does, but to its religious empowerment." In practical theology, ministry renewal begins when both the ordained and non-ordained church leaders move from an organizational or maintenance mode of leadership to that of empowering the whole church for ministry. As a result, all people, systems and structures are rejuvenated with new life, meaning and power.[65] When the clergy make efforts to empower the laity, they only try to make the church what it should be at all times. In the process of empowerment, the church's local context should be in focus.

7.4   EMPOWERMENT OF THE LAITY AS A NATURAL PROCESS IN AFRICA

Today, there is a loud outcry in Africa that the African church should employ African philosophy and strategies to achieve sustainable results for Africa. Any human or monetary aid from the West or East, cannot be a solution to Africa's on-going struggle for self-reliance. It will be resolved only when Africa's own rationality is developed and uplifted. Nkurunziza (2000:36) says, "True integral development will be brought about by the empowerment of the African mind," but this is not a call for a new ideology for Africa. The philosophy of empowerment is a deeply rooted characteristic in Africa's way

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[65] An article, "Ministry as empowerment" by Rowland Croucher (GRID, Summer 1989) - John Mark Ministries. Accessed from http://www.jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/8109.htm (16 September 2008).

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of life. Empowerment is a natural African practice, and elements of it can be traced in major facets of African life. Some of them follow.

7.4.1 The concept of community

A highly cherished communal life is common in Africa, despite the urbanization movement that has posed a great threat to African communities and settlement patterns. The sense of belonging to the other remains a bonding factor between individuals, families and extended families. On African communal organization, Nurnberger (2007:23) remarks, "Life is life in community; there is no other possible life. Even children are educated largely by social interaction with siblings and age groups." This indicates that the essence of communal living empowers one another for the upliftment and continuity of life. Central to this kind of African characteristic is the principle of *ubuntu* – I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am (Mbiti 1975:102). Everyone in the community is responsible for the other. Thus, the empowerment of one another takes its natural course as community members release their potentials and share their abilities to achieve communal goals. In a summary on community life in Africa, Nurnberger (2007:44) says, "Life as it is understood in Africa is in community. Any particular part is embedded in a greater whole." A consideration to share power with others for the sake of moving on together is not uncommon in the African way of life. O'Donovan (1996:155) writes, "In Africa, a person's extended family and ethnic community are the most important realities in his or her life…. It is the group of people whom you can count on to help you when you are in need or in trouble." In Africa, this understanding of responsibility for one another makes the sharing of ideas and possessions a natural empowering process.

7.4.2 Rites of passage

Another element that makes empowerment a natural activity in Africa is the notion of grooming and mentoring people in the process of life. All over Africa, life is marked by stages where it is celebrated with rituals that are always symbolic of life itself. These are life's turning points, commonly known as "rites of passage" (King 1986:47). They act like knots on a long

rope of life in Africa. Rites of passage include childbirth, a naming ceremony, initiation, marriage, and death. From birth to death, every stage in life is marked by rituals that are meant to prepare a person for the next stage. Each of the rites of passage is marked by celebrations, dedication, instructions, physical training and preparations that are real. For instance, during initiation, the central aim is to groom young or ignorant ones to become successful members of the community who can plough back success into the community to complete the circle of life. The initiates are empowered to face adult life in the full knowledge of challenges; therefore they are equipped to shoulder the responsibility to fend for themselves and their community. Mbiti (1969:121) points out that, among others, the special significance of the initiation rites is to introduce the candidates to adult life. It is the time that allows them to share in the community's full privileges and duties. Empowerment of its members is considered highly significant and therefore carried out as part of life.

7.4.3 Traditional leadership

In African communities, a one-man leadership is most uncommon. Regardless of the honour and high esteem in which traditional leaders are held, they are not considered to be the sole source of power and authority. Power is always shared to ensure that all aspects of life are cared for. Chiefs are considered to be the heads of most ethnic groups in Africa, but they do not possess all the powers. They work with *nduna* (counsellors) – a team of elderly men and women who advise the chief on how to run their community's affairs. Generally, in most African communities, it is believed that ultimate authority lies in the hands of the living-dead, because they are the ones who pioneered the existing traditions. The living elders are just custodians. Magesa (1997:246) says, "In practical terms, the most significant purpose of existence of these leaders is to guard the power of life of the community." For example, among the Maseko-Ngoni of Malawi, the paramount Chief has several titles of honour, but the most outstanding is when he is addressed as "*Ntwana kosi*" meaning – the son of the chief, not merely the chief. This confirms that the living only take care of what was initiated by the living dead; therefore, no one particular individual should hold

all the powers. Traditional chiefs in Africa empower others to take care of various facets of the tribal or communal life. Chiefs identify the different skills and abilities in their communities, so these people can receive the responsibility to take charge of various aspects of the community. For instance, some are specially selected to settle cases; some are appointed as community medicine men and women; while others are organisers of all traditional rituals, etc. The Chief usually receives progress reports of events, and coordinates all the activities to harmonize life in the community. Such levels of empowerment are achieved in the spirit of trust and a sense of belonging to one another.

The practices outlined above described the natural way in which empowerment is effected in African communities. This is the simple reason why empowerment of the laity should not be a strange phenomenon in the congregational life of any African setting. The church in Africa should not find it untheological to learn how to manage congregational life from its own roots of existence. Kanyandago (in Kinoti & Waliggo 1997:143) comments, "But the church cannot be revolutionary without being truly African. [The church in Africa] therefore needs to give a response that is grounded in the African cultural heritage and which takes into account the history and humanity of the African." A truly converted church in Africa should use its natural strength to be more missional. The African idea of empowering each member of the community, regardless of status, can draw its parallel from the Bible. We shall now examine a biblical view of how the marginalized were considered for empowerment.

7.5   EMPOWERMENT AND THE MARGINALIZED – A BIBLICAL VIEW

The church has a biblical mandate to empower the marginalized in the society and uproot social injustice. Jacobsen (2001:14) says, "Biblically speaking, the preeminent activity of the church is in the public arena, not in the sanctuary, The Holy Spirit calls and gathers the church and sends the church into the world with the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ." Where social justice is not seriously observed, there are always groups that suffer

injustice, and those who are comfortable with the status quo either do not hear, or simply negate, their grievances. The former are usually the poor in the society, women in the male dominated communities, children who are often abused, people living with disabilities, minority ethnic groups and many other pockets of people in the society who are considered and treated in less than human ways. God still cares for, and is concerned with, them. Barker (2009:150) asserts, "Poverty disempowers people and communities, making them victims of injustice. Since God is just, he has a priority for those facing injustice." Marginalization and oppression of the weak in the society is a practice that is condemned in all world religions, including African traditional religions. The biblical understanding of the marginalized is that, in the eyes of God who created them in his own image - the *imago Dei* - they are as important as any other human being. Thus, regardless of social levels, the human dignity of every person should be left intact. In fact, in several places, the Old Testament records warnings that God gave to the Israelites to treat orphans, widows (Ex. 22:22), and even strangers fairly. All over the Bible, God specifically indicates that He stands with the marginalized and is their defender against oppressors. Furthermore, God instructs that the weak and the poor should be empowered in various ways. God declares (Lev. 23:22), "*When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.*" The hungry should be provided for in communities. The widows should be defended and treated justly. If the poor borrow money and they have not repaid for a specific number of years, they should be forgiven in the sabbatical year. All these and many other Old Testament examples testify to the fact that empowerment is the opposite of oppression that God, by his nature, detests. Barker (2009:51) writes, "God therefore provided a whole range of laws and commandments, setting out a code to live by so that the oppressed did not quickly become oppressors."

The social background of the New Testament was different from that of the Old Testament. The Roman Empire's domination and oppression marred the Jews' political situation during that time. So, the talk about liberation and yearning for empowerment was very common among the Jews. Mary, in the

magnificat (Lk. 1:46-55), spoke about God's acts of "*lifting the humble up*" and "*filling the hungry with good things.*" This signifies the common wish of the people in her community in accordance with the disempowered living conditions they were experiencing. They eagerly awaited a Messiah to redeem them from the marginality that they suffered under the Roman power. They expected someone to empower them, as a nation, to move on.

Throughout the Gospels in the New Testament, Jesus Christ is recorded as having a special concern for the marginalized. His whole mission was aimed at empowering the powerless; thus, to preach the Good News to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recover the sight of the blind, and release the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). He worked with the neglected and despised in the Jewish communities, such as women and children. The healing ministry that dominates Jesus' public works proves his keen interest in the restoration of human dignity and power. Adeyemo (ed.) (2006:1213) comments, "It is clear that from the beginning to the end Jesus was oriented to the needs of the poor, both those who were poor within themselves and those who were poor in social, economic and political context." Therefore, in the biblical view, empowerment is a process of offering the marginalized an opportunity for self-sufficiency, as well as to encourage them to develop skills to graduate from dependency. Power comes from God, and, as Jacobsen (2001:40) puts it, "To the powerless, the Bible frequently promises power. The ascending Jesus promises his disciples that they will 'receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.'" Therefore, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit sustains the church that, in turn, is mandated to empower the world.

7.6   THE NEED FOR CHRISTIAN EMPOWERMENT IN MALAWI

The social context in Malawi, like throughout Africa, needs to be decisively addressed. The poor quality of life, unequal distribution of wealth, abuse of children and women, nepotism, and other social ills, are still rife across Malawi. As already shown earlier, the Malawian Christian community forms more than 80% of the population. This indicates the opportune position of

the Christian church to influence a societal upgrading, and it is not just its numbers that places the Church in Malawi in a better position, but also its understanding of God's purpose for the world. God is aggrieved when his people live in miserable conditions. In commenting on wealth and poverty from an African perspective, a contemporary African theologian, Stephen Adei (in Adeyemo [ed.] 2006:762) challenges that it is not scriptural to equate material poverty with piety. Therefore, he lodges an appeal that Christians must work to remove the barriers that prevent people from escaping from poverty.

Firstly, most Malawian Christians need to be empowered before they are urged to be tools of empowerment to the others, because they, themselves, are mostly poor. Myers (1999:255) notes, "An agent of transformation who is not also being transformed is capable of doing more harm than good." In such a case, there is need for poor Malawian Christians to understand that caring for others is an indisputable Christian responsibility and mandate. One can begin to share as a gesture of care, not only when one has more than enough. Sharing should be done with what is available, regardless of the quantity; and it should be done in obedience to God's command to care for the needy. God cares for his people and has a way of reaching out to them through those who avail themselves to be God's agents. The Gospel story of a small boy who offered his measly meal to Jesus to feed the multitude[66] serves as a good example. At first, for the disciples, it seemed impossible to do so, because, in their estimations, they had insufficient resources to cater for the gathered multitude. Then the boy took the bold step to offer the little food he had and Jesus Christ multiplied it to feed more than 5000 people. The boy's character is the Christian character that is needed in the congregations today. Usually, this is the result of Christian empowerment that induces the empowered to share their empowerment with others. O'Donovan (2000:152-153) says, "Jesus knows we do not have the ability or resources ourselves to meet the impossible needs of the poor in

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[66] This story is found in Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; and John 6:1-15. It is the only miracle that Jesus performed that is recorded in all the four of the Gospels. It presents Jesus meeting the most basic human needs using the least quality and quantity supplies.

Africa, but he still tells us to do it. Why? Because he is God, and he has the power to do what we cannot even imagine." Therefore, it is important that "empowerment" becomes a catchword for meaningful steps among Malawian Christians towards being agents of God's mission to the world.

Secondly, there is a need for empowerment, as many poor people underrate their own potential in the mission to improve their livelihoods. More often than not, people are swift to criticize their governments for their poor living conditions, without assessing what they themselves could have done. The empowerment of communities, based on Christian values, can help people to recover their God-given identity and vocation. Myers (1999:117) says,

> With a rediscovered identity and a character to match, transformational development works to empower people to live out these values in search of their new vision. This means teaching people to read, to understand and interpret their context, to figure out what and who is contributing to their current situation, and then to decide what they want to do about it.

Many Malawian Christians are in need of theological analysis and an interpretation of their living conditions. This is related to the biblical search for God's stance in such a situation. The obvious outcome of such a search will be the confirmation that all human beings are made in God's image and they bear his identity. His many biblical promises are still true, even amidst poverty and other forms of suffering. Consequently, empowerment will contribute to the process of realising that God has provided the poor with gifts to fulfil his creation mandate, in which every human being can be fruitful and productive.

7.7   PRINCIPLES OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is intended to permanently influence the lives of individuals or communities. It should not be carried out without proper planning and strategy. Employment of good principles for using empowerment as a methodology for transformation can help to achieve the intended outcome. Principles of empowerment can vary from situation to situation, but there are

always commonalities among them in different fields and approaches. To consider any principles of empowerment to be good, one needs to re-cap the definition of "empowerment."

> Empowerment is the process of achieving continuous improvement in an organization's performance by developing and extending the competent influence of individuals and teams over the areas and functions, which affect their performance, and that of the total organization (Kinlaw 1995:11).

One should keep the goal of any empowerment in mind, which is to release the untapped human power in an organisation or individual so as to generate the initiative for improvement.

7.7.1 Perspectives on empowerment principles

A few examples of principles of empowerment from selected sources will now be presented.

Example 1: The International Institute for Human Empowerment[67]
This American human empowerment institution aims to help individuals and organizations to recognize and harness their power. They outline the following as principles of empowerment:

- All people are created equal.
- Leadership is based upon integrity, character, ethic, talent, and skill.
- Honesty is the highest character value.
- Deceit must be eliminated from all systems.
- The human spirit is the highest priority.
- All systems must serve people.
- New systems must be created that value the human spirit and promote its development.

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[67] The International Institute for Human Empowerment is dedicated to the mission of empowering all people toward the attainment of basic human rights, including quality education, healthcare, food, and a peaceful and loving environment. The Institute was founded by Sue Kidd Shipe (Email: sueshipe@humanempowerment.org). Their postal address is P.O. Box 3920, Albany, NY 12203.

- The highest and only priority of government, business, churches, and families is to serve people.

- The individual must be empowered to serve; all who are not empowered drain the system of its most valuable resource.

- True empowerment is real equality. Democracy is its product.

The principles listed above can be viewed as containing social Christian values with a special emphasis on anthropocentric rights. Equality, honesty and integrity are shown to be the governing issues in a process of empowering people. The list further indicates that empowerment results in people acquiring the ability and skills to design and pursue their own programs in a true democratic manner.

Example 2: *Harley's eight critical principles of empowerment*[68]

William B. Harley is the President of Harley Training and Consulting Inc., St Paul, Minnesota, in the United States of America. As a trainer in Business Management, he writes with an organizational improvement drive. Harley (1995:5) contends, "To improve successfully, organizations must balance operational and human factors in change initiative. The balance begins to emerge as managers internalise eight critical principles of empowerment...." He lists the eight principle of empowerment as follows:

- Protect the dignity of all employees;

- Manage perceptions, not just the "facts";

- Use organizational authority to release, rather than inhibit, human potential;

- Use consensus decision making;

- Clarify vision, mission, objectives, goals and job descriptions;

- Unshackle the human desire to be of service to others;

- Come from values (identify values first, then guide the people);

- Provide the feedback requested by employees.

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[68] This is taken from William B. Harley's article, "Eight critical principles of empowerment" in *Empowerment in organizations*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1995, pp 5-12 © MCB University Press. ISSN 0968-4891. Accessed on http://www.emeraldinsight.com.ez.sun.ac.za

Harley believes that, when these critical eight principles are adhered to in an organization, they will not only help human and operational issues to balance, but will also allow the improvement to be unifying, innovative, continuous and permanent.

Example 3: *O'Donovan's principle of empowerment*

Wilbur O'Donovan Jr. was a missionary in West and East Africa and has lectured in several African theological colleges. He articulates the role of the church as helping the needy, especially in the impoverished African context. An outstanding point that O'Donovan puts across is that the people being empowered should not be deemed as less than human, without any feelings and values or even capabilities, and in need of superiors to save their situation. In order to be improved, they should not be despised.

Together with this principle of empowerment, it is necessary to consider sustainability in the process. Empowerment should not be a relief measure but a transformational genesis. O'Donovan (2000:157) writes, "It may be necessary to give the person fish for a short time while you are teaching him how to catch fish with a fishing-net. You may need to provide him with the material to make the net." This also is about the preservation of the empowered people's dignity

Equally important is the principle of using a holistic approach in the process of empowerment. People should be empowered so that they can set their paces to develop socially, spiritually and economically. They should not be indoctrinated with "pie-in-the-sky" theories. O'Donovan (2000:157) says, "God is concerned with all the needs of human beings – not just with the souls. The hearts of people are made open to the love of Christ when they are helped at a point of physical need in their lives."

7.7.2 Empowerment principles drawn from the examples above

Regardless of the different angles from which the examples above speak, as a focus of this discussion, several common elements can be drawn for the

purpose of formulating principles for empowering the laity. The following are the summarized extracts of principles of empowerment that are suggested to empower the laity.

Firstly, all involved in the empowerment of the laity should bear in mind that it is a theological exercise - God Himself is involved at the centre of the process. Therefore, all people should be seen how God sees them as equally created, regardless of their social and economical levels. A good exegesis of John 3:16[69] and 10:10[70] reveals that God loves and values every human being; and wants everyone to prosper and live a life full of hope. God's love inspires Him to find a way for his people to be redeemed from a hopeless situation into positive thinking and living. As a principle of empowerment in a congregational setting, equality can even help the church shift from being clerically, to all-participatory, centred, thus narrowing or terminating the gap that has always existed between the clergy and the laity.

Secondly, there is the principle of dignity. Both Harley and O'Donovan (in the examples above) believe, in the first place, that any empowerment process should preserve and protect the dignity of those being empowered. On this point, O'Donovan (2000:156) explains,

> The good way [of empowerment] builds up the dignity and responsibility of the needy and gives them a sense of their importance and value to God. The bad way degrades the needy and makes them feel dependent, helpless, hopeless and useless.

This is an issue of human rights; every human being has the right to be respected. It is also a theological issue, because every person was created in the image of God. The people being empowered should not always be put at the receiving end without them participating. Batchelor (1993:19) comments, "Men and women take pride in being able to support themselves. Development programmes that turn them into beggars – or make them think

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[69] "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (NIV).
[70] "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*" (NIV).

that they are being treated as such – are counterproductive." So, in empowerment, all people should be treated with respect and sensitivity. In the process of empowerment, the facilitators must regard all others as stakeholders and important resources, or co-workers. The practice of consensus decision-making is important.

Thirdly, empowerment should seek to change people's lives for the better. Empowerment, driven by kingdom values, should liberate people and give them *shalom*. The International Institute for Human Empowerment [71] describes the human spirit as the highest priority, for which new systems that value and improve it must be created. The emphasis is that empowerment should aim at making a difference in human lives. This is in line with the meaning of theology as transformative action (Hendriks 2004:33). When all systems target to serve the human spirit, they should be able to stir the potential in those human beings to serve others, as a result of themselves being served and empowered. In this case, the results of any empowerment system should not be an end goal in itself, but the beginning of yet another empowering process for others. O'Donovan (2000:157) appeals:

> God's people must help needy people to become self-sustaining. They should help them even to be able to help others, rather than making them dependent on the help they receive. It is only when people begin to help and reach out to others instead of just thinking about their own needs and problems that they are truly helped and changed.

In the same vein, Harley (above) calls this an "unshackling human desire to serve others," which reflects the basic role of various offices in a congregation's life where discipleship and empowerment are at work. According to Ephesians 4:11-12, the different offices (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) are intended to equip the saints (all members) for service to others in order to build the Body of Christ. Commenting on this biblical passage, Ogden (2003:132) says, "Paul appears to define equipping [empowering], not in terms of pastoral images or functions, but in terms of results. In other words, equipping is a means to a greater end."

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[71] Reference taken from http://www.humanempowerment.org

Finally, accountability and transparency should be the norm in the process of empowerment. As a corporate venture, where all stakeholders participate and contribute, all should know every detail in the system. Integrity, honesty and trustworthiness will not only sustain the system, but will promote its smooth advancement. All financial issues should be reported with clarity to eliminate any cloud of doubt. Empowerment involves individuals and groups of people, so it involves the public. Therefore, public funds should be as clear as possible to encourage concerned people, whether in a congregation or general community.

In summary, principles of empowerment seem similar in different disciplines, because they all focus on the well-being of people. In business institutions, empowerment relates its customers and employees in a balance with production and service delivery. Therefore, the principles in such an institution are established in line with what is contained in their vision and mission statements. The spirit of missions and Kingdom values should drive empowerment in the church. The focus is not on only the members, but also on non-members, as God's mission to the world. Therefore, all principles of empowerment in the life of the church should be theologically sound. Biblical core values, such as compassion, honesty, love, integrity, trustworthiness and self-denial, should be practised in order to discern God's purpose for his people.

7.8   THE CHAPTER'S CONCLUSION

It has been established that "empowerment of the laity" is the key phrase required for the church to survive in the postmodern world. Without departing from the theme of empowerment of the laity in the church, this chapter has exposed and elaborated how "empowerment," as a terminology, is used in different non-theological sectors. Yet, the bottom line established is that every aspect of empowerment focuses on improving human beings in personal and service delivering activities. In summary, Rubin and Rubin (1986:20) say, "Empowerment simultaneously encompasses both the concept of

decentralized democracy and increased capacity of people to make decisions that affect their lives," i.e., it is intended to restore people's dignity and self-respect. Therefore, an understanding of empowerment from business leadership, education, and developmental perspectives is extremely essential for the church, as a faith community, to engage a holistic approach in its own empowerment strategies.

Empowerment of the laity is part and parcel of the church's on-going search for solutions for contemporary communal problems in order to discern the will of God, unpack it and pursue it. Hendriks (2004:30) comments:

> The solution to faith communities' questions about how to participate in God's missional praxis is critical, constructive dialogue or correlation between their interpretations of the realities of the global and local context and the faith resources at their disposal. On the one hand, the discernment process is rational and on the other, it is a mystery.

This is a practical theological view of how the church should deal with human concerns that surround it in all its endeavours, especially in the African context. It really remains a mystery for the church to participate faithfully and make a workable contribution towards God's missional operations. It all depends on the church's faithful interpretation of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the church's effort to discern God's will through empowerment of the laity, all aspects of empowerment are therefore tested and applied where applicable. The use of empowerment, as a strategy in the church, cannot be ignored in the modern movement of institutional survival. Kinlaw (1995:3) notes, "Empowerment has become more than a theoretical possibility or experiment. It is now a developmental strategy that organizations must embrace to stay competitive and survive."

This chapter also pointed out that God is always involved in the empowerment of his people. The different biblical views have shown that the theology of empowerment is developed when one examines the very nature of the Triune God and his involvement with marginalized groups of people. Both the theory and practice of empowerment cannot be detached from the fact

that God cares and is always concerned with the disempowered or oppressed people. He wants all people to be equal so that they can serve Him and serve one another effectively in their participation in his mission. Dignity and equality are essential principles in communal living. Ledwith (2008:28) says, "Empowerment is a key concept at the heart of radical community development. It is the process whereby we develop the theory and practice of equality." In other words, through empowerment, people are liberated to contribute in local decision-making, local self-reliance, participatory democracy, and social learning (Myers 1999:99-100). Usually, transformation is a natural result of empowerment, which the church should consider as its life's agenda.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EMPOWERMENT AT CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL: A CASE STUDY OF THE NKHOMA CCAP CONGREGATION

8.1   INTRODUCTION

The concept of empowerment of the laity has been clarified by establishing its dynamic transformational role in the life of the church. This chapter now demonstrates empowerment of the laity as a proven strategy for transformation. In the previous chapter, the line of thought showed that empowered congregations could play an important role in the empowerment of local communities by means of participation at different levels. Hendriks (2004:216) explains, "By empowering local people they are able to transform dysfunctional societies. This also applies to research." In the interest of such a paradigm, this chapter presents a case study that was conducted within the framework of PAR in the Nkhoma Congregation of the CCAP (the Nkhoma Synod).

8.2   A THEORETICAL CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

Gillham (2000:32) says, "Case study research is very much like detective work. Nothing is disregarded: everything is weighed and sifted; and checked or corroborated." That is why this case study bears an ethnographic nature where the researcher adopts an insider's role of observing and describing. Case study research falls under ethnographic research. Ethnography demands that the researcher becomes an insider because of its special focus more on detailed and accurate description, than explanation (Babbie 2007:293). To do that, ethnographers must engage the grassroots reality of the lives and culture of the group being studied, by actually living among them for a reasonable period (Dawson 2009:18; Yin 2009:15; Hancock & Algozzine 2006:31), which worked well for this researcher who is, by occupation and responsibility, part of the field of research.

According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006:33), there are three types of case study research designs namely, exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. Their distinctive features are:

- *Exploratory designs* seek to define the research questions of a subsequent study or try to determine the feasibility of research procedures.
- *Explanatory designs* seek to establish cause-and-effect relationships, and
- *Descriptive designs* attempt to present a complete description of a phenomenon within its context.

This case study engages all three types, regardless of their affinity towards mere description, because of their ethnographic nature. It targets a clear presentation of the central research question and, at the same time, point out the cause-and-effects of what a precise description thereof observed. In any case, Gillham (2000:13) writes, "Case study is a main method. Within it different sub-methods are used; interviews, observations, document and record analysis, work samples and so on."

In the field of social research, the case study research method is not without shortcomings and criticism. Yin (2009:14-16) mentions four, which are outlined here along with this researcher's comments.

First, the method is criticized for a lack of vigour, in the sense that the researcher can become sloppy, disregarding systematic procedures. Never-theless, this does not hold much water, because sloppiness can be found in any type of research method, if the researcher does not work hard.

Second, case studies are considered to provide little data for scientific generalization. The response to such a criticism is that the ability of case studies to draw accurate generalizations is found in its focus on analytical, not statistical generalizations.

A <u>third</u> criticism is that case studies take too long. As a result, they produce massive and unreadable documents due to congestion of data. This is not always the case, especially when the researcher is well equipped with reporting skills that portrays a precise and valid research outcome.

A <u>fourth</u> common criticism of the case study research method is that it does not include randomized field trials or true experiments, which point to the non-quantifiable outcomes common in case studies. Yin (2009:16) says, "Overlooked has been the possibility that case studies can offer important evidence to complement experiments." After all, this does not mean that case studies are confined only to a qualitative data approach. Where need be, quantitative data and their analysis can illuminate the descriptive efforts of case studies (Gilham 2000:80).

The case study presented at this stage has been identified as the most fitting tool for this particular research study, in the full light of its strengths and weaknesses. It has basically been deemed the most appropriate tool to describe the way of doing theology in the Nkhoma CCAP Congregation. Hendriks (2004:214) advises, "The congregation's leaders must take the responsibility to ensure that the process of doing theology is a constant vigil, part of the congregation's culture." This case study guides particularly into data development to address its research question: "W*hat should be done in the Malawian Church to lead the laity and lay leadership towards a holistic ministry relevant to the contemporary situation in an effort to develop congregations into self-reliant, spiritually matured, all-participatory and social service-providing ones that strive to act as signs of the reign of God?*" Through the qualitative data analysis and from long-term participant observation in the congregation, the case study seeks to discover a practical way of energizing the laity at congregational level in order to maximize their missional role. A basic outline on selected elements of this particular case study will now be presented.

8.3 THE SETTING OF THE CASE STUDY

The case study engaged two groups of people within the CCAP Nkhoma Synod's setting. Firstly, it engaged the grassroots laity and their lay leaders at congregational level in the Nkhoma CCAP Congregation. As explained above (2.4.2), this congregation has 6500 members spread over 76 wards that form 19 prayer houses, which are grouped into five zones for administrative purposes. Each zone has a holy communion centre. On average, each Church elder is responsible for approximately 90 members. Secondly, the study involved ordained clergy drawn from various Presbyteries within the CCAP Nkhoma Synod. Their role was to appraise lay leadership empowerment in the Synod. They were identified, not as mere representatives, but as keen researchers who contributed to the triangulation and validity of the study.

8.3.1 Engaging the laity at congregational level

For 18 months (March 2007 to July 2008), this researcher, with the assistance of one Church staff member (the Church clerk), engaged the members of the Nkhoma CCAP Congregation in an energizing exercise by implementing training and planning workshops. The outcome of these workshops was converted into practical projects. As the resident minister in the congregation, the researcher designed three-phased cycles of meetings throughout the five major prayer houses (holy communion centres also known as zones) of Station, Chigodi, Chipala, Mkundi and Chipamphale (cf. *Table 2* in *2.4.2.1* above). This translates into 15 meetings conducted at three levels (phases). During the three-phase meetings, the focus was on a self-evaluation exercise for each of the five zones. These three phases constitute field-research work designed for this study. Much of the work in all the centres was done in group discussions to generate data that represent the target group's collective opinion. The individual interviews conducted were meant to clarify the information ciphered from the study group's work results. A description of each of the phases of the research meetings now follows.

8.3.1.1   Phase 1 meetings: Setting off

The Phase 1 cycle of meetings was introductory and was meant to sensitize and engage the lay leadership in the quest for the Church's expected missional practices. This pastor-researcher deliberately designed it in the form of normal leadership training and empowerment meetings at each of the zone centres. Through a story-sharing process, the participants were oriented and guided into full discussion. All the Church elders, deacons, committee members of all the Church committees, and leaders of women's guild and youth groups participated in these Phase 1 meetings.

Within two weeks, a series of five initial meetings were conducted (from 6 to 20 March 2007), thus covering the entire congregation's zones. These meetings were initially planned to be conducted in a week for the purpose of consistency, but two of the five meetings failed in the first week due to funerals, which are a major part of cultural obstacles beyond the researcher's control. As part of research ethics (Dawson 2009:149), the researcher is expected to cope with any culturally sensitive issues to avoid influencing the research participants negatively. Thus, the two meetings were held the following week. Every meeting started with a briefing session. The researcher explained the aim of the research meeting to the participants (cf. Appendix 3 – Briefing notes). Enough time was allowed for the participants' discussions, questions and comments in order to put them on board. Their responses and contributions contained enough evidence of their understanding of the subject matter. By the end of each of the phase 1 meetings, participants in every zone made resolutions for the way forward as the Church's move for doing theology. A summary of overall resolutions in all the five zones follows:

- Participants agreed to meet within a week to choose what they would try to do at prayer house level; and to plan for the chosen action.
- Participants agreed to extend the participating groups to all interested members and local traditional leaders.
- Participants agreed to communicate the shared research objectives with all the groups that they represented, e.g., the wards, women's guild and

youth groups. (For this purpose, printed summarized notes were distributed in the local language, Chichewa.)

- Participants committed themselves to invite all members and local leaders to the next meeting.

These points made up the agenda of the phase 2 activities.

8.3.1.2   Phase 2 meetings: Charting the way and action plan

In May 2007, a series of phase 2 meetings was conducted. Together, these meetings intended to develop a practical methodology and activities as a way forward towards impacting the society as regards their congregational needs. In addition to the elected lay leaders of the Church, all congregational members in the various Church committees, as well as local community leaders, were invited, as phase 1 participants had agreed. These meetings took the form of planning workshops facilitated with a focus on empowering the laity. Church members from various Church committees were helped to assess their ministries at congregational as well as zone level, and plan together. May is usually the most appropriate month for planning in most CCAP Nkhoma Synod Congregations, as it is harvest time. The Church members, who are mostly subsistence farmers, are able to project their financial status gauged from the intended harvest on their fields.

The main mode of the meetings was discussion in groups preceded by a briefing. Participants were divided into discussion groups that comprised a variety of characters and representations, such as gender, level of church position, age groups, etc. This researcher formulated guiding questions (cf. Table 8a below) which were meant to consolidate the insight shared during the preliminary phase meetings. After the group discussions, there was a report-back session, which led to the formulation of resolutions and a corporate plan of action for each zone.

At the phase 2 level, each zone decided on what activity they could immediately embark upon as a way of exercising self-motivation. The short-

listed resolutions are summarised in a tabular form (cf. Annexe 1 below). Resulting from the motivational empowerment workshop, every zone decided, independent of the others, on their activity priorities, from which it is evident that the workshops stirred self-esteem in the congregants and motivated them for action. Among themselves, each zone elected a task force committee of eight people to co-ordinate and keep record of events for future prayer house reports. The committee was mandated to call for prayer house meetings when deemed necessary.

8.3.1.3   Phase3 meetings: Progress assessment

Between the phase 2 and 3 meetings, 15 months elapsed. During this period, there were numerous other meetings of both a formal and informal nature. In any case, they were part of the normal congregational activities where this researcher conducted routine pastoral visits and engaged church lay leaders in several Church forums. Consultations with co-ordinating teams and Church elders were held at least every three months for progress updating. Different zones demanded special meetings at times, depending on their encountered problems worth sharing. In August 2008, a series of meetings was conducted that aimed at evaluating the planned work, and assessing transformation in each zone. Then, in September 2008, all the zones were invited to meet for reporting at congregational level. The aim was to share stories and harmonize the activities as a way of formulating an overall congregational picture of the impact made due to the deliberate empowerment of the laity.

As from the September meeting, this researcher compiled the first results of the research and shared them with the participants. In a process of evaluation, the participants discussed the draft report, and all the recommended adjustments were taken care of.

8.3.2 Engaging the clergy as teaching elders

As part of the on-going research, the researcher facilitated three workshops for serving ministers, which were held in conjunction with the JMTI, as part of the in-service training workshops that JMTI organizes regularly. The three

workshops were conducted at three different venues in three consecutive weeks between 8 and 26 June 2009. The Commission for Witness (CFW) funded the workshops and they were co-facilitated by the researcher and Rev. Dr. Johann du Plessis, a senior Church minister of the DRC's Kenridge Congregation in Cape Town, who is also a part-time New Testament lecturer at Stellenbosch University. These research workshops targeted 60 of the 84 ministers in eight of the then 14 existing presbyteries.

At this stage, the clergy were engaged in their capacity as teaching elders to appraise the lay leadership empowerment in the Nkhoma Synod. The appraisal had a three-fold purpose namely:

1. To assess the validity of empowerment strategies and training tools generally being used in the Nkhoma Synod.
2. To evaluate the different analyses that church leaders (the clergy) use in the Nkhoma Synod in their congregational operations.
3. To test the applicability of the empowerment strategies (developed within the Nkhoma Congregation) to other congregations within the CCAP Nkhoma Synod.

8.4   THE QUALITATIVE DIMENSION

This case study received a prolonged time to allow for a natural process of data collection, while hearing the stories of the people in the congregation and journeying with them in the empowerment process. As qualitative research, there was a need to scrap all presumptions to allow the insiders' story to take shape. Hancock and Algozzine (2006:8) say,

In qualitative research, the goal is to understand the situation under investigation primarily from the participants' and not the researcher's perspective.... Because the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative research, s[he] must spend significant amounts of time in the environment of those being studied.

In the process, this researcher never departed from the methodological framework of doing theology that clings to the vitality of God's initiative.

Theology is about God and is about the faith community, and about the faith community discerning the will of God, leading to active involvement in church and society (Hendriks 2004:34). The involvement of people (the church) in the research draws in some elements of social research, such as coding and making use of grounded theory.

8.4.1 Coding

In the process of data collection, the use of codes is a necessary technique. This was done in its simplest form, after reaching data saturation point in order to categorize pieces of data for a later analysis stage. Babbie (2001:640) describes coding as a process of transforming raw information into standard form that can be analysed and interpreted. Coded data is easy to process manually or by using computers. Computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (QADAS) is commonly used when researchers engage computers.

The codes developed in this data collection and development were first handwritten and then compiled in a tabular form (see Table 8d). As the process advanced, "*the codes were compared for any similarities, differences and/or general patterns emerging in the data*" (Kunkwenzu 2007:89). This was done with careful consideration of establishing a grounded theory as a tool for the eventual data development required for analysis and interpretation.

8.4.2 Grounded theory and its application

In this research, as in any qualitative research, the use of grounded theory could not be avoided. Gillham (2000:12) writes, "The case study researcher, working inductively from what is there in the research setting develops grounded theory: theory that is grounded in the evidence that is turned up." In short, grounded theory is a substantive theory that is generated inductively from the data obtained systematically through research (Kunkwenzu 2007:43; Holloway 1997:80; Hancock & Algozzine 2006:9). In this case study, the use of grounded theory was necessary in order to give a reasonable interpretation of the data generated; with a clear understanding

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of the context and interactions in the study process. In situations where little is known, or where a new and exciting outlook is needed in a familiar setting, grounded theory is especially useful (Holloway 1997:81). A good thing about grounded theory is that it is flexible and enables new issues, which the researcher may not have thought about previously, to emerge (Dawson 2009:20). In summary, the use of grounded theory took an upper hand in the development of data in this research.

8.5   DATA DEVELOPMENT

In this case study, data was developed, not just collected. The argument is that this researcher developed different means of choice, guided by ethno-graphic observations, to generate information from the participants. As observed by researchers, such as Kunkwenzu (2007),[72] the term "data collection" is ambiguous when used in grounded theory research, because the type of questions posed in the process shapes the data. With reference to other researchers, Kunkwenzu (2007:47)[73] further contends:

Data development in a grounded theory study does not proceed through the traditional process of research plan, data development and data analysis. Data development and data analysis occur simultaneously, because the analysis directs the sampling of data.

For this reason, the brief section that follows presents the background and the process of data development and analysis that led to the research results of this study.

8.5.1 The background of data development

This researcher played a three-fold role in this particular study. The <u>first role</u> was being a pastor/researcher. This study is set within the parameters of normal congregation life where the researcher ministers. As such, he has the advantage of full acceptance by the people involved in the research. Rapport developed   through   the   researcher's   long   acquaintance   with   the

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[72] Other researchers mentioned by Kunkwenzu (2007) are Reddy (2001) and Gough (1999).
[73] In her work, Kunkwenzu (2007) refers to Charmaz (2006), Glaser & Strauss (1967) and Strauss & Corbin (1998).

congregation's traditions and values on the ground. For six years, he was part of the general membership before he assumed pastoral responsibility in the congregation for another three years. This long-time relationship provided both parties' openness, even during face-to-face interviews.

The second role is that of research moderator or facilitator. This is a common role for any researcher, especially when it involves many participants or when it comes to running focus groups. According to Dawson (2009:28), the moderator leads the discussions. He/she introduces the topic, asks specific questions, controls digressions and stops digressing conversations. This role was also carried out with ease, because the participants already recognised the researcher as the conductor, and there was mutual trust.

The third role was that of an observer. During the time of study, the researcher carried out his full pastoral duties and naturally interacted with members of the congregation at different levels. Different formal or informal views shared by members were recorded in a dairy and analysed shortly thereafter.

8.5.2 Data development strategies

(i)   Focused group discussion

In this study, the outstanding strategy for data development was the focus group. Common in qualitative research, this data development technique involves a small group of people who are asked to focus on an issue and discuss it in depth with the researcher (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner 2006:150-151). Usually, the discussions are held on a number of occasions over time. In this case, the research focus was the empowerment of the church's laity in order to release their potential towards becoming a missional church.

Dawson (2009:29) says, "Focus groups may be called *discussion groups* or *group interviews*. A number of people are asked to come together in a group to discuss a certain issue." As presented above (7.3.1), focus groups were engaged at all of the phase meetings; but was more systematic at phase 2. Babbie *et al.* (2001:292) say,

The main advantage of focus groups in comparison to participant observations is the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time based on the researcher's ability to assemble and direct focus groups.

Furthermore, the focus-group method has a few advantages as Dawson (2009:30) shows:

- One can receive a wide range of responses during one meeting.
- Participants can ask each other questions which can be of importance to the researcher.
- It helps people to remember issues that they might otherwise have forgotten.
- The gregarious instinct found in the group helps to minimize restraints on data development.
- The group effect is a useful resource in data analysis.

As such, it was deemed right and proper to use the focus-group technique as a method in developing data in this qualitative research. George Kamberelis and Greg Dimitriadis (in Denzin & Lincoln [eds] 2005:903) observe, "On practical level, focus groups are efficient in the sense that they generate large quantities of material from relatively large numbers of people in a relatively short time." However, it requires good group-organizing skills on the moderator's part to put the focus group in the focus of research.

There were a total of 25 focus groups for the entire congregation at an average of five focus groups per zone. For these meetings, the researcher formulated discussion questions. With the help of appointed elders and deacons, who acted as tentative group leaders, the discussions were first organized in simultaneous small groups around the prayer house premises. The researcher/moderator supervised the discussions and guided them where necessary. Each small group appointed their own secretary/reporter who recorded all the group's points. These small group discussions took 60 to 90 minutes. After that, all the groups converged in the church building for a report back session. Each group presented their points that were

commented upon, criticized or asked to be clarified, before the house adopted them. All the agreed points were recorded on a separate sheet of paper. Below are the questions and the top five most common group responses, according to the summary:

Figure 8a: *Phase 2 meetings' group discussion responses*

Question	Common responses
[1] What do you think is the laity's responsibility in the congregation's life?	To give offerings To attend church services and Holy communion To participate in church projects To pray and obey church rules To support one another (members) during funerals and weddings
[2] What is the main role of a church minister in a congregation?	Preaching Administering sacraments Drawing church programs and plans Conducting funeral services Visiting people
[3] What is the church's (the laity's) responsibility towards the life of the general community?	To spread the Gospel To demonstrate love and good morals To help the sick and the poor To pray for it To initiate development (personal and communal)
[4] In what ways can the church (the laity) become involved in addressing the community's social problems?	Intensifying their HIV/AIDS care ministries Sensitizing local leaders Initiating small-scale working groups Organizing community grain banks Communal-care advocacy
[5] What motivation can the church (the laity) have to partner with local authorities in the community's social welfare?	It is part of their mission to the world They have a biblical mandate to care It is the nature of the church to be concerned with others They have the structure in which to operate They are part of the community under the local authorities
[6] Why is the church (the laity) not doing what it is supposed to do?	No knowledge of their potential Lack of self-confidence Lack of the required skills Poor leadership No personal space due to structures

With reference to the list of adopted points of discussion, the house now proceeded towards action planning. Holloway (1997:73) comments, "Focus groups can be combined with individual interviews, observation or other methods of data collection .... The findings from the focus group interviews are often used as a basis for action." (For a compiled list of resolutions and priorities made in all the zones, see Appendix 1.)

The focus group method was also the main data development strategy in meetings with the clergy during workshops (cf. 8.3.2).

(ii)   Face-to-face interviews

While the focus group data development method can be self-sufficient, it still has room for other methods. Face-to-face interviews is one of them. The type of face-to-face interviews used in this research was semi-structured. On this, Gillham (2000:65) comments, "This is the most important form of interviewing in case study research. Well done, it can be the richest single source of data." However, face to face interviews were not used in this study as a primary source, but was employed for corroboration of some of the data generated by the focus groups. For that purpose, two to three people were chosen from each zone for interviews. These interviewees were not identified merely on the basis of availability, but they were also deemed to have the best information to address the topic in focus (Hancock & Algozzine 2006:40). An interview guide was formulated (cf. Appendix 2), but electronic tape recorders were not used to prevent disrupting the natural flow and flexibility during interviews. Notes were produced immediately after every interview to capture all the valued points that were committed to memory.

(iii)   Observation and pastoral interaction

The day-to-day interaction, which this researcher/pastor had with people, was found to be an important strategy for data development, especially in the rural setting where the research mainly took place - an African communal setting where visiting, chatting and eating together take place naturally. Consequently, congregational work for a pastor in such a setting involves natural interaction in homes, market places and public functions, such as weddings and funeral ceremonies. In ordinary circumstances, the position of a church minister is respected in rural communities, and many would not feel free to chat ordinarily with the minister. Nevertheless, simplicity and humility are rewarding virtues on the part of any researcher. This researcher's acquaintance with the general community at all levels created an opportunity to probe for more information without raising any suspicion on the part of the contributors. During these interactions, the researcher took the role of a

participant-observer. Yin (2009:111) describes participant-observation as a special mode of observation in which the observer is not merely passive. He/she may assume different roles within a case study situation and can even participate in the events under study. Thus, this researcher participated in the ordinary congregation and community life while noting any relevant information that could contribute to the on-going research. In simple terms, an observer should watch what people do; listen to what they say; and, sometimes, ask them questions for clarification (Gillham 2000:45).

In fact, observation does not entail an interaction without direction. Hancock and Algozzine (2006:47) indicate,

The researcher develops an observation guide and conducts the observation in a setting chosen to maximize the usefulness of data that are gathered. Responses are systematically recorded for later review and analysis.

As in the face-to-face interviews, discipline was needed to record important observations as soon as possible, because memory can sometimes lapse.

(iv)   Questionnaire

This data development strategy was used only when engaging the clergy during the workshops (8.3.2). At the beginning of each workshop, each church minister received a questionnaire that was completed and returned before the end of the workshop programme. The questionnaire was labelled "*An evaluative reflection on the trends of laity empowerment in the Nkhoma Synod – a Minister's view.*" It had open-ended questions for the sake of allowing the respondents to use their own words and express themselves freely (Dawson 2009:88). This was done to avoid the common problem that questionnaires often encounter, as Gillham (2000:79) puts it, "The trouble with questionnaires is that people often ignore them or don't complete them properly (even when they are 'simple' and 'obvious'). In other words, data quality or completeness suffers." The overall questionnaire's focus was on the assessment of empowerment strategies and training tools that ministers in the Nkhoma Synod use as they carry out their roles as teaching elders. (The questionnaire is attached as Appendix 4.)

8.6   DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents a summary of the findings and an interpretation of the data developed during this case study. Hancock and Algozzine (2006:56) note, "In case study research, making sense of information collected from multiple sources is a recursive process in which the researcher interacts with the information throughout the investigative process." What it means here is that there is an ongoing examination and interpretation of data from beginning to end in case study research. This differs from other research forms, in which data examination is done at the end of the process.

In this case, the results and the interpretation presented were acquired through the triangulation of pieces of data sourced by means of all the strategies outlined above. Yin (2009:114) defines "triangulation" as a "rationale for using multiple sources of evidence." Therefore, at this point, the analysis and the interpretation of data reflect different aspects of the same case study. What follows now in this section is a list of the remarkable revelations from the analysis and interpretations.

8.6.1   Strength of the approach

Before presenting the data analysis, it is worth commenting on the data development approach that led to the analysis. In this study, the approach to the development of data took a unique nature, different from the familiar congregational approach in the Nkhoma Synod. Normally, in the Nkhoma Synod, a minister is seen as the only researcher on congregational matters. He collects and uses data from the centre in a centrifugal manner, and designs a way forward for the congregation. The members bring information from the outer prayer houses to the central prayer house (the Station), which is generally the seat of church administration, because that is where the minister dwells. However, the data presented in this research was developed through interaction with all members at grassroots level. As such, the approach had its strength in:

a. *The use of zones*: This research used a decentralised approach. Instead of bringing all the involved people to the Station (main) prayer house, it implemented the zones as basic operational units. The approach reduced the travel distances of the participants and increased their zeal, without spoiling the natural atmosphere of the research process.

b. *Direct participation of the grassroots members*: Normally, in the Nkhoma Congregation and the Nkhoma Synod as a whole, it is a church tradition that meetings are meant to discuss church issues, and only church elders or deacons should attend. In this case, the direct involvement of the non-leadership laity in the focus group was in itself empowerment of the laity. They were keen to point out issues in the church that the church elders and deacons may hesitate to do.

c. **Involvement of local leaders**: Local leaders are rarely CCAP Church members and are often deemed to be strangers in the church. They are only invited to church during special services of worship, but not for discussions of church matters. Their presence enhanced the level of influence that the church has in the community, because it addressed the possible lack of dialogue between the church and its surrounding community. The level of discussion was raised to engage workable and acceptable issues that addressed the reality on the ground. Furthermore, the "outsiders'" attendance changed the community's perception and attitude towards the church. While it was not easy for the church elders to accept local leaders into church discussions, it was eventually discovered to be of significant benefit.

8.6.2 Members' self-understanding: A ministry within ministry

From the common responses to the very first question (*What do you think is the responsibility of the laity in the congregation's life?*) in different focus groups, one could immediately detect members' lack of theological self-understanding. For instance, each of the top five responses placed more emphasis on traditional practices and missed out on correct theological answers. A picture that emanates from the responses is a hazy self-understanding of lay members' position in the church. Their theological

understanding of their membership in the body of Christ overshadows their commitment to what the congregation demands of them. The church's *social demands,* such as the giving of offerings, attending church services, participating in church projects and supporting one another during funerals and weddings can be better described as "ministries within the ministry," rather than "responsibilities." As such, there is an indication that the ministries within the church ministry are taking an upper hand at the expense of members' core responsibility. The laity's focus leans more towards serving the church than being agents of service in the church. The overall missional task of the church is obscured by the in-house demands of maintenance. Two paradigm shifts in the members' self-understanding were deemed to be eminently suitable for the right positioning of the church, namely:

8.6.2.1 *From passengers to co-drivers*

As evident in the data above, the laity's passive attitude in the congregation was caused by diminishing their participation in other church activities. At leadership and non-leadership levels, lay members are simply passengers while the pastor drives. He does this by using the church elders and other leaders as auxiliary drivers. The challenge is to move the laity from being passengers to becoming co-drivers.

8.6.2.2. *From consuming to producing*

Along the same lines, there is evidence in the data that the laity in the congregation are more on the receiving end than on the giving end. For instance, the common response to the question: "*What can the main role of a church minister be in a congregation?"* depict the laity as consuming what the clergy produces. The table below summarizes the scope of the set of role expectancy. It puts the clergy at the hub of more or less everything.

Table 8b – The clergy working for the laity

The clergy	Preaching to	... the laity
	Administering sacraments to	
	Drawing church programmes for ...	
	Conducting funeral services to	
	Visiting homes of	

This explains that the church's life circles around the clergy, while the laity play a passive role. In the faith community, the danger is that the church minister becomes the sole producer, while the rest are consumers. This reduces the church's capacity of satisfying its missional demands. Therefore, it is imperative that the laity should be empowered to shift from consuming to producing.

8.6.3 The other side of the church's operational structure

In the face-to-face interviews, an important element about the laity's inactivity was revealed as a confirmation of the focus group's responses to the question: "*Why are the non-leadership laity not doing what they are supposed to do*?" It emerged that the church structure is most important for church administration, but can be detrimental to church ministry. In respect of the Nkhoma Synod's church structure, there is little or no space for personal ministries. In addition to what the responses indicate to the above question, the analysis of the verbatim face-to-face interviews confirm the same. Here is an excerpt from an interviewee's face-to-face interview:

Question. How active are the laity without any leadership position in the church?
Response. *Well, they are active but very limited. They don't take the initiative to do what they know best.*

Question. Tell me more, why is it like this?
Response. *One of the reasons is that our church structure does not make room for personal ministries. You cannot just initiate something or easily present your views, unless you are a church elder. For instance, you cannot just start a prayer cell or Bible study group with fellow church members if church elders do not approve of it* (Face-to-face interviews with respondent No. 2 – July 2008).

It was noted that there is a remarkable misconception among many lay members that all congregational ministries should be initiated by church elders. Because of such a misconception, many lay people even avoid offering voluntary services, such as Sunday School teaching, until they are appointed by the church elders. They think that any personal ministry and initiative by an "ordinary" church member is against church protocols. This misconception has its roots in an old-time missionary principle that was used to guide the growing church against strange practices. Church elders were mandated to oversee the church work in their wards and safeguard them against false teachings (*Malongoseledwe* 1968:48).

It was also noted that there is a general misunderstanding of the church's leadership structure. In the opinion of one of the interviewees (No. 1), most church elders are not well versed in the church's real operational structures. They just inherit what they saw their predecessors doing, because they do not have adequate training for their leadership positions. Much of what they assume to be the church by-laws are just a creation of an individual in the line of leadership succession. So, the church elders themselves somehow instigate the gap.

Another respondent (an ordinary member, but a teacher in the civil service) even indicated that some church elders hide behind the structure and protocol to discourage individual ministries, because they themselves suffer from an inferiority complex if the non-leadership laity are more active than themselves. As such, the church structure has been selfishly used and has become a stumbling block to individual lay ministries, when it is supposed to be enhanced by creating space. The Nkhoma Synod structure has enough room for individual ministries, yet it can also easily be misused for personal motives of leadership along the chain of command in the system. In their un-distorted condition, the policies and standing orders require to be clarified for every member to promote participation without fear of offending church traditions.

8.6.4 Laity training levels: Whose responsibility?

A combination of all data development strategies used in this case study (8.5.2) indicates that poor levels of church leadership skills among the lay leaders are mostly caused by the clergy. For instance, the focus group's responses to Question 6 (*Why is the church [the laity] not doing what it is supposed to do?)* reflected a lack of proper basic training and the laity's induction to help them:

- *Discover their potential*
- *Gain self-confidence*
- *Acquire the needed basic skill for ministry*
- *Develop into capable leadership*
- *Discover the spaces for personal ministry within the church structure.*

In a face-to-face interview, respondent No. 4 (a retired deacon) was quick to say:

We know that ministers learn a lot in four years and know very well what the church is supposed to do. They have the ability to train all of us in different ministries, but they are too busy for that because of the vastness of their work in a congregation. Instead, they only have time to do routine work and no time for training us in various ministries. For example, I was a deacon for two terms (6 years). All along I expected a special induction session for deacons but, until I retired, we never had one. I just learnt from my fellow deacons how to write receipts and, in turn, I was also able to teach new ones. Otherwise, during the orientation session to which we went with our wives, we were only briefed on our personal morals and conduct, not the job skills.

The reflection here is that church members have great expectations of the clergy in terms of the training and equipping for their roles. They are ready to learn and use the knowledge to serve in the church, but they are not prepared for it.

8.6.5 Potential in the laity

Another important aspect that the case study revealed was that there is always potential in the laity regardless of their social, economic or educational positions. During the phase 2 series of meetings, each zone produced a list of activities to carry out as a church (Appendix 1). Each zone

had four priorities listed in their order of importance. With little facilitation and guidance, each zone independently appraised the congregation's needs and surrounding community, before listing activities. The researcher's personal observation was that their resolutions and priority of activities were driven by their theological and social self-understanding. They produced fitting plans that were intelligently conceived and put together within their workable levels. The evidence is that when they were raising funds for the planned projects, they easily met most of their budgets within a short time. Consequently, (*as indicated in the Table 8c below*) every zone achieved the first two of its priority church projects within a year.

The table below summarizes the reviews or reports that were brought from the zones to the congregational progress meeting (*see section 8.3.1.3 on Phase 3 meetings: Progress assessment*). The aim was to check if there were any notable achievements or not, after the laity received an opportunity, with little guidance, to draw up their own work plan. They had to draw the work plan after a good evaluation of their church/congregational system. Some of the outstanding results of this laity empowerment exercise are noted as follows:

(i) *Growth of church capacity*: The laity empowerment that took place influenced the rate of giving, as well as evangelism in the congregation, resulting in work expansion. The birth of two autonomous congregations of Mkundi and Chipala are a clear indication that there was both capacity and numerical growth. According to *Zolamulira* (2006:457a) the Nkhoma Synod can qualify a zone to be an autonomous congregation only when it has attained a communicant membership of not less than 1000 people. Furthermore, it must have the financial capacity to build a manse and sustain a minister with a basic stipend. According to the Synod Minutes of October 2009 (S.4106), both congregations were officially confirmed during the Synod's General Assembly. In June 2010, both were officially launched as independent congregations under the Nkhoma Presbytery of the CCAP Nkhoma Synod.

(ii) *More sensitivity to community issues*: Zone representatives had time to think about their surroundings, which is their immediate mission field. This led into a notable departure from an all-maintenance to a missional church, by creating projects that would benefit the larger community beyond the four walls of the prayer house. Such activities are HIV/AIDS home-based care, orphan care, kindergarten, community food security, water development, youth development and adult literacy.

(iii) *Improved coordination*:   There also is a notable indication of inclusion of everyone on board! Because of the range of people who participated in the planning, a cross-section of the church and other community members were willing to participate in the execution of the plans. Small working groups were formulated to regulate the progress of all the planned activities. The inclusion mentioned above not only refers to church members, but also non-members and even traditional local chiefs.

(iv) *Work discipline*:   Hard work, a team spirit and time-consciousness are also indicated from the plan and report. The fact that the laity set fixed time limits for themselves, helped them to work with enthusiasm towards meeting the targets in the specified time. There was a sense of responsibility even about unfinished work. They shared the work willingly. They were motivated to participate in the project with the sense of ownership, rather than mere solidarity.

Table 8c: Phase 3: Evaluative progress report (updated 10/2010)

Zone	Priority	Evaluation	Way forward
Station	Establishing a grain bank	Grain bank constructed and 6 metric tonnes of maize stocked	Women's guild to take responsibility
	HIV Home-based care	Volunteers trained, basic equipment acquired and care started	To train more volunteers
	Start a community feeding programme	Feasibility study under-way	Church deacons to handle the project
	Open tuck-shop as an income generating activity	Old garage identified, renovations started	Women's guild to take charge
Chigodi	Construct a new church roof	Work finished	
	HIV home-based care	Work started	Jointly done with community leaders
	Start adult literacy	Awaiting teaching materials	Need for a quick follow-up
Chipala	Become an autonomous congregation	Process finished, congregation officially launched.	To call a minister within a year
	Start adult literacy classes	Place, teachers and materials identified	Registration should start
	Form youth HIV/AIDS clubs	Co-ordinating committee in place	Youth committee to do a follow-up
	Start farmers' co-operative	Advocacy started	Local chiefs to be involved
Mkundi	Becoming an autonomous congregation	All procedures followed, congregation officially opened	To identify and call a minister.
	Extend church building	Project finished	To proceed with toilets project
	Orphan day-care expansion	Committee in order	More orphans to be registered
	Safe water project	Identifying donors	Need for further consultation with government

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Chipamphale	Church roof renovation	Done	To decorate the outlook
	Intensify orphan care	Volunteers and materials acquired	Advocacy and registration to start
	Establish a youth life-skill centre	Proposals written and submitted	Youth committee to make a follow-up
	Demonstration garden	Awaiting chiefs to allocate land	Development committee to do a follow-up

8.6.6 Bottom line statement

The bottom line is that empowerment of the laity is a significant tool in the transformation of a congregation and the surrounding community. According to the case study, any form of empowerment of the laity proved to produce positive results in the Nkhoma Congregation. In this case, empowerment did not end with training the laity, but it demanded that the minister should walk life's journey with the congregation. At congregational level, it was possible to journey together while shifting the focus from addressing only members' needs, to equipping members to address the needs of the wider society. Laity empowerment in the Nkhoma Congregation resulted in creating a spirit of missional movement that opens up to critical self-analysing questions. Sine (2008:42) says, "The missional movement deserves credit for raising important theological questions regarding what it means to be church and do the mission of the church." Since people began to answer questions regarding a real life situation on the basis of their self-understanding, there has been a significant impact both within and without the congregation.

At this point of the research, there was a need to measure the authenticity of the developed data and theory to attain validation.

8.7   CASE VALIDITY AND EVALUATION

According to Babbie *et al.* (2001:122), "The term validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under study." To some extent, it is a degree of verifying how sound

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the research results are and, at the same time, checking the quality and reliability of the developed data (Kunkwenzu 2001:56; Yin 2009:41). It was worthwhile for selected kinds of validity to be employed at this point, but much of what was used is construct validity. According to Yin (2009:41), in construct validity, researchers use multiple sources of evidence (triangulation), establish chain of evidence, and have key informants review draft case study reports. To keep abreast with the standard procedures of case study reporting, this study's compilation of results went through three stages.

The first stage was an assessment of the draft report, which was done at congregational level where all participants had a taste of it (cf. 8.3.1.3 above). With a few changes (mainly on the editorial side) and additions, new drafts were written with the assistance of church staff involved in the process.

The second stage was an evaluation done by peers with similar research interest – in this case, fellow ministers (8.3.2). This was when the clergymen evaluated the case study's compiled results as a way of checking the transferability of those initial findings into other congregations of similar settings.

Through the questionnaire and discussions during the workshop (as stated in 8.3.2), it was established that more than 80% of the Nkhoma Synod's ministers provide a one-day orientation session to new church elders and deacons. Some even give as little as a three-hour training to lay leaders who are to take responsibility for three years. In many cases, this is a single training session. During workshops, the discussions of the clergy also revealed that less than 50% of them make any deliberate effort to give basic Bible interpretation and preach-training to the church elders. Yet, they are the church elders who do most of the work in the prayer houses. This confirms the weakness on the part of the clergy to provide special skills training for special key ministries in the church.

In the course of the workshop discussions, the clergy listed the following causes for poor levels of skill training:

- *Some clergy do not have teaching skills due to the theological curriculum they pursued during their ministerial training.*
- *Some clergy are lazy and lack creativity.*
- *The members' attendance to training sessions is usually discouragingly low.*
- *Some of the official Synod training materials are outdated.*
- *There is a lack of training facilities in particular congregational settings.*
- *There is a lack of time due to the heavy workload in congregations.*

This list offers a good summary of the problems that have contributed to the poor quality of lay leader training in the Nkhoma Synod. The list serves as a source of evidence for the findings sourced from the laity (8.6.4). It was important that both the laity participants and fellow clergy examine the study results, because they are better positioned to qualify the compatibility of the results. Babbie (2001:124) says, "Ultimately, social researchers should look both to their colleagues and to their subjects as sources of agreement on the most useful meanings and measurements of the concepts they study."

The third stage involved a final compilation of the findings, which is what has been included in this chapter.

8.8   CONCLUSION – A SUMMARY OF RESEARCH OUTCOMES

A summary of data developed during the case study is captured in yet another table (Table 8d below). In the first instance, it indicates a positive attitude that the laity have in the congregation towards themselves. In themselves, they see the potential to do more than what they have been doing as a faith community. For example, the unity among members (Box 1B & 1D) and their influence in the community (Box 1A & 1E) are reliable tools for making a difference in the life of the congregation and beyond. But, inversely, the summary shows that the non-CCAP members (Box 2A,B,C) had a negative perception of the church that needed to be addressed. An important fact was that the negativity of the non-members did not affect the communal relationship (Box 8A & 8C) that was deeply engraved in the

cultural background of the area under study. The cultural influence was still high (Box 12 A, B &D). The congregation also had challenges in their lay-leadership ability (Box 5B & 5C) which was a result of poor levels of training (Box 6A-E).

Table 8d: *Data categories and assessment for the five zones (developed from focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews)*

Category	General assessment results in zones				
	[A] Station	**[B] Chigodi**	**[C] Chipala**	**[D] Mkundi**	**[E] Chipamphale**
[1] Members' self-attitude	Satisfactory giving Influential	Steady fellowship	Trying hard Potential	Can do better United Established	Influential Vibrant
[2] Community's attitude	Hypocritical Influential	Out-reaching Dominating	Isolated	Networking Potential	Strict rules Out-stretching
[3] Member's ability	Reserved Limited	Basic	Trial and error	Limited	Satisfactory Potential
[4] Member's roles	Solicit funds for church work	Solidarity on social issues	Pray and work Patronize church functions	Uphold church traditions	Church attendance
[5] Lay-leadership ability	Just satisfactory	Lack training	Below expecta_tion	Average	Can do better
[6] Lay-leadership training levels	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
[7] Lay non-leadership training levels	None	Low	None	None	Low
[8] Church-community relationships	Good	Satisfactory	Good	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
[9] Social welfare engagements	Not common	Improving	Not satisfac_tory	Good	Good
[10] Lay Non-leader-ship partici-pation	Good	Average	Average	Satisfactory	Average
[11] Clerical influences	Medium	High	Medium	High	High
[12] Cultural influences	High	High	Medium	High	Mild

[13] Ecumen-ical attitude	Reserved	Reserved	Slightly open	Balanced	Tolerant

Therefore, from the data developed, it is clear that empowerment of the laity is not only a strategy to mobilize the congregation into missional theology, but also a means to address the social constraints surrounding the life of the church. Concurrently, the case study unmasks the long down-played task of training and equipping lay leaders that the clergy have failed to maximize (Box 7A-E). Due to the culture's openness, there is a wide open opportunity in the Malawian setting so conducive to servant leadership and communal interaction (Box 12 A,B & D). A deliberate reduction of barriers (created by the church's structural set up and incompatible in the freely interacting culture) needs to be encouraged. Empowerment in the CCAP Nkhoma Synod should focus at promoting personal ministries using the communal spirit that dominates the culture. In the case study, the availability and willingness of the multitude of laity to be equipped was also evident. One lay member of the church had this to say during a short informal discussion:

I am personally and inwardly convinced that I should participate in teaching kids during Sunday school but I am always hesitant because I do not have any teaching skills. I think I have the ideas for the children's lessons but I don't know how to start it all. When I shared this with our church elder, he only encouraged me to start but he himself had nothing to offer me as an orientation to the job. I waited for the teacher training session at the station until I just gave up. Perhaps God did not allow me to do the job (Kenani Mbewe – June 8, 2008 at Mkundi prayer house).

This is one of the many available and ready resources for the various church ministries but they lack a kick start. Their cultural environment and academic levels deny them the self-initiating spirit that can only be ignited by basic empowerment.

In this ethnographic research - practical experience with the Nkhoma Congregation - it was noted that the laity who are well guided have the potential of making remarkable changes in church and society. The research

also proved that the available resources in the Nkhoma Synod's congregations are sufficient to give the church a kick start into self-reliance, spiritual maturity and engaging every member into active participation. Despite some restrictions, motivated by poor leadership and Church's written and un-written policies, the Church has the potential to contribute at substantive levels in the community social services. The clergy are well-positioned to empower the congregations to overcome the obstacles and perform with a missional spirit. By planning together and accompanying the laity, this researcher discovered new angles of empowerment required in the Church today.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUDING REMARKS

9.1   A REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH DISCUSSION

This practical theological discussion has been developed out of an effort to answer the practical investigatory question, "*What should be done in the Malawian Church (the CCAP Nkhoma Synod) to lead the laity and lay leadership towards a holistic ministry relevant to the contemporary situation, in an effort to develop congregations into self-reliant, spiritually matured, all-participatory and social service-providing ones that strive to act as signs of God's reign?*" The research question reflects the pneumatological, ecclesiological and diaconal aspects of the problem concerning:

(i) The degree of openness in the church leadership – especially the clerical personnel - to the Holy Spirit's role in leading the church to be meaningful and relevant;

(ii) The operational structures that seem to retard grassroots participation; and

(iii) The missional role of the Church in making a difference in its own environment.

So, these have been the guiding lines in the quest for a way to mobilise the available resources (the laity) into a much needed holistic ministry.

This practical journey of exploration did not begin out of mere curiosity, but was based on the researcher's assessment of his own ministering situation and interest in congregational studies. While it has been interplay between practice and academics, this researcher puts interest in the daily practical theological encounters of the local church. Hendriks (2004:211) says, "The sub-section of theology called Practical Theology concentrates on understanding what is happening in and around us." This researcher believes that, in the efforts to address the real issues on the ground, the church can continue to be theologically meaningful in the world of quantum changes and stand the test of time. Only a theology that addresses life's situation is meaningful and relevant for people, because they see God

working in their lives. As a practical theological study, this discussion has sought to put in the limelight the interaction between the Triune God and his creation (people) in the Malawian context. It seeks to manifest the *missio Dei* in and through the life of the Church in a practical way.

9.2   DOING THEOLOGY IS WORKING WITH GOD

In line with the pneumatological part of the problem question, this research has revealed that the Church in Malawi, like anywhere else, is first and foremost a spiritual entity. Its members are fully committed to the life of Christ and his mission. However, the clerical ministers lack the needed openness to maximize the potential in the Church members.

The historical background presented in Chapter 2 described the important roles that the laity have played in the past life of the Church. It cited the village school system as an example of laity empowerment, which the contemporary church can learn from the past. The openness of the clerical leadership and that of the entire church to the leadership of the Holy Spirit leads to the manifestation of various gifts needed in the church today. Theology is about God, and those who do theology start with God. Empowerment of the laity is deemed to be a key to check out their passiveness, which is a problematic scenario in a growing church. The church exists to participate in God's mission within a context. In Chapter 3, the contextual analysis of the Malawian Church established a clear picture of the type of missionary field in which the Church works. Poverty and HIV/AIDS were noted as outstanding among the many challenges that face Malawi and the entire sub-Saharan Africa. The analysis emphasizes that the Church does not exist in isolation, but forms part of the suffering community. Therefore, it should participate in God's mission with a context-sensitive approach, interpret the situation, and address the challenges. Even the style and level of empowerment of the laity in the Church should consider the Church's mission ecology in order to be relevant.

Therefore, the economic, social and political challenges that surround the Church in Malawi should, on the contrary, offer an opportunity for the church

to be what it should be in the 21st century. It requires a missionary attitude for the Church to utilise opportunities that seem to be threats, and be missional in such a challenging situation. Therefore, in being missional, the Church does its ministry. Burrows (1980:59) states briefly that the church's ministry is its service to humanity.

9.3   DOING THEOLOGY DEPENDS ON THE CHURCH'S SELF-UNDERSTANDING AND ITS LEADERSHIP

The ecclesiological part of the research problem led to the scrutiny of the Malawian Church's identity and further understanding of the Church's essence as a participant in God's mission. Chapter 4 presents the essential elements that formulate the identity of the Nkhoma Synod. The methodological steps of understanding context and interpretation were combined to establish the role of identity in the empowerment, or disempowerment, of the laity in the Nkhoma Synod. The end thesis was that the misunderstanding of church governance and structure has created gaps that have crippled the Reformed notion of priesthood of all believers. The question of power and control has derailed the empowerment process that was meant to enhance the Church's identity in line with the Great Commission.

With due respect to the traditions and values that have been part of the Church's identity; and have guided the Church from the past to the present situation, further discernment of God's will by the Church today is needed. Hendriks (2004:30) points out, "This calls for prophetic imagination, for creative thought and action in which a faith community tries to discern the Holy Spirit's guidance and, in the process, witness to present experiences of revelation." So, a way forward for the Church in Malawi is that the clergy, in obedience to the Holy Spirit, should lead the Church in the discernment process beyond identity maintenance.

In Chapter 5, the ecclesiological part of the research problem question was discussed further in order to give a theological description of the church and its missional nature. The discussion led to the discovery that the church exists solely to serve God's missional purpose. In its dual (spiritual and

social) nature, God called it into existence to carry out his mission in the world. As such, through its laity, the church is expected to do theology at grassroots level. It needs visionary empowering leaders to initiate the church's discernment process of God's will in the world. For the church to keep abreast with the missional needs of the surrounding world, the leadership roles and style should be dynamic. Therefore, the church leadership should not be reticent to make regular self-evaluations in order to make necessary adjustments for the sake of being effective participants in the *missio Dei*. Both the teaching (clergy) and the ruling (laity) elders are keys to church progress and should not be easily complacent with their roles and styles of leadership.

9.3.1 The roles of church leadership

In this study, the hypothesis points to the manifestation of a missional identity that can be expected to take place if the clerical leadership in the church can empower the laity to use their gifts. While, in a Presbyterian setting, it sounds enough and classical that ordained ministers are called teaching elders, there is more attached to their roles in the church today than mere teaching. Teaching alone is not enough because, primarily, it entails the imparting of information for the purpose of application (Tangeman 1996:225). The preference in this research is that ordained ministers should be called "equipping" or "empowering elders." Tangeman (1996:222-225) discusses the word "*equip*" that Paul uses in Ephesians 4:12. The following points are spotted in their significance to this research's main discussion:

- The word "equip" means to make complete or to supply what is lacking.
- The idea is to make something usable, to restore it, to make it complete, or in the spiritual realm, to bring to maturity.
- Equipping also plays an important role in the restoration process.
- The Bible also reveals that equipping is needed for the strengthening of our faith.
- Another area in which equipping is needed is in doing God's will.
- Equipping is also important for unity.

- Equipping is also essential in helping believers to develop a greater manifestation of Christ-likeness in their lives.
- Finally, *Ephesians 4:12* says that believers must be equipped for ministry. This part of a pastor's equipping responsibility requires not only the teaching of God's Word, but also the training of people for the ministry.... In teaching, people understand what they need to do, in training, they learn how to do it.

The suggestion to shift from mere teaching to equipping elders presents a clear reconsideration of the clergy's task in the life and future of the Church in Malawi. The laity should be motivated to identify and appreciate their tasks in the body of Christ. Their domesticated spiritual gifts should be released to make them complete and usable by God – the author of our mission. Empowerment (used interchangeably with equipping) leads to maturity of the laity that is needed to discern God's will. Enabling leadership is needed.

Both the clergy and church elders (in the Nkhoma Synod's setting) should begin to see themselves as facilitators, animators and coordinators in their specific groups where they exercise leadership, that is, the congregation for the clergy, and the ward for the church elder. According to Hope and Timmel (1984:51-52), a facilitator provides a process that helps the group to discuss their own content in the most satisfactory and productive way possible. An animator helps a group to discover and use all its potential for creative and constructive team work. The animator imparts a new spirit to a group. A coordinator draws together people, actions and events, in such a way that they support and strengthen each other, and do not compete or clash with each other. If the clergy and the church elders can attain these levels of leadership, then the Church will live up to the needed qualities in its missional tasks.

So, reviewing and redirecting the clerical leadership roles can contribute significantly to stir the contemporary church towards a more biblically designed one in order to suffice for its purpose of existence.

9.4 DOING THEOLOGY IS SERVING, EMPOWERING AND TRANSFORMING

In line with the third – diaconal – prong of the problem in this research, it has been established that there is a God-given potential in the Malawian Church to go beyond its walls and make a difference in the society at large. There are adequate human resources in the church to offer adequate service (*diakonia*) to the world as God's stewards.

9.4.1 The church in service to God and the world

The church has a theological mandate to serve God's created world. Chapter 6 presents the role of the church in sustainable development. The participation of the church in development is a way of reflecting God's reign in the world. As such, it serves the world as part of its mission while pursuing the quest to discover God's intention in his created world. The nature of the a serving church is derived from God's being. In his reign, He creates, sustains and serves his creation. When the church is involved in development at both local and national level, it demonstrates its missional calling to serve the Triune God and his creation. In development, the church practises the theology of "salt" and "light" as entrusted to it by the Master (Mat. 5:13-16).

The church should rise above all stakeholders in dealing with issues of sustainable development, because of its understanding of God's creation act and the responsibility that God gave to human beings to care.

9.4.2 The church as an agent of empowerment

God created human beings in his own image. He is concerned with the evils and suffering that overpower the human race and deprive it of its dignity. In his mission, God wants to empower the world to recover its lost glory as the *imago Dei*. Chapter 7 articulates the term "empowerment" extensively by using different lenses. The bottom line is that empowerment is about people. Therefore, the church should act as an agent for empowerment among God's people. Empowerment of the laity in the church is the starting point to engage the whole church in God's agency to take the mission to the world.

In doing theology as a framework for this study, empowerment of the laity is deemed to be a stepping stone towards the manifestation of the Kingdom of God. For instance, the Church in Africa needs to empower the laity to participate in the struggle against poverty. It is a common fact that poverty is rampant in Africa. O'Donovan (2000:165) asserts, "Poverty is one of the greatest problems in Africa. This problem can be overcome within a local church. The church can even be the means of helping many poor people outside the church." If the Church in Malawi is to be truly missional, it has to respond to human needs and continuously address the identified causes of human suffering. This poses a challenge for the Malawian Church, as its members are also part of the poor in the society. Yet, the empowered Church should respond to human needs, not because of having plenty, but because of responsibility.

9.4.3 The church in transformative action

Chapter 8 describes the practical example of a Church in transformative action by a case study undertaken in the Nkhoma Congregation. Through empowerment of the laity, the Church is able to make notable differences in the community. Members of the Nkhoma Congregation were taken on an empowerment process that helped them to do self-assessment and to design their own action plan. This resulted in the members' motivation in being opened up to community participation. Practical transformation took place in both the Church and community. Theology is about transformative action. Reader (2008:7) states, "Practical theology is transformational in that it aims to make a difference not just to people, but also to understandings and situations in the contemporary world." Therefore, empowerment of the laity is an essential pillar in Practical Theology, because it is a catalyst for spiritual and social transformation.

9.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A THEOLOGY THAT ADDRESSES LIFE SITUATIONS

A theology that makes sense in the contemporary world is a theology that focuses on the grassroots, that works and makes a difference through the

laity. The Church's current need is to re-organize itself towards creating means for a theology that addresses life's situation. The following is proposed to the Nkhoma Synod in order for it to be a pacesetter in meaningful laity empowerment for the Malawian Church:

i.   It is high time that the Church considers investing more in lay training centres.
ii. Mainstream laity empowerment in the Ministerial Training Curriculum.
iii. Use Integrated Leadership Development.
iv. Diversify empowering methods or strategies.

9.5.1 Investing more in lay training

The Nkhoma Synod has one lay training centre, known as the Namoni Katengeza Church Lay Training Centre (cf. 2.3.2 iii above). Incidentally, the establishment of this Centre was the first major assignment that the Synod undertook when it became autonomous from the DRC. But, over the years, the use of this institution has drifted away from its original ethos of empower-ing the laity[74] and has been reduced to a mere retreat or conference centre. However, there is a very small scale of lay training that takes place only when there is a need. The other unfortunate part is that the accommodation and catering rate has become so high that only affluent congregations can afford to send their lay leaders for short courses.

Here, the recommendation is that the Synod should consider investing more in the running of the Centre than ever before. The aim should be to bring back the Synod's focus on lay empowerment, as a way of addressing the congregations' predicament, i.e. the lack of well equipped people for service. The curriculum and schedules at the NKCLTC should be thoroughly revised to meet the current demand for lay training and should be put to maximum use. Further to this proposal, the Centre should act as a research centre for the need of lay training in congregational life. As such, the Centre should

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[74] This is evidenced in the recent (October, 2009) Centre's Report to the Bi-annual Synod General Assembly recorded in Minute No S.4205/2009. Out of all the seven points of its highlights, nothing is mentioned on lay training.

assist ministers to develop their own materials for training the laity in their particular congregations. The traditional lay leadership training material, such as *Moyo ndi Ntchito za Akuluampingo ndi Atumiki*[75] should be revised to eliminate what is no longer meaningful, and polish those that still are relevant. In that way, every congregation will turn into a "lay training centre." The long term objective for the Synod's investment should be that the NKCLTC multiplies itself into as many centres as the number of congregations in the Synod. The Centre should work very closely with the in-service training wing of the JMTI to organise workshops for ministers from time to time (Z.163), in order to interact and share insights on congregational needs.

9.5.2 Mainstreaming laity empowerment in the ministerial training curriculum

In Malawi, theological colleges are meant to be ministerial training centres with appropriate curricula for that purpose. But, most have clung to the traditional Western method, as Hendriks (2004:201) points out, "Theological colleges, by and large, train pastors in the skills required by the Christendom paradigm." This type of training provides much theory at the expense of the practical, grassroots churches' needs. In the analysis of theological training in sub-Saharan Africa, Wiid (2002:136) observes, "The main problem experienced by both formal and non-formal training programs regarding curriculum is to determine what subjects are relevant for a given student in a given context." For any training curriculum to be relevant, it has to formulate its objectives with the goal of offering the most important skills that the students need for the work in which they are being trained. The situation in the Malawian Church and the Nkhoma Synod, in particular, demands that every ordained minister has the practical skills of empowering the laity. A need exists to mainstream the empowerment of the laity in all theological subjects in the process of training ministers. As observed in this research (7.6.4), many pastors understand that equipping their members is one of

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[75] An official handbook for training of elders and deacons in the Nkhoma Synod. It was written in the 1950s and was last revised in 1967.

their main responsibilities, but they lack the skills to do it - a weakness of the training curriculum.

Therefore, it is extremely important that the theological training curricula at the JMTI, and other ministerial training institutions, should be revised and adjusted to suit the current need in the life of the Church – the empowerment of the laity. All the subjects stipulated for the training of a minister should aim to answer the question: "How will the minister relate this to the laity – the congregation - at various levels of understanding?" Where needs be, some material should be organized, taught and examined in the vernacular that reflects the reality of the field experiences. The focus of ministerial training should be: helping the pastor to see his ministry in terms of equipping God's people for their ministries (Wiid 2002:117).

9.5.3 Engaging Integrated Leadership Development (ILD) philosophy

Another important suggestion is the adoption of ILD as a philosophy to empower the laity in the Nkhoma Synod. Veritas College International designed it in an effort to create a philosophy of theological education that will effectively serve the church in the 21st century.

9.5.3.1   Components of ILD

Therefore, ILD has been created in such a way as to fulfil the following two main conditions:[76]

1.   It should be faithful to the biblical principles of theological training.
2.   It should be relevant to the needs of a changing church in a changing society.

It is a kind of theological education that drifts away from institutional clergy-forming to one that is:

(a)   integrated into the life of the church;
(b)   promotes whole life development, and

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[76] A full outline of ILD educational philosophy is found on the website: http://www.veritascollege.org

(c)   enhances integrated theological practice.

According to Skinner (1999:85-93), these three are the ILD characteristics. To integrate theological training in the life of the church alludes to training men and women of all educational levels as leaders in the context of the church. In turn, it promotes the objectives of church growth through equipping the church to fulfil its part of the *missio Dei* (1999:86-87). Thus, the church is equipped not only for clerical duties, but body/physical? ministry using minimal resources. In promoting whole life development, ILD trains people in all areas of life within their context. It is so holistic that it equips the whole person by integrating knowledge, character and skill (1999:89-90), which often result in the full empowerment of all members of the body of Christ. In interactive theologizing, "participants are led to develop their own theological understanding through the interaction of the Word with practice" (1999:90). In this process, the Bible takes its rightful place and theology is rightfully applied in the context. For the African setting, Hendriks (2004:27) advises, "Theological honesty about the contextual realities that face Africa would help the church to be a public church that actively witnesses to all spheres of life about the way, the truth and the life."

9.5.3.2   *Why should ILD be adopted?*

The ILD philosophy has several advantages in the situation and working structure of the Nkhoma Synod. It is flexible and adaptable in both rural and urban settings and is cost effective. It is accommodative, as it does not need any prior academic or professional qualifications. It is easily accessible to any interested Church minister in Malawi through Veritas Malawi, housed in Lilongwe. According to the Veritas website[77] on Malawi,

> Veritas provides a flexible and skill oriented curriculum, in the local language of Chichewa, for training leaders and discipling believers. The training method used by Veritas equips leaders not only to become better trained themselves, but also to pass their training on to others. Training is run in Malawi and the Tete province of Mozambique.

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[77] http://www.veritascollege.org / Malawi.

As such, this offers an opportunity for any member of a congregation to be exposed to this leadership development process. While using ILD, ministers can train the new Church elders, deacons, *Alangizi*, Sunday school teachers and catechists in a natural way in their context, without objectifying them. Should ILD take place in the context of the Church, Skinner (1999:86) points out the following advantages:

- It has an immediate impact on all the activities of the church.
- It binds leaders more strongly to their church and does not alienate them from the church.
- With its nature of training-on-the-job, it is time and resource efficient. The learnt skills and knowledge feed back into the church.
- It is relevant and practical for the needs of the church.
- It guarantees the future of the church and its leadership because of the continual process of leadership development and discipleship.
- It covers all the areas of the participant's life and, therefore, produces mature disciples. It is holistic in its approach to leadership.

The Church in Malawi, and the Nkhoma Synod specifically, has the capacity to engage ILD philosophy in empowering the laity for the Church's own efficiency in the *missio Dei*. In fact, it is a philosophy that can be conveyed to all students who undergo ministerial training. According to Nehemiah Kanzanthu, [78] the training and follow-up coordinator of Veritas Malawi, by September 2010 already 107 ministers were trained at different levels in ILD. All ministers who tried it in their congregations have given reports of positive feedback.

9.5.4 Diversification of empowering methods

While ILD is considered to be a recommended philosophy for laity empowerment, there is a need to diversify methods. Variety is a spice of life. One form of this diversification is the use of a variety of training materials. As the

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[78] Rev Nehemiah Kanzanthu was interviewed telephonically on 8 September 2010 and confirmed by a cell text message.

person responsible for training in the congregation, a church minister should continuously assess training materials for their effectiveness. At the same time, he should search for any available materials that can serve the same purpose. There are other lay church leadership training materials like those used by the Nehemiah Bible Institute (NBI); the African Evangelical Enterprise; Kingfisher Mobilisation Centre, and many more.

Another way of diversifying the empowerment method is by networking. In the Nkhoma Synod, Church ministers will do well if they work in clusters when training their lay leaders. It is a common African philosophy to work in groups for the sake of achieving greater things than can be imagined. Due to a difference in skills and areas of strength, the clergy should deliberately organize themselves in training teams within their convenient geographical areas. Such teams must not necessarily comprise only the clergy. Some non-ordained Church members with special gifts, including women, can be used. We live in a world of networks; networking is a cultural concept among rural Malawians that is embedded in its language and social life. A Chichewa proverb goes, "*Kunyamula nkhokwe yakale nkuchuluka manja*" (which literally can be translated as, "It is easy to lift a loosely built object when you use many hands"). So, networking of trainers in the Malawian Church should not be a strange principle. Hendriks (2004:17) observes, "A network has certain implications. Primarily, it requires a new leadership style, a style that works with trust, not control. Relationships are important and an ethos of serving one another drives these relationships." In networking, ministers will improve the quality of training and relationships.

FINAL REMARKS

Through its resource, contextual, identity and process analyses (Hendriks 2004), this research has exposed the current condition and predicament of the Church in Malawi. Within the Church structure, the lack of clerical initiative to empower the laity and institutional leadership styles has contributed to the weakness in the Church's stewardship. This research has found that the church's openness to ministry is needed more than ever at this time in church history. Odgen (2003:94) observes, "The fresh wind

blowing in the church today is being felt wherever the doors of ministry are thrown open to include all of God's people. We live in a day when the shift from institution to organism is taking place." This research (Chapter 8) field-tested a similar hypothetical theory on empowerment of the laity. The outcome was a success story of both Church growth and strength, evidenced by the birth of new congregations and higher levels of participation. The empowered and entrusted laity are capable of serving God, the Church and the society. Smith (1996:8) says, "Empowering God's people, as individuals and as a community, is the foundation of fruitful ministry. Pastors who themselves have been empowered, and who focus on empowering others, are much more likely to be effective."

This study has shown that theology is dynamic, as well as contextual. Therefore, the recommendations that have been made are not intended to be exhaustive how-to tips. They, rather, are entry points for continued doing of theology at grassroots level. They should serve as a gift, as well as a challenge, to the Church in Malawi. In other words, the recommendations should be an inspiration to the Malawian Church for further research in Congregational Studies as part of discerning God's will.

Finally, Reader (2008:14) states, "Practical theology faces the challenge of identifying thresholds or points of engagement where alternatives become visible and faith communities may be able to nourish people in their search for the hope of transformation." This researcher proposes the empowerment of the laity in congregations as one of the thresholds for the Nkhoma Synod.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The resolutions and priorities of zonal activity

Priority	Station	Chigodi	Chipala	Mkundi	Chipamphale
1	Establish a grain bank	Construct a new church roof	Work towards becoming an autonomous congregation	Work towards becoming an autonomous congregation	Replace locally-made roofing tiles with iron sheets on the church roof
2	Home-based care	Home-based care	Start adult literacy classes	Extend the church building	Intensify orphan care
3	Start a feeding programme	Open a kindergarten school	Form youth HIV/AIDS clubs	Expand the orphan day-care activities	Open youth life-skills centre
4	Open IGA tuck -shop	Start adult literacy classes	Start a farmers' co-operative society.	Identify NGOs to assist with safe water utilities	Acquire a communal demonstration garden

Appendix 2: Face-to-face interview guidelines

1. As a member of the Congregation, what do you value most?
2. Why are many members not active on their own?
3. How do members view elders in the Church?
4. What type of training do members receive in different ministries of the Church, e.g. "witnessing the un-churched"?
5. What is your opinion on the Church-community relationship?
6. What is the possibility, if any, for the Church and non-church members to work together on social development issues?

Research at zone level

The Church carries the Great Commission's mandate to spread the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. It has to teach this Good News in a way that those who accept it should not keep quiet but take it to others. That is what disciple-making is all about. Spreading the Good News also means communicating the will of God for the world He created and continues to care for. So, the Church is also concerned with the welfare of the world in which it exists. Each local congregation is supposed to continue reminding itself of its missional responsibility and strive to fulfil it.

We are gathering as a Church zone to assess ourselves and review what we are doing; what we are supposed to be doing; and even what we are not supposed to do. The aim of this research is to discover the gaps in the operations of our Church as a congregation and an entity of the community. Then, we should be able to identify the main causes of our shortfalls as a Church, in line with our expected levels of operation. Having done that, we shall proceed to put our ideas together to plan for a way forward so as to achieve the maximum desired levels.

Let us make this a good time of reflection and honest self-evaluation, so that we can put things in the right order, as expected of the Church today. By the end of the whole exercise, each one of us should discover his or her role in the life of this congregation and make every effort to fulfil the role according to our individual calling.

Finally, this research will help us to answer the question: "What can happen to the life of the Church and the general community if all of us are faithful in our roles; and are equipped and empowered to serve in the Church?"

Appendix 4: A questionnaire for the clergy

"An evaluative reflection on the trends of lay empowerment
– A minister's view"

1. Approximately, how many times per year do you have special training sessions for different lay leaders in your congregation?
2. Do you find this sufficient? Why?
3. List the materials you use as a source of your training material.
4. If you were given a chance to improve "*Moyo ndi ntchito za Akuluampingo ndi Atumiki,*" what would you add? Give a reason for each addition.
5. What method do you use during training? (Tick one.) a. Lecturing; b. Group discussion; c. Assignment; d. Visitation; e. Others (specify). Why do you like this method?
6. How are your lay leaders involved in social issues in the communities?

7. In your opinion, why do you think lay leaders do not like to preach during public functions, such as *maliro* (public funeral services) when the Church minister is present?
8. What common problems do you often encounter in empowerment of the laity in your congregation?
9. Which lay group in your congregation do you think is the simplest to empower through training? (Tick one.) a. Men; b. Women; c. The youth; d. Children. How?
10. Comment on the impact of the laity's thorough training or poor training, on the life of your congregation

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