

Kingdom Congress of Illinois

Position Paper on Ekklesia Convocation: The Nature of Ekklesia Authority

Jesus not only possessed full understanding of all the truth contained in the writings of the Old Testament, He was the Truth. He was the Word. From His perfect comprehension of the Logos, He would often bring realignment to the preaching of the religious leaders of His day. Jesus would begin His instruction with, “You have heard it said.” Then He would continue by declaring, “But I say unto you.” Whether examining religious practices, interpreting the Law of Moses or explaining Biblical prophecy, Jesus had impeccable clarity of the ways, work, and will of the Father.

When Jesus announced to His disciples that He would establish His church or His called out kingdom ambassadors, He was standing at a point in redemptive history where He was embodying all that God had done in days gone by and launching all that God was planning in days that would follow. The truth of the old, the promises of the past, the foundations of the previous: these were still in play. The agreement with Abraham, the faithful to the covenant, the fulfilment of pledges: these were as vital as the day they were activated. Jesus was bridging the Old and New Covenantal eras seamlessly as the one perfect plan from eternity past into eternity future.

God always intended to have a people who managed the earth by the patterns of the eternal Kingdom of God. God always intended for the earth to reflect heaven. From the beginning when God created Adam in His own image and gave man dominion over the earth, God had demonstrated His will to co-labor with His sons. Jesus declared the continuation of that perpetual plan. Jesus was stating that the newest facet was being added to the ongoing design.

The idea of management was as old as time itself. The managers – those people of faith – were being more completely identified when Jesus called out His church; but the job was that same assignment given to Adam, to the seed of Abraham, to the household of faith. Take dominion. Rule. Legislate. Govern. And, as you preside over creation, keep it holy, subjugate evil, and honor God.

The role of the God’s people, the ekklesia, is and always has been ambassadorial and governmental. The ekklesia is the body of kingdom citizens managing the earth. First and foremost, before defining religious practices, God’s called out serve the Lord through management of the earth. Of course, without defined religious practices, the earth managers would not be successful. In His announcement that He would build his church, Jesus was connecting His purpose to God’s ongoing purpose, which was the identification of the earth’s managing sons and their work of oversight of heaven’s government in the earth.

Even Adam did not govern the earth alone. God gave him Eve. Together they decided what would be best, allowed what they had determined to be beneficial, and executed their judgments. One could say they formulated the principal by which they would live and then voted. Their new law of “eating from the tree of knowledge” was introduced to the floor of their legislative body and passed by a unanimous vote. So authoritative was their legal act that they and all of creation came under the control of the official action they had taken.

The idea of a legislative body or collective assembly making laws that regulate culture is a rudimentary concept to civilization in every age and in every nation. That body might be composed of elders sitting at the gate of a city, such as was common in rural Israel, or it might be multifaceted, such as was found with King Solomon and his domain that astonished all the nations that surrounded Israel. Most modern-day Christians have no problem embracing

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the concept of the civil realm functioning in governance, but the idea of Jesus' church operating as a legislative body over the earth is less understood. When Jesus declared, "I will build my church," Jesus looked back to Adam, throughout history of the nation of Israel, and unto the those who would believe in His name as He called forth His kingdom governors.

The best form of government is localism. Those closest to any situation have a better understanding of the problems, resources, support structures, and the opposition. Localism does not waste resources that must be paid out to support multiple layers of bureaucracy. Localism means local leaders that can be held accountable to the people that are being served. The closer to home the governing body, the better will be the governance. Therefore, self-government is better than restraint imposed from external authorities. City governance is better than State governance. State governance is better than Federal, and Federal is better than International control. Although bad government is better than no government at all, which would lead to anarchy and chaos, God's best is decentralized power and local governance.

The principle of localized control and authority is found in all layers of society. For example, the home is comprised of people who are in covenant with one another and functions under the direct guidance of an adult who has charge of that household. Parents raise children, feed children, protect children, and guide children through the means of one-to-one contact and direct responsibility. A business echoes the same pattern. A boss or an executive team that holds the fiscal responsibility for the company keeps an eye on the quality of the product, aptitude of the personnel, compliance to civil laws, and the satisfaction of customers. Whether through hands-on management or through a chain of command, businesses function best through localism. The bigger the chain of bureaucracy, the more susceptible a business is for waste, corruption, mismanagement, and loss of quality. The same principle applies for civil government, which is a concept that the framers of the Constitution of the United States understood as they adjudicated for localism over centralized, Federal control.

Localism applies to Christ's ekklesia. The church began with gatherings from house to house. As the gospel spread, local elders were appointed to oversee local meetings. Apostles arose with territorial assignments, but congregants still fellowshipped and received training in local assemblies. Even the implementation of church sacraments requires localism. A believer must be baptized somewhere by someone. Communion is celebrated by partaking of the elements administered by someone. Maturation of the people of God through the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph. 4:11-12) insinuates that there is some form of direct contact between the trainers and the ones being trained. Also, the concept of church disciple depicts localism. Matthew 18:15-19 describes the process of dealing with a transgression as being first brother to transgressor, next witnesses to transgressor, then church to transgressor. At every step of the disciplinary process, localism is required.

Theologians define Jesus' church as one universal church, meaning that it consists of all persons who, from any nation or in any generation, profess the Lordship of Jesus Christ and are in the household of faith. This universal church is both visible and invisible at the same time. The invisible church is the whole number of God's elect, both living and dead. Those believers living on earth plus the great cloud of witnesses comprise the invisible church. The visible church is that part of the universal church that is on the earth. Although the kingdom does not originate from this visible earthly realm, it is administered by and seen in the earth through the visible church. The invisible church, the cloud of witness, cannot finish their job of conforming

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the earth to the mandates of heaven without the company of saints who are living (Heb. 11:40). The visible church functions as feet for the whole body of Christ. Where the feet go, the body goes. In every generation, the living church moves the whole church forward in the advancement of the kingdom. As the living church walks into new areas of dominion, the whole body progresses. It could be said that there has been a church in every age bringing heaven to earth and managing heaven's business on the earth.

The visible church, although part of the whole body of Christ, gathers in local assemblies. The church or the ekklesia is not only a called out people, it is an assembled people. The ekklesia assembles to be a legislative body, as has been discussed in previous articles. Without assembling, the church could not arrive at a consensus, develop policy, share ideas, benefit from one another's skills, conduct local church business. Ekklesia, by definition, must mean called out to come together.

In local houses, the church gathers as a body, some for the hearing, some for the smelling (I Cor. 12:17). If members of a body are not assembled, they cannot be defined as a body nor can individual parts fulfill their functions: e.g. eyes see; ears hear, feet walk, hands reach (I Cor. 12:12-17). I Corinthians 12:18 reads, "But now God has set the members every one of them in the body, as it has pleased him." God has set the members. Scripture is clear on this subject. God makes one man a teacher and one woman an exhorter. God sets one person in as an apostle and another as a giver of mercy. God not only sets the gifting in the person, He sets the gifted person into the body and, specifically, into the local assemblies.

Church life, as defined in Scripture, is not about an individual choosing a local church because of the Sunday School program that their children like or because of the type of worship that best appeals to their musical palette. Members should recognize that they are set in a local house by God, planted in an assembly by God, appointed to a local ekklesia by the will of the Lord. With an acknowledgement of being called out and being set in, the believer can recognize his or her appointment and the authority that comes with that appointment. Every believer is an ambassador who represents heaven's kingdom in their assigned earthly territory. Authority accompanies appointment.

A church that is comprised of called out and set in believers can function as an ekklesia, a governing body in a territory. Whatever they bind or declare unlawful on earth will be declared unlawful in heaven and whatever they loose or declare lawful on earth will be declared lawful in heaven (Mt. 16:19). Those believers who recognize the power and responsibility of localism can operate as Christ's ekklesia. A church that understands local authority and local governance will manage the spiritual activity of their communities, serve the citizens through acts of charity, and influence the policy-makers through offering biblical solutions to cultural problems. Power flows to those willing to take responsibility. A local ekklesia is a gathering of locally-set believers who are willing to take responsibility. Ekklesia is kingdom governance through localism.

Every legislative assembly is comprised of members who operate by authority. That authority might be granted by a superior who delegates the right to make decisions and to whom the delegates must give an account. In a structure like the legislative body found in the United States, the representatives govern by the consent of the governed. They derive their authority to rule from the collective vote of the people and answer back to the people in the next election cycle or in the donations and contributions from the people. Authority comes from somewhere.

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In the case of the ekklesia, or the church of Jesus, authority is granted because of the covenant relationship between Christ and each believer. Every Christian is empowered with delegated authorization and may use that power within his or her appointed boundaries. All may pray in Jesus name. Every believer can resist and rebuke the devil, speak God's Word into every situation, pray heaven into earth, and minister the grace and gifts of God to others. To be a Christian is to be endued with power from on high.

When the ekklesia gathers as a governing body for a territory, the concept of authority advances beyond the level of that invested in an individual. Those believers who have the right to rule their private lives have also the right to rule the land in which they live. God told Joshua that he could possess every part of the earth on which he walked (Josh. 1:3). Jesus told his disciples to go into all the earth with the authority to make disciples (Mt. 28:19). God told Adam to take dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28). When the righteous take the mandate to heart and act upon it, "the people rejoice"; but when the wicked rule or exert authority in the earth, "the people mourn" (Prov. 29:2). Land management is tied to people and people are authorized to manage land.

Authorized people gathering to make legislative decrees over the region in which they have territorial authority is an ekklesia convocation. Individual authority and land authority are fundamental requirements for the delegates. Beyond those two basic levels, other kinds of authority are also needed. God appoints different functions and gives His appointees authority commensurate to the calling. For example, the Apostle Paul stated that he was called to be an apostle by the will of God (I Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1) and that calling gave him authority over many churches. "So, if I brag a little too much about the authority which the Lord gave us, I'm not ashamed. The Lord gave us this authority to help you, not to hurt you" (2 Cor 10:8). Elders have assigned power to rule. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Acts 15 records the gathering of a council in Jerusalem to decide what to do with the new converts from among Gentile nations. A disagreement as to whether or not the new believers should be circumcised arose, and an assembly was convened to rule on the issue. Scripture says that the apostles and the elders came together to consider the matter (15:6). Whether or not other believers from Jerusalem were present is not disclosed in the text, but the reader is informed that church officials with the level of authority of elders and apostles were present. Later in the narrative, the Apostle James, who seemed to be presiding over the gathering, spoke out of the book of Amos and gave an answer to the dispute. Scripture records James' words: "Wherefore my judgment is, that we trouble not them that from among the Gentiles turn to God" (Acts 15:19). The converts would not be required to be circumcised. The decision was legislated because apostolic authority was present.

Authority and placement are tied together in all levels of society. A boss has more weight than the supervisor but the supervisor has more say-so than the worker. A parent has rights in the house but the civil realm can supersede the parent if the health or safety of a child warrants another level of power. An ekklesia gathering functions as a legislative, law-creating, and law-enacting arm of the church; therefore the presence of elders, pastors, apostles, or other governmental offices found in the five-fold ministry (Eph. 4:11-12) is often necessary to have the level of authority needed to accomplish the purpose for which the meeting was assembled.

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Another form of placement that might be needed when a convocation is called is authority that arises from a sphere of influence. For example, teachers and superintendents have permission to make decisions in education while elected official rule in civil matters. The set agenda for the convocation defines the sphere of culture under discussion. Believers who function in the designated cultural area carry an authority for that area as well as a perspective about the issues. In the Council of Jerusalem, Paul was invited and asked to testify because of his ministry to the Gentiles. He was not only an apostle; his area of labor was in the field under discussion. God opens doors for His people to labor in all areas of society and then mantles his laborers with levels of authority to match their level of responsibility. The collective power of an ekklesia is augmented when representatives from the sphere under consideration exercise their authority.

One more kind of authority is earned authority. As has been previously discussed, authority arises from delegation and from placement. One with a higher level of authority may delegate the use of his name or his assets to another under set guidelines or restrictions. This is made clear in God's third commandment, which is the directive to not use God's name in vain. Man is not given limitless use of God's name as though His name was man's private property. God defines where and how His name may be used by those to whom He has delegated the right to operate in representative authority.

Both delegated authority and placement authority can grow or gain higher levels of power through fidelity and consistency. Persons who have a lot of responsibility are always looking for those to whom they can download some of the work. A wise leader delegates more management tasks to the person who has proven his faithfulness, invested his time to gain more knowledge, and worked extra hours to deliver a quality outcome. Promotions come to those who have merited the advancement.

Almost any worker employed in any kind of a job knows that he or she must earn the advancement. Even in spiritual matters, higher levels of authority can be earned. In I Timothy 3:1-7, Paul is instructing Timothy about setting elders into church leadership: "This is a statement that can be trusted: If anyone sets his heart on being a bishop, he desires something excellent. A bishop must have a good reputation. . . He must manage his own family well. His children should respectfully obey him. If a man doesn't know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a new Christian, or he might become arrogant like the devil and be condemned. People who are not Christians must speak well of him, or he might become the victim of disgraceful insults that the devil sets as traps for him" (GW).

Paul's admonition could be summarized by saying that a ruling leader in the church must earn that position. He might desire it, which is excellent; but he must prove his worthiness in other positions – like in his family or with his business associates – before being promoted. Authority can be and often is earned.

In considering the concept of ekklesia convocations, the called out assembly should be comprised – at least in part – of those who have earned authority, who have been proven in little and been made ruler over much (Luke 16:10), who have been faithful with a few talents and been rewarded with more (Mt. 25:14-29). David found courage to stand against the giant Goliath because he had previously defeated a lion and a bear (I Sam. 17:36-37). Past tests, past victories, and past lessons put every believer in a posture for promotion. Higher promotions means higher

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levels of authority. Increased anointing means increased power. Jesus told His impotent disciples who could not cast a dumb spirit out of a young boy, “This kind comes out by prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29). Jesus’ followers were being admonished to earn a power promotion.

When an ekklesia is convened, the conveners and the constituents alike should consider the authority level available to accomplish the task. Always, kingdom citizens are needed, which are those who are part of the covenant community of the saints (Eph.2:19). Added to the citizenry are those with authority from their placement and from delegation. And last, but not least, saints with earned authority must add their portions to the tally of spiritual power.

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