



**Family and kinship in the early  
Christian church and the modern  
Seventh-day Adventist Church:  
A comparison in ecclesiology**

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*Vir my mense,  
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# Chapter 1: Introduction

The terms “brother” and “sister” are widely used within Christian communities when referring to fellow believers. These familial terms became a general way of speaking, one could almost say a Christian vernacular, for many Christian groups and communities over many generations, but what does it really mean to be a brother or sister, and to have brothers and sisters in the church?

Familial terms are not merely a metaphoric explanation for the community of believers by the early Christian authors, it is the literal acceptance of a fictive kinship, a group of non-blood members, becoming family through adoption. Within the fraternal community of the church, brotherhood is the essence of existence for the community. It was not so much the form of address that was of importance, but rather the motivation behind the use of such terms (Pieniadz 2023:41). Whereas the very first Christians became part of more than just a faith community, they became part of a newly established familial bond, the question posed to the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church today is simply whether it is in line with the Biblical directive of the kinship church. The focus of this study therefore is the ecclesiological nature of family and kinship of the first-century church compared to the ecclesiology of the SDA church.

## 1.1 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

This study is motivated by a love for the people and structures of the SDA church, a concern for the ecclesiastical praxis currently observed in the church, and a desire for the church to develop into the institution that God intends for it to be.

This motivation is dually approached: First, it is to examine the ecclesiology of the SDA church from the perspective that it boldly claims to have no creed but the Bible alone. Will this claim hold in the praxis and philosophy it has regarding itself as a church? Is the SDA church performing church on the same basis as the first-century New Testament church or did we take a different direction? And second, it aims to enhance the mission of the church to reach the world with the Three-angels’ messages. As a missionary movement, the church not only commits to a *Sola Scriptura* (maybe it should be *Prima Scriptura*) approach, but it also commits to a

*polycentric missiology*. This study is motivated by these two principles, the Biblical authority, and the mission perspective of the SDA church.

The Biblical examination of the New Testament church would be lacking if its focal point is not the community of *κοινωνία (koinonia)*, more specifically the *κοινωνία* of kinship and family. The understanding of this social institution is best examined from the perspective of social scientific criticism (SSC). The family model of SSC interpretation is a vital, yet often neglected, tool when dealing with the early church.

Early Christian ecclesiology cannot be divorced from the highest level of the community grouping it adopted, namely the family. As a familial institution, several functional premises were accepted. Its voluntary nature, trans-locality, inclusivity, egalitarian structure, focus on study, religious emphasis, and strong familial emphasis combined, all positioned the church as a unique social institution within the Graeco-Roman context it was established (Hellerman 2001:5–14).

The first motivation thus is for the Adventist church to return to this Biblical, New Testament ecclesiology namely family and kinship, summarized in the Greek word *κοινωνία*. To stay true to the Biblical perspectives, believers not only have to adhere to a certain set of rules or commandments but must also adopt a certain set of attitudes and ways of thinking (Glanz 2020). The challenge with the *Sola Scriptura* view of Adventism is that it tends to have a very limited approach to hermeneutics at times. The fear of over-contextualization has led the church to accept (mostly informally) a historical-grammatical approach only and to shun away from all other criticisms. In the opening sermon of the 2021 Annual Council of the General Conference of SDAs, the president of the world church made the statement:

There are people who ... use the horribly self-centered historical-critical or higher criticism approach, placing their own private interpretation on what the Bible says. Seventh-day Adventists believe in the historical-biblical or historical-grammatical approach, allowing the Bible to interpret itself ... The historical-biblical hermeneutical method is the only method accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

(Wilson 2021a)

The very conservative approach to hermeneutics which tends to demonize hermeneutical approaches such as historical criticism has closed the 'Scriptural door' for a deeper understanding of the Bible, its authors, and their world. To truly identify as a *Sola Scripture* church community, it is vital to examine, study and understand the world the very first Christian community existed in. This study is motivated by a hope to develop a deeper Bible-based familial ecclesiology.

The second motivation for the study is that of the mission of the SDA church. Mission and evangelism have always been an identifying aspect of the SDA church, yet the question remains whether the methods used are truly successful in reaching the world with her unique message. If the SDA church and its mission are dearly loved by the members of the church, it is vital that the best and most effective approach to evangelism is used to further the work that the church believed itself to be called for.

This study is motivated by the hope that reform in evangelistic praxis will occur sometime not too far in the future. If the SDA church wishes to experience the growth explosion that happened in the New Testament church, we need to examine what made the early church's missiology so successful and why. The work of evangelism in the early church was laid upon all members. Perhaps the church is approaching evangelism wrongly by focusing on the programs rather than the people. As stated by Tosi about the early church:

More recently scholars have taken up that particular point, growth through a community actualizing itself, as to the reason for the success of the early Church. Perhaps the explosive growth of the Church was not at all through a conscious evangelistic strategies and methods (though they may have been hints of it), but rather it was through sociological and demographic shifts which the early Church community exploited.

(2011:4–5)

There is a hope that this research will form part of a larger crowd of voices that call for the development of a familial structure and approach to evangelism. This development needs to start with the investigation of the early church's social structures and progress to a better understanding and practice of social structures in SDA Ecclesiology.



## **1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to identify the comparisons and contrasts that might exist between the kinship and familial ecclesiology of the first-century Christian church and the ecclesiology of the SDA church. It further aims to highlight the benefits of developing a familial ecclesiology in the SDA church. The last aim of this study is to positively contribute to the development of a biblical familial approach to the doctrine and practice of ecclesiology in the SDA church by making specific recommendations. The aim of this study is not to bring complete reform to SDA ecclesiology, but rather to inform and sensitise the SDA community with regards to the familial experience of the early Christian believers.

The objectives that this study hopes to achieve can be summarised in eight statements.

1. The study of a familial ecclesiology of the New Testament church. The study uses a branch of historical criticism that deals with the societal context of the Biblical texts namely social scientific criticism. Employing SSC, a better understanding of the early Christian church community and worship experiences will be obtained.
2. An analysis of the pre-easter Jesus movement, compared to the early Christian church. Although Jesus set the foundational principles for a fictive family, it was in the decades to follow that Christianity, in its early years, evolved into a fully functioning kinship system. Understanding the development from the Jesus movement to Christianity is a key aspect of the research presented.
3. The identification of influential principles and practices of the early church's fictive family. These principles and practices made the fictive kinship community what it was. Understanding the ecclesiastical family of the early church cannot be done without presenting the praxis of such a community.
4. An examination of the early church polity. The early church polity lays the basis for comparing the later SDA church community structure with that of the first Christian church family.

5. To research and present SDA ecclesiology. The study includes the history, polity, identity, and mission of the SDA church. SDA ecclesiology is based both on an organizational level and in local congregation. Both are to be examined for a proper ecclesiological perspective.
6. To discuss the comparisons and contrasts of the early church and the SDA church ecclesiology. The most significant agreements and differences will be highlighted.
7. A presentation of the benefits and potential of developing a kinship-based ecclesiology in the SDA church. It is important to not only present the outcome of such a development in some practical terms. Change can only be suggested if the benefits outweigh the difficulty of change.
8. To recommend adjustments and changes for the sake of developing a kinship-based ecclesiology in the SDA church.

### **1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used in this paper will be qualitative research on the topics of the ecclesiology of the New Testament church and the ecclesiology of the SDA church.

The research dealing with the early Christian church is done by employing social scientific criticism (SSC) as a method of interpretation, the focal models used being primarily family and kinship, and secondary honor and shame. As a sub-criticism of historical criticism, SSC focuses on the socio-cultural dynamics within the early Christian church with the emphasis on the experience of early believers as being part of a larger family or kinship, albeit a fictive one.

The method used for examining the ecclesiology of the SDA church is the examination of the historical development of the movement, the development of its polity, and a systematic understanding of its unique theological identity as an ecclesiastical movement, both organizationally and as local congregational groups.

The research done on the topic of SDA ecclesiology focuses on the theological and practical principles of the social community of Adventism, specifically in the light of its identity as a remnant people and its calling to evangelise the world. Similarly, the research on the early church focuses on the identity and calling of the congregational

family. The two ecclesiastical movements are compared and contrasted, based on their social identity and their mission to reach others with their message.

The qualitative design of the research will deal with the historical analysis of the early church, studying early Christian texts, the practices of the Jesus movement and the later first-century church, and the structures of the early church. Focussing on the SDA church it will examine historical and current publications of the denomination, its founders and theologians to uncover its origins, identity and practices as an ecclesiastical body. The data for both ecclesiastical movements is dissected into several aspects including, social dynamics and constructs, polity, structures, doctrines, praxis, identity claims and experiences, and mission. These aspects are presented both implicitly and explicitly to emphasize the nature of the early Christian movement and the SDA church.

A vital aspect for understanding the ecclesiology of the SDA church is the engagement between theological reflection, understanding of identity, and church practices. The research will link these three principles of the church together to form an ecclesiastical basis that can be compared with the early Christian church's family model.

Although research of this nature might not be challenged by many ethical implications, it could be noted that there remain some ethical and moral requirements when dealing with historical texts, cultures, and societies. While the research aims to make comparisons and contrasts between the SDA religious community and the early Christians, it aims to handle the sires of the Christian faith with the ethical consideration it deserves. Elliot (1993:59) presents an ethical code for travellers who wish to visit the ancient communities of Bible times. He urges a respectful, quiet travel through the pages and lives of people who lived in a very different world than what we know today. Be aware of the feelings of those whose lives you will intrude on. Listen to their story, rather than just hearing.

Other ethical implications that are considered in the study, are that of dealing with the SDA denomination as a worldwide religious community. The SDA church has a wide spectrum of theological understandings within the boundaries of its beliefs. Perspectives ranging from both the ultra-conservative and liberal sides and

everything in between, are to be respected in a study dealing with the social interactions and connections of the faith community.

This study is restricted by certain limitations. Access to material dealing with the κοινωμία aspect of the SDA church is limited. Most SDA authors venture into the field of remnant theology, eschatology and missiology when dealing with the ecclesiology of the denomination. The social and communal aspects of the church seem to be of lesser importance and there are thus not many resources on the topic. The study of the New Testament church is similarly limited by access to early Christian material on the ecclesiological experience of the first believers. There is also the limitation of the subjective experience of church. Although the study is venturing into the field of ecclesiological theology and understanding, a study of the church cannot be divorced from the personal experience members might have in their religious community. These experiences are subjective and difficult to measure in a qualitative study. The diverse theological viewpoints in Adventism, as mentioned above also present a limitation to setting a precise ecclesiology for the church as a whole. Lastly, the study is limited by gaps in the early church's geographical, cultural, linguistic and religious historical records.

The qualitative methodology used in the research hopes to blend the social scientific study of the early church as a family with that of the study of the SDA church as a community. The textual analysis together with the ethnographic insights presented in this paper aims to uncover the connection and detachment of the early church and the SDA church.

## **1.4 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

### **1.4.1 Chapter 2: Social-scientific criticism**

In chapter 2 the interpretative model of social-scientific criticism is explained. It is divided into two sections, the first part deals with the theory of SSC while the second part of the chapter shows how SSC is implemented through the family and kinship model of interpretation.

The chapter begins with the definition of SSC. It elaborates on the need for SSC and how it can be used to uncover a deeper understanding of the underlying message found in Biblical texts. The chapter then deals with the history of SSC. It plots the

historical development from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century starting with the work of G Theissen in 1973, discussing several key players in the development of the method and concluding with the mentioning of recent proponents of SSC such as D Martin and J Elliott. Special attention is given to the role that B Malina played in the development and implementation of SSC as a respectable method of interpretation.

The chapter briefly mentions the strengths and weaknesses of the method before it outlines the methodology that is used to apply the SSC theory. A list of 10 presuppositions by Elliott is presented to be acknowledged. The methodology further expounds on the two stages of the methodology. First the collection of data and second the interpretation and application of the data. Both stages are explained in a detailed manner to show the thought process involved when engaging in SSC. The chapter then deals with some of the models of interpretation that are used in SSC namely, honor and shame, limited good, patronage and purity.

The rest of the chapter is a detailed implementation of SSC using the family and kinship model of interpretation. A definition of family and kinship in the Mediterranean context is given, followed by an explanation of the importance of group identity in the ancient world. This is exemplified by the Abrahamic family identity. The chapter ends with the process and implications of fracturing the kinship ties by an individual. This is especially important for the study of the early Christian church as many of them fractured ties with a natural kinship to join a new fictive family union.

#### **1.4.2. Chapter 3: The family and kinship nature of New Testament ecclesiology**

Chapter 3 of the study deals with the familial nature of the early Christian church. The chapter is divided into two sections, first dealing with the pre-easter Jesus movement and then discussing the early Christian church.

The radical perspective of Jesus regarding the family as the primary social group is highlighted, showing that Jesus' views and statements undermine the cultural construct that identity was primarily found in the family and kin group. The chapter further deals with the concept of a new fictive family in the Jesus group, highlighting some indications that the first followers of Jesus experienced the group as a familial affair.

The larger part of the chapter covers the familial nature of the early Christian church. The chapter elaborates on the interactions, unity, beginning and identity of the first believers, first as the people of the way, and then as Christians. It delves deeper into the adoption into the “new” Abrahamic family of God, as the early Christians identified themselves.

The chapter then deals with some practices in the early church that one would normally expect to happen in the ancient family circle. Practices such as kissing, eating together and material solidarity, are discussed to demonstrate how the church expressed itself as a family. The final part of the chapter examines the growth of the first church. Lastly, the reason for the Christian explosion, namely the attractiveness of the family and kinship model is then discussed.

#### **1.4.3. Chapter 4: Ecclesiology of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church**

The fourth chapter of the research deals with the Ecclesiology of the SDA church. It starts by giving the historical background of the denomination both doctrinally and organizationally. This historical outline of the development of the church lays the foundation for what it would become in nature and identity.

The chapter then moves to the current statistical records of the SDA church, highlighting several numbers relating to institutions and membership, laying the foundation for the discussion on the polity of the world church. The organizational structure of the SDA church is presented in as simple a form as possible. The organization is extremely large and almost innumerable, as churches, ministries, departments, bodies, and institutions are all connected to the larger SDA church. The section dealing with the polity of the denomination describes how the church deals with authority and the administrative governance of the world church.

Following the discussion on the polity of the church, the self-identification as the Remnant people of God is examined. Remnant theology is the key to understanding Adventist ecclesiology. The remnant identity is closely linked to the mission of the SDA church, the chapter deals with the evangelistic mission of the church, immediately after the explanation of remnant theology.

The chapter then gives special attention to the contributions and influence of Ellen White in Adventist ecclesiology. Ellen White writes elaborately on the topic of church

identity and the church community. A list of affirmations and denials by the Biblical Research Institute is given to provide the framework on how the work of White is to be used and recognised in the SDA church.

The last section of the chapter deals with the ecclesiastical praxis of local SDA congregations. The relationship with the higher administrative organizations is discussed, showing the apparent disconnection often experienced by church members. The chapter then examines the priesthood of all believers as a principle foundation to the ecclesiology of the SDA church, especially at the local church level. Although not always visible in the church, the priesthood of all believers is presented as the ideal model for ministry in the church.

#### **1.4.4. Chapter 5: Ecclesiological comparisons and contrasts between the New Testament church and the Seventh-day Adventist church**

The final chapter of the research draws distinct comparisons and contrasts between the New Testament church and the SDA church. The comparisons and contrasts first discussed are on the future advent hope shared by the two religious communities. The expectation of the *Parousia* (Παρουσία) in the New Testament church as the primary focus of the early believers is examined. The development from expectation to organization is presented, showing how the church started to organize with the realization that Jesus may not return as quickly as they expected. The Adventist expectation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is then discussed in comparison with that of the early church.

The second topic under discussion in the comparison of the two movements, is that of the mission of the church. The evangelistic priorities of the New Testament church and the SDA church are discussed. The passion and *kerygmatic* calling of both movements are examined, and strong comparisons are shown. When it comes to motives and practises however, certain distinct contrasts exist. The chapter discusses the motivators and methods of evangelism, showing the different approaches to the topic of evangelism between the SDA church and that of the apostolic Christian movement.

The third topic discussed is the polity of the early Christian church and that of the SDA church. It is on this topic where the most apparent contrast is shown. Whereas the first believers were focused on relational development, the SDA church is

focused on the development of the organization. In contrast to the strong remnant theology of the SDA organization, the family model of church is prevalent in the early Christian church.

The section continues by providing some potential benefits when *κοινωνία* is deliberately and intentionally incorporated into the current remnant ecclesiology. The work of Tihomir Lazic on this topic is used to identify 7 benefits or motivators for the church to return to a relational community.

The last section of the chapter is the presentation of two possible developments which the church will have to consider if it wishes to adopt a stronger familial ecclesiology. The first is an organizational reorganization. If the initial motivation behind the structure of the SDA church was for administrative levels to serve the local congregations, it has been turned upside down to the extent where the local churches are being used to keep the higher organizational structure in place. A recommendation for change in the organization is brought. The second call for change is at the local church level. A better understanding and employment of spiritual gifts in the local church community will develop a stronger familial bond of servanthood. Care among members is to be intentionally cultivated and developed if the church wishes to become more family-oriented.



## Chapter 2: Social-scientific criticism

### 2.1 DEFINITION OF SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM

The study of the social institutions encountered in the New Testament is based on a method of interpretation called social-scientific criticism (SSC), and time should therefore be invested in understanding the method before using it to investigate the characteristics of the Christian church as encountered in the New Testament documents.

Elliott (2011:1) defines SSC in short as “that phase of the exegetical task which analyses the social and cultural dimensions of the text and its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences”. This definition is supported by the definition given by Murphy (2020): “Social-scientific criticism is an exegetical method which attempts to explore the original social and cultural setting of a text through clues in the text’s content and rhetoric and the analysis of other ancient evidence”. These definitions are only introductory to the SSC method, and more explanation is needed to understand exactly what is meant by SSC.

Although SSC can be seen as a component of historical-criticism, it should not be deducted in definition as only a sub-section of historical-criticism. Whereas historical criticism is concerned with authorship, dating, and other fields of study in the historical field, the SSC method seeks to uncover and investigate the deeper social context of the New Testament culture, the social community with its cultural expressions is under investigation. SSC aims to scrutinize the geographical, historical, economic, social, political and cultural (including ‘religious’) contexts of the society the author is writing in, to, or about. Barton calls SSC a development of historical-criticism, referring to its task in investigating the historical background of the text (Barton 1997:277).

In the process of applying SSC, three important fields are examined. First, the conditioning factors and intended consequences of the text are examined. Second, the correlation of a text’s linguistic, literary, theological and social dimensions, is examined. Lastly, the design of the text as a vehicle of interaction within the social

context is examined. When considering these three critical examinations of the text it becomes evident that SSC is not merely an abstract philosophy, but that it in fact becomes part of the exegetical process equal to other operations in the task of exegesis such as textual, literary, narrative, historical, form criticisms (Elliott 1993:7–8).

SSC studies the text from the position that it is both reflective and responsive to the social setting of the author, readers, and characters of the text. The Bible is written in the context of society (two or more agents present), that is, where “social relations, social structures, social institutions, roles in the social setup, as well as social scripts to be enacted in the social dramas of everyday life,” is ever-present. Aspects like genre, content, style, and structure of Biblical texts are determined by the social and cultural context of the times they are written in. These social influences on the text can be subtle or very clear and obvious, but the fact of the matter is that they are ever-present and cannot be ignored in the interpretation of the text (Elliott 1993:9).

The major emphasis of SSC is the internal and external social dynamics of the social community surrounding the text, how the author and his audience lived and communicated within their communities. SSC assumes that meaning is understood as a socially constructed phenomenon. Unlike narrative criticism, SSC is not concerned with the individual author and his life story. SSC is focused on the social community in which the author wrote and the social community to which he wrote (Murphy, nd). Elliott (1993:11–12) states that historically exegesis was more concerned with, as he calls it, the “big man” view of history where the focus is more on the main figures like Paul, John, Peter, and Jesus. SSC shifts the focus to the communities these characters represented and was supported by.

A study of the New Testament could never be truly comprehensible without placing the text in a larger “constellation of the social, economic, political and cultural current”, in other words, grounding the New Testament story in the principle of a community, first the Jesus movement and later the Christian church. The context of the texts of the New Testament is a social context. The emphasis of SSC is thus on the plurality of persons and how their language, content, structures, and meaning encode information about the social system under discussion (Elliott 1993:9).

Sociological exegesis claims thus that there are certain aspects of the texts that will

only be uncovered if there is a new set of questions, different than what is asked by other interpretative methods (Garrett 1992:89–99).

When going about the task of SSC the exegete should realise that respect for the ancient culture is just as vital as the respect expected from a modern-day traveller.

As Murphy explains:

To examine a text as a social-scientific critic would first assume the posture of a 'respectful traveller' visiting a foreign country. Accept that the customs and social organization of the text you are visiting are foreign; prepare yourself to suspend judgment until you have observed the new phenomenon and tried to understand it in its own social context.

(Murphy 2020)

The New Testament is written in a "high context" society. Meaning that the communicators or authors assumed the reader will have a shared acquaintance with, and knowledge of, the culture and social context. It is expected that readers will be able to read between the lines and social concepts are often more nuanced than explicitly stated. For the modern reader to properly understand the writings, he/she needs to know the social system that is presupposed in the text under consideration. A great danger is reading into the text information of principles from a present social context rather than aiming to understand the ancient social and cultural perspectives (Elliott 1993:10–11). Cultural miscommunications are in the order of the day with language, identity perspective, unwarranted assumptions of similarity, and cognitive styles acting as obstacles when attempting an SSC of the text (Rohrbaugh 2007:5–13).

The reader of the text should ultimately distinguish between his own social perspectives and the social reality of the text. The anthropologic distinctions between emic and etic<sup>1</sup> can assist in distinguishing between what the reader perceives to be stated and what the text in reality states. The emic is the communication given by the natives, or in the case of Biblical interpretation, by the author, and the etic, the interpretation of the investigator based on his/her different social or cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Emic is derived from the term Phonemics, in other words the act of speaking, while etic is derived from the term Phonetics, referring to the act of listening.

perspectives. This shift from emic to etic demonstrates how different readers from different cultural and societal backgrounds may construe and interpret the reality of the text as they experience it (van Eck 1995:162–164). SSC emphasises the study of ancient social structures in the study of religion. The basis for any historical religious studies is partly to acknowledge that the first-century Mediterranean religious context was not freestanding, apart from other aspects of life. Economics, politics, and everyday relationships were intertwined in the practice of religion. As Malina (1986:97) states: “Just as there was domestic economy and political economy in the first-century Mediterranean, but no economy pure and simple, so also there was domestic religion and political religion, but no religion pure and simple”.

SSC aims to examine and understand the complex cultural constructs within the ancient Mediterranean societies and use that as a foundation stone for the exegesis of the Biblical text.

### **2.1.1. History of social-scientific criticism**

Since SSC as an interpretive method is younger than most other interpretive methods, it is often not recognized or given its rightful place in the process of exegesis of the Biblical texts. SSC as a method of interpretation started in the 1970s. The SSC method of interpretation, however, was not without predecessors, it did not “fall from the sky” but was built on the work of various notable scholars interested in the social context of biblical documents.

Some of these pioneers include Max Weber (1864 – 1920) as a sociologist who engaged in studying the social context of ancient Judaism. Ernst Troelstch (1865 – 1923) was a historian who engaged in the study of the Social Teachings of the first church. Adolf Deissmann (1866 – 1937) was a historian who had an interest in the way ordinary people lived in ancient times. Also worthy of mention by Elliott (1993:17) are Donald Riddle and Shirley J Case who presented the sociohistorical method typical of the American Chicago School. These, and other authors, predating the 1970’s, laid the foundational work in showing awareness of the importance of social disciplines in the processes of exegesis.

The story of SSC started in 1973 when Gerd Theissen published *Wanderradikalismus: Literatursoziologische Aspekte der Überlieferung von Worten*

*Jesu im Urchristentum* in which he analysed the sayings of Jesus by showing the relationships between the texts and the human behaviour in society. After *Wanderradikalismus*, Theissen published several other studies in which social context and sciences were the focus, the groundwork was laid for SSC to become a promising theory of Biblical interpretation (Elliott 1993:19–23).

At the same time Fernando Belo, in 1974, published his Lecture *matérialiste de l'évangile de Marc*. In this work, Belo examined the social settings of Mark and the foundation was laid for a materialistic reading as opposed to an idealist reading, and this was followed by *Kingdom and Community* by John Gager in 1975. In *Kingdom and Community*, Gager presented the synthesis of exegesis and social studies in English.

The 1980s saw an increase in the interest in social studies with the arrival of Howard C Kee, Bruce J Malina, and John H Elliot on the scene. Especially Malina published very widely in the 1980s concerning social contexts and studies.

In his published works, Malina began introducing various models to use in the study of the social context of the circum-Mediterranean world. These models included honour and shame, family and kinship, limited good, and purity and pollution. Malina convincingly demonstrates how these models are present, both implicitly and explicitly in the texts of the New Testament.

Whereas Malina focussed on the cultural patterns present in the ancient circum-Mediterranean world, Elliott published his *A home for the homeless: A social-scientific criticism of 1 Peter, its situation and strategy* in 1981. In a *Home for the homeless*, Elliott probably brings the very first proper exegetical work of SSC examination to the forefront. Soon thereafter Wayne Meeks in 1983 also published *The first urban Christians* In this work, Meeks offers a panoramic view of the social background, interactions, functioning, and rituals of the early Pauline churches.

First being called social description, Elliott (2008:1–7) developed from his groundwork the concept of SSC and coined it as such in 1990. It was with the publication of *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* in 1990, that Elliott became one of the leading voices in SSC.

In the early 1990s, Martin (1993:114) noted that SSC “is now a staid and respectable member of the exegetical scene”. Ever since then the methodology of SSC has been employed widely by exegetes and numerous publications saw the light in which SSC was used as a tool for Bible interpretation and earned its position in the exegetical process.

In conclusion to his article on the history of SSC, Elliott makes the following statement:

We now know more than ever before not only about how the ancient world looked, but also how it worked. SSC in particular has given us better maps for surveying the social and cultural terrain of the biblical world, comprehending these foreign biblical texts with greater cultural sensitivity, and seeing more clearly the possibilities and limits of finding in the Bible guidelines for addressing the pressing issues of our own time

(Elliott 2008:7)

### **2.1.2. Strengths and weaknesses of social-scientific criticism**

As with any other method of interpretation, SSC is by no means a perfect method of interpretation. With its strengths and its valid position in the exegetical suitcase, it also comes with some weaknesses. In his examination of SSC as a method of interpretation, Barton outlines both the strengths and the weaknesses of SSC very effectively.

The biggest strength of SSC is probably the fact that it enlarges the agenda of interpretation. SSC shows the social and political reality of the New Testament writings, writers, and audiences. The strengths of SSC are evident and need very little discussion as we deal with the benefits of engaging in SSC in detail. The weaknesses and concerns, some valid others not so much, of SSC should, however, be addressed in more detail.

The first concern mentioned by Barton is that SSC might be too anachronistic in using models from a modern discipline such as sociology. A related concern to this is raised by Barton quoting John Milbank who argues that social sciences often aim to

'police the sublime'. The social sciences are contrary to Christian orthodoxy and are grounded in ideologies. In response to this concern the interpreter should note that sociological study does not become the only map of the Biblical ground, as Barton quotes David Martin, a religious sociologist, to emphasise the point:

Sociology can have nothing whatever to say about the Incarnation. Sociology might consider the long-term impact of Jesus Christ on human history, or analyse the struggles between groups which surrounded this or that formulation of Christian doctrine, but it cannot trespass directly on who He is.... It may identify Christ as a bearer of charisma, that is, as anointed by a powerful grace, but the Incarnation is not within its scope. You cannot even imagine a sociological argument for the conclusion of which triumphantly vindicates or disproves the Christian claim concerning Christ.

(Barton 1997:281)

Another concern related to those above is that SSC will limit or even eliminate the spiritual and theological aspects of the text under consideration. Yet the greater danger is maybe in ignoring the study of the social context of the text. Christian literature is often thought of as the "history of ideas" where the theology of the authors is disconnected from their social reality. This is however dangerous as the authors of the New Testament found themselves, very much in a specific social context, and within that society, the meaning is constructed to whatever is communicated in words. The task of SSC is not to limit the spiritual and theological implications of the text, but rather to place these in context with mankind in its cultural society. Barton (1997:279) quotes Scroggs: "In short, sociology of early Christianity wants to put body and soul together". The task of SSC is in no way to narrow down the understanding the exegete might have of the Biblical text, but rather to enlarge his/her understanding of the world behind the text as well as the world within the text, and simultaneously open the eyes of the interpreters to their own sociological context, or the world in which the text is read by the modern reader.

Although there may be valid concerns about SSC the benefit that SSC as a tool adds to the exegete is notable. It remains important to approach the interpretative theories

with balance, making sure that each of them is given their rightful position in the exegetical process.

### **2.1.3. Methodology of social-scientific criticism**

The methodology used to apply the SSC theory is based on presuppositions and procedures. Elliot lists ten presuppositions to be acknowledged when the reader is engaging in SSC.

1. The interpreter presupposes that knowledge is socially conditioned in nature. The modern SSC interpreters must accept that their own personal and social context does influence how they will interpret the text.
2. The method includes means for the interpreter to distinguish and clarify the differences between his/her own social location<sup>2</sup> and that of the author. One of the means to distinguish these differences is to acknowledge the differences in the emic and the etic of the text as discussed above in the section dealing with the definition of SSC.
3. The interpreter has to acknowledge that theories and models clarify the differences in context between him/herself and the author. The next section of this chapter will deal in more detail with models in the SSC theory of interpretation.
4. SSC involves a logical process that is neither exclusively deductive or inductive, but rather abductive, a process that is inclusive of both deductive and inductive examination of the texts.
5. SSC insists that Biblical documents are to be situated within their appropriate geographical, social, and cultural context. The most appropriate field of study for the above contexts is that of the Circum-Mediterranean and ancient Near East areas.
6. When analysing text from a social perspective, critics presume two vital aspects of texts, their features, functions, situations and strategies, namely, 1) texts are units of meaningful social discourse in oral or written form, and 2) texts are intended to communicate the interest of their producers.

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<sup>2</sup> Social location is all the factors that have an influence on the person or group. (gender, age, ethnic roots, class, roles and status, education, occupation, nationality, group memberships, political and religious affiliations, language, cultural traditions and location in place and time)



7. Critics presume that SCC is different yet complementary to historical orientations. Whereas historical criticism would focus on individual actors, personal rather than social relationships and unusual actions or events, SSC focuses on social groupings and their regular, recurrent and routinized behaviour as well as on institutionalized and structured patterns of behaviour and relationships
8. Any study of religion in the Bible requires a study of social structures and relations. In ancient times there were no freestanding institution of religion. Religion was embedded in all other aspects of life, notably into the two dominant institutions of kinship and politics, both of which are social institutions.
9. The practitioner of SSC may use a full range of social science theories, methods and research.
10. Social-scientific critics are not only concerned with the original meanings by the authors of the biblical texts, but also with the aggregations of different meanings through all the ages. It asks the questions of how and under what circumstances did the Bible continue to be meaningful in modern times. It seeks to link the modern reader with an ancient author (Elliott 1993:36–59).

After considering all the presuppositions in the process of SSC, the next step is to engage in the process itself. The procedures of SSC are divided into two stages namely, the gathering, organization, and classification of data and secondly, the synthetic, interpretation of data.

In the first phase, the gathering, organization, and classification of data, the empirical study takes place. A hypothesis based on a conceptual model is explored and the noticeable features of the model are presented. This phase is based on previous empirical research and displays salient properties of a specific social interaction, context, or phenomena.

This investigation can be based on micro, mid-range, or macro levels of society. A macro-level would be to do a broad, encompassing study of the social system abstractly; a macro-level study would be interested in the structures and of the social system as a whole (i.e. the economy, political system, personality structures, and ideologies). A micro-level study would be to study a specific event or narrative from

the perspective of the social models (i.e. the focus of a specific group of people like the Essenes, their formation, continuation and practices). The mid-level study, between micro and macro levels, would have a more in-depth focus on particular institutions and/or movements within the larger society (i.e., commerce and trade, factions, traditions, rituals, values, and norms). This can be demonstrated by comparing the study with looking at a map. A study of the circum-Mediterranean area would be a macro-study, the study of a city within that area like Jerusalem would be a mid-level study, and the study of a building or street in Jerusalem would be a micro-level study.

The empirical study involves six steps: First, the critic must identify the topic to be studied. Second, the critic determines the relevant theory and model for the topic. Third, the gathering and classification of data occur. Fourth, the evidence is presented and explained. Fifth, a connection between the data and the model is made. Sixth, the model is confirmed as useful or rejected and the search for a more appropriate model is started (Elliott 1993:60–68).

Malina divides the data of social studies into four different sections:

- Institutions and values: Institutions such as kinship, economics, politics, and religions and values as the normative orientation of action within a certain social system.
- Social interactions: Studying the conditions of social relationships and the behaviours that follow those relationships.
- Reading and language: Access to Biblical writings is through reading and the interpretation of the language used by the authors. The data can only be retrieved if the student engages in the process of examining the specific words of the author of the biblical text.
- Persuasion and communication: Examining the communication and persuasion techniques of the first century Bible writers to understand how information was shared and behaviour was modified (2008:8–11).

The next phase of the SSC procedure is the interpretation or application of the data. In this phase, the goal is to understand a specific text from the perspective of the model. The goal is to understand how the social model that is decided upon is

relevant in the understanding of the text. In engaging this process, Elliott proposes several questions to be asked:

1. Who are the readers or hearers of the document? Where are they situated? What is the socio-economic and socio-political situation like? Can a social profile of the audience be presented?
2. Who is the author of the document? What information can be found about the author outside of the text? What is the relationship between the author and the readers?
3. How is the social situation described in the text? Is there any information that the author emphasises?
4. What is the author's view or evaluation of the social situation? What does the author commend or disapprove of? What are the ideas, beliefs, values, norms, or sanctions that the author uses in the evaluation?
5. What is the strategy of the text, and how is it presented? What is the genre that the author uses? How does he present his content? How does he organise his writings? How does he integrate different themes, and show his ideologies? In narrative, what is the *plot* of the story? Is it romance, satire, comedy, or tragedy?
6. What is the desired response from the readers? Does the author explicitly state how the audience should react?
7. What motivation and persuasion tactics does the author follow? How does he present his appeals?
8. What social system makes up the larger context of this writing? What are the dominant institutions in society and how do the readers relate to those institutions? Are there any comparable groups or situations? Are there any conflicting groups? What sects, movements, or factions can be identified in the social sphere of the audience?
9. What is the self-interest/group-interest of the author? What is his motivation for the document? What ideology is presented and identifiable? (Elliott 1993:72–74).

Taking all into consideration, it is clear that SSC is not to be used as a shortcut in the exegetical process. Dealing with presuppositions, procedures and questions takes time, but may prove to be valuable in the interpretation of the New Testament.

#### **2.1.4. Models of interpretation within social-scientific criticism**

SSC as a method of interpretation is grounded in the use of social models. Models are used to interpret and understand the world. Dvorak quotes Elliott in his critique of SSC as follows:

Models are cognitive maps that organize selected prominent features of social terrain such as patterns of typical behavior (for instance, at work, at meals, in law courts), social groupings (kin and fictive kin groups, faction, coalitions, patrons and clients and such), process of social interaction (for example, buying and selling, oral and written communication, feuding, making contracts), and the like. Such models alert the social traveller to typical and recurrent patterns of everyday social life in given times and places.

(Dvorak 2007:260)

The scope of this research is specifically within the family and kinship models of interpretation, yet an extended presentation of the primary and prominent models of interpretation is necessary as these models are all interconnected and have influences upon each other as social constructs. For that reason, a short description of some models will be given. The list of possible models of interpretation extends far beyond these, but the models included in this research provide a sufficient foundation for understanding the use of models in SSC.

##### **2.1.4.1 Honour and shame**

Malina and Rohrbaugh (2003:76) explains honour as “the value of the person in his or her own eyes (that is, one’s claim to worth) plus that person’s value in the eyes of his or her own social group”. Shame, on the other hand, refers “chiefly to people’s (especially women’s) mindfulness of their public reputation” (Joubert & Malina 1996:e-book). Within modern Western societies, honour is obtained through individualistic performance and accomplishments, but in Mediterranean cultures, it was mostly kinship that determined honour or shame. The family was central in the ancient Mediterranean world, and became the basis for the New Testament church. It was within a family that obtaining honour was most accessible. If one’s family was honourable, honour was ascribed to members of that family group (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:76). The motivating force behind honour was that of authority and

social interactions with non-family members were a constant battle for honour. The expectation that family members had of each other was a conduct that at the very least would keep intact, but ultimately increase, the honour of the family unit. Members of a family unit had certain roles, and behavioural expectations of each other as parents, children, spouses, daughters, and sons (C. Patterson 2019:4–14). Where these expectations were not met, shame on the larger family unit, and even at times, the social group was the consequence.

#### **2.1.4.2 Limited good**

Since the perception was that all good exists only in limited amounts, it meant that any increase in social position would automatically result at the expense of another person or group. Any person who might have an increase in position or any other good in life would be viewed as a threat to the entire community since it might not be certain who would be losing their part of the limited good available. This sets the scene for conflict in any social circle. There seems to be a thin line between the desire for more 'good' and the desire to keep face in the community by not obtaining any good too rapidly. (Malina 1993:90–112)

#### **2.1.4.3 Patronage**

The patronage system functions in a manner where a person in power provides a product or a service to those who do not have it. This system included the aspect of benefaction, where the receiver of the goods or service could not financially repay the giver, but the giver received as payment a form of honour for the good deed done. In this system, it is referred to as a "Patron-Client Institution". The patronage system is built on three basic foundations: 1) It was not based on equal relationships, but rather between parties who differed in status. 2) The relationship was personal, unlike modern-day business transactions, disguised friendships were the most common relationships in the patronage system. 3) It revolved around the reciprocal giving and taking of products and services (Batten 2008:47–48).

#### **2.1.4.4 Purity**

Purity codes laid the foundation of what was socially acceptable and proper for a specific place and time. Purity codes addressed and influenced many spheres of social life including dealing with food, body image, health, and wealth. It informs us what and who belonged where and when. Although the whole circum-Mediterranean

context had a strong sense of purity, the Jewish society “drew extensive lines of purity, of clean and unclean, in an attempt to create a model of God’s cosmic order and to help an individual locate his or her place in that order so that the person may know when pollution has been contracted and what needs to be done to dispel it, so that access to the holy God and His benefits will remain open” (Da Silva 2000:e-book).

## **2.2 FAMILY AND KINSHIP AS A MODEL OF INTERPRETATION**

### **2.2.1. Definition of family and kinship**

Although the social constructs or models of interpretation are all interconnected, the SSC model that is of interest for this study is that of family & kinship. Of the four major social institutions namely politics, religion, economics, and kinship, kinship stood as the primary social domain. All other social interactions in the first-century agrarian societies were touched in one way or another by kinship. A mutual influence between family and religion can be observed for instance, in the influence of relationships on purity and the lineage of the priests. Similarly, the influences of politics and economics on family and *vice-versa* were also notable as law and order and wealth were determined and enforced in the family unit (Hanson 2008:27–28).

In the Mediterranean context, it is very difficult to make a clear distinction between kin-group and family as a very closely related group. Hellerman (2001:29) makes this distinction by defining ancient family in a narrow sense, referring exclusively to those sharing a blood-line connection with a common ancestor referred to as consanguinity. This distinction is picked up by Cohick (2013:179) who states that kin on the other hand can refer to a larger group of members including extended family, cousins, in-laws, and some other individuals. Using these distinctions, the Western mind may think that there is a clear separation of family and larger kin-groups, but the reality is that the distinction was not so clear in the ancient thought, and both terms could very easily refer to a large group sharing certain connections, or a smaller group living together in the same house.

The definition given to “family” is largely different from a modern Western understanding of family. Social-scientific critics have several different approaches to

defining family and kinship. Osiek and Balch (1997:41) accurately define the Mediterranean society as a “diachronic and synchronic association of persons related by blood, marriage, and other social conventions, organized for the dual purpose of enhancement of its social status and the legitimate transfer of property”.

Diachronically the family was made up of a lineage of ancestors and all previous generations. Even the deceased ones belonged to the family or kin unit in a sense. Simultaneously, the family was synchronic in the sense that several living units, connected by blood ties or marriage also participated in familial responsibilities and privileges (Osiek & Balch 1997:42).

The kinship setup of the ancient Mediterranean world, especially in the Jewish community, is a pyramid consisting of different levels. First is the Jewish or Israelite nation, then the tribe, followed by the *mispahah* or clans, and as the basic unit of society the *bet'av* or household. The “*kin*” is defined as those who are of the same “kind”. This could be anything from a macro expression of kin such as the nation of Israel down to the smaller unit of the *bet' av*. The context of the situation would determine the meaning ascribed to the group. The *bet' av* was separated from others based on kin, the *mispahah* from other clans, tribes from tribes, and eventually the nation of Israel from other nations (Da Silva 2000:e-book). The *bet' av* functioned as the legal foundation of society with the father of the household acting as judge in familial legal matters. This defines the household setup in a new way when it is understood that a household rarely consisted of only a father, mother, and minor children, but rather was a combination of several adults and children, both from the bloodline of the patriarch as well as those who have married into the kinship. The *bet' av* could have up to 4 or 5 generations living together as a household, all being ruled by a single patriarch. This ‘togetherness’ of a number of individuals living as family served as a shield of protection in various aspects of life such as economics, physical safety, and honour (Sanders 2002:117–128). The horizontal dimension of kinship can thus make it difficult for the modern interpreter to understand what kinship meant for ancient communities as it could refer to anything from belonging to a specific nationality to belonging to the smaller kin-groups of households (Da Silva 2000:e-book).

For hundreds of centuries, the Hellenistic culture dominated society, and to a large extent, the Jewish society was also influenced by Hellenistic views. Yet the cultural view of family extends far beyond the modern nuclear family present in the Hellenistic view as well. When referring to family, Greek literature makes use of the term οἰκονομία, the management of households. It was less concerned with the “who” of the οἶκος and more with the “how” of it. In other words, the management of property and people belonging to a household (Moxnes 1997:20–21). According to Aristotle, “the component parts of a household are (1) human beings, and (2) goods and chattels. And as households are no exception to the rule that the nature of a thing is first studied in its barest and simplest form” (Aristotle, *Oec.* 1.1343a).

The Greek οἶκος included all the members of the household who stood under the management of the patriarch. The family in the ancient Mediterranean context also included non-kin members as household members. Aristotle defined the family setup as consisting of a husband, wife, parents, children, masters, and slaves (*Pol.* 12.2-12). Slaves, workers, lodgers, and apprentices were all included in the family setup with similar responsibilities in protecting and caring for the family as kin-members, but also had the benefit and rights of being fed, clothed, and taught as members of the family (Huebner 2017:15).

The characterization of every kinship and family group is derived from the *ethos* of the ancient kin group. Da Silva discusses the *ethos* of family and kin groups as a description of what constitutes a Mediterranean kin group. First, cooperation in a competitive context. Sibling rivalry was seen as an evil attitude and no spirit of jealousy was allowed. According to Plutarch, if an older or stronger brother would seem to have an advantage over the younger family members, it was expected that he would downplay his advantage to the benefit of the other (*Mor.* 487 A-B). Above all else, unity in the family was to be preserved. The second is trust. Kinship members were to be reliable in all aspects. The romance author Tobit claimed that only one’s kin members are ultimately reliable. He tests a character by his lineage, and once it is determined that he is from the “right family” he is trusted with a business venture (*Tob.* 5:8-14). Third is harmony, joining in communal religion, business ventures and the sharing of all assets was required of those in the kin-group. And last is attitudes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and patience (Da Silva



2000:e-book). Plutarch presents the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation in kin-groups as follows:

And our asking and receiving forgiveness for our own errors reveals goodwill and affection quite as much as granting it to others when they err. For this reason we should neither overlook the anger of others, nor be stubborn with them when they ask forgiveness, but, on the contrary, should try to forestall their anger, when we ourselves are time and again at fault, by begging forgiveness and again, when we have been wronged, in our turn should forestall their request for forgiveness by granting it before being asked.

(Plutarch, *Mor.* 489C-D)

In short, the concept of family can be summed up in the words of Malina:

While all human societies presumably witness to kinship institutions, the Mediterranean world treats this institution as primary. and focal .... In fact in the whole Mediterranean world, the centrally located institution maintaining societal existence is kinship and its sets of interlocking rules. The result is the central value of familism. The family or kinship group is central in a social organization; it is the primary focus of personal loyalty and it holds supreme sway over individual life.

(Malina 1989:139)

### **2.2.2. Group identity**

It is evident that the ancient Mediterranean concept of kinship and family was more complex than the modern Western thought on family. It often consisted of many individuals, blood-related and non-blood-related, working together for the benefit of the larger group. This group was bound by a certain *ethos* of living. Before all else was the benefit and safety of the group. Individualism was of little value and people were not judged or taken on their own merits. Identity was achieved and experienced in kinship. Although other kin-groups such as religious or political groups also influenced one's identity, the primary influence of identity was that of the family kin-group, either in larger kin-groups or in the *bet' av*. Individuals had a place and worth

ascribed to them, but always in the context of the household, clan, tribe, or nation. Human worth and identity were a corporate affair. A way to clarify this type of thinking is to understand how the counting of any group of people took place. In western society, the number of individuals will be recorded, but in the ancient Mediterranean world the number of families represented was counted (Sanders 2002:122–124).

Identity in the family unit was determined by the identity given to the specific family in the larger society. Identity was a shared affair and experienced in all levels of the kinship pyramid, with the *bet' av* as the most influential group to develop an identity in the social network (Da Silva 2000:e-book). The family security in terms of economics was also grounded on the principle of “the family before all else”. The rich and poor all belonged to the same family and shared economic security. A rich individual keeping his wealth to himself as found in western societies was a foreign concept. Wealth, influences, and honour were shared within the household, or even within other levels of kinship (Sanders 2002:120).

Staunch loyalty to the family was expected in all circumstances. The traditions of the family were to be kept in all manners. Tradition not only refers to the way things were done, but even more important to the way things were thought about. This was also known as “the communal wisdom”. A circular movement existed where tradition informed the importance of the family structure and the family in return enforced the traditions. Any person not sharing the cultural identity found in the tradition of the family, was seen as an outsider that could not be trusted as they did not necessarily have the best interest of the group at heart (McVann 1993:70–71).

While the family was the major institutional dynamic, honour was the major social dynamic or construct through which identity was developed. Family or kinship and honour were closely connected, as the family was seen as the major foundation and source of honour and shame (Murphy 2020). Honour determined all thoughts, behaviours, and interactions. In contrast to a guilt and innocence culture<sup>3</sup>, the honour and shame social perspective was not concerned with the individual's legal standing, but rather his level of honour within his social network (Beech 2018:338–341). Public

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<sup>3</sup> Descriptive of most Western societies.

value was determined by the level of honour achieved in society. Aristotle very explicitly claims that honour is the greatest concern of all:

“Therefore, the great-souled man is he who has the right disposition in relation to honours and disgraces. And even without argument it is evident that honour is the object with which the great-souled are concerned, since it is honour above all else which great men claim and deserve”

(Aristotle. *Eth. nic.* 4.3.10-12).

Aristotle equated honour and pleasure to be the two great motives for any decision or action, yet his senior, Isocrates, advised the young Aristotle to be cautious in dealing with pleasure, thus placing honour as the greatest motivation of all: “The two great motives that people have for choosing any course of action is honour and pleasure” (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 3.1.11). While honour with pleasure is a great good, pleasure without honour is the worst of evils (Isocrates, *Demon.* 17). Isocrates further claimed that a man’s honour is to be placed above anything else, including his own safety: “The value of honour is to be placed above one’s personal safety” (Isocrates, *Demon.* 43).

Honour was obtained in two ways, it was either achieved, or it was ascribed. When honour was achieved, it was a result of active involvement in civic duties or tasks such as military campaigns, the arts, sports, and education. Although there were means of achieving honour without competition, most forms of achieved honour came by being victorious in some sort of conflict (Neyrey 1998:15). The most common method of obtaining and keeping honour was to engage in a conflicting type of interaction named “challenge and riposte”. In a culture where honour was acclaimed, the great need for all was to grow in honour. Honour was dynamic in nature. It could increase or decrease based on circumstances or social interactions. In the challenge and riposte interactions, a challenger would emerge, challenging the individual about his actions or words. This challenge aimed to question the honour of the receiver, who on his side would defend his claim to honour. Whoever walked away as the victor in this interaction would have increased in honour in the eyes of those present and would have achieved honour based on social interaction. Challenges were only given to those who were equals. A peasant or slave would not

have the “honour capital” to challenge the honour of the elites in their society (Neyrey 1998:20–21). These interactions were not always formal in nature, and Malina suggests that in the first-century Mediterranean world all social interactions outside of the family was a challenge to honour and a mutual attempt to gain honour (Malina 1993:34–36). Honour was of little use within the walls of the family home. It found its significance in the larger society a person lived in. Honour was valued in social contexts where peers had the opportunity to challenge each other’s honour and increase their own position with those that surrounded them. It was the public audience that determined the outcome of a challenge and riposte interaction.

Ascribed honour on the other hand was given to a person without any action by the personal self. The most common example of this was honour obtained by family or kinship relations. Reputation, wealth, and social standing influenced how families were rated in terms of honour. This rating occurred within the communities a family was found in and was done by neighbors and other social contacts. A child born into a family would automatically receive the same honour as the family he/she was born into. A person was known first by their father’s name and would be carriers of his honour or shame: “children will blame an ungodly father for they suffer disgrace because of him” (Ben Sira, *Sir.* 41.7).

It is noteworthy to mention that birth order as well as gender, influenced honour. Even though children from the same family would be ascribed the same basic level of honour as that of the family, a first-born son would have significantly more honour in society than a last-born daughter (Neyrey 1998:14–16). Children were constantly reminded that they are carrying the honour of a whole family and would be evaluated by friends and family who had specific social expectations of them. The aspiration of parents was not for children to have a better social stance than their family of origin, but rather that children grow up to maintain the social standing of the family in the community they found themselves in (McVann 1993:74).

Irrespective of the source of honour, whether it was achieved or ascribed, it was always placed in the context of the larger group. The individual was dependent on the group for the recognition of his honour. No honour was given to an individual apart from the kin he belonged to (Moxnes 1997:19–20). The primary seat of honour in the Mediterranean societies was the household and all affronts to a member of a

family were seen as a challenge to the honour of the whole family. An attack on the honour of the family was seen in a very serious light, and retaliation was inevitable. (McVann 1993:71).

An examination of honour would in no case be thorough if the opposite construct of shame is ignored. As much as the aspirations for honour were present in the Mediterranean cultures, so was also the avoidance of shame. Shame, as the opposite of honour, meant that a person would lose value, or face in the society he finds himself in. This would happen if the public opinion of a person started to become negative. There were many reasons why a person would be shamed in the social domain, and Aristotle list several vices in which a person would deserve to be shamed. Yet it should be noted that vices were not the result of the shame, but rather the breaking of a social code. A classic example would be the throwing away of a shield in battle. The real source of the shame was the cowardice displayed by the action (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.6.3) or making an undeserved profit in business, whereas the real shame was in the stinginess of the person (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.6.5).

It would however be too simplistic to only refer to shame as the reverse of honour. Although in a certain sense that was true, shame had a larger meaning than only loss of respect or honour. Shame also had a positive effect when a person had a proper sense of shame. This awareness of shame and what actions would result in shame was pivotal for the gain of honour. A shameless person who had no awareness of his own shame would ignore the “great game of reputation” and would ironically lose their honour in society (van Eck 1995:166).

Just as in the case of honour, shame was also experienced in the public domain. A person would experience no shame in violating the social code if they were not discovered. Shame was a result of public humiliation, especially before those whose opinion was valued by the person. Aristotle states. “The eyes are the abode of shame. That is why they feel more ashamed before those who are likely to be always with them or who keep watch upon them, because in both cases they are under the eyes of others” (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.6.18).

In the development of identity in the ancient Mediterranean world, the achievements, status, or position of the individual was of little value. Unlike the view of the modern

Western society, the individual's identity was formed and experienced in the identity of the kin and family he or she belonged to. The level of honour the family and the group had in the society, was ascribed to the individual, and all the honour achieved by the individual was ascribed to his kin and family.

### **2.2.3. Abrahamic family and patriarchy**

For a Jewish family, it was of utmost importance to show how the family group they belonged to fit into the larger kinship group known as the descendants of Abraham, the principal ancestor. It could almost be seen as entry-level honour (Da Silva 2000:e-book). The Gospel of Matthew is an example in presenting the honour of Jesus as a descendant of Abraham. The author, presumably Levi Matthew the disciple, starts his text with the Genealogy of Jesus, highlighting two principal ancestors, Abraham and David. (Mt 1:1). In doing so the author is particularly concerned with giving attention to the fact that Jesus is from the royal line of David, already presenting a potential claim to the Davidic throne and secondly establishing Jesus' identity as truly Jewish, being a descendant of Abraham.

The act of *encomia*, the practice of praising a person, place, or thing, in the series of ancient Greek writings named the *Progymnasmata* was built on the premise that the honouring of a person always began with the mentioning of the person's genealogy and highlighting the most honourable members of such a genealogy. Various biographies and writings from the ancient Greek writings highlighted the fact that a person's honour to a great degree resided in his bloodline (Neyrey 2008:89–90). Even at death the *encomium*,<sup>4</sup> started with the genealogy and mentioning of noteworthy ancestors and their claims to honour (Da Silva 2000:e-book).

Aristotle explained the importance of genealogy by explaining that an honourable person is born from a family who is of an honourable descent.

Noble birth, means that its members are sprung from the soil, or of long standing; that its first members were famous as leaders, and that many of their descendants have been famous for qualities that are highly esteemed. In the case of private individuals, noble birth is derived from either the father's or the mother's

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<sup>4</sup> A speech given to commemorate the deceased.

side, and on both sides, there must be legitimacy; and, as in the case of a State, it means that its founders were distinguished for virtue, or wealth, or any other of the things that men honour, and that a number of famous persons, both men and women, young and old, belong to the family.

(Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.5.5)

Genealogical honour functions in various ways to achieve practical goals in the presentation thereof. According to Hanson, the presentation of a genealogy may be to establish religious purity, rights of political leadership, inheritance rights, marriage eligibility, ethnic connections and to identify outsiders (Hanson 2008:30–31).

Every generation of a genealogy could have been used to present a family's honour in contrast to the honour of any other family, finally culminating in the apex of the list, the person seen as the "head of the genealogical family". In the case of all Jews, the importance of having Abraham as the apical father of the "Jewish family" was vital as it made each Jewish descendant of the patriarch a rightful heir of the promises of children, land, and reputation given to him (Hanson 2008:39–41). In many of the Ancient Mediterranean cultures, people were known and addressed by their father's name as seen in various Biblical references including the name of the father (Mk 10:46, Ac 13:6, Mt 16:17). The Roman culture had a similar practice where the individual would have his clan name included in his name (Da Silva 2000:e-book).

A person primarily achieved genealogical honour through the bloodline of the father, although at times the mother would also be mentioned if she was from an exceptional honourable family, or the fact that the person was born from a free woman and not a slave, was emphasised (Da Silva 2000:e-book). The father figure was always the central figure of the family and kinship with a culmination of familial identity in some or other patriarch. In the case of the Jewish people (and others as well) that patriarch was Abraham. All further male descendants with their male children would stand as "mini-patriarchs" in their families. The continuity of the family was central, and this was only possible with the birth of male children (Sanders 2002:118–121).

The identified living patriarch of the family was rarely replaced by a younger son. Even though he might have retired from duty (vocation mostly was a familial affair, where the sons would follow in the footsteps of the father), he would still be heading

the household as an authoritarian whose decisions were always respected and whose commands always heeded. In the third century CE the Roman lawman Ulpian made the statement about fathers: “In the strict legal sense we call a *familia* a number of people who are by birth or law subjected to the *potestas* of one man” (Ulpian, *Digest* 50.16.195).

Young sons often found themselves under pressure and strict discipline to prepare them for the role of adult manhood. The responsibility of protecting the honour of the family and the larger kinship was emphasised with harsh discipline in the upbringing of sons (*Sir* 30:12; *Pr* 17:25; *Pr* 29:15) (Osiek & Balch 1997:43). Any action that would bring dishonour upon the patriarch was forbidden as Epictetus, the second century Greek philosopher said:

Bear in mind that you are a son. A son’s profession is to treat everything that is his as belonging to his father, to be obedient to him in all things, never to speak ill of him to anyone else, not to say or do anything that will harm him, to give way to him in everything and yield him precedence, helping him to the utmost of his power.

(Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.7)

At the death of the patriarch, his position was given either to his oldest son who would then serve as the head of his own and his brother’s families, or in some instances would fragment into the families of the sons of the patriarch, all starting their own new network of patriarchy (Huebner 2017:16–18).

#### **2.2.4. Gender roles and marriage**

At the core of the patriarchal family setup are the social roles and expectations for males and females. These expectations and roles are often assumed and embedded in the culture’s structures and habits, rather than having them formalised in law or prescription.

In the ancient Mediterranean world, men had a clear privileged status. This was based on the absolute centrality of progeny. More important than any other influence of honour was the presence of a male descendant in the family. With the birth of



every male descendant in the Jewish society, the divine promise of land and progeny as numerous as the stars and the sand of the sea in Genesis 12 was reinforced and fulfilled. The assumption was that the man provided the seed from which a child was created while a woman would merely serve as the carrier of the unborn child. Women who could not bear any children often faced divorce and shame upon herself and her family of origin, while women who did produce offspring was seen in a very favourable light by her husband and family. Even a slave girl who produced offspring would have higher status than a free woman who could not bear children (Sanders 2002:118).

Male supremacy in Judaism was further emphasised by the order of the Israelite creation story where Adam was created first and therefore had a superior position (Hanson 2008:28). The first-century Jewish philosopher Philo explained the supremacy of men by saying that males and females had different types of souls:

There are two kinds of soul, much as there are two sexes among human relations; the one a masculine soul, belonging to men; the other a female soul, as found in women. The masculine soul is that which devotes itself to God alone, as the Father and Creator of the universe and the cause of all things that exist; but the female soul is that which depends upon all the things which are created, and as such are liable to destruction.

(Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.178)

This view on gender was directly linked to the honour and shame construct that society revolved around. As men and their ability to procreate was seen as the source of honour, women were perceived as the source of shame to the family. This was a complex social construct not easily understood in western societies. Women were presented as potentially dangerous and had to be feared as they could seduce men with their looks. Philo explains it as follows:

For we confess that our sex (males) is in danger of being defeated, because our enemies are better provided with all the appliances of war and necessities for battle; but your sex (females) is more completely armed, and you will gain the greatest of all advantages, namely the victory; carrying off the prize without having to encounter any danger; for without any loss or bloodshed, or indeed, I

may rather say, without even a struggle, you will overpower the enemy at the first sight of you, merely by being beheld by him.

(Philo, *Virt.* 38)

This fear of females resulted in unmarried daughters being seen as the biggest threat to the honour of any family. If an unmarried woman willingly lost her virginity, the shame of the act would be placed on the whole of the family and might result in the killing of both her and her male accomplice.<sup>5</sup> If she was raped her male relatives would avenge the shame brought to their family by killing the offender (Esler 1994:30–31).

Gender roles, especially in the social space were rigid and with very limited room for exceptions. Philo, in his *Special Laws*, explains the place of women in society as follows:

Market places, and council chambers, and courts of justice, and large companies and assemblies of numerous crowds, and life in the open air full of arguments and actions relating to war and peace, are suited to men; but taking care of the house and remaining at home are the proper duties of women; the virgins having their apartments in the centre of the house within the innermost doors, and the full-grown women not going beyond the vestibule and outer courts;... Therefore let no woman busy herself about those things which are beyond the province of economy, but let her cultivate solitude, and not be seen to be going about like a woman who walks the streets in the sight of other men, except when it is necessary for her to go to the temple, if she has any proper regard for herself; and even then let her not go at noon when the market is full, but after the greater part of the people have returned home; like a well-born woman, a real and true citizen, performing her vows and her sacrifices in tranquillity, so as to avert evils and to receive blessings.

(Philo, *Spec. Laws* 3.169, 170)

Women were responsible for the management of the *bet' av*. This included any informal familial connections with other women, child-rearing, cleaning and cooking.

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<sup>5</sup> "Honour killings" still happens to this day in certain Middle-Eastern communities.

Men had the responsibility of field management, providing economic resources, all social functions such as negotiations and contracts, religious sacrifices and education. A deviation of this would result in shame being brought upon the family by society (Hanson 2008:28–30).

Marriages were interpreted as a social affair arranged to benefit the family rather than an individual choice made based on a romantic attraction. In most cases marriages were arranged to combine the honour of two families for the benefit of both. Betrothal was the contract between the families to commit to a future marriage relationship. Dowry and bride wealth were negotiated in this period. Although the bride officially became part of the groom's family kinship there was still a mutual sharing of honour among the families (Hanson 2008:31–32).

Two types of arranged marriages existed, endogamy and exogamy. Endogamy was a marriage between two members of the same kinship. This should not be mistaken for incest. The ancient definition of incest was not as broad as the modern view thereof and marriages between direct cousins were in the order of the day. Marrying within the kinship resulted in the honour, wealth, purity, and power of the kinship remained and was protected from any outsider groups. Exogamy on the other hand was marrying outside of the kinship group. These types of marriages often occurred among the political elite and the ruling class. The motivation for an exogamous marriage was no more romantic than that of endogamy. It was to strengthen network links with other political, religious, powerful families in the Mediterranean world. A classic and well-documented example of this was the various marriage relationships the Herodian family had with women from other influential families (Hanson 2008:32–33).

### **2.2.5. Fracturing of kinship ties**

In the Mediterranean world where honour and shame were the primary social construct, the fracturing of kinship ties would be no minor event. Any person who decided not to be associated with the family or kinship, or who went against the practice of “family above all else”, was a source of great shame. Philo in his writings indicated that the family of such a person should: “punish him as a public and general enemy, taking little thought for the ties that bind us to him” (Philo, *Spec.* 1.316).

There is not much information available on the fracturing of kinship ties, maybe because it was so unknown to the culture of the ancient Mediterranean world. The conclusion can however be drawn that since the family was the primary social institution, the fracturing of familial ties would not merely be frowned upon. The movement from natural kinship and adopting a new fictive kin group could have enormous social repercussions. If the possibility of a breakaway was raised, it was more likely for the patriarch to disown or divorce such a member before he could act against the family. In doing so the patriarch would attempt to save face in society and not lose all credibility (Da Silva 2000:e-book). The joining of a new movement at the expense of a natural family and kinship was a serious decision that resulted in public shame on both the individual and the natural family.

To summarise in short, any ancient Jew worth his salt would place the honour of family and kinship before and above all else. An honourable Jew would die for his family without having a second thought. Family was everything, which introduces us to the strange spiritual concept of adoption into a fictive family found in the New Testament church.

# Chapter 3: The family and kinship nature of New Testament ecclesiology

## 3.1 PRE-EASTER JESUS MOVEMENT

In the New Testament, it becomes evident that the Jesus movement and later the Christian church perceived themselves to be part of a family of some sort. In search of their understanding of kinship and their own identification of a family, one must examine the views and perspectives communicated on family and kinship by Jesus and his earliest followers. The investigation of Jesus' attitude towards natural kinship and family and the movement to a fictive family and kinship goes beyond the sayings and actions of the historical Jesus, but also mirrors the communities which received and passed on the written and oral traditions of Jesus. The earliest events of the Jesus movement thus lay the foundation for the early Christian church (Barton 1994:57–58).

### 3.1.1. Jesus and the family

Some familial statements made by Jesus in die gospels would be shameful in an ancient Mediterranean culture. The gospel writers often emphasize Jesus' undermining statements regarding the natural family unit and his statements regarding the importance of a new fictive family unit. Luke portrays a person who is unwilling to hate his family not worthy to be a disciple of Jesus.

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

(Lk 14:25-27)

In the Jesus movement, the natural family made way for a new fictive kinship. This replacement of kinship is not only placing the natural family secondary in line but replacing it altogether. Matthew's parallel of the section does not use the word 'hate'

but says “he who loves more...” (Mt 10:35-39). Although μισεῖ in Luke could be used in a hyperbolic sense emphasizing the “loving less” concept as in Matthew, it remained offensive in a society where honour of family was the highest obligation<sup>6</sup> (Keener 1993:e-book). Irrespective of which account, either from Matthew or Luke’s perspective, the obvious message stands out, Jesus requires total commitment to the newly formed Jesus movement. The natural kinship would not take precedence in the lives, decisions, and actions of those following him. Jesus is aware that this movement from natural to fictive kinship is no minor event in the lives of his followers and refers to it as an act of self-crucifixion, the most shameful punishment reserved for the worst of society’s criminals.

Another familial statement made in the Gospels confirmed a negative attitude towards traditional family values. Jesus not only taught the rejection of natural family but also modelled it.

Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.” Answering them, He said, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! “For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.”

(Mk 3:31-35)

The response of Jesus to his family’s presence would be perceived as extremely shocking and by doing so he is not only dishonoring himself but also his natural family (Hellerman 2009:95). There was a clear movement in the Jesus group from a natural to a new fictive kinship. This drastic move was made regardless of the possible, or maybe even certain, loss of honour for both the individual and the larger family. By their willingness to leave their kinship and family behind the followers of Jesus took the foremost and most fundamental step for discipleship as the *imitatio Christi*. In the Matthean account of the narrative (Mt 12:46-50), a clear indication of the full acceptance of the Jesus group as a new kinship is the communal partaking of

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<sup>6</sup> The most common use of μισεῖ is still in the context of detest, hostility and opposition (Friberg & Miller 2000).

the Passover meal (Lk 22:14-15). The Passover meal was the highlight of the Passover feast and was enjoyed with the household and family members. The meal was not a synagogue or temple event and unlike other Jewish feasts, it was not a communal event but primarily a family affair (Gribetz 2019:1–14). The centrality of family in the partaking of the Passover meal is evident in some ancient documents. Josephus stated:

And as the feast of unleavened bread was at hand, in the first month, which, according to the Macedonians, is called Xanthicus, but according to us Nisan, all the people ran together out of the villages to the city, and celebrated the festival, having purified themselves, *with their wives and children*, according to the law of their country; and they offered the sacrifice which was called the Passover.

(Josephus, *Ant.* 1.4.8; emphasis added)

All the gospel accounts mention Jesus and his disciples celebrating the Passover meal together as an indication that the group thought of themselves as operating within the boundaries of a family (Guijarro 2004:114–115).

God is presented as the father of the new fictive kinship and the followers of Jesus subscribing to God's patrilineal will are described as his new family. The trading of the natural family unit for that of membership of the Jesus-kinship is not merely an implied or metaphorical step. Jesus foresaw that his followers would be heavily resisted in their natural families because they decided to follow him

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household."

(Mt 10:34-36)

### **3.1.2. Familial conflict**

Familial conflict was frowned upon, even more so when the conflict was with a parent. There is however a movement towards a new parent in the Jesus movement. With God as their father, the followers of Jesus could now find in their new

relationship with God what they had given up by detaching themselves from their natural kinship. This is evident in the opening lines of the Lord's Prayer, "Our father..." (Mt 6:9). Although the Old Testament alludes to God's role as a father to the nation of Israel, it is only in the Jesus movement that God not only fulfils the role of a father, but is referred to as being the father of the new kinship (Guijarro 2004:117–118). The fictive kinship of Jesus is further developed by surrogate siblings. The relationships between siblings were one of the strongest within the traditional ancient kinship network and the Jesus movement seems to mirror the cultural social norm by forming a network of siblings. Referring to the members of the fictive kinship as brothers are affirming their position in a new family setup (Mk 3:35; Mt 18:21; Mt 5:22) (Hellerman 2009:110–114). In a social context where female members of kinship were rarely mentioned unless necessary, it is remarkable that the fictive kinship includes sisters in the fictive family unit (Barton 1994:74).

The natural family of Jesus, together with scribes and Pharisees, are often portrayed as outsiders to his new circle, even to the point where enmity is often sensed between him and them (Barton 1994:75). The enmity between Jesus and the larger kinship group of Nazareth is clear when they have the intention of killing him (Lk 4:29). The murderous intentions of the Nazarenes came because of the shameful message presented by Jesus in the local synagogue and is a symbol of the drastic expulsion from the local community (Talbot 2008:99–113). The crowd in the gospel accounts is often portrayed in a more positive light compared to the family and kinship of Jesus. Traditionally a crowd drawn from a wide geographical spread would be seen as outsiders who should be distrusted, and the ingroup should be protected from the suspected threat of shame from any outsiders. The Jesus movement seems to disregard this as Jesus seemingly refers to the crowd as his new family (Mk 3:34). The "true" family of Jesus has an inclusive identity and is constituted by people from all walks and areas of life (Barton 1994:79–80).

### **3.1.3. A new fictive family**

Jesus envisioned a new kinship community, based solely on a religious basis, and not based on a natural bloodline or tribal kinship. Loyalty is now expected to be shown to God as Father and to the fictive family as brothers, sisters, and mothers. Later in the Gospel accounts, the new family group is responsible for providing for the



physical needs of Jesus and his followers (Lk 8:1-3). In contrast to supplying in his needs, the natural response of leaving the natural family for his new fictive family is the loss of family wealth and benefits. Jesus refers to this when stating that in the new kinship his followers will enjoy greater benefits than before (Mk 10:28-30).

The loss of communal wealth and status for the sake of following Jesus is evident in the accounts of the calling of the “fishermen disciples” (Mt 4:18-22, Mk 1:16-20, Lk 5:1-11). In the calling of the fishermen, the command to δευτε σπισω μου is the first reference to a following of Jesus, and the further use of this term in the New Testament will exclusively be used to describe the act of following Jesus. The use of the imperative verb is indicative not merely of an invitation, but a command resulting in either compliance or disobedience. The imperative verb, when being used as a command, such as here, was usually used by a superior speaking to one in an inferior rank (Wallace 2000:210–211). The force of the imperative mood, in this case, is in the present tense of the verb, indicating that the action being commanded (to follow Jesus) was to be an ongoing process and not only a once-off event. The Greek writing of the command implied “follow me forever”. This adamant command stands in contrast to the social expectation that younger males would follow the patriarch of the kinship above all, as sons were raised to have absolute obedience towards their fathers and were bound to his authority over them until his death. The four men were confronted with a decision as to who they would follow, the social expectation to follow Zebedee, or the imperative command to follow Jesus (Talbot 2008:101–102). By choosing to follow Jesus, the fishermen left behind not only their father or vocation but their whole identity encapsulated in whatever honour they had in the eyes of the community. The rejection of their familial responsibilities would surely have resulted in a loss of honour within the community. As Da Silva explains it: “The group will then award honour to its members that adhere to the way of life promoted by the group, and use shame and censure to bring wayward members back into line with group values” (2000:e-book). Many of the Jesus followers would not follow through with their original intent to follow him and would return to their family of origin where they would probably have been accepted back under a cloud of shame (Jn 6:60-66).

Even though the gospel accounts seem to elevate the fictive kinship, Jesus had no intention of portraying the natural kinship as a community that should be shunned. A

proper reading of the gospel accounts will present a balanced view of Jesus' attitude towards the family. Jesus positively addresses the duties of children to their parents and is critical of those who are not complying with their duties in this regard (Mk 7:6-13). Jesus is also elevating the importance and sanctity of marriage, refusing to allow divorce for reasons the Pharisees deemed admissible (Mk 10:2-12). Disciples were sent to proclaim the good news of the kingdom to households and were not tasked to break up existing family bonds. In the movement from natural to fictive kinship the requirement was not to break the natural relationships, but rather to prioritize the fictive kinship. The conflict with the natural kinship was not to be initiated by the disciple, but rather a result of the disciple's alignment with a new family (Guijarro 2004:114–115).

Any group, whether religious, political, or family, were bound by a common purpose, both internal and external. The following of a religious teacher was not an unknown event but the expectation, except in a few groups like the Essenes, was that the natural family and kinship values and purpose would be upheld by the followers of any group. The internal and/or external purposes of any group outside of the family unit remained secondary to the purpose of the natural family group, namely the development of honour. The Jesus group was distinct in this specific aspect. The external and internal purpose of the fictive kinship was to take priority over the purpose of any other group. The external purpose of the Jesus group was the spreading of their message. The disciples of Jesus were called to promote, sustain and drive the new movement to become a mass movement that awaits the kingdom of God (Guijarro 2004:117–118). This mission-driven external purpose is presented to the very first disciples at their calling, "I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). The new Jesus family would not be primarily concerned with protecting the honour of their natural family, but to communicate to others the message of the kingdom of God. There was very little honour in following the ways and teachings of shamed, homeless, preachers. The first disciple-group was more concerned with the achieved honour obtained within the fictive kinship derived from being successful in their mission to spread their message to all who would hear. This is evident in the joyful response of the 72 disciples as they report the success of their mission (Lk 10:17).

The internal purpose of the Jesus movement was to develop a proper new fictive kinship based on the same internal principles that the natural kinship would have. The loyalty to “siblings”, was caring for one another’s physical needs and defending the honour of the group in the presence of outsiders. For the Jesus group, the fictive kinship was not an institutional organization, but a literal family with the benefits and responsibilities ascribed to the internal functions of a natural family. The internal purpose of the fictive kinship was to support their external purpose of the mission. The Gospel of John emphasizes the love required within the new kinship community, yet this is to advance the mission of the new group. The words of Jesus in John 13:35 are relevant; “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The commandment to exert love is not to be restricted within the circle, but to be used as a portrayal of what the Jesus community stands for. The acts of love were not primarily to develop a position of honour from outsiders, but to present a new family where outside honour is of lesser relevance (Ridderbos 1997:477).

## **3.2 THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

### **3.2.1. Unity in the early church**

After the Easter event and the ascension, the Jesus movement continued in its growth as a fictive kinship, developing into the New Testament church. This was a continuation of the pre-Easter Jesus movement. As soon as the ascension event happened, the Jesus group was said to be together as an inclusive group in what is called “τὸ ὑπερῶν ἀνέβησαν οὓς ἦσαν καταμένοντες”(Ac 1:13), the perfective use of *καταμένοντες* possibly indicating that the upper room served more than a place of gathering, but that it was part of a house occupied by the earliest post-Easter Jesus-group, possibly owned by one of the members of the group (Robertson 1960:e-book). The early Jesus group would remain closely connected and “with one mind” (Ac 1:14; 2:46; 4:32). The theme of unity within the Christian church would later become a topic of emphasis in early Christian writings such as:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with

patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to *preserve the unity* of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

(Eph 4:1-3; Emphasis added)

This unanimity existed of old among the Apostles; thus, the new assembly of believers, guarding the commandments of the Lord, maintained their charity. Scripture proves this in the following words: 'But the multitude of those who believed acted with one soul and one mind.' And again, 'And all were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and His brethren.' Thus, they prayed with efficacious prayers; thus they were able with confidence to obtain whatever they asked of God's mercy.

(Cyprian, *Unit. eccl.* 25)

I myself think that perhaps the holy apostles are able to be such whole and undefiled stones, making one altar all together on account of their unanimity and concord.

(Origen, *Hom. Jos.* 9.2)

### 3.2.2. The people of the way

The first group of believers identified themselves as the people of “τῆς ὁδοῦ” (Ac 9:2; 19:9; 22:4). Other religious groups similarly called their way of living, “the way”, as some of the Qumran texts indicate for instance: And all of you, of *perfect way*, strengthen [...] the poor! Be slow” (1QHa 9:36); “And for all those who deviate from the path. I shall not comfort the oppressed until *their path* is perfect” (1QS 10:21) (*emphasis provided*).

The Christian sect however implied a different meaning to their identification as followers of “τῆς ὁδοῦ”. The way was more than a type of behaviour, it was a soteriological statement that in the kinship group of “τῆς ὁδοῦ”, salvation from sin was found. Becoming part of the “τῆς ὁδοῦ” was not by accepting a way of lifestyle but accepting the founder of the movement as a Divine person (Ac 4:12). This was a unique perspective within Judaism where the lifestyle and behavior of different teachers were followed, but always within the context of showing the way to YHWH,

not the teacher himself claiming to be YHWH. This explains the fierce resistance to the Jesus kinship in the earliest years of the movement by opposers from within Judaism (Witherington 1998:316).

The identification as “τῆς ὁδοῦ” soon made way for other terms most notably *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία ) and *koinonia* (κοινωνία). The former refers to the event of gathering or assembly of people with a common goal, while the latter refers to the fellowship or participation in a two-sided relationship. According to the Lexham theological workbook, the definition of κοινωνία is more indicative of a family relationship than ἐκκλησία which is referring to a formal assembly (Davis 2014:e-book). In most cases, the word ἐκκλησία in the New Testament refers to the formal meeting of a local Christian group. When using κοινωνία, the fundamental meaning for Greek authors was the concept of sharing and unity in the fellowship of a certain group or community (Ac 2:42). This κοινωνία became the essence of the early Christian church attitude, while ἐκκλησία would be the essence of the early Christian church organization. To explain the usage of the terms ἐκκλησία and κοινωνία the questions “what” and “how” can be answered. What was the early Christian group? It was an ἐκκλησία, the gathering of the Christ-followers. How was the early Christian group? It was a κοινωνία, the fellowship of the Christ-followers (Child 1958:351–361).

### **3.2.3. The early church as familial kinship**

The community of Christ-followers, from the very start, experienced their new faith as a familial kinship. As the church began to develop an ecclesiological theology, it was consistent with natural kinship relationships. Terms, words, and references related and ascribed to family relationships were used to refer to the church community. The most frequent of these is ἀδελφός, which when being searched in a digital lexicon, delivers more than 300 results in the New Testament. The importance of the term “brother” is often overlooked by modern readers of the New Testament but considering the ancient Mediterranean context and view of family and kinship, it is clear that the use of the word ‘brother’ had significant meaning to the early church.

The major theme of unity in the early Christian writings is evidence of the importance ascribed to living in harmony with one another. It is only in the family setup that unity was so strongly encouraged. This unity was not only promoted within the local church

groups but also the church as a larger community. Christians traveling within the Roman empire in the first century would feel welcome and at home in other Christian group settings (Muller 2016:5). The early church had a strong holistic nature and extra-local linkages were found in the Christian ἐκκλησία, yet absent in other social voluntary associations (McCready 1996:63–64).

The unity theme is emphasised by Paul:

[B]eing diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

(Eph 4:3-6)

Together with the singularity of the Spirit, the Lord, the Father as well as hope, faith, and baptism, there is the oneness of the body. Paul frequently refers to the church figuratively as a body with various parts, each having its own particular work but all working together in unity for the achievement of communal goals. (1 Cor 12:12-14). Paul further drew on sibling imagery to address issues of disagreement in the Corinthian church:

Now I exhort you, *brethren*, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.

(1Cor 1:10-11; emphasis added)

This notion of family unity in the early church is also presented by the shaming of the congregation for their legal litigation in the Roman courts against one another:

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? So if you have law courts dealing with

matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, *but brother goes to law with brother*, and that before unbelievers? Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

(1Cor 6:1-7; emphasis added)

The willingness to suffer injustice was only found in a family setup. Within all other social and public scenes, it was expected that two parties engaged in conflict would defend their position to keep a position of honour. The Roman courts provided a setting for such disputes to be handled. Paul admonishes the church to react as siblings in a family and put up with any injustices rather than engage in lawsuits (Hellerman 2009:141–143).

#### **3.2.4. The Abrahamic family**

The New Testament authors present the fictive kinship foundationally as an Abrahamic family. As already discussed, the primary familial basis was being “sons of Abraham”. But contrary to the Jewish ideology of kinship, the fictive Abrahamic descent is presented as a voluntary association rather than a natural development based on bloodline. This presented the church as a fictive Israel in opposition to natural Israel. With the resistance to circumcision as the holy covenant sign, (Ac 15) the church, to a great extent, openly distanced itself from Judaism (Ladd 1993:387–390). The term Ἰουδαῖος is consistently used to refer to the groupings within Judaism who are ideologically rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and His community. On the contrary, to the Ἰουδαῖος the ἔθνος is presented as those who are open to accepting the Messiah (Rm 9-11). The two groups are contrasted by juxtapositions such as Jew/gentile, Jew/Greek, circumcised/uncircumcised. Abrahamic patrilineal descent is now presented to all who belong to the new fictive group, and not to a specific nationality (Hodge 2007:44–66). Within the new fictive Abrahamic family, the practice of baptism bridges the divide between Israelite and non-Israelite. Baptism becomes the new covenantal sign for the fictive children of Abraham. In Pauline writings, the metaphorical transformation of a slave becoming a son by adoption is presented with

the baptismal ritual into the new family group (Gl 4:1-7, Rm 8:14-17)(Hodge 2007:90–91).

Joined by voluntary association, the new kinship is open for all who choose to become part of the Abrahamic church community. This decision is based on the construct of faithfulness, or faith (Gl 3:7, Rm 4:16). By accepting the faithfulness of Jesus as the Messiah in faith, the believer joins the new family of Abraham, the church. All believers joining the church community is seen as descendants of Abraham and all become siblings in the household of the ἐκκλησία. The use of the term brother is thus more than just a spiritual reference to a fellow believer, but a familial statement grounded in the Abrahamic patrilineal descent. The early church should thus be investigated not primarily as a formal religious institution but as a large family joined by mutual values. These strong familial values found in the ancient Mediterranean family circles, and present in the early church shows that the references to the church as family is not a metaphor, but that the church was experienced as a kinship group in reality (Meeks 2003:75–77). The family of God accepted believers not as strangers but as family members based on their faith in the crucifixion of Jesus as the method of being reconciled with God:

... and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And he came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household.

(Eph 2:16-19)

Even though the Christian kinship is presented as the new Abrahamic family, the true patriarch of the family is God himself: “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1Jn 3:1).



### 3.2.5. Adoption into the family of God

The New Testament authors actively present God as the father of the fictive kinship called church. The idea of YHWH as Israel's father is not strange in the Old Testament, yet it is only in the New Testament that the early church consistently refers to God as their father and the believers as his adopted children:

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

(Rm 8:14-17)

In the ancient household, adopted children enjoyed equal rights and privileges with natural children. Adopted sons would inherit property and receive the honor of the father as if he was a son born from the father. Paul clearly shift the position of believers from slaves, who had limited privileges in the household to sons, who had full privileges (Hodge 2007:67–72).

In the Christian church, under the patriarchal rule of God, the principle of equality was foundational. This was a revolutionary phenomenon as all other groups were set on developing their honour by drawing members that could increase their status (Sanders 2002:124). Christians argued that in Christ a new family was set up and encouraged anyone, irrespective of status, gender, or nationality to join as Paul clearly states:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise

(Gl 3:28-29).

It should be noted that the New Testament authors had no intention to disrupt the social order, but to modify the behaviour and attitude of such order (Eph 5:21-6:9).

Evidence of this is Paul's letter to Philemon regarding Onesimus. In this letter, Paul is not rejecting the authority of master Philemon over Onesimus in the natural family but is presenting a model of equality between believers in the new fictive family (Sandnes 1997:150–165).

In accepting the Christian church as a new fictive kin group, believers were often faced with the social conflict between the church and the natural family. Membership of the fictive kin group at the expense of the natural family is portrayed in the apocryphal writings, *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. The young girl Thecla converts from paganism to Christianity and the effects of her new life on her natural family are portrayed as follows:

And those who were in the house wept bitterly, Thamyris for the loss of a wife, Theocleia for the loss of a daughter, the maidservants for that of a mistress. So there was a great confusion of mourning in the house. And while this was going on (all around her) Thecla did not turn away, but gave her whole attention to Paul's word."

*(Paul and Thecla, 5)*

The imagery of death by mourning is specifically mentioned to show that Thecla has died for her family. Later in the writings, her own mother calls for her death: "Burn the lawless one! Burn her..!" (*Paul and Thecla, 20*).

### **3.2.6. Familial practices in the early church**

The brother-(and sister)hood of believers had a strong sense of affection towards one another. As a natural family would present its members with a strong sense of emotional attachment, so the early church's fictive siblings had strong emotional bonds resulting in them sharing familial affection through various practical activities. Kissing within the church community was in the order of the day. Kissing was one of the universal features of early Christianity, practised throughout the Christian world. The New Testament presents familial kissing as an expected requirement among believers and commandments to exchange a "holy kiss" or a "kiss of love" seems to be nothing out of the ordinary (Rm 16:16, 1 Cor 16:20, 2 Cor 13:12, 1 Th 5:26, 1 Pt 5:14). Kissing remained an important action in the affirmation of brotherly love among

believers for a number of centuries. In the second century Justin presents it as part of the Eucharist:

We salute one another with a kiss when we have concluded the prayers: then is brought to the President of the brethren, bread, and a cup of water and wine, which he receives; and offers up praise and glory to the Father of all things, through the Name of His Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

(Justin, *1 Apol.* 65:2)

Also, in the second century, Athenagoras presented directions on how to engage in the act of familial kissing and not be caught in the thought of adultery while doing so. This was written in response to the charge by non-Christians that the Christian church encouraged adultery even to the point of incest:

We consider them then as brothers and sisters and give them other names of kinship, and therefore we set great store by keeping their bodies free from violation and corruption. Our law says furthermore: 'If any man takes a second kiss for the motive of pleasure, etc....' We have thus to be so precise about the kiss, or rather the salutation, since if any one of us was even in the least stirred to passion in thought thereby, God would set him outside eternal life.

(Athenagoras, *Leg.* 32:5, 8)

The use of kissing in an ecclesiastical setting was grounded in the cultural expectation of the Greco-Roman world that natural family members would engage in kissing. As the Christian church constructed itself as a fictive kinship the ritual kiss became central as a kiss between "relatives" and even adopted some sort of theological meaning as John Chrysostom presented it:

The kiss is given so that it may be the fuel of love, so that we may kindle the disposition, so that we may love each other as brothers [love] brothers, as children [love] parents, as parents [love] children. But also far greater, because those [are] by nature, these by grace. Thus our souls are bound to each other.

(John Chrysostom, *Hom. in 2 Cor.* 30.2)

Kissing within the community presented an inclusive community where all were welcomed into the new fictive kin, irrespective of social standing, wealth, or status, including slaves. The kissing of slaves for non-sexual reasons was highly unlikely, yet the Christian church included the kissing of slaves as part of the ritual, as in the case of the slave Felicitas who was kissed by the martyrs of Carthage before their execution (Penn 2002:151–174).

Another example of the strong bond shared by the early church is that of partaking in communal meals. Within the Mediterranean context, the sharing of meals was a strong expression of fellowship and shared values. Sectarian movements in the Greco-Roman world often used meal practices to distinguish themselves from other groups and to affirm the identity of those attending meals as part of the group (Brumberg-Kraus 2004:19–20). Sharing of meals is presented as a regular occurrence in the New Testament and other Christian writings and extended beyond the eucharist (Ac 2:46). Christian gatherings including worship services were characterized by the eating of meals together (Smith 2015:357–358). Communal meals occurred in smaller groups gathering in different homes for the sake of eating together and building the affective nature of familial identity (Barrett 1994:170–172). Common meals were used to set boundaries between insiders and outsiders in the Christian community, and the *Didache* warns that only those who are baptized may partake in communal meals (*Did.* 9:5).

The strong affective nature of the ingroup of the early church is presented in the texts of the New Testament authors to various churches. The first Thessalonian letter significantly shows the affection shared between the Apostle and the church as they are identified as his brothers and commended for being his source of joy:

But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while--in person, not in spirit--were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, more than once--and yet Satan hindered us. For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.

(1Th 2:17-20)

Further bonds between individuals as well as New Testament church groups are being presented with strong expressions of emotional attachment, affection, and the use of familial statements (Phlp 2:25-28; 2 Cor 2:12-13; Gl 4:12-15; 1 Jn 4:21) (Hellerman 2009:136–139).

Material solidarity may probably be the greatest evidence of all for the familial nature of the early Christian church. The sharing of material possessions for the sake of the common good in the Christian community:

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

(Ac 2:44-45)

As discussed above, all individual wealth was reckoned as the wealth of the family unit. The Christian church adopted the familial value of pooling resources together. This practice was not exclusive to Christians, as the Qumran communities also engaged in sharing of property. Yet outsiders, more specifically the elite pagans, ridiculed this behavior as bringing shame to the Christian believers and their natural families (Keener 1993:326).

The narrative of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac 5:1-11) shows the serious nature of material solidarity in the Christian church. The couple acted in self-interest while claiming to act in the interest of the group. The aim was to acquire honour by presenting their possessions to the fictive family of believers and yet at the same time retain wealth for their own comfort. The actions of the couple were in contrast with the strong family values presented in the preceding text of the narrative (Ac 4:32-37). The expectation was for the wealthy to act as patrons towards believers from lower economic status by providing for their physical needs. The sharing of wealth raised the economic status of the poor and included them in the fictive kinship (Sanders 2002:124–125).

The sharing of wealth seems to remain a practice of the early Christian church and extends further than only the early Jesus movement. Other New Testament texts also

testify about the material solidarity shared between Christians during times of economic challenges in the Roman empire (Ac 11:27-30; Gl 2:1-10; 1 Cor 16:1-4).

Of special interest is the admonition in Romans:

Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

(Rm 15:27)

The requirement for gentiles to care for the Jewish Christians is an illustrative model of the kinship experience of the early Christian church (Hellerman 2009:146–147).

Writing to the congregation in Corinth, Paul uses the term ἄδελφός to encourage the believers to care for one another as a family in the “collection text”:

Now, *brethren*, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

(2Cor 8:1-2; emphasis provided)

“Paul viewed the collection as a prime opportunity for his readers to practice the central Mediterranean family value of sharing their material resources with brothers who were in need” (Hellerman 2009:151). The sharing of material resources in the fictive family of Christianity remained present for the first centuries and caught the attention of pagan writers such as Lucian of Samosata in the second century. Lucian narrates the events surrounding the imprisonment of the Christian martyr Peregrinus. He writes the following about the actions of fellow believers in this time:

Indeed, people came even from the cities in Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense, to succor and defend and encourage the hero. They show incredible speed whenever any such public action is taken; for in no time they lavish their all. So it was then in the case of Peregrinus; much money came to him from them by reason of his imprisonment, and he procured not a little

revenue from it. The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody; most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once, for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws. Therefore, they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property, receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So, if any charlatan and trickster, able to profit by occasions, comes among them, he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk.

(Lucian, *Peregr.* 13)

The church took the role of kinship in that the church was the financial net that provided security and care for its members who needed economic assistance. Cyprian recounts the story of a Roman actor named Marcus who converted to Christianity. Marcus left the acting stage due to a moral conviction and was without any source of income. Cyprian, a mentor, and confidant of Marcus wrote to the leaders of the church concerning Marcus as follows:

His needs can be alleviated along with those of others who are supported by the provisions of the Church. ... Accordingly, you should do your utmost to call him away from this depraved and shameful profession to the way of innocence and to the hope of his true life; let him be satisfied with the nourishment provided by the Church, more sparing to be sure but salutary. But if your church is unable to meet the cost of maintaining those in need, he can transfer himself to us and receive here what is necessary for him in the way of food and clothing

(Cyprian, *Ep.* 2.2.2-3)

### **3.2.7. Growth in the early church**

The growth of the Christian religion, because of the fictive kinship model, was the topic of discussion in the first centuries both in the writings of Christian and non-Christian authors. Emperor Julian, an ex-Christian, wrote in the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the

pagan priest of Galatia the following regarding the success of the Christian community, which he called “atheism”:

Why do we not observe that it is the Christians’ benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done the most to increase atheism? When the impious Galileans support not only their own poor, but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us!

(Julian, *let. Arsacius* 22)

The growth of Christianity was not based solely on doctrinal convictions, but on the experience of an inclusive family. The way Christians treated each other, (and even outsiders) was appealing to non-believers. Lucian, also a pagan author, presented the source of the kinship model of Christianity to be Jesus Christ the “first lawgiver who persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another” – (Lucian, *Peregr.* 13). The familial words of Jesus were coming to fulfillment so to speak:

“Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’  
“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

(Jh 13:33-35)

The early church was fulfilling its Gospel commission not merely by presenting the new religion as a series of facts and doctrines, but as a family, converts would belong to, and non-converts could belong to.

The attitude of kinship unity and mutual care is displayed by the Christian’s response to a plague afflicting the city of Alexandria in the third century. Eusebius, quoting Dionysius wrote about the Christians amid the plague:

The most, at all events, of our brethren in their exceeding love and affection for the brotherhood were unsparing of themselves and clave to one another, visiting the sick without a thought as to the danger, assiduously ministering to



them, tending them in Christ, and so most gladly departed this life along with them; being infected with the disease from others, drawing upon themselves the sickness from their neighbors, and willingly taking over their pains... In this manner the best at any rate of our brethren departed this life, certain presbyters and deacons and some of the laity... So, too, the bodies of the saints they would take up in their open hands to their bosom, closing their eyes and shutting their mouths, carrying them on their shoulders and laying them out; they would cling to them, embrace them, bathe and adorn them with their burial clothes, and after a little while receive the same services themselves, for those that were left behind were ever following those that went before. But the conduct of the heathen was the exact opposite. Even those who were in the first stages of the disease they thrust away, and fled from their dearest. They would even cast them in the roads half-dead, and treat the unburied corpses as vile refuse.

(Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.22)

In this section, Dionysius contrasted the kinship-brotherhood of the Christian believers with the self-persevering actions of the non-believers. Tertullian also affirmed this: “The practice of such a special love brands us in the eyes of some. “See,” they say, “how they love one another and how ready they are to die for each other” (Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.5–7).

It is evident that the early believers had a self-sacrificing attitude. In the ancient Mediterranean world, this attitude was exclusively seen in the family circle (Hellerman 2009:200). The writings of later Christian authors clearly show that the family ideals and values of the Jesus Movement and the New Testament authors were being practiced by, and formed part of the ideology in the Christian church of the first centuries. It is this very attitude of a familial ecclesiology that resulted in the Christian church’s explosion of the first centuries.

## Chapter 4: Ecclesiology of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church

The opening paragraph of the document of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, called “28 Fundamental Beliefs”, reads as follows:

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference Session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.

(General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 2005)

This document is a set of doctrines that is globally accepted by about 22 million Seventh-day Adventist members.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the years, this document has been adjusted and changed as the church is believed to have gained more light on certain topics (See Annexure A). Two of the doctrines (Belief 12 and 13) set out in the official beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church are of particular importance for this study. They are:

Belief 12: The church

The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to humanity, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. The church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word revealed in the Scriptures. The church is God's family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died

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<sup>7</sup> Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics (2021)

that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all the ages, the purchase of His blood, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish. (Gen. 12:1-3; Exod. 19:3-7; Matt. 16:13-20; 18:18; 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38-42; 7:38; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11; 5:23-27; Col. 1:17, 18; 1 Peter 2:9.)

(General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 2005:163)

and

Belief 13: The remnant and its mission

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Dan. 7:9-14; Isa. 1:9; 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Mic. 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4.)

(General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 2005:181)

This chapter will aim to investigate the ecclesiological theology that the SDA church ascribes to. But first, the historical development of the SDA Church will be discussed from a doctrinal as well as an organizational perspective to lay the foundation of who Adventists are.

## **4.1 HISTORY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH**

### **4.1.1. Doctrinal development**

In the investigation of the SDA church ecclesiology, it is vital to first examine the historical background of how the movement came about. Throughout this chapter, references will be made to certain historical principles dating to the early years of Adventism. The major ecclesiastical themes are built upon foundational principles that motivated the launch of the SDA church. The chapter's purpose is not

apologetical, nor is it an attempt at systematic theology, but rather a summary of the historical development of certain SDA doctrines.

The SDA church find its roots in the Millerite movement of the early nineteenth century. William Miller became a committed Christian during the second great awakening period in American churches. Soon after joining the Baptist church, Miller became zealous in Bible study, and using the proof-text method of comparing scripture with scripture, Miller became convinced that the visible return of Christ would be in 1844. This was based on his study of Daniel 8:14: "For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored." Miller interpreted this verse with the principle that one prophetic day is equal to a literal year, and that the start of the prophecy would be in the year 457 B.C. as the date on which the command was given to rebuild the temple (Dn 9:25) by King Artaxerxes (Ezr 7:1-28).

Miller, convinced of his dating of the second coming, became an itinerant preacher, proclaiming the return of Jesus across the United States. Soon his following grew to more than 500 000 people hoping for the return of Christ in 1844 (Knight 2012:13–18).

Miller finally set the date for Christ's return as 22 October 1844. On this day, thousands of believers waited for Jesus to return, but the day passed without any significant event. The great expectation turned sour into a great disappointment. On 24 October 1844 one of Miller's followers wrote to him "It is a cloudy and dark day here – the sheep are scattered – and the Lord has not come yet." Another follower of Miller wrote:

Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept, and wept, till the day dawn.

(Knight 2012:25)

The Millerite movement fell apart in chaos with followers reacting in different ways, most returning to their previous religious convictions, others claiming a spiritual second coming on 22 October 1844, a small number of believers staying loyal to Miller and an even smaller number of people returning to study the Bible, concluding

that Miller's date of 1844 was correct, but the event was wrong (Schwarz & Greenleaf 1995:51–52). Out of this confusion the Adventist movement was born.

The first step towards the new movement was the conclusion that the prophetic calculation coming to 1844 was correct, but the event happening at that date was not the second coming of Jesus Christ, but rather the start of a new phase of His heavenly ministry. Several Millerite believers engaged in developing a new meaning to the prophetic date. Under the leadership of H. Edson, O.R.L. Crosier, and Dr. F.B. Hahn the meaning of the "cleansed sanctuary" in Daniel 8:14 was established as that of being a heavenly sanctuary. Knight summarizes their conclusion in six basic points: 1) There is a literal sanctuary in heaven; 2) The Hebraic sanctuary system was a representation of the plan of salvation that was patterned after the heavenly sanctuary; 3) Just as the priests of the earthly sanctuary had a two-phased ministry, even so, Christ's heavenly ministry is two-phased. The first in the holy place starting at his ascension, the second starting in 1844 in the most holy place. This would be the anti-typical fulfilment of the day of atonement; 4) The first phase of His ministry dealt with the forgiveness of sins and the second deals with the cleansing of sins; 5) The cleansing of Daniel 8:14 was cleansing by blood, not fire; and 6) Christ would only return to earth once He completed His ministry in the most holy place (Knight 2012:31–32).

Soon after the group of new Adventists established a doctrinal answer to the great disappointment dilemma, the 17-year-old Ellen Harmon received what she believed was her first prophetic vision. Harmon was initially among the group that rejected Miller after the great disappointment, but the vision in December 1844 convinced her that there was more to the 1844 date than what she believed. Harmon, marrying the Methodist, Christian Connection, preacher James White in 1846, quickly became an authoritative voice in the Adventist circles and her authority would remain an important part of Seventh-day Adventism till today. Van Niekerk examines the authority of White for the Seventh-day Adventist church and concludes that, although not inerrant, White remains an authoritative prophetic voice for the church (van Niekerk 2019:132–135).

During the early months of the Adventist movement, Bible students such as Frederick Wheeler, Rachel Oakes, T.M. Preble, and most notably, founding fathers

of the later SDA church, Joseph Bates and John Andrews, became convinced that observance of the seventh-day sabbath remains a requirement for Christian believers. Soon after, especially Andrews and Bates started preaching the observance of the Sabbath, James and Ellen White were also convinced that there was no biblical directive that the day of worship was changed from Sabbath to Sunday.

Among those who were in doctrinal agreement, Sabbath Conferences were arranged in 1848. The scattered believers, still clinging to the Advent hope used these conferences to draw together and develop a doctrinal position addressing at least eight specific points of belief: 1) The visible and soon return of Christ; 2) The two-fold ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary; 3) The seventh-day Sabbath; 4) The prophetic ministry of Ellen White; 5) The duty to proclaim “the three angels’ messages”; 6) Conditional immortality and death as a soul-sleep; 7) The timing of the 7 plagues and 8) The complete extinction of evil and the godless after the millennium (Froom 1954:1021–1031). The details and development of these doctrines would still be a process in the coming decades, but by the end of 1848, the basics had been determined and accepted by the small group of Adventists.

Before the Adventists developed a systematic theology on what they believed, they had an anti-mission approach which can be described as the “shut door theory”. The idea behind the theory was that the return of Christ is so imminent that His judgment was completed and that all probation to humanity has ceased. Originally a theory upheld by Miller, it soon became part of what the Adventists believed. They had no intention to be involved in any mission or evangelistic work. This however was rejected by the Adventist believers by the end of 1848. A prophetic mission was accepted, and the Adventists would begin to actively engage in converting Christians from other denominations to join their movement.

In the years that would follow the Adventist movement and later Seventh-day Adventist church shifted its focus from its established theology to that of lifestyle. With many members joining the movement from the Methodist, Christian Connection, and other holiness movements, it was expected that the topic of lifestyle came up sooner than later (Knight 2012:68). One can only wonder to what extent the holiness movements of the time influenced the new movement. With the help of

visions from Ellen White, the Adventists developed a message of “health reform”. She encouraged Adventists to discard caffeine, tobacco, and alcohol. She claimed to have received light on the topic of healthful living and also included all unclean meat such as swine to the list of foods which are not permissible (Schwarz & Greenleaf 1995:101–104). White later encouraged believers to abstain from flesh food in general. Although she and other early pioneers of the SDA church wrote extensively on the benefits of vegetarianism it never became an official position of the church. With the help of John Harvey Kellogg the movement developed its stance on healthy living by establishing institutions called *sanitariums*. Kellogg proclaimed that the meaning of the name is “place where people learn to stay well”. These *sanitariums* served as centres of education on healthy living and other lifestyle principles. The *sanitarium* where Kellogg worked himself, became the largest institution of its kind in the world. It was evident that Adventists took healthy living serious (Schwarz & Greenleaf 1995:112–113). The emphasis on healthy living allowed the Adventists to reach the world with their message. Publications and seminars on healthy living were used with much success, to introduce people to the Seventh-day Adventist message (Knight 2012:73).

During this same period, the Adventists took strong positions on various other topics involving practical lifestyle. These included education, financial stewardship, and non-combatancy. Non-combatancy in particular was a topic of much debate. With the American Civil war raging between 1861 and 1865, the Adventists were divided over the use of weapons in defending their country. Patriotism came under fire in the Adventist movement with some standing firm on not breaking the sixth commandment, while others argued that all have a responsibility to defend their country. When the government, under the pressure of some religious groups, opened non-combatant options, many Adventists made use of these options, joining the military but not in positions that would require the use of weapons. By the end of the war, the Adventists solved the tension by recognizing that the decision to partake in various military options remained with the individual’s conscience (Knight 2012:73–79). In 2016 the film *Hacksaw Ridge* told the story of Adventist believer Desmond Doss, a combat medic in World War II who refused to carry a weapon and saved the lives of 75 soldiers, receiving the Congressional Medal of Honour

(Bradshaw nd). The debate on non-combatancy eventually paved the way for individual conscience in decision-making within the SDA church.

The early Adventists made a clear distinction between Biblical doctrine and lifestyle issues as set out above.

Even though twenty-first-century Adventists have tended to see doctrinal and lifestyle issues as being of equal magnitude, that was not the position of the denomination's founders. Whereas they hammered out the basic doctrines through intensive Bible study and held conferences to bring consensus, the formation of lifestyle positions was much more casual.

(Knight 2012:80)

The SDA church has always maintained that it is not dependent on the prophetic ministry of Ellen White to establish its Biblical doctrines, but from her writings it is clear that she had a big influence on lifestyle issues. (van Niekerk 2019:132–133)

The biggest doctrinal crisis since 1844 for the Adventists came in 1888. By now the SDA church “perceived its mission to be that of converting other Christians to Adventism’s precious message” (Knight 2012:87). The distinctive doctrines of Adventism were used as “evangelistic bait” to draw other Christians into a closer understanding of Bible truths. This led to a neglect of probably the greatest of Christian doctrines, the doctrine of justification by faith. In 1888 a General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist church was planned. Two of the attendees, young men, E.J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones have challenged some of the theological assumptions of the young movement, more specifically the understanding of the law in Galatians. For Waggoner and Jones, the law in Galatians was the moral law of God, while many of the older leaders such as G.I. Butler and U. Smith opposed the view vehemently, arguing that the law in Galatians was referring to the ceremonial law. Butler and Smith argued that disobedience to the ten commandments would be the result of Waggoner and Jones’ theology. Until now obedience to the commandments of God was pivotal in the theology of the SDA church, as much of the sabbath doctrine hinged on this. The direct conflict in this debate was the doctrine of salvation, either by obedience to the law or, by faith. During the 1888 conference, both sides had the opportunity to present their views. It seems that the debate turned aggressive, especially those on the side of defending the moral law



verbally attacking the men on the other side (Wieland 1980:35–40). This resulted in some strong responses from Ellen White siding with Waggoner and Jones:

You will meet with those who will say, ‘You are too much excited over the matter. You are too much in earnest. You should not be reaching for the righteousness of Christ, and making so much of that. You should preach the law.’ As a people we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa, that had neither dew nor rain. We must preach Christ in the law, and there will be sap and nourishment in the preaching that will be as food to the famishing flock of God. We must not trust in our own merits at all, but in the merits of Jesus of Nazareth.

(White 1890:13)

She was concerned with the perspective that the rest of the Christian world would have on the SDA church, and presented the findings of the 1888 conference in a very positive light and encouraged preachers to preach the message of saying “so that the world should no longer say, Seventh-day Adventists talk the law, the law, but do not preach of belief Christ” (White 1915a:91)

In the aftermath of the conference, White consistently proclaimed the message of justification by faith and not by works or obedience (Wieland 1980:52–64). The 1888 conference turned the direction of the SDA church heavenwards with a renewed focus on Christ as the saviour of the world. The legalistic theology of the pre-1888 church made way for a theology of grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. This in no way meant that Adventism turned their back on the obedience of the law, but it did mean that the emphasis of the Adventist message of salvation shifted from legalism to Christ (Schwarz & Greenleaf 1995:187–188).

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the SDA Church had established its distinctive doctrines, also called the “pillars” of Adventism. These were set out as 1) The personal, visible, premillennial return of Jesus; 2) the cleansing of the Sanctuary, beginning in 1844 which was the beginning of the anti-typical day of atonement; 3) the validity of the gift of prophecy manifested in the ministry of Ellen White; 4) The obligation to observe the seventh-day sabbath; 5) the mortality of the soul, and that immortality is only given to believers at the return of Christ while evil is annihilated (Knight 2012:43–44). Yet it was not only distinctive doctrines that were settled, but also major Christian themes, such as the belief in the Trinity, Salvation by faith

alone, and the authority of the Bible. Throughout the history of the SDA church, there has always been a struggle to remain theologically balanced between what is Adventist in Adventism, and what is Christian in Adventism.

Since the beginning of the Advent movement, the SDA Church is in a continuous process of developing doctrine. Ellen White motivated the church to continue in its quest for doctrinal truth:

New light will ever be revealed on the word of God to him who is in living connection with the Sun of Righteousness. Let no one come to the conclusion that there is no more truth to be revealed. The diligent, prayerful seeker for truth will find precious rays of light yet to shine forth from the word of God. Many gems are yet scattered that are to be gathered together to become the property of the remnant people of God.

(White 1938:34)

The doctrinal development of the SDA church was presented by the General Conference Executive Committee in 2005 as follows:

1. The earliest list of doctrines appeared in the masthead of the Sabbath Review and Advent Herald in five successive issues, August 15-December 19, 1854. The "leading doctrines" were only five: The Bible alone, the law of God, the Second Coming, the new earth, and immortality alone through Christ.
2. In 1872 Uriah Smith wrote "A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists." The list contained 25 doctrines.
3. In 1889 the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook published a list of "Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists" for the first time. This list, based on Uriah Smith's list from 1872, contained 28 articles.
4. In 1894 the 1,521-member Battle Creek Church issued its own statement of faith. It had 31 elements.
5. The statement of faith that first appeared in the 1889 Yearbook was also included in the yearbooks for 1905, and from 1907 to 1914. According to Leroy Edwin Froom, the statement was not included in the yearbooks 1890-1904,

1906, and 1915-1930, because of conflicting views over the Trinity and the Atonement.

6. In 1931 F. M. Wilcox prepared a statement of faith on behalf of a committee of four authorized by action of the General Conference Committee. This statement, titled "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists," had 22 articles. Although it was never formally adopted, it appeared in the 1931 Yearbook and in all subsequent year books. In 1932 it was printed in tract form. This was the statement that remained in place (with slight changes) up until the new formulation in Dallas in 1980.

7. The 1941 Annual Council approved a uniform "Baptismal Vow" and "Baptismal Covenant" based on the 1931 statement.

8. The General Conference session of 1946 voted that no revision of the Fundamental Beliefs shall be made at any time except by approval of a General Conference session.

9. In 1980 the General Conference session made major revisions of the Fundamental Beliefs. Completely new articles were added on: Creation; The Great Controversy; The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ; The Church; Unity in the Body of Christ; The Lord's Supper; The Gift of Prophecy; and Marriage and the Family. Some existing articles were rephrased.

(General Conference Executive Committee 2004:23)

In 2005 another belief namely, "Growing in Christ" was added which brought the total of Fundamental Beliefs of the SDA Church to 28 (Annexure A).

#### **4.1.2. Organizational development**

The history of the SDA church not only constitutes its doctrines and beliefs but also a long line of organizational development. At the beginning of the Adventist movement, there was strong resistance to any form of organization. The early Millerite believers stood strong in their conviction that any form of an organized church would become part of the Babylonian system. This deduction seemed to be an emotional reaction to the excommunication of many Millerites by the organized churches to which they belonged. The Millerites viewed the Christian *Connexion* as a more admirable movement than the churches of the time. With the expectation that Christ would

return very soon, there was no motivation to formally organize the group of believers, as such an organization was seen to be a denial of the hope for the second coming. After the Great Disappointment, the Advent movement experienced widespread growth. One estimate is that by 1850 there were only about 200 adherents to the Advent message, but by 1852 this increased to about 2000, and by 1863 this number increased to 3500 (Knight 2012:58). The closest to any form of organization at this stage was the Sabbatarian Conferences that were being held from 1848 to 1850 with its founders acting as the main preachers of its message. Yet the believers found themselves as a scattered flock, all over the United States with no real direction (Schwarz & Greenleaf 1995:83–84).

By the mid-1850's more pressure to organize in some form was placed on the movement. With no formal structure, any communication from the pioneers to the believers became diluted. The call for a church to be established came in 1854 by Ellen White, but was rejected by many of the Adventist pioneers. Still, the movement experienced growth and the need for paid ministers became evident. Other practical challenges were a burden on the movement. Financial management, the mission work spreading to Europe, as well as legal challenges, all forced the Adventists to reconsider their view on a formal organization. In the late 1850's the Adventists acquired several properties, including a printing press from where they have been printing the Review and Herald, as well as the Present Truth periodicals. These periodicals would in the years to come prove to be a very effective evangelistic tool for the SDA church. The properties acquired were registered in the name of James White and for practical reasons, this was not an amicable situation, but since the movement had no legal standing it could not hold any property. By May 1863, the Seventh-day Adventist church was formed at the first General Conference held for its more than 3000 members. The official formation of the SDA church was largely pragmatic and seemed to have had very little theological motivation (Oliver 2018:39). John Byington, a former New England Methodist minister was elected to serve as president of the SDA church (Mustard:n.d.:6–9).

Being formally organized, the SDA church now had a podium from which it could take a stance on various social issues of the time. During the Civil war, the church published a paper stating that “slavery pointed out in the prophetic word as the darkest and most damning sin upon a nation” (Reggio 2012:12). On alcohol and

tobacco use the church also formally positioned itself as a defender and proclaimer of total abstinence (Schwarz & Greenleaf 1995:102).

During the first years of the 1860's the SDA church developed a structure of congregations placed under the administration of district conferences. The district conferences were administered by the General Conference officers namely the president, secretary, and treasurer. This organizational structure was unique in the sense that it had elements of various systems of polity. Congregational, Presbyterian, and Episcopal systems all had some influence on the establishment of the SDA church's structure. From the congregational structure, the SDA church wisely adapted the broad-based authority of constituency, from the Presbyterian system, spilled over the committee system and concept of representation, and from the Methodist episcopacy, the conference structure was established. (Oliver 2018:38–39). The newly Adventist polity was a synchronism of the governance systems used by other religious communities.

In the years to follow the General Conference at times was faced with increased centralization of control. This was especially true under the leadership of President George Butler in 1871 – 1874 and again in 1880 – 1888:

Supervision embraces all its (the General Conference) interests in every part of the world. There is not an institution among us, not a periodical issue, not a conference or society, not a mission field connected with our word, that it has not a right to advise and counsel and investigate. It is the highest authority of an earthly character among Seventh-day Adventists

(Butler 1888:50)

The notion of centralized authority was criticized by Ellen White. She strongly advocated for the proper use of the committee system that was established in 1863. In a letter to John H Kellogg she states “God would not have many minds to be the shadow of one man's mind. In a multitude of counsellors there is safety” (White 1886:7). Two years later White was more critical of the leadership style used by Butler:

A sick man's mind has had a controlling power over the General Conference committee, and the ministers have been the shadow and echo of Elder Butler

about as long as it is healthy and for the good of the cause. Envy, evil surmisings, jealousies have been working like leaven until the whole lump seemed to be leavened. He thinks his position gives him such power that his voice is infallible.

(White 1888:82)

Criticism from church leaders, ministers, and Ellen White pressurised the General Conference leadership to actively decentralize the authority held by the highest administrative office of the SDA church. This was the beginning of a new organizational era in the SDA church. In the years between 1901 and 1903, the SDA church would undergo a radical reorganization within its administrative structure. Various contextual factors led to this reorganization. The numerical growth of the SDA church was influential in the reorganization. From an insignificant organization in 1863, it has now grown, in less than 40 years, to a worldwide church with more than 75,000 members in the United States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The organizational structures developed into various institutions consisting of departments for publishing, education, health, and missionary interests. Because of financial constraints, the General Conference also had challenges to uphold its missionary ventures in the last years of the 1880s (Oliver 2018:43–46). These factors all contributed to the reshaping of the organization.

Various important changes were made in the early 1900s, with the most significant addition to the church structure being the formation of union conferences as constituent bodies of the General Conference. The first union conference was established in Australia in 1894, and soon thereafter the SDA world church adopted the same model (Knight 2012:110–111). The union conference served as an intermediate level of administration between the local conferences, and the General Conference. While the local conferences had the task of administering local congregations in a certain geographical area, the union conferences handled the administration of a certain number of conferences. Introducing this level of organization, much of the decision-making powers of the General Conference were decentralized, and union conference executive committees received more power in decision-making (Oliver 2018:46–47). In 1918 another level of church organization was added, namely divisions of the General Conference.

During the first 50 odd years of its existence, the SDA Church developed into a 5-level organization with the General Conference and its Divisions overseeing the administration of union conferences, union conferences overseeing the administration of local conferences, and local conferences overseeing the administration of local churches. This organizational structure will be discussed in more detail under Section 4.2. *Ecclesiology of the SDA Church*.

Within this period of re-organization, the SDA Church was faced with yet another major crisis. J.H. Kellogg, A.T. Jones, and E.J Waggoner left the SDA Church. The men who once had a profound influence on the formation and development of the SDA church, both doctrinally and organizationally, had a series of conflicts with church leadership in the years ranging from 1907 to 1910. The men decided to start a break-away group which lasted only a few short years. Over the years many groups would follow, including The Branch Davidians<sup>8</sup>, Adventist Reform Movement, and the Anti-Trinitarian Movement, but consistently these groups had very little success or growth.

The exact opposite was true of the SDA church, the denomination experienced tremendous growth in the post-Ellen White era. At the time of her death, Ellen White wrote prolifically, with more than 100 000 pages of books, tracts, articles, and letters addressing topics such as evangelism, practical ministry, prophecy, health, and many more. Her life legacy is summed up by Knight: “On July 16, 1915, “the little old woman with white hair, who always spoke so lovingly of Jesus” (in the words of her non-Adventist neighbours) died at the age of 87. The last words that her family and friends heard were ‘I know in whom I have believed’” (Knight 2012:127). It is however her written legacy that continued to be authoritative and influential in the SDA church. This will be addressed in more detail under Section 4.2.5 *Ellen White and the Church*.

During the first 50 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the SDA church experienced unapparelled growth and by 1950 the documented membership was 750,000 members worldwide. But this was only the beginning of the growth spurt of the young

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<sup>8</sup> Infamously known for the violent shootout with police in Waco, US in 1993.

new movement. With an established organizational structure and a strong focus on mission, the growth in membership and organization became exponential.

## **4.2 ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH**

### **4.2.1. Statistics**

By the year 2007, the SDA church was identified as one of the largest Christian denominations in the world, being the twelfth-largest religious body in the world and the sixth-largest highly international religious group (Office of Archives and Statistics 2009).

For a proper understanding of SDA ecclesiology, it is important to examine the statistics of the SDA worldwide structure. This section of the research will provide the statistical information for the SDA world church at the date of the statistical reports.

The total membership of the SDA church is 21,723,992. These members are divided into 13 Divisions and 3 Mission fields globally, as follows:

**TABLE A – Divisions of the SDA Church**

<b>Field Name</b>	<b>Churches and Companies</b>	<b>Membership</b>
East-Central Africa Division	30205	4518003
Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division	27244	4242121
Inter-American Division	23303	3675689
South American Division	28555	2568201
Southern Asia-Pacific Division	11469	1688247
North American Division	6533	1265754
Southern Asia Division	9407	1141332
West-Central Africa Division	10131	873579
South Pacific Division	6235	609868
Chinese Union Mission	4130	476047
Northern Asia-Pacific Division	1075	287255
Inter-European Division	3100	178790
Euro-Asia Division	2562	104387
Trans-European Division	1392	88533
Middle East and North Africa Union Mission	77	5375
Israel Field	20	811

The first administrative level, namely Divisions, is further divided into 123 Union conferences, which again are divided into 713 local Conferences and Missions. Under the local Conferences and Missions, 165,438 churches are serving almost 22



million members and many regular visitors of the world church. The SDA Church is active in 212 of the 235 countries of the world recognized by the United Nations.

The SDA Church is managing 9,489 educational institutions of which 118 are tertiary institutions and 9,334 secondary and primary schools. A further 1,048 hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, retirement centres, and orphanages are managed by the SDA Church.

#### **4.2.2. Polity**

The management of a religious organization of this scale requires a proper system of organization. Each level of church organization is responsible for the administrative governing of the lower organization. Since the formation of Divisions of the General Conference in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the SDA church has not made any key changes to the organizational structure (Organogram of SDA church– Annexure B).

Within the SDA church it is generally said that “the local church has the highest authority” and although this may sound attractive, the reality is a very complicated system of committees and organizational sessions. The local congregation is made up of individual members. Membership is obtained through baptism by immersion, or by confession of faith in exceptional circumstances. The local church has ultimate authority over its governance concerning discipline, practical worship, finances, programs, and the election of local church leaders. The local church appoints the church board by a process called the Nominating process, a process that is explained in the SDA Church Manual (2015a:110–113). The church board is responsible for the day-to-day management of the local congregation and church and is accountable to the congregation at large. But the local church is ultimately accountable to the higher organization namely the local conference or in short the Conference (Oliver 2000:249–252).

The Conference serves as an administrative authority governing the administrative aspects of several local churches in a geographical area<sup>9</sup>. The conference is divided into departments, such as Personal Ministries (evangelism), Youth Ministries, Children’s Ministries, Stewardship Department, and others. These departments are

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<sup>9</sup> In some instances, conferences might be organized based on ethnical, racial or language boundaries. This however is exceptional and conferences are mostly organized on the basis of a geographical area.

responsible for any support needed by the local church in equipping the members for evangelism, in-reach, development, etc. The Conference leadership is called officers and consists of three persons with equal authority, the president, the executive secretary, and the treasurer. The Conference serves as the employer of the pastoral workforce in the geographical area in which it is situated and collects the tithing from the local churches for the explicit use of remuneration for denominational employees. Denominational employees may be moved within the bounds of the Conference area to serve at the discretion of the Conference. The Conference leadership, officers, and departmental directors are elected by a Conference Session, generally every three years. These sessions are based on a representative system, where local churches send representatives to the Session to vote on appointments and administrative procedures on behalf of their local congregations. The voting, as with all levels of the church is democratic, and a majority vote determines the decision.<sup>10</sup> The Session further appoints an Executive Committee to serve as the highest authority in the conference between sessions. The Executive Committee is made up of both lay members and denominational employees (Oliver 2000:249–252).

The union conference, or in short, the Union, serves as the organizational authority that is tasked with governing several local conferences. In general, unions are also bound by geographical areas, covering all the conferences in a specific area. Unions have the responsibility of equipping the church at large for its work in the area in which it is found. Unions are responsible for the printing and distributing of materials and resources. The Union is also tasked with the management of all institutions of higher education, as well as all medical facilities belonging to the SDA church in the specific geographical area. Like local conferences, unions also have a session, normally every 4 years. The representatives attending the union session are denominational workers as well as lay members from the conferences of the said union. At the union session, the officers, as well as directors are chosen, and a union Executive Committee is chosen to serve as the decision-making authority between Sessions (Oliver 2000:249–252).

The final level of the SDA church polity is that of the General Conference and its 13 divisions. Unlike the unions or conferences, the divisions have no ecclesiastical

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<sup>10</sup> In some instances, such as the change of a constitution a 2/3 majority is needed for a vote to carry.

authority but act as representatives of the General Conference in different regions of the world. The General Conference leadership is made up of a president, secretary, treasurer, vice-presidents, and various departmental directors. The Division leadership is similar and nature. The final authority in the organization rests with the General Conference.

The General Conference Session, and the General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions, is the highest ecclesiastical authority in the administration of the Church. The General Conference Executive Committee is authorized by its Constitution to create subordinate organizations with authority to carry out their roles. Therefore all subordinate organizations and institutions throughout the Church will recognize the General Conference Session, and the General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions, as the highest ecclesiastical authority, under God, among Seventh-day Adventists.

(Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015a:29)

Both the General Conference as well as its divisions are subject to a General Conference Session every 5 years. Once again, the Session functions on a representative model, where every conference in the world church body elects church members as well as denominational employees to represent their conference at the Session. The General Conference Session however has more than a mere administrative role. It is also at this Session where representatives of the world church vote on doctrinal changes, official positions and statements regarding certain significant topics concerning the church and its members (Oliver 2000:249–252).

A practical example of this was the vote on Woman's Ordination at the 2015 General Conference in San Antonio, Texas. At this Session, the vote for the church to ordain women to pastoral ministry was on the agenda. The debate, commonly known as Woman's Ordination debate has been on the table for many years before the Session, with strong proponents of both views, for and against the pastoral ordination of women. These debates were seen on all levels of church organization, as well as in the theological circles of the church (Barna 2009:308). At the Session, several hours were set aside for discussion on the topic, and various speakers from lay people, evangelists and theologians, had the opportunity to speak on the topic. When it came to voting a total of 2,363 ballots were cast in the vote with the outcome

being 1,381 against and 977 for women's ordination for pastoral work.<sup>11</sup> The motion did not carry and because of the 2015 General Conference Session, women may work as ministers in the SDA church but may not receive ordination credentials (Adventist Review Staff 2015).

The official polity of the SDA church can be explained as a top-down organization, yet the authority of each constituency is given to the leaders by a representative model in which lower organizations appoint the leadership of higher organizations. It is thus both correct to state that the highest authority of the SDA church is with the local congregation, as well as, that the highest ecclesiastical authority is with the General Conference.

#### **4.2.3. Remnant theology**

Although the SDA church in its fundamental belief number 12 acknowledge that the church of God is universal and made up of all who confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, fundamental belief number 13 addresses the theological foundation of Adventist ecclesiology, namely remnant theology. SDA ecclesiology rests on the premise that the SDA church has been raised by God to serve as a remnant within the general Christian church in the last days period prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ. It is no surprise that authors within Adventism rarely discuss any ecclesiological themes without including remnant theology as a major theme. The remnant has become so central in SDA theology that Rodríguez (2002:1) states: "There is an almost unconscious feeling among us that if we lose the idea of the remnant we would lose, as a church, our purpose, our reason for existence."

The remnant concept is presented throughout the Bible in a few different ways. Old Testament narratives and prophecies are loaded with remnant themes. Some of these include Noah and his family as the only people saved in the flood (Gn 7:23), Joseph being sold to Egypt while his brothers remain at home (Gn 45:7), Amos indicating that within Israel only a few will be saved (5:3), Micah indicating that a remnant of the Jews will remain among the nations to bring hope (5:7-8), Ezra and Nehemiah describes a remnant of post-exilic Jews that heeds to the invitation to return to Jerusalem (Neh 1:2-3; Ezr 9:13). The remnant groups of the Old Testament are those that remain faithful amid all sorts of adversity. The New Testament authors

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<sup>11</sup> There were five abstentions.

also employ the principles of a remnant within the larger group of God's people. The preaching of John the Baptist (Mt 3:7-10), Jesus' parables on the judgment (Mt 13:30), and Paul's teachings on the Jews that accepted Christ as Lord (Rm 9:27; 11:5) are all indicative of some sort of a remnant of faithful ones among the larger group of believers. Within the SDA remnant theology philosophy, there has always been a remnant of faithful believers in God and His word (Rodríguez 2002:11–13).

Ellen White wrote extensively about remnant theology making statements such as:

Those who love and keep the commandments of God are most obnoxious to the synagogue of Satan, and the powers of evil will manifest their hatred toward them to the fullest extent possible. John foresaw the conflict between the remnant church and the power of evil, and said, 'The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed. which keep the commandment of God. and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.'

(White 1906a:7)

Among earth's inhabitants, scattered in every land, there are those who have not bowed the knee to Baal.... God has in reserve a firmament of chosen ones that will yet shine forth amidst the darkness, revealing clearly to an apostate world the transforming power of obedience to His law.

(White 1917:188–189)

I saw that God has honest children among the nominal Adventists and the fallen churches, and before the plagues shall be poured out, ministers and people will be called out from these churches and will gladly receive the truth.

(White 1882:26)

The members of God's remnant church in this our day depend too largely on the ministers to fulfil the commission of Christ to go into all the world with the gospel message. Many have seemed to lose sight of the fact that this commission was given not only to those who had been ordained to preach, but to laymen as well. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained ministry. All who receive the life of Christ are called to work for the salvation of their fellow men.

(White 1910:8)

The remnant theology of the SDA church sprouts from a prophetic understanding of primarily Revelation 12. In this passage the salvation history of the world is presented from the fall of Satan in heaven, the incarnation of Jesus, the middle ages, persecution of the church, and the birth of a remnant movement in the end times. This movement is characterized by two major themes namely those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rv 12:17). The Adventist church identifies as the group described in this passage as commandment-keeping people who place their faith in Jesus Christ.

Adventists view their distinct doctrines as Biblical truths, which are neglected in the Christian church at large, with the major of these probably the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. These distinct doctrines came to be known as identifying marks of “the remnant church” which Adventists believe they are part of. The remnant is an overarching ecclesiastical reference to the SDA church, based on its distinct doctrines. The five most distinctive doctrines are: 1) the investigative judgment and sanctuary, 2) the soul sleeping state of the dead, 3) the Sabbath, 4) the prophetic ministry of Ellen White, 5) the mission of preaching the messages of the three angels in Revelation 14 (Venden 1982:12–18).

The Adventist perspective of the Remnant is in no sense a fragmentation of the Christian church but could rather be described as church and Church. Whereas church would be the universal church of God, united in salvation through Jesus Christ, the Church would be a development within the church to commit to Biblical teachings. Adventist remnant theology is not working against the unity of the church but seeks to develop unity within the bounds of doctrinal truths. In other words, “the remnant, works to rectify the fragmentation of the Christian world in anticipation of Christ’s soon return. We could then suggest that a remnant ecclesiology is in a sense a revolt against the fragmentation of the Christian world” (Rodríguez 2009:217). Although remnant theology might be used by many to enforce an ecclesiology of exclusivity, the intended motivation for remnant theology is that of inclusivity, practically displayed in the missionary calling of the church (Knight 2008:77–79).

In the 1950s Adventists started to engage on a deeper level with other theological minds in the Christian world. The result of that engagement was the publication of the book *Questions on Doctrines (QoD)* by a group of SDA theologians. The book itself resulted in major discord within the ranks of the SDA church, especially regarding the study of the nature of Christ. For some, this work of theology was drawing the church away from its exclusivity within Christianity, while the proponents of the book argued that it was doing the exact opposite and was grounding the SDA church as a beacon of light within the Christian world (Knight 2003:522). Addressing the topic of the Remnant church *Qod* states that Adventists should not in any way identify themselves as a people that are more loved by God than others, or who have sole access to the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. Adventists should rather accept the responsibility of making God's truths so clear and persuasive that it will draw others to be ready for the day of Jesus' return (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist church 1957:195–196).

#### **4.2.4. The mission of the Church**

Whereas remnant theology might be foundational in the theology of SDA ecclesiology, the missionary task of proclaiming the three angels' message of Revelation 14:6-12 is foundational in the praxis of its ecclesiology. The SDA church understands the messages given by the three angels as the message to be proclaimed to the world before the return of Jesus Christ. In summary, the three angels' messages are 1) The Gospel of Salvation through Jesus Christ and that God alone is worthy of worship. 2) That Babylon as the anti-Christ system will come to an end. 3) That judgment is reserved for those who choose to worship the anti-Christ beast and reject God. Part of this message is the centrality of the Sabbath in worship. Adventists interpret the words used in Revelation 14:7 as linked to the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:11 (Merklin 2008:1).

Since its founding, the SDA church has had a strong missionary drive. In the beginning years of Adventism, mission was its focal point. Publishing houses, periodicals, missionary preachers and other assets were all applied to the mission and message of the church (Schwarz & Greenleaf 1995:273–292). As the church became an established organization, more funds and resources were consumed to the upholding of its organizational levels and administrative requirements. The result was "a much smaller percentage of the church's income and human resources

devoted to extending the presence of the church into “unentered” territories” (Bruinsma 2009:178). Statistics still show a positive trend in global church growth within the SDA Church. In 1900 the SDA membership was about 75 000, which grew to 1 million by the 1950s and currently stands at over 21 million. The Christian faith, in general, saw significant growth in followers, from 500 million Christians in the world in 1900 to about 2,3 billion Christians at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The population explosion of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries largely contributed to this increase in Christian believers, as the percentage of Christians in the total world population stagnated at about 30 percent (Baumgartner 2009). Adventist growth was remarkably stronger, while in the 1950s there was one Adventist for every 2,500 people in the world, the ratio in 2009 was 1:425 (Bruinsma 2009:178).

The SDA church believes that it is tasked with not only reaching non-Christian believers with the message of the Gospel but also Christian believers with the messages proclaimed by the three angels, with emphasis on Sabbath observance as a covenantal sign of worshipping God. The same characteristics ascribed to the remnant in Revelation 12:17 is also ascribed to the bearers of the three angels’ messages in Revelation 14:12, “Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” and SDA believers recognize themselves as a prophetic movement brought into existence to call the people of this world into a closer relationship with Jesus in preparation of his second coming. The SDA church believes herself to play a major role in the final developments of the Christian mission before the eschaton. This role will be to preach the same message the SDA church has been preaching since its beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Johnsson 2013:449–450).

As the missionary theme is prominent in the Bible, more explicitly in the New Testament church, the SDA church looks to itself as a continuation of the fulfillment of the Biblical mandate. The church in the first century was organized around the gospel commission and the SDA church believes itself to be organized around the mission of reaching the world with the gospel message. Adventists argue that a sound ecclesiology “demands that mission remain the prime responsibility of the church” (Bruinsma 2009:181).



The message of the three angels to be proclaimed throughout the world has taken on many different forms within Adventist circles. Various independent ministries exist on the basis that they are proclaiming the three angels' message, yet these ministries are often not in line with the traditional Adventist interpretation of what the message entails. Many of these independent ministries engage, as their primary goal, in presenting current world events in such a manner that it is perceived as the fulfilment of prophecy of sorts. Many of these independent ministries rely on tactics that consistently present conspiracy theories as the main theme in the prophetic messages of the Bible. This is however rejected by mainstream Adventist theology which believes the foundation of the three angels' messages are the soteriological event of the cross (Hasel 2021:5–6).

Throughout the last few decades, the SDA church has launched some evangelistic campaigns with its aim to reach the people of the world with its message. Mission to the Cities, Total Member Involvement, an annual Book of the Year that is distributed worldwide, and many others, are initiatives developed by the General Conference to enhance the mission of the church. In addition to the GC initiatives, the various organizations of the church also engage in local initiatives to promote the mission of the church. Local churches are encouraged to engage in active evangelistic campaigns in their geographical areas.

Ellen White's writings concerning mission and evangelism have placed an emphasised focus on the mission of the church in SDA ecclesiology. As this was one of her most prolific topics, it is impossible to include her total scope of opinion on the topic in this research, but as a general indication, the following statements are evidence of her strong opinion on the mission and evangelistic work by the church.

The conversion of souls to God is the greatest, the noblest work in which human beings can have a part. In this work are revealed God's power, His holiness, His forbearance, and His unbounded love. Every true conversion glorifies Him and causes the angels to break forth into singing. We are nearing the end of this earth's history, and the different lines of God's work are to be carried forward with much more self-sacrifice than is at present manifest. The work for these last days is in a special sense a missionary work. The presentation of present truth, from the first letter of its alphabet to the last, means missionary effort. The work to be

done calls for sacrifice at every advance step. From this unselfish service the workers will come forth purified and refined as gold tried in the fire. The sight of souls perishing in sin should arouse us to put forth greater effort to give the light of present truth to those who are in darkness, and especially to those in fields where as yet very little has been done to establish memorials for God. In all parts of the world a work that should have been done long ago is now to be entered upon and carried forward to completion.

(White 1902:52)

This message (*the message of the third angel*) was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure.

(White 1915a:92–93)

When we have entire, wholehearted consecration to the service of Christ, God will recognize the fact by an outpouring of His Spirit without measure; but this will not be while the largest portion of the church are not laborers together with God.

(White 1946:699)

The gospel invitation is to be given to the rich and the poor, the high and the low, and we must devise means for carrying the truth into new places and to all classes of people. The Lord bids us, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled." He says, "Begin in the highways; thoroughly work the highways; prepare a company who in unity with you can go forth to do the very work that Christ did in seeking and saving the lost."

(White 1946:552)

So much emphasis is placed on the evangelistic nature of the church by White that a compilation of her works relating to the topic namely Evangelism was published in

1946 by the White Estate. This 700-page book covered to a large extent the Missiology of White and is seen as an authoritative resource in the SDA church regarding evangelism. The book *Evangelism* covers various practical and theoretical topics related to the evangelistic calling the SDA church perceives herself to have.

#### **4.2.5. Ellen White and Adventist ecclesiology**

The writings of Ellen White regarding the church have influenced SDA ecclesiology in a major way. Although Adventists have a strong commitment to *Sola Scriptura* when it comes to the development of doctrine, yet they often make use of Ellen White to expand theologically on their Biblical doctrines (Graybill 1981:7). It can be questioned whether this strong relying on White is fair towards her, especially in the light of some of her admissions with relation to her writings and the Bible as she believed her writings to be a “lesser light to lead men and women to a greater light”, the Bible (White 1946:257). She also highlights that “*the testimonies*” as she often referred to her writings were to “exalt God’s word, and attract minds to it, that the beautiful simplicity of truth may impress all” (White 1915b:199).

Whether one understands the use of Ellen White’s writings as it is done by the church today as fair to her intention or not, the influence she had on the Adventist view of the church can rarely be overstated (Knight 2019:62). Adventist theologians have argued consistently that the work of Ellen White should not be used as a final exegesis of biblical texts, or herself be seen as a theologian in the proper sense, but that she should rather be interpreted as a prophetic preacher and evangelist.

The prophetic and hortatory mode was more characteristic of her than the exegetical. The people to whom she was preaching, or writing to, were more the object of her attention than the specific people to whom the individual Bible writers addressed themselves

(Dederen 1977:24)

Yet, the use of Ellen White among some Adventists as the final authority on scripture is exactly what she was warning them not to do. “But I do not ask you to take my words. Lay Sister White to one side. Do not quote my words again as long as you live until you can obey the Bible” (White 1958:33). In response to some questions regarding the use of Ellen White in hermeneutics and Biblical interpretation, the

General Conference in 1983 published the following list of official affirmations and denials about the authority of Ellen White in the Adventist church.

### **AFFIRMATIONS**

1. We believe that Scripture is the divinely revealed Word of God and is inspired by the Holy Spirit.
2. We believe that the canon of Scripture is composed only of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments.
3. We believe that Scripture is the foundation of faith and the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice.
4. We believe that Scripture is the Word of God in human language.
5. We believe that Scripture teaches that the gift of prophecy will be manifest in the Christian church after New Testament times.
6. We believe that the ministry and writings of Ellen White were a manifestation of the gift of prophecy.
7. We believe that Ellen White was inspired by the Holy Spirit and that her writings, the product of that inspiration, are applicable and authoritative, especially to Seventh-day Adventists.
8. We believe that the purposes of the Ellen White writings include guidance in understanding the teaching of Scripture and application of these teachings, with prophetic urgency, to the spiritual and moral life.
9. We believe that the acceptance of the prophetic gift of Ellen White is important to the nurture and unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
10. We believe that Ellen White's use of literary sources and assistants finds parallels in some of the writings of the Bible.

### **DENIALS**

1. We do not believe that the quality or degree of inspiration in the writings of Ellen White is different from that of Scripture.

2. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are an addition to the canon of Sacred Scripture.
3. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White function as the foundation and final authority of Christian faith as does Scripture.
4. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White may be used as the basis of doctrine.
5. We do not believe that the study of the writings of Ellen White may be used to replace the study of Scripture.
6. We do not believe that Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White.
7. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture.
8. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are essential for the proclamation of the truths of Scripture to society at large.
9. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are the product of mere Christian piety.
10. We do not believe that Ellen White's use of literary sources and assistants negates the inspiration of her writings.

(Biblical Research Institute 1983:24)

One might wonder if *Sola Scriptura* is truly a proper characteristic of Adventist doctrines, maybe a *Prima Scriptura* statement might be more realistic.

The acceptance of the prophetic ministry of Ellen White has often resulted in the SDA church being accused of cultism, this charge having been refuted by independent non-SDA author Walter Martin in his book *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Martin goes to great lengths to examine various cultic groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ's Latter-Day Saints. In his examination of the Seventh-day Adventist church and the prophetic ministry of Ellen White, Martin concludes that:

Seventh-day Adventism as a denomination is essentially Christian in the sense that all denominations and groups professing Christianity are Christian if they conform to the classical mission of Christianity in the Bible... It is my conviction that one cannot be a true Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, Christian Scientist, Unitarian, Spiritist etc. and be a Christian in the Biblical sense of the term, but it is perfectly possible to be a Seventh-day Adventist and be a true follower of Jesus Christ, despite certain heterodox concepts.

(Martin 1965:359)

The question then remains is: What was Ellen White's view of Adventist ecclesiology? Attempting to exhaust the ecclesiology of White would be a daunting task as her writings are almost exclusively aimed at members of the SDA church and could in essence all be seen as ecclesiological in nature. In the sections dealing with the Remnant and the Mission of the SDA church, some of White's ecclesiological perspectives are already examined. It would however be futile to discuss her perspective on the church if special attention is not given to her ecclesiology of the local congregation.

Like many of her contemporaries, White also had a strong conservative view of liturgy and worship. She wrote about kneeling in prayer, an inner attitude of reverence, proper decorum, a focus on mindful rather than emotional worship, and music styles (Fortin 2015:1–7). A proper and investigative reading of White's writings however will lead Adventists to reconsider the enforcement of detailed specifics, and rather aim to understand and implement the principles of her writings (van Niekerk 2019:133–135).

The unity within church groups was prominent in the ecclesiastical thinking of Ellen White. She consistently emphasised that the role of the church as the agent of salvation could only be fulfilled if fellow believers would act in unity and harmony. In 1906 White wrote:

If all would completely consecrate themselves to the Lord and through the sanctification of the truth, live in perfect unity, what a convincing power would attend the proclamation of the truth! How sad that so many churches misrepresent the sanctifying influence of the truth, because they do not manifest the saving grace that would make them one with Christ, even as Christ is one

with the Father! If all would reveal the unity and love that should exist among brethren, the power of the Holy Spirit would be manifest in its saving influence. In proportion to our unity with Christ will be our power to save souls.

(White 1906b:130)

There are numerous quotations in her writings that relate to the unity among fellow believers. Her understanding of unity however, should be understood properly. For White, unity in no way meant uniformity, but rather a oneness in mission and vision. She motivated members to focus on the things they agreed on, rather than their disagreements. White was aware and sensitive to the fact that members in a congregational community would have diverse backgrounds, experiences and cultures that shaped them. White's view of ecclesiastical unity was that it is achieved not by a common method, but by a common purpose. The purpose of any Christian congregation, according to her, was the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ, and his soon return. This formed the unified identity of the Christian group. She further advised that the common purpose could only be achieved by a common relationship with Christ. As the communal relationship with Christ developed, the individual would start to give precedence to the mission of the church over their own desires. Aiming to achieve a common method in all things, would result in disunity, but seeing the bigger picture of achieving a common goal, even by different means would be the source of unity in the church group (Jackson 2017).

White did not explicitly write about the church in a familial sense. She did however make various allusions to the believers as being a family, all with equal status, yet none of these statements explicitly refers to the church community as family.<sup>12</sup> One of the more explicit statements for example is: "It is not earthly rank, nor birth, nor nationality, nor religious privilege, which proves that we are members of the family of God; it is love, a love that embraces all humanity" (White 1986:75).

Although White had great ideals for the church, she was aware of its defects and imperfections. In various of her writings, White would discuss the possibility of being discouraged and disappointed by the church, yet she encouraged believers to stay true to their conviction and belief in the church (1915a:47). About the church she

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<sup>12</sup> At least not according to my knowledge or findings.

said the following: “enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theatre of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts” (White 1911a:12).

The role of the church as the agent of salvation was prominent in her writings. She emphasised the obligation that rests upon all Christians to fulfil the Great Commission of preaching the gospel message to the world (Mt 28:19,20) (White 1892:81). Motivated by her understanding of one of Ezekiel’s revelations, White describes God’s intention for the church as follows: “Wonderful is the work<sup>13</sup> which the Lord designs to accomplish through His church, that His name may be glorified. A picture of this work is given in Ezekiel’s vision of the river of healing” (White 1911a:13).

Most of what White wrote about the church is in reference either to the larger Adventist church as the remnant, or to the evangelistic mission of the church. Apart from the importance of unity, White rarely touches on ecclesiastical subjects concerning the local congregation. As White is seen as the most influential author in the denomination, it is expected that members of the SDA church will follow her train of thought and attach more emphasis on remnant theology and the mission of the church. As stated earlier, Ellen White and the SDA church’s official stance has never been that she would be the final authoritative voice on any theological discipline. Although she has influenced the church positively in numerous ways, it would be a dishonour to the church to have no further and deeper developments in its ecclesiology especially relating to the local church and its community.

## **4.3 THE LOCAL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CONGREGATION**

### **4.3.1. Relationship with higher organization**

Traditionally it is believed and emphasised that the higher organization of the SDA church is to act in service of its local churches. The conferences, unions, and divisions of the General Conference have one overarching task, and that is to lead the church to be a vessel of salvation. Evangelism, mission, and church growth are the reason for the existence of the higher organization, as well as its focus (Knight

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<sup>13</sup> The work she is referring to here is the proclamation of the gospel message.



2016:32–44). Since the local conference is the body directly overseeing the local church, the examination of the higher organization will focus on conference level, yet not exclude other levels of the organization, and most of what is said about the local conference can be applied to the rest of the SDA church organization.

The role of the Conference is mostly administrative. It is to give support, coordination and facilitation of the proclamation of the gospel that is occurring at the local church level. The local conference further has the responsibility to equip the church for Christian ministry by training, pastoral placements, and providing community service programs, such as Meals on Wheels and Adventist Welfare Services in support of local churches (Plaatjes 2007:52). The thought of a congregation being served and aided by a higher organization is an attractive position for believers. Unfortunately, local church members have often been disappointed with the relationship between the congregation and the Conference (and the rest of the higher organization). Local churches have at times felt neglected by the higher organization, especially churches that are not of notable size. The impression rendered by the conference level has at times been that finances, support, and focus are to be placed within the organizational levels and the minority groups of larger churches. Local congregations at times have called for a more simplistic, affordable organizational structure where more funds would be distributed to the operations and work of the local churches (Plaatjes 2007:209–211).

In his doctoral dissertation, Plaatjes investigates the local church relations with the higher organization, primarily in the South African context.<sup>14</sup> Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. Most church members<sup>15</sup> experience the higher organization to be dictatorial in its decisions. A further experience of local churches is that of people vs. institutional orientation among the leadership of the higher organizations. Once again, the majority of members<sup>16</sup> indicated their perception of the higher organization as prioritizing organization and not people. The study reveals that members experience the conference and other administrative levels as ignoring

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<sup>14</sup> A strong assumption can however be made that a large portion of the membership of the world church would agree with the results of this study.

<sup>15</sup> The study shows that 85% of members in the focus group are concerned with the authority that is concentrated in a few leadership positions at higher level.

<sup>16</sup> In this instance again 85% of members in the focus group indicated a disagreement or strong disagreement with the statement that “Leadership is people orientated”. While 87% of the focus group agreed, or strongly agreed that “Leadership is structure orientated”

the wishes and feelings of church members and being more concerned with policies and the enforcement of policies in local churches. The church organization, once serving a practical ministerial role, is now seen as rigid, unwilling to change, and bureaucratic, all the while missing the mandate given to it to serve the local congregations in an enabling way (Plaatjes 2007:91–105).

This authoritative style flows from the organization to the local church leadership. Damsteegt highlights the current local church leadership as pastoral lead, rather than elder lead. The New Testament model followed by early Adventism was that local elders as lay members oversaw the day-to-day management of local congregations, while the role of pastors was to establish new churches and engage solely in evangelism. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the pastoral role in Adventism became more congregational and would stay as such, with pastors serving church districts, consisting of one or more churches. This model gave local conferences more power and influence in the local churches as the pastors serving the congregations are employed by the conferences and have the responsibility of implementing all agendas and programs initiated by the higher organization (Damsteegt 2005:673–680). This can create tension in congregation-conference relationships as some congregations choose not to follow some of the implementations from the Conference, or other higher organizational levels. Since the church functions as an open system, the expectation would be good relations between the local church and the higher organization, with the minister being the facilitator of such relationship. This ideal, unfortunately, very often does not realise as Adventist pastors are faced with a dual expectation, that of the Conference, as well as that of the local churches being served by the pastor. These expectations might at times not be united in vision and practice, and the tension between Conference, pastor, and local church can rise to full-blown conflict in some cases (Delafield 1978:191–192). The relationship with the higher organization might be marred by the desire to have autonomous control on the side of the local church, while the conference and other administrative levels aim to have unified control over all its affiliates. One can only ask where does it leave the call to the mission given to the church at large.

#### **4.3.2. The church community, a priesthood of all believers**

The ecclesiology of local SDA congregations can best be summed up by calling the members of the church community by the protestant phrase, ‘a priesthood of all

believers'. This doctrinal branch of ecclesiology has remained one of the cardinal beliefs of the Adventist church (Edwards 1995:63). The local Adventist church is to be viewed as a community where each believer is individually acting as a type of priest, but also where the community as a whole, acts as a priesthood:

The priesthood of believers means each believer offering his own body: it also means Christ the high-priest offering his body, the Church. These two aspects of the one perpetual offering may be distinguished in thought: they cannot be separated in fact.

(Manson 1958:64)

This view of the local church is a motivator that the responsibility to minister is not only that of the clergy, but of all laity. The priesthood of all believers was introduced to the reformation by Martin Luther writing to the German church, calling for a new understanding of the role of the church:

That the pope or bishop anoints, makes tonsures, ordains, consecrates, or dresses differently from the laity, may make a hypocrite or an idolatrous oil-painted icon, but it in no way makes a Christian or spiritual human being. In fact, we are all consecrated priests through Baptism, as St. Peter in 1 Peter 2[:9] says, 'You are a royal priesthood and a priestly kingdom,' and Revelation [5:10], 'Through your blood you have made us into priests and kings.'

(Luther 1520:407)

The reformed view of the priesthood of all believers was accepted by John Wesley's Methodism, the forerunner movement of the SDA church. Wesley passionately supported the ministerial service of all Christians and dramatically announced as quoted by Davies, "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they are clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the kingdom of heaven" (Davies 1952:133).

Based on the Biblical calling of the early church, Adventists have traditionally viewed themselves to be part of priestly communities. The texts of 1 Peter 2:5-9, Revelation 5:10, and Revelation 20:6 motivated the thought that the local church as a whole is

to act as ministers of the graces of God. The priesthood of all believers is the basis on which the Adventist's call to mission is to operate. Edwards explains it as such:

This understanding of the priesthood of believers calls for a widespread recognition and honoring of the biblical vision of the unity of the *laos* of God, of the ministry of all members and of the vocation of all Christians. It will be realized only if the "non-clergy" are willing to move up, if the "clergy" are willing to move over, and if all God's people are willing to move out. For the ministry of this community is rendered first and foremost in the world and for the world. It is performed in the daily lives of its people, in their sacrificial obedience in the church and in their mission to proclaim the good news in all the world. For Seventh-day Adventists it has serious eschatological consequences because the work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.

(Edwards 1988:10–11)

Once again, the challenge of authority is laid before Adventist ecclesiology. Even though the church might be preaching the priesthood of all believers, both individually as well as in local church communities, the artificial barrier between ordained minister and layman that separates the one from the other as if they form part of two different classes, became the practice and norm (Edwards 1988:27).

The historical call for all believers to have an equal responsibility to engage in ministry to reach the world is clear, yet the authoritative distinction is difficult to overcome in Adventist thinking:

The missionary nature of the church was evident in the general understanding that all believers were called to engage in missionary activity, though a distinction in authority was maintained between the leadership and laity. The mission endeavors of the believers were placed in the framework of God's mission.

(Damsteegt 1977:270)

In the priesthood of all believers, the call to ministry is placed on every believer at the moment of baptism (Dederen 1998:17). The sacrament of baptism is thus not merely a sign of an individual decision to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, but also

a sign of the acceptance of the universal call presented to all who profess to be believers.

Making the shift from theology to practise where every member identifies as a minister, brings practical challenges to a church community. The expectation for the pastoral position is clearly set out as preacher, evangelist and shepherd, but the expectation of the so-called *lay minister* seems to be ambiguous. What is expected of members in their daily lives as they navigate through life seems to be unclear in the ideological priesthood of all believers. The reflection on the subject seems to be more theological, than practical. Although there might be many suggestions, motivations, encouragements, and resources provided by the organization to equip believers to engage in personal evangelism, it is not placed within the larger responsibility of the priesthood perspective.

A further point worthy of mention is the later hermeneutical development of the priesthood. Adventists have always insisted that a reading that is “plain, normal, literal, unless a clear and obvious figure is intended or a symbolic passage is employed” (Hasel 2006:39) be used in Bible interpretation. Sokupa in his doctoral dissertation presents the priesthood of believers, both laity and those engaging in theology proper, as having the communal responsibility of Biblical interpretation (2011:215). The result of such a responsibility is that theologians are not only accountable to themselves but also to members who are equally accountable to one another as well as to the theological community of the church.

Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology seems to be based on the theological premise of the remnant and its mission. These themes are the most influential in the identity of the SDA church. Theoretically, the administrative structure, the local church body, and the individual member are to focus on the mission directive of the remnant group to which it belongs. How this compares to the family directive of the New Testament church will be investigated in Section 5.

# **Chapter 5: Ecclesiological comparisons and contrasts between the New Testament church and the Seventh-day Adventist church**

In this chapter, a comparison between the ecclesiological model of family and kinship in the early church, and the SDA church, will be presented. The aim is to present the possibility of an ecclesiological development in the SDA church that will include a stronger emphasis on the family and kinship model of the local congregation. Several comparisons can be drawn between Adventist and New Testament ecclesiology, but to imply that the SDA church is a perfect representation of the early church is a fallacy that will be shown in the contrasts between the ecclesiological perspectives. The objective of the Chapter is in no way to diminish the ecclesiology of the SDA church, and possible future developments are discussed not as an alternative to a broken system, but rather as an improvement of a polity that has served the SDA church for more than 150 years. This chapter will aim to show that the major adjustment to be made is not in the ranks of church organization, but in the local church living as *κοινωνία*.

## **5.1 THE ADVENT HOPE**

### **5.1.1. The church as Plan B in the New Testament**

One of the overarching topics found in the New Testament is that of the near-apocalyptic return of Jesus Christ. The ascension of Christ is immediately followed by the promise of His return by the angelic beings.

Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.

(Ac 1:11)

Immediately thereafter the Jesus group assembled in the upper room awaiting the imminent coming of God's Kingdom in the form of the *Parousia* (Παρουσία). The intent was not to organize as a formal religious group but only to wait a little while for

the Messianic return. The formation of the first Christian church only came about because of the Παρουσία event not happening. The apostles “had hoped that the Kingdom of God would come, but what came was the Church” (Loisy 1904:155). Loisy may have been a cynic in his views, but he is on point. The arrival of the church can be seen as a surprise; it was not expected. Caputo calls the church the ‘Plan B’. It was born from necessity. For the hope of the Παρουσία to continue, the apostles and their followers had to organize themselves in groups, all waiting for the expected event (Caputo 2007:34–35). It cannot be over-emphasized that “apocalyptic Christianity has been historically and theologically one of the most striking and important expressions of Christian faith” (Dunn 2006:337). Käsemann (1969:40) calls apocalyptic theology the “mother of all Christian theology”.

The eschatological focus in the first chapters of Acts is indicative of the hope the apostles held for the soon return of Jesus (Ac 1:11; 2:17-21. 39; 3:20-21). Even after the organization of ecclesiastical groups, the early believers lived in daily expectation of the Παρουσία of Jesus. Significantly major figures in the early church, such as Stephen, summed up their faith when faced with a crisis, referring to the event of the coming of the Son of God (Ac 7:56). Similarly, James the brother of Jesus when brought before the Jewish leaders replied to them:

Why do you question me about the son of man? I tell you, He is sitting in heaven at the right hand of the Great Power, and He will come on the clouds of heaven.

(Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.13)

The main focus of the early Christians was without a doubt the belief that they were in the very last days, awaiting the end of the world (Dunn 2006:353). As the first century played out, the Christian church developed its doctrinal views, summed up in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Apostolic creed, but never without the expectation of the imminent return of Jesus.

The imminence of the Παρουσία remained central to the Christian church. Although not the singular focal point as it was in the early days after the Easter event, but still very central as an ecclesiological hope. This became one the most common motifs of the Pauline epistles, especially but not limited to, 1 and 2 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians 15. Paul’s hope of the eschatological event is communal, it is the church that is awaiting glorification, and it is the church that is called to holiness and purity

on the day of the coming of Christ (Phil 1:10, 1 Cor 1:8). The coming of the Lord becomes a source of motive for sanctification, but also of comfort for the community of believers in the present affliction of the pre-advent era (Ridderbos 1975:487–488).

Whereas Christianity emerged from a strong apocalyptic perspective, it continued to remain in the state of being “in the meantime”. The Christian church is caught up in a persistent state of waiting, and in the meantime, it has to “do the best it can to bring the kingdom to herself” (Caputo 2007:35).

### **5.1.2. The emphasis on the Second Coming in the Seventh-day Adventist church compared to the early church**

The birth of the Seventh-day Adventist church can be seen as some sort of a replication of the early days of Christianity. The comparison is striking. SDA ecclesiology is grounded in the expectation of the imminent advent of Jesus Christ. As the early church had no intention of forming any sort of organized religion, the Adventist pioneers similarly had no intention of forming an organized denominational structure. For the early Adventists, the SDA church was Plan B. The church’s formation was out of practical necessity. The polity of the church had the duty to serve the mission and identity of Adventists, as a people that is preparing the world for Christ’s soon return. The Early Adventists had such a focus on the expected return of Christ, that the Shut Door Theory was easily accepted for a very short period. This anti-mission approach however soon made way for the missional identity the church accepted in her interpretation of the three angels message of Revelation 14.<sup>17</sup>

It is maybe at this point that a major distinction should be drawn between the early Christian group and the SDA church. Their respective responses to the disappointment experiences would be indicative of the respective identities that were formed in the years to come. Whereas the apostolic church responded to the delay of the Παρουσία with a sense of unity and togetherness before starting their mission, the SDA church started its organization with a zeal for evangelism and a mission to reach as many believers as possible “before Jesus comes again” (Platon 2017:75–77).

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<sup>17</sup> The history of the Seventh-day Adventist church’s doctrinal formation is discussed in more detail in section 4.



The question that begs to be answered remains: To what extent did the respective organizations respond to the delay of the Παρουσία based on the cultural and social influences on them? With family and kinship as the primary social group in the ancient Mediterranean world, it was to be expected that the early Christian believers responded accordingly when Plan A of the Παρουσία did not happen. Even though a strong focus was laid on the mission and the preaching of the message, the identity of the group remained familial in nature.

The early Adventists however found themselves in a very different context. The religious scene of early Adventism was largely influenced by the Great Awakening, also called “the great foreign-missionary century”, an era developed out of the reformation period. The emphasis of the reformed churches in America was not so much to develop a communal sense of togetherness, as it was to spread their respective messages and reach as many converts to their belief systems as possible. ‘Evangelism’ was the religious slogan of the day. When realizing that Jesus will maybe not return as soon as they thought, the SDA church organized itself with a continued focus on mission and evangelism, accepting its calling as that of preparing the world for the soon-expected Advent of Jesus (From 1978:46–48).

Although both the first-century Christians and the early Adventist Christians started their movements based on the expectation of the Παρουσία, the Plan B for the early Christian church was to become a family in the truest and proper sense of the word, while the early Adventists developed their Plan B around their call to become a world-wide missionary movement. Ever since the formation of the SDA church, the second coming of Jesus Christ has always been a main pillar of faith for believers, with the SDA church accepting its identity in the calling to proclaim the soon coming of Jesus to all.

## **5.2 THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

### **5.2.1. Evangelism as a priority in the New Testament and the Seventh-day Adventist church**

Although an emphasis on the coming of Christ motivated the early church to form a familial community a secondary, yet equally important, characteristic of the church was that of preaching the message of Jesus Christ to the world. As discussed in

Section 3, the calling of the fishermen to become “fishers of men” was a clear directive of the mission of the Jesus movement, and the later Christian church. Passionately convinced of the truth of the gospel, the early church paid heed to the great commission given by Christ in Matthew’s final words (Mt 28:19-20). The *kerygma* (κήρυγμα) of the coming of the Messiah was to be heard by all, far and wide (Green 1995:58).

The Christianising of Jews and proselytes, as well as the conversion of heathens to accept the Christian faith, was the main ministerial objective of the church outside of the kinship group. The ἐκκλησία was a proper blend of Jews and non-Jews becoming Christians as a result of the evangelistic focus of the Jesus movement and the snowball effect it had on new believers (Levinskaya 1996:44–48). According to Green, this zeal for evangelism in the early church could well be one of the most remarkable things in the history of religions.

Here were men and women of every rank and station in life, of every country in the known world, so convinced that they had discovered the riddle of the universe, so sure of the one true God that they had come to know, that nothing must stand in the way of their passing on this good news to others

(1995:286)

The early Christian group prioritised the spreading of the message of Jesus. Although acting internally as a family kinship, it had as its external task that of winning more souls for their cause. As previously noted in Section 3, the internal purpose of upholding the familial position was to serve the external purpose of the enormous missionary task the church accepted (Ridderbos 1997:447). The Christian church has always seen its primary reason for existence, the κήρυγμα of the Messianic message to the world (Ladd 1993:364–365).

The reason for this evangelistic zeal can be summed up in three main motives namely, a sense of gratitude, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of concern for others. The motive of gratitude was their response to the love of God they had received through Jesus Christ. “Magnetized by His love their lives could not but show it, their lips could not help but tell it” (Green 1995:294). The second motive, that of responsibility, was their response to the commission given by their Master. The

reckoning to be given on the day of Judgement was a concern to them, and they wanted to remain faithful and true to their Master's command (Green 1995:300).

Their sense of concern for others however might bear more testimony to their success than any other reason that motivated them to engage in the spreading of the message of Jesus Christ. Early Christians such as the Biblical apostles, and later church fathers such as Polycarp, Tertullian, Clement, and Origen highlight the motivation of love and care for fellow men as the reason for the evangelistic nature of the church (Green 1995:305–306). Tertullian describes the caring attitude of the Christian group as follows:

All men love those who love them; it is peculiar to Christians to love those that hate them. Therefore, mourning over your ignorance and having compassion on your human error, and looking on that future of which every day shows threatening signs, necessity is laid upon us to come forward in this way (by writing) that we may set before you truths you will not listen to openly.

(Tertullian, *Scap. 1*)

The driving force for the proclamation of the gospel might very well be that Christians believed that they have found “a better way” than where they came from, whether it be from Judaism or Pagan roots, and because of their intrinsic care and love for their fellow men, they wanted all people to experience the “better way”. As mentioned in Section 3, the growth of the church was largely because of their care and love for those within the kin group, but strangely so, also for those outside of their own group.

Similarly to the early church, the SDA church is grounded in the principle of evangelism. The call to adhere to the great commission and the proclamation of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14<sup>18</sup> is central to the Adventist identity. Evangelism and mission stand as a central tenet of the Adventist church. Adventist authors have often compared the church to the early Christian movement saying that Adventism exists for the sole reason of rekindling the evangelistic flame of the early church (Jules 2009:80–81). Seventh-day Adventists believe that they have a unique message about Christ that should be communicated to all who are willing to hear, in the same way that the early church had a distinct message about Christ.

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<sup>18</sup> Discussed in more details in Section 4.

However, it is when the set of motives are examined that Adventists might find themselves in contradiction to the early church. Although the emphasis on evangelism is similar, the motive for the spreading of the Word may prove to be different.

Knight in his writings is known to be critical of the SDA motivations for evangelism. One of the great motivators critiqued by Knight is that of success, or rather success for the sake of success alone (Knight 1995:31). This type of evangelistic growth can be referred to as “religious secularism”. Success in Adventism might be measured in several ways. Institutional, educational, and financial developments are all measures by which the church could measure its success, yet no other form of measurement is valued as much as the number of baptisms. The number of new converts is often highlighted as the measurement of success. Membership growth is often presented as the main reason for evangelism. It is the main determining factor of success by a congregation, pastor, or higher body such as a conference or union. The church, irrespective of the level, is seen as successful when evangelistic efforts and methods result in baptisms and membership growth (Doss 2016:154–156).

A further motivator for evangelism in Adventism is the result of the irrelevance of institutionalism. This can be referred to as program-driven evangelism. With the history of being a church-growth institution, the pressure for growth is still felt in the organizational structure of the Adventist church. The departmental organization of the church (see Section 4.2) in all its structures, leads to program-driven initiatives. From the local church to the higher organization, distinct departments are developing innumerable programs to fulfil its mandate to grow as a church. Children’s ministries, Youth, Evangelism department and Women’s ministries, to name but a few, are seen to develop an extensive number of resources and programs to be used primarily in evangelism. Church departments, especially in the higher organization are set up to provide programs and material to lower organizations and local churches. The motivation for evangelism through programs and resource development is grounded in the institutional expectation that church departments will deliver on their task to evangelize. Although Adventist administrators agree that personal evangelism should take precedence over event-oriented evangelism, it still seems that most levels of church organization fall back to this approach (Lechleitner 2010).

More motivators may exist for the evangelistic thrust of the SDA Church, but the greatest motivation among Adventists for evangelism is probably that of their identity as proclaimers of the three angels' messages in Revelation 14 (see Section 4.2.4). Gospel proclamation for Adventists is often coupled with the proclamation of a warning that needs to be brought before the world. The warning that Jesus is coming again to judge all is at the centre of Adventist missiology. In the opening statement of a sermon preached from the General Conference offices, the GC President, Ted Wilson, makes the following statement regarding the three angels' messages: "These messages are prophetic, illustrating the reliability of God's Word, and proclaiming the most serious warnings found in Scripture" (Wilson 2021b). The motivation for evangelism as being obedient to the duty of watchmen sent to warn others, is a regular and recurring theme in Adventist missiological writings and sermons (Zaitsev 2012:20).

Adventist evangelism is largely motivated by the belief that they are appointed as the watchmen to warn the world of its impending doom. One of the frequently used statements by Ellen White is:

In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.

(1909:19)

When examining the zeal for evangelism in Adventist ecclesiology it is evident that even as in the first Christian community, there is no shortage of enthusiasm for the task at hand within the Adventist church. This comparison is also leading to a striking difference when the motivators of this evangelistic zeal are examined. Although the early Christians were certainly motivated by their task to warn the world, it seems that their primary motivator was their love for their fellow men. For the early Christians, it was not merely a blind obedience to the great commission, but a sincere concern for the souls of others. The motivation for Adventist evangelism seems to have shifted from a relational motivation to a task-driven motivation.

Adventist motivation seems to be grounded in obedience to a corporate calling, more than relational care for other people. Adventists are called to be moved with compassion, as the Saviour when He encountered the lost people of His time.

If we are Christians, then the burden of Christ has become our burden. Jesus paid too much, and the value of a soul is too high, to allow inconvenience, reputation, or fear, to prevent us from giving our best to lead souls into the truth.

(Howard 2018:58)

### **5.2.2. Methods of Evangelism**

When comparing early Christian missiology with SDA missiology, it is not only motivation that is of importance but also method. The way in which the κήρυγμα was proclaimed compared to Adventist evangelistic practices seems to be in some ways drastically different. The early church proclaims and spreads the Gospel in mainly two ways, public preaching, and household evangelism or personal evangelism.

Both in Judaism and paganism, the use of oracles, speeches, and sermons were employed to convince hearers about a certain position or belief, often to the dismay of the counterargument, typical to the honour/shame and challenge/response social constructs of the time. The open-air, public preaching of the first Christian preachers was not a new or novel idea. It was a common occurrence, that celebrated preachers were given a platform within and apart from the synagogue, to present their teachings, and for philosophers to be granted the public spaces of government to share their insights into various affairs (Levinthal 1927:17). Historical documents, mention the public preaching approach of the Gospel. The book of Acts mentions several public preaching events:

And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

(Ac 5:42)

... and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God.

(Ac 9:20)

So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

(Ac 17:22-23)

The evidence of Christian public preaching is also found in extra-biblical documents as in the case of the interaction between Thaddeus and Abgar of Edessa documented by Eusebius:

As I was sent to preach the word, be good enough to assemble all your citizens tomorrow, and I will preach to them and sow in them the word of life about the coming of Jesus and how it happened.

(Eusebius, *Hist.eccl.* 1.13.18)

Another example of public evangelism done by the early church is found in the pseudo-Clementine writings when the author describes his public evangelistic preaching to the residents of Rome:

...standing in a most crowded place in the city, made proclamation to the people, saying: "Hear me, O ye citizens of Rome. The Son of God is now in the regions of Judea, promising eternal life to everyone who will hear Him, but upon condition that he shall regulate his actions according to the will of Him by whom He hath been sent, even of God the Father. Wherefore turn ye from evil things to good, from things temporal to things eternal. Acknowledge that there is one God, ruler of heaven and earth, in whose righteous sight ye unrighteous inhabit His world. But if ye be converted, and act according to His will, then, coming to the world to come, and being made immortal, ye shall enjoy His unspeakable blessings and rewards.

(*Ps.-Clem.* 1.7-1.9)

Although public evangelism was not strange for the early church, it was not the primary method of evangelism either. Where there are clear references to evangelistic preaching in public places, there are many more references to a private

approach to evangelism, named by Green as household or personal evangelism (Green 1995:234).

Evangelistic presentations to families and individuals are often referenced in documents. Evangelists bringing the message of Jesus to families or individuals who then join the Jesus movement, is one of the main themes of Acts. It is stated that they preached the gospel from home to home (Ac 5:42; 20:20). There are also several familial conversions documented as a result of household evangelism. The families of Cornelius (Ac 10:1-11:18), Lydia the merchant (Ac 16:11-15), the Roman jailor (Ac 16:25-34) and Crispus, the synagogue president (Ac 18:1-11) are all examples of the early successes of household evangelism.

Once again the pseudo-Clementine writings give some indication of the centrality of household preaching. The author claims to have gone to a home where the Apostle Peter would be known to preach:

When I had landed, and was seeking for an inn, I learned from the conversation of the people, that one Peter, a most approved disciple of Him who appeared in Judea, and showed many signs and miracles divinely performed among men, was going to hold a discussion of words and questions the next day with one Simon, a Samaritan. Having heard this, I asked to be shown his lodging; and having found it, and standing before the door, I informed the doorkeeper who I was...

*(Ps.-Clem. 1.12-1.16)*

The significance of the household as the fundamental social unit in ancient times lay the foundation for the success of household evangelism. It was within the family unit that religion was primarily practiced and early Christian evangelists, both apostolic and post-apostolic penetrated these family units to establish small bases from where the Gospel message of Jesus Christ would spread to other family units in the communities (Green 1995:253). The very first pre-Easter evangelists are sent to enter the homes of people with the “kingdom of God” message (Lk 10:5). It is also in a house where the Pentecost event occurs (Ac 2:2).

Although the early church engaged in public forms of evangelism, it is the personal interactions with families that are getting most of the attention from early Christian



authors. It is undeniable that the public preaching done by apostles and church leaders had some role to play in the successes of the early church movement, yet its greatest growth spurts came because of the common people sharing their faith in a loving and caring way with others on a personal level that is found probably only in familial setups.

SDA ecclesiology and missiology go hand in hand. It is grounded in the principle that evangelism is the task of every church member and not only of a select few. Most books dealing with the SDA mission will address the task from a total member involvement perspective. In Adventism this is called Personal Ministries. The Personal Ministries handbook describes Personal Ministries as “enlisting every member in active soul-winning service for God” (GC Sabbath School & Personal Ministries 2006:2).

With such a focus on the personal aspect of mission, it is a strange phenomenon that evangelism in SDA churches and organizations is mostly program driven. One of the most popular methods of evangelism is that of the public campaign. The Personal Ministries handbook devotes a few chapters to training for evangelistic programs, one of which is the public campaign. This traditionally will be a 3-week series presented in the evenings at a certain venue. Members of the community will be invited through various means of advertising the campaign and often Biblical prophecy is used as a drawing card to get people interested in the program. The focus of these outreach campaigns is generally to convince the attendees of certain doctrinal truths. Local churches are encouraged by the higher organization to plan and present at least one major public evangelistic campaign each year. These campaigns are often expensive and the Conference in many instances will assist the local church with funds to host these campaigns. After a campaign, those who are interested will be introduced to the church, they will be given a series of Bible studies going deeper into Adventists' belief, and on acceptance of the doctrines they will be baptised into membership of the SDA church (GC Sabbath School & Personal Ministries 2006:59–70).

The Personal Ministries handbook highlights several other soul-winning methods, that are described as the specialization of personal ministries. Yet, most of these are program-driven initiatives that are implemented by the local church with very little

emphasis on relational evangelism (GC Sabbath School & Personal Ministries 2006:2). Even the aspects that are dealing with one-on-one evangelistic attempts are presented in a structured program. Bible studies, community welfare, and Christian literature distribution, to name a few, may all be seen as personal evangelistic attempts, yet these are all developed in a program-type style. Organizational Personal Ministries departments provide extensive training in various methods and principles of personal evangelism to laity and pastors, but most of these are developed to enhance the effectiveness of church programs.

Another example of this apparent disconnect between theory and practice is found in the Discipleship Handbook, a resource developed by the General Conference of the SDA church to motivate practical Christianity. A missionary spirit is encouraged to all who profess and believe in Jesus Christ, yet when practical applications to this missionary spirit are given, a focus on program-driven evangelism and a lack of practical relational practices are evident. The discipleship handbook highlights the public sharing of testimonies, distribution of literature and material, and Bible Studies as means of reaching others (Howard 2018:54–56).

The program-driven approach to evangelism has been criticised by several theological voices in the Adventist community. A call is made for a felt needs-oriented approach to reach people. People will respond to the doctrinal messages of any given group if they are convinced that the people in that group care about them, deeply and intimately. For any attempt to discipling others, the most important task is that of building relationships and trust (Burrill 1998:213–216). Ellen White's famous statement, namely 'Christ's method alone', is a motivating force for the relationship-centred approach:

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'

(White 1905:145)

Even within the organizational structures of the church criticism is presented against the program-driven approach to evangelism. Metrics seem to be an indicator of success rather than relationships; this is probably because metrics are easily

measurable, and relationships are not. Baptismal numbers are often presented to measure success in both local congregations and the ministerial work of the clergy. Lately, this approach has been criticised as encouraging a program-driven approach rather than a relational one. Programs seem to deliver baptismal candidates, but relationships develop disciples (Thurmon 2015). While the metric of baptism might show the effectiveness of public evangelistic programs, it is the metric of membership retention that will show the effectiveness of a relational approach.

Christ's method is indicative of a relational approach when reaching people. In the statement by Ellen White, the emphasis is first on an attitude of care towards others, not contingent on any behavioural changes. Second, He ministered to the physical needs of people and showed compassion to them. Third, He won their confidence through personal interactions. Last, He called them to follow Him as disciples.

Criticism of the program-driven approach by no means has the motivation to make public evangelism obsolete, but rather to motivate a change in priorities. A movement from an exclusively program-driven approach to a hybrid model where the priority is a personal, relational evangelistic approach, supported by public evangelistic programs is necessary (Thurmon 2015). There is no suggestion for a compromise in the presentation of Adventist beliefs either. Relational evangelism is merely prioritising the building of relationships over convincing arguments about doctrines (Burrill 1998:216).

If Adventists wish to experience the same sort of ecclesiastical growth as the early Christian church, it would be imperative for them to employ a similar approach to reaching people. Public evangelistic programs need to continue playing a role in the spreading of the Adventist message, but it will be the development of personal relationships with non-members through interactions, showing them sympathy, caring for their needs, and winning their confidence, that will be most effective in the call to follow Jesus as disciples in the way Adventists understand discipleship.

## 5.3 CONGREGATIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY

### 5.3.1. Polity of the early Christian Church versus Polity of the Adventist Church

An ecclesiological comparison of the early church and Adventism would be incomplete without comparing the organizational structures of the two institutions. Although Sections 3 and 4 dealt with the organizations, separately and in more detail, some aspects of the polity need to be compared to understand the differences and agreements they might have. This section will focus largely on the organization of leadership and authority in the local church.

Authority in the New Testament church seems to be divided between all the members of the local church. The early church members are presented in the New Testament as having the authority to dismiss members (Mt 18:17), to implement discipline (1 Co 5), to appoint leaders among themselves (Ac 6:3), and to send missionaries (Ac 13:1-3). “The early church engaged corporately in ministry decisions” (Newton 2011:29). Early church leadership appointments give light on how the church functioned on a democratic basis.

Elect therefore for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord men that are meek, and not lovers of money, and true and approved.

(*Did.* 15.1)

The same principle is found in the election of church leaders in the congregations.

When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord whom they had believed.

(Ac 15:23)

χειροτονήσαντες used in Acts 15:23 is indicative of a democratic election in the meeting of the ἐκκλησία by the showing of hands rather than an arbitrary appointment by the apostles. Although family-centred, there was a shift from patriarchal authority to the authority of all believers.

It should however be noted that local congregations did not necessarily engage in the development of Christian doctrine. It was a community of believers from various backgrounds and possibly different congregations that met to discuss and determine

doctrinal issues. Even though the whole congregation was not necessarily involved in the discussion, the appointment of representatives to the Jerusalem council was by congregational consensus.

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas--Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,

(Ac 15:22)

The movement of authority seems to start from the bottom level, the local congregation and move up to a higher level of decision-making. The whole church is involved in a democratic and representative system as they are settling the doctrinal issue (Akin 2004:30).

The polity of the Seventh-day Adventist church is examined in more detail in Section 4.2.2. It is however noteworthy for this comparison to highlight the organizational structure of the SDA church again. In the SDA Church Manual, a section dealing with church authority acknowledges the authority given to the local church to deal with and decide on matters of doctrine, practice, and discipline. It concludes that "The Church thus has authority to settle the rules for its own governance" (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015b:29). The SDA church is claiming authority as a church on two basic levels, that of organization and that of the local congregation. The Church manual states:

Therefore all subordinate organizations and institutions throughout the Church will recognize the General Conference Session, and the General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions, as the highest ecclesiastical authority, under God, among Seventh-day Adventists.

(Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015b:29)

There is however also a conflicting ideology to the above. The view that the local church member has the highest authority in the polity of the SDA church is often portrayed as a way to elevate the governance model of the SDA above those of other denominations that might use the episcopal or papal models (S. Patterson 2019:7). This statement, however, is not as simple as perceived. The representative model employed by the SDA church, at best, grants the local members authority in

appointing their chosen representation in the various committees and boards of the higher organizations. Even though the local church members and every level of organization have the authority to appoint representatives to the higher organizations, it remains out of the reach of the non-elected members of lower organizations to have any influence in represented committees and governance of the SDA church organization is laid upon the chosen representatives of various levels as discussed in Section 4.2.

The major comparison between SDA church polity and that of the New Testament church is that of authority in the local congregation. In like manner, the SDA church also assigns the authority of various practical worship and ecclesiastical decisions to the local church congregation. Although the higher organization, through a representative system, can impose organizational decisions on local churches concerning doctrines, financial policies, and systems, often through their employee namely the pastor, the local church still has final authority over local matters such as disciplining members, local financial decisions, worship styles, and local programs. The authority of the local church is vested in the business meeting of the local church where all church members are eligible voters. These business meetings may be attended by officials of the higher organization but are not to be influenced by them as representatives of the organization.

The New Testament church had a limited organizational polity. The principles of decision-making as vested in both the local congregation and the higher organization seem to be present. The SDA church has developed an organizational mammoth with decision-making authority on each level, and yet her polity allows for the local churches to make decisions on topics that have a direct influence on them.

Within the current structure of authority of the SDA church, there are however concerns that are being raised. The risk of having a *kingship* polity instead of a *kinship* polity seems to be relevant. Theological voices have been raised against the lack of accountability and a consolidation tendency. Adventist organizational history shows the danger in allowing any one individual, or small group of individuals to possess the power to make decisions that will impact the world church. Within the enormous organizational system of the SDA church, there seems to be times when more power is given to conference, union, division and General Conference

administrators than what the spirit of the representative system intends. This is in direct contradiction to the New Testament Church polity system in which kinship was the basis of the existence of the church (Patterson 2012:5–9).

### **5.3.2. The Family model of church**

Even though the polity of the early church seems to be functioning as a democratic system, at least in practice, the presence of a familial model is ever present in the New Testament and other Christian writings. The formalization of decision-making by using a democratic process did not mean that the early Christian congregations operated as political units. If democratic polity was the formal system of governance, the family was the underlying model of interaction.

The family model of church is more than a metaphor. The New Testament church positioned itself as family, most probably because the family circle was experienced as the most intimate social experience one could have. The early church not only had a theology of adoptive kinship, it was a praxis in the daily lives of those who professed to be followers of Jesus (Hellerman 2001:70). As the early church developed into various different congregations throughout the Mediterranean world, the move was not a development of formal organization, but into familial units that formed part of a bigger kinship group. The Pauline writings consistently address believers which is not part of the specific faith community by using familial terms.

But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.

1 Cor 16:12

All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

1 Cor 16:20

Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren.

2 Tm 4:21

The family of Christianity was a closely knit community in the first centuries, even though they might have been from different *congregational households*.

It is however not in the organization of Christianity, but in these *ecclesiastical households* that fictive family members lived their lives as believers. Material solidarity, several familial practices such as kissing and eating together, and a close emotional bond, were evidence of the familial kinship present in the early congregations. A special distinguishment was made between insiders and outsiders, and although outsiders were called to become part of the kinship, they remained outsiders until a decision to make the transition to the Christian family was made.

Believers lived their lives for the benefit of the ἐκκλησία. The new kinship was the primary group they belonged to, and ultimate allegiance was given to a new fictive family, even to the extent where shame was brought upon the believer for rejecting a natural family in exchange for the fictive family kinship. Section 3 discussed the family model of the early church in full detail.

In comparison to this kinship ecclesiology of the early church, the SDA church also claims to have a strong kinship connection, yet it is not familial bonds that are the strongest motivator for SDA ecclesiology but remnant theology.

Remnant theology, as discussed in Section 4.2.3, may overshadow the potential that kinship as a priority in SDA ecclesiology might have. Remnant theology is focussed almost exclusively on the theological premise that the SDA church has been raised up with the task to proclaim an exclusive end-time message. The SDA church does not primarily find her identity in being a family, but rather in being a movement to proclaim a special message. Community is of lesser importance than the task at hand. The SDA statistical records show a tendency of success in evangelistic efforts, often by programs, done by Adventist congregations, yet a very stark picture is presented when the question of retention is brought up. From 1965 to 2022 more than 37 million people officially joined the Adventist church. The consistent growth rate currently is more than 2 million members per year for the years 2015 – 2021. Yet the current membership of the SDA church is standing at around 22 million members. More than 14 million, or 42% of those that joined the church are counted as missing or apostatized members (Office of Archives and Statistics 2022). Although the remnant ideology may be very successful in achieving its task to grow the church with members, it appears to be ineffective in keeping those members within the Remnant church's local congregations.



There seems to be a disconnect between the Polity of the New Testament church as an organization and the polity of the SDA Church as an organization. Whereas the New Testament churches were connected loosely to each other but solidly connected within the local ἐκκλησία groups, the family of SDA churches and organizations are firmly connected at the organizational level, yet the ecclesiology of Adventism is not primarily focussing on connecting members at the local church level in a familial way. The church is assumed to function both as a universal church and yet still has to remain the community of believers found in a particular place (Dederen 2000:542).

### **5.3.3. The potential of incorporating *koinonia* into the Adventist remnant ecclesiology according to Tihomir Lazic**

Some questions may arise from within the SDA church when it is confronted with the possibility of developing a deeper kinship ecclesiology. Why is this so important? What difference does it make? How will we adopt and incorporate a new perspective of church into an organization of this size? Lazic is highlighting several reasons the church might consider incorporating the principles of familial *κοινωνία* as the foundation for its ecclesiology.

First, is the biblical potential. With Seventh-day Adventists calling upon the Bible as their only creed, it would make sense for them to incorporate the Biblical family model of church as emphasised by the New Testament authors such as the Apostle John.

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

(1 Jn 1:1-4)

Second, is the historical potential. Seventh-day Adventists often call upon the restoration of the pre-Constantinian apostolic church (White 1911b:37–43). Within

the Apostolic Creed, dating back to the pre-Constantinian period, the church is presented as a community and not merely an organization.

Third, is an ontological potential. All aspects of the church should come together in the *κοινωνία* of adoptive family members. The familial community will create a space for intrapersonal relations that are lacking in other ecclesiological systems.

Fourth, is a dialogical potential. Remnant theology, at times, has resulted in the exact opposite of what it intends to do, to communicate the distinctive Adventist message to other Christian believers. The incorporation of kinship ecclesiology will not only be beneficial for the ingroup but also for the relations with the outgroup. Although Adventists do not have a particular need for joining ecumenical bodies, it does have a strong emphasis on sharing Biblical truths as they understand them. The exclusivity of a purely remnant perspective is inhibiting the evangelistic work of the church. Having the remnant church ingrained in a familial community will broaden the potential field for evangelism.

Fifth, is a cultural potential. The values of the ancient (and modern) group-driven societies, especially found in the family-first societies, are also embedded in the modern, contemporary culture, with the recent shift in contemporary cultures from a very individualistic worldview to a “relational interpretation of reality”. Belonging to a community has become more important in recent years. If an impact on contemporary culture is desired, it has to be done in the space of a community-driven ecclesiology.

Sixth, is a unifying potential. The current approach to dealing with doctrinal and conflicting matters within and outside of the SDA church is purely a reasoning method. Within the church, the method of dealing with conflicting principles and doctrines is accepting the majority voice on any given topic, (such as Woman’s Ordination at the 2020 GC Session discussed in Section 4.2.2). Outside of the church, the method of dealing with conflicting doctrines is the aim to convince the other party with certain cognitive reasonings. If a community-driven familial foundation is primary to Adventist ecclesiology, different approaches might seem to be more effective in obtaining unity. Within a purely organizational democracy, the losing group in any conflict feels divorced from the larger community that voted against their position. A *koinonia*-centered church, both congregationally and

organizationally will experience differences and conflicting situations not as a disconnect from the church since the individual experience will be of lesser importance than the wellbeing of the family of believers.

Seventh, is a systematic potential. Biblical doctrines are most effectively understood within the interlinking quality of the group-focused church. The true purpose of the Sabbath, the relational ideals of the Decalogue, the believers as spiritual Israel in the sanctuary doctrine, and other doctrinal beliefs are all better understood within the realm of a close-knit community such as the fictive kinship of church. It is especially the doctrine of God's remnant people that is better understood within the vitality of the ecclesiastical family. The remnant is not positioned as an exclusive group of people with whom one can become united only by the acceptance of a list of doctrinal beliefs, but rather a kinship group that is aiming to adopt as many believers as possible (Lazic 2019:153–161).

## **5.4 POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS TOWARDS A FAMILIAL ECCLESIOLOGY**

Although Lazic addresses the “why?” question by showing the potential and benefits to the church if a more community-centred approach is adopted, the “how?” remains unanswered. This section will highlight two main approaches that speak to the praxis of achieving a family-oriented ecclesiology in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

First, the possibility of an organizational restructuring will be discussed and second, the principle of a primary focus on the church as family in the local church will be discussed. Thus, dealing with moving to a kinship-oriented ecclesiology, both on the organizational and the local church level.

### **5.4.1. Organizational reorganization**

There are currently several voices calling for a reorganization within the Seventh-day Adventist organizational structure. The development of this structure is explained in detail in Section 4.1.2.

Haloviak is calling for reorganization resulting from the diversity that is present in the world church. Over the last few decades, the discussion on reorganization was raised several times, both from lower levels of the organization but also at the General Conference level. The cross stands foundational in what organizational

structure the church should adopt, as the cross is an equaliser of all believers. The conclusion that Haloviak comes to, is simply that “the time seems appropriate for a fresh look at the principles and organization that would most appropriately demonstrate the influence of that cross” (1993:11).

Knight also started calling for a reorganization already in the early 1990s. A strong motivator would be the limitation that a top-heavy structure is placing on the missionary achievements of the church. Knight(1995:47–53) is mildly critical of the bureaucracy within the church structures and claims that “administrators, breed administrators”, implying that the organizational leaders keep each other in the administrative positions as a move from pastoral ministry to administration is often, wrongly, seen as some sort of a promotion. Knight strongly advises against having the most effective clergy in the administrative offices of the SDA denomination. He calls for the reorganization based on the fact that “in many parts of the world there appears to be more salaried ordained talent behind desks than in frontline pastoral and evangelistic posts” (Knight 1995:49). One of the conclusions he comes to is bluntly stating that “the denomination’s institutional structures need to be totally re-evaluated in the light of current realities and new possibilities” (Knight 1995:50). Knight had numerous publications in which he has consistently shown the need for reorganization. Plaatjes (2007:208–210) expands on these publications in his doctoral dissertation.

A call for structural reorganization came from the academic field in South Africa by Plaatjes. He highlights the need for reorganization from mainly a financial perspective. Expanding on the cost of different administrative levels to the institution, he argues that the benefits (or rather the lack of benefits) to the local churches do not warrant the expenses of running such administrative levels. Plaatjes(2007:210–211) claims that administrative levels that see financial challenges in its sub-organizations, especially employing conferences, will make recommendations to cease new employments of pastors, to give no increment to pastors, to reduce benefits and to give no bonus pay-outs. He argues that such measures are often “to protect the interest of the Union and other higher organizations” (Plaatjes 2007:211). He calls for the church to “be constantly ready for change, as small adjustments will not suffice to deal with the challenges the church faces” (Plaatjes 2007:207).

From the perspective of the practicality of the structure, Oliver argues that the current system of the SDA church was instituted for a practical role and has very little theological significance. As the world has changed dramatically since 1901 a need arises for pragmatic adaptations to the current structure. Although a certain form of centralization is necessary for the church to function as a unit, some decentralization within the organization seems to be necessary for the church to function properly in the world she finds herself in today (Oliver 2017:27–28). Oliver, as a church administrator very subtly calls for a more pragmatic organization that will serve the church in the current age with the different challenges and contexts that she finds herself in now. “Adaptability and flexibility are vital for the fulfilment of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Not everything is to be done the same way everywhere. When there is no direct “Thus saith the Lord,” the Church must be flexible if it is to be true to its reason for existence” (Oliver 2017:28).

Many other Adventist authors have added their voices for a reorganisation of the current administrative structure. Hillock in 1972, Ryan in 2006, and Lee in 2001 are only a few others that have called for such a change in the SDA church. Adding to the list of pragmatic reasons why reorganization could be beneficial for the church, is that of a more localised governing system. Should the SDA church decide to trim its administrative structure by removing and/or reducing one or two of the organizational tiers, it will result in massive changes for the lower organizations of conferences and specifically local congregations.

Some very practical benefits might include a more desirable financial structure for the lower organizations and local congregations. With more funds available closer to the “groundwork” of the church, local churches will have a better opportunity to flourish as a familial unit, that serves each other and the communities they are found in effectively. With more funds being channelled to local churches, institutions that serve the ingroup as well as the outgroup, will be viable options to ensure the close unity of kinship in churches. Needs such as education, health care, the elderly, and others, might become possibilities for congregations that never could have thought of running such institutions.

Another way the reorganization of the SDA structure might be beneficial, would be the availability of qualified workers, particularly clergy. With the movement from an

organization-driven to family-driven ecclesiology, the need arises for shepherds within the group to serve the family of believers. Clergy currently serving within the organizational structure, will be reassigned to pastoral positions in local churches. In addition to freeing administrators to serve in local churches, a larger budget for the employment of pastoral workers will be available. With more pastors serving congregations not merely as evangelists but as shepherds, those within church communities will become more connected with one another.

If such a reorganization should happen, it could ensure that the lower level of the church, ultimately the local congregation, will receive more authoritative power. As a family unit, the local church will be closer in its connection with other organizations within the larger kinship of Adventism. Local churches and conferences will play a larger role in the representative democratic system the church is governed by. The family unit of the local church will receive more authority which will result in having more responsibility which, in turn, will develop the social principle of “family first” within the religious community.

#### **5.4.2. Developing the local church into a family**

Although much can be done at the organizational level of the SDA church to strengthen kinship focussed ecclesiology, the change that is mostly needed is at the local church level. Although many changes can be proposed for the development of familial ecclesiology in the local church, two basic categories are the development of a caring group and the development of spiritual gifts in the local church.

As discussed in Section 3, the *κοινωνία* is a societal community of people, who become part of a fictive kin group. Society is developed by man, and society develops man. It may be seen as having a dialectic character (Berger 1973:13). Members of a community are thus responsible for developing the nature of its being, while this nature, whatever it might be, is also developing its members. If the individual members of a local congregation commit to developing the faith community with a certain set of characteristics within the social group, this very nature of the group, in turn, will be to portray the same characteristics towards those within the group.

The familial nature of the *κοινωνία* requires a primary characteristic of care among its members. If the local church wishes to experience the same benefits, blessings and

successes of the early Christian church, it will have to adopt its approach towards members of the group. Other-centred care should become a paramount characteristic for any congregation that is aiming to become a familial kinship group. As the organizational structure of the church could be seen as top-heavy and program centred, even so, the local church organization is at risk to become an organizational community rather than a relational one.

The care within the group requires more than merely addressing each other as brother and sister or shaking hands in the parking lot of the church. It requires the development and outpouring of Christian love in each other's lives by not only attending church services together but also experiencing life together in the good and the hard times (Webb 2009:16). For the local church to become more family centred, it is to become more caring, and to become more caring is to become more involved.

The transition from a merely program-driven society to a caring personal society can only happen with intent. A commitment to intimate relationships, teaching and preaching on the importance of interpersonal relationships, developing creative ways for involvement, and an observable example needs to be implemented by pastors and other congregational leaders.

A further development that should happen in the local church is that of spiritual gifts. If the church wishes to become a family, the various contributions that family members bring to the group should be recognized and developed. These contributions in relation to the Christian church, is identified as spiritual gifts. Although at least 20 spiritual gifts are mentioned in the New Testament (Rm 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30; Eph 4:11; 1 Pt 4:11), these gifts may be divided into two categories, namely nurture of the family, and bringing others into the family circle, or inreach and outreach. The list of gifts in the New Testament should not be narrowly viewed as if it is the only set of gifts. Within the different gifts there may be many variations in which the gift is manifested in the specific culture, context, and era the congregation finds itself in. Spiritual gifts can be seen as a set of attributes, skills and qualifications that are given to an individual by the Holy Spirit for the sole purpose of supporting the ministry and mission of the church (Naden 2004:9–11).

For the local church to properly be seen as a family unit, it is vital that all the members recognise their own gifts and those of all the other members. The employment of these gifts is to be seen as the responsibility of every member to live a life of service, serving the church family and those outside of the family group (Naden 2004:12–13). The use and development of spiritual gifts are not to be equated with the formal leadership roles required within the congregational organization. Although certain leadership positions may require a certain set of gifts, gifts are to be used not only for the administrative roles and worship programs of the church. The proper development of spiritual gifts will result in an attitude of service to other individuals and the larger community of believers. It is not merely a position that is to be filled by the most skilled person (Gladden 1993:11–13).

The development and encouragement of spiritual gifts in all members will result in a deeper experience of the priesthood of all believers, but not merely on a theological level, but also on the practical level of doing church together as a family unit. The family model of the early church was successful, as all the members contributed by utilizing their gifts and skills for the benefit of the larger group. If the local SDA congregation wishes to experience the same unity, it is vital that all members will contribute to the church family, and that members recognise the contribution made by others within the family.

## **5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The conclusion of the study can be summarised as follows: Whereas the New Testament church functioned in its theology, ideology and praxis as a family, albeit a fictive one, Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology might be far removed from a family focussed church, both organizational and at local church levels. While the early church engaged in evangelism and the expectation of the Παρουσία they constantly did so in the context of togetherness as a family. When read through the lens of social scientific criticism, the reason for the early church's success becomes apparent. The kinship bond between the early Christians was foundational in their success with the proclamation of their message.

As a missionary movement, the SDA Church has since her earliest years focussed on sharing the Biblical truths as understood by her members with others, with a particular focus on the Second Coming message. Although it may seem that the



SDA church has grown exponentially over the last 2 centuries, the growth rate remains almost insignificant in relation to population numbers. If the SDA church wishes to experience similar successes as the early believers, it is vital that she begins to follow the same principle of building a religious community, based on true familial relationships rather than programs.

This study should in no way be seen as an exhaustive study on the way forward for Adventist familial ecclesiology. The recommendations in this study are merely scratching the surface of the development into a more family-centred faith community. Practical implementations are necessary and should be developed and implemented by the organization and the local church communities. For the Seventh-day Adventist, scripture-based, remnant people, it is vital for her evangelistic identity to reconsider her ecclesiological focus.

May God help his people to be devoted to one another in brotherly love and to give preference to one another in honour (Rm 12:10).

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## **Annexure A: Fundamental Beliefs of the SDA church**

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain Fundamental Beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference Session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.

### **1. The Holy Scriptures**

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (Ps. 119:105; Prov 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)

### **2. The Trinity**

There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Gen. 1:26; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2.)

### **3. The Father**

God the eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The qualities and powers exhibited in the Son and the Holy Spirit are also those of the Father. (Gen. 1:1; Deut. 4:35; Ps. 110:1, 4; John 3:16; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:28; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 John 4:8; Rev. 4:11.)

### **3. The Son**

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly human, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to heaven to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things. (Isa. 53:4-6; Dan. 9:25-27; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-3, 14; 5:22; 10:30; 14:1-3, 9, 13; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; 2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17-19; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 2:9-18; 8:1, 2.)

## 5. The Holy Spirit

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He is as much a person as are the Father and the Son. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth. (Gen. 1:1, 2; 2 Sam. 23:2; Ps. 51:11; Isa. 61:1; Luke 1:35; 4:18; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7-13; Acts 1:8; 5:3; 10:38; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 12:7-11; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Peter 1:21.)

## 6. Creation

God has revealed in Scripture the authentic and historical account of His creative activity. He created the universe, and in a recent six-day creation the Lord made "the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" and rested on the seventh day. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of the work He performed and completed during six literal days that together with the Sabbath constituted the same unit of time that we call a week today. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was

finished it was “very good,” declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1-2; 5; 11; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Isa. 45:12, 18; Acts 17:24; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; 11:3; Rev. 10:6; 14:7.)

## 7. The Nature of Humanity

Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7, 15; 3; Ps. 8:4-8; 51:5, 10; 58:3; Jer. 17:9; Acts 17:24-28; Rom. 5:12-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 John 3:4; 4:7, 8, 11, 20.)

## 8. The Great Controversy

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God’s adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the global flood, as presented in the historical account of Genesis 1-11. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation. (Gen. 3; 6-8; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:4; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:6; Rev. 12:4-9.)

## 9. The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ

In Christ's life of perfect obedience to God's will, His suffering, death, and resurrection, God provided the only means of atonement for human sin, so that those who by faith accept this atonement may have eternal life, and the whole creation may better understand the infinite and holy love of the Creator. This perfect atonement vindicates the righteousness of God's law and the graciousness of His character; for it both condemns our sin and provides for our forgiveness. The death of Christ is substitutionary and expiatory, reconciling and transforming. The bodily resurrection of Christ proclaims God's triumph over the forces of evil, and for those who accept the atonement assures their final victory over sin and death. It declares the Lordship of Jesus Christ, before whom every knee in heaven and on earth will bow. (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:1; Isa. 53; John 3:16; 14:30; Rom. 1:4; 3:25; 4:25; 8:3, 4; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 20-22; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 19-21; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 2:15; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.)

#### 10. The Experience of Salvation

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Substitute and Example. This saving faith comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab. 2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8, 16; 16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-10; 8:1-4, 14-17; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8.)

#### 11. Growing in Christ

By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil

forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. We are also called to follow Christ's example by compassionately ministering to the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of humanity. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience. (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matt. 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Phil. 3:7-14; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16-18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.)

## 12. The Church

The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to humanity, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. The church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word revealed in the Scriptures. The church is God's family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all the ages, the purchase of His blood, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish. (Gen. 12:1-3; Exod. 19:3-7; Matt. 16:13-20; 18:18; 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38-42; 7:38; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11; 5:23-27; Col. 1:17, 18; 1 Peter 2:9.)

## 13. The Remnant and Its Mission

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Dan. 7:9-14; Isa. 1:9; 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Mic. 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4.)

#### 14. Unity in the Body of Christ

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children. (Ps. 133:1; Matt. 28:19, 20; John 17:20-23; Acts 17:26, 27; Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; 2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Gal. 3:27-29; Eph. 2:13-16; 4:3-6, 11-16; Col. 3:10-15.)

#### 15. Baptism

By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Saviour, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings. (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12, 13.)

#### 16. The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a participation in the emblems of the body and blood of Jesus as an expression of faith in Him, our Lord and Saviour. In this experience of communion Christ is present to meet and strengthen His people. As we partake, we joyfully proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again. Preparation for the Supper includes self-examination, repentance, and confession. The Master ordained the service of foot-washing to signify renewed cleansing, to express a willingness to serve one another in Christlike humility, and to unite our hearts in love. The communion service is open to all believing Christians. (Matt. 26:17-30; John 6:48-63; 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:23-30; Rev. 3:20.)

#### 17. Spiritual Gifts and Ministries

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts that each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. Some members are called of God and endowed by the Spirit for functions recognized by the church in pastoral, evangelistic, and teaching ministries particularly needed to equip the members for service, to build up the church to spiritual maturity, and to foster unity of the faith and knowledge of God. When members employ these spiritual gifts as faithful stewards of God's varied grace, the church is protected from the destructive influence of false doctrine, grows with a growth that is from God, and is built up in faith and love. (Acts 6:1-7; Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27, 28; Eph. 4:8, 11-16; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.)

#### 18. The Gift of Prophecy

The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.



(Num. 12:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9.)

## 19. The Law of God

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Saviour. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, and its fruit is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is an evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow human beings. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness. (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 28:1-14; Ps. 19:7-14; 40:7, 8; Matt. 5:17-20; 22:36-40; John 14:15; 15:7-10; Rom. 8:3, 4; Eph. 2:8-10; Heb. 8:8-10; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12.)

## 20. The Sabbath

The gracious Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God's kingdom. The Sabbath is God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts. (Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 20:8-11; 31:13-17; Lev. 23:32; Deut. 5:12-15; Isa. 56:5, 6; 58:13, 14; Ezek. 20:12, 20; Matt. 12:1-12; Mark 1:32; Luke 4:16; Heb. 4:1-11.)

## 21. Stewardship

We are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow human beings, and by returning tithe and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. Stewards rejoice in the blessings that come to others as a result of their faithfulness. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15; 1 Chron. 29:14; Haggai 1:3-11; Mal. 3:8-12; Matt. 23:23; Rom. 15:26, 27; 1 Cor. 9:9-14; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; 9:7.)

## 22. Christian Behavior

We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things that will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness. (Gen. 7:2; Exod. 20:15; Lev. 11:1-47; Ps. 106:3; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 10:5; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 2:4; 4:8; 1 Tim. 2:9, 10; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 John 2:6; 3 John 2.)

## 23. Marriage and the Family

Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between a man and a woman who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor,

respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, a man and a woman who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ through marriage may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving, tender, and caring guide who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God which embraces both single and married persons. (Gen. 2:18-25; Exod. 20:12; Deut. 6:5-9; Prov. 22:6; Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:3-9, 12; Mark 10:11, 12; John 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 7:7, 10, 11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:21-33; 6:1-4.)

#### 24. Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle that the Lord set up and not humans. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. At His ascension, He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and, began His intercessory ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the holy place of the earthly sanctuary. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry, which was typified by the work of the high priest in the most holy place of the earthly sanctuary. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God

in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Lev. 16; Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Heb. 1:3; 2:16, 17; 4:14-16; 8:1-5; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; Rev. 8:3-5; 11:19; 14:6, 7, 12; 20:12; 22:11, 12.)

## 25. The Second Coming of Christ

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is near. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times. (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-6; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7; 14:14-20; 19:11-21.)

## 26. Death and Resurrection

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later. (Job 19:25-27; Ps. 146:3, 4; Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10; Dan. 12:2, 13; Isa. 25:8; John 5:28, 29; 11:11-14; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Tim. 6:15, 16; Rev. 20:1-10.)

## 27. The Millennium and the End of Sin

The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections. During this time the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels. At its close Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth. The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected, and with Satan and his angels will surround the city; but fire from God

will consume them and cleanse the earth. The universe will thus be freed of sin and sinners forever. (Jer. 4:23-26; Ezek. 28:18, 19; Mal. 4:1; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Rev. 20; 21:1-5.)

## 28. The New Earth

On the new earth, in which righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. For here God Himself will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away. The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more. All things, animate and inanimate, will declare that God is love; and He shall reign forever. Amen. (Isa. 35; 65:17-25; Matt. 5:5; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 11:15; 21:1-7; 22:1-5.)

## Annexure B: Organogram of the SDA church

