

PART III

PEOPLEHOOD OF GOD AS PARADIGMATIC OF
PROTOTYPAL EVANGELICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

CHAPTER 8

THE CALLING OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD PRECEDING THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

God has always been calling a people since the Fall. Snyder, in the context of the Old Testament, remarks:

This concept of peoplehood is firmly rooted in the Old Testament and underlines the objective fact of God's acting throughout history to call and prepare a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (1 Pet. 2:9; compare Ex. 19:5-6).¹

Hayes, in the context of the New Testament, brings out a similar point:

Central to the theology of the Christian faith is an understanding of the unique work in calling out a people for Himself. Part of the good news that the apostles preached was the direct revelation from Jesus Christ that His redemptive work of grace would bear fruit in the formation of the church.²

The concept of the peoplehood of God is very foundational in ecclesiological understanding and in understanding the continuum that consequently resulted in the formation of the Christian church, and the continuum of God's call to humanity from the Fall to the eventual restoration of the archetypal cosmological state. In the pre-Fall state, humanity was one in God. There were no divergent humanities externally joint together

¹ Snyder, *The Community of the King*, 58. Thus Kung sees that, "The concept of the people of God is at the heart of Judaism." Kung, *The Church*, 116.

² Ed Hayes, *The Church: The Body of Christ in the World Today* (Nashville: Word, 1999), xviii.

in God, but that there was only one humanity³ whose essence was a perfect humanity: created perfectly, in perfect relationship with the Creator- God, and in perfect relationship with one another. By virtue of the ideality of God's primal creation, this could be an appropriate characterization. However, the Fall marred this archetypal state.

Immediately⁴ after the Fall, God was calling Adam out of the world of hideness and state of fear.⁵ It was a call to come out from a fallen world to a state of reconciliation with God.⁶ But since then, human response is often times diversionary rather than responsive. Adam's alibi was embryonic of further human ideological constructions centered on self-excuse, a self-justification with propensity to divert human orientation away from God. This was the beginning of humanistic rather than divinely-oriented response. Humanistic ideological constructions are, at the outset, self-assertive, then secularistic. It is self-assertive because they eventually become assertions of human capabilities disregarding the primality of God's creative and regenerative roles. It is secularistic in the sense of being human attempts to find solution primarily within human realm, thus eventually outside of God. This humanistic self-assertion is one of the greatest ideological ironies of humankind, for while it admits human shortcomings, it also attempts to find a way out of human predicaments by primarily resorting to deficient human capabilities in the circumstance of degenerative life situations.

³ Consideration of racial diversity in the pre-Fall state could be speculative on grounds of speculative ecological and cultural existence.

⁴ The details of how immediate it was, is not indicated in the Biblical account.

⁵ "Toward evening they heard the Lord God walking about in the garden, so they hid themselves among the trees. The LORD GOD called Adam, 'Where are you?' He replied, 'I heard you, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.'" Genesis 3:8-10. It is beyond the scope of this work to discuss the narrative's acceptability, evangelicalism simply regard biblical narratives as it is, within the framework of its soteriological significance.

⁶ As Grenz sees it, "God's purpose is to establish 'one new humanity' consisting of a reconciled people (Eph. 2:14-19)... As the fellowship of believers we enter into relationship with God and one another. This covenant relationship is a foretaste of the future community we will share in the new creation..." Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 461.

It is in the context of humanistic, secularistic, self-assertive, and degenerative life situation of humanity that God has been calling people to come out of such life situation, to experience regeneration, and be reconciled to him as their Creator-God. And since the archetypal state of relationship is not only characterized by perfect human-divine relationship but also by the spontaneously coexistent perfect human-human relationship, the divine call is not just for people to be reconciled to God but also to be reconciled to one another. And by virtue of the foundationality of the restoration of divine-human relationship in the restoration of human-human relationship, response to God's call is primarily soteriological then consequently missional.⁷ That is, people need to respond to the salvific call of God, experience regeneration, and consequently be reconciled to their Creator-God who is the root of their life.⁸ This divine-human reconciliation is the essence of divine human love—a perfect living relationship enjoyed whose realization is willed by both parties.

Then, the people who responded to God's call and are in the state of reconciliation-in-love with God could not but also love their fellow human beings. But recognizing that love between humans could not be perfectly realized by themselves, those who are living in the love of God, become the missionaries of the salvific love of God. Because of their love to God and their love to their fellow human beings, they proclaim God's love and lead other people to love God, so that when they all love God

⁷ Further by virtue of the individual volitional freedom the Creator-God endowed to humanity, response to God's call is individual. Thus humans have to positively respond to the salvific call of God.

⁸ As Noll said of the search for Christian mind in relation to the search for an evangelical mind, "The search for a Christian mind is rather an effort to take seriously the sovereignty of God over the world he created, the lordship of Christ over the world he died to redeem, and the power of the Holy Spirit over the world he sustains each and every moment. From this perspective the search for an evangelical mind takes an ultimate significance, because the search for an evangelical mind is not, in the end, a search for mind, but a search for God." Mark A. Noll, "The Evangelical Mind," in *The Evangelical Landscape: Essays on the American Evangelical Tradition*, ed. Garth M. Rosell (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 1996), 38.

they would naturally love one another. Thus the restorative end of the divine-human relationship is the most profound of humanity's need for this determines the future existence of humanity. To synthesize, God's call to people is a salvific call with missional implication. The salvific objective and the missional implications are the essences of the divine "*ek-klesiality*," the essence of God's act of calling people out of the fallen life circumstance into a regenerated life.

8.1. The Calling of God's People Preceding Israel

Although God's call to Adam was the genesis of God's call for humanity to come out of the fallen world; but in an ecclesiological sense, the divine call to Noah and his family⁹ could be regarded as an embryonic paradigm of God's ecclesial call. The life situation, the theology of God's call, the characterization of the called out ones, and the intended end are embryonically paradigmatic in the history of the church. The Noahic call, although indicating a representative individual response, was a call to a family necessitating familial response; thus could be regarded as the primal precedent of God's corporate ecclesial calls.

Genesis relates God's call to Noah's family:

When the human population began to grow rapidly on the earth.... Now the LORD observed the extent of the people's wickedness.... But Noah found favor with the LORD.... Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless man living on earth at the time. He consistently followed God's will and enjoyed a close relationship with him.... So God said to Noah.... "I have decided to destroy all living creatures.... Make a boat.... I solemnly swear to keep you safe in the boat

⁹ The citations, in this work, of various historical calls of God for people to come out to fulfill his purpose are not intended as implying a dispensationalist perspective, but to point out the facticity of God's ever patient call for humanity amidst general human irresponsiveness or misdirected reactions. Such prevalent negativity, however, did not also preclude the responsiveness of those who wholeheartedly listened to God's call.

with your wife and your sons and their wives....” So Noah did everything exactly as God commanded him.¹⁰

The structural elements of this call could be identified as:

Life situation: The proliferation of wickedness in the world.

Theology of God’s call: Calling a family, who preserved their peoplehood of God, as the medium for regenerating the world with new humanity.

The called: The only family with close relationship with God, amidst the spiritually darkened world, thus the people of God.

The intended end: To regenerate the fallen world through radical global ecological transformation and peopling the world with a new people of God, thus global renewal of humanity.

God called Noah and his family to come out of the judged world into an ark¹¹ that would be their temporary refuge before the new world. Although Noah’s missional endeavor could be viably assumed while building the ark, but what was obvious in the Noahic call was the soteriological intent. There was an apparent divine intent to save and to renew the spiritual state of humanity. Although theodicy is not the intent of this work, but suffice it to say that by virtue of God’s Creatorship and eventual welfare of humanity, it was an inherent divine prerogative to radically curtail destructive propensity and regenerate the world with new humanity. Amidst that degenerated world God had a people, a family that did everything exactly as he had commanded them.¹² And he called

¹⁰ Genesis 6:1-22.

¹¹ Although for Augustine, the ark was regarded as metaphoric of the church as the ark of salvation, however, stretching the metaphor too much to construct an allegorical theology of the church as exclusive soteriological locus, could lead to a humanistic institutionalization and exclusion of the spiritually transcending and inclusive soteriological plan of God.

¹² Genesis 6:22.

that family unto salvation. Here could be seen the concept of God calling a people unto salvation from expected universal judgment, in a sense an ecclesia anticipating the *eschaton*.

Right after the flood, there was a new beginning of humanity. But then, afterwards, again there was the resurgence of humanistic, secularistic, and spiritually degenerative disposition in life. Humanity began to live in a life independent of the Creator and dependent on human capabilities; thus, the Babel phenomenon of humanity's fragmentation.

Genesis portrays the phenomenon:

At one time the whole world spoke a single language and used the same words. As the people migrated eastward, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there. They began to talk about construction projects. "Come," they said, "let's make great piles of burnt bricks and collect natural asphalt to use as a mortar. Let's build a great city with a tower that reaches to the skies—a monument to our greatness! This will bring us together and keep us from scattering all over the world..." [But] the LORD scattered them all over the earth; and that ended the building of the city. That is why the city was called Babel, because it was there that the LORD confused the people by giving them many languages, thus scattering them across the earth.¹³

Herein were the ironically tragic consequences of secularistic, humanistic and self-assertive approach to reconstructing human wholeness: confusion, diaspora, and fragmentation. With these came further degenerative side effects of exclusion, conflicts, wars, and brutalities. And these were characteristics not only of the ancient Babel history but even of the history of the church; when churches became secularistic, humanistic and self-assertive in their approach to reconstructing ecclesial "wholeness".

It was in that setting of humanity's fragmentary diversities, even diversities of

¹³ Genesis 11¹-8.

religions and spiritualities losing relational rootedness in the one Creator-God, that another family was called out from a polytheistic locality. Genesis tells the call of Abram:

Then the LORD told Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s house, and go the land that I will show you. I will cause you to become the father of a great nation.... All the families of the earth will be blessed through you.” So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed him, and Lot went with him.¹⁴

The structural elements of this call could be identified as:

Life situation: The proliferation of religious and spiritual confusion.

Theology of God’s call: Calling a family who had a spiritual inclination to become a people of God and responsive enough to re-generate the people of God amidst a polytheistic world.

The called: A family, though influenced by situated culture, still remained relatively connected with the Creator-God, still responsive to his call, and willing to obey God and be his people.

The intended end: To re-generate the theistically confused world with a new generation of God’s people.

The world from which Abraham was called out was a confused world of multiple spiritualities and gods. It was a world that was spiritually and theistically lost.¹⁵ The divine call to Abraham was a call to come out of that lost world, be a people of God, live in a safe zone, and re-generate God’s people who would be a blessing to all the families of the earth, i.e., to the whole humanity. The calling of Abraham’s family to be God’s

¹⁴ Genesis 12:1-4.

¹⁵ Rosenbaum notes, “Abraham’s wife Sarah’s—name is also moon-related in Akkadian (*sarratu* = Ningal, wife of Sin). Such evidence seems to suggest that Abram/Abraham’s ancestors were moon worshippers, something that should come as no surprise so deep into the era that began with “farming revolution.” Stanley Ned Rosenbaum, *Understanding Israel: A Reexamination of the Origins of Monotheism* (Georgia: mercer University Press, 2002), 126-127.

people was metaphoric of the calling of nominal Christians to a wholehearted commitment to God's call, live in a purposeful life, and re-generate the world with God's people.¹⁶ Abraham responded with a leap of faith, obedient, and trustful to the divine call without pragmatic grounds for bright prospects of future life. His response was a model of faith, and his call was a missional call. Thus, here we had the apparent concept of missional progenation of God's people amidst the spiritually and theistically confused world, in a sense an early stage of missional ecclesia.

The story of Lot was another story of God's ecclesiality to save a people from imminent judgment. Again like the life situation in Noah's time, judgment could not merely be equated as punitive judgment for punishment sake; but in a more teleological sense, the curtailment of serious destructive propensity so as to possibly allow a progenation of another people of God; in a sense, soteriologically intended.

Genesis again accounts the call of Lot:

“Do you have any other relatives here in the city?” the angels asked. “Get them out of this place—sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone else. For we will destroy the city completely. The stench of the place has reached the LORD, and he has sent us to destroy it.” So Lot rushed out to tell his daughters' fiancés, “Quick, get out of the city!” The LORD is going to destroy it.... At dawn the next morning the angels became insistent. “Hurry!” they said to Lot. “Take your wife and your two daughters who are here. Get out of here right now, or you will be caught in the destruction of the city. When Lot still hesitated, the angels seized his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters and rushed them to safety outside the city, for the LORD was merciful. “Run for your lives!” the angels warned.¹⁷

The structural elements of this call could be identified as:

Life situation: The proliferation of wickedness in the city.

¹⁶ As Armerding notes, “The people of God throughout history have by their very nature provided an antithesis to the secular world.” Armerding, “The Evangelical in the Secular World,” 130.

¹⁷ Genesis 19:12-17.

Theology of God's call: Calling a family, through direct intervention, out of the wicked city imminently judged.

The called: A family clan, but only the immediate family of four hesitantly responded, minus one.

The intended end: Salvation from imminent destruction.

The Lotic call brings another aspect of God's ecclesiality, e.g., direct intervention, and an embryo of salvific kerygma, thus a missional embryo. When Lot hesitated, the angels seized his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters. This is an incipient stage of a salvific missional aggressiveness, when God's act of saving humanity through divine agents, i.e., the angels, was no longer a passive wait and see approach, but was actively interventionistic. It was like an early stage of an active evangelistic missional approach. Again the one called out from a morally darkened world was a family that still had the sense of relationship with God. Lot and his immediate family members were the people of God in the city of Sodom. However, within that family of God there was still a falling away. This is not intended to be too allegorical, but somehow this reminds the ecclesia of the historical falling away from the called out people of Christ.¹⁸ Further, here we see a concept of God calling a people out of a sinful world to save them from imminent destruction, in a sense an ecclesia meant for a salvific end.

¹⁸ Carpenter criticizes evangelicalism in the backdrop of the falling away in different periods of Protestantism, see John B. Carpenter, "The Fourth Great Awakening or Apostasy: Is American Evangelicalism Cycling Upwards or Spiraling Downwards?" *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 44(December 2001): 647-670.

8.2. The Calling of Israel as the People of God

Now historically leaping from familial to a more corporate and more paradigmatic divine ecclesiality—the calling of Israel, the progeny of Abraham’s family. We see in the calling of Israel a direct precedence of Christian church. The identification of Israel and the Christian church is so close, that it even creates confusion¹⁹ resulting in ecclesiological conflicts. Thus there is a view fusing Israel and the Christian church, while another one proposes continuity of the distinct election of Israel in parallel with the election of Christian church, and still another see the cessation of Israel’s divine election that was transferred to the Christian church. However, the biblical perspective of divine ecclesiality is really not that confusing. A un-preconceive look at Israel’s calling and its consequential response in the framework of God’s historical call is ecclesologically clarifying.

Exodus characterizes God’s call of Israel:

Then Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The LORD called out to him, Give this instructions to the descendants of Jacob, the people of Israel. You know how I brought you to myself and carried you on eagle’s wings. Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all nations of the earth; for all the earth belongs to me. And you will be to me a kingdom of priests, my holy nation.²⁰

The structural elements of the call could be identified as:

Life situation: Physical and spiritual slavery of a people amidst a polytheistic society.

¹⁹ Smith’s comment reflects this confusion, “It is a serious error to believe that God has rejected Israel in favor of the church. Yet it is equally problematic to believe that God has two peoples—Israel and the church—and has different purposes for each. God has only one people.... Some maybe labeled ‘Israel’ and some ‘church’....” David L. Smith, *All God’s People: A Theology of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 205-206. The two could not be literally, spiritually, or missional confused; for one is an ethnic group and the other is not, Israel rejected Jesus while the church accepted him, and the church’s mission is the proclamation of Christ which was apparently not an Israelic mission.

²⁰ Exodus 19:3-6.

Theology of the call: Calling a people out of slavery to make them God's people for a special purpose.

The called: A later generation of a previously called Abrahamic family that had extended into an ethnic group.

The intended end: To free a people from slavery, reconcile them to God, and make them a kingdom of priests.

The Israelic call was ecclesiological fuller than the precedent calls and could have been the highlight of the divine call for humanity. It was ecclesiological fuller because of the following characteristics:

There was a detailed volitional propositions on how the people of God could be more truly reconciled back to God. The Pentateuch is replete with propositions intended to strengthen Israel's commitment to and reconciliation with God; with such commitment and reconciliation anticipated to bring about national blessings to them. Those propositions were pedagogical means to spiritually and morally re-educate a people acculturated by cultures foreign to their original heritage faith psyche. There was a process of deconstructing their internal conceptual and attitudinal psyche, so that they could think and act more truly like the people of God intended them to be. This deconstruction and reconstruction of their psyche is descriptive of a regenerative process; thus the concept of convertive piety. As Bush points out:

Though rooted in God's initiative and grace, the covenant held the people of God responsible for living a life worthy of their calling....It is this quality of life that the Pentateuch's various 'codes of law' articulate.²¹

²¹ Frederick W. Bush, "Images of Israel: The People of God in the Torah," in *Studies in Old Testament Theology*, eds. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., Robert K. Johnston, and Robert P. Meye (Dallas: Word, 1992), 104.

Moreover their convertive piety was volitional. Although the punitive consequence of disobedience in contrast to the blissful end result of obedience was emphasized; however, both individually and corporately, they were free to choose the kind of life they would like to live. If ever judgment was emphasized it was because their corporate identity was the people of God, and they needed to preserve the integrity of their new identity. And as such, they were expected to think and live as people of God. Otherwise, an individual or a sub-group within that was discordant of the corporate characterization would cease linkage with the whole body. In here we see the development of the concept of the preserving the corporate ecclesial integrity.

Further, the pedagogical propositions were not merely conceptual but biocentric, and biocentrically transformative. These propositions were spiritual and moral life propositions. The intention was not to lead Israel to mere conceptual assent, but to direct them towards a new convertive life in God. Thus the Pentateuch teachings were not so much the tools for indoctrination, as pedagogical means of discipling a nation. They were to be disciplined, become disciples of God, and, as implied by their priesthood, to disciple other nations. In here we see the parallels of the basic religious structures of the later Christian church.

In regards to the covenant²² between God and Israel, although there is fuss about its interpretation due to conceptual complications constructed around; yet it was nothing more confusing than the apparent stipulation of God's ecclesiality.²³ In the perspective of the divine *ekklesiality* it was nothing more complex than the succinct anthropomorphic

²² For an overview of present concepts on covenant, see Dennis J. Carthy, *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinion* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1972).

²³ As Klein points out, "Temporal blessings and prosperity depended upon the terms of the covenant. Covenant did not guarantee salvation." Klein, *Ibid.*, 32.

dealings of God with humans; to call a people who still preserved a faith heritage, though marred, to come out of a degenerated life situation and participate in the process of regeneration. And by becoming a regenerated people of God, they in turn could be the means of guiding the rest of humanity to a regenerated state.

Moreover, Israel was called not by virtue of their ethnicity²⁴ but by virtue of their proximity to faith lineage. Israel's call was circumstantial rather than ethnic or predestinary. Among other peoples at the time of their ecclesial call, they were the ones who still preserved the God-consciousness more pronounced in them than the rest of other ethnic groups. It should be noted too that the second progenation of humanity was from the called out family of Noah, and biblically there was no dual or multiple progenitors in the post-deluvian world; thus, basically there was only one humanity. Ethnicity is accidental and superficial, thus there could be no such thing as a sort of deified inherent factor in an ethnic group, for ethnicity is not an essential of human ontology. And of course, it would be more conceptually coherent with the characterization of divine *ekkesiality* to assume that Abraham's call²⁵ was not predestinary or ethnicized²⁶ but was based on his responsive disposition to divine call, a disposition to faith. For Abraham was originally a Chaldean or Babylonian that later also

²⁴ As Flanders, Jr. and colleagues point out, "Israel had no inherent greatness that caused Yahweh to choose it; its greatness lay only in the fact that Yahweh had chosen it. Both existence and worth were owed to the redemptive activity of a sovereign God, who made Israel God's own people." Henry Jackson Flanders, Jr., Robert Wilson Crapps, and Anthony Smith, *People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 217. Rosenbaum notes, "Paradoxically Israel's chooseness was not exactly of its own doing. Pseudo-Israelite groupings will have included a lot of 'outcasts' and 'ne'er-do-wells,' malefactors who probably joined themselves together through blood-brotherhood rituals." Rosenbaum, *Understanding Biblical Israel*, 137. Klein emphasizes, "...Israel could not attribute her election to everything within the nation herself." Klein, *The New Chosen People*, 29.

²⁵ From which Israel claim ancestral root.

²⁶ For Abram, being originally a Chaldean or Babylonian, was also an expatriate of people who, were not only regarded as paganistic but also, later enslaved Israel.

enslaved Israel and were polytheistic. Thus faith-response is the basis of God's covenant with humans. When a people wholeheartedly respond in faith to God, they become the people of God, and the divine purpose is fulfilled through them. They become regenerated people and agents of regeneration.

There was a formalization of faith. Preeminent in Israelic ecclesiality was the institution of liturgy. Such liturgical institution, of course, was an inherent need in a corporate call. And the institution of sanctuary services was a societal "macrolization" of a more private personal or familial sacrificial liturgy. A liturgical institution could be seen here as central in the life of the called out ones or the *ekklesia*. However, the liturgical center was neither the piety-acts of the people nor the locus of the liturgy per se, but the sacrificial offering. From the sacrificial offering of Abel,²⁷ to Noah after the flood,²⁸ to Abraham when Isaac was a youngster,²⁹ to the Passover,³⁰ and, of course, as the common personal and public practice when Israel was relatively settled onward to their journey to the eventual establishment of their state and temple—the sacrificial offering was not only even the liturgical center³¹ but also the center of their everyday piety as the people of God. The sacrificial offering was the core of their national psyche.

Of course, in Christian perspective such sacrificial liturgical and piety center is recognized as anticipatory of the coming of Christ. The sacrifices and liturgical piety

²⁷ Genesis 4:4.

²⁸ Genesis 8:20-21.

²⁹ Ibid., 22:13.

³⁰ Exodus 12:3.

³¹ Even among the later generation of Jews, the temple cultus was still central in their lives. Kee notes, "A significant number of Jews from the time of the Babylonian exile forward perceived the central model for God's people and for the maintenance of the relationship between them and God to be the Temple and its cultus. Only when the Temple cultus was being fully and properly carried out could the real Israel participate in the life God intended for his people." Howard Clark Kee, *Who Are the People of God: Early Christian Models of Community* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 19-20.

built upon and around it were soteriologically illustrative of the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus. Thus in a Christian sense, the sacrifice was proleptic of Jesus Christ; the Israelic and pre-Israelic liturgy and piety were proleptic of Christocentricity. The formalization of sanctuary services was meant as a prolepsis of Christianity. This coheres with John's outright recognition of Jesus as the Lamb of God. John declared:

Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about when I said, "Soon a man is coming who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before I did. I have been baptizing with water in order to point him out to Israel."³²

Apparent in John's declaration is the presentation of Jesus as the anticipated Lamb of God, and his act of directing Israel to the Lamb. Hebrews, of course, is very expository of the concept of Jesus as the fulfillment of the sacrificial system. It emphasizes that, "The old system...was only a shadow of the things to come, not the reality of the good things Christ has done for us."³³ The Pauline message, of course, that we are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood³⁴ sacrificing his life for us, is an overarching kerygma in the New Testament, from the Gospels to the letters to the prophetic Revelation. Thus the Israelic liturgy and piety were, as a whole a preparatory Christological pedagogical system. Since the core of their existence and life as a distinct people was not their ethnicity but their responsive sacrificial-centered life, it could be viably conclusive to say that they were being prepared for Christian faith. They were given the volitional privilege to be the forthcoming Christian body. But being volitional, their being the proleptic Christian body was dependent on their willful

³² John 1:29-31.

³³ Hebrews 10:1.

³⁴ See Romans 5: 9.

response and act; and being a privilege, dependent on their volitionality; thus it was probable that they could lose their *ekkesiality*, and proleptic Christian *ekkesiality* at that.

Aside from liturgy, there was also the formalization of law which was, in essence, support system for the spiritually-based overall life of the nation.³⁵ It is interesting to note that instead of what could be called in present term, theological or doctrinal formulations, what the Mosaic Israel had were formulation of laws. Although later they became legalistic and ethnocentric, and even soteriologically legalistic and ethnocentric, i.e., they equated the means of salvation to legalistic accomplishment and ethnic election; but, at the outset these formulations were intended as biocentric principles, i.e., as principles of regenerated personal and national life. It was intended to bring about order out of their bare society. The order that they needed, so that the nation could be morally, socially, and religiously directed towards a national life engendered out of spirituality focused on the proleptic redemptive Sacrifice.

Thus, these formulations were moral, societal, and religious legislations purported as guidelines in their transformation as the people of God. What they have were formulations for convertive life, rather than merely formulations for intellectual engagement or legal impositions. These were their theology, not doctrinal per se, but biocentric teachings that are somehow, in essence, reflective of Contemporary Evangelicality. Generally, then, these could be called discipleship teachings. Thus, in here we see the concept of proleptic Christocentricity and regenerative biocentricity.

There was a missional intent. It is interesting to note that the establishment of

³⁵ Ferguson has this to say about the covenant, “God’s covenant are not so much a legal relationship as love relationship, a fact shown by the marriage analogy employed by the prophets (Jer. 2:2; Ezek. 16:8-14; Hos. 2:1-3:1).” Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*, 18.

Israel in a particular promised land was never an end in itself; but it was simply a venue for the process of transforming them, not into a kingdom with priests and with holy peoples, but a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Although a particular order of priesthood was instituted; however, as evident in their call, the nation-believer was intended to be, as a whole, the priest of God. Of course, the concept of paternal priesthood was common in the Old Testament even before the calling of Israel; however, at Israel's call, the familial concept was taken in its larger global context, and was applied to the priesthood of Israel over other nations. Israel was called to obey God so that they could be God's "own special treasure among all the nations of the earth....a kingdom of priests...."³⁶ Here we see the further development of the concept of priesthood of all believers, as integral in God's act of calling people out of the world to himself for the fulfillment of his purpose for them in the world.³⁷

Further, the intention of making Israel a nation of priest was not self-directed nor nationally statically terminal, i.e., they were called not simply because they would be transformed into a sort of cultural exhibit amidst a community of nations. As Guder emphasizes:

The term [*ekklesia*] refers to the fact that God's actions in salvation history include his choosing some people to carry out his purposes—for the benefit of all. Election, understood biblically, is God's purposeful action within the total scope of his gracious desire to save his erring creation. Thus, Israel is

³⁶ Exodus 19:5-6

³⁷ As Anderson states it, "This calling [Israel's spiritual calling] is grounded on the event of the Exodus which manifested God's action in delivering Israel from Egyptian bondage ('you have seen what I did'). But Yahweh's initiative evoked response from the people. It placed them in a situation of decision, summoned them to a task within the divine purpose." Bernard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 82. Coppedge identifies three means in accomplishing God's objectives for Israel's calling: "learning to live under the authority of God," "living in fellowship with others who seek to follow God," and "faith." He also identifies the heart of the covenant as "the personal presence of God among his people." Coppedge, *The Biblical Principles of Discipleship*, 30, 33, 35, 36. Such view, however, is more focused on Israel's national self, and is not emphatic of the missional importance of Israel's calling.

not called, or elected, for its own benefit, to be a special culture that is to enjoy privileges not given to anyone else. Rather Israel's election is functional to God's universal saving purposes.³⁸

Israel's call for priesthood was a dynamic call engendering spontaneous responsibility. It was a spontaneous responsibility, because the missional responsibility was to become their national activity naturally and coherently ensuing out of the nature of their missional being. As a kingdom of priests they were to become, not a priest for themselves but, priests for others. Their priesthood was a missional priesthood. They were called to be missionaries to proclaim what God has done to them, so that other nations too would be regenerated and also become the people of God.³⁹ As Klein points out, "Thus election was a call to serve God in the world."

Peter pointed out the missional intent of the called people of God in parallel yet in contrast with the calling of Israel. It is parallel because of the same conceptual mold, in contrast because of Israel's failure to fulfill such priesthood is indicated.⁴⁰

Peter declared to the Christian *ekklesia*:

...you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.⁴¹

Here we see the re-application of the Mosaic call to the Christian *ekklesia* due to Israel's ekklesial failure. Here we see that indeed, the concept of priesthood is a missional concept, i.e., "to show others the goodness of God." The liturgical concept of priesthood was temporal and co-terminus with the temporality of the anticipatory sanctuary services.

³⁸ Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 9.

³⁹ Klein, *The New Chosen People*, 33.

⁴⁰ As Peter declared, "They [Israel] stumble because they do not listen to God's word or obey it.... But you [Christian *ekklesia*] are not like that..." 1Peter 2: 8-9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2:9.

With the realization of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ the liturgical sacrificial-based Israelic priesthood “is now out of date and ready to be put aside.”⁴² What remain as descriptive of priesthood are the concepts of holiness and mission. The called out ones are called to be holy so that they could fulfill their mission. And their mission is kerygmatic, i.e., both a communicative and biocentric proclamations of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. As priests they are to witness both in their verbal proclamation and in their lives the goodness of God through Jesus. Thus Peter was emphatic of getting rid of malicious behavior and deceit and growing into the fullness of salvation,⁴³ so that they could be, “showing others the goodness of God,” i.e., living in a life proclamatory of the effects and benefits of salvation.⁴⁴

Israel was called to be holy so that they could verbally⁴⁵ and biocentrically witness for God to other nations. Their calling was not meant as an exclusive soteriological election but as a missional call. In this sense, Guder comments:

Election is a calling to service. God calls, and enables the response to his call, not solely for the benefit of the one called, but for a greater purpose, for which the called-out ones are now enlisted and enabled.⁴⁶

They were called not to make salvation exclusive to them,⁴⁷ but to proclaim salvation to other nations. But as Flanders and colleagues emphasize, “Israel...forgot that Yahweh

⁴² Hebrews 8:13.

⁴³ 1Peter 2:1-2.

⁴⁴ Coppedge comments, “Israel must respond to God’s offer, choosing whether to continue with Him or to draw back.” He emphasizes further, “At the bottom line, as it is usually in Scriptures, God’s people are called to live by faith.” Coppedge, *The Biblical Principles of Discipleship*, 24.

⁴⁵ As Torrance sees it, “Israel became in a unique way the bearer of the oracles of God...” T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982),87.

⁴⁶ Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 9.

⁴⁷ As Klein emphasizes, “...the election-knowing involves a function or task and does not necessarily imply their salvation.” He further adds, “God’s elective knowledge of Israel does not guarantee the salvation of all Israelites.” Klein, *The New Chosen People*, 32.

had chosen it for service and not for privilege.”⁴⁸ And they could only fulfill their salvific mission, if, at the outset, they themselves experienced salvation. They needed to experience national regeneration so that they could become a national missional means of global regeneration. Thus here we see the concept and interrelationship of regeneration and ecclesial mission. And these are the concepts that are to be revived later in Contemporary Evangelicalism.

8.3. Conclusion

To summarize, God has always been calling a people to himself, not only to save them but also, to send them as missionaries to the world.⁴⁹ God’s call is both soteriological and missional. Soteriological not in the sense of making salvation an exclusive rights but, in the sense of calling them out to experience salvation, so that by experiencing salvation they could also witness to others of their salvific experience. Further since response to God’s call is volitional; the called out ones, the *ekklesia*, may fulfill or reject or respond then abandon the call, or, though have already responded yet some time later because of being misdirected by their self-centered insistence eventually, loss their ecclesiality. This point is very important in the recognition of the perpetuity of an *ekklesia*, i.e., the perpetuity of an *ekklesia* is not predestinatory nor inherent in its socio-ethnic characteristics, but co-terminus with its spiritual and missional responsiveness.

⁴⁸ Flanders, Jr., et. al., *People of the Covenant*, 214.

⁴⁹ Hart notes, “First, the Church is the *people of God*. As the Gaither gospel song asserts, ‘God has always had a people!’ In actuality, the Church is the continuation of all that God began to do through Abraham, calling out a people unto himself for the salvation of the world.... Tragically, God’s people were not faithful...so that ultimately God began to speak of another and better covenant in the future (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezek. 37:26, 27; Heb. 8:8-12).” Larry D. Hart, *Truth Aflame: A Balanced Theology for Evangelicals and Charismatics* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 481.

Thus, as long as an *ekklesia* is willfully remaining in God and fulfilling his divine purpose for it, it remains as the *ekklesia* of God. Thus *ekklesiality* is conditional.

In Israelic *ekklesiality*, however, what could be seen was an early developmental construction of the structures of Christocentricity, convertive biocentricity, and missionality of the people of God—structures which are very evangelicalistic. But what is the relevance of the concept of the historical calling of God in the Old Testament?

CHAPTER 9

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AS THE NEW PEOPLE OF GOD

Now what is the relevance of the historical calling of God in the Old Testament? It is relevant because it shows that the call of God is historical, and historically progressive. First God called a couple, then a family, then an ethnic group which was an extended conglomeration of families having the same ancestral root and faith heritage.¹ God has always been calling for a people throughout history, and as history approaches the *eschaton* the calling takes on a fuller dimension. And the Old Testament people of God is commonly regarded as the direct predecessor of the Christian church.²

9.1. The Calling of the People of Christ

It is in this backdrop, that this work proposes that the emergence of Christian

¹ The exodus people, though, could have included some non-Israelis.

² The concept of Israel as being fully succeeded by the Christian church is still an issue of debate for some theological schools.

church is incidental.³ It is incidental because there could have been no necessity of calling a church, if Israel remained faithful and responsive to their calling. But it did not. Instead they rejected their proleptic Christologicity. They rejected the coming of the Lamb of God, prophetically illustrated in their sanctuary, then temple, sacrificial services; which ironically were central in their national existence and life. It was so because they did not remain faithful to God. The process of spiritual regeneration was substituted by the process of religio-ethnic “ideologization”. Their relationship to God became socio-institutionally legislative rather than spiritually transformative. Convertive piety was substituted by legislative preoccupation, and, as such, the object of their piety became ideological rather than Christological.

Thus when Christ came, their psyche was already clouded by religio-political ideology, so that they ended up rejecting Christ whom they presupposed did not fit in their conceptual mold. It is much like the loosing of Christologicity in churches losing their convertive piety to theological ideology. Israel became exclusivistic, i.e., they claimed the kingdom of God as their exclusive rights; and political, i.e., even the messianic expectation was politicized to mean political national deliverance rather than personal spiritual deliverance from sin. Instead of fulfilling their spiritual salvific mission; Israel was preoccupied with political emancipation and even an obsession of global political power. They lost their deep sense of true calling, purpose, and mission.

³ Thus Toussaint tries to make it clear that, “Because of Israel’s negative response, God is now working with the Church, distinct from Israel (Rom. 9-11; Eph. 2:11-12; 3:1-12). The Church therefore is a mystery, never prophesied in the Old Testament (Eph. 3:4-6).” Stanley Toussaint, “The Church and Israel,” *The Conservative Theological Society Journal* 2 (December 1998). Cited March 14, 2004, <http://conservativeonline.org/journals/02-07-journal/1998v2n7-ldo1.htm>. The concept of ecclesial mystery when seen in the perspective of the church’s incidental emergence due to Israel’s spiritual and missional failures, become a demythologized concept.

And they eventually lost the meaning and fulfillment of the Sacrifice that was supposed to be prophetic and pervasive in their national psyche.

Thus Jesus proclaimed that the “stone rejected by the builders has now become the cornerstone.”⁴ Peter echoed, “He was rejected by the people...”⁵ Their rejection of Christ consequently meant not only the loss of the proper framework of their spiritually-based national life, but also the loss of their missional content and function. With the loss of their supposed to be Christocentric core of their national existence, life, and purpose, consequently they lost their *ekkesiality*. Thus, Christ after proclaiming the Jewish rejection of him concluded, “what I mean is that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit.”⁶ Peter addressing the Christian believers affirmed:

And now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple. What’s more, you are God’s holy priests.... You are a kingdom of priests, God’s holy nation.... This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.... “Once you were not a people; now you are the people of God.”⁷

Peter’s declaration was a direct re-application of God’s national call to Israel⁸ to Christian believers. Now, it is conclusive that Israel’s rejection of Christ is indicative of their spiritual and missional failure, that consequently resulted in the calling a new spiritual nation, the global congregation of Christian believers. The new people of God are called to be holy and to show others the goodness of God, the life that was expected of the previously called people of God. Thus God’s call for Christians is also a spiritual

⁴ Matthew 21:42.

⁵ 1Peter 2:4.

⁶ Matthew 21:43.

⁷ 1Peter 2:5, 9-10.

⁸ Exodus 19:5-6.

salvific and missional call; in evangelical terms, Christians are called to be born again and to witness for Jesus.

With the calling and congregating of all those who believe and accept Jesus as their personal Savior, the phenomenon of the Christian church emerged. In Chafer's words, "By divine calling, which is efficacious (Rom. 8:30), the Church as an elect company is being gathered."⁹ Thus, the ecclesiality of the Christian church is not inherent in its societal institutional self, but is conditional on its integrity and responsiveness as the new people of God. Its peoplehood of God, i.e., in its archetypal sense its peoplehood of Christ, is its core identity. And this identity engenders Christocentric and Christological spiritual and missional self of the church. The church is the congregation of the people of Christ, living the life of Christ and witnessing the salvation Christ had realized. The so-called various ecclesiological models are simply metaphors of the various aspects of the corporate life of the people of Christ.¹⁰ They are not in themselves the ecclesiological essences nor the core of ecclesial identity. *The essence of Christian church is its being the people of Christ—the people who responded to the salvific and missional call of Christ. They are regenerated people of Christ called to be agents of regeneration in the world.*

The concept of the church as the people of God/Christ is the core ecclesiological concept in the New Testament and the conceptual paradigm not just of evangelical but also of the whole Christian ecclesiology. Chadwick points out that, "When Paul wrote

⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:39.

¹⁰ Regarding the different aspects of the church ministerial life, Jordan categorizes these in three, "There are three kinds of occasions or ministries conducted by the Church.... They are liturgical (worship), koinonial (fellowship), and diaconal (service)." James Jordan, "The Church: As Overview," in *The Reconstruction of the Church*, ed. James B. Jordan (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1985), 15.

letters to groups of Christians, he used various words: ‘to you who are chosen and set apart in Rome’ (or in Philippi, or in Colossae)...’to the *ecclesiae* in Galatia’. This word meant ‘the people called out,’ or ‘chosen’.”¹¹ Thus, Schnackenburg asserts, “for early Christian thought the ‘Church of God’ ...is nothing else but the people of God, so that Church and people of God in this perspective are identical.”¹² Kung likewise characterizes the church as a pilgrim people:

The Church is always and everywhere a living people, gathered from the peoples of this World and journeying through the midst of time. The Church is essentially *en route*, on a journey, a pilgrimage.”¹³

With the people of Christ concept of the church, the church becomes a real and dynamic aggrupation of purpose-driven believers—a living organism. As Kung further comments, “If the Church really sees itself as the people of God, it is obvious it can never be a static and supra-historical phenomenon, which exists undisturbed by earthly space and historical time.”¹⁴ Phillips and Okholm succinctly state the essence of evangelical ecclesiology:

...the Christian family, that is, the church. They are the people of God who continue Christ’s incarnate ministry by being his representatives in the world.¹⁵

They expound further the very identity of the church:

The *ecclesia* of God is a specific type of people, one that God in Jesus Christ has called into existence by his work (Acts 20:28). When one accepts Jesus’ offer of salvation, one is now “in Christ” (Gal. 1:22; 1 Thes. 2:14), part of his “church” (Eph. 5:23), a member of the “body of Christ” (Eph. 4:4, 15-16). In fact, our

¹¹ Chadwick, *A History of Christianity*, 29-30.

¹² Rudlof Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament* (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 1965), 153.

¹³ Kung, *The Church*, 130.

¹⁴ Ibid. Sawyer, however, has this criticism, “ ‘community’ as the heart of Christian faith, as the very essence of living a Christian life, is a concept that lies dormant in more institutional churches than not.” Mary R. Sawyer, *The Church on the Margins: Living Christian Community* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2003), 13. She points out the function of community, “At the micro-level, community commonly denotes a gathering that provides nurture and mutual support.” Ibid., 11.

¹⁵ Phillips and Okholm, *A Family of Faith*, 108.

English term “church,” which is related to the Germanic word *kirche* and Scottish *kirk*, has etymology that originally meant “of the Lord” (from the Greek *kyrios*). We who were not a people, are now a people “of the Lord.” That is our primary identity.¹⁶

Furthermore, John pointed out to the people in Jordan River that Jesus “is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”¹⁷ The introductory Johannine declaration followed by baptism was then highlighted by the dramatic anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit and the verbal confirmation of God the Father. Thus began the public ministry of Jesus on earth. Then as exemplary of Christian life in overcoming temptation, or in a sense, could be metaphoric of experiencing regeneration before witnessing, Jesus overcame temptations, and afterward Mark accounted his preaching:

“At last the time has come!” he announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Turn from your sins and believe in the Good News!”¹⁸

Jesus’ inaugural kerygma is paradigmatic of the salvific call ringing throughout the New Testament—the call to be born again. In essence, the gospel proclamation is the call for people to believe in Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The call is a salvific regenerative call with ecclesial consequence. It is the call for the people of the world to be transformed into one people of Christ. Then the Markan account continues:

One day as Jesus was walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother, Andrew, fishing with a net, for they were commercial fishermen. Jesus called out to them, “Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people.” And they left their nets at once and went with him.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., 110.

¹⁷ John 1:29.

¹⁸ Mark 1:15.

¹⁹ Mark 1:16-18.

After the salvific call, Jesus called out two people to come out from their being fishermen to being his disciples and “fish for people.”²⁰ Here we see the beginning of personal missional call. Christ was calling people not only to salvation and also to be his disciples, with an intention of, not just following him and listening to his teachings but, eventually calling other people out of the world into his kingdom, as metaphoric of fishing for people.²¹ This is the proximate conceptual implication of fishing for people.

Now what do we have here? It is a paradigm of salvific call followed by a missional call that is paradigmatic in Gospel accounts and in other ecclesial accounts in the New Testament—and this is the evangelicalistic model. With the ecclesial failure of Israel, Jesus is calling a new *ekklesia*. And the call has become more emphatically personal than ever. Those who personally responded to the call, came together and became an aggrupation of disciples of Christ, the core people of Christ that would become the progenitor of the global people of Christ. In essence the aggrupation of disciples was the embryonic Christian *ekklesia*.

Christ’s act of calling out disciples was an act of forming a new *ekklesia*. The aggrupation of the twelve disciples was an *ekklesia* in its formative stage. It was in its formative stage, because the ecclesial maturation has still to come at a later time after the realization of the soteriological plan and the inaugural fulfillment of the Pneumatic ecclesial empowerment. The aggrupation of disciples was still an embryo that needed to

²⁰ For a study on the concept of “fisher of people,” see Wilhelm H. Wuellner, *The Meaning of “Fishers of Men”* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965).

²¹ Neuhaus challenges, “The church is to represent to the world a possibility that God has opened for humankind.” Richard John Neuhaus, “Why Evangelicals and Catholics Belong Together,” in *Pilgrims in the Sawdust Trail*, ed. George, 105. Healy further adds that the church, “is oriented towards the ultimate goal of all humanity, indeed, of all creation.” Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical and Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17.

grow, and needed to grow into full maturity, and not only to grow into full maturity but also needed to be Pneumatically empowered. In fact as reflective of the anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit before Jesus began his ministry, they too needed to be anointed by the Holy Spirit before they could begin their ministry.

The ecclesiality of the disciples was still embryonic for they still needed to realize the very reason why they were called. Before Jesus' ascension they still did not have the whole soteriological and missional picture of their calling. In fact, it could be viably pictured out that the disciples were only beginning to realize the whole perspective of their salvific and missional call, when Christ commissioned them to go and make disciples of all nations. Afterwards, not only them but also the rest who responded to the call of faith congregate together, began reflecting, and praying, but still did not know how they could propagate their newfound faith to Israel, much more worldwide. Although they had the conviction, they lack the power and linguistic capability.

The ministry of Christ while on earth could be identified in two aspects, namely pedagogical and redemptive. While on earth he was teaching people how to live a new life, thus his pedagogy was actually a regenerative biocentric pedagogy. He was calling people to come out of their spiritually beclouded life situations, and teaching them a regenerative life style. He was propagating convertive piety among the spiritually lost ex-called out ones. Thus the preeminent kerygma, that became an evangelical cliché, of humanity's need to be born again. And Christ was emphatic of the realization of regenerative life as a Pneumatological operation, "the Holy Spirit gives new life from heaven."²² Christ was also emphatic of his soteriological mission. He proclaimed,

²² John 3:6.

“Salvation has come.... And I, the son of Man, have come to seek and save those like him [Zacchaeus]²³ who are lost.”²⁴ Thus in here we have both the Pneumatological convertive and Christological salvific structures of Christian faith with corollary missional implication.

But note that there was still an attempt of Christ to let Israel realize their being lost and call them back to him. There was still an ecclesial call for Israel. Jesus grieved:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stone God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather you together as a hen protects her chicks beneath his wings, but you wouldn’t let me...”²⁵

However, Christ foresaw their resolute rejectionist stance. Christ was building a Pneumatologically regenerative structure amidst their nationally degenerating ecclesial life; and was fulfilling the archetype of their sacrificial core. They got to be Pneumatically regenerated and Christologically saved. However Christ eventually judged:

“And now look, your home is left to you, empty and desolate. For I tell you this, you will never see me again until you say, ‘Bless the one who comes in the name of the LORD!’ ”²⁶

Here we see the eminent anticipation of the cessation of Israel as the people of God. Although the call of the disciples may not have been intended at the outset as a separatistic call, i.e., a separate *ekklesia* from Israel but rather an ecclesia within the Israelic ecclesia intended to reform the whole; but eventually with the corporate rejectionist stance of the whole Israel, a new *ekklesia* emerged. Thus, the Christian

²³ This is figurative of people who were supposed to have spiritual lineage but was lost along the way.

²⁴ Luke 19:9-10.

²⁵ Matthew 23:37.

²⁶ Ibid., 23:38-39.

church emerged. As Van Gelder points out:

The birth of the church opened as new chapter in God's redemptive work. God's presence in the world would no longer be mediated through a single nation nor located in the physical Temple in Jerusalem. God was constructing a spiritual building consisting of people from all nations.²⁷

Guder sees an ecclesial heritage of the Christian church with Israel and indicates the cessation of Israel's call:

Just as God called and set apart the nation of Israel to be blessed and become a channel of blessing to all nations, he now calls and sets apart a people, the "new Israel," to proclaim what he has done.²⁸

Therefore, in essence, ecclesiology is not merely a New Testament concept, although the formal Christian ecclesiology emerges only in the New Testament.²⁹

However, historical *ekklesiality* could be spiritually traced from Adamic call and formally traced from Noahic call and eventually became ecclesially full-grown in the Israelic call. It should also be noted, as aforementioned in the preceding Chapter, that ecclesiality is conditional. If the present Christian church fails in its spiritual and missional calling, most probably there could be a new dimension of ecclesiality, perhaps, a great multitude transcending denominational barriers, in a similar way the Christian church transcended ethnic barriers of the Old Testament Israel.

9.2. Peoplehood of Christ as the Ecclesiological Paradigm

The cessation of Israel as the people of God was apparent because of its apparent rejection to become the people of Christ. The peoplehood of God and the peoplehood of

²⁷ Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 103.

²⁸ Guder, *Be My Witness*, 16.

²⁹ Thus it is in this sense that Lightner could say that, "Ecclesiology is primarily a New Testament doctrine." Lightner, *Evangelical Theology*, 217.

Christ could not be distinguished for they are essentially the same peoplehood. The concept of the cessation of Israel as the people of God, and apparently not the people of Christ, with the emergence of the Christian church is an issue of debate to those whose concept of election is either ancestral or ethnically colored, or back-dropped by apprehension of the nullification of the Old Testament heritage.

However, when the concept of ecclesiality is placed in its proper framework of regenerative biocentricity, Pneumaticity, Christologicity, and salvific missionality, the concept of ecclesiality is seen in a much larger perspective beyond ethnic ancestry. Ecclesiality is co-terminus with the holistic responsiveness of the called out ones to the Caller and his ecclesial purpose. With Israel's rejection of spiritual, societal, and religious regeneration in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and their rejection of Christ that eventually lead to their missional failure in proclaiming Christ as the prophesied Messiah and Savior—they simply lost their ecclesiality. Thus as Van Gelder succinctly puts it:

The church is pictured...as the New Testament fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic expectations regarding the people of Israel.

This new people, this spiritual Israel finds its identity as God had always intended, along faith lines, not blood lines.³⁰

Watson supports, "The church, by faith in Jesus the Messiah, became the true Israel, the true people of God."³¹ The very identity of the peoplehood of God in the Old Testament was not Israelic but messianic. So is the very identity of the church in the New Testament was not institutional but Christocentric.

³⁰Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 108.

³¹ Donald Watson, *I Believe in Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 78.

Who then are the new called out ones? It naturally follows, that they are those who respond³² to Christ's regenerative and missional call. They are those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah and Savior, experience spiritual conversion through the Holy Spirit, and then witness and proclaim Christ through their verbal proclamations and exemplary life.³³ Their aggrupation becomes the corporate ecclesial entity---called *the church*. Thus the church emerged as the consequence of the spontaneous response of people to Christ through the operation of the Holy Spirit. As Leith portray the phenomenon of the church:

The New Testament knows nothing of people conceiving the church and then bringing it into existence in the manner that other human institutions have come to be. The first Christians discovered that they were the church, having been created as a community by the impact of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and by their receipt of the Holy Spirit.³⁴

The New Testament ecclesiological identity was neither ethnic, geographical, cultural, nor sectarian. All the aggrupation in various localities whether household, city, or province were all aggrupations of believers in Christ—in essence, the one whole people of Christ—the new people of God. Thus appropriately called Christians as descriptive of what the society recognized them, as a consequence of their profession, discipleship life and missional preoccupations focused on Christ. Thus they become a distinctive group of people in Christ.³⁵ Thus Kummel writes:

³² Williams emphasizes, "there is still no *ekklesia* until the people respond in faith." J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: The Church, the Kingdom and Last Things* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 3:42.

³³ In regards to the apocalyptic church amidst the Roman Empire, Howard-Book comments, "From John's vision...*ekklesia* is used as a name for urban discipleship communities precisely so that they see themselves as people 'called out' to live God's assembly according to a way entirely opposed to that of empire." Wes Howard-Book, *The Church Before Christianity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001), 34.

³⁴ John H. Leith, "Ecclesiology," in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, eds. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abindgon, 1992), 135.

³⁵ As the *Eerdman's Bible Dictionary* defines the meaning of the church, "Usually the Greek term [*ekklesia*] represents God's people as distinguished from others..."

...the primitive community expresses its claim that those who believe in Christ represent the people of God and thus have taken the place of the old people of God. But this people of God is characteristically no longer identified as “God’s community” but as “Jesus community” or “Christ’s community.”³⁶

The new people of God had one faith framework, one purpose, one missional objective, and one identity. They were all believers of Jesus Christ as the prophesied Messiah and the only Savior of humanity. Their purpose was to live the life of Christ and proclaim the evangel of Jesus Christ. Their missional objective was the global discipling of humanity. And they were appropriately and apparently identified as Christians. A new humanity emerged. As Hunter and Johnson said it, “the gathering of men and women around him [Jesus] signifies the coming of a new humanity.”³⁷ The early Christians were one in spite of superficial cultural diversities. They all, as one, transcended their cultural and geographical enclosures. And the culture they transcended even included their previous religious culture. In Christ they become regenerated and their religious psyche was transformed into a Christocentric faith. Thus there was only one church, only one people of Christ, who, because of missional zeal Pneumatically empowered, proliferated the progeneration of Christian faith in many localities.

Prototypally there was no such thing as Eastern and Western churches, there were just churches located in the east and west. As TDNT puts it, “the congregation in different places is simply called *ἐκκλησία* with no question of precedence or correlation.”³⁸ TDNT further explains, “the sum of individual congregations does not

³⁶ Werner George Kummel, *The Theology of the New Testament: According to Its Major Witnesses: Jesus—Paul—John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 129.

³⁷ Victor L. Hunter and Phillip Johnson, *The Human Church in the Presence of Christ: The Congregation Rediscovered* (US: Mercer University Press, 1985), 31.

³⁸ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “*ἐκκλησία*.”

produce the total community of Christ. Each community, however small, represents the total community, the church.”³⁹ The core of their oneness was an internal faith in Jesus and their common Christocentric Pneumatically empowered missional zeal. Shwartz comments:

This unity [Eph. 4:5f] in Christ that Paul expresses was experienced by the Christian community and it transcended all other differences. It is therefore difficult to see in the New Testament a justifiable basis of...denominationalism.⁴⁰

He further adds:

The usage of the term church does not indicate that the one church is divided into churches or that an aggregate churches result in *the* church. It is rather that in different places *the* church is manifested in local congregations.⁴¹

They were not divergent churches trying to unite themselves together, but one church proliferating, numerically expanding, and spiritually growing in various localities.

Churches were not denominational but geographical. Hodge, although not emphasizing missionality, thinks of the church’s oneness in theocentric, Christocentric, and Pneumatic senses, “There is no doubt if there be one God, there is but one Church; if there be but one Christ, there is but one Church; if there be but one Holy Ghost, there is but one Church.”⁴²

Further, there was no such thing as visible and invisible churches⁴³, for all visible churches are all of one spiritual characterization. As Williams explains it:

The one and only church undoubtedly has both invisible and visible

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Hans Shwarz, *The Christian Church: Biblical Origin, Historical Transformation, and Potential for the Future* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1982), 74.

⁴¹ Ibid., 74-75.

⁴² A. A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology: A Course of Popular Lectures* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 174.

⁴³ Such concept of visible and invisible church is a prejudicial concept exploited to exclude and include denominational entities based on one’s denominational eccentricities.

dimensions. There is the invisible dimension of not belonging to the world: the church is *ekklesia*—“called out.” There is also the visible dimension of being totally in the world and sharing fully in it as a social entity.⁴⁴

Murray sees it in a similar sense:

With respect to her inward life the church may therefore be said to be “invisible.” In another respect, however, the church is visible—in here profession of the gospel, and in here obedience to Christ’s commands and ordinances. So although there are not two churches, the church may be considered under the two aspects of invisible and visible.⁴⁵

Schmidt however, projects a more pragmatic and apparent concept of the *ekklesia*:

Moreover, the *ἐκκλησία* as the assembly of God in Christ is not invisible on the one side and visible on the other. The Christian community, which as the individual congregation represents the whole body, is just as visible and corporeal as the individual man.⁴⁶

Lightner however speaks in terms of the local and universal church in relation to Christ:

The local church is, in a real sense, a miniature of the universal church. To be a member of the universal church one must be divinely related to Christ.⁴⁷

Further, there was even no distinction of apostate and true churches.

Thus the church is a singular spiritual entity embodied in varied localities. It is not that Christians have churches or the churches have Christians, but that Christians is the church and the church is Christian—the people of Christ. *There is only one church--the church of Jesus Christ—the people who believe in Jesus Christ as their only personal Savior, and who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, live in a transformed life and witness for Jesus. In the same way that there was one humanity at creation, there will also be one new humanity at redemption—and one proleptic new humanity en route.*

⁴⁴ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 23.

⁴⁵ Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 274.

⁴⁶ K.L. Smith, “*ἐκκλησία*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

⁴⁷ Robert P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology: A Survey and Review* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 232.

Another point, the church as a whole, tagged at times as invisible church, could not be equated with the kingdom of God, for the church and the kingdom are apparently distinct in the New Testament.⁴⁸ The kingdom of God that would be populated by believers of all time is sometimes confused with the church. Example of the indication of this conceptual fusion could be found in Grudem's statement, "The church is the community of all true believers of all time." However, as Schnackenburg reminds, "It is not the Church but the Kingdom of God which is the ultimate goal of the divine economy of salvation and redemption in its perfect form for the whole world."⁴⁹

Furthermore, although there were individual false claimants of Christian discipleship, but the church as a congregation of the people of Christ was regarded as "holy and without fault"⁵⁰—because of Christ's sole headship.⁵¹ In fact churchliness per se was not central in the life of congregating believers. What were central for them were faith and life in and witness for Jesus. In this sense, they were evangelicalistic.

With their Christian identity, they began to use other metaphors⁵² to illustrate their being and life as the new people of God. They needed metaphoric conceptual aids to expound their existence, life, and purpose in Christ; ministerial relationship within the local congregation, and relationship with the rest of the congregations located in different localities. Thus as synonymous of their being the new people of God, i.e., the people of

⁴⁸Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Intervarsity, 1994), 853.

⁴⁹ Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament*, 188.

⁵⁰ Ephesians 5:27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 5:23.

⁵² Regarding ecclesiological metaphors Mudge has this to say, "Above all the biblical 'people' metaphor carries with it a note of *historical and sociological realism*. Unlike terms such as 'body' or 'temple' or 'sacrament' or even 'servant,' it requires relatively little translation into operational terms." Mudge, *The Sense of People*, 38. This work, however, does not see the peoplehood of God as merely metaphoric but rather the very identity of the church.

Christ, they referred to themselves as:

1. The children of God (1John 3:1).
2. The chosen people (Colossians 3:12)
3. Church of God (1Corinthians 1:2)
4. Congregation of the saints (1 Corinthians 14:33)
5. Family in heaven and earth (Ephesians 3:14)
6. Family of God (1Peter 4:17)
7. Family of Believers (Galatians 6:10)
8. Flock of God (1Peter 5:2)
9. God's Household (Ephesians 2:19)
10. Holy Nation (1Peter 2:9)
11. Holy Ones (1Thessalonians 3:13)
12. Sons of God (Romans 8:14)

As the new people of God, i.e., the substitution of the failed Israel, they referred to themselves as the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). Here we see the spiritual continuity of the new with the old, yet the actual missional discontinuity of the old that lead to the incipience of the new. Ferguson thinks in line with this perspective:

Many of the Old Testament descriptions for Israel are taken over by the New Testament in reference to the new people of God. This fact emphasizes the continuity in the history of salvation, but it also shows a newness, in that a new people is designated. Even richer blessings are said to be theirs.⁵³

Ferguson listed these descriptions as indicating the New Testament claims of the new

⁵³ Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*, 77.

people of God:

1. Israel of God (Ps. 98: 3; 121:4—Rom. 9:6-8, 1 Cor. 10:18, Phil. 3:3, Mt. 3:9-10).
2. Royal Priesthood (Ex. 19:6—1Pet. 2:5, 2:9, Rev. 1:6).
3. Holy Nation (Exo. 19:6—1Pet 2:9).
4. Righteous Remnant (Is. 1:9, 10:20-23—Rom. 9:27-28, 11:1-5, Acts 3:14)
5. Covenant People (Lk. 1:54-5, Rom. 9:4, Gal. 3:6-29, Acts 3:25-26)⁵⁴

The Hanson's bring out similar point, although with dispensational implication:

The fundamental and oldest account of the church in the New Testament is that it is the people of God. Just as Israel was God's people under the old dispensation so the Christian church in God's people under new.⁵⁵

Thus in essence there is indeed no break in the continuity of the historical *ekklesiality* with the emergence of the Christian church. The Christian church is the new form of the same essence of peoplehood of God. As the Hanson's stress, "The continuity of the church therefore must consist basically in the continuity of the people of God."⁵⁶

To illustrate their charismatically-based ministerial interrelationship within the church, metaphors like the body of Christ⁵⁷ (Ephesians 4:12) were used. As illustrative of the church's relationship with Christ, the metaphor of the church as the bride of Christ (Revelation 22:17) was used. As descriptive of the church's kerygmaticity the church was prophetically illustrated as the golden lampstand (Revelation 2:1).

These and other metaphors were not intended as trajectories for constructing

⁵⁴ Ibid., 77-78.

⁵⁵ A. T. and R.P.C. Hanson, *The Identity of the Church: A Guide to Recognizing the Contemporary Church* (London: SCM, 1987), 6. This work, however, does not imply an inclination toward dispensationalism implied by Hansen's use of dispensation. Costas, although seeing the people of God is a socio-political sense and as image rather than the very identity itself points out that, "the foremost image of the church in the Scripture is that of God's people." Orlando E. Costas, *The Church and Its Mission: A Shattering Critique from the Third World* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1974), 23.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁷ For a scientifically contextual exposition with practical implications of the body of Christ metaphor, see Howard A. Snyder and Daniel V. Runyon, *Decoding the Church: Mapping the DNA of Christ's Body* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002).

divergent ecclesial identities, but rather illustrative of the different aspects of ecclesial life.⁵⁸ The one ecclesiological trajectory they had was their being the people of Christ. As Mudge sees it, “the trajectory of biblical thought is toward increasing realization of what is really meant by a *people of God*.”⁵⁹ Thus prototypically there were no divergent ecclesiological models. Divergent ecclesiological constructions⁶⁰ are accidental constructions based on fragments of ecclesial life. Thus we have liturgical churches that highlight the liturgy of the church; we have mystical churches that made mysticity out of the church’s relationship with Jesus and Jesus’ act of calling out believers that resulted in congregational formation. And we have churches constructed out of a highlighted aspect of Christological teachings; or even a reconstruction of what was presupposed as Christological teachings, but were either extra-biblically, philosophically, culturally, or ideologically motivated. Thus what we have in Christian ecclesiology are actually fragmented or fragmentary ecclesiologies diverging more and more from the prototypical ecclesial essence. And so, we have numerous divergent denominations, which though ironically recognizes their Christianity yet, are separatistic and apprehensive of being spiritually, pedagogically, liturgically, and missionally united as one people of Christ. The prototypical fideistic structure of Christian church has been substituted by

⁵⁸ Dulles points out the importance of ecclesiological images, “Images are immensely important for the Church—for its preaching, its liturgy, its general *esprit de corps*.” Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, expanded ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 14. He feels it so important to the life of the church that he identifies the root of faith-crises, “The contemporary crisis of faith is, I believe, in very large part a crisis of images.” *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁹ Mudge, *The Sense of a People*, 31.

⁶⁰ For the evolution of the church see, Eric G. Jay, *The Church: Its Changing Image Through Twenty Centuries* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978). Nazir-Ali, however, foresees that, “The shapes of the church to come and its mission and ministry will continue to be affected by the shape of the world as it is now and as it will be in the future.” Michael Nazir-Ali, *Shapes of the Church to Come* (Eastbourne, England: Kingsway Communications, 2001), 22. a truly evangelical ecclesiology, however, though may have form transformation, would always remain prototypical in its essential structures.

denominational eccentricities.

Doctrinal reconstructions have become so complicated that it clouded the simple prototypical ecclesial teachings of believing and living in and witnessing for Christ through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The believers act of congregating because of their common faith in Christ, their common need to nurture one another's spiritual life, and corporately equip themselves for personal kerygmatic mission—were replaced either by denominationalistic preoccupations or denominationally defined structures. *By coming back to the full recognition and wholehearted consideration of being one people of Christ, the Christian church could begin to realize and experience an internal regeneration that could lead to the eventual restoration of the state of wholeness of the church as the renewed people of Christ.*

Thus, in here we see the unitive and regenerative viability of the concept of the church as the people of Christ, more than any other ecclesiological models. Besides, as Pate noted, that out of the 114 occurrences of the term *ekklesia* in the New Testament, 109 “is used of the community of God's people.”⁶¹ Grenz emphasizes a notable point:

The choice of *ekklesia* as the designation of the Christian community suggests that the New Testament believers viewed the church as neither an edifice nor an organization. They were a people—a people brought together by the Holy Spirit—a people bound to each other through Christ—hence, a people standing in covenant with God. Above all, they were God's people (2Cor. 6:16).⁶²

Grenz further adds:

The early Christians found in this term [ekklesia] a helpful means for expressing their self-consciousness. They saw themselves as a people called together by the proclamation of the gospel for the purpose of belonging to God through Christ.⁶³

⁶¹ C. Marvin Pate, “Church, the,” in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*.

⁶² Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 465.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

When the present church profoundly considers itself as the renewed people of Christ, the ecclesial life foci would be the experience of regenerative life in Christ and the fulfillment of salvific Gospel Commission. In this sense experientially, spiritually, and missionally the fragmented churches could become one people of Christ again.

Assimilating the deep consciousness of the peoplehood of Christ in ecclesial psyche could be reformative of the prototypal ecclesiological framework because of the following factors:

Christocentricity and Christologicity. By Christocentricity what is meant is the central and apparent focus on Christ, and by Christologicity what is meant is the overarching articulations of such Christocentricity. As the people of Christ, the church's focus should not be the institutionality of the church nor any of its institutional aspect but Christ himself.⁶⁴

The proclamation of Christ as the only Savior becomes the missional focus of the congregation, not the propagation of its dogma nor the expansion of its institutional growth per se; although the church with its Christocentric and Christological teachings and proclamation could expand. In this sense, dogmatic (or in a less confusing term, theological) and institutional (or in a less confusing term, pastoral and missional fruitfulness) matters become just the products of Christocentric life and Christological preoccupations, not the source of production of spiritual matters itself.

This is one of the blunders in the post-prototypal church because the various theological products are regarded per se as the essences of the *ekklesia*. Thus what we

⁶⁴ Ferguson expresses this Christocentric rootedness, "If the church is the people of God, it is the people of God *in Christ*. If the church is the community of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is the gift of the resurrected Christ." Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*, 72.

have in the history of the church are churches founded not on the deep and wholehearted consciousness of the peoplehood of Christ, but on a particular theological issue. Issue which could have been regarded as an aspect of the whole progressive reformatory revelatory operations of the Holy Spirit in restoring the church back to its being more truly the people of Christ. When denominations recognize themselves, not in terms of their supposed denominationalistic identities in contrast, or in separation, or even in exclusion of others—but in terms of their commonality as being the one people of Christ—Christian churches together as a whole could indeed be more truly reflective of being the *ekklesia* of Christ. *The essence of the church is Christ, and the essence of churchhood is peoplehood of Christ.*

Pneumaticity. By this I mean the ecclesial dependence on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for its life and mission. As Hanson reminds that the church “must remain open to the presence of the Spirit.”⁶⁵ As aforementioned in the preceding Part, charismatism is meant as a postscript revelation for Contemporary Evangelicalism. Because the appropriate recognition of ecclesial dependence on the Holy Spirit is very essential in the life and mission of the people of Christ—for it is the Holy Spirit that directs the people of Christ to Christocentricity and Christologicity.

As Jesus said:

But when the Father sends the Counselor as my representative—and by the Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I myself told you.⁶⁶

Thus when the early *ekklesia* received the empowerment of the Holy Spirit—the spontaneous consequence was the Christocentric and Christological kerygma. And, of

⁶⁵ Hanson, “The Identity and Purpose of the Church,” 349.

⁶⁶ John 14:26.

course, at the outset, living a convertive life in Christ is a Pneumatic operation. Thus the Holy Spirit is always the power behind conversion in Christ, living the life of Christ, preaching the message of Christ. Coppedge brings out a paradigmatic point, “the infilling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples become a model of what Jesus desires in the life of everyone in any age who seeks to be a disciple and a disciplemaker.”⁶⁷ As Grenz describes it:

He [the Holy Spirit] effects the union of believers with Christ and Christ’s community, the reconciled people of God. At the consummation, the Spirit’s mission will reach its ultimate goal as he establishes the glorious fellowship of the redeemed people living in a redeemed world and enjoying the presence of their Redeemer God. En route to that day, the Spirit nourishes the spiritual life he creates.⁶⁸

Moreover, Volf emphasizes the Pneumatic constitution of the church is not a passive matter but a foundational factor necessitating active human response. He notes:

It is *the Spirit* who constitutes the church. *People*, however, must accept the gifts of God in faith (even if this faith is itself a gift of God); *they* must come together, and *they* must remain together.⁶⁹

This Pneumatological structure is inherent in the ecclesial’s peoplehood of Christ, thus should be actively and aggressively recognize and assimilated in the whole ecclesial life and functions. As people of Christ the church do not exist and live by its own self. It is not self-existent. Its existence is a derived existence—derived from Christ and the Holy Spirit. Its existence is dependent on its responsiveness to the call of Christ and its responsiveness to the operation of the Holy Spirit. By being responsive to the salvific and missional calls of Christ and to the regenerative and charismatic operation of the

⁶⁷ Coppedge, *The Biblical Principles of Discipleship*, 122.

⁶⁸ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 379.

⁶⁹ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 176.

Holy Spirit—the aggrupation of the respondent called out ones become more truly the people of Christ.

As Clowney stresses:

The church is called to God, called to be his people. By that relation to God the being of the church is defined.⁷⁰

Thus what draw people together to become the church are the internal Christological and Pneumatological determinants that become the very being of the *ekklesia*. The church's Christogenicity and Pneumatogenicity are the inherent divine nature of the church.

These ontological ecclesiological constituents transcend external ethnicity, attitudinal, or theoretical human-made productions. Thus for the confessing called out peoples to insist on the ecclesiological primality of their respective human-made ideological productions and make these as ground for ecclesial separation and fragmentation is tantamount to the ecclesial denial of its peoplehood of Christ.

Missionality. By missionality what is meant is the centrality of the Christocentric kerygmatic preoccupation of the church.⁷¹ The mission of the church is an evangelical mission, i.e., the proclamation of salvific gospel of Christ.⁷² Thus Bloesch reminds Christians:

It is incumbent on us to recover the doctrine of the church, particularly with regard to its indispensable role in the communication of salvation. The church is not a mediator between God and man, but it is a veritable means of grace to man. It cannot dispense grace as though it were in control, but it can function as an instrument of the Holy Spirit who does convey the grace of Christ to “a sinful world.”⁷³

⁷⁰ Edmund P. Clowney, “The Biblical Theology of the Church,” in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1987), 15.

⁷¹ Regarding a missional perspective of church Riddel has this to say, “The essence of the church has always been mission. It is created by mission, renewed by mission, and participates in mission.” Riddel, *Threshold of the Future*, 174.

⁷² As Hayes concisely puts it, “The church's mission in the world implies preparing people for the future kingdom.” Hayes, *The Church*, 241.

⁷³ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2:278.

The church's mission is the proclamation of Christ, not the proclamation of itself. When churches are preoccupied about proclaiming itself, it becomes preoccupied with its denominational self, thus more like a people of a denomination rather than a people of Christ. With such ecclesial self-centeredness, churches are lead to construct what they consider protective enclosures which are sorts of socio-ideological preservatives of their respective self-centeredness. The ecclesiological self no longer becomes Christ but their respective religious ideology. Consequently, the mission becomes the propagation of sort of denominational ideology. Then baptism becomes denominationally exclusivistic rather than convertively Christocentric. Even convertive piety would consequently be defined as theological assent, rather than a Pneumatological process of living a new life in Christ. New life in Christ would end up being dogmatically defined as a new life of denominational doctrinal assent. Teachings become dogmatic rather than biocentric. And eventually, Christian life becomes mechanical, then nominal, till it resort back to secular.

The scenario would also lead to the spiritual death of liturgy. Liturgy becomes momentarily emotive, if not mechanical, rather than spiritually nurturing. Then at the end of church service, Christianity dissipated throughout the week. In this circumstance, ecclesial pastorality does not naturally result in ecclesial missionalty, because, at the outset, there is a deficiency of the sustainability of convertive piety. Attendance to church service becomes a sort of periodic superficial therapy to let off steam the pressures of everyday life, or to assuage a conscience bothered by a sense of irreligiosity; rather than a means for developmental nurturing of spiritual and missional life.

In the paradigm of the peoplehood of Christ, the church's focus is to witness for Christ both by biocentric exemplification and communicative proclamation. With the focus on living the exemplary life of Christ and witnessing for Christ, churches are redirected to their common natural mission. Such biocentric and kerygmatic commonality is a very viable framework that would spiritually and missionally draw altogether the one people of Christ located in different localities. Churches will no longer be regarded as different denominational entities, but localities of one people of Christ. Thus what we have here is an internal unitive structure for the New Reformation of churches into its prototypal wholeness. Watson brings out the profound kerygmatic spiritual implications of the "people of God" ecclesiology:

The concept of the church as "the people of God"—as God's new society, his family, his community—breaks upon many today as the most thrilling "goodnews," they could ever hear. And what a transformation it can bring when a person knows that he belongs to God and his people for ever! In an age of isolation, the joy of really belonging to God and of being a part of his people throughout the world—a belonging which depends not on earning acceptance, but on receiving freely God's love—is one of the most relevant features of the Christian message of the goodnews.⁷⁴

Transdenominationality. By this what is meant is the eclesiality that transcend present denominationally eccentric productions and reproductions. As Thwaites reminds, "The containment of the church in denominations and buildings was not a part of the early Christian perspective."⁷⁵ The people of Christ ecclesiological paradigm defines exclusion and inclusion not in denominationalistic doctrinal sense but in a universal Christocentric term, i.e., exclusion and inclusion depending on unresponsiveness and

⁷⁴ Watson, *I Believe in the Church*, 76.

⁷⁵ James Thwaites, *The Church Beyond The Congregation* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster), 180.

responsiveness, respectively, of the people to the salvific and missional calls of Christ.⁷⁶

When people respond to Christ they spiritually become the people of Christ. Their peoplehood of Christ becomes the essence of their new spiritual identity. The rest of their respective cultural identities are transformed to harmonize with their new spiritual self. The cultural elements in their individual life that are not contradictory to their new spiritual self remain as is; the contradictory ones are either discarded or reformed into structures that cohere with their overall new identity framework.

Thus as Paul succinctly puts it:

But now that faith in Christ has come.... So you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism⁷⁷ have been made like him. There is no longer Jews or Gentile, slave or free, male or female.⁷⁸ For you are all Christians—you are one in Christ Jesus.⁷⁹

For early Christians, their peoplehood of Christ transcended their previous religious-cultural and ethnic identities. This is paradigmatic of denominational conversion, when all those who truly respond to the call of Christ become one in Christ. As one people of Christ, they would either discard or reformed their respective denominational ecclesiological structures incoherent with their new spiritual self as the new people of Christ. This could be a bold and risky proposition for this impinges not only on denominational mindsets, but also on the established institutional components that has become synonymous with denominational existence.

⁷⁶ Thus Hodgson regarded “the image of the people of God” as “the earliest and most inclusive.” Peter C. Hodgson, *Revisioning the Church: Ecclesial Freedom in the New Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 29. However, the peoplehood of God should be regarded as the very identity of the ecclesia rather merely an ecclesiological metaphor.

⁷⁷ It should be noted that even with the existence of many churches in different provinces, cities, and households, baptism here never connotes separatistic sectarian baptism. Baptism was just baptism in Christ, applying this in the present would mean baptism for common entrance into the peoplehood of Christ.

⁷⁸ This term here is not primarily used in biological sense but in socio-cultural sense, where women in a very patriarchal society, were regarded with social status lower than men.

⁷⁹ Galatians 3:24-28.

However, the full assimilation of the peoplehood of Christ into denominational structures is not actually a threat to the existence of churches, but on the contrary is even unitive and restorative of the true nature and function of the *ekklesia* of Christ. The church as a whole becomes a renewed and revitalized body of Christ. In the same way that a born again person has to leave his old life, however, what is left out is not really his existence but the form of life he lived before. And the true essence of human existence and life is regenerated, and this essence is the renewed existence and life in the Creator-God. Being a new child of God, a new creation of Christ, life for the converted takes on a new dimension—a fuller life reflective and anticipatory of the archetypal state of perfection and bliss. So are churches when they leave their respective old forms of ecclesial life and then be regenerated into one whole new people of God—one whole new creation of Christ.

Clouse prophetically foresees an ecclesial oneness in the *eschaton*, “the church will appear in the age to come as the one people of God united in one congregation before the throne, as the one celestial city—the new Jerusalem.”⁸⁰ The church as proleptic of the absolutely new humanity in the *eschaton* should represent such eschatological wholeness in the present form of ecclesial life.

However, in its anticipation of the *eschaton*, distinction should also be made apparent between the church and the Kingdom so as not to confuse a human institution with the divinely recreated cosmos. For as Schnackenburg succinctly points out:

Even the New Testament people of God as it is assembled in the Church, and continues to assemble, is not yet identical with the community of the elect which enters into the perfect kingdom of God; it is still subject to test and will be scrutinized and separated at the judgment.⁸¹

⁸⁰ R. G. Clouse, “Church,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, rev. ed.

⁸¹ Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament*, 156.

The trueness of the profession of peoplehood of Christ is still ambivalent. In a similar way, Pannenberg cautions the church, “the church must distinguish its own existence from the future kingdom of God.” He further adds, “If the church fails to make this distinction clearly, then it arrogates to itself the finality and glory of the kingdom....”⁸²

Jenkins also speaks of ambiguity in Christian life:

To speak of the church...we begin in the dwelling place of our habitation...paying close attention to the living texts of the people of God in the ambiguity of the lives we live under the unambiguous claim of God’s reign.⁸³

Kung reminds the church, “For the Scripture the Church is the people of God, which, following the Old Testament people of God, is always a people of sinners, constantly in need of forgiveness.”⁸⁴

The state of ontological and relational imperfections of the individuals constituting the corporal *ekklesia* is indicative of the church being still in the process of regeneration that would only be fully consummated by Christ in the *parousia*. Thus, the church is not the absolutely perfect kingdom of God. The church is the agency providing preparation for the people en route to the kingdom; it is not the kingdom itself.⁸⁵

In this framework, the church, without arrogating itself as the kingdom, becomes open to the operation of the Holy Spirit. It humbles itself, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and allows itself the Pneumatic creation and recreation. It recognizes itself, not as a

⁸² Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998)3:32.

⁸³ Michael Jenkins, *The Church: Its Changing Image Through Twenty Centuries* (Atlanta, GA: John Know, 1978), 89.

⁸⁴ Kung, *The Church*, 131.

⁸⁵ Eller sees the church as a caravan rather than a commissary; he distinguishes between the two, “a commissary...is and has its existence simply in being what it is. A caravan, conversely, has its existence only in a continual becoming.” He further adds, “A commissary is essentially *establishment* oriented, and a caravan eschatologically oriented.” Vernard Eller, *The Outward Bound: Caravaning as the Style of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 13.

deified human creation, but an instrument for the kingdom whose utility depend upon divine operation. Thus it has no reason for self-claim, other than what it is originally designed for by Christ and the Holy Spirit.

9.3. Conclusion

The aforementioned structures of the peoplehood of Christ, e.g., Christocentricity and Christologicity, Pneumaticity, missionality, and transdenominationality—are very characteristics of Contemporary Evangelical ecclesiology. The peoplehood of Christ constitutes the structures of Christocentric content, Pneumatic empowerment, missional focus, and transdenominationality—the very structures of Contemporary Evangelical ecclesiology.

Gasques describes the New Testament ecclesiology in a very evangelicalistic sense, “The church in the New Testament is the assembly of believers who have been drawn together through Jesus Christ for the purpose of worshipping, serving, and obeying God in the world in the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁶ Hunts adds:

If we are biblical when we think church, we think corporately—we think people. The focus is on people, on *God’s people*, on a living organism, not on a building, an organization or a place. As the Christian life represents the individual aspect of Christian experience, the church represents its corporate dimension.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ W. Ward Gasque, “The Church in the New Testament,” in *In God’s Community: The Church and Its Ministry*, eds. David J. Ellis and W. Ward Gasque (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1978), 2.

⁸⁷ Hunt, “New Dimensions in Church,” in *New Dimensions in Evangelical Theology*, ed. Dockery, 340. It is not implied in this work that the church should be a-institutional or a-organizational, for as existing in the realities of societal life, it could not pragmatically live without its institutionality and organizationality. However, such institutionality and organizationality are instrumental of its purpose, not the very purpose of its existence. Snyder comments, “While the Church is not essentially an institution it does, however, have an institutional side in the same way the family does.” Snyder, *The Community of the King*, 63.

Moreover, it is conclusive that the concept of the people of God, or in particular the people of Christ, is a not only a viable paradigm of Contemporary Evangelical ecclesiology; but also, and in a deeper and wider sense, the paradigm for holistic identity restoration of the Christian church back to its prototypal framework as seen in the ecclesiological framework of Contemporary Evangelicalism.

Grenz sees the relevance of the people of God ecclesiology in a postmodern context, “the postmodern, pluralist context calls for an apologetic evangelical theology that reaffirms the place of the church as a people and, in a certain sense, as a soteriologically relevant reality.”⁸⁸ Mudge speaks of the people of God in a teleological sense:

The church is that part of human whole which conveys *to* that whole *its* destiny as the space of God’s reign. The church is a community in which the whole of humanity may so signified *its* calling to become a people of God.⁸⁹

Van Der Ven sees the significance of the peoplehood of God in a wider and richer contextual sense:

The code *people of God* meets the requirement of all sorts of peoples and population groups to express their own social-cultural and ritual identity in a Christian sense. Through this they can develop their own spirituality: their own religious aspirations, forms of expression, language and text, dynamics, and style. It is not only a question of religious wordings or coloring; the social-cultural forms even penetrate the structure of the identity and the convictions themselves. They make the church into “something that is ours” To the extent that one could say, proceeding from a personal intrinsic impulse: “the church is all of us together,” “the church is what we are,” this is what essentially appeals to groups and collectives in the code *people of God*.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 308. Grenz concisely discusses the prospects of evangelicalism in postmodern culture, see “Stanley J. Grenz, “Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodern and the Future of Evangelical Theology,” *Crux* 30 (March 1994): 24-32. Jenkins expounds the situation confronting the church in a postmodern context; see Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death*.

⁸⁹ Mudge, *The Sense of a People*, 52.

⁹⁰ Johannes Van Der Ven, *Ecclesiology in Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 196.

Thus to conclude, the very identity of the Contemporary Evangelical church in particular and the very identity of the Christian church in general is the people of Christ. And Contemporary Evangelical ecclesiology is a Pneumatic revelatory call and regenerative framework for the Christian church today to become more truly the prototypal people of Christ—Christocentric, Pneumatic, missional, and transdenominational.