Original Article

Eldership in Traditional Africa as a Core Definer of Ubuntu Ecclesiology in Configuration to Pauls' Conception of Eldership Institution.

Dr. Peter Lee Ochieng Oduor, PhD[1]*

[1] Africa International University, Nairobi, Kenya & Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology.
[*] Author for Correspondence Email: pastoroduorlee@gmail.com.

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ABSTRACT

The growth of Christianity in Africa comes with a strong demand on biblical African ecclesiology that is keen on strong and trusted leadership. There have been multiple of accusations labelled against the African church that centre around her quality of leadership. In the formulation of an Ubuntu ecclesiology, we are keen to have an ecclesiology that is most friendly to the African conceptual framework and one that can indeed be of use in the articulation of theology in Africa. This is in the spirit and letter of contextualization that is bent on an incarnational theology. This is only achievable through an understanding of the eldership framework from an African mindset and the biblical concept of eldership as is captured in the Old and New Testament. The benefits that African Ubuntu ecclesiology can obtain with regard to quality leadership from the concept of eldership in traditional Africa is well articulated to combat the leadership ineptitude that has characterized African ecclesia. Lastly the study at the conclusion has presented a theological reflection on eldership as a core definer of accuracy of leadership within Ubuntu ecclesiology by the observation of church leaders as representatives of the church in the model and pattern of Christ who is the character par excellence in the institution of eldership.

INTRODUCTION

The global shift of the Christian presence from the North to the South has placed Africa, Asia and Latin America on the limelight of the World Christianity because of the fact that the numerical strength of Christianity is on the increase in the South as is expressed by Jenkins (2006, p. 2). Over the last century, the centre of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably away from Europe, southwards to Africa and Latin America and eastwards to Asia with the largest Christian communities coming from these regions as is emphasized by Jenkins (2011, p. 2) in his more recent work. In the same breath Jenkins (2011), while quoting Mbiti captures the phenomenon in the emphases that the centres of the church's universality are no longer in Geneva, Rome, Athens, Paris London, New York but Kinshasa, Buenos Aires, Addis Ababa and Manila. This shift must not only be envisioned along the numerical parameters but must be a significant demand for a shift of theology that was Eurocentric towards a theology that is contextual and appreciated by the philosophical worldview of the indigenous audiences. Jenkins (2006, p.2), acknowledges that Southern traditions of Bible reading must be seen as the Christian norm where we will no longer treat the culture-specific interpretations of North Americans and Europeans as 'theology'- that is, as the real thing- while the rest of the world produces its curious provincial variants of 'African theology', 'Asian Theology' and so on.

The task of contextualization of the Christian message is becoming more essential because without it, people will not connect to Christ in a way that moves their hearts, faith will be foreign, people lose what they have grown up cherishing, churches will never feel rooted in their own culture, and people will not see the true winsomeness of the gospel as is expressed by Moreau (2012, p. 8-19). There is not only a sense of emergency but also the understanding that it is imperative for significant impact of the Christian message on the natives. Kato's analysis on '*The Gospel, Cultural Context, and Religious Syncretism*' in the work on Douglas (1975, p. 1217), states that the practice is accurate because the gospel message is inspired but the modes of expressions are not, contextualization of the modes of expression is not only right but necessary. The contextualization ideology sprang in the 1970s with its original implication being relativism in every aspect of the church including potential theology and even morality but the Conservative evangelical adopted the term but reshaped it to mean communication of an unchanging biblical message in changing cultural expressions as is affirmed by (Aniol, 2015, p. 56).

As concerns the African tradition and cultural worldview the dominant expression that was identical to Africans was the notion of Ubuntu. Ubuntu was a comprehensive ancient African worldview based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values ensuring a happy and qualitative human community life in a spirit of family as expressed by Broodryk (2002, p. 13-14). Ubuntu is the name for the acquired quality of humanity that is the characteristic of a fully developed person and the community with others that results and thus comprises values, attitudes, feelings, relationships and activities, the full range of expressions of the human spirit as in the comments of Shutte (2002, p. 31). It is apparent that Ubuntu brings Christianity and African culture closer and serves as a powerful motif that can contribute enormously in transforming Christianity

and vice versa according to Resane (2017, p. 112). This is greatly significant by virtue of the significant role Africa plays in present day Christendom and that the African culture with specificity to the concept of Ubuntu that is a demonstration that the African conceptual framework can indeed be of use in the articulation of theology in Africa.

The Ubuntu concept covers a vast paradigm of the African perspective of life and is holistic in scope but our concern will centre on the conception of Ubuntu about leadership in traditional Africa. This is because the increase and expansion of Christianity in the continent should be marched with stable leadership to sustain and strengthen the quality of Christians in the territory of the continent of Africa. The problem that has faced the African ecclesia over the years of her existence has been leadership anaemia that has birthed myriad of problems that the church is facing today. This brings to our attention the sacred institution of eldership that was highly respected and revered by the African communities. The significance of the institution of an elder was no mean feat in the African traditional society. This is adversely captured not only in the elevated status of occupants of the institution by community members but also the significance of the activities that the community expected occupants of the revered institution to undertake. Eldership had more important criteria other than age as it involved achievement in life and contribution to society or community as well as devotion to the extended family as is captured by Attah-Poku (2012, p. 85). *Eldership* is considered the most honoured position one can achieve in traditional society and is a significant rite of passage whose candidates assume a position called elder hood, called among the *Chagga* (mosongoru) and *Amara* (shimagle - male elder, *baltet* - female elder) according to Gutema and Smith (2005, p. 139). In agreement with Attah-Poku, Gutema and Smith (2005) also affirms that the concept goes beyond the characteristic of age though it was important and entails the attainment of a life of honor, respect and responsible behavior over time.

Therefore, by virtue of the high esteem that traditional Africa placed on this office the honors were high on the criterion to verify the candidates that were to be considered to be enjoined in the council of elders in the community. The constituents of the eldership in any society were considered as leaders within the framework of the given society. Tokunboh (2006, p. 546), affirms that many traditional African ideas about leadership are embedded in the Kikuyu legend about the despotic king Gikuyu who was overthrown because of his tyrannical rule and replaced by a council of elders, chosen from the older men of the community who had previously been warriors. Attah-Poku (2012, p. 85) has accurately captured this by drawing a distinction between eldership and royalty; eldership as opposed to royalty that is inherited is earned with wisdom, maturity, responsibility, selflessness, courtesy, knowledge of one's history and culture, respect and integrity as important ingredients or requirements of eldership status in Africa.

In similar fashion the scriptures all the way from the Old Testament through the New Testament has an elaborate sense of veneration that was attached to the institution. This sense of admiration continued to accompany the high office of the church with only people of calibre and good testimony assuming this office. Apostle Paul in his writings and interactions with churches in the first century as a measure to establish stable, structured and well governed churches emphasizes the centrality of the eldership institution. It is in this regard that this study observes a strong corelation between the two perspectives: African tradition and Christian perspectives towards the institution of elders. It is from this understanding that we wish to explore the impact of the already present understanding of the institution of eldership for African Christian and by extension her ecclessia to influence the tragectory of the Ubuntu ecclesiology towards a model of church leadership that is well structured to facilitate the advancement of the African church towards the strides similar to the first century church. It is imperative for our study to assert at this stage that our intention is not to approve or disapprove any form of church government but to emphasize on the quality of leaders that the African Church is in dire need of to reclaim her dwindling place as a prophetic agency in the society.

To achieve this end, the study will take the path of having a discussion of the understanding that traditional Africans had with regard to eldership and the impact it had on the leadership establishment of the society and community at large. Subsequently our study will take the direction of enhancing our understanding of the Biblical perspective on leadership by an interaction with the subject matter in both testaments of the scriptures. We shall seek to explore the benefits that the concept of eldership extends to the Ubuntu ecclesiology and lastly develop some theological reflections of Eldership in the formulation of accuracy on leadership in Ubuntu ecclesiology.

AFRICAN CONCEPTIONS OF THE INSTITUTION OF ELDERSHIP

It was a matter of profound clarity that the institution of eldership was no mean feat across the different African people groups. The office was considered an honourable and therefore the occupants were to be distinguished people in the society. Mbiti (1970, p. 229), concurs with this in his sentiments that the elders were given a place of great respect and honour in traditional African societies and a large spectrum of responsibilities that involved leadership and religious functions because even where the priests were available the elders were expected to participate in some or all of the ceremonies in addition to conducting domestic and minor rituals. The *AGikuyu* in Kenya is a good illustration of a people whose cultic life had a strong dependency on the services and wisdom of their elders because it was the obligation of the elders both men and women (who had passed their menopause), to superintend the task of making sacrifices, offerings and prayers for and on behalf of their community as is stated by Kenyatta (1938, p. 240-267). All this was for the elders to act in representation of the entire community.

The significance of the elders was also envisioned during the community's important ceremonies where the family headship was brought to book with regard to participation. The role of elders was to offer prayers for rain and sacrifices during planting season, purify crops, as well as officiating traditional rites such as making libations and other means of contact with the living dead because the

Agikuyu had no formal priesthood and it was their elders who wore these shoes according to Kenyatta (1938, p. 240-267). Cerulli (2019, p. 115) in the same breath states the same concerning the Nandi elders who prayed frequently to God, both in private and public needs, a thought that was taken further by the Sangama who believed that it was only through the king's councillors, who undoubtedly are elders, could their prayers reach God. We can underscore that eldership was more than mere aging because being an elder is fundamentally different from just being old with the purpose and practice of eldership found in the spiritual meaning of eldership according to Asante & Mazama (2008).

Beyond the religious aspect that was a core responsibility of the eldership; their sphere of duties was wider in scope. This can be attested to in the scope of understanding that the connotation of the term 'elder' bore in diverse African cultural settings. The term "*Mzee*" in the Swahili culture refers to an elderly person and has a bearing of three substantive connotations: first it captures any parent being an elder to his or her children thus deserving respect that is mandatory; second is anyone above fifty years of age was considered an elder because of the belief that he had a treasury of wisdom and a gift of love; lastly was the higher status in the community especially the managerial roles and material wealth that made one an elder even if he or she was young according to Keenan and McGreevy (2019, p. 54). Among the Yoruba for instance as stated by Keenan and McGreevy (2019), there was a wise saying: If you stay away from the elders because of bad breath, you will not learn wisdom. These words were a reflection that elders in the African society were rightly considered as wise, experienced, dignified, powerful symbols and upholders of values that ensured the society's integrity and peaceful coexistence. In a nutshell, elders were not only the face of the society but also the glue that brought the entire community together.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF ELDERSHIP

The concept of elders is one that has a history even as far back to the biblical tradition. To have an accurate understanding of the treatment that the Scriptures accorded to the concept of eldership, we

will highlight on some of the basic functionalities as was witnessed of Israelite elders to the Israelite community as is documented in the Old Testament and view it as a background to some general thoughts about the office of elders as is attested to in the New Testament church. Our interest is that in the process of our interactions we can be in a position to identify some areas of implications and principles that we can emulate in regard to the institution for the benefit of African ecclesiology employing the technology applied by Paul in his steadfast advocacy of the significance of the appointment of elders in the first century church as is envisioned in his pastoral epistles. The facilitation of this task will demand of us a studious reflection of the notion as it was perceived and interpreted in the Old Testament. Subsequently, we shall be called upon to move into the New Testament and interact with the conversations of Paul to the churches in light of the profound aspect of the significance of the institution.

Concept of Eldership in the Old Testament

Ancient Israel in their leadership organization as is tabulated in the Old Testament has a strong reference of the institution of elders. From the Holman Bible Dictionary, the term elders in the Jewish language translated from the Hebrew word *zaqen* that has its root meaning to "beard" or "chin". At earlier stages in the life of the Israelites the institution served the purpose of providing the community with much needed leadership especially for the various clans and the tribes as well. At the formation of the nation of Israel by the bringing together of the twelve tribes of Israel the significance of the office of the elders with functionalities of governance of the newly established nation called Israel drastically increased. Scriptural references of the institution date as far back as the book of Exodus 3:16, 18 as God instructs Moses to notify the 'elders of Israel' concerning God's purpose with regard to the redemption of Israel from the Egyptian captivity and the elders' involvement in the task of confrontation with Pharaoh. Ndjerare in Tokunboh (2006, p. 91) comments on the text that God assures Moses that he will not have to appear before Pharaoh on his own as he was to be accompanied by the elders that were a representation of the leadership of Israel.

The next mention gives us the implication of their number being seventy and played an active role with Moses at Mount Sinai in the covenant meal in Exodus 24: 9-11. Childs (2004, p. 507) observes that these verses in their present position in the biblical narrative function as a Eucharistic festival in which selected witnesses celebrate the covenant sealing of the earlier verses 3-8. The involvement of the elders in this meal in the meeting on the mountain clearly demonstrates that they acted for and on behalf of the entire Israelite constituents. Later on as there is growth and increase of community, the need of proper administration was of great significance as this noble responsibility is transferred from Moses to a council of seventy elders and they were a representation of the nation in Numbers 11:16-17. Boniface-Malle in Tokunboh (2006, p. 183-184), comments that the first thing that God did in response to Moses' complaint was to acknowledge that Moses needed human helpers and instructed him to select seventy elders from the twelve tribes to share the burden of leading the people. This solution underscores the importance of dividing work and involving others in leadership. A couple of clear-cut functions ascribed to the institution of the Elders are captured in the book of Deuteronomy. One of their responsibilities was to oversee the judicial jurisdiction of the nation by actually sitting as judges in the city gate in Deuteronomy 22:15. They had the mandate as well to grant determination to cases that affected the family life of the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy 21:18-21; 22:13-21.

Lastly, they were to execute decisions for and on behalf of the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy 19: 11-13; 21:1-9. More importantly than the establishment of the presence of elders is the criterion put in place to choose the candidates for eldership in Israel. One of the key qualifications for the assumption of the office was maturity as they doubled to be the heads of their families (Exodus 12:21). Another significant qualification was attached to their character because far beyond their maturity status they had to be men of ability and the highest moral character attested to by their stature of being God-fearing, truthful, and full of

integrity (Exodus 18:20-21). In addition to the stated attribute was the necessity of divine unction for extraordinary empowerment to undertake their tasks (Numbers 11:16-17). The candidates were also to be able in the direction of their intellectual capacity thus they had to be full of wisdom, discernment and experience. It was this capacity that enhanced their state of impartiality in addressing issues and bold enough to undertake judgment by discretion, training and intercession (Deuteronomy 1:13-17).

Holman Bible Dictionary attests to the rise in prominence of the institution of the elders during the post-Canaan era even towards the monarchical dispensation of the nation of Israel especially in the political and judicial life of Israel. It is the eldership that was on the forefront in the demand for Prophet Samuel to appoint the nation a human king in 1st Samuel 8:4-5. The elders played an active role in the assumption of David and his retaining the throne as documented in 2nd Samuel 3:17; 5:3; 17:15; 19:11-12. During the historic event of the Temple consecration by King Solomon, the elders represented the people in 1st Kings 8:1-3. Their prominence goes to the decline in the era of the post exilic as they were not functional out of the Palestine region. This body of elders traditionally referred to as the council of elders became the Sanhedrin sometime after the Babylonian exile and became a critical body in Jerusalem that coupled to be significant in the development of New Testament.

Concept of Eldership in the New Testament

As we transition to the New Testament, we can draw a strong sense of similarities between the Old Testament elders and the concept of eldership in New Testament especially that of the churches in Jerusalem that were predominantly Jewish and emulated synagogue models. With little information on the functional responsible in the early stages of the Jerusalem church, we have certainty that they served as the highest decision-making organ of the newly established Christian community in the Jerusalem council of Acts 15. There was a strong similarity to the qualifications of the occupants to the institution in both dispensations. It is worthwhile for the furtherance of our understanding in the New Testament era to

capture in brief a word study of the term in Greek. The Greek word for elder, *presbuteros* and like *zaqen* the English terminology "elder" (*presbuteros*) is a reference to maturity status of an individual and there is a wide usage of the term to about seventy times in the New Testament as is expressed by Andria in Tokunboh (2006, p. 1509). McCain (1996, p. 256) affirms that there is also the usage of the term *episcopos* that is translated as an overseer and is designated to those who have been called to care for God's sheep translated in English to the word 'bishop', but the word 'pastor' or 'shepherd' are also correct.

This concept of governance of church organizations by elders, seem to gain much momentum and have deep roots during this historical period in the history of the church. Even as the church experienced growth and expansion beyond the borders of Jerusalem, we see the emulation of the same procedure as Acts 14: 23 captures Paul and Barnabas appointing elders in the churches established in the course of their missionary trips. Their duty is captured in Acts 20:28 as Paul interacts with the elders of Ephesus capturing their responsibility of oversight and servitude to the church. We can capture that the concept of elders in the Pauline churches was predominantly that of spiritual leadership and ministry and not restricted to governing council. It is observably clear that elders were very influential in the foundational life of the early church.

It became a pattern observable in the running and establishment of the church in the New Testament bringing to perspective the design of leadership development in the church. This is identifiably true from the interaction of the concept of elders as expressed in the Pauline literature leaving the highest probability of the occupants of the office of the elders as being spiritual leaders and ministers beyond their governmental responsibilities. The significance of the subject of the elders with regard to her functions as an agency of guidance to the church and an intervention against the threat of false doctrine has not robbed it of the contemporary debate as concern the relationship of the bishops and elders. Andria in Tokunboh (2006, p. 1509), acknowledges the same in his commentary of Titus 1:5-9 that some theological observers are of the opinion that the instruction of

Paul to the effect of appointment of elders implies that Titus was the bishop of Crete, while the elders are pastors in the towns.

Others are opinionated towards the thought that Paul is not interested in setting up of a model of church organization but is focused on a measure for the church to garb her combative schemes against the dangers posed by false teachers according to McCain (1996, p. 260). The context that is keen to elaborate on the directive of the appointment of elders in every town and the description of the bishopric qualifications leading to the perception that there is reference to the same person implying that the terms are interchangeably used. However, a point of caution is submitted by Andria in Tokunboh (2006, p. 1509), that the sentiments of Paul should not be taken as an endorsement of a particular system of church government nor can they be legitimately appealed to in the debate as to whether women may be appointed elders or not. A mere look at the qualifications as outlined in Titus 1:6-9 and a replica in 1st Timothy 3:1-7 ostensibly is in application to elders and gives the connotation of elders being the spiritual leaders of the churches.

Clearly, advanced age is not an important criterion when choosing church leaders though in some African cultures elderly people are automatically given authority no matter how they live but Paul seems to lay stress that it is impossible to separate doctrine from lifestyle and that blameless behaviour gives credibility to the teaching of an elder as is captured by Andria in Tokunboh (2006, p. 1510). From a holistic evaluation, the expressed qualification is an observable description of one who is mature in the Christian faith and of good repute, with gifts for teaching, management and pastoral ministry. With regard to the task of caring for the sick, James 5:14-15 advocates for the calling of elders who in this case are people responsible for leading the church and thus have some authority. Through their intervention by anointing with oil and praying for the one who is sick, the whole church offers support to that person because when a member is sick, it is the concern of the whole body as is commented by in Tokunboh (2006, p. 1542).

In as much as the term bishop occurred in the singular sense there is no indication that there was one elder in each congregation as well as any description of the relations that existed among the elders. With the advancement to the second century and the post New Testament era there was a seemingly more formalized structure to the ministry that saw many churches governed by one presiding bishop and assisted by elders or presbyters. It was the duty of these elders to perform pastoral tasks, preach sermons and conduct worship services. The bishops were chosen from the ranks of the elders thus making them the senior elders.

BENEFIT OF CONCEPT OF ELDERSHIP IN AFRICAN ECCLESIOLOGY

Enormous are the benefits that the African ecclesiology draw from the concept of eldership as was manifest in the traditional African setting. As elders were leaders of the society and were to live up to moral standards of high integrity to be able to lead the community towards a similar direction. This is very significant putting into consideration of the analogy used by Kalawole (2015, p. 193-2004) in his description that the church is the manufacturing industry where wild humans are processed and refined into children of God bearing a Christ like character. This is because the church exists on the face of the earth to bear witness for God, intercede and bear witness before the world finding her destiny in the person and works of Christ as is stated by Moltmann (1978, p. 300-303). This is not a mean feat and for the church to come to a place where it can achieve this obligation it has to have a strong pillar of leadership development and pulpit ministry. This will only be realized by an established and mature ecclesiology that is built on the informed position that understanding is incremental and that there is a level of empowerment that you can never get until you have corporate dialogue.

African ecclesiology should draw from the concept of the strong leadership in traditional Africa that gave strong emphasis on the moral character of the candidates above all for the welfare of the entire community. African church must have a detailed strategical approach to empower her people. Borrowing a leaf from Jesus whose Strategy was

to: call the twelve, train and empower them and send them. This will put the African church in the highway of growth because if all are empowered the space becomes small because empowered people look for space and functionality. It is an effort in futility to invest in the task of empowerment without a laid down strategy of releasing people for purposes of expansion and multiplication. It is important for African church ministers not to fall into the deception of the tyranny of numbers but be firm in their understanding that number of people you have in terms of following does not make you a powerful minister it is just popularity. What makes a powerful church minister is the alignment of the resources (Physical and Spiritual) with God's purpose for those resources.

From Matthew 7: 21-23, the picture given is that the problem is not the resource but the mission: resource is holy, but what you did was evil with holy power. This calls for the church to have substantial amount of knowledge of how to use the power as this is more important than the power itself. This exposes to us the essence of the factor of discipline as a requirement of one with the power than for those who do not have the power. For the church to be strategic, it has to have accurate developmental planning that encompasses matters pertaining to projects, programmes, procedures and protocols that the church is interested to pursue. In pursuit of these measures the primary vocation must be the alignment towards the establishment of God's will. This is because anything short of that will be an outright violation against the will of God. Especially in an African setting, Mendy (2013, p. 266) correctly puts it that we need to be intentional in our policy as the African church to protest inhumane activities that have birthed segregations and chaos in our continent to bring justice, peace, and unity.

Theological Reflections of Eldership as a Definer of Accurate Leadership in Ubuntu Ecclesiology

For the steadfast construction and stability of Ubuntu ecclesiology to be achieved in Africa, there needs to be a particular emphasis that is accorded to the function of leadership and this should be in alignment to the scriptural emphasis of eldership

and successful leadership framework of eldership as was manifest in traditional Africa. One of the key definers of the institution of eldership that is in alignment to the Biblical requirements of elders and in traditional Africa was that of the concept of representation. With this concept of representation, we can afford to look back at how God built and formed a nation of people after bringing them out of slavery from Egypt. At this time God gave them a very clear set of definers describing to them their emphases, culture, and their codes of action and behaviour. This was a full involvement of the divine process to create an awareness that God was shaping a people towards a corporate reality that was to trickle down to individual members in the community. Elders were a group of people who were called by God to express and offer representation of the wider community in the Old Testament and the Body of Christ in the New Testament, in the earth before the Lord. This was a vital feature of their identity and culture as an institution.

The principle of representation is by far the most powerful and far-reaching principle that is embedded in the African concept of eldership and is significant in the construction of an Ubuntu ecclesiology in the pattern of eldership in the early church. Elders were expected to observe and to replicate a clear pattern of conduct and behaviour that is approved of in the scriptures. God gave Elders a specific requirement as part of their mission in Christ and as a result of their long and successful journey to offer to the Lord a specific commitment, position and offering that is required of the institution by God. Eldership was required by God to walk in a particular pattern of Christ conduct and operations to observe and to replicate a clear Christ pattern of conduct and behaviour that is sanctioned by scriptures. The pattern of Christ is seen in His life and death on the cross where He was unjustly accused and punished but His response was in the most correct manner. Theirs was to express the accurate Christ pattern and follow in the steps of Christ of compassion, concern, care, and love for the body of Christ. The eldership institution replicates Christ's desire to utilize His greater strength and proximity of God to benefit those who are not in the same position. The pattern of Christ is His desire to impart a value to those who could not find or achieve that same

value on their own. As we picture the actions of Christ we are looking into the heart of God, what drives God and the actual nature of God. Christ pattern is His refusal to proclaim His own state of maturity while leaving others in a state of brokenness.

Therefore, the call for the principle of representation in the institution of elders is Christological as it draws and borrows from the life patterns and teaching of Christ. God's emphasis to the eldership ecclesia in Africa is that of impartation of Christological values that are biblical based on revelation from the scriptures. The principle of representation is God's methodology, principle, mission, and pattern for Ubuntu ecclesiology. It is important to acknowledge that the embracing and expressing of the divine requirement of representation in eldership of the Ubuntu ecclesiology calibrates and defines the spiritual culture, internal attitudes, the foundational value system, the state of love, and compassion of the Ubuntu ecclesiology. The eldership institution to be effective in this regard must have a sense of awareness that the institution is commissioned and raised up by the Lord and have been justified by a lengthy, unique, and extended process. The eldership institution to strongly benefit Ubuntu ecclesiology must stand within a strong framework of biblical principle and doctrine. The institution of eldership must also manifest pristine lifestyle, values and culture that shut the mouths of our enemies and opposers. We can assert that with regard to the doctrine of representation, Christ is by all standards the character par excellence as an Elder with regard to His representation of us to God by his death and resurrection and intercession for us and therefore, should thus be the model of all elders in the African church to enable the Ubuntu ecclesiology to thrive with regard to polity.

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