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THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST WITH  
PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO TRADITIONAL  
AFRICAN CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

APPROVAL SHEET

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PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO TRADITIONAL  
AFRICAN CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

A Thesis Presented to  
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Read and Approved by:

*Richard S. Brumby*

Chairman

*S.T. Oka-Akande Reader April 27, 1994*

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by

Gideon Bala Bagudu  
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## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter demands that we bring our study to a conclusion. This we will do by summarizing what we have discussed above, and then offer suggestions for further study.

From the onset, we have noticed that this study is an attempt to interpret Paul's concept of the Body of Christ contextually. Taking the traditional African setting as our target, we have demonstrated through our literature review that, even though the traditional African concept of community has<sup>a</sup> rich meaning to be used in order to convey biblical truths to the people, so that the gospel becomes flesh to them, yet, the interpretations we have thus far whether in the literal perspective figurative perspective, or modified figurative perspective have not taken care of that. The Christian in Africa is thus left in a limbo, the resultant effect is the crisis of commitment. The Christian faith remains to him only a Sunday affair with the God of the Western missionaries. It is with the intention of rectifying this problem, and thus making the gospel more intelligible, that we selected some passages in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians for exegesis.

In our exegesis of the selected passages, we have come to see that, in Paul's concept of the church as the Body of Christ, the fact remains that, not only is Christ the ruler of

the universe, but that he is also the head of the church. The church is presented to us as a community of all those who have come under the sovereignty of God in Jesus Christ. These include Jews and Gentiles. It is on this essential note that the unity of the community is well established. That is, the community of faith has one head, the Lord Jesus who indwells all the members of the community and gives them his gifts of grace, according to his own criteria. All of these members are responsible, one to another, as unto the Lord, because the gift is for the building up of the whole Body and not just for an individual aggrandizement. The Lord of the community himself sacrificed himself so that the whole community will live in harmonious relationship with one another and with himself, the head. With every member playing his part, the whole body is expected to grow and realize the goal of that community. The goal of the community is the consummation at the eschaton, when the Lord of the church will present her perfect unto himself. This goal is achievable when all members subject themselves to the leadership of the head and participate in building the whole community in love.

Having realized the facts pointed out above from our exegesis of the selected passages in the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, we also noted that for our contextual interpretation in the traditional African setting, we need to bring out into the limelight the characteristics and significance of community in traditional Africa. These

include, among others, the following:

1. God is Creator of all things;
2. The belief in God establishes the common religious background in the community;
3. The community exists within a given geographical sphere;
4. There is the continuation of fellowship between the living and the dead;
5. There is mutual coexistence in the community;
6. There is acceptability in the community;
7. The community is known for its inclusivity;
8. There exists discipline in the community;
9. The community has a common history, and
10. The community lives in preparation for life hereafter.

It is after the points listed above have been discussed that we used them in order to draw out some implications for the church as the Body of Christ. The implications serve to interpret for us what the church ought to look like in the eyes of the Christian in traditional Africa. The thrust of these implications is that, for the church to have her root in traditional Africa, the gospel has to be interpreted in such a way that it is intelligible to the people. The characteristics and significance pointed out above, as seen demonstrated in the implications drawn, reveal those points which we can effectively make use of in explaining the gospel

and the nature of the church to our target audience.

If the interpretation given above is taken seriously, it is hoped that:

1. making Paul's concept of the Body of Christ more intelligible to African Christians, will also make the gospel to have a good foundation in the African soil.

2. The church will cease to be seen as a 'western' institution since people will understand it and 'own' it.

3. The members of the church will freely participate to see to its growth and development in all meaningful ways, just in the same way they do participate in the community outside the church.

4. It will lead many people in traditional Africa to accept Christ while also allowing them to remain Africans.

5. It will help the church to seek to answer the questions raised by her members in that context.

6. The contextual contribution of the church in Africa will enhance the understanding of the church world-wide, for we are different, yet the same.

7. It will, above all, glorify God.

However, we must be aware of certain aspects of the traditional African community that may not glorify God and de-emphasize them. For example, it seems natural for one community to see the other as being inferior. This is noticeable in the type of songs being sung about 'the other community'. Such will constitute a barrier to the gospel of

Christ. Also, in traditional African community, religion is inherited. Can we make a case for looking at the possibility of that in the Christian faith? As evangelicals we maintain that each person must take a personal decision, a faith response to God's saving grace in Christ.

In the light of the foregoing, we will love to submit these points for further study:

1. Since conversion to Christianity does not bring the traditional responsibility of heads of families and groups in the church to an end, can there be a leadership pattern developed within the church in which avenues are created for such people to fulfill their obligations even in a much better way? This is necessary because, as we have seen, the traditional setting respects leadership. It is not an overstatement to write that leadership is held with esteem and the leader knows that the purpose is for the service of community. Any abuse of that could be handled, but we need to study it.

2. On the ministerial level, it appears to this writer that there should be a re-examination of the existing model, for, it is not a true representation of our cultural context. For example, the existing model, at best, sees the minister as a hireling and can thus be employed and /or sacked at any time. This shows that the office of the minister is never esteemed. Also, in the name of our 'democracy', at most times, we do not allow the minister to fulfill his God-given

vision for the church. In the traditional African context, the leader of the group is given his place and the members of the community follow the leadership. In fact, no Western nation could teach democracy to this setting because major decisions are usually taken in an assembly of all the people or representatives of households in the larger community. In cases where these representatives cannot meet, the elders decide and the head of the community speaks on behalf of all the community. It is certain also that the community does have its system of checks and balances so that people will live harmoniously. It is believed by this writer that if we study the leadership model in traditional Africa, we can, to a large degree, utilize it for the maximum benefit of the church, to the glory of God.