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# Use of Sacraments In Church Discipline As a Challenge To Missional Transformation In Kenya's Mainstream Churches: a Case Study of Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church

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USE OF SACRAMENTS IN CHURCH DISCIPLINE AS A CHALLENGE TO  
MISSIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN KENYA'S MAINSTREAM CHURCHES:  
A CASE STUDY OF KENYA EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

by

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Luther Seminary

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACK	Anglican Church in Kenya
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
ELCK	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya
ELCT	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania
KELC	Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church
PACLA	Pan-African Christian Leadership Assembly

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The use of sacraments in enforcing church discipline is an adiaphoran ecclesiastical tradition diversely practiced in the Kenyan mainline churches. Lutherans argue that Adiaphora are practices of the church “centered around actions which are neither commanded nor forbidden by Christ or the scriptures and rites and ceremonies which have historical but not biblical warrant.”<sup>1</sup> Although this definition is quite clear, the Lutheran church in Kenya, in its normative spiritual praxis, has a limited understanding of it. This lack of understanding and documentation has led to a situation in which much emphasis is laid on denial to sacraments for legitimate members of the church under Church discipline, hence, negatively affecting mission work in Kenyan Lutheranism. The reasons for this emphasis are not obvious. However, it would appear that the practices have been influenced externally or inherited from missionaries, which is why this study is significant, especially in the context of mission.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

In this study, I wish to focus on how the use of sacraments, both baptism and holy communion, in Kenya’s mainline Christian churches, particularly in the Lutheran church, are contributing to a high loss of church membership to neo-Pentecostalism, Islam, and

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<sup>1</sup> Julius Bodensieck and Lutheran World Federation., *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965), 6.

nominal Christianity. Nominal refers to those who are Christians by name only or lukewarm members.

The term “nominal Christian” describes members of the community who are perceived as being Christian by name only or who barely meet the minimal requirements of Christianity. Thus, the term often operates as a critique of the Christians outside any given group who appear to be superficial or “lukewarm” in their commitment to the Christian faith and lax in their observance of the traditional Christian precepts.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to this, the practice is punitive, humiliating and denies the holy sacraments to mostly unwed women and children out of wedlock.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in three ways. First, the topic of research, which is of primary importance to me as a clergy member, seeks to explore the heritage of ecclesial discipline that is prevalent in Kenya’s mainline churches. The lack of primary scholarship and documentation of church discipline in the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church has created a situation where the answers to the questions about ecclesial discipline are neither consistent nor readily available. It will therefore be a matter of great satisfaction to me personally to see that this study will not only create insight and awareness for fellow African clergy on how the use of sacraments in church discipline is a challenge to mission work of the church, but also create a well-researched documentation which will be the basis of our reference in matters pertaining to proper use of sacraments.

Secondly, this research is significant for the church in general. It will provoke the church leaders in African mainline churches to rethink the need to revise and improve

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel G. Reid et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 862.



what exists already, which seems to be a barrier to mission of the church today, and help the church imagine new paths towards reforming its practice.

Finally, the research is important to those studying for ministry in African mainline churches. Questions abound in African Christianity regarding the use of sacraments in church discipline and how these practices relate to church doctrine. These questions trigger the need for further examination and analysis, as provided in this thesis.

### **Research Methodology**

This study deals with the use of the sacraments, both baptism and Holy Communion, in enforcing church discipline in Kenyan mainline churches, particularly in the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church, which affects mission work among African Christian churches. In addition to field data, which was involved interviews conducted on both church leaders and the laity, I used library literature as a secondary resource. The materials will be utilized “in analyzing, interpreting and discussing practical data from the field research.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Notes on Chapters**

This thesis consists of five chapters, including this introduction as chapter one. Chapter two explores the teaching and practice of church discipline by missionaries since the advent of missionaries in the east of Sub-Saharan Africa. This chapter investigates how use of Sacraments in church discipline as an ecclesiastical practice was introduced into African Christianity.

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<sup>3</sup> Musa P. Filibus, “An Exploratory Study of the History, Nature and Management Model of Conflict within a Local Congregation with Theological Implications for Pastoral Ministry: Lccn No. 1, Cathedral Numan, Adamawa State, Nigeria, as a Case Study” (Ph.D. diss., Luther Seminary, 1998), 1.

Chapter three engages how discipline is carried out today in African Christianity, using the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church as a case study. I will explore how the Sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, are used as a means of enforcing ecclesiastical discipline in the church.

Chapter four identifies the danger resulting from enforcing ecclesiastical discipline through the sacraments. It explores how this practice challenges the growth of the church, especially in the contemporary society of the day.

In chapter five, I propose that the church can avoid the use of sacraments in disciplining the lapsed, by engaging more seriously in the work of teaching, nurturing and counseling its members towards spiritual maturity.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE TEACHING AND PRACTICE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE BY MISSIONARIES

In order to understand how church discipline came into Kenyan Christianity, we would do well to look at some historical background that characterizes the missionary endeavor from the very beginning of the Christian epoch in Africa, particularly in Eastern Africa. This is important, as it explains why and how the church has stood and grown alongside this practice of use of Sacraments in punishing the lapsed for over a century, yet attracting Africans into Christianity, and even turning Christianity into a movement growing faster in Sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere in the world in spite of the political and socio-economic challenges it faces today.

Historically, mission work in East Africa was through missionary organizations from Europe, which arrived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the aim of conversion and establishing themselves among the Africans. According to Cassidy and Verlinden,

Four main missionary organizations came to East Africa between 1845 and 1900, The church missionary society from England. The Catholic white Fathers and Mill Hill Fathers from Europe. Lutheran church mainly from Germany and the Presbyterian church of Scotland.<sup>1</sup>

Mission work commenced with the establishment of mission settlements or stations in the coastal strip which later spread to various places in Eastern Africa. Mission stations were of great significance for launching mission work for several reasons. First, they served as

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Cassidy and Luc Verlinden, *Facing the New Challenges: The Message of Pacla* (Kisumu: Evangel Pub. House, 1978), 59.

centers for all missionary organization activities in Africa from abroad, and they were centers for the preparation and coordination for African inland outreach. Second, according to Carl Erik Sahlberg in his book *From Krapf to Rugambwa*, all “mission stations and settlements turned into new homes for various people. They were the only hope for helpless freed slaves,”<sup>2</sup> and particularly the new Christian converts thrown out by their kinsmen for giving up the religion of their ancestors.

Initially, most African communities had a common view regarding those converting to Christianity. They were seen and regarded by others not only as lost, but as detached from the ancestors. Disconnection from the ancestors was a taboo in most African cults, and is perceived as a disgrace and misfortune to the entire community. The notion of life after death was central and of great significance in the African religious worldview, and therefore keeping connected to ancestors was important, especially among the elderly people in the community. This is still a common concept today among some communities in Africa, where everyone in the community is forced to keep track with ancestors by observing the required rituals as per the tradition.

In this case, no one dares part ways with ancestors and still have a place in their respective communities. In some instances, the penalty was loss of life of the offender. Hamilton, in his 1908 comments published in *Moravian Missions*, made the following observation and said that “in Nyasa comparatively few converts have been won of an age beyond thirty years. Similarly, old men found it difficult to break with the cult of their ancestors, whom they expect to join in the Sprit World.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Milner Gray, *Early Portuguese Missionaries in East Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1958), 18.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Angetile Yesaya Musomba, *The Moravian Church in Tanzania Southern Province: A Short History* (Nairobi: IFRA Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est, no.29, 2005), 18.

Apparently, Christian converts did not have an easy time with their relatives. They were looked down upon and regarded as fallen and lost; hence, they were treated as outcasts. They no longer had a place among their relatives or in the entire community and hence, became vulnerable to internal as well as external attacks. For purposes of safety and survival, they had to relocate and seek refuge in mission settlements, where missionaries received and welcomed them. They gave them shelter, new hope, and new life. It appears that, in mission stations, missionaries encountered multiple cultural and religious beliefs and languages. This was the case especially within the freed slave settlements, where rescued slaves coming from various parts of Africa were grouped together with converts in one station.

Mission settlements became not only a home to converts, but were also the training centers where missionaries for the first time introduced Africans to Christianity and their European culture. Africans had to learn and adopt new ways of worship, modes of dressing, food and formal education. According to Charles Henry Robinson's observation in his book, *History of Christian Missions*, such missionaries were dealing with uncivilized people who were "backward and from a social and intellectual point of view less developed compared to those of other continents."<sup>4</sup>

In mission stations and settlements, "Africans liberated from the cruelty of their relatives, slavery and poverty could learn to read and write to become brick makers, builders, tailors, carpenters and cobblers."<sup>5</sup> The skills acquired made them different,

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<sup>4</sup> Charles H. Robinson, *History of Christian Missions*, International Theological Library (New York, NY: Scribner, 1915), 277.

<sup>5</sup> Carl-Erik Sahlberg, *From Krapf to Rugambwa: A Church History of Tanzania*, 2nd ed. (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Pub. House, 1986), 52.

hence civilized among their kinsmen. Mission stations, according to Bickers and Seton in their book *Missionary Encounters*, were not only the center of Christianity and Christian life, but “mission stations always contained dozens of schoolchildren, cooks, builders, teachers, priests and messengers.”<sup>6</sup> Christian worship was established and observed in churches built in mission stations or settlements. “Missionaries prepared the first African teachers, catechists, evangelists and even pastors from African Christian communities,”<sup>7</sup> who became agents of the spread of the Gospel and Christianity in their respective communities.

In general, mission stations were life-transforming centers as well as places where western cultural rubrics were introduced and accepted as part of Christianity. This is probably where missionaries brought in this Reformed ecclesiastical tradition, in the African church. It is clear that, church discipline was in place and well established as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For example, in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, those involved in “consumption of alcohol, violent or disruptive behavior and even disorderly households, resolved to make public repentance before the congregation.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, in some cases, “the offender ought to be called to perform public acts of punishment and repentance”<sup>9</sup> before the presence of the entire congregation. All this was done for the good of the church community.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert A. Bickers and Rosemary E. Seton, *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues* (Richmond, VA: Curzon Press, 1996), 128.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>8</sup> Kate Cooper and Averil Cameron, *Discipline and Diversity*, 1. publ. ed., *Studies in Church History* 43 (NY: Boydell Press, 2007), 310.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

There is evidence that missionaries used a kind of discipline in the mission settlements or stations to maintain and contain order. Here I quote Zebulon Nthamburi, an African scholar in the Methodist church of Kenya, who said

At times, these settlements were governed with an iron rod. It was not uncommon to see visible evidence of severe beatings and scourging at the hand of the missionaries, as they tried to keep discipline. For instance, Streeter, who was a lay superintendent at Frere town Mombasa, was accused of misusing his powers, as culprits were either denied their ration of food or were tied up, thrashed and imprisoned. It is clear that the missionaries who administered such settlements ruled by decree.<sup>10</sup>

As the church developed and Christianity was spreading in Africa, these disciplinary practices continued taking roots too. Sometimes missionaries had to discipline converts who turned back to their traditional way of life, in spite of the fact that it is not easy for one to completely abandon his or her culture, which is the only way of attachment to kinsmen. Once again I quote Hamilton in his 1908 comments, published in *Moravian Missions*, who stated that

Even though they report that many young people accepted this new religion, it was not easy to be in this new way of life and forget their traditional life. Therefore, missionaries had to have some kind of church discipline for those who could not follow the procedures as laid down by the Missionaries. Those who did not follow the procedure were placed under church discipline.<sup>11</sup>

According to missionary teaching, any association with African cultural dancing and beer drinking was anti-Christian since it involved the honoring of the ancestors and therefore was condemned and forbidden. In this case, those found “dancing and drinking

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<sup>10</sup> Jon Bonk, “The Dictionary of African Christian Biography : A Proposal for Revising Ecclesiastical Maps,” *Missiology* 27, no. 1 (1999): 24.

<sup>11</sup> Musomba, *The Moravian Church in Tanzania Southern Province: A Short History*, 18.

intoxicating drinks were put under church discipline.”<sup>12</sup> This means they were excommunicated despite that in most African cultures to date, dancing and drinking is part of life and still very well embraced, but underground since it is forbidden by the church.

An overview of real life in the mission settlements and stations connects us to the way church discipline, an ancient ecclesiastical practice in the early church which is also as old as Christianity in Africa, made its way onto African soil over a century ago through various mission organizations. As mission work took roots while the church and Christianity was spreading and developing in African, church discipline was developing and taking shape too. Nevertheless, there is no question that the first missionaries who brought the Gospel to Africa had established church discipline. It is my conviction that all missionary organizations practiced church discipline in their mission stations, which also varied significantly in their specific details from one mission station to another.

However, early missionary work in East Africa reveals how congregations were inclined to use strict disciplinary measures at the church’s disposal to bring violators into line. This is also how African Christianity nurtured and passed on the missionary tradition of use of Sacraments in ecclesiastical discipline through generations.

Richards, in his book *Early Travelers in East Africa*, points to Blumer’s affirmation that among Christians, the congregation was the disciplinary body and that there was no need for primordial socio-ethnological authorities. In some congregations, this resulted in great deal of hardship.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Robinson, *History of Christian Missions*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Richards, *Krapf, Missionary and Explorer, Early Travellers in East Africa* (New York, NY: Nelson, 1950), 14.



Whatever we can learn from the past contributes to our better understanding of the present challenge of use of sacraments in ecclesiastical discipline, leading to excommunication. According to Lueker, “Excommunication is the exclusion of an individual either by himself or by the church leadership from the rights and privileges of the communion of saints.”<sup>14</sup> Excommunication, whether sanctioned individually or by church community, is a huge challenge and barrier to mission of the Church in Africa today. Today, there are many more churches than ever before in the name of Christianity, particularly in Kenya. The church is being divided on a daily basis resulting in so-called neo-Pentecostal ministries all over the African continent.

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<sup>14</sup> Erwin L. Lueker, *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1954), 359.

## CHAPTER 3

### DISCIPLINE AS CARRIED OUT TODAY IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE KENYA EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The application of church discipline, especially in the Kenyan mainline churches, is through the sacraments. In this case, the lapsed are excluded from the rights and privileges of sacraments, an inherited tradition from early missionary societies which has been in practice for over a century now, yet is now rejected or not in use in Western and European Christianity. Use of sacraments in enforcing church discipline in African Christianity today is historical and a long-time church tradition passed on orally from generation to generation. Turner and Sugeno, in their essay on the mission and Common Life of the Church in a global Society, confirm that the exclusion of the lapsed from enjoying sacraments is very old tradition in Africa:

Since 1888, the church in Africa has excluded Polygamists from enjoying sacraments, although in some provinces polygamists are baptized but cannot be confirmed and are excluded in receiving Holy Communion. Some of them regularly attend church and patiently wait until God “frees them” from the state of polygamy so as to benefit from the sacraments of the church.<sup>1</sup>

Church discipline was administered by missionaries themselves, which consisted of exclusion from communion or baptism and, to some extent economic, social, and other

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Turner and Frank Sugeno, *Crossroads Are for Meeting: Essays on the Mission and Common Life of the Church in a Global Society* (Sewanee, TN: S.P.C.K., 1986), 40.

kinds of discipline like corporal punishment and public penance of various kinds. This version of church discipline is un-Biblical, and contrary to Lutheran theology.

The issue of church discipline in African Christianity and, in particular, Kenyan Lutheranism is of great concern today as it is liturgical. It is practiced and enforced through the liturgy. In both Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) and Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC), the practice is categorizing the body of Christ into the righteous and unrighteous, saints and sinners. In general, the practice is punitive by nature and the most vulnerable members of the church are, the unwed women, and children out of wedlock and as well the economically challenged in the church, yet they are the majority and the most committed members. The practice is affecting mission work today and the question remains: Why use Holy Communion and Baptism to punish the sinners. Are not sacraments gifts of grace meant for sinners? When will the church stop locking out its members during the institution and celebration of communion and denying children out of wedlock infant baptism? Finally, can there be forgiveness without discipline? Many of those interviewed members wonder, whether a time will come when the Church will administer communion to the congregation without chasing away those considered unrighteous so that the meal is consumed by those regarded holy and righteous Is this not alienation instead of reconciliation?

The question of sacraments use as a means to enforce discipline or rather punish the lapsed is probably the same as that of Reumann who says that,

although the Jews had rules that one should not be defiled by eating with the unclean people, Jesus Christ received and ate with sinners such as tax collectors,

prostitutes and outcasts (Mt. 11:19). By eating with sinners as friends, Jesus gave the assurance of God's grace (Lk. 19:1-10; Mt. 11:19).<sup>2</sup>

After all, we are all sinners before God's eyes. The clean and the unclean are equally in need of God's grace. The Bible witnesses to Jesus himself giving sinners communion, therefore denying sinners communion is contrary to Christian teaching.

According to interviews which I conducted with bishops from Anglican, Methodist, and both Lutheran churches in Kenya (ELCK and KELC), and with staunch members in these denominations as well, there is an affirmation that, church discipline is inseparable from church life. Most mainline church leaders in Africa believe just like Cooper, that "Church without discipline is not a church."<sup>3</sup> It is remarkable that most mainline church pastors, like their respective church leaders in Kenya, assert that church discipline is a useful missionary tool which has kept the church in Africa firm and strong. However, I believe that the church is facing a magnitude of challenges to the extent of breaking it apart, especially in the West, because it has rather neglected or shied away from this practice, which is vital and meant for checks and balances in the church.

Nevertheless, the fact remains: church discipline should be practiced "not to harm or humiliate, but to encourage repentance, redemption and integration of the fallen beloved children of God."<sup>4</sup> I suppose this was exactly the intention of ecclesiastical discipline from the early church as well in the post reformation church. Like in all Kenyan mainline churches, in both Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) and

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<sup>2</sup> John Henry Paul Reumann, *The Supper of the Lord: The New Testament, Ecumenical Dialogues, and Faith and Order on Eucharist* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Cooper and Cameron, *Discipline and Diversity*, 316.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

Kenya Evangelical and Lutheran Church (KELC), the use of Sacraments in ecclesiastical discipline is part of the church and is intact and very well-embraced throughout congregations.

Archbishop Walter Obare, presiding bishop of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, like most mainline church leaders in Africa hold the view that a church without church discipline is just like a social gathering. According to him, “Church discipline is a huge and useful inheritance from the missionaries, which is instrumental in keeping the church out of insanity and decay.”<sup>5</sup> Without it, he does not see how Kenya today could be 83% Christian, despite its multi-cultural and religious worldviews and practices. Like most mainline church bishops and their staunch adherents, Obare believes “church discipline is necessary for reformation of the fallen; to keep the church pure of sin; to preserve the order of the church; and to make the witness of the church to the world clear and unambiguous.”<sup>6</sup> In this case, discipline should remain intact for the growth and purity of the church.

Critical examination of application of church discipline in Kenyan Lutheranism today leads us to the following observations, which eventually resolve in excommunication of the lapsed. First, to be under church discipline means the person is a sinner and therefore faces exclusion from privileges of the communion of saints. For this reason, the fallen is not allowed to partake Holy Communion, which is the central event in the church and as well as the climax and source of strength in the life of believers. This use of sacraments in enforcing ecclesiastical discipline is in line with the traditional view

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Bishop Walter Omwanza Obare, Head of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (Monday July 18, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

of excommunication where the person excommunicated is being excluded from the privileges of the communion of saints by the church authority. This practice has a negative connotation in relation to Lutheran understanding, where sacraments are “instituted not only to be signs by which people may recognize Christians outwardly, but also as signs of testimonies of God’s will towards us in order to awaken and strengthen our faith,”<sup>7</sup> through which we receive forgiveness of our sins and not through works. Denying the fallen sacraments equates to removing them from the communion of saints, the Church. The offenders’ hope of salvation is also robbed from them. Some even believe that they are disconnected from the Kingdom of God.

Second, traditionally, once one is declared to be under church discipline, he or she immediately loses dignity. In African Christianity, this is a serious matter and unwelcoming. It is normally the turning point and the beginning of tribulations within the church structures and systems. In most cases, one is looked down upon and viewed as a failure not only in the church, but also in the society. A failure in the church is equated as a failure in the society. There is no room for full privileges or participation of church affairs, no matter how gifted or wise one is. In many cases, such people end up in isolation and exclusion, which is again dividing the church into saints and sinners or Jews and Gentiles for this matter. According to Kafunzile,

The person under church discipline may not hold church jobs, for instance being a church elder, teaching Sunday school children or even leading church groups like choir although the person can sing in the choir, give offering to the church and

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, Version 1.0 ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 46.

participate in all church projects. Moreover, the climax of it, when the person dies cannot be buried by church.<sup>8</sup>

Third, the process is liturgical and mostly carried on during Sunday worship where pastors not only make public announcements of those excommunicated in the church, but deny them Holy Communion even though they have participated in the liturgy of confession and absolution in church service. This is not only dehumanizing and unhealthy in 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary society, where rationality, multi-culturalism and religious plurality has taken shape, but is a challenge to mission work today. A big question that remains unanswered to date is how to handle those denied Communion while they have not only participated in confession and absolution, but their offerings or contributions in church projects are never questioned. How can the Church minister and nurture those whom it discriminates against and segregates even when the teachings of the church and Jesus himself is very clear that he came and died for sinners.

Robert Mongi is a staunch member of Jerusalem Lutheran parish, the mother congregation and the cathedral of Kenya Evangelical Lutheran church, and has been under church discipline for a longtime due to his marital status. All this time, the church has never been able to pardon him unless he solemnizes his marriage in the church, which for him is difficult, and beyond his capability. During the parish annual general meeting, he made this observation:

This is a high-class discrimination and contradiction of church teachings, which needs clarity and ratification especially during this time where the society is ignorant, rebellious and has turned away from God. You cannot forgive and at the

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<sup>8</sup> Sylvester T. Kafunzile, "Shame and Its Effects among the Haya Women in Northwestern Tanzania" (Ph.D. diss., Luther Seminary, 2001), 88.

same time condemn. What kind of Jesus is the church preaching today? Has Christ changed?<sup>9</sup>

Mongi's remarks, like that of many other adherents of Lutheran teachings in the church, are in line with the Augsburg Confession, which asserts that

Repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror about sin and to believe in the gospel and absolution that sin is forgiven and grace obtained through Christ. Hence, all those who have sinned after baptism obtain forgiveness of sins whenever they come to repentance and that absolution should not be denied them the by church.<sup>10</sup>

This understanding is not clear even to most clergy in the Lutheran church, therefore resulting in multiple interpretations in various contexts. There is no consistency in matters of ecclesiastical discipline, even in the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran church today. Matters pertaining to discipline are dealt with differently depending on the understanding of the leadership in the congregations. In general, understanding of church discipline is based more on the inherited oral tradition of the church than theology.

Thorough assessment of the way church discipline is executed in the Kenyan Lutheranism indicates that the emphasis is more on the law and works, which undermines Luther's teaching on the justification by faith. There is quite a disconnection between the teaching of the church on justification by faith and the practice of the church, especially on matters of sacraments. The church emphasis has turned sacraments to be the mark of righteousness and worthiness, even when the issue of repentance remains personal, and between the sinner and God. Those who come out openly, seeking pardon like Mongi, should not be denied through the church procedures, but rather, helped to overcome the barriers in both the church and community.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Mongi, Annual general meeting (AGM) Nairobi ( Nov 20, 2010)

<sup>10</sup> Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 44.



I agree with Jonathan Preus' assertion that "sacrament is precisely for those who know that they are sinners and who long for forgiveness."<sup>11</sup> These are no other than children out of wedlock, and the unwed mothers, just to name a few.

### **Procedures of Ecclesiastical Discipline in the KELC**

As a tradition of the church, a person becomes a full communicant and a member of the church either after adult baptism for those who did not receive infant baptism or after confirmation for those who received infant baptism. This is also done after undergoing baptism or confirmation class for one and two years respectively. The church expects that every full member of the church, that is, communicants, will be faithful not only to their vocation, but will adhere to church teachings and practice as well.

Every member has to be a real witness and ambassador of both church and faith. Unfaithful members are regarded as sinners and therefore subjected to church discipline, which ends in excommunication and denial of the sacraments meant for the sinner. The implication is that the church is looking for what I see as an outward repentance, where sinners receive absolution from the pastor before a Sunday gathering. In this case, the focus and whole idea about repentance seems to be upon the pastor. Here the pastor is the determinant factor in who, how, when and where one is to receive forgiveness and reinstatement to the rights and privileges of the church. Thorough scrutiny to this kind of practice shows that church leaders, that is, the pastor and the church elders, are elevated in the place of Jesus. They have the Office of the Keys at their disposal, to open and close.

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Preus, *The Promise of the Sacraments: Martin Luther on Baptism and Holy Communion* ((Publisher unknown), 1994), 6.

In most of the mainline churches in Kenya, excommunication is implemented in two ways. There are those who, out of self-conscience and conviction, do not partaking Holy Communion, but keep on attending church service even on a regular basis, while there are also those who go underground to avoid the shame and discrimination among the saints. In general, self-denial of Holy communion is common, especially among the dormant members in the church, defectors and backsliders, drunkards, unwed mothers, women pregnant out of wedlock, and mostly, the young couples who chose to cohabit, a kind of marriage where they choose to live together as man and wife without church's consecration, or even the parents' consent. This is a common practice among the young people today, especially in the cities, for diverse reasons. According to Fleisch and Jaeschike:

Many lived together out of wedlock without church's consecration and in disregard of their own tribal customs. This may be in part because some fear the stronger ties of a Christian marriage. On the other hand, the young girls are especially concerned and fear that they may not find a male partner, since the girls outnumber the boys in the congregation. Another reason for this may be that the boys did not want to or could not pay the high dowry, which just for Christians had been increased. In any case, the list of offenses, which had come to the attention of the public, was topped by the trespass in of the sixth Commandment.<sup>12</sup>

This is a big challenge today in not only the church but also the society. The church as an institution has to have an impact in every era. The church has an obligation to address all spiritual issues, giving proper interpretation and guidelines based in the truth of the teaching of the word.

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Fleisch and Ernst Jaeschke, *Lutheran Beginnings around Mt. Kilimanjaro: The First 40 Years*, Makumira Publication (Erlangen: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 1998), 21-22.

According to Bishop Zachariah Kahuthu, the head of KELC, matters of church discipline in Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church have two factors based on his long experience in the church leadership.

The majority of those under church discipline are there out of self-consciousness and guilt, leading to self-denial of Holy Communion. Here the decision is individually and silent. This is so especially, for example, among women impregnated outside wedlock. The unwed mothers and those who end up becoming polygamists, they automatically keep off, even desert from church and public at large. There are those who are under church discipline through the church authority, either the church elders, evangelists, deacons, or the pastor. This approach is applied in case of gross misconduct, especially when the church is forced to make a public statement in relation to those involved in social evil.<sup>13</sup>

For those whom the church has to declare publicly, the process is somehow weird and unfriendly too, for one is directly told face to face and through announcements not to partake of Holy Communion. If one happens to be in church service and holding any church position, be it a choirmaster or whatever, that service ceases, and they are forced to relinquish the position.

Many times, a public announcement is made in the church service as stated earlier without prior arrangement with the offender of church traditions. For this matter, one remains under hushed humiliation of church discipline and excommunication until he or she repents and asks for pardon, which is again after consulting the church authority, beginning from the church elders, evangelist/deacon, pastor and the council. In many occasions, the harshness of this practice has affected the entire family of the lapsed to the extent of even running away from the church with the entire family. Again, this exhibits the damages caused by enforcing this ecclesiastical practice. The church's mission is

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Bishop Zachariah Kahuthu, Head of Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (July 16, 2012).

undermined before its leaders, who are the custodians of God's mission in the world, for the sake of protecting the traditions and status quo.

In some cases and especially in the urban and cities, the pastor directly handles the matter, which is the most preferred way by the majority. The same applies for the reinstatement process, which normally is followed by an announcement in the church. The theology behind this is that everyone has to witness the coming back of the lapsed and pardoned member. On many occasions, there are special texts, songs, as well as celebrations where "thanks giving offerings and pledges are made by those reinstated as they are allowed back to the Eucharistic table."<sup>14</sup> In general, the exercise is inhuman and painful. I see it to be more destructive and challenging to the mission of God entrusted to the church.

### **Reinstatement Process**

Apparently, the reinstatement process in the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church is not very clearly stated in the constitution. Its background and use is from tradition, which is not consistent even within the church congregations due to influence from the surrounding mainline denominations from different missional backgrounds within the localities as well as the know-how of most of the church leaders in relation with their educational background. Since there is no binding documentation of the process, implementation depends on leadership in the parishes and more, so church elders are the core in determining matters pertaining to church traditions. To make matters worse, the immigration of Christians from one denomination to another within mainline churches is

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<sup>14</sup> Phares Mathias Kakulima, "The Lutheran Understanding of the Eucharist in the Congregations of the Karagwe Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania" (Luther Seminary, MA Thesis, 2011), 55.

also contributing to ambiguity and misinterpretations of discipline in the church today. There is a mixture of theological understanding in the whole process.

In most cases, the process begins with the initiative of the person under church discipline, mostly women who are the most affected. In order to be accepted back the following procedure must apply, as pointed out in Kafunzile's dissertation:

- 1) The issue is taken to the church elder, either male or female,
- 2) The church elder reports the issue of inquirer to the parish pastor
- 3) The pastor schedules an appointment to meet the inquirer and here he invites council members
- 4) The inquirer pledge for pardon,
- 5) The inquirer if accepted will confess his/her sins before the community of believers on a particular Sunday with public announcement in the church.
- 6) The pastor pronounces forgiveness to the lapsed before the community of faith.<sup>15</sup>

The process, by its nature, is humiliating and laborious, especially when the pastor takes the position of a law court judge who determines eligibility of who is to be reinstated and at what time. There are cases where the lapsed is penalized before reinstatement takes place. In some congregations, this results in a great deal of hardship to those seeking absolution and reinstatement. Congregations are inclined to use strict disciplinary measures, at the church's disposal, to bring trespassers into line. For example, in the Northwestern Diocese of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Kafunzile reports a case where "members are forced to perform a punishment of manual work in the church garden or surroundings before being reinstated back to church rights."<sup>16</sup> In this case, people pay back in advance for their reinstatement, whereas one is left to wonder whether there can be forgiveness without discipline. Sometimes the

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<sup>15</sup> Kafunzile, "Shame and Its Effects," 88.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

procedure is biased, some members treated in a special and private way, others in a humiliating manner depending on status. Again, the church leadership divides the church into social classes.

Although this is not the case with Kenyan Lutheranism, in general, the process of reinstatement to date requires a lot of courage and determination by those seeking reinstatement, and many would be willing to perish rather than be tormented. In fact, church elders are the worst obstacles as far as the issue of ecclesiastical discipline and reinstatement is concerned. Many people, especially women, have ended up locked out of the communion of believers for so long. Some are even dying while still waiting for their turn, just because for unknown reasons they could not expose those who fathered their children out of wedlock.

Here are practical examples of those who were forced out of the church through church elders. Japheth Lerumi Ara-Abhaa left the Anglican Church in 1976, turning into a nominal Christian, just because a church elder removed him from the queue of those undergoing baptism, in spite of his two years in baptism class, simply because he was not in a white uniform, which was the church tradition and, of course, an adiaphoran practice of the church. Josphat's grievance is where Jesus was in this situation. And why did Jesus allow him to undergo such pain and humiliation before everyone? For all these years, this question remains not only unanswered, but no one from his church has ever cared to look for him for all this time.

Nelly Kadidi Eliamongo, a staunch and very resourceful member of the Nairobi Pentecostal Church, and who is of Lutheran background, was denied Holy Communion for over eleven years before defecting to her current church, where she is at home and

nobody can shake or move her allegiance, just because she could not consecrate or solemnize her marriage in church with her husband, who does not even belong to any church. While unfolding her story, she said, “There are too much principles and laws in the Lutheran church, unlike in the Pentecost.”<sup>17</sup>

What disturbs Nelly most is the discrimination and humiliation women under church discipline undergo. Even after being assured forgiveness of their sins, still they are denied the right to partake Holy Communion or the right of being blessed during infant baptism with the rest. The implication is a division of people into the righteous and unrighteous, saints and sinners, Jews and Gentiles in matters pertaining to Sacraments. There is no equality in the Sacraments, except in offerings and anything to do with finances. This kind of practice is oppressive and abusive too. However, there has been no time in the history of African Christianity that the lapsed were not allowed to give their offerings because they were sinners.

### **Reinstatement Service**

Once cleared in the parish council, the reinstatement date, which is normally on Sunday, is announced in the church and the names of beneficiaries are made public, except for a few, the so-called important and untouchables who are served in a special way and mostly privately. Generally, for the lapsed, this is a great day in life. Some will even invite relatives and friends to accompany them in this special Sunday and thereafter join together in celebrating a special banquet in the same manner of the prodigal son who returned home (Luke 15:11-24).

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Nelly Kadidi Eliamongo, former member of Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (Aug 20, 2012).

On the reinstatement Sunday, usually Easter Sunday depending on the congregation, the pastor will begin with the normal service, using the Lutheran book of worship “Swahili” version. After confession of sin, absolution, and the word, the lapsed are invited to the altar. They are instructed to face the congregation while confessing their sins, denouncing Satan and pledging allegiance to follow and serve Jesus without turning back. After that, there is recitation of the Apostles’ Creed. This is concluded with the Lord’s Prayer.

After absolution is announced, the repented lapsed are by now new creatures in the presence of their fellow members. The mass of the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, specifically for the repented sinners. They are invited back to join others. They are connected back to the rest in serving their lord and master, Jesus. The church expects them to be a good example to others in the rest of their lives. Church elders will officially welcome them back to all church responsibilities. The pastor will welcome them to participate in all church activities.

The practice of using Sacraments in enforcing church discipline in Kenya Evangelical Lutheran church, as we have seen, is undermining Lutheran teaching on Sacraments. By nature, it encourages bias and discrimination. According to its application, it implies that the power to forgive sins and receive justification is not through faith in Jesus Christ, but through works and church authority. It also divides the body of Christ into the righteous and sinners or Jews and Gentiles for this matter. Thorough analysis of the practice unfolds that, there is no hope and there will be no hope for single mothers, children out of wedlock, and polygamists in the church. The theology of Jesus dying on the cross for the sinners is not practical and does not work for them.



This for me is the returning of the church back to Babylonian captivity. This is reducing the salvic activity of God to church activity, where the church's authority supersedes the authority of the scripture, therefore diverting from God's mission in the world.

There is need at this time and space to revisit our church practices and interpret them in line with our Lutheran confession in order for the church in Kenya to return to mission, especially in the contemporary, religiously pluralistic and multicultural world. The church mission must have an impact even in this challenging era.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTING PROBLEMS FOR CHURCH PARTICIPATION AND GROWTH

The use of sacraments in church discipline is an unnecessary ecclesiastical practice for salvation. It is a church invention “neither commanded nor forbidden in God’s word but introduced in the church for the sake of good order and decorum.”<sup>1</sup> Its use in disciplining the lapsed in the Lutheran church, like in most mainline churches, has both positive and negative implications for church growth and participation, which I would like to touch on this chapter. In fact, it is unhelpful and even more harmful to God’s mission today in the world of free will and choice, a world of religious and cultural multiplicity.

Although ecclesiastical discipline is a long-time practice in Kenyan Lutheranism, like in all mainline churches in Kenya, it varies in its specific details from denomination to denomination, from diocese to diocese, and even within a given denomination’s congregations. Nevertheless, the pattern and the practice seem to be the same, in the fact that the church holds power to punish at its disposal.

Historically, its initial emphasis was on discipling people into the faith and into a relationship with one another and God. In the course of time, it took a legal and rigid form, which worked against its earlier approach. Gradually, church discipline turned to be punitive and humiliating and its climax is a hindrance to the mission work of the

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<sup>1</sup> Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 315.

church by locking the communion of believers outside (innocent children out of wedlock, unwed women, those with marriages not solemnized in the church, polygamists and so forth) by denying them sacraments which is contrary to the original purpose. At this point, I agree with Laney J Carl's assertion that:

The purpose of church discipline from the beginning was designed not to execute judgment on the fallen saints but to awaken people to their sin and assist them in returning to their former, spiritually heathen condition. This purpose is even strongly affirmed by Paul's words to the Galatians: "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted (Gal. 6:1)."<sup>2</sup>

The denial of Holy Communion to the lapsed in Kenyan Lutheranism, like in most African mainline churches, is seriously affecting the church growth, since "fewer and fewer guests find their way to Jesus' table, and they come less and less often."<sup>3</sup> The implication, as Kasemann points out, is that, "to go to communion becomes a sign of particularly pious groups who see themselves nevertheless as the true congregation."<sup>4</sup> In this way, the church is not only going against its teaching, but contravening the original goal of sacraments and the mission of the church as well.

The sacraments of the church are enacted in anamnesis-remembrance of Jesus Christ. For example Eucharist, is not only the primary sacramental act of the church but the prime sacrament of reconciliation. The question remains: how are those locked out of the church through the denial of Holy Communion reconciled? The participation in

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<sup>2</sup> J. Carl Laney, "The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 143, no. 572 (1986): 353 - 64.

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Käsemann, "Guests of the Crucified," *Word & World* 33, no. 1 (2013): 64-73.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

remembrance of Jesus in the Lord's Table is all-inclusive. Therefore, denying the lapsed communion is un-Biblical.

The sacrament is the "anamnesis" of his sacrificial life and death, and it continues to make present his sacrifice and its victory over sin. It is likewise true, however, of the special sacrament of reconciliation, which proclaims and effects deeper union with Christ in his sacrifice and with the community of people formed at the Eucharistic table.<sup>5</sup>

Fink continues to explain further on this point by saying:

The Sacrament of reconciliation is not enacted in order for that God will forgive sin, but rather because in Christ God has already forgiven sin. It is a celebration of the positive not the negative. Everything that Jesus reveals about God and the possibility of trust, and about human life in which God sees the positive not the negative, is acted out in sacrament by the assembly gathered, and thus it is expressed in their lives. The hope is not that God will reconcile, but that we have to forgive others as we are forgiven, and thus be reconciled both with God and each other.<sup>6</sup>

Sacraments, both Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are means of grace meant for the same sinners the church is locking out of the communion of saints. Sacraments are gifts for all in the communion of believers. For this matter, the denial of sacraments to the lapsed is contradicting the teachings of the church. The church must have overlooked the whole idea, the core use of Sacraments, which has to be revisited for the sake of God's mission in the world. My point here is not for it to be abandoned completely, but that people should be able to make sense out of this practice. Something has to be done urgently.

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<sup>5</sup> B. J. Lee et al., *Alternative Futures for Worship: Vol. 4, Reconciliation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987), 56.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

### **Positive Implications**

Taking church discipline positively, it not only facilitate the propagation and penetration of Christianity in the African soil and cultural barriers, but has shaped strong Christian values which make Christianity unique and more favorable than other religious movements in Africa. Also, church discipline is believed to be instrumental in keeping the church out of insanity and decay. The original biblical basis and practice of church discipline since the advent of the church was, “not as a means of repression, but rather, as a means to educate and integrate those individuals whose behavior transgressed the moral bonds of the Church.”<sup>7</sup> This seems to have worked very well for previous generations, where disciplinary actions generally created a certain amount of anxiety and fear. Such measures today in the contemporary world have become, in some circles, a laughing matter and regarded as irrelevant as there are so many alternatives in contrast with the era of early missionary organizations to East Africa. Church discipline today in the world of diversity and plurality of religious allegiance cannot force or stop one from jumping from one church or denomination to another, as evidenced today in Africa. In this case, there is an evolution of sects and Christian fundamentalism across the African continent, which in a way is reversing the noble work of great men and women of God who sacrificed their lives for the Gospel of Christ and the salvation of Africans.

Discipline was specifically crafted and consummated “to keep the subject within the community of the saints, and to encourage repentance through combination of humiliation, education and awareness, so that his conscience feels how he has offended

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<sup>7</sup> Cooper and Cameron, *Discipline and Diversity*, 316.

God and what slander he hath raised in the Church,”<sup>8</sup> which is not the case anymore. Instead of keeping people within the community of the saints, it is actually driving them away. Furthermore, there is no uniformity in the process of execution of this practice. Therefore, it is imperative that churches in Africa revisit the practice, as well as understand not only the reasoning and goals for church discipline, but also the theology behind the using of sacraments in ecclesiastical discipline, which undermines Lutheran theology on use of sacraments as stated in the Lutheran confessions. In the Book of Concord, for example, it is clearly stated that,

Concerning the use of Sacraments it is taught that the Sacraments are instituted not only to be signs by which people may recognize Christians outwardly, but also as signs and testimonies of God’s will towards us in order thereby to awaken and strengthen our faith. That is why they also require faith and are rightly used when received in faith for the strengthening of faith. Rejected, therefore are those who teach that sacraments justify *ex opera operato* without faith and who do not teach that this faith should be added so that the forgiveness of sin (which is obtained through faith and not through work) may be offered there.<sup>9</sup>

The church’s use of Sacraments in punishing the lapsed leads to alienation instead of reconciliation of the sinner and God. Furthermore, instead of redeeming this sinner, it is condemning the sinners even more to damnation. Church discipline from its original use is really an “act of discipleship that functions as the corollary of evangelism, where evangelism’s function is to minister to those outside the church who are in bondage to sin, and Church discipline ministers to those within the church who are in bondage to sin.”<sup>10</sup> From this point of view, the purpose of discipline in the Church is twofold. It seeks to carry into effect the law of Christ concerning both the admission and exclusion

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 46.

<sup>10</sup> Laney, “The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline,” 353.

of members, and at the same time aims at promoting the spiritual edification of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal here is maintenance of the holiness of the Church of Jesus Christ, and keeping the church out of insanity and decay.

### **Negative Implications**

The use of sacraments in church discipline at this time is not only negatively affecting church participation and growth in Kenyan mainline Christianity, but is also undermining God's mission in the world. According to Lutheran consultation held in Soweto South Africa in 2008 in response to Pentecostalism, it was observed that, "many members of Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church have joined Pentecostal churches."<sup>11</sup> While a good number not belonging anywhere eventually turn into prey for the Islamization of Africa. This is why I am prompted to undertake this study. In Kenyan Lutheranism (and in particular in KELC, where this study was conducted), the congregations are numerically declining, as is the case of all mainline churches, while others are enjoying an influx of new followers in the face of challenges from a context that has become religiously pluralistic. Because of religious freedom, myriads of new religious movements, even of non-Christian background, aggressively operate in Kenya, while the growth of Pentecostalism is taking roots and every day, dwarfing the missional or mainline churches. According to David Gitari, the retired archbishop of Anglican Church of Kenya,

Because of its political stability and religious freedom, Kenya has been a fertile soil for evangelism. Competition among churches in evangelism has many times hindered effective evangelism. The evangelistic task is further hindered by a

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<sup>11</sup> Karen L. Bloomquist, *Lutherans Respond to Pentecostalism 4* (Minneapolis, MN.: Lutheran University Press on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, 2008), 89.

multiplicity of breakaway churches and sects. The registrar of societies in Kenya receives several applications for registration of new churches each month.<sup>12</sup>

Although statistics show that Christians compose about two-thirds of Kenya's population million people, "nearly 90% of Kenyans are Christians according to 2003 figures."<sup>13</sup> There is also a tremendous rise in sects and Islam competing for the breakaway members of mainline churches. The freedom of worship in Kenya today has created space for multiple sects in the name of missional ministries as stated before, which is of course the source of over 4,000 registered Christian denominations mostly Pentecostal.

Due to the impact of Christian missionaries during the British colonial period of Kenya's history, the majority of Kenyans today are Christian. Approximately 45% of the population are Protestant and another 33% are Roman Catholic. There are more than 4,000 registered churches in Kenya, from a mix of denominations such as Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and a variety of newer Pentecostal churches.<sup>14</sup>

The greatest challenge facing the church today in Africa (and in particular Kenya) is the exodus of members of mainline churches to neo-Pentecostalism and Islam. The resurgence of Islam in the region as a strategy of Islamization of sub-Saharan Africa is being realized at the expense of the church. According to Mukwena,

On the 28th of November, 1989, a summit was held in Abuja, Nigeria, whose main objective was to form an Islamic body, which will execute the objectives and movements of Islamic propaganda in African countries. The body is known

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<sup>12</sup> Turner and Sugeno, *Crossroads Are for Meeting*, 38.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Burke, "African Church Leader Warns of 'Disease' of Pentecostalism" <http://prospectinggod.blogspot.com/2007/01/pay-dirt-january-25-2007.html> (accessed March 14, 2013).



as Islam in Africa Organization (IAO). The summit with one voice appointed Col. Gadhafi, President of Libya to lead the body.<sup>15</sup>

In this case, Islam propagation is taking shape across the continent. In Kenya today, Muslims are spending millions of dollars from the oil-rich Middle East countries to build magnificent mosques along all highways joining every strategic area in every important town or village in various places. In some cases, the Muslim teachers through their famous “Muadhara,” the open air outreach meetings or the “Mdahalo” dialogue forums, are trying “to win people by showing superiority of Islam over Christianity, often by distorting the Christian gospel. Some Muslims claim to offer one God and many wives, unlike Christianity, which offers three Gods and one wife.”<sup>16</sup>

This kind of message is quite appealing especially to polygamists, whom the church has not only locked out and with no hope of being reinstated back by nature of their situations, but the church as well does not recognize as pointed out by Turner and Sugeno, in their book *“Crossroads Are For Meeting: Essays on the mission and Common Life of the Church in a global Society.”* They quote David M. Gitari as follows:

Our Anglican heritage has also been a hindrance in dealing with some of the pastoral problems that confront the church in Africa. Polygamy is at the top of the list of such problems. As early as 1862, Bishop John Colenso, the first Bishop of Natal, wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury expressing his conviction on this issue: “The conviction has deepened within me more and more that the common practice of requiring a man, who may have more than one wife at the time of his conversion, to put away all but one before he can receive Christian baptism, is unwarranted by the scriptures, unsanctioned by apostolic example and authority, condemned by common reason and sense of right, and altogether unjustifiable.” Yet in 1888 Lambeth conference resolved: “It is the opinion of this conference that persons living in polygamy be not admitted in baptism, but they be kept under Christian instruction until such a time they shall be in a position to accept

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel Mwankemwa, “The Secret Agenda of Islam in East Africa,” <http://findtruefaith.blogspot.com/2010/06/secret-agenda-of-islam-in-east-africa.html> (accessed March 7, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Turner and Sugeno, *Crossroads Are for Meeting*, 38.

the law of Christ.” since 1888, the church in Africa has excluded Polygamist from enjoying sacraments, although in some provinces polygamists are baptized but cannot be confirmed and are excluded in receiving Holy Communion. Some of them regularly attend church and patiently wait until God “frees them” from the state of polygamy so as to benefit from the sacraments of the church.<sup>17</sup>

The policies practiced by Kenyan mainline churches (the Lutheran church in particular) in dealing with pastoral problems, and especially polygamy, are biased and not consistent, whereas the clergy are not well-informed. They are mostly oral traditions which African church leaders and even church discipline have never been able to solve. Even today in the contemporary world, the African mainline church forums have never reached consensus. There is still ambiguity in dealing with this matter. It is amazing that what was happening in the church so many years ago is still with us today, as reflected in Trobisch’s comment on the inconsistency and ambiguity of the church in dealing with pastoral matters:

Some churches do not even allow polygamists to enter catechumen class. Others allow them to do so, but do not baptize them. Again, others baptize them, but exclude them in the Lord’s Supper. A few, for example, the Lutheran church in Liberia, allow polygamist husbands full church membership.<sup>18</sup>

While in the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church, a polygamist is forced to divorce the immediately wife (s). Those who happen to be reinstated are not allowed to “hold office in the church or congregation or be engaged as a Christian worker.”<sup>19</sup> It is remarkable that these are some people the Pentecostals use for their advancement and sustainability.

Of late, there are many Muslim charitable organizations, hospitals, and schools as well Islamic universities, financial assistance programs, business loans, school bursaries,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Trobisch, *The Complete Works of Walter Trobisch: Answers About Love, Sex, Self-Esteem & Personal Growth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987), 517.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

and scholarships. All these facilities are targeting conversion of Christians to Islam, which is actually working very well. Today in Kenya, Islam has grown to be the “second largest religion, with about 10% of the population”<sup>20</sup> while Christianity has dropped to 83% from 90% in 2003. The declining mainline churches have failed to maintain the family bond and cycle inspire the challenges of the contemporary world. The reality is undeniable that Christians are leaving the traditional mission churches to look for salvation elsewhere, where their spiritual needs and aspirations seem to be better addressed. One of the important reasons that people leave the mission churches and join independent /Pentecostal churches is that they are able to satisfy certain needs that cannot be met in most mission churches. For instance, “those who seek membership do not have to go through catechism. A person has to identify with, albeit experientially in order to be regarded as a Pentecostal. Their worship and liturgy also tends to be more formal and devoid of ritual symbolism.”<sup>21</sup>

By nature, most Pentecostal movements do not celebrate Eucharist and or have time for what mainline church call “Christian” or “church marriages”. Most African neo-Pentecostal leadership comes out of self-imposition and therefore lacks theological background. Hence, the issue of the Eucharist is out of place. This is why those whom the mainline churches lock out of communion by denying them church rights are quite at home when they join Pentecostal sects. That is why such sects attract young people, especially the unwed women with children out of wedlock, who are looked down upon,

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<sup>20</sup> The Independent Kenya Travel Guide, “Religion in Kenya: An Introduction,” <http://www.kenya-advisor.com/religion-in-kenya.html> (accessed March 7, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 12.

sometimes with no attention from church leadership. In the Pentecostal sects, they find new hope, value, and a sense of belonging, which is what African Christians are looking for in the church.

Pentecostal movements in Kenya, like in other parts of African, are unique and have become an increasingly prominent force in African life due to their dramatic growth. Rev. Nyansako-ni-Nku, moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, and the president of the All Africa Council of Churches, a fellowship of mainline Protestant, Orthodox and indigenous Christians, made the following remark during an AACC convention in Nairobi:

Pentecostalism is a "disease" spreading across Africa, according to an AACC news release. Speaking at the Ecumenical Platform of the World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, the Rev. Nyansako-ni-Nku seemed to direct his remarks at a type of Pentecostal prosperity preacher who "gets richer and the congregation gets poorer."<sup>22</sup>

The only danger with Pentecostalism is its ability to reduce Christianity into sects and fundamentalism, as experienced today across Africa. According to Businge, "On 17<sup>th</sup> March 2000, more than 500 Members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments (MRTC), led by Joseph Kibwetere, had burnt to death in a church."<sup>23</sup> This was one of the sects based in southwest Uganda which had prophesied the end of the world to be March 2000. Since it did not happen, they committed suicide as a way fulfilling their mission. Another serious problem of Pentecostalism is their teaching of prosperity gospel, which exploits people who have placed their trust in them. This has

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<sup>22</sup> Burke, "African Church Leaders Warns".

<sup>23</sup> Gerald Businge, "Seven Years since the Kanungu Massacre," <http://www.ugpulse.com/people/seven-years-since-the-kanungu-massacre/586/ug.aspx> (accessed March 6, 2013).

become a way of life, source of income, and enrichment for most of Pentecostal leaders, at the expense of the masses, mostly women and youths, who are more vulnerable. This kind of teaching and practice is misguiding and undermining of mission work.

Although Pentecostalism has become prominent and popular in Africa, let it be known that it is also undermining ecumenism or church unity across Africa. Competition among churches in evangelism has many times hindered effective evangelism, while the evangelistic task is further hindered by a multiplicity of breakaway churches and sects. The only credit for Pentecostalism is their potential for keeping the fire of Christianity burning in spite of the challenges of Islam and African traditional religions. Again, according to Nyansako, “mainline churches have to wake up to the challenge and provide direction; otherwise many people will follow these Pentecostal churches.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Burke, “African Church Leaders Warns ”.

## CHAPTER 5

### A PROPOSAL FOR ANOTHER WAY

The emphasis on church discipline in Kenyan Lutheranism, like in most mainline churches in Africa, demonstrates the necessity of some form of discipline in the church. Discipline is a mandatory requirement for the success of any activity, be it at the personal or institution level. When people commit themselves to a church, they subject themselves to that discipline. This is the case for any kind of social institution or organization. Although church discipline is biblical, and part of Christian life, the tradition of enforcing church discipline through the sacraments, in particular in the Lord's Supper today, seems to be foreign to many among the young generation both inside the church and those who are not part of the Christian faith. There is no way the church can be appealing to those outside the church when they learn about the church disciplining its members.

It should be noted! that, although the church tradition of denying the fallen access to sacraments in order to enforce discipline is a common practice among the majority of churches in Africa, the concept is questionable. Many people cannot comprehend why one is punished in matters concerning faith especially when they know for sure that, "the task of the church is to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them, and to teach them to obey everything that Christ has commanded."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it is through Baptism one receives the grace of becoming a member of the body of Christ. For this matter, denying

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<sup>1</sup> Turner and Sugeno, *Crossroads Are for Meeting*, 28.

children baptism is discouraged in the strongest terms in the Lutheran confessions.

According to Turner and Sugeno, the confessions hold that: “Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists who teach that baptism of the children is not right.”<sup>2</sup> Again, this is not only un-Lutheran, but non-Biblical and affects the mission of the church. I concur with Galardi when he argues that,

The eclipse of church discipline affects godly practice among the saints, and also the way the gospel message is understood and applied. If church practice and behavior resembles the world, then the light of the “called out” (ekklesia) becomes hidden (Matthew 5:13-16). Therefore, this eclipse diminishes Christ’s body within the world and fundamentally disables the church from accomplishing its tasks (Matthew 28:19-20).<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, behind this ancient ecclesiastical practice, there is a widely mishandling and over emphasis, as manifested throughout church history. Although church discipline is Scriptural, the use of sacraments (the gifts of Grace) in discipline is un-Biblical. It is through sacraments that we become members of the church and a communion of believer. Therefore, denying people the church Sacraments is equivalent to revoking them their communion-ship and belonging to Christ.

The Bible is very clear on how to institute discipline in the church. Mathew 18:15-17 is the basis of church discipline as it should be practiced in the church. It stipulates and categorizes the purpose of discipline in the Church as twofold: “First, it seeks to carry into effect the law of Christ concerning the admission and exclusion of members and in the second place it aims at promoting the spiritual edification of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ,”<sup>4</sup> and promotion of mutual relationship and

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<sup>2</sup> Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 599.

fellowship of members. Furthermore, Jesus' remarks in Matthew 18 reflect His concern for corrective discipline and the process for invoking it when needed. According to Galardi, "Jesus remains the chief shepherd (I Peter 5:4), and His model for the care of His sheep should not be undervalued or employed haphazardly."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, disciplining process should be that which is underpinned with the concern and format outlined in Matthew 18.

Church discipline is never to be punitive, but rather, restorative. When a sinful member is unrepentant, the role of church leadership is to seek to restore that person. The goal is never to be unforgiving and expulsive, but always lovingly restorative. In the process of discipline, guidelines and instructions must be applied correctly. It is not to be shameful, and humiliating process, but a reconciling one intended to bring about repentance in a believer's life to live in a way that honors and glorifies God.

There is no way the Church can continue to be a moral authority without discipline. Therefore, I propose the following in matters pertaining to discipline in Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church. First, the concept of use of Sacraments in ecclesiastical discipline needs to be rehabilitated. Discipline has to be in the form of discipleship or mentorship in order to restore its usefulness as an educative tool in the life of the church in the world. The negative fallout from enforcing church discipline through Sacraments must be counter-balanced with its nurturing benefits.

Secondly, leaders in the church are responsible for the training, equipping, and teaching of church members. Part of that responsibility requires bringing correction in

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<sup>5</sup> Don E. Galardi, "Corrective Church Discipline: A Study in Scripture, the Reformed Heritage, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church " <http://communityepc.org/resources/discipline.pdf> (accessed March 10, 2013).



grace when members are living contrary to the Scriptures in a way that is unhealthy for them, for their families, or for other members of the church. The task of Christian education is equally crucial. Church should take seriously the role of teaching children, because here is where we are directly contributing to the shaping of the moral character, and to moral agency overall. The ministry of teaching in the church has to be taken seriously. Most churches and families today do not value Christian education in the church compared with the secular education. According to Birch and Rasmussen, “It is the further duty of the church to provide for the nurture of its members, to promote the welfare of the whole Church, to provide the sacraments, to teach the faith.”<sup>6</sup>

Thirdly, the preferred way I find suitable for solving spiritual matters should be through a counseling approach. By this method, we can engage and help each other to face the challenges and reality of God’s word. Through non-judgmental compassionate approach and love we can manage to help those in brokenness and rebellious situations, and resurrect hope and mutual relationships with God and others. This is what the church in the world is commissioned for: to go out and make disciples for Jesus Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible & Ethics in the Christian Life*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 199.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine the origin, development, and practice of Sacraments use in enforcing Church discipline in the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church. The study also aimed at exploring the heritage of use of Sacraments in ecclesiastical discipline that is prevalent in Kenyan Lutheranism (and in particular the KELC). The objective of study was to establish the challenges which are negatively affecting mission work and contributing to high loss of membership to Pentecostalism and Islam.

The study observed that the use of Sacraments in discipline is liturgical and has always been central in the church, while its theology is not well understood in KELC. As discussed in chapter two, the purpose of church discipline as inherited from the missionaries was to keep the church out of sanity and decay. Originally, it is for the good of the church and not to be punitive, as it appears to be. Critical examination of this practice shows that Kenyan Lutheranism denies the lapsed Sacraments, which are a means of grace, therefore locking its members out of the communion of saints.

In chapter four, the study explored both positive and negative challenges as a result of the use of sacraments in church discipline. Its use in the disciplining the lapsed in Lutheran church has both positive and negative implications in the church growth and participation.

The study also noted that the church tradition of denying the fallen sacraments in enforcing discipline is a common practice in Kenyan Lutheranism, yet the concept is not well understood even among the leaders.

Finally, this study has established that ecclesiastical discipline is Scriptural, but use of sacraments (the gifts of Grace) in discipline is un-Lutheran and un-Biblical. It is through sacraments that we become members of the church and a communion of believers. Therefore, denying the lapsed Sacraments constitutes actually locking them out of the communion of saints. In this case, I propose that, the church should revisit the practices of using Sacraments in enforcing discipline and teach, counsel, and nurture its members in the word.

APPENDIX 1

**List of Informants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>
Japheth Lerumi Ara-Abhaa	Peasant Farmer	July 15, 2012	Taveta
Nelly Kadidi Eliamongo	Banker	Aug 20,2012	Taveta
Robert Mongi	Technician	Nov 20,2010	Nairobi
Walter Omwanza Obare	Bishop	July 18, 2012	Nairobi
Zachariah W. Kahuthu	Bishop	July 16, 2012	Nairobi
Julius Kalu	Bishop	July 9, 2012	Mombasa

APPENDIX 2

**Interview Protocol**

Questionnaire for Lutherans

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Status \_\_\_\_\_

Denomination \_\_\_\_\_

Sex \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why are you Lutheran?
2. What are the things you like in the Lutheran worship practice?
3. What are the things you don't like in the Lutheran worship practice?
4. What are your views concerning Lutheran worship practice as a whole?
5. What is your suggestion concerning Lutheran worship practices?
6. You have seen Lutherans switching to other denominations, what do you think are the reasons?
7. Today, we are witnessing a rise and growth of new religious movements in Kenya against mainline churches. What do you think might be the reasons? And what do you suggest that the Lutheran church can do to keep their members away from joining new religious movements?
8. If you are a leader, what do you think are the challenges within the church. Which are barriers to mission of the church?

## Questionnaire for Church Leaders

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Status \_\_\_\_\_

Denomination \_\_\_\_\_

Sex \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you been in the church leadership?
2. Does your Church use Sacraments? If yes, how many?
3. Is there any time one is not allowed access to Sacraments? If yes, when and how?
4. Do you practice church discipline in your Church? If yes, how?
5. How long is one under church discipline?
6. Do you think church discipline in the church today is necessary?
7. Many church members believe use of Sacraments in discipline is a hindrance to mission of the church. Do you agree with them? If yes, explain. And if no, explain.

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