

The Doctrine of the Church: An Integrated Ecclesiology a Case for Paradigm Shifts in Doing Systematic Theology

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| ABSTRACT | Article History |
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| <p><i>There is a lacuna in systemic theology where the subject-matter of the doctrine of the church is not given adequate attention and comprehensive coverage. As Luis Berkhof candidly observes, among the outstanding theologians treatise there are those that have, "no separate locus on the church in their dogmatic works and in fact devotes very little attention to it" The doctrine was viewed as an appendage to other topics which did not warrant an independent and considerable attention. The study of the doctrine of the church was dabbled in which generated more heat than light. Hence the subject matter of the church is "a very familiar and a very misunderstood topic" The study of the doctrine of church is prone to assumptions and misrepresentations necessitating a crystal clear definition. It goes without say that, "the systematic articulation of the spirit work among cooperative people of God is ecclesiology of the doctrine of the church."</i></p> <p><i>The church and the concept of the community are inextricably intertwined and the doctrine of the church cannot be adequately comprehend without being viewed as a community of the divine Holy trinity and the community of the human beings that is the innate and irrevocable desire of every human being. It is an insatiable human craving, "community- fellowship-communion is a fundamental human longing." The church is indeed a fulfilment of the human aspiration for fellowship and communion and this desire for belonging cannot be satisfied except in the community of the church. This is because of the fact that, "The communion of the church is prefigured, made possible and sustained by the communion of the trinity." Hence the church as a community is enabled and derives her germ from the triune God where there is unity, diversity and equality in the trinity. There is also subordination in roles but in the essence of the persons. This truth should be gleaned in the formulation of the doctrine of the church that the church has a correlation with the doctrine of the trinity. This is vividly captured by the eminent Theologian Jurgen Moulmann sermon entitled, The Triune God: Rich in Relationships that, the church is an icon of the trinity. Its community of freedom and equality illuminates the image of the triune Gog. This is best expressed in the base communities of Latin America and in some Pentecostal communities, communities of social Justice and personal freedom modeled on communities of the early church which lacked nothing because they had everything in common."</i></p> <p>Keywords: Church, Ekklesiology, Images of the Church, Sacraments and means of Grace, Episcopal, Presbyterian and congregational</p> | Original Research Article |
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I. INTRODUCTION

There is a lacuna in systemic theology where the subject-matter of the doctrine of the church is not given adequate attention and comprehensive coverage. As Luis Berkhof candidly observes, among the outstanding theologians treatise there are those that have, "no separate locus on the church in their dogmatic works and in fact devotes very little attention to it"¹ The doctrine was viewed as an appendage to other topics which did not warrant an independent and considerable attention. The study of the doctrine of the church was dabbled in which generated more heat than light. Hence the subject matter of the church is "a very familiar and a very misunderstood topic"² The study of the doctrine of church is prone to assumptions and misrepresentations necessitating a crystal clear definition. It goes without say that, "the systematic articulation of the spirit work among cooperative people of God is ecclesiology of the doctrine of the church."³ The church and the concept of the community are inextricably intertwined and the doctrine of the church cannot be adequately comprehend without being viewed as a community of the divine Holy trinity and the community of the human beings that is the innate and irrevocable desire of every human being. It is an insatiable human craving, "community- fellowship- communion is a fundamental human longing."⁴ The church is indeed a fulfillment of the human aspiration for fellowship and communion and this desire for belonging cannot be satisfied except in the community of the church. This is because of the fact that, "The communion of the church is prefigured, made possible and sustained by the communion of the trinity."⁵ Hence the church as a community is enabled and derives her germ from the triune God where there is unity, diversity and equality in the trinity. There is also subordination in roles but in the essence of the persons. This truth should be gleaned in the formulation of the doctrine of the church that the church has a correlation with the doctrine of the trinity. This is vividly captured by the

eminent Theologian Jurgen Moltmann sermon entitled, *The Triune God: Rich in Relationships* that, the church is an icon of the trinity. Its community of freedom and equality illuminates the image of the triune God. This is best expressed in the base communities of Latin America and in some Pentecostal communities, communities of social Justice and personal freedom modeled on communities of the early church which lacked nothing because they had everything in common."⁶

The human element is evident in every human being who is intensely communal especially the Africans as Prof John Mbiti observed, "There underpinning philosophy of the African is that, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, therefore I am."⁷ The church seeks to address this profoundly human longing for a community where, "priority is given to the duties which individuals owe to the collectivity and their rights, whatever these may be, may seem secondly to their exercise of their duties."⁸

There are multifaceted and multi dimensional approaches to the church that may obfuscated and blight our comprehension of the church. Consequently to address this quagmire and acute and elaborate of the church is inevitable and at this juncture. Wayne Grudem succinctly defines the church as, "the community of all true believers for all time."⁹ He further elucidates this definition by stating that, "the church is either stated categorically or inferred across the entire spectrum of the scripture to refer to the constitution of the people of God for all time both all testament believers and New Testament believers."¹⁰

The church from its Etymology is derived from the Greek word *Ekklesia* which has the verb *ekkleo* which means to call out. The same word has a Hebrew dynamic equivalent word "*Kahal*" which is translated into the following English words; congregation, assembly and company it must be noted that assemblies were not exclusively of a religious nature. It could be of evil council (ps26:5), war (Judges 20:20), evil affair

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946), 330-336

² Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Vol 3, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1995), 1027.

³ Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994, p. 461.

⁴ Kasper, Walter. *Theology and Church*. London: SCM Press, 1989, p. 1151.

⁵ Ibid, 152

⁶ Jason Geroncy, '*The Triune God: Rich in Relationships*'- A sermon by Jurgen Moltmann,

<https://jasongoroncy.com>, Retrieved on 5th June 2018 at 18:16 GMT.

⁷ John Mbiti, *Africa Religions and Philosophies*, (New York: Double Day and Company, 1970), 141

⁸ Ifanye A Menkiti, *Person and community in African Traditional Thought*, African Philosophy: An Introduction, R A Wright, Ed, (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984), 120-136.

⁹ Wayne Grudem, *systematic Theology, Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 853

¹⁰ Ibid

(king 12:13), or even religious worship of God.¹¹ It must be noted that these nuances to the Ekklesia and Kahal have necessitated different interpretation and even interpolation of the concept of church some viewing it as business, a place to be in order capture political power, status and even as an assembly of the chosen few (edah) who are representative.¹²

It is crystal clear from the definitions given that are diverse and varied interpretations of the church that are paradoxical. The church is both visible as well as invisible the organ and as well as organization, the church is both a gathering and a scattering community, particular and yet universal. The Theologian must maintain a healthy balance of avoiding all extremes. As a result the researcher will endeavor to give a concise yet profound exposition of the doctrine of the church for the African perspective. The study will delve into the nature of the church purpose of existence of the church, the sacraments in the church, and the church governments with an African focus without neglecting the history of the doctrine of the church from the primitive to the contemporary church. The researcher will critically highlight the challenges and issues that will be arise from the study and avoiding extremes and giving a mediating position with an African context thrust then appropriately applying it to the contemporary African church and my personal ministry as a church minister.

II. THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH DOCTRINE

Church doctrine cannot be comprehended well if an historical formulation of the doctrine is either repudiated or shunned. The history of church doctrine is of irresistible value. The researcher will give a precis of the history with a specific thrust on the formulation of the church in church history. It must be noted that doctrine were promulgated in reaction to heresy, controversy and misunderstanding. The doctrine of the church did not have prominence in the primitive church. As Robert P Lighter observes that, "up until around AD 600, the centers of doctrinal controversy were the Trinity, Christ, the Holy Spirit, man and sin,"¹³ These were the issues that stirred controversy and Schism in

the church and required urgent concentration of the church. Hence, "the church fathers gave their attention to these issues because the earliest heresies arose over these doctrines."¹⁴

The two rather emphasized on the church in this period that catapulted the church to delve into scrutiny of the doctrine of the church. There were two polarized and antagonist position of the church, there were those who stressed the external unity of the church on one hand and those that obsessed with internal purity on the other hand.¹⁵

The unity of the church that is the visible is, "discernible in the writings of such men as Clement of Rome, Ignatius and Polycarp."¹⁶ The attempts to unite the church Christians necessitated some sort of centralization of authority and power and the development of monarchical Episcopacy.¹⁷ Iraneaus developed a teaching of centralization of power and authority.¹⁸ While Cyprian took this doctrine to its logical conclusion when he developed the doctrine of the Episcopal authority in juxtaposition which his mantra was that there is no salvation outside the church.¹⁹ He believed in the unity of the Catholic Church and the full authority of the Bishop.²⁰ This was the precursor of the apostolic succession dogma and the infallibility of the Pope. All these have been done in order to secure the unity of the church. The emphasis on the unity of the church was given a fresh impetus by Augustine the Bishop of Hippo.²¹ This was in reaction to the heresy of Donatism. The doctrine of the unity of the church was defined, defended and promulgated in reaction against those who emphasized the internal purity at the expense of the unity of the church. The people who championed the unity of the church were considered authentic and Orthodox.

There was at this moment a group that was keen on internal purity it was, "advocated most strongly by those not identified with the Orthodox Church."²² This group was in strong opposition to the notion that the church is one visible Catholic Church which comprised of both good and evil. This notion was obnoxious and repugnant to those who advocated for the purity of the church. The proponents of the purity of the church were persuaded that the church was only composed of the

¹¹ Gyang D Pam, *Compendium of Theology*, (Jos, Nigeria: Sele Printing and Publishing House, 2012), 392-393.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Robert P Lighter, *Evangelical Theology; A Survey and Review*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1986), 218.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid 220

redeemed.²³ It was position advocated by those that church considered as heretics like Marcion, Montanus and Donatus.²⁴ In the middle ages there was no substantive development on the doctrine of the church.²⁵ The same was also evident during the Epoch of the protestant Reformation. Martin Luther the father of protestant Reformation did little to advance the New Testament teaching of the local church and the state did gain control of the church under his tutelage.²⁶ The emphasis of the protestant Reformation was on sola fidei, sola Gratia, sola Scripture and sola Christos other doctrines including that of the church was formulated in relation to the issues that were critical and at that time Ecclesiology was given a periphery role and not even the systematic theologian of the protestant of the protestant did give the doctrine of the church a cogent and comprehensive formulation. John Calvin did make a very clear distinction between the visible and the invisible church when he categorically affirmed that, the church is the invincible consist and contain all the elect and that the visible church is comprised of those who profess to know Christ.²⁷ There was close state and church relationship in John Calvin Conceptualization of the church.²⁸ We find that even in the protestant Reformation there was no coherent and systematic presentation of the dogma of the church that has persisted unabated to even the contemporary church. The doctrine of the church has been viewed in relation to other doctrines like that of the Pneumatology, Trinity and Missiology. As a result there is need to have a systematic theology of ecclesiology that I will endeavor to propose in this paper that will examine all theological topics from the lenses of the church. However it is imperative that we begin from the basic and examine the nature of the church, the function of the church, the church government and the means of grace in the church.

III. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

It is crystal clear from the Biblical texts that church has not been directly and unequivocally defined. However there are Biblical images that are evident in the Bible

that we can glean the nature and description of the church. C.R Sproul accurately identify the Biblical images of the church when Le asserts that, "The church is called the body of Christ, the family of God, the people of God, the elect, the bride of Christ, the company of the redeemed, the communion of Saints, the new Israel among others.²⁹ There is an inherent danger in these images for there is a temptation of emphasizing one image and the expense of the other that may lead to extremes and excesses that we have observed that, "perhaps it is not unfair to say that a continual danger for the church clogged the church in the history of the church is to pursue one Biblical Metaphor to the neglect of the others which the Bible balances it.³⁰ As a result I will maintain the Biblical balance by examining the four metaphors that are prominent in the Bible in order to give the church a very clear, balanced and orthodox image. The researcher will examine the image of the people of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit and the community of Faith.

A. THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Although no image of the church is more prominent than others but it must be noted that the image of the people of God has been most frequently used in the entire Bible more than the other images. The people of God are essentially the concept of the people of God can be aptly summed in the covenantal phrase, "I will be their God and they will be my people (Exodus 6:6-7, Leviticus 26:9-14, Acts 15:14, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Hebrews 8:10-12 and Rev 21:3).³¹ This is a concept that has pervaded and permeated the entire Bible. This image vividly captures, "our attention to the history of redemption through images and to God's Mighty at Calvary and Pentecost."³² This concept unites the old and New Testament. There has always been a position that supports continuity that there is always one God divine plan for his people. While the dispensationalist hold that God first plan with Jews failed and the second plan with the church succeed. The truth is that this dispensational view cannot be sustained by the Biblical message for:

It is a serious error to belief that God

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ **Sproul, R.C.** *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*. Tyndale House Publishers, Illinois, 1992, p. 217.

²⁹ **Cole, Alan.** *The Body of Christ: A New Testament Image of the Church*. London: Hodder and Stoughton,

1964, p. 12.

³⁰ R K Harrison, "Church", *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, Ed, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company 1996), 95.

³¹ Harold S Bender, *These are my People: The New Testament Church*, (Scott dale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1962), 25.

³² David L Smith, *A Theology of the Church; All God's People*, (Illinois: Victor Books, 1996), 205-206.

has rejected Israel in favor of the church. Yet it equally problematic the believe that God has two people- Israel and two and have different purpose each. God has only one people. The people of God are seen as a massive three rooted in the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Out of that single trunk grow many branches. Some may be labeled 'Israel' and some church.³³

The concept of the people of God does not show uniformity but diversity in the people of God. • The church does not supplant rather supplement Israel as the one people of God. The one people God transcending eras of old and New Testament but we must be cognizant of the continuity and discontinuity between the church and Israel that are interwoven into the rich tapestry of one Gods plan for his people. In a nutshell the people of God and those in the Old Testament and New Testament who have responded to God by Faith and whose spiritual origin rest exclusively in God's grace.³⁴

This image of the people of God is descriptive of the church being a group that is called by God the Ekkaleo, Secondly it denotes that the church is a group owned by God Kuriakon that is people owned by God. Thirdly it presents an all encompassing group that is not based on nationality, race or bribe but rather on a covenantal relationship with God. Truly there is an inclusion within the covenant of God that distinguishes the people God, they are made up of those he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles."³⁵ This image of the people depicts very important characteristics of the church through the image in and it is not adequate for it doesn't point out other elements in the church. The researcher will proceed to explore the mystery of the church by examining the church as the body of Christ.

B. THE BODY OF CHRIST

Lewis Sperry Chaffer gave the image of the church as the body of Christ it most vivid description that, "The church as the body of Christ includes every Christian joined by Christ as the head of the body by Baptism of the spirit."³⁶ This is a uniquely Pauline image that is

laden with diverse meaning. The image suggests the interrelatedness of diversity and unity within the • church.³⁷ In the body of Christ image it is undisputed that Paul "begins with the oneness of the body which then goes on to discover its diversity."³⁸ The church as the body of Christ does is a very inclusive metaphor of the church. It can depict both the unity and diversity the local and the universal church, the visible and the invisible church, the particular and the global church. All these attributes can be summed in the image of the church as the body of Christ. It signifies that the church is alive and an organ that can have, life can grow and needs to be nurtured. The body has the leadership of Christ which is clear presentation that Christ is lord and the undisputed read of the church. The idea of the ownership of the church is refueled for it belongs to Christ. This is prophylactic against individuals with rapacious concupiscence who the church belongs to them. It is an indictment to church that operates as if it is a business that has a human sole proprietor.

We must know that body of Christ is supported to be one, Holy Catholic and Apostolic. We must note that the body of Christ is both militant and triumphant. It is in heaven and also here on earth. The image of the body of Christ shows the mystery of the church.

C. THE TEMPLE OF GOD

The image of the church as the temple of God reifies the theme of continuity and discontinuity between the church and Israel. "It is evident in the old testament that the temple had been the centre of national faith and worship and as a building in Jesus day a source of national pride"³⁹

The Old Testament anticipated and predicted the rebuilding of the temple in the future kingdom of God (Ezekiel 40-48), Jesus hinted that there was such a construction (Matthew 16:18)⁴⁰ His construction was more spiritual rather than a physical temple this is the element of discontinuity. The discontinuity was evident in Pentecost where the dream was fulfilled when the spirit inhabited the church the eschatological temple was established (Acts 2:16-36).⁴¹ It was profound in the other New Testament writings that the presence of the spirit in believers will be constituting the new temple (I

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Harrison, 95

³⁵ Millard J Erikson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 1036.

³⁶ Lewis Sperry Chaffer, *Major Bible Themes*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House)

³⁷ Harrison, 96

³⁸ John F Balchin, *What the Bible Teaches about the Church*, (Wheaton; Tyndale House Publishers, 1979),32

³⁹ Balchin,79

⁴⁰ Harrison, 95

⁴¹ Ibid

Cor 3:16-17, 6:14-71, 2 Cor 6:14-71; 1,)⁴²

The image of the temple is clearly captured in Ephesians 2 :19-20 where the church is accurately depicted as the temple of God built on the foundation of Apostles and prophets and Jesus being the cornerstone. In this image the emphasis on the presence of God in the temple, the eschatological temple commenced at Pentecost that is when the church was established. The temple of God also illustrates an important concept of the church that is the undisputable cornerstone and without which there is no church, he hold the church together without him the church will fall apart. The church is built on the foundation of God's word that was written by prophets and apostles. The church is also a product of both the spirit of God and the word of God in Pentecost.

D. THE CHURCH AS THE PEOPLE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The book of Revelation 1;6. "(and as made us to be a kingdom and priest to serve his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever amen." It is undisputed that the church is part and parcel of the kingdom of God. The New Testament identifies the church as the people of the kingdom of God (Rev 5:10) not the kingdom itself. The church is instrumental in the kingdom of God. This is well illustrated in the in Matthew 16:18-19.⁴³, that the keys of the kingdom and the establishment of the church and inextricably intertwined. The preaching of Peter and the church truly become the keys of opening the kingdom of God to all who will enter.⁴⁴ In this image of the church as people of God we find that there is a correlation though not asynymity between the church and the kingdom of God. There are elements of convergence and divergence in the church and the kingdom of God.

The paper has labored to present the nature of the church that is what the church is but it is imperative that we also discuss what the church out there does for us to have a complete comprehension of the church.

IV. THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

In order to have a thorough understanding of the people of the church logic dictates that we need to us the pertinent question that what is the *raison d'être* or the church purpose of existence. It must be noted that church activity began after Jesus ascension and the Pentecost.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Erickson, 1052

A. EVANGELISM

It is from great commission of Matthew 28: 19-20 that we surmise that, "it appears that he regarded evangelism as the very reason for the church existence"⁴⁵ Hence Evangelism is not an optional extra but an integral reason of the church existence for, if the disciples truly loved their Lord, they would carry out his call to Evangelize. It is not an optional matter for them."⁴⁶ The contemporary church is considered as a center for healing, prosperity and coming to witness the "Manifestation" of the spirit. It has vacated its very purpose of existence as a scattering community. If the church does not engage in evangelism then it is a church in heaven. As long as the church is on earth it has no choice or option but to engage in evangelism, "to go yee" not to "settle yee". To be the salt and the light of the world to perused, impact and transform the world with the word of God by doing Evangelism. The church is not only a scattering community, but it is also a gathering community.

B. EDIFICATION

It is true that before becomes a scattering community it has to be a gathering community where members are empowered, healed and commissioned for mission and evangelism. The church implies of necessity as, "an association of believers gathered together and involved in the lives of one another, to encourage, love, to discipline, to strengthen and to sustain the budding life of God and character of God within each Christian."⁴⁷ This was clearly captured in the early church in Acts Chapter 2 to 4. There should always be the warmth of fellowship in the church for it is the *Koinon* that is the community of faith whose fellowship is not the husk but truly the kernel of the church. This should be an antidote to the contemporary church emphasis on material prosperity and materialism at the expense of fellowship. The concept of church discipline is not only frowned at but also repudiated but all these are part and parcel 'of the church' purpose of existence.

C. WORSHIP

The chief end of man is to glorify God as it is asserted in 1 Cor 10:31. Worship is the sum total of the church activities, the motivation, the same activities and the goal of all the other function of the church which is evangelism, edification and social action. Worship is

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ O Lawrence, *A new Face for the Church*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan Zondervan Publishing House, 1970),97

the glue that sticks together church activities. Worship is the ultimate purpose of the church both at the individual and the corporate level. The church is, "the focus of our corporate worship, however, must always be the glory of God. In modern services, too much attention is directed to the worshiper. Churches resort to sound, lighting, symbolism, Liturgy and pageantry to produce emotional feeling in the worshiper"⁴⁸ The challenge of the modern church is over emphasized on narcissist pleasure and rapacious materialism. The church exists to worship God as both a gathering and a scattering community. This should be evident even in social action.

D. SOCIAL ACTION

Although Evangelism and Edification is the core and crux of the church existence but there is always an undisputed place of social action in the church. Though it is undisputed that, "our relationship with God is crucial but if we love truly, it is not in word only but indeed" and we don't say to a hungry man 'Lord bless you brother, I hope you get some food and clothes. We feed him. And we clothe him, even if he doesn't listen to us.'⁴⁹ The church does not exist itself but to serve others and to be an instrument of change by doing well to others. The dichotomy of the "soul" and the "body" the sacred and the secular has made the church not engage in social action but it is our sacred duty the glorify God, to reach out and to touch humanity even if they don't accept the gospel. It is not bait for evangelism but it is a genuine service to humanity and conversion may be a byproduct we must touch both.

V. THE CHURCH GOVERNMENT

The church is both an organism and an organization. It is unfortunate that some distinguished scholars like Henry Clarence. Thiessen do not think that studying the church as an organization or the study of church government that, "since the subject belong more properly to the province of pastoral Theology, no exhaustive investigation of any of them is undertaken here."⁵⁰ This pejorative look on the doctrine of scripture has pervaded and permeated systematic

theology. As a result the doctrine of the church government is considered the husk and not the Kernel of systematic Theology. Consequently it has not been exhaustively covered and yet not an optional extra in systematic theology. We should hence shun the notion of dabbling in church doctrine and approaching it casually. This is because there is a lot of misconceptions on church government for, "dominations differ profoundly."⁵¹ They do not only differ in structure and appearance but also in mind frame for, "different denominations reflect different ways of being Christian which often have their origins in response to historical circumstances."⁵² As a result, "they are intuitions and such organizations tend to retain the marks founding and development."

It is therefore imperative that we study the different kinds of church governments. Thiessen only identifies three kinds of church governments which are, "Apart from the hierarchical system of the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic churches there are three basic types of church government today; The Episcopal, the Presbyterian and the congregational. The Episcopal type is the government of the church by Bishops, in reality three distinct orders of ministers; Bishops, Priests and Deacons. The Presbyterian is the government of the church by presbyters. It usually provides for the following courts: the session, the presbytery, the synod and the General Assembly. There are but the order in the ministry namely, pastors, ruling elders or elders and deacons. Both pastors and ruling elders take part in the meeting of the presbytery, Synod and General Assembly. The congregation vests all legislative authority in the local church District and general organizations are merely advisory in power and instituted simply for the purpose of cooperating in missionary work."⁵³ It is abundantly clear that there is an apparent contradiction from the term church government and the spiritual organism that is presented in the Bible. As Dennis J Mock aptly observes that, "the word 'government' carries the idea of ruling, controlling or exercising authority over the affairs and actions of an organization or institution"⁵⁴ however, the New Testament advances the concept that the, " church is primarily a spiritual organism with Christ as the

⁴⁸ Bruce L Shelly, *The Church: God's People*, (Illinois: SP Publications In, 1978), 70

⁴⁹ Lawrence, 274

⁵⁰ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WMB Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1949), 420

⁵¹ William H Harrison, *Frequently-Asked Questions in Christian Theology*, (London: Continuum, 2008), P 116

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ Thiessen

⁵⁴ **Mock, Dennis J.** *Bible Doctrine Survey: Course Manual*. Atlanta, GA: Bible Training Center for Pastors, 1989, p. 256.

Head."⁵⁵ It must be noted that the ideal is that since the church is made of the redeemed it is a spiritual body but also because if made of redeemed but fallen human it has to have an organizational structure since the time of the wrangles among Christians on food as expressed in Acts chapter 6. Hence, "the New Testament reveals certain organizational structure; furthermore church history clearly reveals that traditionally the local church has had organizational structure and human administrators."⁵⁶ It is irrefutable that three form of church government are mentioned in the Bible. The, "three basic forms of church government are Episcopal, Presbyterian and congregational. From a terminology stand point the Episcopal is sometimes called 'hierarchical' and the Presbyterian called, "federal"⁵⁷ it is true that the Episcopal can be known as the democratic. It is imperative that we examine each of the church governments.

The Episcopal is a form of church government where authority is vested in the Bishop.⁵⁸ There are three distinct offices in this form of church government the Bishop, priest and deacons. It is evident that the priests are the subordinate, "to the Bishop who alone have the right to ordain priests and deacons. The Bishop in effects governs the church."⁵⁹ The major premise of this church government is that since man is created in the image of God hence he can administer the church. However, since he is fallen there are structures to assist in administrating the church which are the synod, the parish church council and the local church government. There is always a controversy between elders and Bishops but both Greek elders and Bishops words. It must be not that some people are convinced that, "the Episcopal from is that it is not found in the New Testament but arose in the second century with the Pope becoming the ultimate Pope."⁶⁰ It is clear to some that the, "New Testament does not disclose a separate office of the Bishop since the term is used synonymous with the elders."⁶¹ This system of the church government seems to be contrary to the priesthood of all believers affirm the, "direct, personal access to God."⁶² This view is supported by apostolic succession that is not scriptural according to some strong antagonistic view of Episcopal Church government. All these objections

though they seem very formidable, they are fraught by a lot of inconsistencies. The first is that the term Bishop and elders are used interchangeably hence it is superfluous to state their distinct terms that are employed at different times. It implies of necessity that though there is a correlation in ministry but there is clear distinct to warrant the use of both titles to be in the Bible. Secondly, there is some hierarchy even in defining the qualifications of the church leaders it begins with overseers then deacons. As a result there is a clear hierarchy even with apostles, deacons in Acts chapter 6 there is always a hierarchy otherwise it will lead to anarchy and may hem in the church. This does not nullify the reality that all are equal I Christ, (Gal 3:28). My considered opinion is that church hierarchy and structure does not discount or evacuate the priesthood of all believers. I find that this system is not Biblical has some Biblical elements but also has serious challenges in autocracy and over extolling individual Bishops, hence it has to be adopted by incorporated in what I term as an integrated church government that seeks to synergize from all other systems of church government.

The second system of church government is the Presbyterian or federal church government. This is a, "form of church government refers to ruler ship by the elders where elected as representatives of the members of the church."⁶³ In this system, the Christians, govern indirectly through the elders."⁶⁴ There is a distinction of ruling elders who do not govern but do not teach or preach or administer the sacraments and teaching elders who teach, preach and administer sacrament,⁶⁵ and the two set of have, "equal authority with no third order of ministry above them."⁶⁶

In the Episcopal system of church government or polity have three distinct orders or rather levels of ordination: Deacon, elder cor presbytery and Bishop.⁶⁷ It is evident in this church government that, "only bishop can perform the rite of confirmations. The Bishop also has the authority to ordain presbyters and deacon."⁶⁸ These three offices *raison d'etres* was maintain the catholicity of the church, faithful preaching of the word and faithfully administering the two sacraments of the Holy Communion and Baptism.⁶⁹ This model is derived from

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Daniel Akin et al, *Perspective on church Government; 5 Views*, Eds Chad own Brand and Norman, (Nashville; Tennessee; Band H Academic, 2004), 2013

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

the three strands of scripture, tradition and reason. As a result the polity is saturated with traditions that are evident in the strict adherence of the common book of prayer or liturgy. It is observed that, "Episcopacy evacuates power when the prelate takes over, and it turns too much when theological discipline proves impossible and when churchliness, hence distance from real life, is attracted to it."⁷⁰

The strength of this model is that the structure hierarchy is its strong fort. While there is challenge of consolidation of too much power in an individual known as the Bishop and rending it improbable to discipline a Bishop, I must note that the various writings on the Episcopal church government has totally failed to highlight the checks and the balances in the system. In fact my considered opinion is that it is a hybrid synod that stands in contrast with the tyranny of elders in the Presbyterian system of church government, the tyranny of the Pope in extreme Episcopal system like the Roman Catholic church, and the tyranny of the congregation in the congregational system that have led to grave ramifications. The system has the local church to oversee the deacon who is the chair through the body is the supreme to the leader, the same with the priest and the parish church council and the Bishop and the Synod. This fact is not captured by the scholars. This system of the church government though it is perceived that it is highly improbably to indict a Bishop my considered opinion is that it is not impossible for Bishops have been dethroned for gross misconduct a base in point is that of Bishop Njuguna of Mt. Kenya South Diocese. This system has been examined casually and with a pejorative biases by most of the Evangelical scholars from the Presbyterian and congregational orientations. The congregational model is, "a form of church governance in which final human authority rests with the local particular congregation when it gathers for decision making."⁷¹ There are two forms of expression of this church structure the externally in that the congregation can associate with likeminded churches and internally there are structures that was deemed appropriate in that local church. However, in all the systems all the authority is vested in the local church.⁷² There is evident in the New Testament of this form of church government. It provides for fairness, inclusivity, flexibility in administration and promotes the maturity of Christians. The challenge is that the emphasis on the

local church more often than not eludes the authority of the pastors and may be cumbersome if not impossible to discipline Christian who exerts a lot of influence in the local church.

It is appropriate to highlight that there is no church government system or model that can be said to be fool proof or completely Biblical. There are elements in each system that can be gleaned and supported by scriptures. There are numerous hitches and hiccups on all the systems of churches because they are human systems and not perfect they may be shrouded in vested interest and abuse of authority both in the Episcopal, Congregational and Presbyterian Church polity. As a result, we must avoid a bias of looking to the fact that there is a pure model all these models have elements of the other. As a result, I do propose an integrated model that deals decisively with the tyranny of the Bishop and the tyranny of the elders and the tyranny of the congregation. In this integrated model of church government the congregation is involved in vetting church pastors or leaders, endorsing of ratifying decisions of the councils. Secondly, a strong council of elders from the local church to the diocese the elders are supposed to check the excesses of the Bishops or Priests or deacons and indict them if need be. Thirdly, the church should have a structure overseen by the Bishop with priests or deacons and make the church have a universal rather than a parochial or myopic world view. This integrated church model seeks to harness, synergize and incorporate the strength of Episcopal, Presbyterian and congregational system of church governments while avoiding their pitfalls and excesses.

VI. THE MEANS OF GRACE IN THE CHURCH

Heman Barvin in his magmas opus entitled Reformed Dogmatic is categorical that grace is, "the favor and fellowship of God."⁷³ While means of grace are described as, "external, human perceptible actions and signs that Christ has his church and with which he has linked the communication of his grace"⁷⁴ there are different views on the means of grace with some Barick identifying the three while other theologians have an elaborate list. Barick is unequivocal that, "strictly speaking, the word and the sacraments alone can be viewed as means of grace."⁷⁵ Some Theologian adds prayer to the list while some add Christian fellowship to

⁷⁰ Ibid, 240

⁷¹ Ibid, 157

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Herman Barinck, *Reformed Dogmatic, Vol 4*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 474

⁷⁴ Ibid, 448

⁷⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology, Vol 4*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publish.

the list. Wayne Grudem list a more comprehensive list of eleven means of grace that includes, "Teaching of the word, Baptism, the Lords supper, prayer for one another, worship, church discipline, giving, spiritual gifts, fellowship, Evangelism and personal ministry to individuals."⁷⁶ The first position that limits the means of grace the three could be deduced from the direct means of grace that are directly identified in the scripture. The scriptural basis for the list of three is more definite and Biblically verifiable. However, it misses the Biblical allusion to the other means of grace that permeate and saturate the scriptures. The list by Wayne Grudem is exhaustive and Biblically tenable. The list could have a broader acceptable in the Christian church that includes those who believe that with the advent of the Holy Spirit there is no need of the sacraments that includes Baptism and communion like the Quakers and the salvation Army. There are issues to deal with the methods of Baptism and the elements in the Holy Communion. I can affirm that there debate will not be exhaustive and there is more important than the method of Baptism, while the symbolism and meaning of the elements of the Holy Communion are important than the elements itself. Therefore, we have to examine the sacraments as a means of grace. It must be, "a sacrament is an Holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs Christ and the benefits of a new covenant, are represented, sealed and applied to believers."⁷⁷ It had a dual element, "a visible sign of invisible grace instituted for our justification."⁷⁸ Protestant on one hand "holds that Christ instituted through sacraments, baptism and the Lords supper, corresponding to the Old Testament Sacraments, circumcision and the Passover."⁷⁹ On the other hand Roman Catholics have "added five other sacraments, confirmation, penance, holy orders, marriage and extreme unction. The council of Trent said that Christ instituted all seven sacraments, but this is figment, the New Testament recording only two."⁸⁰ It goes without say that the scriptures only instituted the two sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion the rest cannot be sustained by sound exposition of scripture. It must be when the sacraments are exaggerated beyond proportion it creates a problem of sacramentalism which, "ascribes such importance to the sacraments as to make them absolutely necessary to salvation and conveyors of divine grace, opus operatum."⁸¹ The opposite extremely is the sacramentarians who are the, "Zwinglians and Calvinist

who repudiated the Lutheran notion of consubstantiation and the Roman Catholic dogma of transubstantiation and denied the so called "real presence" in the Lord's supper holding that the bread and wine were no more than symbols of the body and blood of Christ."⁸² We must of necessity avoid the extremity of idolatry in the sacraments and embellishing its significance for it cannot add anything to Christ's vicarious death on the cross. Also we must not disparage it until it become a significant ritual without decorum and respect and done haphazardly. There should be a healthy balance of honor in the sacraments without worship. The means of grace are within the church and are beneficial to the Christians but they are not a summatum to salvation and repentance. The sacraments are in regard to our encouragement and ministry but they are not essentially meant to appease God. We should not dogmatically stick to the numbers of means of grace for it can be more. The means of grace are beneficial for the church to have its true church as one, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. It promotes church unity and cohesion for as Christian we have, "one baptism, one hand faith, one Lord and one hope," (Eph 4:5-6). Secondly, it is for a believer's enrichment at its instrumentality in sanctification cannot be overstated. It promotes catholicity especially the two sacraments that are adhered to by very many Christians with the exception of the Quakers and the Roman Catholics and the sacraments derive their germ from the apostolic times. Therefore the means of grace and especially the sacraments unifies, solidifies and enhances the true marks of the church as one Holy Catholic and Apostolic church.

VII. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH - A PARADIGM SHIFT

There seems to be a lacuna in the doctrine of the church in the reality that this important dogma is treated casually and perfunctorily and it is not accorded the significant that it deserves. Some of the theologians think that its place is in the pastoral theology, some contend that it is just an appendage to systematic theology. As a result there is a serious neglect of the cohesive and integrative doctrine of the church.

The doctrine of the church seems to be a standalone it is nominally associated with other Christian doctrines of theology. Hence we need a paradigm shift in church doctrine in regards to firstly integrate it with other

⁷⁶ Alan Calvins, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, (Pensacola, Florida Chapel Library, 1982), 105-209.

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Ibid, 210

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Ibid

systematic theology doctrines like creation, Man, Trinity, God's decrees and plan. It is important to note that church as in God's mind in eternity. Hence as we examine the plan of God, his decrees we need to examine them in juxtaposition to the doctrine of the church especially its nature and marks of the church. Christology and eschatology cannot be studied in separation to the doctrine of the church. Christ died for the elect of the church (Eph 5:23-24). The correlation between Christology and Ecclesiology is remarkable and the new perspective of the doctrine of the church should include Christology. Salvation is for an individual but incubated in the church as a result there is need to study the doctrine of the church vis a vis the doctrine of salvation especially in relation to the visible and the invisible church. The true redeemed elect are members of the invisible church while the visible church comprises of both elect and the reprobates like wheat and tares in Matthew 13. In church polity there is need to understand in relation to the doctrine of trinity where there is unity in diversity. There is also an element of subordination and equality. Subordination in the church among members is not in essence but in responsibility and it does not imply inferiority. The doctrine of Pneumatology and the spirit work must never be dichotomized from the church. The Spirit initiated, grows and empowers the church. The doctrine of the church secondly needs to be consulted, harmonized and systematized. In all the theological volumes the teaching of the church is done hasty and without coherence. The doctrine of the church, the marks of the church, the functioning of church, church polity and means of grace without wishing away the contemporary challenges of the church that includes schism, secularization, consumerism, church and business. I must affirm that all the issues of prosperity gospel, Pseudo prophets and cults and sects should be encompassed in the doctrine of the church to give it contemporary relevancy. The *modus operandi* of doing doctrine of the church ought to have a contemporary relevancy and should not be status quo in doing the doctrine of the church. This contemporary touch is conspicuously absent in the formulations of the doctrine of the church.

Thirdly, the concept of contextualization and enculturation is not evident in the doctrine of the church. Analogies from the west are uncritically aped and unwittingly adapted to the African church. The way church polity is defined is in western oriented terminology and definition. We need to have an African doctrine of the church that will look at the church as a family, community and kinship bond in the blood of Christ. Those concepts will have Biblical fidelity and

contextual relevance.

The doctrine of the church need to have a practical thrust, the doctrine of scripture must of necessity avoid abstraction and intellectualization of the church without dealing with practical matters. The means of grace which are the main preoccupation of the church ought to have been the kernel and not the husk of the doctrine of the church. The issues of gifts, manifestation of charismatic gifts, and the rise of prophets ought to be addressed in the doctrine of the church.

The purpose of the church existence that is worship, Evangelism, Edification and social action ought to be emphasized. This is in line with the personal responsibility of the Christians. There is more need to emphasize on praxis more than orthodoxy or to incorporate all so that we have an orthopraxis oriented doctrine of the church. The place of the church in the society ought to be defined in that though the state and the church and distinct bodies created by God to perform distinct function the church is to do Evangelism, Edification, Worship and works of Mercy while the state is to maintain law and order and punish offenders. The church ought to be the conscience of the state and the prophetic role of the church in dealing with systematic evil; condemning evil and siding with the poor and the underprivileged should be crystal clear in the doctrine of the church that does not encompass all these practical issues.

There is a reason for synergy and cohesion and learning from each of the church polity there is more than what we see in my considered opinion there is an element of Presbyterian system of church government in Anglican Episcopal system of church polity in the Synod, Local Church and Parish. There is no such thing as a Presbyterian, congregation or Episcopal systems there is a blend but one system is more pronounced in one domination than the other system that are in the periphery. As a result there is need to relook at church polity from a more objective lenses and identify the much pronounced, church government in a denomination and there subtle system of church government that is in the periphery.

There is need for a paradigm shift in the way the doctrine of the church is formulated. There is a need to make this doctrine more comprehensive, cohesive and systematic. There is the overarching need to have the doctrine of the church deal with contemporary issues that bedevil the church and society from an ecclesiological perspective. There is need to mainstream and streamline it with major theological themes like the doctrine of Trinity, Pneumatology, man, Soteriology and virtually every aspect of systematic theology has a church dimension for. theology of

necessity is expressed and practiced in the church that is in the world in militant. There is need to contextualize this doctrine of the church and shun the western orientation exposition of the doctrine of the church. We need to synergize Biblical Exegesis, Biblical Theology and contextualized theology to make the doctrine of the church to have Biblical fidelity and contemporary relevance.

VIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

It is an exercise in futility to study without appropriating in personal life the lessons gleaned from the study. I have learned to study and learn from the various manifestation of the church without necessarily being Judgmental or snobbish. There is need to relook all the Christian doctrines for theology is a human enterprise hence not infallible and sometimes there is need to relook at various theological issues. I have embraced the fact that the Bible is immutable but theologies are for seasons and times but not completely relevant at all times like the Bible. Hence I have learned to study critically without being judgmental or dogmatic and to change outlook if need be guided by the immutable word of God to be the Gibraltar in the mutable and ever changing contexts for me to be an effective and relevant minister in the contemporary church, that is to appropriate Biblical fidelity and contextual relevance in my day to day ministry.

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