

*(Draft—not for publication or citation)*

## **Church Practice and Church Discipline in the Worship Service**

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### **Abstract**

In addressing the problem caused by the application and practice of Church discipline, the research aims to examine critically the practices of Church discipline in the liturgy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania with the example of the Central Diocese, whether they are consistent with the doctrine of justification by faith.

Lutheran Theology aims to point to Christ. To know if our Church's practice points to Christ, we have to analyze it within its actual historical and human context in the local parish. Therefore the Contextual Model was used for this research.

The practice of many pastors and congregations follows a pattern wherein a person is reinstated into full communion with the Church only after accomplishing all the demanded deeds. This approach is apparent during Sunday worship service by the way Church discipline is exercised in the liturgy. Some Christians are denied Holy Communion, even though they have taken part in the liturgy of confession and absolution. The Church, however, demands that they accomplish all the deeds prescribed before being offered total forgiveness of their sins and allowed full access to it. In this way, forgiveness of sins is offered on conditions. The person asking for absolution is ordered to undertake certain actions before he is restored. This is in opposition to Luther's teaching that forgiveness of sins is freely offered to us only on hearing of faith preached, despite our terrible sins and unworthiness.

### **1. Introduction**

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania it seems that what the Church does in practice is contrary to what it confesses in the Lutheran Confessions. There is a problem about how to link the teaching of the Church on justification by faith and the practice of Church discipline which demands believers have sanctification along with good deeds. This problem threatens the doctrine of salvation through justification by faith in Jesus Christ. Church discipline as it is practiced in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania puts stress on the law; its outcome is that the gospel is undermined. Luther, commenting on Gal 2:14, argued that Peter, Barnabas, and other Jews, preached the gospel, but in the course of their dissimulation, they established the law and as a result the gospel was eliminated.<sup>1</sup> When the gospel has been lost, then the doctrine of justification is lost.

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<sup>1</sup>Luther 1979, 61.

The practice of many pastors and congregations in the Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania follows a pattern wherein a person is reinstated into full communion with the Church only after accomplishing all the demanded deeds. This approach is plain during Sunday worship service in the way Church discipline is exercised in the liturgy. Some Christians are denied Holy Communion, even though they have taken part in the liturgy of confession and absolution. The Church, however, demands that they accomplish all the deeds prescribed before being offered total forgiveness of their sins and allowed full access to it. Does God also forgive half a person and another part is retained until he accomplishes what is not yet completed? But God forgives a total person- *totus homo*, not part of him, and He does not wait until he accomplishes all the demands of the law. Luther points out that we are sinners not because we commit this or that sin. We commit them because we are sinners first.<sup>2</sup> For this reason a person can stand in God's judgment only through God's gracious forgiveness and on the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Hence every Christian is "simultaneously a righteous person and a sinner" as Luther puts it, *simul iustus et peccator*. This study aims to view critically the practices of Church discipline in the liturgy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania with the example of the Central Diocese, whether they are consistent with the doctrine of justification by faith.

## 2. The Disciplinary Process

The procedure that many congregations have used to put a Christian under Church discipline is to report to the Church elder, evangelist, or pastor, that a Christian has committed a particular sin. He is then placed under Church discipline. Sometimes this happens when the evangelist or Church elder in the area goes and tells him or her "you are now under Church discipline" and no longer allowed to partake in Holy Communion. At other times the Christian goes of his or her own accord to the Church to ask for absolution before the Church elders' council. Once a person confesses his or her sin, he or she is told from now onwards you are under Church discipline.<sup>3</sup> Occasionally, when a Christian woman recognizes that she has committed a sin, especially breaking the sixth commandment, she stops participating in Holy Communion, and may even stop attending Sunday worship services.

Usually, when the date of the Church elders' council meeting, is announced in the Church, then there would also be an opportunity to settle other problems of those under Church discipline. Each Church elder goes and informs the people in his area. Those under Church discipline, for instance, unwed mothers and pregnant women, Christians who have stopped attending worship, backsliders and those who have apostatized, are

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<sup>2</sup>LW 12, 348.

<sup>3</sup>See for example Minutes of Kinampanda Parish of 20.7.1993; 22.7.1993; 24.8.1993; 10.3.1994; 6.9.1994 Christians were put under Church discipline by the Church elders' council after confessing to have committed adultery and having children out of Church wedlock. See also Minutes of the same parish of 20.7.1993 and 6.10.1994 Christians were put under Church discipline by the Church elders' council after confessing that they used to make and drink millet beer.

told to appear before the Church elders' council. The pastor is the Chairman of the Church elders' council, and this council meets whenever there is a need. When there is a meeting, it normally takes one session lasts six to seven hours each. The Christians, who came to ask for absolution, are called one at a time to appear in front of the council. They are interrogated by the members of the council to determine if a person has truly repented of his or her sin. There can be up to twenty people on the council depending on the size of the parish, but not less than ten in the case of a small parish. In this situation, pastoral care and counseling cannot be done to the sinner in front of ten or twenty people, as the Constitution of the Central Diocese directs. This becomes more like making disputes between the Christian who has appeared in front of the council seeking forgiveness of sin, and the members of this council who are at the same time the judge, to either accept the Christian's request of absolution or deny it. After several questions have been asked, if the members are satisfied with the answers of the Christian who is seeking forgiveness of sin, then he or she is released from the ban. However, if the members are not satisfied with the answers given, which for them proves that he or she has not yet truly repented, then, he or she is asked to go back without absolution and consider whether, he or she has truly repented. He or she must make assurance that he or she is not going to commit the same sin again. In this way, he or she is given time to go and rethink his or her request for forgiveness and bring the right decision for what the council judges to be a true repentance.<sup>4</sup> If a Christian was making and selling local beer and now seeks absolution and reinstatement, then once interrogated, if the members of the council are not satisfied with the answers given by this Christian, they may put such a person on probation to determine if the person has actually stopped making, selling and drinking local beer.<sup>5</sup> In the case of an unwed mother who is seeking absolution, the members of the council may ask her to first have her marriage blessed in the Church<sup>6</sup> before being reinstated. Sometimes a person is asked by the members of the council to come with the one who made her pregnant, or forced to separate from the father of the child.<sup>7</sup> In this Church practice, forgiveness of sins is offered conditionally and the person who is asking for absolution is required to undergo certain changes before being reinstated.

When women or young girls who get pregnant outside of wedlock confess to committing adultery, they are put under Church discipline on the spot. She is denied Holy Communion, suspended from singing in the choir, and sometimes baptism is refused for the child until the mother undergoes certain penitential acts. After which, she is reinstated and the child baptized. Is such evangelical freedom, a freedom which liberates the conscience from works? Or rather, is not the conscience more imprisoned and thereby forced to trust in completing certain works, instead of relying on Christ's mercy alone as

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<sup>4</sup>See for example Minutes of Kiomboi Parish of 12.3.2003, and 2.4.2003.

<sup>5</sup>See for example Minutes of Kinampanda Parish of 6.10.1994.

<sup>6</sup>See for example Minutes of Ulemo Parish of 11.7.1999 and 19.7.2000; Minutes of Kiomboi Parish of 12.3.2003.

<sup>7</sup>See for example Minutes of Kinampanda Parish of 6.9.1993 and 26.3.1994.

Luther taught?<sup>8</sup> This woman went to the Church to ask for forgiveness so that her conscience might be set free. Instead of being set free, certain works are demanded of her before she is liberated. Kafunzile points out that in the Northwestern Diocese they believe an unwed mother has committed a serious sin of fornication. This comes from the Haya traditional culture. When an unwed mother is put under Church discipline, she is not permitted to participate in Holy Communion, or hold positions in the Church such as, Church elder, Sunday school teacher, or parish worker. If she dies, she is not buried by the Church. The child is denied baptism because the father is unidentified. Kafunzile lists the seven steps which must be followed in order for the unwed mother to receive absolution. First, the unwed mother must take the matter to a Church elder; second, the Church elder then takes the matter to the parish pastor; third, the pastor invites or calls the members of the parish committee (in case of the Central Diocese the Church elders' council) to meet with the unwed mother; fourth, the girl asks forgiveness; fifth, if her request is accepted, her punishment is doing manual work in the Church garden or surroundings; sixth, she confesses her sin before the congregation during a particular Sunday worship; seventh, the pastor pronounces absolution to the unwed mother before the Christians in the Church.<sup>9</sup> This is too much. I don't see Christ's mercy present in this process. Christ forgives us freely without any condition. The statement "if her case is accepted," implies that sometimes the request of unwed mothers for absolution can be denied by members of the parish committee who acts as judges. This goes against the gospel which requires nothing but is offered freely for the forgiveness of sins apart from the deeds of the law.

### **3. The Practice of Church Discipline in the Liturgy**

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, every Sunday service starts with confessing sins. The minister starts by addressing the congregation with the words: "Dear brethren in the Lord, open your hearts. We confess our sins to God." While all kneel or stand, each person utters these words:

Almighty God, merciful Father, I'm poor and weak and born in sin. I confess to you all my sins which I have committed in thought and word and deed. I have angered you several times. I justly deserve your punishment here on earth and unto eternity. But I'm sorry for my sins and truly repent. I earnestly beseech your great mercy. Be merciful to me and save me, a poor and sinful being. O Lord, forgive me all my sins; give me the power of your Holy Spirit, so that I may have a new conduct. Amen.<sup>10</sup>

Or

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<sup>8</sup>See LW 44, 298.

<sup>9</sup>Kafunzile 2001, 88. Kafunzile states that the Haya traditional culture did not allow a single woman to be impregnated and bear a child while she was still in her parent's home. If the young woman was impregnated out of wedlock, this woman has conceived an illegitimate child in the family. The unwed mother has shamed herself, the family, the clan and the ancestral spirits. She was supposed to be killed, or forsaken by her family, because bearing a child while still in her father's house was a taboo, See *ibid.* 81.

<sup>10</sup>See *Mwimbieni Bwana* 2000, 268. Translation from Swahili is mine.

Almighty God, Heavenly Father, I confess that I have sinned against you and my neighbors, in thought and word and deed. Have mercy on me, I earnestly beseech you. For the sake of Jesus Christ forgive me all my sins. Cleanse me by your Holy Spirit. Renew my conscience and enable me to forgive my neighbors, so that I may serve you in new life, and to the glory of your holy name. Amen.<sup>11</sup>

In this confession, every participant enumerates their sins committed in thought and word and deed. This means there is no sin which is left without being confessed. The comprehensive nature of the confession of sins is in line with Luther's teachings, where in his treatise *A Discussion of Confession (Confitendi Ratio)* 1520 advises that the confession be made in the most general terms, covering sins both known and unknown.<sup>12</sup> After the confession, the pastor or the one leading the service announces absolution assuring Christians that their sins have been forgiven and grace obtained through Christ. While the congregation is still standing or kneeling, the minister stands, faces the congregation and offers the words of absolution, "God, Almighty and merciful, having mercy on us, gave His only Son to die on the cross for us. For his sake God has forgiven you all your sins. Amen."<sup>13</sup> Or

If this confession is true and if you desire with all your heart the forgiveness of sin for the sake of Jesus Christ; then, by the power of his Word and by the commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ I declare to you that: God by His grace has forgiven you all your sins; in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.<sup>14</sup>

These words of absolution affirm the entire forgiveness of all the sins to everyone who takes part in the worship service. There is no sin or portion of it which is left without forgiven. The Lutheran understanding of the forgiveness of sins centers around the person of the sinner, rather than the person's sins. It is the person who is forgiven his sins. When the person is forgiven one sin, then all his sins are forgiven; for there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). Where the smallest sin is kept, all sins are retained, and none are forgiven. Thus, the significance of the confession depends not on the confession itself, rather it is through this confession that we rely on Christ and the word of his promise.<sup>15</sup> In Luther's view, the person who is ready to go to confession, should not put his trust in his confession but, places his trust in the gracious promise of God. Therefore we are to rejoice, not because we confess, but because He has promised forgiveness to those who do confess. Therefore the act of confession is nothing more than an opportunity when God is called to the fulfillment of His own promise.<sup>16</sup> Our

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<sup>11</sup>*Mwimbieni Bwana* 2000, 268-269. cf. Lutheran Book of Worship 1978, 194, 98, 77, 56.

<sup>12</sup>LW 39, 37.

<sup>13</sup>*Mwimbieni Bwana* 2000, 269. Translation from Swahili is mine.

<sup>14</sup>*Mwimbieni Bwana* 2000, 269. cf. Lutheran Book of Worship 1978, 98, 194.

<sup>15</sup>WML I, 77.

<sup>16</sup>WML I, 81; LW 39, 28.

confession is nothing unless the promise of God stands firm; it is by his divine goodness alone that He promises forgiveness. It cannot be acquired by any righteousness unless He has given the promise. For that reason, trust in this promise is the first and most important requirement for whoever is ready to make confession.<sup>17</sup>

Melanchthon in *the Augsburg Confession* states:

Those who sin after Baptism receive forgiveness of sin whenever they come to repentance, and absolution should not be denied them by the Church. Properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ), and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest.... Rejected ... are those who teach that forgiveness of sin is not obtained through faith but through the satisfactions made by man.<sup>18</sup>

When we confess our sins and the minister announces absolution, we believe that all who have participated in the worship service have received the forgiveness of their sins through their faith in Christ. No one can draw limits around faith and decide who believes and who does not except Christ himself. Our responsibility is to 'take hold of Christ like a wedding ring,' a common saying of Luther, and trust God's promise of the forgiveness of our sins. Even the words of absolution which the minister utters to the congregation affirm that it is only through God's mercy, for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, that we receive the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins is freely given despite our sins and unworthiness, through faith in Christ. Faith is nothing other than the certainty of the heart that trust in the promises of God. As Melanchthon states, we cannot receive absolution of sin and be righteous before God on account of our own value, deeds, or accomplishments. We receive absolution of sin and become righteous before God by grace, through faith, for Christ's sake, when we believe that Christ suffered for us, and that for his sake, our sin is absolved and righteousness and everlasting life are offered to us.<sup>19</sup>

The Lutheran Church in Tanzania in general, and the Central Diocese in particular actually practice Church discipline which is contrary to the Lutheran theology and liturgy. It seems as if some Christians are assured of the forgiveness of their sins while others are denied access to it; for instance those, who bear children out of wedlock, those who are divorced, and those whose marriages were not solemnized in the Church or have not received a Church blessing, and drunkards who are under Church discipline. Despite this, most of them continue to attend Sunday worship regularly. These Christians participate in the worship service and confess their sins like other Christians and are assured by the presiding minister of the forgiveness of their sins like any other Christian.

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<sup>17</sup>LW 39, 29-30; WML I, 83.

<sup>18</sup>*The Augsburg Confession* XII, 1-5, 10.

<sup>19</sup>*The Augsburg Confession* IV, 1-2.

Yet even after being assured of the forgiveness of their sins, Christians who are under Church discipline are denied the right to partake in the Lord's Supper or of being blessed in cases where their children are being baptized. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania Northern Diocese Constitution openly states that it blesses Christian mothers, whose marriages are recognized by the Diocese, on the day of the baptism of their newborn children.<sup>20</sup> The Constitution does not give details about what kind of marriage is recognized by the Diocese. The Northwestern Diocese however recognizes only officially a marriage which has been solemnized in the Church. For that reason, Christians whose marriages are made official through customary rites, government laws or elopements are under Church discipline.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, the Mbulu Diocese Constitution states that Christians who marry without a Church blessing, that is, if their marriage was solemnized outside the Church, they will be under Church discipline.<sup>22</sup>

In the baptismal liturgy there is a special section for the Church to offer a blessing to the parents, thanking God for safety during childbirth. In the past this blessing was only offered to the mothers of the newly baptized babies, but since the newest edition of the hymn book which was published in 2000, this blessing is now given to both parents.

Young children, who are baptized, gather at the font before the altar, sponsors, and parents. Those whose marriages have not been solemnized in the Church or received a Church blessing are asked to return to their respective places. Only the parents whose marriages have been solemnized in the Church or have received a Church blessing remain in front with their newly baptized babies to receive the Church's blessing. The Church blesses them, thanking God for a safe delivery, asking God to protect the parents and their children in order that they may be strengthened in body and spirit and to fill the parents with the Holy Spirit that they may care for their children in love, so that they may recognize God, obey Him, and that they may grow in knowledge to do God's will.<sup>23</sup>

The Church by denying a blessing to the parents have baptized their newborn babies just because their marriage have not solemnized in the Church or received Church blessing, and by denying the Sacrament to other Christians who are under Church discipline, while all participated in the worship service as well confessing their sins as other Christians, and being assured by the presiding minister the forgiveness of their sins, contradicts herself and the entire Gospel on giving absolution.

These practices are not even in line with the missionaries' practice from which it was inherited. In the time of the missionaries, Christians under Church discipline who attended worship service, had to sit in the back, were not allowed to participate in the

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<sup>20</sup>Constitution of Northern Diocese 1986, III, 2(h), page 63.

<sup>21</sup>Lugayana 2006, 62-63.

<sup>22</sup>Constitution of Mbulu Diocese n.d. , Law XVI, B, 8, page 57.

<sup>23</sup>See *Mwimbieni Bwana* 2000, 302-303. Translation from Swahili is mine.

liturgy and were denied the Sacrament. The missionaries didn't want to contradict themselves or ignore the entire forgiveness of sins, which is why they prohibited anyone under Church discipline from participating in the liturgy. I am not suggesting a return to the missionaries' practice, and adopting the questionable practice of prohibiting them from participating in the liturgy. They should continue participating in the liturgy as it is now, but not denied the Church's blessings because their marriage has not been solemnized in the Church or received a Church blessing. For, it is God himself who has accepted us, and is absolutely ready to forgive. Therefore it is really God who through the consideration of his promise calls forth the confession of our sins and enables us to receive the forgiveness of our sins.<sup>24</sup> The significance of the confession rests only on the grace of God and the word of His promise. Even our good works are wicked and undeserving if God were to judge them strictly and were not willing to accept them with forgiving mercy.<sup>25</sup>

It is good for Christians to have their marriage solemnized in the Church or for the Church to offer a blessing nevertheless, asking God's blessing in the Lutheran context does not mean that marriage is sacred. Matters of marriage and ethical issues in general are under the worldly realm in the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms. But the Gospel rules the spiritual realm where the core message of the Gospel is salvation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by grace alone through faith alone.

Those denied access to the Church's special rituals and services are required to undergo additional acts in order for their sins to be forgiven. It then becomes a work on account of which one is forgiven. The absolution is reduced to a stamp of approval placed upon the confession. This is in opposition to the Lutheran understanding which focuses on the person who is forgiven. If a person is forgiven one sin, then all his sins are forgiven. In the Scriptures we read, there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1); and "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9). To deny Christians Holy Communion as well as baptism for their children until they complete certain acts is in conflict with God's mercy. God offers these means of grace, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper, freely for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, and ask us to receive them only through faith in him.

The Means of Grace are God's gracious gift to the Church through which divine love reaches people and establishes fellowship.<sup>26</sup> The grace of God embraces all people, of all epochs and circumstances. Child Baptism expresses most clearly the very nature of the Gospel. The basic meaning of grace is that God comes to people. God takes the initiative to redeem, and salvation is a free gift to all and for all. The Sacrament of Baptism is the open arms of the heavenly Father whose unlimited love embraces the child

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<sup>24</sup>LW 39, 30; WML I, 83.

<sup>25</sup>LW 39, 35; WML I, 89.

<sup>26</sup>Wahlstrom 1960, 52.

and brings him into fellowship with God and all the saints.<sup>27</sup> For this reason, the Church should accept the child and baptize her without putting any restrictions on the parents or demanding of them or the guardians that they first have a true faith before the Church can accept and baptize the child. As, Luther argues, neither the faith of the sponsors, nor that of the Church, avails more than simply to take the child to Baptism, with whom God at this moment deals directly.<sup>28</sup>

In most parishes of the Central Diocese, Holy Communion is celebrated once per month. Those who intend to commune should usually first register with the evangelist who is assisted by Church elders in their congregations. Registration is intended to help the congregation to know how many people will partake of Holy Communion, but in most cases registering some days before the celebration of the Holy Communion, gives an opportunity to those in authority to exercise Church discipline. Those who seem to be “unworthy” are told not to attempt to participate. A Christian who didn’t register is not permitted to partake. This practice of registering prior to receiving Holy Communion is held to so strictly that during the worship service if a Christian who is believed unworthy to partake, or one who is under Church discipline attempts to come to the Lord’s Table they may be removed by the Church elders or they will be bypassed by the pastor who is administering the Sacrament. This practice is stricter in the rural parishes than in the urban parishes.<sup>29</sup> One reason is that in rural parishes each Christian is known by the Church elder on his street, while in urban parishes many people live in different areas of the town and it is not easy to know where each and every Christian lives. Exercising Church discipline in urban areas is not imposed strictly as in the rural areas. Another reason is that urban parishes have many Christians. One parish may have as many as three services on a Sunday morning, each one having eight hundred to one thousand people who want to commune. In these parishes everyone is forced to receive Communion quickly in order to finish the service early. As a result, parishes in urban centers rarely deny Holy Communion to Christians under Church discipline by pulling them away from the altar or by bypassing them while they are kneeling at the altar ready to partake of Holy Communion. In contrast, there are parishes in rural areas where after the first part of the service is complete and before the second part of the service of Holy Communion begins, those judged unworthy or unrighteous are dismissed. Only those regarded as holy and righteous are allowed to partake of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>30</sup> The Church is made up of people who are *simul justus et peccator*, a *communio peccatorum* where each and every Christian is made holy only through the divine sanctification given us by the grace of Christ. Luther emphasizes that, the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments does not make us holy. We are all sinners; imperfect and dependant on the forgiving grace of God making us truly and actually a *communio sanctorum*, that is, the

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<sup>27</sup>Wahlstrom 1960, 56.

<sup>28</sup>WML I, 55.

<sup>29</sup>See also Mchami 2005, 273. He has similar remarks.

<sup>30</sup>See also Kafunzile 2001, 96. He has similar observations.

communion of saints. The Church should not deny Christians Holy Communion. Instead, let them be guided by their own conscience about whether to partake of Holy Communion or not. God accepts us through His gracious mercy on account of our faith in His Son Jesus Christ. The manner in which, the Church restricts Holy Communion, judging other Christians unworthy to partake until they demonstrate a holy life and right preparation, has led many to view the Lord's Table as a judgment table rather than a table of grace. As a consequence, some of the Christians decline to commune because they cannot believe that God will receive them because of their sins. Therefore the question should be about accepting or not the invitation to receive the gift offered freely and not about judging who is and is not worthy to partake. For, on this Means of Grace we all expect to receive the mercy of Christ and to be strengthened and comforted in our hearts.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The way Church discipline is practiced in the Central Diocese and in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania in general has roots in the African traditional religion as well as in the Lutheran missionaries' practice of Church discipline. Both traditional African discipline and the missionaries' Church discipline show that salvation is based on works and moral achievements, which conflict with Luther's teaching on justification. The traditional *Anilamba* people have accepted the way of Church discipline in the Central Diocese in agreement with their own heritage. So the problem of Church discipline is conditioned by this heritage, and to deal with it in the right way is a challenge.

This practice of Church discipline has been contradicting or even eliminating the doctrine of justification by faith. This has been a continuous problem for the Church. The way Church discipline is often practiced directs people to the thinking that moral laws justify or merit salvation. As a result, instead of trusting in the mercy of God for their salvation, people put their trust in their own works in order to be saved. This makes people unable to see the difference between Christianity and the traditional religion of Africans, in which a person is accepted both in the present life and hereafter by fulfilling moral laws and cultural values. Therefore the Church, in demanding that Christians accomplish certain good deeds before being offered total forgiveness of their sins and being allowed full participation in the access to it, contradicts herself and the entire Gospel. In giving absolution while at the same time judging other Christians as unworthy to receive Church blessings and to partake of Holy Communion, the Church shows herself as unfaithful to God's promise and in conflict with God's free forgiveness of sins. We have to learn from our Savior Jesus Christ himself, whose whole practice was characterized by considerable grace, mercy and understanding for human failings.

#### **5. Questions for discussion**

If the Church is described by the presence and not the absence of the sinner *corpus permixtum* and the redeeming word addressed to him, that is, the primary word which must always be absolution and forgiveness, how Church discipline be used in the Church today in relation to our Lutheran heritage?

Christianity, as introduced by Lutheran missionaries and as perpetuated by the way the Central Diocese practices Church discipline, suggests that a person can earn merits or contribute toward attaining his own salvation. Hence, both traditional African discipline and the missionaries' Church discipline show that salvation is based on works and moral achievements, which conflict with Luther's teaching on justification. According to Luther, justification and salvation depend only on God's mercy, which is received only in an act of faith. If the problem of Church discipline is conditioned by this heritage, how we can deal it in the right way?

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