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Correspondence

Managing Editor, *Al-Itqān*
Research Management Centre, RMC
International Islamic University Malaysia
P.O Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: +603 6196 5558
Website: <http://journals.iium.edu.my/al-itqan/index.php/alitqan/index>
Email: al-itqan@iium.edu.my

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The Biblical Meaning of Ekklesia and Its Relevance with the Christian Church

Ungaran@Rashid*

Abstract

The topic on the church is one of important issues in the systematic theology in Christianity. The Christians believe that all of them gathered together by God in an institution named church, which mostly refers to a building or organization. On the other hand, the Scriptures mention that Jesus (PBUH) will build and become the head of the *ekklesia*, which refers to a community. This community contains people who believe and confess that Jesus (PBUH) is the Messiah, regardless of an institution or organization. This article tries to examine the relevance between the *ekklesia* of Jesus (PBUH) and the Christian Church by comparing the two in terms of definition, characteristics, and government. The aim of this article is to examine either the Christian Church is still in accord with the concept of *ekklesia* or there are various differences so that the Church is no longer in accordance with the Biblical studies.

Keywords: Ekklesia, Church, Bible, Jesus, theology.

Introduction

Ekklesia is a Greek term which refers to an ordinary gathering. This term is no longer ordinary when Jesus (PBUH) responded to Peter's confession, who stated that Jesus (PBUH) is the Messiah. He said, "on this rock, I will build my *ekklesia*" (Matthew 16: 18), and he is not only to build his *ekklesia*, but he also becomes the head of the *ekklesia*.

In its development, the *ekklesia* broadens into a community which so-called church. In fact, the term church comes from a different Greek word, *kuriakon*, which means (thing belongs to God). This word is applied mainly to refer to a building.¹ So, there is a difference between *ekklesia* and *kuriakon*, although it is implied that the *ekklesia* also belongs to God. One refers to a gathering and the other one point out a building.

There are many aspects that can be discussed concerning the term *ekklesia* such as the nature, characteristics, government, member, and so

* Department of Fundamental and Inter-Disciplinary Studies, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: ungaranrashid@gmail.com

¹ F.L. Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 344.

on, but in this article the researcher focuses on some issue that related to the Christian church since this research aims to see the relevance between the ekklesia and the Christian church nowadays.

Definition of Ekklesia

In Greek, the term *ekklesia* could mean “Assembly, assemblage, gathering, meeting generally, the Christian church or congregation,”¹ and appears 114 times in the New Testament. In its appearance in the New Testament, the term *ekklesia* refers to the congregation, either universally or locally; for examples, Ephesians 5.25, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the *ekklesia*² and gave himself up for her,” in the former sense, and 1 Corinthians 1.2, “To the *ekklesia* of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours,” in the latter impression.

In Septuagint (the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible), the term *ekklesia* is used to translate the term *qahal*, which means “Gather together, assemble (in *niphal* form), call together, bring together, convoke (in *hiphil* form).”³ In the Hebrew Bible, this term is also utilised to refer to the military group (2 Chronicles 28. 14), people who run the courts (Ezekiel 23. 47), Israel as a people group, and also point out to people who are worshipping God.⁴

By referring to the explanation above, on one hand, the term *ekklesia* simply means a group of people who gather together, but on the other hand, when it refers to the New Testament, various aspects should be considered to conclude of this term. Firstly, one should see Matthew 16.18, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my *ekklesia*, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” The statement of Jesus (PBUH) that he will build the *ekklesia* on “this rock” can raise a question either the rock means Simon himself as a person or his statement which says that Jesus is the Messiah.

Even though, Jesus (PBUH) called Simon as Peter which means a rock or a stone, it seems that the phrase refers to the statement for the

¹ Walter Bauers, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (London & Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 240.

² I, intentionally, do not interpret this word into “church” for I have a different view to translate this term, as I will discuss briefly later.

³ William A. Van Gemeren (Ed.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Theology & Exegesis Vol. III* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), p. 888.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 889-890.

New Testament reports that Simon denies Jesus (PBUH) as his teacher in the night when Jesus (PBUH) was arrested by Roman soldiers. In other words, the *ekklesia* is built on a sturdy foundation, which is not based on Simon as a person, but on his firm statement. Secondly, in Acts 7.38, Luke says “He was in the *ekklesia* in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us,” which means the word *ekklesia* is used to refer to the people of Israel in the past. Thirdly, as mentioned above that in Acts 7. 38, Luke uses *ekklesia* to point out Israel, but in Acts 8.1 he utilises this term to differentiate the followers of Jesus (PBUH) from Israel in general, even though the followers of Jesus (PBUH), at that time, were the people of Israel.¹ Fourthly, Acts 15.4 seems using the term *ekklesia* to distinguish congregation in general from the apostles and the elders. Moreover, in this verse, the term does not involve the structural positions in the congregation because of the organization body of the assembly is represented by the term the elder. However, in Acts 15.22, one can see that the apostles and the elders are parts of the *ekklesia*. Fifthly, in Romans 16.4, Paul uses *ekklesia* not to refer to Israel, but to Gentiles. This shows that *ekklesia* is not only used to refer to Israel, but also to other people from other nations who follow Jesus (PBUH). Sixthly, in Romans 16.5, the word *ekklesia* is utilised by Paul for people who gather together in a certain house. Accordingly, the term *ekklesia* does not refer to a building, but a group of people.

Thus, concerning the New Testament, the term *ekklesia*, in particular, can be concluded as a group(s) of people, who are nor limited by particular ethnic nor religion, who also believe and develop their faith on the foundation of confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised one of God. The group(s) of people universally united into the body of Christ, but in a particular area and smaller crowd, the community can be called a local congregation.

Some Issues Concerning Characteristic of the *Ekklesia*

The understanding of *ekklesia* mentioned above can raise some issues such as the existence, the members, and the function of the *ekklesia*. This section discusses some aspects relate to the characteristic of the *ekklesia*. First, in considering that the term *ekklesia* is used to interpret the term *qahal* in the Septuagint, it raises a question, either the *ekklesia* started

¹ Amy-Jill Lavine, *The Misunderstood Jew: the Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*, (New York: HarperCollins e-books, 2006), p. 53.

before Jesus (PBUH) was born or just appeared after Peter confessed that Jesus (PBUH) is the Messiah as mentioned in Matthew 16: 18?

Louis Berkhof, a 20th-century Reformed theologian, opines that the *ekklesia* in the era before and after the life of Jesus (PBUH) basically is one, in which both of them essentially consist of believers who live righteously. However, in the New Testament era, the *ekklesia* is separated from Israel as a nation, while in the previous era, it had its institutional existence in the national life of Israel.¹ Likewise, Wayne Grudem, an American evangelical theologian, says that the term *ekklesia* is used to apply to those who believe that the death of Jesus is redemption for them, in other words, those who are saved by the death of Christ. In addition, this salvation is valid for all ages, including the era before Jesus (PBUH). Besides, Grudem based his argument with the fact that the Septuagint translates the verb *qahal* in Hebrew as *ekklesiazō*, which is cognate to the noun *ekklesia*.²

In contrast to Berkhof and Grudem, Mal Couch, a dispensationalist theologian, opines that *ekklesia* just started in the dispensational grace era, which means the New Testament era that cannot be separated from the day of the Pentecost.³ Similarly, Charles C. Ryrie, also a dispensationalist theologian, says *ekklesia* had not existed before the time of Jesus (PBUH) due to the fact that the foundation of the *ekklesia* is the statement of Jesus (PBUH) as mentioned in Matthew 16: 18. Besides, the *ekklesia* started to have a functioning head only after the resurrection of the Christ and the ascension of Christ is the starting point of operating entity with functioning spiritual gifts of *ekklesia*.⁴

The researcher on the opinion that *ekklesia* is established on the confession of Peter, who says that Jesus (PBUH) is the Messiah, the son of the living God. Immediately, after that confession, Jesus (PBUH) used the term *ekklesia* for the first time, stating “on this rock I will build my *ekklesia*.” So, Jesus had not founded the *ekklesia* yet when he responded to Peter’s confession; this can be seen from the word “will”

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (n.p.), p. 631.

<https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/systematic-theology-louis-berkhof>

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 853.

³ Mal Couch (Ed.), *A Biblical Theology of the Church*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publication, 1999), p. 29-31.

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Teologi Dasar 2* (translated from English to Indonesian), (Yogyakarta: Yayasan ANDI, 1986), p. 192.

which is used in that sentence. However, the concept of *ekklesia* had already existed before Jesus' era, namely in the life of Israel as a nation.

Second, according to the definition and its existence, those who can be part or member of *ekklesia* should be those who believe that Jesus (PBUH) is the Messiah. It is not an easy task to consider whether someone is part of the *ekklesia* or not because no one can see the bottom of the heart of those who claim that they believe that Jesus (PBUH) is the Messiah. To overcome this issue, some reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin suggested categorising the *ekklesia* into two parts which are visible and invisible. The concept of visible and invisible of *ekklesia* does not mean there are two different *ekklesia* but two aspects of the *ekklesia* of Christ.¹ The aspect of the invisible *ekklesia* of Luther and Calvin was eager to fight against the Roman Catholic teaching that states that *ekklesia* was the one visible organization passed down by the apostles through the bishops.² So, the invisible *ekklesia* could be understood as the *ekklesia* that cannot be seen by human being and only God can see it because it is essentially spiritual.³

Meanwhile, the visible *ekklesia* might be seen as a manifestation of the invisible *ekklesia*, just as the human soul takes a body and manifest itself through the body. The visible *ekklesia*, on the one hand, is universal, just like the invisible one; but on the other hand, it can be seen in the form of a local congregation. For example, Paul, in his epistles, greets the visible *ekklesia* with the phrase "To the *ekklesia* of God in Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1: 2); "To the *ekklesia* of Thessalonians." (1 Thessalonians 1: 1). However, although the visible and the invisible *ekklesia* are similar, both are not equal in every respect. Not all members of local *ekklesia* belong to the invisible one if they do not believe that Jesus (PBUH) is the Messiah. Conversely, those who are part of the invisible *ekklesia* do not automatically affiliate to the visible one if they either do not want or have no opportunity to be members of a local congregation.⁴

Thus, the members of the *ekklesia* essentially are those who believe that Jesus (PBUH) is the Messiah, which automatically belong to the invisible *ekklesia* but not necessarily to affiliate to a local congregation conversely not all members of local *ekklesia* are part of the invisible one.

Third, in relation to the existence of the *ekklesia* in the world, the issue of the function of the *ekklesia* should be examined, which are to

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 626.

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 855.

³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 626.

⁴ Ibid., p. 627.

worship God, to nurture each other in the context of local *ekklesia*, and to do ministry to the world. In Matthew 5: 9-13, Jesus (PBUH) teaches his disciples to communicate with God through worshipping and praying to Him. Similarly, Paul orders the *ekklesia* at Colossae to praise and thank God in their heart. So, the first function of the *ekklesia* is to have a good relationship with God by worshipping, praising and praying to Him.

The second function is to nurture each other in the context of local *ekklesia*. Jesus (PBUH) gives a command to his disciples to love each other. In accordance with Jesus' command, Paul addresses the members of some local *ekklesia* to mutual edification (Romans 14: 19), to instruct one another (Romans 15: 14), to have equal concern for each other (1 Corinthians 12: 25), to encourage one another and to be one mind, live in peace (2 Corinthians 13: 11), to carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6: 2), to be patient and bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4: 2), and to be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God forgave the believers (Ephesians 4: 32).

The third function is to do ministry to the world. Jesus (PBUH) says, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations..." This order does not cover spiritual aspect only but also physical needs for the poor, even though they do not respond to the spiritual message.¹ Besides, this function reflects a good relationship with God.

The Government of the *Ekklesia*

This section discusses the government of the *ekklesia* from the Biblical understanding and its comparison with the government of the church which is developed in Christianity. The researcher thinks that this issue is interesting to examine either the government of the church in Christianity is exactly the same as the government of the *ekklesia* or it is only in accord with the Biblical one.

The term government of *ekklesia* is not explicitly stated in the Bible. The term is developed as an interpretation of some position/officers or functional minister in the *ekklesia*. There are two kinds of functional officers in the *ekklesia*, namely extraordinary and ordinary officers. The Bible mentions some functions of the ministers in the *ekklesia* that can be categorised as the extraordinary, that is to say: apostles, prophets, and evangelist. Meanwhile, the ordinary ministers are elders, teachers, and deacons.² In this article the researcher discusses only the ordinary ministers

¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 868.

² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 648.

because the extraordinary one is not used by the Christian church as the system of government, which is part of comparison study of this research.

The first order of importance among the positions in the *ekklesia* is *presbyteros*, elder, which refers to of age and as designation of an official. In the plural form, this term *presbyteroi* usually used as council of elders and rank of elders or presbyters. Another term, which also important, is *episkopos*, usually translated as overseer, guardian, and Bishop. Another form of this term is *episkeptomai*, which usually interpreted as view, inspect, visit, and afflict. In terms of a designation of the office, the term *episkopos* and *presbyteos* are often used interchangeably and they overlapped in function.¹

As mentioned above that *presbyteros* is an important position in the *ekklesia* according to the New Testament. The book of Acts mentions that Paul and Barnabas appointed *presbyteroi* (elders) in every *ekklesia* and, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord, in who they had put their trust (Acts 14: 23). Then, in his letter to Titus, Paul asks Titus to appoint elders in every town, which mean the position of elders should exist in every town and every *ekklesia*. Furthermore, in appointing the office of elders, Paul set some criteria for those who are appointed to be the elders. (1) An elder must be blameless, (2) faithful to his wife, (3) a man whose children are trustworthy and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. (4) He is not overbearing, (5) not quick-tempered, (6) not given to drunkenness, (7) not violent, (8) not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, (9) he must be hospitable, (10) one who loves what is good, (11) who is self-controlled, (12) upright, holy, and disciplined. (13) He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught.² Thus, there are two significant issues in dealing with the term *presbyteroi* (elders), firstly, the office of elders is not occupied by a single person but by several people. Secondly, the requirements to sit in the office of elders also are important, which is not everyone can fulfil those requirements. In other words, those who want to be elders must be mature in terms of faith and trusted by people around them.

Furthermore, the important aspect of the elders is not only the position but also the function and the duty of the elders. 1 Timothy 5: 17 says, "The elders who direct the affairs of the *ekklesia* well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."

¹ Collin Brown (Ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* Vol. 1, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), p. 193.

² Titus 1: 5-9; 1, Timothy 3: 2-7.

Through that verse, one can see that the elders have three functions, which are overseer, preacher, and teacher. As the overseers, they must manage the *ekklesia* well like they manage their family, as the preacher and teacher, they have to preach and teach the *ekklesia* regularly. However, the verse shows that not all elders have all three roles, it seems that there is a special group of elders whose function as preacher and teacher.¹ Interestingly, in Acts 20: 28, Paul calls the elders as shepherds, which means Paul indirectly asks them to feed the member of the *ekklesia*.

Another position which is commonly mentioned in the New Testament is *diakonos* (singular)/*diakonoi* (plural), deacon, which literally means servant. The function of deacon(s) is not clear, but some figures such as Paul and Stephen, are called as deacons. However, 1 Timothy 3: 8- 12² mention about the qualifications to be deacons, that suggest some functions. For example, the term “not pursuing dishonest gain/not greedy for gain” is a picture that they have a responsibility in caring for the finances, and they have to manage their children and households well suggest that they had responsibility in managing/administrating the *ekklesia*.³ Besides, the Book of Acts 6: 2-3⁴ implies that the deacons had a responsibility in the distribution of food to the widows who in need.

Unlike the government of the *ekklesia* as mentioned in the Bible, in so many Christian churches nowadays establish other offices such as treasurer, music director, education director, youth worker and so on. Most of them may be paid as full-time workers, although they are not elders or deacons. Besides, the government of the Christian churches have developed not only some position inside the local church but also the system of government. Today, one can see there are at least four forms of the government system of the church, which are papal, episcopalian, presbyterian, and congregational form.

Firstly, the papal government basically is similar to the episcopal form that is brought to its logical conclusion. The logical conclusion in

¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 915.

² “⁸In the same way, deacons^[b] are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ¹¹In the same way, the women^[c] are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. ¹²A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well.”

³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 919.

⁴ “So, the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’”

this respect is that the Roman Catholic system is the successor of Peter, who had the primacy among the apostles. The successor is believed as the special agent of Christ. The Pope, who is considered as infallible, is the head of the Roman Catholic Church who has the right to establish and standardise the doctrine, ritual, and government of the church. Besides, the Pope is the highest hierarchy above some positions such as Cardinal and Bishop in the church government of the Roman Catholic Church. In this type of the church government, people absolutely have no voice to decide anything.¹ The researcher could say that this model of government is not in accord in the Biblical teaching of the administration of the *ekklesia*, in which the authority is not under the leadership on one person but several people.

Secondly, the episcopal system puts Christ as the head of the church. Even though Christ is the head of the church, in the local church there is a hierarchy of leadership. An archbishop has domination over some bishops. A bishop supervises some local churches, while a local parish is overseen by a rector or sometimes by a vicar, who acts as a substitute of a rector. An archbishop, bishops and rectors are ordained to the episcopalian priesthood, so that all are called priests, although in practice the rector is most named the priest. However, the term priest in the episcopalian system should be seen as presbyters/elders in the New Testament, which is different from the understanding of priest in the Roman Catholic Church that understands the term priest concerning the priesthood in the era before Jesus Christ.² In the researcher's view, the episcopalian system also is different from the New Testament's view to which the Biblical understanding of the government has no hierarchy of leadership.

Thirdly, the presbyterian form is the form where the church members elect elders to a session or consistory. Then, a pastor is appointed as part of the elders and has the same authority as other elders in a local church. In a region, some local churches are united into one classis or presbytery, where all the elders of local church are also members of the classis and some classes are unified into one synod or general assembly as national or regional church. This type of government is use by many evangelical Christians nowadays.³ The authority to decide the doctrine, teaching and administration are on the synod level. The researcher thinks that this kind of church polity in which the elders manage the church, can be seen in the

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 643.

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 925.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 926.

practice of the ekklesia in the New Testament teaching; however, there is no evidence in the Scripture that the elders are part of the national or regional congregation.

Fourthly, the congregational polity of the church has five models of government which are single pastor/elder, plural local elders, corporate board, pure democracy, and “no government except Holy Spirit”. In the single elder model, the pastor is the only authority and helped by a board of deacons who appointed by the pastor. This kind of government is used in general among the Baptist Churches in the United State. Further, the pastor and the deacons usually are appointed by the congregation and the authority of the pastor is different from church to church.

The plural local elder government has several elders, and the pastor(s) of the church is one of the elders, but the pastor(s) has no authority over them. The pastor, especially senior pastor,¹ usually has a significant power to decide and support leadership in many responsibilities which is given by the board of elders. This type gives opportunity to a pastor to apply strong leadership, yet equal with the other elders in terms of governing authority. So, the pastor cannot be arbitrary towards the congregation because the authority he has is a collective authority with the other elders.² The researcher opines that this model of government is acceptable to manage the congregation; unfortunately, one cannot see this form in the Scriptures.

Nowadays, the other three models are not used commonly, so the researcher does not explain them for the reason that these types cannot be compared with the Biblical perspective.

Some Important Aspects of *Ekklesia*

In Mark 12. 29-31, Jesus (PBUH) says that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Referring to what Jesus (PBUH) says, one can see some aspects in life as a person that strongly related to *ekklesia*.

Fellowship

A saying, “I am nothing without others” is a simple expression but it has a deep meaning. Through that adage, one can be conscious that the existence of other people around him is important. One can say that he has love, properties, knowledge, and so on, but if there is no one around him, it seems that everything he has is useless, even himself is

¹ Senior pastor means the leader of some pastors in a local church.

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 933.

meaningless. Therefore, make a relationship with others is something that one needs to do in order that life is to be meaningful.

Fellowship perhaps is an appropriate word to express the longing of loving and sharing what one has with others. In the New Testament, the term fellowship is used primarily to denote the Greek word *koinonia* and its derivations and in the King James Version of the New Testament, this word is also utilised to express the Greek word *metochē*. The perfect picture of *koinonia* in the New Testament can be seen in Acts 4: 32, where the people who believe in Jesus (PBUH) through the work of Peter and John, live together in peace and harmony. They did not consider their properties as their own possession, but as sharing properties. This verse gives strong evidence that fellowship is one of the important elements in the development of the community of Jesus (PBUH). In the early Jesus's congregation, their life in the togetherness of love was an expression of an exciting love.¹

There are some suggestive aspects that should be thought by the followers of Jesus (PBUH). First, fellowship is an instrument to achieve God's plan through the *ekklesia* as explained in Ephesians 3. 8-11. Second, fellowship is described that the followers of Jesus (PBUH) are not only "being" together, but also "doing" together as stated in some passages in the New Testament, such as showing respect one another (Romans 12. 10), edifying one another (Romans 14. 19), caring one another (1 Cor. 12. 25), completing, comforting, living in peace one another (2 Cor. 13. 11), carrying each other's burden (Gal. 6. 2), bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4. 2), kind and compassionate to one another and forgiving each other (Ephesians 4. 32), encouraging one another (Hebrews 3. 13) and confessing sins to each other and pray for each other (James 5. 16). Third, the followers of Jesus (PBUH) need to be aware that fellowship is not limited by place and a number of people and also is not differentiated by the background of people (Matthew 18. 20). A good example is shown by Jesus (PBUH) himself when he made fellowship with his followers; he made it in the temple of God, in a house, in the open air, and even on the boat. Fourth, fellowship can be done not only in a formal meeting, but also in an informal gathering.

Thus, fellowship is one of important facets in the development of the community of Jesus (PBUH) and it can be applied anytime, anywhere, and by any of followers of Jesus (PBUH).

¹ Colin Brown (Ed.), *Dictionary of New Testament Theology Vol. 1*, 642.

The fellowship in the Christian churches nowadays seems to be different in many ways, for example, people gather together as the fellowship mostly on Sunday, in a church building, and only in a formal meeting. Besides, the spirit of encouraging one another, carrying each other's burden, and so on cannot be seen in many churches due to the fact that the members of a church are very high in number. So, the atmosphere of fellowship as described in the Scriptures is slightly different from the situation of most of the churches nowadays.

Discipleship

An interesting and, perhaps, the important commission of Jesus (PBUH) that given to his followers is the one that is mentioned in Matt. 28: 29, which so-called the great commission. It is interesting because this is only one delegation, but it has three elements. Besides, this is an inference of what has been conveyed in the previous passages in the book of Matthew. In other words, this is a consequence of what has been taught by Jesus (PBUH) to his followers.

The consequence is that the followers of Jesus (PBUH) must go and make all people groups to be or to become disciples of Jesus (PBUH), which means the people groups bind themselves to Jesus (PBUH) to get knowledge, both practical and theoretical. Further, getting knowledge comprehensively, practical and theoretical, must work together in balance; usually, one has different interest, some people tend to deepen only practical aspect, on the other hand, some people try to focus on the other side, theoretical, in this respect, reaching knowledge at the level of academic theology.

The concept of discipleship can raise a question, what is the purpose he ordered to make disciples of all ethnic groups, who obey everything he has commanded? The researcher believes that one of the purposes of discipleship is that people will repent. Matthew states that Jesus (PBUH) started his ministry through preaching, saying, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven has come near." The word repent is taken from the Greek *metanoia*, which means a change of mind. It seems that the meaning of repent in Matt. 4: 17 has a similar message that is stated in Isaiah 55:7,¹ Jeremiah 3: 12,² and Hosea 6: 1.³ The meaning of repent is not only

¹ "Let the wicked forsake their way and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

² "Go, proclaim this message toward the north: 'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD, 'I will frown on you no longer, for I am faithful,' declares the LORD, 'I will not be angry forever.'"

³ "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds."

changing of mind and feeling sorry about something, but it has a deeper understanding that someone must turn from a wrong way to the right way. In Islamic tradition, human beings were born sinless, but when they sinned, they must repent going back to the same nature as they were born. Therefore, as a Muslim, the researcher thinks that a better translation for *metanoia* in Matthew 4. 17 is revert, which means going back to the original states as human beings were born. It does not deal with religious conversion, as mentioned by many people.

Another purpose of discipleship is that people will love God and love one another. Jesus (PBUH) says in Mark 12. 29-31, “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” This statement summarises all the laws stated in the Scriptures, and this is what the followers must apply in their life; otherwise, they will miss the most important point of following Jesus (PBUH).

Forgiving others is another important aspect that followers must learn in discipleship. Loving is not perfect without forgiving, although it is not an easy action. Peter asked Jesus (PBUH), saying, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” (Matthew 18. 21-22) Loving others is not only addressed to those who do good to us, but also to those who hate us, as mentioned in Matthew 5: 44.¹

Service

Service is a matter that cannot be separated from the *ekklesia*, both service of God and service of the community. The service of God can be seen in two aspects, essential of relationship and ritual. The essential of relationship is uninterrupted relation between *ekklesia* and God. The awareness that God is always being with us is a concrete example of the essential relationship. Paul, in his writings, uses a term “the *ekklesia* of God”, which shows that the existence of *ekklesia* cannot be separated

¹ “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”

from God, vice versa. Besides, the *ekklesia* is called the temple of God in 1 Cor. 3: 16. So, the *ekklesia* should not keep away from God; otherwise, it serves the opponent of God that has different plan from God's will (Matthew 6: 24).

The ritual is a physical expression of the essential relationship and usually followed by ceremonial actions that indicate the worshipper has a relationship with the object he or she worships. However, it seems that many people are confused, and they consider ritual as essential. Besides, they think that ritual is the only correct way to relate to God. They assume that they cannot do bad deeds while they are performing the ritual ceremony, but it is fine to do wickedness after that. So, they miss the important point of a relationship, the essential one.

The researcher opines that the true expression of the essential relationship with God is to have a good relationship with people, to keep good behaviour and morality, and to consider that every aspect of our life is under God's supervision. Having a good relationship with people means to serve them, not to be served, like Jesus (PBUH) came to serve people (Mark 10. 45). Keeping good behaviour and morality means trying to be favourable for others, not to be harmful. Considering that every aspect of our life is under God's supervision means trying to keep holiness in performing daily life. Hence, one will not do sinfulness, both in front of God and people. Thus, one can do his/her best to apply the most important commandment mentioned in Mark 12. 29-31.

Metaphor of *ekklesia* in the New Testament

Family

The New Testaments describes the *ekklesia* through some metaphor such as family, the temple of God, the body of Christ and so on. The researcher thinks these metaphors are used to make followers of Jesus (PBUH) understand some aspects of *ekklesia*, what and who *ekklesia* is, and, where and how *ekklesia* can be established.

The family seems to be an important and biggest picture of *ekklesia*. It is important and big because all the important characters of human's life have a role in this metaphor. God, as our creator, is described as a father; this appellation is even given by Jesus (PBUH) when he teaches his followers how to pray (Matthew 6. 9). The *ekklesia* is figured out as sons and daughters of God (2 Cor. 6. 18). And Jesus (PBUH) is depicted as the firstborn child among many brothers and sisters (Romans 8. 29).

Body of Christ

One of the most well-known images of *ekklesia* is the body of Christ (Romans 7: 4, 1 Cor. 12: 27, Eph. 4: 12). Paul uses this term in his letters to explain various differences such as form, element and so on, but they work together in balance and need each other. The body is not perfect if one of the elements does not exist. Besides, all aspects of the body have their own function and role, and the body will have a problem if one of the elements does not work. As same as the body, all members of the *ekklesia*, universally and locally, have different function and role; they should work together in balance with their respective function and role in God's plan. So, all parts of the *ekklesia*, the body of Christ, may be built up reaching unity in the faith and the knowledge of Jesus (PBUH) and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4: 12-13).

The Temple of God

The temple of God is another important metaphor applied to *ekklesia*, as mentioned in 1 Cor. 3: 16, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" This statement implies that three important elements in the life of the *ekklesia* work together in it. God himself is the builder; Jesus (PBUH) as the saviour king or *al-Masih*, is the cornerstone (Matthew 21: 42); and the Spirit of God, as the giver of guidance, dwells in it. So, through this metaphor, one can see that God and His agents actively involve in the development of the *ekklesia*, which means that the *ekklesia* is valuable in the sight of God.

Conclusion

The *ekklesia* is the community of people who believe and confess that Jesus (PBUH) is the Messiah. This community can be established anywhere, anytime, and without having a formal institution. On the other hand, the Christian church is a community that needs a formal organization and place or building to form it. There are some differences between the *ekklesia* and the Christian Church nowadays, especially in terms of the government. The *ekklesia*, according to the Bible, governed by some elders and deacons to develop the faith of its member and to feed the members who in need. The elders and deacons in the *ekklesia* have no hierarchical position in the government. Conversely, the Christian Church has several systems of government, which is not mentioned the Scriptures. One of the forms of government even claim that the Church is the representative of Jesus

(PBUH) and governed by a leader who has full authority in many responsibilities, and he is infallible.

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