

ecclesiologies, if the quest for an authentic but biblical African Christianity is to be achieved.

Global and African Ecclesiological Studies

Ecclesiological studies can be classified into three distinct areas of study, namely, identity ecclesiologies, concrete ecclesiologies, and conceptual ecclesiologies. In identity ecclesiologies the content of ecclesiology is focused on, and/or is from the perspective or in the interests of, a given denomination.¹ Ecumenical ecclesiologies are also included in identity ecclesiological studies although their intent is to transcend denominational boundaries.² African identity ecclesiological studies are found in historical studies literature on African Initiated Churches (AICs),³ which are churches in Africa that were founded by Africans, in historical studies literature on various African churches which were started by missionaries,⁴ and, in exceptional cases, in studies of the church in a given African country.⁵ These African identity ecclesiologies

1. See, for example, Walter Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality, and Mission* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); and Paul Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of Church* (London: SPCK, 2013).

2. See, for example, Gillian R. Evans, *The Church and the Churches: Towards an Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994); and Gesa Elisabeth Thiessen, *Ecumenical Ecclesiology: Unity, Diversity, and Otherness in a Fragmented World* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

3. See, for example, F. B. Welbourne and B. A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home* (London: Oxford University, 1966); David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University, 1968); Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000); H. J. Becken, "A Healing Church in Zululand: The New Church Step to Jesus Christ Zion in South Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 4 (1972): 213–222; M. C. Kitchhoff, ed., *African Independent Churches Today: Kaleidoscope of Afro-Christianity*, African Studies 44 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1996); and Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Asmara: Africa World, 2001).

4. See, for example, Walter L. Yates, "The History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in West Africa: Liberia, Gold Coast (Ghana) and Nigeria, 1900–1939" (PhD diss., University of Hartford, 1967); Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity 1950–1975*, African Studies 26 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979); and Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008).

5. See Kenneth R. Ross, "Current Ecclesiological Trends in Northern Malawi," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 19 (1999): 465–485; Christine Chaillot, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Tradition: A Brief Introduction to Its Life and Spirituality* (Paris: Inter-Orthodox

CHAPTER 7

The Church as an Assembly on Mt Zion: An Ecclesiology from Hebrews for African Christianity

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I classify ecclesiological studies, against which I briefly survey African ecclesiological scholarship. From this survey I show that, relative to ecclesiological studies elsewhere, there is a paucity of literature on ecclesiology within African scholarship. I argue that this paucity puts African Christianity at a disadvantage in the quest of African Christians to be simultaneously African and biblical, thereby embodying an African biblical Christianity. In an effort, therefore, to contribute to African ecclesiological scholarship, I offer a conceptual ecclesiology drawn from Hebrews in which the church is understood as a community approaching God, in Christ, in his heavenly dwelling (the heavenly Mt Zion) to offer him, through the same Christ, prayers and immaterial sacrifices, and to live in obedience to him en route to partaking in the coming fullness of his presence and kingdom. This fullness will result in the realization of God's purposes for creating the world.

I wish to propose from Hebrews a biblical theological ecclesiology that is at home in African Christianity. But since the subject of ecclesiology is vast I will begin my paper by classifying academic discourse on ecclesiology, and within that classification give an overview of ecclesiological studies in Africa. This overview will support the view that, although all types of ecclesiological study are found in Africa, more ecclesiological studies from Africa are needed, especially in the area of conceptual

usually discuss the genesis and spread of African churches, together with their peculiarities.

Also to be found within identity ecclesiological research are studies along the lines of race and ethnicity and, to a lesser extent, gender.⁶ They are highly contextual in nature and are usually fueled, for various reasons, by the need for ecclesial emancipation from Eurocentric or Western ecclesiologies. Black ecclesiologies in Africa belong to such studies where, for example, Vellem articulates a black ecclesiology based on the narrative of the uprising of liberation spirituality.⁷

Concrete ecclesiological studies are ecclesiological studies which focus on the practical and empirical matters of a church or churches. These practical studies include how to be church or a certain kind of church,⁸ church order and church polity,⁹ church ministry,¹⁰ how to grow a church,¹¹ what successful or healthy churches look like,¹² church

Dialogue, 2002); and Frank-Ole Thoresen, *A Reconciled Community of Suffering Disciples: Aspects of a Contextual Somali Ecclesiology* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014).

6. See, for example, Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993); De Woong Park, "Towards an Asian Ecclesiology Based on Asian Liberation Theology and Minjung Theology," PhD dissertation (Drew University, 2008); and C. René Padilla, "A New Ecclesiology in Latin America," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11 (1987): 156–164.

7. Vuyani S. Vellem, "Black Ecclesiology: Uprising Faith Praxis for the Blackness of Humanity," *The Ecumenical Review* 67 (2015): 651–663. See also Goba Bongonjalo, "Towards a Black Ecclesiology," *Missionalia* 9 (1981): 47–59.

8. See, for example, Michael Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Community Where Life Happens* (Oxford: Monarch, 2014); and C. René Padilla et al., eds., *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós, 2004).

9. See, for example, Mark Dever, ed., *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life* (Washington DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001); and Steven B. Cowan, *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

10. See, for example, Robin Greenwood, *Transforming Church: Liberating Structures for Ministry* (London: SPCK, 2002); and Brian D. MacClaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

11. See, for example, Bob Jackson, *Hope for the Church: Contemporary Strategies for Growth* (London: Church Publishing House, 2002); and George Barna, *Grow Your Church from the Outside In: Understanding the Unchurched and How to Reach Them* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2002).

12. See, for example, Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); and Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Leicester: IVP, 2006).

life and membership,¹³ and church architecture¹⁴ (from which "ecclesiology" as a technical term was first used).¹⁵ There is a small amount of African literature on concrete ecclesiologies dealing with how to be an indigenous church,¹⁶ being a local church,¹⁷ types of congregations in Africa,¹⁸ church ministry to youth in Africa,¹⁹ and church architecture in Africa.²⁰

Conceptual ecclesiologies address the topic of who or what the church is, or simply the nature of the church.²¹ For this reason, they are considered ecclesiologies of the first order, are prescriptive in nature, and provide guideposts for concrete forms of being church, of church practice, and doing mission. Studies on the creedal pronouncement of belief in the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" are in this group of ecclesiological studies and, as such, have inspired a variety of forms of being church. African literature on conceptual ecclesiologies is dominated by understandings of the church based on socio-cultural dynamics

13. See, for example, James P. Wind and James W. Lewis, eds., *American Congregations*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994); and Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

14. See, for example, Mark A. Torgerson, *An Architecture of Immanence: Architecture for Worship and Ministry Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003).

15. Gerard Mannion, "What Is Comparative Ecclesiology and Why Is It Important? Roger Haight's Pioneering Methodological Insights," in *Comparative Ecclesiology: Critical Investigation*, ed. Gerard Mannion (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 13–40 (14).

16. E. Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (London: Oxford University, 1965).

17. See A. Radoli, ed., *How Local Is the Local Church?* (Eldoret, Kenya: AMECEA Gaba, 1993); and John Gichinga, *The Local Church* (Kampala: IPES, 1995).

18. H. Jurgens Hendriks, *Studying Congregations in Africa* (Wellington, South Africa: Lux Verbi BM, 2004).

19. Jesse Jackson Mirega, *The Youth and the Church in the 21st Century: A Handbook for Youth Ministry and Pastors* (South Bend, IN: Sahel, 2010).

20. Richard Tambwe Mutibula, *Towards an African Ecclesiology in Stones: A Theological Cry of An African Newborn Child* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2011).

21. See, for example, Avery Duiles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987); Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity, Sacra Doctrina* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); and Scott MacDougall, *More Than Communion: Imagining as Eschatological Ecclesiology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

