

**AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF  
A PNEUMATOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY  
INSIDE THE CHURCH OF CENTRAL AFRICAN  
PRESBYTERIAN IN MALAWI**

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v7i1.4>

**Submission: July 11, 2017 Acceptance: May 10, 2018**

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**Abstract**

I investigate the African philosophical foundations of a pneumatological controversy inside the *Church of Central African Presbyterian* (CCAP) in Malawi. While apparently the conflict consists in difficulties in embracing both the New Pentecostal Theology (NPT) and the Reformed Calvinist (protestant) Theology (RCT) within CCAP, it is rooted in the philosophical conflict between communitarianism and individualism. CCAP fully embraced the African communitarian philosophy mixed with Christian communism as its essence, while adherents of NPT followed individualism. Consequently, this affected the interpretation of the fundamental doctrines such as *sola scriptura*, *sola grazia*, and other practices. I suggest a philosophical solution constituting in rebuilding African identity and a theological solution in promoting a new pneumatology based on the concept of enculturation.

**Keywords:** Pneumatology, Communitarianism, Individualism, African philosophy, inculturation

**Introduction**

Pneumatology has raised a series of metaphysical difficulties in its application in different parts of the world. For instance, the history of Christianity shows a number of controversies that focus on the metaphysical problem of ‘essence’ of the Holy Spirit (HYKIN 2010; ERICKSON 1972, 856). One of such issues is the metaphysical controversy between Athanasius and the Tropic<sup>1</sup> on whether the essence of the Holy Spirit is fully divine, consubstantial with the Son and the Father or a created angel at the highest rank (ATHANASIUS

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Tropic* comes from the Greek word *τρόπος* which means figure.

(356-361)1951, 10-60). A similar notable conflict on the essence of the Holy Spirit was between the Pneumatomachians (Spirit-fighters) and Basil (375)<sup>2</sup>. The former denied the essence of the Holy Spirit as fully God, while Basil defended the deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I want to focus on a philosophical interpretation of the current pneumatological issues that have characterised different churches, and specifically CCAP in Malawi.

The CCAP in Malawi embraced the traditional ontological conception of the essence of the Holy Spirit as consubstantial with the Father and the Son, with slight modifications and specifications as firstly done in the Calvinist theology (CRISP 2014; ERICKSON 1972, 856) and later by other reformers (DUNNING 1988). However, the problem came in on how the Holy Spirit functions in relation to human essence and practice. Traditional CCAP underlined both Bantu ontological conception in which the essence of a human being, is being in a community and Christian communism, while some of the adherents to NPT adopted an individualistic conception of the Holy Spirit. At stake is not the essence of the Holy Spirit but the essence of being African and at the same time follow either CCAP theology or NPT.

Before presenting African metaphysical foundation of pneumatological<sup>3</sup> controversy in Malawi, in section 2 below, I will present a conflict between CCAP traditionalists and those that embraced NPT (neoliberals), more especially from late 1980 to 2017. In section 3, I offer an ontological basis for the pneumatological controversy. I argue that the traditionalists embraced Bantu communitarian ontology while the NPT adherents underlined a neoliberal individualistic ontology. In section 4, I argue that influenced by conflicting ontologies, CCAP traditionalists and NPT's held conflicting views on the understanding and interpretation of the fundamental theological teachings of CCAP. These conflicting views concerned the interpretation and practice of the doctrines of *sola scriptura*, *sola grazia*, *sola fidei* and the sacraments. In section 5, I attempt to provide an African philosophical and theological solution to the pneumatological controversy.

### CCAP's Pneumatological Controversy

In Malawi, CCAP has experienced a continuous internal pneumatological controversy on either to embrace the traditional RCT (conservatives) or the NPT (progressives). According to the view of the conservatives, CCAP, as one of the members of the *Council of*

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<sup>2</sup> *De Spiritu Sancto*

<sup>3</sup> This word is derived from *pneuma* which means Spirit. It is used in *pneumatological controversy*, to refer to problems that have something to do with the Holy Spirit in the Christian context.

*Reformed Churches in Central Africa* (CRCCA), is traditionally known as an African Christian community founded on the RCT mixed with elements from the Bantu community-centered culture of Malawi. The RCT is founded on the following elements: *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), which places the *Bible* as the sole authority and source of infallible truth, *sola gratia* (grace alone) which supports the idea of total grace as the source of human salvation, and this is accompanied by *sola fidei* (Faith [in God/Christ] alone), which indicates total trust of a Christian in God (ERICKSON 1972, 81). Commenting on the Bible CRCCA catechism notes:

The Church, her doctrines, her judgments, her liturgy and everything else about the Church, are built on the firm foundation of the Bible. Care must be taken that all these are judged by the standard of the Bible. (CRCCA 2004, 115)

It is further centred on the sacraments and the coming together of well-disciplined community of believers to worship God. The Bantu culture is generally known for underlining among others, togetherness (unity), solidarity and respect, which are expected to be reflected in the community of believers. A good CCAP member is expected to follow the RCT, the church's interpretation as contained in the Catechism and be disciplined as demanded by the surrounding Bantu culture, the Bible, and other ordinances.

As is well known, CCAP churches include: the Free Church of Scotland, which first arrived in Malawi in 1875 (now known as the Livingstonia Synod), the Church of Scotland which came in 1876 (now known as the Blantyre Synod) and the Dutch Reformed Church (now known as the Nkhoma Synod (see MWALE 1979)), which is originally from the Dutch people from South Africa and started its mission in 1889.<sup>4</sup> These churches are commonly known as Presbyterian, which also includes the Synod of Harare in Zimbabwe and the Synod of Zambia (PAAS 2006, 197). While these churches have practiced reformed Calvinist/protestant theology, a new theology based on new protestant pneumatology has been introduced in the system by the progressives and has resulted into the problem of compresence of the two theologies inside one system.

In their NPT formulation, the progressives emphasised the compresence of the Father the Son, the Holy Spirit and a Christian.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the Catholic missionaries (White Fathers) arrived at a later stage in 1889. They arrived in Mangochi District in the area of chief Mponda.

These teachings may be traced to as early as 1900s, when Donald Fraser from the Livingstonia Synod and David Clement Scott from Blantyre Synod were leaders (STROHBEHN 1999, 9; STROHBEHN 2005).

The number of progressives started increasing from mid-1990's mainly due to the growth of Pentecostals, which has been enormous in different parts of the world because of the spread of globalisation and rapid advancement of technology. In fact, in the period between 1994 and 2017, most Malawians were exposed to televisions from abroad, and this made CCAP Christians to watch different Pentecostal channels for free.<sup>5</sup> Apart from being introduced to the NPT theology, they were also exposed to neoliberal ideas.

Although the conservatives and the progressives agreed in some fundamental teachings of the CCAP, the progressives added the centrality of individual salvation through being born again and baptism in the Holy Spirit as necessary conditions for genuine Christianity. This brought tension, given that the insistence on individual salvation by the progressives conflicted with the conservatives' conception of salvation through the total grace of God. Similarly, the progressives' requirement of a second baptism after water baptism was questionable to the conservatives who were used to one baptism.

A commonly known controversy in the church was experienced in 1998, when the progressives announced a new reformation in the CCAP based on NPT. This led to a lot of resistance from the conservatives who viewed them as separatists. A number of progressives decided to develop their own church known as the Presbyterian Church of Malawi (PCM).<sup>6</sup> This new environment is where the members preached about personal salvation and baptism of the Holy Spirit (from the Greek *Baptizeinen pneumati*) and the reception of various gifts, such as, healing, speaking in tongues, etc. (TURNER 2000). Using NPT, the progressives claimed that their being had power and authority to transform anything. The defection of these members did not necessarily imply the end of the controversy, given that the conflict still continued within the church, though it took a different form.

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<sup>5</sup> Currently, some of the Pentecostals that are influencing Christians through the Television in Malawi include: Prophet T. B. Joshua, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, Prophet Mukhandiwa, and many others. Most of these Pentecostals were preceded by the American famous evangelists such as, A. A. Allen (1911-1970), Jack Coe (1918-1956), Oral Roberts (1918-2009, he pioneered the gospel of prosperity), Billy Graham (1918-2018), Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003) and William Marion Branham (1909-1965).

<sup>6</sup> See their official website: <http://www.pcmchurch.org/about-us/>. For the ministry of this new church which defection from CCAP, see, <https://www.facebook.com/presbyterianchurchofmalawi>

The new form of the controversy led to an internal division—although not declared – between the Holy Spirit filled leaders who accepted NPT and the conservatives who wanted to strictly continue with the reformed Calvinist theology in its traditional form. The conservatives saw the new forms of worship as disturbing the communitarian spirit in such a way that they were destroying the identity of CCAP.<sup>7</sup> The individualistic style of praying of some of the members of the new movement was quite disturbing for them.

Progressives who remained in the CCAP started gaining more ground as many young people, from the early 1990s, showed interest towards this new form of theology and worship. The involvement of the CCAP youth's in Pentecostalism may be explained by many factors, such as the presence of an inter-denominational prayer group in Malawian secondary schools and universities, known as, Students Christian Organisation of Malawi (SCOM), which introduced the young generation to NPT, new form of worship and new relationship with the Trinitarian God. Those who embraced this theology were commonly known as the Born Agains (BAs). As years passed by, the generation of the BAs increased and some had influential positions in the church. Most of the old people and some young men, saw this as a form of confusion, and tried to suppress the new movement.<sup>8</sup>

Aware of the internal tensions and the possible divisions as it was the case in 1998 with PCM and some elders such as, elder Mbewe, who started the Calvary Family, and elder Ziba, who started Illumination Assembly,<sup>9</sup> most of the conservatives accepted a compromise, by allowing the youths to practice fellowships, a place where they could have the Pentecostal experience.

Although the compromise of the conservatives is a positive move that helped in solving some of the problems, there are still many challenges that pastors and other elders are facing based on the sides they take with respect to these controversial groups. Pastors who are more involved in the Spirit-filled related activities such as healing, speaking in tongues, etc., are looked at by the other strong conservatives with suspicion. They are seen as those who want to destroy the church's identity. Similarly in places where Pentecostalism is favoured by the young generation, more specifically in towns, a pastor who attempts to

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<sup>7</sup> The people had a habit to pray in a certain uniform way, and this gave them an identity as members of CCAP.

<sup>8</sup> One Pastor who offered some information on this element of suppression (did not allow the name to be exposed) indicated that a number of them were accused of bringing confusion in the church and they were threatened to be sent away.

<sup>9</sup> He started with a ministry known as Fountain of Victory, which is still present, together with the church.

suppress this group is looked at with suspicion. This is problematic in a system of governance of CCAP that is practiced in Nkhoma Synod, where pastors can be removed whenever the people decide.<sup>10</sup>

Although I appreciate the decision of most of the conservatives to integrate NPT in their missions, I believe that the philosophical and theological foundations of this controversy require a serious consideration to avoid promoting a superficial Christianity built on compromises, yet ignoring the individuals who are becoming victims because of their choices.<sup>11</sup>

### **Philosophical Foundation of Pneumatological Controversy in Malawi**

Although pneumatological controversy is apparently a doctrinal issue, it is primarily a consequence of a threatened conception of a human being's essence in Bantu/African ontology. According to this ontology, it is argued that the essence of a human being from an African perspective is being with others (communitarianism) (see also MBITI 1969; MENKITI 1984 and 2004; MOLEFE 2017). I argue that the CCAP conservatives in Malawi, being predominantly Bantu, adhered to communitarian ontology while NPT progressives to individualistic ontology.

In African studies on the Bantu people, communitarian ontology embraced by CCAP conservatives may be traced in one of the earliest works, *Bantu Philosophy*, by Tempels (1959). According to Tempels, the Western thought followed individualistic ontology while Bantu thought a communitarian ontology. Commenting on this difference Tempels writes:

This concept of separate beings, of substance which find themselves side by side, entirely independent one of another, is foreign to Bantu thought. Bantu hold that created beings preserve a bond one with another, an intimate ontological relationship, comparable with the causal tie which binds creature with Creator. For the Bantu there is interaction of

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<sup>10</sup> The system is different from Blantyre Synod and Livingstonia Synod where pastors are not normally invited by the people, but they are assigned or appointed by their leaders (Moderators and their helpers)

<sup>11</sup> For an article that discusses pentecostal, presbyterian clash in 2011 because of a similar problem, see <https://www.facebook.com/MalawiVoiceFanPage/posts/157678054294788>.

being with being, that is to say, of force with force.<sup>12</sup>  
(TEMPELS 1959, 58)

Tempels considers individualism as foreign to the Bantu people. Consequently, any idea or way of life that promotes an individual and his independent way of doing things as was the case with NPT is a threat to community's well-being. In fact, just as it was the case with CCAP's original Church in Malawi, the community was at the centre of every activity such as religion, morality, politics and social life.

Mbiti portrayed communitarian ontology as conflicting with individualism. His dictum "I am because we are" is considered as a summary of African communitarianism (MBITI 1969, 108-109). This is presented as an ontological thesis, indicating that the essence of an African is defined by the community. This thesis is famously defended by Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984). Anyone bringing individualism is therefore tempering with this essence. Mbiti contrasts his dictum with the Cartesian epistemic dictum 'I think therefore I am', and argues that Western thought is based on individualism as opposed to African communitarianism. It is unfortunate that Mbiti compares an African ontological thesis with the Cartesian epistemic thesis and takes this as a foundation of African as opposed to Western identity (see KAYANGE 2018).

Communitarian ontology (for Africans) as opposed to individualistic ontology (for Westerners) has been adopted in the Sub-Saharan countries through *Ubuntu/Umunthu*<sup>13</sup> ideology. Desmond Tutu, one of the supporters of this thought argued for communitarianism that,

We say, 'a person is a person through other people'. It is not 'I think therefore I am'. It says rather: 'I am human because I belong.' I participate, I share ... Harmony, friendliness, [and] community are great goods. Social harmony is for us

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<sup>12</sup> Commenting on force Tempels wrote, "When we think in terms of the concept "being", they use the concept "force". Where we see concrete beings, they see concrete forces. When we say that "beings" are differentiated by their essence or nature, Bantu say that "forces" differ in their essence or nature. They hold that there is the divine force, celestial or terrestrial forces, human forces, animal forces, vegetable and even material or mineral forces" (Tempels 1959, 35 [24-25]). The citation shows that being as force is said of things as a universal term, applied on everything that is. It therefore represents genera.

<sup>13</sup> *Ubuntu* is a Xhosa and Ndebele term, *Umunthu* is its translation in Chichewa, and *hunhu* in Shona, they all represent a state of living communitarian values such as solidarity, as the essence of being human (see also RAMOSE 1999).

the *summum bonum*—the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague. (1999, 35)

Desmond Tutu extends the Mbitian conception of the essence of being African rephrasing ‘I am because we are,’ into ‘I am human because I belong.’ Like Mbiti, he repudiates the Cartesian ‘I think therefore I am,’ which is Western and seen as promoting individualism. The citation suggests some of the fundamental virtues in the African context such as harmony, friendliness and sharing (METZ 2012).

In Malawian thought, the above idea has been discussed based on the concept of *Umunthu* (TAMBULASI and KAYUNI 2005, 2012;<sup>14</sup> MFUTSO-BENGO 2016). It is argued that a person with *Umunthu* (humanity) practices communitarian virtues. Malawian proverbs such as *kalikokha nkanyama, ali awiri ndi anthu* (the one who is alone is an animal, but those that are two are human beings) is a case in point (see TAMBULASI and KAYUNI 2012; KAYANGE 2016).

I am aware that although communitarianism is emphasised as African, it does not imply that the individual is not recognised in African context. African philosophers like Kwame Gyekye (1992) and Bernard Matolino (2014), have defended individual autonomy in their respective communitarian theories. As Kaphagawani also observes:

[t]o assert African communalism is not in any way to imply the denial of recognition of individual human beings *qua* individuals. African communalism in fact takes cognizance of ontological pluralism; and to assert, as Mbiti does, that *we are*, presumes prior recognition of the individuality of those making up the *we*.... And to claim, ‘whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group,’ and vice versa, is no doubt to forget the difference between individuals on the one hand and *sets* of individuals on the other. (1998, 173)

This may be further supported by various studies that focus on investigating an individual in the African context through the study of

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<sup>14</sup> Kayuni and Tambulasi discussed *ubuntu* in a Malawian setting in their works, *Can African Feet Divorce Western Shoes? The Case of ‘Ubuntu’ and Democratic Good Governance in Malawi* (2005) and *Ubuntu and corporate social responsibility: the case of selected Malawian organization* (2012), but tried in vain to recommend African values in governance.



the concept of person (see KAGAME 1976; KAPHAGAWANI 2000).<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, communitarian ontology is apparently dominant in the Bantu tribes of Malawi.

The application of communitarian ontology by CCAP conservatives may be seen in their conception of the essence of the church in terms of the community of Africans and believers. This definition of a human being within CCAP was founded on both African culture and the authority of the Bible. Jurgens Johannes van Wyk (1995, 11), commenting on CCAP, underlines this link between the community and the Word of God in the following words, “[T]he emphasis was on the believers gathered around the Word and Sacraments.” CCAP individuals adjusted African traditional beliefs and incorporated the central elements of Calvinist Protestant theology, hence reinforcing African communitarian spirit. For instance, the idea of having days of communal celebrations encouraged the communitarian spirit, as is echoed in this passage on CCAP by MacCracken:

But to the Ngoni, these annual celebrations of baptism and communion may well have brought back memories of the Nguni *incwala* First Fruits ceremony during which the Chief had been ceremonially washed. At all events, these years marked a remarkable expansion in the church. As late as 1892 there were only eleven converts in Ngoniland, but in 1898 no fewer than 196 adults and 89 children were baptized in a day and by 1899 this figure had increased to 309 adults and 148 children. In that year 662 church members took communion at the climax of the convention. They did so in the presence of more than 6,000 of their fellow tribesmen, many of whom had travelled from a distance to be present. (2012, 105)

Apart from the Calvinist idea of building and strengthening a community of believers, communitarianism was enhanced by the nature of evangelisation, which generally led to a conversion of different tribes. For example, most of the Chewa tribes in some parts of the Central Region and the Ngoni in the Northern Region belonged to the CCAP, as they influenced each other by enhancing their tribal relations. Similarly, many individuals belonging to the Yao tribe became Muslims due to missionary work done by the Arabs (MACCRACKEN 2012, 101-102).

Although individualistic ontology (Western) was earlier contrasted with communitarian ontology (African), NPT demonstrated a strong tendency towards the former.

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<sup>15</sup> See also GYEKYE 1984 (1978) and WIREDU (1987) 2004.

Firstly, NPT is individualistic because it underlined the centrality of the relationship between an individual and the Holy Spirit. Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee (1981) captures this individualistic tendency by indicating that, “[T]he Pentecostal Experience of the Full Gospel as defined by theologians of the day emphasized personal holiness and sanctification as expressed by Asa Mahan’s book, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost* (1870).”

The above citation led to the focus on individual salvation and individual guide by the Holy Spirit (individualism), which threatened the prevalence of communitarian ontology.

Secondly, NPT is individualistic because it originated from Western thought (American thought), which promoted the individual and his freedom.

Following this individualistic orientation, the presence of this ontology implied disturbing different communitarian offices, such as the priestly office and the sacraments (such as baptism, communion and marriage), which were approached communally. In fact, some spirit-filled individuals (born agains), who endorsed NPT, independently performed services (such as praying for individuals to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and water baptism through immersion) outside the accepted communal structures.

### **Influence of Philosophical Orientation on Pneumatological Interpretation**

The controversy between CCAP conservatives and progressives is further based on differences in pneumatological interpretations and other CCAP central doctrines as influenced by philosophical orientations (communitarianism and individualism).

Firstly, individualistic ontology followed by NPT, viewed interpretation of the Bible and exercise of different religious functions as a duty of every individual through his status of being spirit-filled. On the contrary, the conservatives, using communitarian ontology, accorded interpretation, preaching and exercise of religious functions as the duty of the church ministers who represented the community. The conservatives expected their community to function like a village with a clear structure and well-defined functions (roles).

According to communitarian ontology, as followed by the conservatives, the church was considered as a fellowship of believers possessing the true marks of the church. According to Jurgens Johannes van Wyk (1995, 163), these marks include; the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of discipline. The church recognised the offices of minister, elder and deacon, who were all equal and serving one Christ as ministers of the Word and Sacraments.

What is important is not the office, but the function that was offered. Infallible authority was only for Jesus Christ, who exercises his direct rule in the church through his Word and Spirit. There is no substitution of Christ with an individual, such as a Bishop or a Pope as is apparently the case in the Roman Catholic Church. Every minister had to serve through the Word in the name of Jesus as van Wyk (1995, 23) informs:

The conviction was that Christ through His Holy Spirit used office-bearers to gather, protect, and maintain His Church. According to the leaders of the reformed conviction, these office-bearers were the minister, elder and deacon. Related to Christ and His Church they were to serve in His name. The emphasis was on the belief that the authority of office-bearers was vested on Christ who gathers His Church.

In relation to the *sola scriptura*, the church minister (pastor) was given authority of preaching and interpreting the Word of God and administering sacraments to the community of believers (congregation).<sup>16</sup> Further, ministers were expected to lead the Christians and rule them based on the Bible. van Wyk (1995, 67-68) summarises the communitarian functions of a minister in the following passage:

It was accepted that the office of pastor was to feed, which included preaching and teaching, to convince, to reprove, to exhort, and to comfort, as well as to catechise. It was agreed that it belonged to the pastor to pray when he preached, something which the bishops did not allow. It was also agreed that a part of the office was to care for the poor. In addition, the task of the minister, as eventually circumscribed in the *Form of Presbyterian Church-Government*, included reference to visitation of the sick, dispensing other divine mysteries, administration of the sacraments, blessing of the people from God and “ruling over the flock as pastors.”

According to individualistic ontology by the progressives, individuals have authority to perform all the duties above in view of their being spirit-filled. This was strengthened further by the Lutheran/Calvinist doctrine that all believers share in the *universal priesthood of Christ* (ERICKSON 1972). Progressives saw this concept as giving authority to all members of the Church to partake in preaching/interpretation of the

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<sup>16</sup> See also THE NKHOMA SYNOD. 2003; 1970.

Bible and other functions given that they share in the priesthood of Christ.

The shifting of the mandate of preaching the Word of God from ordained ministers to individuals was quite disturbing to both African traditional theology and CCAP doctrine, given that, in practice, not every member qualify as a messenger of God through the ancestors. Nevertheless, the CCAP doctrine still guided individuals by providing a communal interpretation through the *magisterium* of the Church. However, in virtue of the supremacy of *sola scriptura*, the authority of the Church was relative, while the authority of individual interpretation through the sharing of the *universal priesthood* became absolute.

For the adherents of NPT inside the CCAP, by virtue of possessing the Holy Spirit and sharing in the *universal priesthood of Christ*, apart from the Bible, individuals may receive direct messages from God. For example, any individual can receive direct messages to warn a village or give direction on what must be done. The idea that all members have the Holy Spirit was strengthened further by the African traditional conception that spirits may enter anybody as they wish and live in them. While in this traditional setting such spirits can be good or bad, the Holy Spirit was a good spirit, hence individuals felt at home with this idea.

In spite of being attractive, the idea of having direct contact with the Holy Spirit did not only threaten the African traditional conception of communication with God through ancestors and certain authorities, but also the CCAP doctrine on the role of the Bible and church ministers. Consequently, the CCAP church immediately started experiencing a plurality of interpretations as different individuals exercised their right to preach and interpret the Bible.

Differences in interpretation may be considered based on the communitarian and individualistic views in the understanding of pneumatological verses, namely, John 3:5-6 and Matthews 3:11.<sup>17</sup> These are some of the central verses that are taken as the foundation of the NPT, as they focus on being born again (individualistic version), and baptism in the Holy Spirit as fundamental in Christian life (LEDERLE 1988, 21). For instance, in John 3:5-6, it is pointed out that:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time

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<sup>17</sup> Matthews 3: 11, states that: 'I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire.'

into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God! That which is born of flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

For the progressives, this passage is fundamentally about 'individual salvation', which constitutes in the personal choice of 'being born again'. In fact, departing from this individualistic interpretation, a movement of 'born agains' (the saved) started taking shape within the CCAP and other churches such as the Roman Catholic Church. Entering the category of 'born agains' in the NPT, required an awareness of being a sinner and the acceptance/confession that Christ is Lord and personal saviour.<sup>18</sup> Generally, this confession and acceptance of Christ follows Alter Call, a ceremony where the preacher invites those who want to accept Christ to present themselves before the congregation, followed by a prayer establishing them as children of God.

The above interpretation of salvation was totally different from the communitarian version of the conservatives, whereby salvation is a consequence of the grace of God, freely transmitted to his church through faith. In Calvinist theology, this is summarised by the concept of *sola grazia* (grace alone), which is related with *sola fidei* (faith alone) (PAAS 2006, 12ff.). Salvation is therefore not necessarily a result of personal choice and confession, but it is given to the community of believers by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ (EPHESIANS 2, 8). Human beings need to trust in God's promise to save them out of his total grace not their will or effort. Different Calvinist theologies will portray a human being as sinful and totally corrupt (because of original sin)<sup>19</sup> to the point that he/she fails to respond to the grace of God (see also CALVIN 1561). The sovereign God, unconditionally, chooses certain people who are saved from this helpless condition of sin (EPHESIANS 1:4-5). The idea of salvation in Calvinist theologies is summarised by Erickson as follows:

What designated Calvinism has taken many different forms over the years. We shall here examine certain common features found in all of them. A mnemonic aid sometimes used to summarize the complete system is the acronym TULIP: total depravity,

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<sup>18</sup> This comes from the scripture that, when one acknowledges his sins with his mouth, and accept that Jesus is the Lord, will be saved (Romans 10:9).

<sup>19</sup> As is well known, this is the sin committed by the first man, Adam and woman, Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3).

unconditional predestination, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance. (1976, 927)

Secondly, what creates more problems is the interpretation of 'being born in the Spirit', which is required after water baptism. Unity of CCAP started being affected as different individuals claimed the second baptism and taught others, leaving the traditionally accepted doctrine.

Further divisions came from the interpretation of a sign that indicates that the baptism of the Holy Spirit has taken place in an individual. For example, when Pastor Chakwera defected from the CCAP and joined the Assemblies of God<sup>20</sup> in the 1980s onwards, the important sign of this baptism was indicated as speaking in tongues. In different places, some individuals unorthodoxly taught how to speak in tongues. The belief in this gift was due to the fact that on the day of Pentecost, people were speaking in different tongues and they understood each other (ACTS 2). The conflict came in this context because of the fact that CCAP puts emphasis on the baptism of water and not on speaking in tongues (PAAS 2006, 32). According to their teaching, the Holy Spirit works in a person when this baptism takes place. Conversion also occurs with this baptism. The question from CCAP to the Pentecostals then, is: why should we need another baptism when everything happens during the baptism of water?<sup>21</sup>

### **An African Solution to the Conflict**

I suggest a twofold solution to the pneumatological controversy, which may be summarised in rebuilding African identity and promoting inculturation.

Firstly, I contend that an African solution to the pneumatological controversy consists in rebuilding African identity. In the CCAP church, the insistence on the individual, which is common in NPT, is a sign of identity crisis. In fact, this is contrary to the earlier assumption indicating that CCAP's are considered as communitarian in

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<sup>20</sup> This is one of the biggest groups of Pentecostal churches in the world. Most of the Assemblies of God churches recognises the United States of America as a place where their founders were coming from. In Malawi, there is a strong connection with the missionaries from the USA who tried to support it more especially in the 1980's and the early 1990.

<sup>21</sup> Related to the above scripture, is the question whether the CCAP interpretation of baptism through water in their liturgical context corresponds to the scriptural practice. CCAP has the tradition of baptizing by sprinkling water on the forehead; this was attacked by some converts to Pentecostal theology that it is not biblical. Their argument is that there is no place in the Bible where it is said that someone was baptized through sprinkling of water on the forehead/head. Another argument is that the semantics of the word 'baptize' (*Baptizo*) suggests immersion in water.

view of their common doctrine and culture. The loss of identity in African traditional context is a general problem, which was also alluded to in the Article, *The Crisis of Identity in Africa: a call for subjectivity*, where Kochalumchuvattil writes:

The first section of this article points to the African crisis in identity and considers the role of the *Ubuntu* philosophy in the recovery of the African identity and self-respect while at the same time arguing that it is insufficient in itself to consistently bring about the growth of freedom and responsibility that are the marks of true personhood. It is argued that this lack of individuation is at the root of the African crisis in identity and in the failure of the continent to sufficiently address its problems. The prevalence of communalism in African society is identified as the main barrier to the process of subjective becoming. (2010, 108)

In a situation where African identity is not clear, it is very difficult for the CCAP church to avoid various pneumatological conflicts. I suggest that the African identity that needs to be underlined is where the value of the community is recognised concurrently with the value of subjectivity. Individuals in this case are considered as the building blocks of the community, without which a community cannot exist (KAPHAGAWANI 2000).

Although my suggestion builds on both the individual and community, I am aware of the current debate in African philosophy on what must be prioritised between the two (GYEKYE 1992; 2004; MATOLINO 2009; FAMANIKWA 2010). According to the radical communitarians, the community must be prioritised over the individual (some representatives are, MENKITI 1984; 2004; IKUENOBE 2006; MOLEFE 2004). For example, Menkiti (1984) argues for radical/extreme communitarianism against the individualistic approach, by indicating that, it is the community that is responsible for giving the individual his/her identity, mainly, through the process of socialisation. Personhood in this thinking is not a given ontological fact, but it is achieved through experience in the community (MENKITI 2004, 326). Similarly, Ikuenobe (2006) and Molefe (2017) support radical communitarianism by prioritising the “community over the individual,” and not vice versa. On the contrary, moderate communitarians argue that the community and the individual must be equally prioritised (GYEKYE 1992). In fact, Gyekye criticises radical communitarians for being less charitable towards individual autonomy.. According to Matolino (2009, 160-170), Gyekye’s moderate communitarianism does

not provide anything different from radical communitarianism, in fact he argues that they are the same. This motivated Matolino (2014) to put forward his limited communitarianism as a system that mitigates on the community dictatorship over the individual. Other thinkers such as Famakinwa (2010), and Oyowe (2014), do not agree with Gyekye's view and argue that the acceptance of both individualism and communitarianism may lead to a conflict, as the two are in principle opposites. Metz (2012) somewhat agrees with Gyekye insofar as individual autonomy can be realised in his system.

I still think that what does justice to African identity is the recognition of the presence and practice of both community-oriented and individual-oriented thinking in the African traditional society as Metz tends to suggest. In fact this may be demonstrated by considering the presence of both community-oriented and individual-oriented values in different African tribes (see KAYANGE 2018). These are encouraged by the community depending on the context of use. For instance, in a perspective where sense of belonging is emphasised, values such as solidarity may be prioritised. On the contrary, a perspective where subjective interventions are necessary, values such as self-control and self-awareness may be prioritised. There are also some circumstances regarding ownership of property, where individual-oriented values may be prioritised. This may be supported by the ordinary use of Chichewa language figurative expressions such as, *Chamwini ndi chamwini* (What is for an individual, is what is for an individual) and *Chinthu chikatayika chimalira mwini* (When something is lost, it cries for the owner (individual)). I think that for radical communitarians to claim that such expressions still prioritise the community, is to overstretch their argument, and this reveals their dogmatic slumber.

An African solution, therefore, consists in re-educating members of various communities to avoid taking the communitarian or individualist extremes. This implies teaching them the true African culture without biases. I further indicate that communitarianism and individualism are not absolutes in determining or building African identity, in fact identity is complex. It is given by geographical position, dressing, artefacts, history, music, etc. It is therefore necessary to recognise and encourage the appreciation of everything good that is African. It is unfortunate that traditional African culture has often been seen as pagan by most of the earliest missionaries. This has led to a growing suspicion towards everything that is African, seen as not Christian (MAJAWA 2005).

Efforts to balance communitarianism and individualism were frustrated in 1994, when Malawi embraced the free market system, which is founded on individualism. This new system underlined the



importance of individual freedom in different areas. This worsened the pneumatological controversy, as many individuals felt free to follow their own understanding of the Holy Spirit and practice of faith.

In spite of the increase of individualism among church members in Malawi, there is a wave of dissatisfaction with free market system. One of the main critics of this system was Bingu wa Mutharika (2011) who encouraged Malawians to go back to a communitarian system. He attributed different evils that are menacing the country such as increased theft, poverty and divisions as a source of free market system and its insistence on individual freedom. Communitarianism was therefore reinstated in different areas. This did not last long given that individuals went back to the free market system soon after the death of Bingu wa Mutharika in 2012.

Although an attempt to rebuild African identity is apparently impossible in a globalised world, there is hope due to the current wave of dissatisfaction in the West and other areas. For example, in the USA the coming into power of Trump as the president, has sent a strong message to free market system that it is no longer the only orthodox system. If this trend will also take shape in Malawi, this will be an opportunity for reintroducing African identity in the church, hence, build a strong communitarian understanding of the Holy Spirit. This will not imply the elimination of the individual, but recognition of a free individual in the community. An individual who is not infallible but is aware of the possible misinterpretations of the bible he/she can give. This is an individual who values mutual support among Christians.

Secondly, there is need for inculturation and integration with regard to pneumatology. The theological concept 'inculturation' deals with the interpretation of Christian doctrine such as pneumatology in a particular culture. Commenting on this concept, Majawa (2005, 1) writes:

It is difficult to ascertain the origin of the term "inculturation". Probably it was a derivation of "acculturation", a term used in anthropology to designate the process by which one social group acquires the customs and habits of another. The use of the prefix "in-" adds a theological insight and suggests that a seed is sown, takes root and flourishes in a new soil.

Since the late 1980s, inculturation has been used by different missionaries as a way of appreciating African culture and preserving African identity among the converts (MAJAWA 2005; CHINGOTA 1996). However the new Pentecostal wave in Malawi departing from the late 1980s has often tended to look with suspicion at this move. NPT

adherents have generally attacked mainline churches such as CCAP and Roman Catholic Church as entertaining pagan practices in the Christian faith.

As part of inculturation, a new pneumatological theology, must explain the various teachings of the new Pentecostal experience in relation to the RCT and African traditional experience. For example, issues such as spirit possession, deliverance and prophecy are part and parcel of both African traditional culture and RCT. In this way most of the new practices will not be taken as a threat to the society but as an integral part of the communal practices. For example, in the context of possession, Malawi's traditional pneumatology shows that certain individuals were possessed by the spirits (spirit possession cult). In some cases spirit possession was seen as a disease, which required an intervention from the entire community. Similarly, traditional pneumatology shows that individuals were sometimes delivered from the evil spirits. For instance, in the case of spirit possession cult in Malawi known as *vimbuzo*, individuals were assisted through a communal intervention, whereby drums were beaten and the spirits were made to free the affected subject. In the same way, other Malawian tribes such as the Chewa were performing deliverance to get rid of evil spirits in the community or individuals. For example, spirits were taken to a crossroads to confuse them so that they don't remember where they were.

Briefly, inculturation has to go hand in hand with integration of NPT adherents into CCAP by giving them a platform where they can exercise their beliefs/faith. Of course this has recently been the trend, whereby different CCAP pastors (mainly the youngones) are creating a platform for young Christians to have new Pentecostal experience. This is mainly by having a special service where individuals can express themselves inside this new Pentecostal experience.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has considered the foundations of CCAP's pneumatological controversy between the progressives and the conservatives. While a conflict between communitarian ontology and individualistic ontology is regarded to be at the centre of this controversy, it is acknowledged that African identity that puts together elements of communitarianism and individualism present in the African traditional communities may help to cancel the foundation of this conflict. Africans are therefore expected to exercise their individual freedom as spirit filled individuals inside the community. Inculturation considered together with integration, provides a possible platform for solving the pneumatological conflict.

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