



## Church as *Mbumba* and Bishop as *Nkhoswe*: Anglican Ecclesiology and Missiological Imperatives in Central Africa

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the use of the Chewa and Nyanja concepts of *mbumba* and *nkhoswe* in Central Africa and Southern Africa as interpretive tools for an Anglican ecclesiology and theology of leadership. Following an exposition of these two concepts, it conceptualizes *mbumba* as a diocese, and bishops as *nkhoswe* deriving from Christ as *Nkhoswe* par excellence. These two concepts entail critical values including responsibility, accountability and mutuality, which can be used as a model to enhance the relationship between a diocese and bishop. Conceptualizing a diocese as *mbumba* and the role of a bishop as that of *nkhoswe* has the potential to enhance missional practice in Central and Southern Africa.

**KEYWORDS:** Anglicanism, *Chewa*, Church of the Province of Central Africa, ecclesiology, episcopacy, Malawi, *Mbumba*, missiology, *Nkhoswe*, *Nyanja*

### *Introduction*

#### *Mbumba and Nkhoswe*

Twin words, *mbumba* and *nkhoswe*, describe the functional relationship between a sister and her children in relationship to her brother (uncle) respectively among the matrilineal societies of the Chewa and Nyanja in Central Malawi, Eastern Zambia, and West of Mozambique, as well as in some parts of Zimbabwe. This study seeks to explore the functional role and relationship between these terms as used in Malawi, the West of Mozambique, Eastern Zambia and Hwange in the region of Victoria Falls

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in Zimbabwe, and consider how these terms can be a framework within which an Anglican ecclesiology can be conceptualized, and possibly have bearings on missiological imperatives in Central Africa.

### *African Concepts and Missional Ecclesiology*

This study falls within a broader framework of African theology of which John Mbiti has been one of the pioneers. However, since this study entails the use of African tools to interpret Western Christian concepts, it falls within what Justin S. Ukpong and others call African Inculturation Theology.<sup>2</sup> African Inculturation Theology seeks the use of African value systems to explain doctrine or systems within Western Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

The justification for use of African concepts as a tool to interpret Western Christian ones, such as for an Anglican ecclesiology, lies in the fact that down the centuries Christianity has engaged in dialogue with other cultures, notably Judaism, Greco-Roman culture, and subsequently with Western cultures.<sup>4</sup> As a hermeneutical tool, use of African theological/cultural frameworks has dominated African scholarship since the 1960s. Even though it does not fit neatly into his conceptual framework, this study follows what Justin Ukpong calls a *sociological-anthropological* approach.

Rather than concentrating on the religious aspects of culture only, Ukpong argues that the *sociological-anthropological* approach to inculturation is holistic, in that it takes into consideration socio-economic and political factors as well; it seeks thus to consider the religious aspect of African cultural values.<sup>5</sup> Here culture has not only religious dimensions, but secular ones as well. According to Ukpong, the process is driven by three hermeneutical tools: context, text and an interpretive framework. In this case our *context* is Central and Southern Africa, particularly Malawi, Eastern Zambia and West of Mozambique. The *text or value* is *mbumba/imbumba* and *nkhoswe* vis-à-vis an Anglican ecclesiology. The *interpretive framework* consists of the underlying assumptions embedded in an African conception of reality, that is, communitarian as opposed to Western individualism, interconnectedness as opposed to independence, unitary in contrast to Western dualism, and wholeness as opposed to compartmentalization.

2. J.S. Ukpong, 'Towards a Holistic Approach to Inculturation Theology', *Mission Studies: Journal of the IAMS* 2.32 (1999), pp. 100-24.

3. Ukpong, 'Towards a Holistic Approach', pp. 100-21.

4. Ukpong, 'Towards a Holistic Approach', pp. 100-102.

5. Ukpong, 'Towards a Holistic Approach', pp. 107-21.

I will argue that the meaning and hermeneutical values of the concepts of *mbumba* and *nkhoswe* can only be located within these African communal systems and values of the Chewa and Nyanja in Central Africa. In undertaking this study, I seek to illustrate that African concepts can make a contribution to ecclesiology, and enhance missional praxis in Central and Southern Africa.

### Mbumba and Nkhoswe – The Background

#### Etymology

Etymologically the term *mbumba* is a combination of the prefix *mbu* and suffix *mba*. The term derives from the Chichewa and Chinyanja verb *ku-wu-mba*, or IsiZulu and IsiXhosa *uku-bu-mba*, as in moulding clay, creating, shaping, bringing together, or binding. More significantly, the word *uku-bu-mba* is the same one used in IsiXhosa Bible in Genesis to denote the ‘creation’ of humankind.

The word *nkhoswe* is said to derive from the word *khoswe*, a rat.<sup>6</sup> Its usage can be related to the Chichewa and Chinyanja saying about ‘a rat (*khoswe*) when seated on an earthen pot’ which deters one from killing (shooting) it, since in trying to do so one runs the risk of destroying the pot as well.<sup>7</sup> The rationale is that by sitting on the earthen pot, the rat (*khoswe*) is protected but it also protects the pot from being destroyed.<sup>8</sup>

In this sense, the role that the *nkhoswe* play seems to derive from the root verb *nkh* – ‘*khala*, (sit) meaning the rat ‘sitting in between’ the earthen pot and the third party.<sup>9</sup> What is implied is the notion that the *khoswe* (*nkhoswe*) is the one who sits in between earthen pot (the *mbumba*) and a third party, or perceived danger or threat. The logic behind the analogy is that a symbiotic relationship prevails between the *khoswe* (rat) and the earthen pot. Behind this notion lies a much deeper one: the power dynamics of a reciprocal functionality existing between the *nkhoswe* and *mbumba*. The term *nkhoswe* is said also to refer to the four poles that support a maize barn on its stand.<sup>10</sup> In this respect,

6. B. Chitheka, personal communication to H. Mbaya, 20 March 2015.

7. B. Chitheka, same communication. The Chinyanja/Chichewa saying goes ‘when a rat sits on an earthen pot (*mkhate*) it cannot be killed or shot’. To appreciate the significance of this saying, one has to consider the critical role that an earthen pot played in an African home. It could perhaps be favourably comparable with a refrigerator and precious utensils today.

8. A. Mbaya, personal communication to H. Mbaya, 15 March 2015.

9. B. Chitheka, same communication.

10. E.D. Pembamoyo, personal communication with H. Mbaya, 21 March 2015.

its significance lies in its critical role in supporting a maize barn, the storage of the staple food in Central and Southern Africa.

### *The Evolution of Nkhoswe*

Christine Saidi has given critical insight into the development of the role of the *nkhoswe* in relation to the *mbumba* in the Chewa and Nyanja society in Central Africa. According to Saidi, the period when 'the role of *nkhoswe* was introduced is unknown...'.<sup>11</sup> However, she reckons that 'this development would have been the latter centuries of the first half of the second millennium, in the era of the establishment of more centralised institutions among the Nyanja/Chewa by the Phiri and the growth of greater male political power at the centre'.<sup>12</sup> The growth of male power came about precisely because of the critical role that the woman came to play in ensuring the survival of the matrilineal society.

Saidi further notes that originally in that context the term *nkhoswe* applied 'to one who advocates a position in a public or court debate or to one's advocate in marriage negotiations'.<sup>13</sup> Saidi's rendering of the term comes close to that of the Reverend David Clement Scott, a Scottish missionary in Southern Malawi. Scott's carries civil and legal connotations; he defined the term *nkhoswe* as 'an advocate in *mlandu* (civil lawsuits) or marriage or business'.<sup>14</sup> It is this aspect of the role of the *nkhoswe* that tends to dominate marriage contracts in Malawi, that is, the *nkhoswe's* role in arrangements and as an arbiter in disputations in marriage. More recently Louis Chimango has stressed the legal dimensions of the role of the *nkhoswe* in legitimizing marital contractual obligations entered into by a man and a woman as husband and wife.<sup>15</sup> Chimango noted that any marriage without the *nkhoswe* is considered null and void. While this is an important aspect, nonetheless it is the second dimension that is more critical to this study, to which I now turn.

11. Christine Saidi, *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010), p. 88.

12. Saidi, *Women's Authority*, p. 88.

13. Saidi, *Women's Authority*, p. 88.

14. *A Cyclopedic Dictionary of the Mang'anja Language* (Edinburgh: William Blackhood & Sons, 1892), p. 454.

15. L.J. Chimango, 'Women without "Ankhoswe" in Malawi: A Discussion of the Legal Position of Women Who Enter into Informal Marital Relations', *African Law Studies* 15 (1977), pp. 54–61.

## Nkhoswe as Ward or Guardian of the Mbumba

Saidi has argued that even though the development of the role of the *nkhoswe* was meant to protect the *mbumba*, in fact it buttressed male power. In her words:

the application of the term *nkhoswe* to a kin context rationalizes the position as a supportive one; in effect it would have given male members of the matrikin their own collective role, parallel to that of the *mbumba*. The role of the protector is normally that of greater power than that of the protected.<sup>16</sup>

Saidi concluded that a mid-twentieth-century description of *nkhoswe* as men 'responsible for the well-being and the good conduct [emphasis added] of their *mbumba* makes it clear that the creation of the role of the *nkhoswe* did in the end shift the balance of authority towards males'.<sup>17</sup> Saidi's critical insights regarding power relations between the *nkhoswe* and the *mbumba* have to be acknowledged, as no social system or structure is impervious to abuse. However, her observations and arguments have to be considered in light of how the *mbumba* and the *nkhoswe* are constituted, and how power is disbursed among the two parties.

Building on J.C. Mitchell's definition of *mbumba* as 'sorority group', Matthew Schoffeleers has asserted that *mbumba* 'consists of a group of sisters and their children under the leadership of their brothers, who are known as their *nkhoswe* (guardians)'. 'One of these is regarded as the leader of the *mbumba* (*mwini mbumba*)...'. 'When such a man refers to his *mbumba*,' he asserts, 'he includes not only his sisters and their descendants but also his younger brothers'. Schoffeleers then suggests that: 'Thus, in that case the term is used in a broader sense. A woman normally belongs to more than one *mbumba*, namely, that of her brother, that of her mother's brother (*malume*), and possibly also that of her maternal grandmother's brother.'<sup>18</sup> He argues that:

The directly effective one, however, is that of her mother's brother, who will be assisted by her elder brother if the latter is an adult. The head of the *mbumba* is responsible for the behaviour of those under his charge. He has to see to their general well-being, conduct their marriage negotiations, appear for them in court, and pay fines on their behalf.<sup>19</sup>

16. Saidi, *Women's Authority*, p. 88.

17. Saidi, *Women's Authority*, p. 88.

18. Matthew J. Schoffeleers, *River of Blood: The Genesis of a Martyr Cult in Southern Malawi, c. A.D. 1600* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p. 23.

19. Schoffeleers, *River of Blood*, p. 23.

The Honourable Dr Justin C. Malewezi, former Vice President of Malawi, argued that there are 'checks and balances' built in this Chewa social structure and system.<sup>20</sup> According to Malewezi, the role of *nkhoswe* and *mbumba* reflects the institution of the Chewa monarchy and the relationship that prevails between the king (*Kalonga Gawa Undi*) and the queen (high priestess), *Makewana* (Mother of children). For instance, the king cannot carry out major activities like wage war without the consent of *Makewana*. On her side, *Makewana* cannot bear arms but must be protected by the *Kalonga*. The king appoints a chief or chiefs to protect *Makewana*.<sup>21</sup>

Malewezi notes that it is the *mbumba* that appoints the *nkhoswe*, and hence it is a hereditary position – 'always a blood relation on the matrilineal line ... usually the first born amongst the brothers. If he is unsuitable they go down the line.' So it follows that 'the *nkhoswe* is accountable and answerable to the *mbumba*.'<sup>22</sup> Schoffeleers also states that 'theoretically, the eldest brother is elected as headman, but in practice there is considerable freedom of choice, and other factors such as the candidate's popularity with kinsmen are also taken into account'.<sup>23</sup> In other words, it is the *mbumba* who 'constitute' the power of the *nkhoswe*. Similarly the *mbumba* have a leadership structure among the members. 'The first born sister (if she has leadership qualities) is the head among the women (*Mbumba Yaikulu*).'<sup>24</sup> In his relationship to the *mbumba* the *nkhoswe* plays a number of important roles including offering sacrifice (*kuthira nsembe*), considering issues relating to land, and funerals.

However, the *mbumba* system does have its own weaknesses. Schoffeleers noted that 'the potential sources of conflict in the *mbumba* system are the relationships between a man and his brothers and between a man and his mother's brother ... The cause of conflict is usually competition for effective control over the *mbumba* and positions of authority which follow from it.'<sup>25</sup> Malewezi noted that when the

20. J.C. Malewezi, personal communication to H. Mbaya, 12 March 2015. Dr Malewezi is the founder chairman of Chewa Heritage Foundation in Malawi under the guidance of His Majesty Kalonga Gawa Undi, King of the Chewa people in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. He is also an Advisor to HM Kalonga Gawa Undi at his Palace at Mkaika in Katete, Zambia, the traditional headquarters of the Chewa Kingdom.

21. Malewezi, same communication.

22. Malewezi, same communication.

23. Schoffeleers, *River of Blood*, p. 25.

24. Malewezi, same communication.

25. Schoffeleers, *River of Blood*, p. 25.

*nkhoswe* abuses his power he '... is called to a private meeting in a house (*Kuka*)' where 'The *mbumba* led by the senior *mbumba*, called "AKuKa" point out [the *nkhoswe*'s] weakness and ask him to change his ways. Several such meetings can take place' and then '...the *mbumba* [may] select another leader...'.<sup>26</sup>

The significance of this is that 'these actions are done in private. The rest of the people are told that he has asked his brother to assume the role. The *mbumba* still respect the outgoing *nkhoswe* and do not disgrace him.'<sup>27</sup> Both Saidi and Malewezi highlighted important dimensions for this study. While Saidi's contribution lay particularly in highlighting the legal and civil dimensions of the roles of the *mbumba* and *nkhoswe*, similarly Malewezi's conceptions pertaining to the constitutional, legal and priestly aspects are critical.

#### *The Complementarity of the Mbumba and Nkhoswe*

In Chewa and Nyanja matrilineal societies in Malawi, Eastern Zambia and Central Mozambique, and some parts of Zimbabwe, the term *mbumba* carries important socio-cultural dimensions. Roman Catholic scholar Jan Vermeullen asserted that the term *mbumba* denotes the 'kindred, those sustained by one, one's female relations'.<sup>28</sup> Steven Paas noted that the term *mbumba* 'refers to a woman (and her children) under the guardianship of a brother, *nkhoswe*'.<sup>29</sup> The brother carries special obligations and responsibilities of caring for the sister (and her children).<sup>30</sup> In fact according to one Chichewa dictionary, the *nkhoswe* is a mediator, intermediary, go-between; advocate, advisor, guardian of the marriage bond/counsellor and most significantly a representative.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Vermeullen applied the term *nkhoswe* to denote the role of advocacy and intercession such as of St Patrick in heaven. This comes close to the Chichewa

26. Malewezi, same communication.

27. Malewezi, same communication.

28. J. Vermeullen SJ, *Chinyanja (Chichewa) – English Dictionary*; published online at [http://www.fenza.org/docs/various/vermeullen\\_chewa\\_dictionary.pdf](http://www.fenza.org/docs/various/vermeullen_chewa_dictionary.pdf) (accessed 8 June 2014).

29. Steven Paas (ed.), *English-Chichewa Dictionary*, Buku la Mvunguti 19 (Zomba: Kachere series, 2005).

30. Clement Scott, *Dictionary of the Nyanja Language* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1929), p. 284. See also Steven Paas, *Mtanthauziramawu wa Chinyanja/Chichewa* (Blantyre: Dzuka Publishing Company Limited, 2000), p. 203.

31. Steven Paas, *Dictionary/Mtanthauziramawu: Chichewa/Chinyanja – English // English – Chichewa/Chinyanja*, online edition at <http://translate.chichewadictionary.org> (accessed 16 April 2014).

Dictionary rendering of the Holy Spirit as *nkhoswe* (depicted as female), whose role is understood as the intercessor.

Among the Yawo tribe at least in Malawi a woman also becomes the *nkhoswe*.<sup>32</sup> This case is unique as it sharply distinguishes the woman's role in the Yawo communities from other tribes. The implications for a female *nkhoswe* with regard to leadership in the church will be discussed further below. Nonetheless, Paas's definition comes closer to that of Bridget Kasauka's as traditional obligations of the *nkhoswe* towards the *mbumba* are concerned, but more importantly in this respect the stress lies on the role of women in the Chewa and Nyanja society. Kasauka noted that:

Women have a special place in Chewa society and belief. They are recognised as reproducers of the lineage (*Mbele*) which is an extended family of people related to the same ancestor. As a matrilineal society, property and land rights are inherited through the mother. *Mbele* means 'descended from the same breast'. Children of the same mother or female make up a family of dependence or *mbumba*. Elder brothers of the mothers, who are called *nkhoswe*, are the guardians of the lineage, and are mentors to their sisters' sons.<sup>33</sup>

According to Kasauka, two roles are critical. The first one is the woman's role in Chewa society to ensure the survival of lineage. Unlike among the Angoni or other tribes in Malawi, where the child of the existing chief succeeds to chieftaincy, among the Chewa it is a son (in some cases a daughter) of the *mbumba* who succeeds. Second, the significance of the *mbumba* lies in the fact it is her children that inherit property of the *mbumba*'s brother, commonly called *malume* (*nkhoswe*), by virtue of their biological relationship with the mother. From this perspective *mbumba* can also be understood to be the 'owner' of lineage, that is, '*mwini mbumba*', 'owner (custodian) of *mbumba*'. But in fact it is the brother of the woman, *malume* (uncle), who undertakes the role of *mwini mbumba*, custodian, who is officially called the *nkhoswe*. This is how Moya Aliya Malamusi described this concept:

If a male person's sister marries and produces children, all her children constitute the *mbumba* of her brother whom they will address as *malume* (maternal uncle). And he will be the *mwini mbumba* (= the owner of the

32. J.C. Mitchell, *The Yao Village, A Study in the Social Structure of a Nyasaland Tribe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 146. See also Ian D. Dicks, *An African Worldview: The Muslim Amacinga Yawo of Southern Malawi* (Zomba: Kachere Series, 2012).

33. Bridget Kasauka, 'Malawi', in B. Kasauka (ed.), *African Writers* (Dar es Salaam: New Africa Press, 2013), pp. 140–41.



*mbumba*), all those children will be his *mbumba*. The matrilineal social structure of the Achewa brings about this kind of bifurcation. It cannot be that the man in question would call children of his elder or younger brothers (*mbumba yanga* (my *mbumba*), he would call them *ana anga* (my children). In this society, parental power projects from the *malume* to the *mbumba*. A man is the 'owner' of his sister(s) children.<sup>34</sup>

What is critical here is the relationship between the *mbumba* and the *malume* (*nkhoswe*). As Moya Malamusi asserts, the *mbumba* refers 'to a person's allegiance through kinship ... the "ownership" of a person'.<sup>35</sup> He is the 'owner' in the sense of being a 'custodian' rather than 'owning' as 'property'.

It is significant also that Scott's definition of the term *mbumba* denoted three shades of meanings, as the 'kindred; those sustained by one; thus one's female relations, the sustainer or advocate being called *nkhoswe*; then the people of a chief, thus ruled and sustained by him, his kingdom'.<sup>36</sup> Scott's reference to 'the people of a chief, ruled and sustained by him, his kingdom' as *mbumba* introduces an important dimension. It is quite striking that in the New Testament the church is portrayed as prefiguring the kingdom of God, while Scott associates *mbumba* as 'the people of the chief'. The fact that the term *mbumba* (and *nkhoswe*) carries these meanings is suggestive.

The foregoing discussion has important implications. First, the *nkhoswe* has legal and social obligations towards the *mbumba*. Secondly, the *nkhoswe* has a representative role. He represents the *mbumba* and the ancestral lineage. Thirdly and more significantly, the *nkhoswe* is the protector (*mtetezi*) of the *mbumba* and guards her on behalf of the ancestors. He is the custodian of the *mbumba*. The *mbumba* feels safe under the guardianship of the *nkhoswe*.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the uncle acts as the ward of his *mbumba*. The apparent special role that the *mbumba* plays, and the privilege the *mbumba* enjoys derives from the position which she traditionally holds as a mother whose children have the right to ascend to the chieftaincy. In this sense she occupies the role of a

34. Moya Aliya Malamusi, 'The Popular Dance of Mbumba in the 1980s', *Ntama: Journal of African Music and Popular Culture*, [http://www.uni-hildesheim.de/ntama/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=12:the-popular-dance-of-mbumba-in-the-1980s&catid=66:articles&Itemid=29](http://www.uni-hildesheim.de/ntama/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12:the-popular-dance-of-mbumba-in-the-1980s&catid=66:articles&Itemid=29) (accessed 8 August 2014).

35. Malamusi, 'The Popular Dance of Mbumba in the 1980s'.

36. In *A Cyclopedic Dictionary of the Mang'anja Language*, p. 454.

37. For further exposition on this concept, see H.J. Sindima, 'Moyo: Fullness of Life. A Hermeneutic of the Logos in John's Prologue', *African Christian Studies* 6 (1990), pp. 50–62; cited by Martin Ott, *African Theology in Images* (Kachere Series; Blantyre: CLAIM, 2000), p. 383, n. 44.

custodian of the royalty. The *mbumba* then embodies 'womanhood' and 'motherhood', 'family-kinship'.

In Northern Malawi, the term *mbumba* also carries another meaning. In general it denotes the existence of family or clan members as 'one people' bonded to each other in a patrilineal lineage in a village.<sup>38</sup> The stress here is the union and fellowship engendered through close family ties or kinship. The *mbumba* exist in terms of blood relationship. This conception comes much closer to the South African IsiXhosa/IsiZulu term, *imbumba*, understood in the patrilineal rather than in the matrilineal sense among the Chewa and Nyanja. *Imbumba* derives from the root verb *uku-bu-imbana*, hence *ubumbano* (noun), which carries a very similar connotation as the word *umanyano*, unity as in a gathering,<sup>39</sup> literally translating union or fellowship.<sup>40</sup> According to V.V. Mkhize, the word denotes a holistic and collective dimension of the people's life, the people's 'communities together' in the sense of their 'union in values, needs and mission'.<sup>41</sup> This rendering of the word seems to stress union and fellowship engendered through values that enhance 'moulding' or 'creating', that is *ukubumba*, hence *ubumbano*.

I suggest that *mbumba* has to be construed within this broader perspective. Through his counsel and guardianship, the *nkhoswe* is the one who 'moulds' or 'creates' or 'raises' the *mbumba*. The values that the *nkhoswe* stands for and the role that the *nkhoswe* plays enhance the 'moulding' or the 'raising' of the *mbumba*. The *mbumba* is thus raised through the values of care, protection and counsel. The *mbumba* is under the custodianship of the *nkhoswe*.

Mkhize's association of the idea of the *imbumba* with 'coming together' of the people, engendered by common values, needs and mission is significant. Fellowship derives from a sense of common purpose and values. It engenders more than fellowship. In fact in meaning, the word approximates to the Greek word, *koinonia*.

38. Revd John Gondwe, interview with H. Mbaya, Stellenbosch, Cape Town, 14 May 2014.

39. A.C. Nkabinde, *Isichazamazwi 2* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1985).

40. Sibusiso Nyembezi, *AZ - Isichazamazwi sanamuhla Nangomuso* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1992).

41. Professor V.V. Mkhize, personal communication to H. Mbaya, 21 July 2014. Mkhize is an honorary lecturer, School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, and President/Founder of Umsamo African Institute and South African Healers Association.

*Ideology, Mbumba and Nkhoswe in the Recent History of Malawi*

Perhaps precisely because of their powerful metaphorical symbolic meaning and social connotations in the recent history of Malawi, the terms *nkhoswe* and *mbumba* have been used to advance some political causes. In the years 1892–95 the Anglican missionary on Likoma Island, Archdeacon Chauncy Maples, assumed for himself the role of the guardian, *nkhoswe*, for the people on the Island, and not only for the members of the new Christian community,<sup>42</sup> his own *mbumba*.<sup>43</sup> While the role that Maples exercised as the *nkhoswe* undermined the traditional authority of the traditional chiefs, it also tended to enhance his civil and political power among the Islanders, and so the chiefs opposed his efforts.<sup>44</sup>

Likewise throughout his presidency, the former State President of Malawi, Dr Kamuzu Banda (1964–95) arrogated to himself the role of ‘*nkhoswe*’ of the *mbumba*, that is, a guardian for all women in Malawi. Thus, Kishindo noted that he ‘considered himself the head of a modern Republican state as well as a paramount traditional ruler. In this role he distributed land to a chosen few [and] built them houses.’<sup>45</sup> He styled himself as the ‘ward’, the *nkhoswe* and ‘protector’ of all Malawian women, and by implication he expected them to be even more loyal to him even than men. In this way, through women he sought to control their husbands and other men.

Notwithstanding this misuse, the terms *mbumba* and *nkhoswe* embody some positive sociological values that can help shed light on an Anglican ecclesiology from the African perspective.

*Church, Mbumba and Nkhoswe**The Problem: Anglican Missionary Ecclesiology in Central and Southern Africa*

The Anglican Church came to Central Africa (Malawi, Mozambique, Southern Tanganyika and Zambia) and Southern Africa from England

42. S.W.C. Linyama, ‘Perceptions of Identity: The Case of Likoma 1885–1955’, *History Seminar Paper*, Chancellor College, University of Malawi, Malawi, 1985.

43. A.C.C. Mndalasi, ‘Local Rulers and the UMCA Missionaries during the Early Years of the Mission’s Establishment of Likoma’, *History Seminar Paper 1975/76*, Chancellor College, University of Malawi, Malawi, p. 6; John Weller and Jane Linden, *Mainstream Christianity in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1977), p. 38.

44. Mndalasi, ‘Local Rulers and the UMCA Missionaries’, p. 6.

45. Pascal J. Kishindo, ‘Evolution of Political Terminology in Chichewa and the Changing Political Culture in Malawi’, *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 9 (2000), pp. 20–30.

through the work of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) missionaries in the late nineteenth century.<sup>46</sup> Both organizations were inspired by the Oxford Movement, whose teachings stressed the sacramental view of the church. With regard to the Anglican Church in South Africa, Frank England noted that an Anglican understanding of the church 'has been greatly influenced by Anglo-Catholicism'.<sup>47</sup> 'The SPG monks and nuns ... through their devotion ... emphasized the holy office of the priest, the sacraments and ritual.'<sup>48</sup>

The episcopate, and by extension the priesthood, was of the *esse* of the church. Unlike the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in East and West Africa, in Central Africa the UMCA and in Southern Africa the SPG brought a conception of the church wherein the episcopate seemed almost synonymous with it.

To varying degrees in these regions, the episcopate has played a very significant role in the ecclesiology of the Anglican Church. Referring to what he called the 'Anglo-Saxon captivity' of the episcopate in the post-missionary modern Africa era, John Pobee noted that:

the bishop ... has become a carbon copy of the English bishop whose office and style have been accommodated to the English culture, particularly the upper-class culture. A classic example is the African bishop being addressed as the Lord Bishop of Cape Coast or Tamale or Freetown.<sup>49</sup>

He went on to say that:

The title reflects an English culture and social structure which are irrelevant to the African situation. Thus a major task before the younger dioceses of the Anglican Communion is to work their way out of the captivity, so that the Anglican apprehensions of Christ may become authentically 'enfleshed' in Africa.<sup>50</sup>

46. Henry Rowley, *The Study of the Universities Mission to Central Africa* (London: Saunders, Otley & Co.; 2nd edn, 1967); Peter Hincliff, *The Anglican Church in South Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963).

47. Frank England, 'Tracing Southern African Anglicanism', in Frank England and Torquil Paterson (eds.), *Bounty in Bondage* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), pp. 14–29 (p. 17).

48. England, 'Tracing Southern African Anglicanism', p. 20.

49. J.S. Pobee, 'Newer Dioceses of the Anglican Communion – Movement and Prospect', in S. Sykes and J. Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1988), pp. 393–405 (396).

50. Pobee, 'Newer Dioceses of the Anglican Communion', p. 396.

In Central Africa bishops still use the title 'Lord Bishop'. While very few bishops in South Africa would be comfortable to be addressed as such, there as in Central Africa episcopal trappings of the office often associated with the Victorian era have endured.

Pobee's critical observation might well then apply to the Anglican Church in Central and South Africa. In Central Africa, the too-close identification of the episcopate with the church, at least in Malawi, seems to have influenced Anglicans to view the 'church primarily as an institution and secondarily as a community'.<sup>51</sup> This is precisely because traditionally the Anglican Church in Central and Southern Africa has been too closely identified with the sacramental role of the episcopate, and by extension the priesthood.

More significantly, England asserted that perhaps 'there has been an over-emphasis on the sacraments and liturgy where sanctification is mystical rather than truly incarnational...'. He concludes that 'perhaps the Church has tended to perceive herself as the guardian of truth, speaking out and condemning injustice and exploitation, but without creatively moulding the lives of her members for practical tasks of ensuring that the "captives are released, the blind see and the oppressed are liberated" (Lk. 4:18)'.<sup>52</sup> In other words there exists a missiological challenge that is not unrelated to ecclesiology. To conceptualize the church (an Anglican diocese, in particular) as *mbumba* or as *imbumba*, and leadership as *ankhoswe* (bishops), has the potential to bring a positive dimension to an African ecclesiology with a bearing on missional imperatives.

### *The Essence of the Church as an African Family*

In Chewa and Nyanja society, the *mbumba's* rights can only be appropriately fulfilled and her privileges enjoyed within an 'African family social structure' – hence by extension the church, and in this case a diocese can also be perceived as the African family. It is as the 'African family' that the church can enjoy its rights and privileges in the true sense of the Chewa/Nyanja term *mbumba*. African Roman Catholic scholars have fruitfully contributed to an African understanding of the church as an African family and as an African clan.<sup>53</sup> Using the African model of an African family, Donatus O. Chukwu has illustrated the

51. James Tengatenga, *Church, State and Society in Malawi: The Anglican Case* (Zomba: Kachere Series no. 13, 2006), p. 18.

52. England, 'Tracing Southern African Anglicanism', p. 20.

53. Ukpong, 'Towards a Holistic Approach'.

significance of the sacramental and fellowship dimensions of the church in Africa.<sup>54</sup> In his view, the African family is a model of sacramentality and the communion of the church that transcends mere family and ethnic ties.<sup>55</sup>

Josiah Kibira introduced the idea of the African clan as a true model of an African Church.<sup>56</sup> Going beyond the African family model, Deusdedit Nkurunziza embraces ethnicity as the gravitational centre of evangelization to stress the importance of unity in diversity.<sup>57</sup> Similarly Alozoie Onwubiko urged a Catholic ecclesiology based on the African family value of *ujamaa*, brotherhood or sisterhood in East Africa.<sup>58</sup> He argued for the importance of understanding of the Roman Catholic Church from the perspective of family-hood. The significance of his argument lies in the fact that the Church in Africa ought to be understood as a closely knit fellowship, *koinonia*.

While the family is the cornerstone, it is the community that defines the identity of the primary family. It stresses the idea of collectiveness, the 'corporate' dimension of the church which becomes critical. The diocese becomes a 'family' and the global communion an 'extended' family, where all are connected to each other by virtue of the space they occupy in the family.

Liturgically, the term *mbumba* appears in the second Eucharistic prayer of an Anglican Prayer Book in Malawi, where it refers to the 'Church spread out in the world',<sup>59</sup> denoting the 'Universal Church'. It is a prayer that has been adapted from the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (Roman Catholic Church). However, nowhere in the liturgy is the term related to its kin word, *nkhoswe*. As Pascal J. Kishindo noted, 'the words *mbumba* and *nkhoswe* are defined in terms of each other'.<sup>60</sup> In Chichewa and Chinyanja, however, as we have seen, the two words, *mbumba* and *nkhoswe* are almost inseparable as the roles and functions of the persons who assume them in the communities are closely intertwined.

54. Donatus O. Chukwu, *The Church as the Extended Family of God: Toward a New Direction for African Ecclesiology* (Indiana: Xlibris Publication, 2011).

55. Chukwu, *The Church*.

56. Josiah Kibira, *Church, Clan, and the World* (Lund: Gleerup, 1974).

57. Deusdedit Nkurunziza, 'Ethnicity - The Gravitational Centre of Evangelization: An Essay in African Ecclesiology', *European Journal of Science and Theology* 3 (2007), pp. 51-62.

58. Alozoie O. Onwubiko, *The Church in Mission* (Paulines: Nairobi, 2001).

59. The text is found at <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Chichewa.html> (accessed 27 June 2014).

60. Kishindo, 'Evolution of Political Terminology in Chichewa', p. 22.

A Diocese as *Mbumba* and Leaders (Bishops) as *Ankhoswe*<sup>61</sup>Missiological Implications for the Ecclesiology of *Mbumba*  
and Leadership as *Unkhoswe*<sup>62</sup>

In light of the above exposition, the concept and role of *nkhoswe* can rightly be attributed to Jesus Christ, *mwini mbumba*, to whom the Church belongs. Since in Chewa society, among others, the *nkhoswe* fulfils a sacerdotal role, offering sacrifice to the ancestors on behalf of the *mbumba*, Jesus Christ can also be regarded as the *Nkhoswe* par excellence in terms of his New Testament role as mediator, intercessor and high priest.<sup>63</sup> Others have portrayed him in the related role as the Ancestor.<sup>64</sup> Jesus Christ is the ultimate *Nkhoswe* precisely because in his divine and human person he embodies the church, his *mbumba*, which he also represents.

As a diocese constitutes a unit of the Church in Anglican ecclesiology, so it can appropriately be described as the *mbumba*. A diocese is the *mbumba* precisely because its members, whether on parochial, archdeaconry (regional) or other levels, are organically interrelated, as members closely belonging to the same Christian *family*, the *mbumba*. So it follows that a Province is a 'family of *mbumba*' as it is constituted by dioceses, and so too a conglomeration of *mbumba* is a 'Communion'.

By virtue of their calling by Christ, bishops are the *ankhoswe* of the church in succession to the apostles. Bishops and by extension the clergy become the *ankhoswe* after the pattern of Christ. However, they are not *mwini mbumba*, who is Christ alone. They are merely stewards and guardians to serve the diocese, the *mbumba*, and in return the latter 'rewards' the *mbumba* with gifts. It is from the *mbumba* and not vice versa that the *nkhoswe's* role is defined. In fact, it is the *mbumba* (people of God, the diocese) that constitutes the *nkhoswe* (bishop) and not vice versa. Through consecration (ordination) and appointment to a pastoral charge, the *nkhoswe* (bishop) and the *mbumba* (diocese/parish) enters into a contractual relationship. The obligations of this relationship are similar to those in marriage. Behind the roles of guardian, warden, protector, advocate, that a *nkhoswe* fulfils in relation

61. *Ankhoswe* is plural for *nkhoswe*.

62. The term *unkhoswe* also derives from *nkhoswe*, and denotes the leadership role exercised by the *nkhoswe*.

63. Cf. Letter to the Hebrews.

64. See, for instance, C. Wanamaker, 'Jesus the Ancestor: Reading the Story of Jesus from an African Perspective', *Scriptura*, 63 (1997), pp. 281–98; Clarke Jawanza, 'Recovering the Doctrine of Jesus as Saviour in Terms of African Understanding of an Ancestor: A Model for the Black Church', *Black Theology* 8 (2010), pp. 140–59.

to the *mbumba* lie critical social values of 'collective identity', 'solidarity', 'mutuality' and 'reciprocity', the very core values that constitute African view of communality. So it follows that as *nkhoswe*, a bishop, and his *mbumba* the diocese, ought to aspire to cultivate, enhance and engender the spirit of mutuality, reciprocity and above all accountability.

In terms of his position as *nkhoswe*, a bishop then has the obligation to raise (*ku-wu-mba*) or (*uku-bu-mba*) the *mbumba* by means of admonishment, giving guidance and counsel in matters of pastoral nature – the advice that builds up and equips the body of Christ. This duty is critical precisely because like an *earthen pot*, the *mbumba* is precious but also fragile. If not handled with care, it can break. Hence the *nkhoswe* is called appropriately to fulfil the role of a pastor and shepherd. A shepherd tends and cares for the sheepfold, his *mbumba*, by nurturing it with godly counsel. It is by virtue of being a 'trustee', 'guardian' and 'warden' that the *nkhoswe* pastors and shepherds. The *nkhoswe* assumes the role of a 'mediator' and 'advocate' between Christ and his *mbumba*, and between the members of his *mbumba*.

Outlining the role of *nkhoswe*, Malewezi indicates: 'I agree with all the various shades of meanings of *mbumba* and *nkhoswe*. This only illustrates the complexity of the concept.' He went on to argue that 'The fact that the role of the *nkhoswe* is more visible in marriages should not overshadow the many other even more important roles the *nkhoswe* performs for the *mbumba* such as offering sacrifices (*nsembe*), health issues, land issues, funerals etc.'<sup>65</sup>

Vermeullen defines the *nkhoswe* as a 'tutor, advocate, the go-between responsible for marriage agreements, patron/advocate in heaven (like St. Patrick)'.<sup>66</sup> It is significant that here the 'advocacy' role of the *nkhoswe* is associated with 'intercession in heaven of St. Patrick'. This conception enhances the view that the church ought to function more as an 'African family' than primarily as an institution, consequently, where a bishop fulfils the role of 'pater familias' or 'mater familias' rather than as a potentate. In this '*nkhoswe-mbumba* framework', all members of the diocese (*mbumba*) have the privilege to contribute to ministry, since their gifts are equally acknowledged, different gifts and yet all equal. Ministry derives from 'service' (*diakonia*) to serve the *mbumba* rather than status, seen as a privilege rather than a status symbol. This conception sets the members of *mbumba* free to see

65. Malewezi, same correspondence.

66. Vermuellen, *Chinyanja (Chichewa) – English Dictionary* (accessed 5 June 2014).



themselves as partners rather than as rivals in mission, as collaborators rather than competitors.

Vermeullen's rendering is also significant in the sense that the Chichewa and Chinyanja Bible denote the Holy Spirit as the *nkhoswe*, the Counsellor and Advocate. Hence, it is logical to understand that the *nkhoswe* functions as the 'advocate' and 'counsellor' to the *mbumba*. So it follows that when occasions of conflict or misunderstandings arise the *nkhoswe* functions as a *go-between* for the *mbumba* and the other party; the *nkhoswe* is like the intercessor of the *mbumba* its advocate. As the supreme *Nkhoswe* of the church, Christ intercedes on its behalf. If as noted earlier, among the Yawo people in Malawi the *nkhoswe* can be female and in some cases even among the Chewa, and as the Holy Spirit (*nkhoswe*) in the Chinyanja/Chichewa Scriptures is depicted as female, does this not strengthen the case for women to be considered for ordination to the priesthood in the Anglican Church in Central Africa?

So in his role *vis-à-vis* the *mbumba*, the *nkhoswe* assumes the role of a guardian. The *nkhoswe* derives and exercises 'his' authority not from the position of 'patriarchal power', or 'patronage', not in relation to the members of the 'household' as 'minors' but rather as an 'elder' standing in line with the ancestors. Seeing his/her role as that of the custodian of the *mbumba*, the wisdom of the ancestors, he/she then promotes the spirit of love and care for the common well-being of all the members of the household.

The Church can be understood as the *imbumba/mbumba* of Christ, 'owned' by Christ, the *nkhoswe* number one, protected by Christ, where the contribution of every family (*mbumba*) is recognized and indeed affirmed. The fact that the *nkhoswe* may be summoned to the *Kuka* by the *mbumba* when he is out of line illustrates the principle of accountability, and highlights the fact that leadership is not only by kinship but earned. In his article on 'African leadership', Maake Masango made a similar point that African leadership is earned, and therefore there is a sense of accountability about it. Caring and accountability are marks of traditional African leadership. Leadership has qualities or values that 'prove a genuine sense of care for people, and an awareness of ultimate accountability'.<sup>67</sup>

Just as the *nkhoswe* serves the *mbumba* in the spirit of a servant on behalf of the living-dead, the ancestors, so the bishops and clergy carry a special obligation to serve the church on behalf of Christ and the saints. The *nkhoswe* is an advocate of the *mbumba*, the counsellor of the

67. M. Masango, 'Leadership in the African Context', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 23 (2002), pp. 707-18.

*mbumba* and in fact the custodian of the *mbumba*. The *nkhoswe* plays a mediatory role between the *mbumba* and the other party.

Finally, it ought to be noted that the term *mbumba* particularly as understood among the Chewa and Nyanja is inseparably associated with 'femininity' or 'womanhood', and even more significantly 'motherhood'. There are parallels here between the 'feminine', 'motherhood' image of the Church in the New Testament (Rev. 19.7; 21.9-10; 2 Cor. 11.2) and the feminine image of the *mbumba*. This is so precisely because in the Chewa and Nyanja society the *mbumba* plays a critical role not only in the survival of lineage through child-bearing but also and consequently succession in the chieftaincy.

The bishops (and clergy) as the *nkhoswe* have the role to watch over (*mtetezi*) the *mbumba* on behalf of Christ, who is in fact the *Nkhoswe* number one. They derive this role from and on behalf of Christ, who is its principal *nkhoswe*. Just as the *nkhoswe* is 'constituted' by the *mbumba* as Malewezi argued, so the leadership of the Church (*ankhoswe*) (bishops) is constituted by the Church (*mbumba*), and therefore the *nkhoswe* is ultimately accountable to the *mbumba*, who has the power to ask the *nkhoswe* to step down if the latter does not discharge his duties accordingly. In other words the *nkhoswe* is not irreplaceable. Depending on his performance the *nkhoswe* can be deposed.

No church leader has the right to operate above the Church. The Church (laity) has an inalienable right to request its leader to step down if she deems it appropriate. Hence ministering in the Church must be seen as a privilege rather than a right, a service rather than a fulfilment of obligations of 'employment'. In other words, when ministry is too much associated with status (and sometimes power) it becomes an obstacle to the Church fulfilling its mission. The Church in Africa, quite independent of its clerical leadership, must strive to develop powerful institutional structures like *aKuka* which it must use with confidence and creativity to counteract leadership tendencies that undermine *koinonia*.

Some of the current structures, such as the Synod, Church tribunals, and aspects of Constitution and Canons in their present forms, developed in the circumstances of medieval Europe, far removed from ours, seem to fail as effective instruments to address critical issues facing the Anglican Church in Africa. The Anglican Church, particularly the laity, must take a bold step to set themselves free from Anglican structures that have failed to serve the Church well down the ages. This will require courage and visionary leadership on the part of some lay Anglicans. In doing this the Church in (Central) Africa will not cease to be 'Anglican' at all, no less loyal to global Anglicanism at all.

In fact it can transform into a 'better' Anglican Church. The Anglican Church in Central Africa ought to express itself in forms that are authentically African and that respond to the needs of the African Anglicans. In using African forms, the church in Africa will justify its missionary role to the other Anglican Churches beyond its frontiers. As long as Anglicanism in Central and Southern Africa is captive to archaic structures, relics of medieval antiquity, it will never grow.

*Sacraments as the Celebration of Koinonia of the Mbumba-nkhoswe*

The celebration of the sacraments constitutes one of the essential marks of Anglicanism. Though no Chinyanja or Chichewa word exists for sacrament of the Eucharist, the notion behind the Eucharist is implied in the descriptive term especially used for intimate fellowship in Malawi and Zambia, *chiyanjano choyera*, which denotes 'profound' holy fellowship literally implying 'sharing in one another's meal (life)' or the 'reconciled', whereby the idea of belongingness is implied. The relationship between the *mbumba* and *nkhoswe* is expressed organically in *chiyanjano*, or more appropriately by the term *chidyerano*, implying 'sharing in one another's meal', literally 'entering' into 'one another's life', that is, 'your life becomes mine and mine becomes yours since we belong together'. There is a 'covenantal' dimension to this - 'participating in one another's life'. This view of the Eucharist is organic, where all are living members, belonging to one family. The 'entering into one another's life' reflects the idea of the *mbumba* and the *nkhoswe* in *koinonia*, where each party has mutual obligations.

So when bishops and the clergy preside over the Eucharist, they stand in a similar role to that of *nkhoswe* when he offers the sacrifice (*nsembe*) to the ancestors. The Eucharist then takes on the meaning of *chidyerano*, deep *koinonia*. Regular celebration and partaking of the Eucharist engenders the spirit of 'we all belong' to one fellowship as brothers and sisters. The sacrament then takes on a deep meaning of a fellowship expressing the virtue of solidarity between the *nkhoswe* and his *mbumba*. It ceases existing merely as a Christian 'spiritual badge' of identity. In a real way it encapsulates the saying 'I am because of what you are'. This is an ecclesiology of 'corporate-ness', 'belongingness', which must engender a spirit of common obligation. The celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist therefore ought to be seen as the sealing of the relationship between the *nkhoswe* and the *mbumba*.

*Conclusion*

The preceding discussion has shown that the roles of the *mbumba* and the *nkhoswe* are intricately interconnected. The *mbumba* defines what the *nkhoswe* ought to be, must be. In short the *mbumba* is of *esse* to the *nkhoswe*, while the latter is of *bene esse* to the *mbumba*. What this implies is that it is the Church that constitutes and defines the episcopate, not vice versa; hence the latter can only find its legitimacy and fulfilment in terms of the former. The Anglican episcopate, and by extension the priesthood in Central Africa, ought to see its role as that of a servant of the diocese, the *mbumba*. Bishops ought to understand that they derive their role and authority from Jesus Christ, *mwini mbumba*. The *nkhoswe* is the guardian, the ward of the *mbumba*, over whom the *nkhoswe* is called to be a shepherd exercising pastoral care. On the other hand, the *mbumba*, the diocese, must understand that chiefly its role entails enabling and equipping the *nkhoswe* in fulfilling his/her role. It is a privilege bequeathed to both the *mbumba* and *nkhoswe* by *mwini mbumba*, *Nkhoswe* number one.