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THE CLAN AS ANALOGY FOR THE CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

This work is a study on the nature of the church. It argues that an adequate understanding of the church entails locating God within the church as a member and head of the church. The analogy of clan is used to illustrate the idea that God is within the church, a member of the church and the head who runs the church from within rather than from without. The members of a clan trace their origins to a common parent who, as the father of the clan, is the head and member of the clan. The strong sense of unity, solidarity and fellowship found in the clans arise from this notion of common descent.

Similarly, this study presents the church as God's clan wherein God is a member and head. The members of the church irrespective of their denominational or cultural backgrounds are God's children whom he has given new birth through Jesus Christ and who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is argued here that such a view of the church deepens the ideas of inter-denominational and inter-cultural unity in the church; Christian communality as well as fellowship.

CONCLUSION

Several implications emerge from the emphasis on God's union with the church. This emphasis is crucial because without it the nature of the church cannot be adequately understood. The church has its origin in God and in his purpose in bringing humans to himself. It seems that Satan targets this idea of God's union with the church because once it is destroyed other aspects of the church such as its unity and mission become hollow.

Thus, the idea of God's union with the church gives depth to our understanding of the nature and mission of the church. Presenting this union in a Trinitarian way helps us account for the involvement of the three members of the Godhead in the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose for humans. The Trinitarian emphasis also helps us explain or include all of God's redemptive activity through different epochs of human history. It can, therefore, be said that the church as God's clan now includes all God's people in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

I think that emphasizing God's union with the church also deepens the traditional ideas of the oneness and holiness of the

church. By "oneness" is usually meant ecumenical unity of the church. How can we justify the claim that the church is one in spite of denominational, cultural and social differences among believers? The answer is found in the idea that the church is God's clan, comprising all of God's children from every denomination, tribe and language. Thus, human distinctions of denomination, tribe, race, language and social class are surpassed.

The holiness of the church is used to indicate the inner and external purity of the members of the church. Sometimes, the idea of the church's holiness becomes difficult to understand in view of the human limitations and imperfections we so often observe within the church. The idea of the holiness of the church will become easier to comprehend when we think of the church as God's clan. God's union with the church throws light on the church's holiness. If it were for the human members of the church, the church will not be holy. But God is in the midst of the church, purifying, building and guiding the church to its eschatological end.

Finally, God's union with the church makes it imperative for all the members of the church to make effort to treat one another as brothers and sisters, irrespective of denominational, tribal or racial differences. The forcefulness of the notions of unity, communality and fellowship do not emerge when viewed only as socially appropriate things to do. That God is in the midst of the church building and guiding it makes it a divine mandate for all God's people to collaborate

with God in making the church truly one clan under the headship and guidance of God.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some recommendations arise from this study. These suggestions are directed mainly to church leaders and pastors. Some of the recommendations relate to efforts that need to be made to change people's orientation, others suggest practical steps that need to be undertaken. It is our view that reorientation is usually necessary to bring about attitudinal change.

First, Christian scholars and leaders need to make efforts to propagate the idea of God's union with the church. The nature of the church is largely misunderstood or at best, partially understood, when God's intimate union with the church is not taught. On the contrary, the nature and mission of the church is perceived more deeply when this union with God is given its proper place. Thus, this idea needs to be disseminated through teachings, symposia, seminars, inter alia.

Second, Christian leaders are encouraged to clearly teach the biblical truth of the common descent of all believers. Such a teaching will correct the exclusive tendencies that some Christians exhibit. This exclusive tendency manifests sometimes when a church leader keeps his or her church from participating in inter-denominational fellowships. The exclusiveness also manifests in policies such as the one, which forbids church members from marrying outside of their denomination. As it has been observed, presenting the church as

God's clan keeps us from defining the church along denominational lines. Effort is to be made to teach believers to see and regard other believers in Christ as Christians and children of God.

Third, effort should be made to enhance inter-cultural ecumenism in the church. Tribalism and racism have continued to be problems, even among Christians. Tribalism occurs when a person denies another person his or her rights because he comes from a different tribe or grants undue favours to another because he or she comes from a particular tribe. Racism occurs when this marginalization or favouritism takes place on the basis of colour or race. The gospel is a message of reconciliation and those who preach it must be seen to be people who have experienced this reconciliation among themselves.

The reorientation needed to enhance this inter-cultural ecumenism can come by designing a study material, which is targeted at this particular orientation change. Different study materials are designed to help Christians grow in different aspects of life and experience.¹ Such a study material can be developed to help believers outgrow the immaturity of tribalism and racism.

Fourth, I also recommend that the church's evangelistic effort, be not only targeted at those outside the church, but also to those inside. This arises from the discovery that some people in the church are merely strangers and not yet genuinely members of God's clan. It

¹ For instance, T. W. Hunt and Claude V. King, *In God's Presence*, (Nashville: Life Way Press, 1994), is designed to enhance a believer's prayer life.

