

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE REHABILITATION OF THE *LEV*

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I. Introduction: Church and the rehabilitation of the lev

Much may be said about ways the Church guides people both before and after their salvific experience. However, the influence of the Church in the lives of Christians is stronger than guiding. It is “foundational.”¹ The Church works together with the Holy Spirit in a rehabilitative role in the lives of believers, which includes their “*lev*,” the whole person. When Kenneth Grider wrote about the Church, he depicted it as “Created by grace and headed by Christ.” His portrait of the Church as “Spirit-led,” worshiping “God in Word and sacrament,” engaging “itself with the Great Commission,” and “uniquely significant” provides a fitting setting for this paper.² Herein is a practical response to the conference question: “Who will be our guide?” with:

“The Church.”

II. Ecclesiology defined: New Testament images of the Church

The Christian doctrine of ecclesiology is the study of the Church as a community of faith, and its role in salvation.³ William Greathouse and Ray Dunning pointed out two images New Testament writers employed to speak of the corporate reality of the Church, observing: “In the first place, the New Testament makes it clear that the Christian Church is now the true people of God, the new Israel.” Later, they clarified: “In the second place, the New Testament teaches that the Christian Church is the Body of Christ, the continuation of His presence and saving activity on earth.”⁴ They continued by speaking of “the entailment of Paul’s metaphor of the Church as the Body.” After “careful analysis” of the instances in the Book of Acts where a giving of the Spirit is recorded, there is evidence that “in each case there is a close correlation between the

¹ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Vol. 1 on Matthew 16:18 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1981).

² J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*. (Beacon Hill Press. Kindle Edition, 2011), Kindle Locations 8248-8249.

³ Daryll Gordon Stanton, *Introduction to Christian Beliefs*, IODL Study Manual (Nairobi, Kenya: Africa Nazarene University, 2010 as updated 2013), 5.

⁴ William M. Greathouse and H. Ray Dunning, *An Introduction to Wesleyan Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, Kindle Edition, 2011), Kindle Locations 1590-1612.

reception of the Spirit and becoming visibly associated with the other local members of the Church.” There are no recorded instances where any individual “as individual” received the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁵

Jesus used the word “*ecclesia*” (church) twice in the Gospels. First, in Matthew 16:18, Jesus says, “...I will build my church (*ecclesia*), and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”⁶ Christ will build His Church, but He includes the Church itself in this construction (18:17) when offering instruction on how to handle situations such as one member offending another. The Church is revealed to be the significant “mediator.” This role is also applied to various members of the Church.⁷

III. Church and the renewal of the heart

What is the mission of the Church? This question frames the discussion in practical terms. Those of Wesleyan persuasion will acknowledge the practical significance of Gregory Clapper’s

The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church. Clapper leads the reader to ask: “Who is a Christian?”⁸ Understanding John Wesley’s three essential doctrines of repentance, faith, and holiness is crucial to answering this question.⁹ Today, as in Wesley’s day, these three doctrines are foundational for the formation of disciples.¹⁰ Believers must understand these doctrines before the Church can guide them to a “thorough change and renovation of mind and heart,” leading to “a new and holy life”.¹¹ Clapper viewed the heart as the “arena of the individual person where Christian truth is either exhibited or found wanting.”¹² While acknowledging that in all things Christians are impacted by God’s prevenient grace, Clapper

⁵ Ibid., Kindle locations 1658-1660.

⁶ All biblical references are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

⁷ Wesley D. Tracy et al, *The Upward Call* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 186-188.

⁸ Gregory S. Clapper. *The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 3.

⁹ See John Wesley, *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1978). Also available online:

<http://books.google.co.ke/books?id=XYJPAAAYAAJ&PG=PA305&dq=John+Wesley>.

¹⁰ Clapper, 6-7.

¹¹ Clapper, 16.

¹² Clapper, 18.

argued that, due to free will, “the final shape or form of our heart” is determined in large part by one’s own “evaluations, judgments and decisions about how we choose to cooperate with God’s grace.” Thus, the Church must also assist believers in the growth and development of their hearts.¹³

Such is consistent with Paul’s admonition to the Philippian Church to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (2:12-13). This is where the term “rehabilitation” is applicable since one definition of “rehabilitation” is to “restore (someone) to health or normal life by training and therapy.”¹⁴ The role of the Church in the rehabilitation of its members needs to be attended to. The book of Acts portrays the Church as very much involved in its development as it is empowered and led by the Holy Spirit. As Orton Wiley wrote: “The work of the Holy Spirit necessarily demands an objective economy.” Wiley referred to this new economy as “the Church, or the mystical body of Christ.” This Church “represents a new order of spiritual life on earth.” The Church “was created by the advent of Christ.” It is now “preserved by the perpetual indwelling of the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, the Church is regarded as “the sphere of the Spirit’s operations”, and it is “the organ of Christ’s administration of redemption.”¹⁵ For example, Peter’s ministry contributed significantly to development of the Church, as evidenced in the conversion of many in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (2:14-41) and even to the Gentiles (10:1-11:26). In Jerusalem, Peter stood up with other members of the Church, addressed a crowd of non-members, quoted and interpreted prophecy (2:14-36). When the non-members ask: “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter responded (38-40) with warning and pleading. Those who accepted were baptized with “about three thousand ... added to their number that day” (41).

Not only did the Church expand its membership among Jews, it also reached “Gentiles” through Peter and some of the “brothers from Joppa” (10:23-29). It is in this setting that a rehabilitating role of the Church is revealed. Peter and his companions travelled to Caesarea and met with Cornelius, together with his relatives and close friends. While Peter was speaking, “the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message” (44). Then, even though “the circumcised

¹³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴ “Rehabilitation” in *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (Oxford University, Press Kindle Edition, 2010), Kindle Location 694568.

¹⁵ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, Volume 3, Kindle edition (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press), Kindle Locations 1922-1924.

believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles”, Peter “ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (45-48). However, back in Jerusalem, “the circumcised believers criticized him” (11:2). So, Peter related the account of his own reorientation, concluding: “So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” (17). God had used the circumstances to re-educate Peter. Then, God used Peter’s defence to bring about further rehabilitation in the Church in Jerusalem as evidenced in 11:18: “When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God...” Their changed mind-set is expressed in their words: “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.” Thereafter, the Church expanded both “to” and “in” distant places, such as Antioch where “the disciples were called Christians first...” (26)

IV. The necessity of the Church

When Kenneth Grider wrote about the church, he portrayed it as a “necessity” but “not a rational necessity.” Instead, “It is a practical necessity.” While being “born again is intensely private, it is never a purely private matter...many other persons are affected by it.” He further observed that when one is born again, one “enters into the community of believers known as the Church.” One becomes a member of the Body of Christ. Furthermore, if a born-again person is to continue in his/ her new relationship with Christ, it is practically necessary to enter into and “be part of a local church fellowship.” As Grider affirmed, it is “in that ‘incendiary fellowship’ called the church,” that new believers “receive nourishment, instruction, hallowing worship experiences, and satisfying evangelism experiences.”¹⁶

Thus, via nourishing, instructing, worshipping and evangelizing the Church joins with God in enabling the members to continue. John Knight described this in terms of a “continuum” of a pilgrim’s journey with two distinct moments of renewal. He remarked: “To be converted to Christ is to be set on the road to moral and spiritual perfection, to a life of holiness.” He sees holiness as beginning in “regeneration” but only completed in “glorification at the last day”. The “two distinctive and identifiable moments” are known respectively as “conversion and entire sanctification”. He identified conversion as “God’s solution to man’s death,” explaining that “it

¹⁶ Grider, *Kindle Locations* 8264-8270.

brings life and new birth.” Knight continued: “Conversion is God’s solution to man’s alienation and estrangement, and it brings reconciliation and adoption into the family of God.” Whereas, “entire sanctification is God’s answer to man’s fundamental pollution of sin, sin in embryo, the being of sin, the spirit of self-sovereignty, the fountain and condition of sin.” Knight recognized that “it brings cleansing as well as the coherence and integrity of the self.”¹⁷

V. *The meaning and rehabilitation of the lev*

In this context of journey, this paper considers the role the Church has in the rehabilitation of the *lev*. Accordingly, it is important to look at and apply this biblical term. The Hebrew word *lev*, together with its various forms, especially *leb* and *lebab*, has several usages in the Bible.¹⁸ Barton Payne observed that this “term that may stand for the whole person”, and he offered several helpful insights into its use in his discussion of “Man’s Constituent Elements.”

It has a number of possible meanings. Subsequently, it is important to keep in mind the biblical “context” which is guiding interpretation. Thus, the *lev* may be seen as a “motivating spirit,” the “seat” of a person’s “moral qualities,” one’s “conscience,” the head or the brain as these relate to the “intellectual function of knowing,” and the “focus of life.”¹⁹

First, what rehabilitating role of the Church may be addressed when the *lev* signifies a person's “motivating spirit”? One example is in Proverbs 4:23, where *leb* is translated “heart” in the NIV. This is seen in the context of “the wellspring of life.” This is also the use of *kardia* (heart) in Matthew 15:18-19 where Jesus teaches about things which come out (*ekporeuomai*) of the mouth, come from (*exerchomai*) the heart. For this reason, an application of *lev* needs to be related to the “source of the issues of life.” When writers, as Clapper, use the terminology of teaching for the “renewal” of the heart, rehabilitation is implied. For, they suggest that Christian counselors, teachers, and practical theologians can nurture and help shape the worldviews that appropriately frame the temperament and practice of believers’ lives. Clapper believed an ongoing twofold task of clarification is necessary. To begin with, he asserted rather than perceiving religious “affections” or “tempers” as simply “episodic, intense feelings,” these must

¹⁷ John A. Knight, *All Loves Excelling* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1995), 19.

¹⁸ “Leb” in *Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary* (03820 on Power BibleCD, 2011).

¹⁹ J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 223-226.

be perceived as dispositions for all of life as “master passions” that shape all behavior, whether or not they are consciously felt. However, he also noted that one must not emphasize a practice that leads to a “deadening moralism” and ignores the heart’s yearning for holiness. Christians must “act from the love of God” rather than from the “love of praise.”²⁰

Secondly, what rehabilitating role of the Church may be addressed when the *lev* may be interpreted as the “seat of a person's moral qualities”? An observation may be found in Psalm 51:10-13, where the NIV speaks of David’s need of a pure “heart” (*leb*). This is in the context of a renewed “steadfast” spirit within and a “willing” spirit to sustain him. Then, he will “teach transgressors” God’s ways. Maddix and Thompson have explored ways the Bible “forms and transforms Christians into faithful disciples within the context of the church.”²¹ They observed that although there is a wide range of methods and approaches, “studying the Bible in groups is “a central aspect” of discipleship. However, “faithful readers” must “come to the text open to hear, to receive, and to respond, and to serve.” Then, when they gather “to struggle over the meaning and contemporary understanding of Scripture, the Holy Spirit is active in the community to form and shape faithful disciples.”²²

Thirdly, what rehabilitating role of the Church may be addressed when the *lev* signifies “conscience”? An instance is found in Job 27:6, where the NIV translates Job's *lebab* as his non-reproached “conscience” in the context of Job’s affirmation: “I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it.” However, *lev* may also be seen from the perspective of negative moral quality as in Jeremiah 17:9, where the NIV translates *leb aqob* as a “deceitful heart” in conjunction with “wicked” (*anash*) beyond cure and “understanding” (*yada*). According to Genesis 8:21, a person’s heart (*leb*) is evil (*ra*) from the time of youth. The New Testament portrays the heart as the seat of the conscience in Romans 2:15. In regard to the Gentiles, Paul observed: “...the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences (*suneidesis*) also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them” (2:14-15). So, Paul wrote to the Roman believers: “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cleave to what is good” (12:9). Later, at the close of his explanation of what love in action

²⁰ Clapper, 91-93.

²¹ Mark A. Maddix and Richard P. Thompson, “Scripture as Formation: The Role of Scripture in Christian Formation,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 46, no.12 (Fall 2012):135.

²² Maddix and Thompson, 141-145.

is, Paul insisted to them: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (12:21). Thereafter he added: "I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil" (16:19). Paul reminded the Church in Ephesus that it is God's desire for His people to be holy and blameless (5:27). To the Church in Thessalonica he wrote: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). For Christians who are "attached" to Christ and "detached" from the secular, there is victorious living. While circumstances may be difficult, these do not overwhelm their spirit. However, as Knight observed: "Though the entirely sanctified person enjoys a *personal* relationship with Christ, it is not an *individualized* relationship."²³ Holy people know that by grace they are members of the Body of Christ. They are part of the fellowship of the saints. Thus, as Knight observed, their "Holiness is sustained by Christ's life, the life of the Church, the community of believers." And likewise, "The Church is holy ... in the sense that there are Christians within the Church who are morally holy or pure in heart."²⁴

Fourthly, what rehabilitating role of the Church may be addressed when the *lev* expresses what is popularly called the "head" in the English language? If an internal organ is to be applied, it could refer to the "brain." Thus, the term concerns the "intellectual function of knowing" as in Deuteronomy 8:5, where the NIV interprets *lebab* in the context of *yada* (knowing). This is also the context of Paul's prayer for the saints in Ephesus in 3:16-19. They required power through God's Spirit in their "inner being." They needed power "together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." It was his desire for them "to know this love that surpasses knowledge."

Nazarene education is recognized for its focus on Christian character formation. The foundation of this is seen in the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene. It affirms that "education in the Church of the Nazarene, rooted in the biblical and theological commitments of the Wesleyan and Holiness Movements and accountable to the stated mission of the denomination, aims to guide those who look to it in accepting, in nurturing, and in expressing, in service to the church and world, consistent and coherent Christian understanding of the social and individual life."²⁵ For example, in 2005, the Africa Regional Advisory Council of the Church of the

²³ Knight, 142-143.

²⁴ Knight, 143.

²⁵ *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene 2009-2013*, 176.

Nazarene adopted five strategic initiatives. Two of them involve church expansion: compassion evangelism and entering one new country of Sub-Saharan Africa each year. Whereas, the other three relate directly to education: disciple-making for children, youth, and adults; pastoral education, training of clergy and laity; as well as leadership development of clergy and laity. The region's educational philosophy published in 2013 reflects this.²⁶ In this context, the Association of Nazarene Education Systems in Africa (ANESA) strives to meet the educational needs of the Church of the Nazarene in Africa (fields, districts, local churches and individuals). All are called to ministry, whether lay or clergy. The emphasis is on the development and empowerment of leaders who can assume positions of leadership and service throughout Africa and the world.²⁷

Finally, what rehabilitating role of the Church may be addressed when the *lev* is a symbol for the “focus of life”? Deuteronomy 6:5 is one of the places where God declares that His people must love Him with all their *lev*. Here, the NIV interprets *lebab* as “heart” in the setting of one loving *Yahweh*, “your” *Elohiym*, together with all one's soul (*nephesh*) and one's might (*ma'od*). This idea of *lev* carried over into the New Testament, as in Mark 12:30, where the command is for one to love (*agapao*) the Lord (*kuiros*), “your” God (*theos*), with all one's heart (*kardia*) together with all one's soul (*psuche*), all one's mind (*dianoia*) and all one's strength (*ischus*). As *Easton's Bible Dictionary* points out, the heart is not only the centre of spiritual activity, but of all the operations of human life. It is the “home of the personal life,” therefore a person is designated, according to his/ her heart, to be “wise” as in 1Kings 3:12; to be “pure” as in Psalm 24:4 and Matthew 5:8; to be “upright” and “righteous” as in Genesis 20:5-6 and Psalm 11:2; and to be “pious” and “good” as in Luke 8:15.²⁸

In the Wesleyan tradition, it is good to ingrain in members John Wesley's appraisal that “The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness.” For as Wesley concluded: “Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of

²⁶ Joseph Kisoi and Daryll Stanton, “A Philosophy of Education for the Church of the Nazarene in the Africa Region,” *Didache* 12, No. 2 (Winter 2013): 51, http://didache.nazarene.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=881&Itemid=51.

²⁷ *ANESA Comprehensive Strategic Plan: Looking To the Future: 2011-2015*, 6.

²⁸ “Heart” in *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (on Power Bible CD, 2011).

Christian perfection.”²⁹ The Christian life is not simply a collection of deeds to do, but it also entails “a distinctive manner of doing them.” For those involved in formal Christian education in classrooms, teaching for this rehabilitation might better begin with a series of questions applicable to students’ lives. Gregory Clapper offered several good examples.³⁰ Such teaching may also require “devoting significant parts of one’s theology classes to helping students see the renewed hearts in some of the saints who have gone before us,” and helping them see the reality that is forming the experience of the ones selected to imitate. Thereafter, one may try to help students “understand the logic or grammar of this gospel that renews hearts.”³¹ Clapper recommended preaching Wesley’s “house of religion” by “offering them Christ.”³² Counseling and pastoral care must seek to shape the hearts of those served. Clapper concluded his work by promoting a Wesleyan evangelism. This is not a one-time act, but requires the Church to involve its members in “a life-long process of being continually conformed to the image of God.”

Bill Hull wrote about a “churchocentric” model in his book: *The Disciple Making Church*. He noted five things required to form an effective discipling group. Included are:

1. In leadership: moving from Christ leading the apostles to elders leading a congregation.
2. In guidance: moving from Christ’s personal presence to the Holy Spirit’s and the ministry of the Word, prayer and others.
3. In training: moving from Christ preparing leaders alone to a leadership community engaged in multilevel training.
4. In outreach: moving from individual evangelism to evangelistic teamwork.
5. In pastoral care: moving from Christ meeting all needs alone to Christ meeting needs through gifts of the Body.³³

VI. Conclusion

²⁹ Wesley, Vol. 14, 305,
<http://books.google.co.ke/books?id=XYJPAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA305&dq=John+Wesley>
 [accessed May 25, 2013].

³⁰ Clapper, 95-100.

³¹ Clapper, 102-103.

³² *Ibid.*, 116-120.

³³ Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Church* (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1990), 33-49.

Practically speaking, the Church should help its members embark on “a life-long project of renewing the heart.”³⁴ Obviously, all of those who are leading others in this evangelism must “cooperate with God” in the process with sanctified lives.³⁵ It is from this perspective of mutual growing in grace that this paper has considered the role the Church has in the rehabilitation of the *lev*. First, in the context of the *lev* as a “motivating spirit”, Christian counselors, teachers, and practical theologians can nurture and help shape the worldviews that appropriately frame the temperament and practice of fellow believers’ lives. Secondly, from the standpoint of the *lev* as the “seat” of a person’s “moral qualities,” the Body of Christ can explore ways for the Bible to form and transform its members into faithful disciples; such as in Bible study groups where faithful readers come together to struggle over the meaning to the text with an openness to hear from the Holy Spirit, to receive contemporary understanding of Scripture, to respond to it, and to serve. Third, in the instance of the *lev* being one’s “conscience,” accountability partners in the Church can remind each other to remain “wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil” because it is God’s desire for His people to be holy and blameless; for Christians who are “attached” to Christ and “detached” from the secular there is victorious living. Fourth, in the framework of the *lev* as the head or the brain as these relate to the “intellectual function of knowing,” Nazarene education must be rooted in its biblical and Wesleyan-Holiness theological commitments and accountable to its stated mission: aiming to guide those who look to it in accepting, in nurturing, and in expressing, in service to the church and world, consistent and coherent Christian understanding of the social and individual life. Finally, in the environment of the *lev* as the “focus of life,” members of the community of believers must not only come together in their centers of spiritual activity, but move out from there to reveal holiness in all the operations of their lives. May the whole Church go out with Peter’s admonition: “...on (our) guard so that (we) may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from (our) secure position. But (growing) in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:17-18).

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ANESA Comprehensive Strategic Plan: Looking To the Future: 2011-2015, 6.

³⁴ Clapper, 125.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 130-131.

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