

## CHAPTER THREE

### ECCLESIAL FULFILLMENT WITHIN HISTORY

#### 3.1 Millennial views and the church

This thesis is integrally related to the millennial debate. Although it is not a millennial issue *per se*, cherished ecclesial anticipations are a corollary of an implicit or explicit millennial position. Due to the nature of this thesis, these millennial issues receive their significance from the expected world condition they project relative to the pre-parousial period. Although the views are chiefly characterised by their stance over the occurrence or non-occurrence of a post-parousial reign, they all impinge directly on issues this side of the Parousia.

The classic millennial views tend to represent three different philosophies of history which terminate in the new heaven and new earth. All three positions converge in agreeing that 'the final reality, the ultimate fulfillment of the promise, is the dwelling of God with humankind in the new heavens and new earth, which thereby brings to completion God's ultimate design for creation' (Grenz 1992:28).<sup>1</sup> *Yet they differ regarding the expected degree to which the kingdom of God will be established in the 'old' heaven and 'old' earth.* Both postmillennialism and premillennialism posit a terrestrially manifested kingdom of Christ prior to the consummation, whilst amillennialism relegates such promises to the future age of the new creation. Thus 'the most fundamental and telling question in distinguishing the unique mark of each position has to do with the *course of history prior to Christ's return*' (Bahnsen 1976:65). Relative to the church, the premillennialist position has, in the main, downplayed the crucial role of the church in this eschatological process,

<sup>1</sup> Millennialism in all forms has 'an historical optimism in which God is the primary and dramatic agent who ushers in a new era of well-being which encompasses earthly political life....[It is] big picture eschatology, seeking through its particular outlook to unite all reality into one dynamic theological panorama' (Doyle 2000:224). For a comprehensive theological survey of the three views, see Erikson 1987 and Grenz 1992. For an excellent historical survey of these eschatological views, see Kyle 1998.

whilst the postmillennialist has accentuated the church's role in the program.<sup>1</sup> The amillennialist posits a more moderate and 'realistic' agenda for the church in the pre-parousial age. At bottom, and requisite for this thesis, the essential issue of each position 'embodies a response to the practical question as to the attitude that ought to characterise the church of Jesus Christ as it seeks to fulfill its mandate in the world' (Grenz 1994a:803).<sup>2</sup>

The issue of the millennium has served as a hermeneutical diagnostic for one's eschatological convictions. Unfortunately, millennial issues have become 'the tail that wags the dog' in eschatology (Gentry 1999:50). Yet the interpretation of a single portion of Scripture (Rv 20) is not determinative for one's eschatological position. Rather, these three views rest on a theological position relative to understanding: (1) the promises of the OT; (2) the nature of the rule of Christ (*regnum Christi*); and (3) the nature of the mission of the church.<sup>3</sup> The position taken on these issues is the prism through which the biblically expected future is seen and interpreted. Revelation 20:1-10 is then merely a mirror to reflect the pre-understandings of the reader.

In the main, the postmillennialist expects many of the OT promises to be realised on earth through the church without a cataclysmic parousial irruption. The amillennialist modifies (spiritualises) the pre-consummative promises through the Christ-event, whilst the premillennialist anticipates the future fulfillment of the majority of the OT promises through the post-parousial rule of the Messiah.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, such interpretations directly determine what the church may expect in the interadventual age.

We can tentatively (avoiding reductionism and typecasting) link postmillennialism with a sanguine ecclesial optimism, amillennialism with a phlegmatic ecclesial realism, and premillennialism with a melancholic ecclesial

<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, in one of the latest books on the millennial debate (Bock 1999), the premillennial presentation (the longest in the book) *conspicuously ignores any ecclesial issues whilst the postmillennial position is replete with ecclesial texts.*

<sup>2</sup> Grenz (1994a:803-806) classifies these 'deeper issues' as: postmillennial optimism, premillennial pessimism and amillennial realism - all having a measure of truth. Grenz' work helpfully cuts through the party characterising that has plagued the three schools. See also Bock 1999:305-308.

<sup>3</sup> 'The differences arise, not because of any conscious or intended disloyalty to Scripture, but primarily because of the *distinctive method employed by each system in its interpretation of Scripture*, and they relate primarily to the time and purpose of Christ's coming and to the kind of kingdom that is to be set up at His coming' (Boetner 1957:3; cf. p 82).

<sup>4</sup> 'Spiritualise' is a pejorative hermeneutic to the premillennialist, but if we interpret 'spiritual' as referring to literal realities of a different order, then we do find the NT 'spiritualising' most of the OT symbols and historical realities (see Strimple 1999:84-100).

pessimism.<sup>1</sup> It might be noted that premillennialism is potentially the most extensive and inclusive view, for it can potentially include both postmillennial optimism and amillennial realism. One can even be premillennialist and hold to the affirmations of the others without siding with what they deny.

In this section the relevant aspects of each millennial view will be related to the thesis of an earthly maturity of the church in history.

### 3.1.1 Premillennialism and the church

Since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the 'modern' premillennial perspective has been wedded with a pessimistic view of the world condition.<sup>2</sup> 'Millenarians [19c] were...convinced of the irreversible downgrade tendencies at work in human society and the utter futility of attempts to ameliorate the effects of sin' (Sandeen 1978:xxi). This dark 'external' condition tailored the degree to which the church expected to influence society at large. The demise of the world (inclusive of the wider Christian body) fuelled the escapist mentality of 'any-momentism'. Dispensational premillennialism, with its particularly acute form of ecclesial pessimism, came to be representative of premillennial thought. However, dispensationalism's mother, historic or classical premillennialism, did not build upon a pessimistic ecclesiology, even though it did not expect a powerful prevalence of Christianity in society (for the view was often prevalent in times of persecution). Yet, as Blaising noted, 'the idea that premillennialism *per se* is pessimistic is a stereotype' (1999:74).

#### 3.1.1.1 Historic premillennialism

It is an established axiom that the post-apostolic church was widely premillennial (Daley 1993; Fromm 1950; Kromminga 1945; Lea 1986). With the change in the status of Christianity after Constantine, the eschatological landscape changed

<sup>1</sup> Gundry (1977) wrote of the correlation between these various positions and the church's perception of itself within its historical horizon. For example, he notes how the decline of postmillennialism and the rise of premillennialism was co-ordinated with the apocalyptic *Zeitgeist* of the late 1700's.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sandeen (1978:5-9) and his excellent diagnosis of the influence of the French Revolution on premillennial thought.

accordingly. Although held by many throughout the intervening periods, it again rose to prominence in the late 1700's, though unfortunately becoming linked with certain idiosyncratic views (see ch 1).<sup>1</sup> For this reason, 'classic' or 'historic' premillennialists identify with the post-apostolic church's species of premillennialism and not that of the dispensational strain.

Premillennialism, due to its apocalyptic cast, has tended to focus on the future aspects of the rule of Christ, sustaining a 'discontinuity between the current age and the thousand years' (Grenz 1994a:801). The paradoxical nature of Christ's present rule has transferred all hope onto a future period when it will be more manifestly revealed. Christ does reign now, but only for certain redemptive purposes and not 'manifestly'. This 'manifest' kingdom is understood to be consequent upon the destruction of regnant world powers, who are often persecuting the church. For the premillennialist, the OT promises refer to a literal future state, yet because they are fulfilled in Christ, some of them are now proleptically experienced in the inaugurated kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup> Suffering and persecution are seen as the horizon of the church's relationship with the world, thus colouring most of the believer's relationship with society. Historic premillennialism is posttribulational and thus expects the final relationship between the church and the wider community to be one of open antagonism.<sup>3</sup> The concept of a latter-day glory of the church is often eclipsed either by the encompassing darkness or the empirical state of Christendom. The primary stance of the church in premillennialism relative to the world is therefore primarily one of evangelistic witness and not social engagement.

### 3.1.1.2 Dispensational premillennialism

One of the key tenets of dispensational premillennialism that sets it off from the other views is its belief that the Parousia can occur at any moment. This 'immediatism', the

<sup>1</sup> One of the reasons for the absorbing of historic premillennialism into dispensationalism during the 1800's was the need for all conservative evangelicals to stand together to combat theological liberalism (Weber 1979:24-25).

<sup>2</sup> For theologians who identify with this position; in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Delitzsch, Godet, Meyer, West, Duffield; in the twentieth: Bass (1960), Blaising (1999), Erikson (1987), Kromminga (1948), Ladd (1972), Beasley-Murray (1983), Blaising & Bock (1992) *et al.*

<sup>3</sup> According to Reese [s a:18] until the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 'the general agreement among the pre-millennial interpreters was that Christians of the last generation will be exposed to the final affliction under Antichrist'.

taproot of dispensationalism, has patently robbed the church of any real sense of historic mission. Due to an extreme dualism, in which the church was related to heaven and Israel to the earth (Blaising 1999:182-183), the church's temporal and penultimate glorious historical destiny is hidden under the glory of her ultimate heavenly destination and condition.<sup>1</sup> The any-momentism also effected the church's missionary self-consciousness. Regarding the mission of the church (Mt 24:14), Sandeen's words are revealing:

[It was a] basic tenet of the millenarian creed in the 1800's...[that] the gospel was not intended nor was it going to accomplish the salvation of the world, but that, instead, the world was growing increasingly corrupt and rushing toward imminent judgment....Almost every British millenarian of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century would have given ready consent to these statement (1978:39).

Although this ardent sense of *Naherwartung* 'caused the growth of separate evangelical missions and their supporting institutions in the late 19th century and early 20th century' (Robert 1990:31), such emphasis on a temporal mission was actually incompatible with early 19<sup>th</sup> century premillennial any-momentism (cf. Weber 1979:65-81). With all the attention on the rise of evil in the world and in the church, as well as their urgent evangelistic zeal to save souls for the imminent rapture and from the impending reign of Antichrist, thoughts of the renewal of the church and her qualitative upbuilding did not feature at all. Her glory lay in the imminent heavenly rapture experience and nowhere else. (For more detail on dispensationalism and the church, see ch 1).

### 3.1.2 Postmillennialism and the church

Must the church merely stand by the Jericho road and hand out tracts? This type of question raises the primary issue that many have had with most strains of premillennialism - its ostensible fatalism and pessimism. To many, eschatological hope is to be a stimulant and not a narcotic. Some accused adventist premillennialism with advocating a resignation which 'is compatible with neither...Scripture's view of the whole of man, both in his total need and in his total deliverance, nor with the

<sup>1</sup> Classic dispensationalists posited 'two coexisting forms of ultimate salvation - one eternal in heaven and for the church and one eternal on the new earth for Israel' (Blaising 1999:183).

profession of Christ's lordship over all of history' (De Jong 1970:228). Comparatively, the postmillennial model has the most terrestrially optimistic ecclesial hope. The heart of historic postmillennialism is a hope for the glorious fullness of the Church of Christ - a condition that will spill over into and condition the world. The OT promises of a reign of world peace and righteousness are expected to be fulfilled through the church in human society. A Scripture which has charged this school has been Habakkuk 2:14: 'But the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea' (see Stanley 2000:103). Beyond proof-texting, this theory confesses to be in tune with the overall spirit of the Scriptures (Robinson Gregory 1887:337; Bahnsen 1976).<sup>1</sup> In this school, the rule of Christ in the present is nuanced, being the theological warrant for looking to a distinct period of heightened and universal peace under Christ's rule. Gentry (1999:13-14) provides us with a cogent and generic description of postmillennialism:

Postmillennialism expects the proclaiming of the Spirit-blessed gospel of Jesus Christ to win the vast majority of human beings to salvation in the present age. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history prior to Christ's return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of people and nations. After an extensive era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and in great glory, ending history with the general resurrection and the great judgment of all humankind.

In Western Christian thought, postmillennialism was popular from the 1600's to the 1800's, reaching its heyday in the mid 1800's (Moorhead 1984:61).<sup>2</sup> Daniel Whitby [1638-1726] has been credited by Fromm (1948:649-655) as the populariser of this millennial school. Whitby preached that the world could expect mass conversions under large effusions of the Spirit, the national establishment of the Jews and the overthrow of the Pope and Turk (Fromm:651). The first resurrection was commonly seen as the renewal of the church which followed after the fall of the papal Antichrist.

<sup>1</sup> 'Tell me what your eschatology is and I will tell you what your attitude is in relation to the Church, state, and society', Visser 't Hooft (1947:186). For a list of theologians of this school, see Bube 1972:217-218; Gentry 1999:14-22 and Mathison 1999:23-53. Bahnsen's monograph (1976) is an excellent introduction to postmillennialism and Mathison's book a recent defence of this position.

<sup>2</sup> Moorehead (1984:61-62) posits that the 'hard residue of apocalypticism that survived postmillennial thought' made the philosophy of postmillennialism inherently unstable, with the result that during the American civil war, 'it slowly decomposed'. Further, the hope for future revival and ecclesial revitalisation waned under the 18<sup>th</sup> century erosion of supernaturalism and the consequent principle of natural continuity (:76), where such hopes were seen as belonging to a pre-critical biblicism and antiquated supernaturalism. The theory then became too liberal for the conservatives and too conservative for the liberals, and was soon rendered implausible (:77). Gundry (1977:52) believed that 'the civil war in America [1861] crushed postmillennial hope'. According to De Jong (1970:229), postmillennialism became somewhat polarised after the 1800's.

The common hermeneutical key was the historicist axiom of the 'year-day' principle, with the 1260 days of Revelation equalling 1260 years (Froom's own view). Once this prophetic axiom is accepted, the Gordian knot was in identifying the correct starting date from which the times could be calculated. Also, the papacy and the Mohammedans were seen as the key protagonists in Revelation's description of the Protestant church and its ultimate terrestrial triumph (cf. Howson 1998:333-334); an interpretation that went hand in glove with the then common historicist attempt to squeeze most of modern European history into the pictorial-historical sequence of Revelation. Such provincialism of interpretation would have been easily unmasked by a wider historical perspective (so Nelson 1981:195). Yet with the European horizons and 'new worlds' continually being discovered, postmillennialism was an eschatology that was suited to the times.<sup>1</sup>

Jonathan Edwards is well known for his postmillennialism and seen by some as the master-mind behind a new direction in eschatological thought (Goen 1959; Withrow 2001). Others, such as Murray (1991) and (De Jong 1970), have mitigated the view of Edwards' strategic position in postmillennialism by showing that he was in line with prior Puritan eschatological thought.<sup>2</sup> Both Murray and De Jong have shown that the Puritan attitude toward both history and the church fuelled their hope for a latter-day glory of the church, the *ecclesiologia gloriae*. As the dispensational view surprisingly motivated mission (yet was more individualistic), the postmillennial mission was driven by its hope for ecclesial glory and fullness (De Jong 1979:2). For this reason the 19<sup>th</sup> century surge in missionary activity was partially a result of this earlier period (1670 onwards) of ideals and hopes. Murray (1991) has well shown how many Puritans believed that if the church was all it could be, it would create the future and expedite the return of the Messiah. He also demonstrated that there was a rectilinear line between the Reformation emphasis on the purity of the true church and the Puritan eschatological hope.<sup>3</sup> Yet the Puritans went beyond the Reformers and sought to establish for Protestants a commonly accepted view of the unfulfilled

<sup>1</sup> Gundry (1977:51), commenting on the correlation between *Zeitgeist* and millennial views, linked the theological postmillennialism of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century with 'the optimistic views of mankind's potential and opportunities with an expanding geographical horizon and an ever-growing confidence in the powers of man's reason'. The times, positively and negatively, abetted the theological vision of the future.

<sup>2</sup> Withrow (2001) has shown how Edwards was influenced by the six day theory of the millennial ages.

<sup>3</sup> Howson's study (1998) showed how eschatological views and all manner of Adventist expectations ensued after the Reformation. He sees the 17<sup>th</sup>c as the root period of the 19<sup>th</sup>c millennial revival.

prophecies which were to precede the coming of Christ (Murray:40). Due to the Puritan concern over the political face of the church, their theology 'was introduced in sermons before Parliament in the 1600's (Murray:44), giving their hope a political spin. Murray also credits them with the view that saw the Jewish conversion as part of a new and brighter era in our history and not a boundary event as some others (including Puritans) held (:45). Further, the postmillennial theory 'postponed history's cataclysmic end until after the millennium and thereby allowed the temporal interval necessary for the gradual evangelical conquest of the world and the triumph of secular progress (Moorhead 1984:61).<sup>1</sup>

Certain currents of modern postmillennialism echo the theme of the Puritans. Davis (1986:12) posits a spiritually revitalised church that will have 'an increasing positive impact on the surrounding world and its structures through preaching, social ministry and the example of its own inner life'. Christianity will be dominant as a world religion, a moral power and intellectual example. In modern postmillennial thought the fudging of postmillennialism and nationalism has been rightly separated, 'because it [was] erroneously linked to the older liberalism, which focused primarily on societal transformation rather than personal conversion' (Grenz 1992:68).<sup>2</sup> Whilst for some - particularly those who attempt to re-pristinise postmillennialism in theonomistic and cultural terms - the cultural and political aspects are foregrounded (see Chilton 1987; Gentry 1999:19), for others 'the central aspect of postmillennialism...lies not in societal transformation *per se*, but in the spread of the gospel and the conversion of a great number of persons' (Grenz 1992:68). Interestingly, modern cultural postmillennialism and its comprehensive application of biblical law on all global and political matters, has absorbed into the church the responsibilities that historic postmillennialists were happy to leave to the state. Yet both groups are united in expecting the present kingdom of Christ to encompass every aspect of life.

<sup>1</sup> Because the postmillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 is compatible with the theme of the glory of the church – though their interpretation of Revelation 20 may not be correct – the theme of the latter-day glory became wedded to millennialism and unfortunately was seen as incongruent with premillennialism. However, we believe that because the spirit of postmillennialism is not a millennial issue *per se*, one can be premillennial in eschatology and postmillennial in ecclesiology.

<sup>2</sup> 'There can be no liberal postmillennialism....What liberal theologian believes in the return of Christ to end history?' (Gentry 1999:47).

The theological building blocks for postmillennialism are drawn from a historical optimism in the triumph of the gospel in this world, a reality congenial to the basic theology of Scripture. It is rooted in the conviction that God has not abandoned history. Therefore before the final apostasy, the deceiving of the nations and the ensuing apocalyptic conflagration, we can expect God to fulfill his earthly purposes to bless the nations through the seed of Abraham (Gn 12:3). On *this* earth, God is expected to extend the rule of Christ from sea to sea until the whole world is filled with the glory of God (Ps 72). For the accomplishment of such a vision, the church can look to the power of God to fulfill his plans and the church's ample equipment in Christ (Strimple 1999); postmillennialism is thus rooted in a victorious Christology (Davis 1986:45) and an optimism over the success of the missionary enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

Before we leave postmillennialism, we note that the Achilles heel of this eschatological school is the fact of NT *Naherwartung* (ch 2.2.1-2.2.4). It is clear that the apostolic church did not expect a glorious future period of many years to lie between them and the Parousia. To them, the Parousia was around the corner. Therefore, in order to handle such a criticism, many postmillennialists have taken a preterist view of the apocalyptic events of the NT, seeing the events of the first century (especially 70 CE) as fulfilling much of the NT futurist eschatology. In this way space is made for a pre-parousial epoch in which there is a reversal of the fortunes of the apostolic church.

### 3.1.3 Amillennialism and the church

In its theological forecasts, amillennialism tends to be more ambivalent, anticipating 'a parallel and contemporaneous development of good and evil - God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom - in this world, which will continue until the second coming of Christ' (Boetner 1957:4).<sup>2</sup> This 'checkerboard approach' conceives of the present NT age, with its fluctuating ecclesial and global conditions, as 'running straight into the final judgment' (Kromminga 1945:17). It agrees with postmillennialism that the kingdom

<sup>1</sup> For the link between eschatology and mission, see Stanley 2000; Robert 1990; Weber 1979; De Jong 1970; Rooy 1965; Lovelace 1979b; Bube 1972 and Preskett 1997.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent and scholarly study of the amillennial eschatological synthesis of both Augustine and Calvin, see Doyle 2000.

of God is spiritual and presently manifested in the church, yet it does not look for a distinct future pre-parousial epoch of exceptional grace and triumph. *The whole interadventual period* is coextensive with the rule of Christ and is characterised by the extension of the gospel in the midst of recalcitrant evil. 'Jesus nowhere predicts a glorious future on earth before the end of the world...on the contrary, the things he himself experienced are the things his church will experience....Christ's church today remains in the desert, and the gradual worldwide dominion does not occur in the desert' (Strimple 1999:63). Amillennialists side with premillennialists when they affirm that the kingdom of God 'cannot be expected from missionary effort alone; it requires the eschatological interposition of God' (Strimple:65).<sup>1</sup> The rule of Christ is seen as coextensive with the church and applicable on a universal level relative to the mission of the church. Grenz (1992:182) underscores the amillennialist's primary hermeneutical approach to the OT prophecies: 'Prophecies couched in physical, earthly terms and given to the old people of God, national Israel, may find their fulfillment in spiritual realities connected with the new people of God, the church of Jesus Christ'.

A latter-day glory for the church is not incompatible with amillennialism, yet it is not a prevalent motif in this theology. The reason may lie in its phlegmatic caution over suggestions of the church attaining any unique status; for history reveals the resilience of sin and the fragility of earthly hopes. Many are reticent to predict a latter-day-glory, probably due to a humble sense of church history, an intimate knowledge of human depravity, and a reaction to the vagaries of apocalyptic fringe groups who have made pronouncements that went far beyond the actual data of the Scriptures. In conclusion, they believe that although the success of the church and the world may fluctuate during the interadventual period, the theological 'success line' running from Pentecost to Parousia remains ultimately the same.

<sup>1</sup> Such an attitude, according to postmillennialists, 'dissuades the church from participating and laboring for wide scale success in influencing the world for Christ during this age' (Gentry 1999:132). For the modern debate between neo-postmillennialism and amillennialism, see Fowler White 2000.

### 3.1.4 Hope for eschatological ecclesial renewal

The genius of Protestantism is the call to doctrinal and ecclesiastical purity. The Protestant movement was born with the will to reform the church of Jesus Christ and to prove the *ecclesiologia gloriae*. De Jong affirms that 'rooted deeply in the Reformation tradition were expectations of greater, more glorious days for the church on earth', and that 'undoubtedly, the spread of the Reformation itself enlivened such corporate, historical hopes' (1970:7). What was on the horizon for many Protestants in the 1500's-1700's was the prophesied 'fall' of the Roman Catholic church, the conversion of the Jews, the preaching of the gospel to all nations and the prestige of the Protestant powers (De Jong:7; Howson 1998). All of which were to serve the glorious latter-day triumph of the gospel in the Christian church (see Glasson 1953:156-168).

De Jong (1970:8-34), Dallison (1986) and Murray (1991) catalogued many mainline Protestants and Puritans who cast this latter-day glory of the church in chiliastic terms.<sup>1</sup> Prior to 1640, Bucer, Beza, Alsted, Fox, Thomas, Brightman, Mede, Perkins, Sibbes and Goodwin, articulated the triumph of the church in millennial categories.<sup>2</sup> Their optimism was primarily based on their Christology, especially that of Ephesians 1:21-23 (Dallison:55, 65). The *regnum patientia* was to become the *regnum potentia*. Some (Alsted, Mede) interpreted the first resurrection of Revelation 20 in literal terms, inaugurating a postmillennial period over which resurrected martyred saints would rule with the 'unresurrected' church. However, these and other eschatological anticipations were often fused with Elizabethan expectations, with the spread of the gospel, colonisation and civilization being spoken of in one breath.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kromminga defines chiliasm as a Christian belief in 'the conception of the Kingdom Age as a transitional period between this world and eternity, in which a reorganised human society will submit to the rule of Christ' (1945:21). 'Chiliasm's first and controlling interest lies specifically in the social-historical sphere' (:20), in the 'social-historical link or transition between time and eternity' (:21). Therefore, 'millenarianism draws eschatology into history' (Moltmann 1996:5).

<sup>2</sup> Dallison shows how the Anglo independent churches during the 17<sup>th</sup> century were interpreted by Thomas Goodwin as part of the purifying of the church in preparation for the millennium. Such hopes for an imminent ecclesial millennium also fired the congregational churches: 'these views provided not only a doctrine which supplied the churches of the Congregational way with a powerful motive for reformation and a glorious hope for the future, but also a framework for a distinct Christology and a theocratic view of history' (:64). For a description of the glorious time of the church in the millennium, see Dallison:62-63.

<sup>3</sup> Through her sea power, 'Englishmen felt mandated to guide history to her appointed ends in these matters' (De Jong 1970:77). Van Den Berg (1956:190) wisely notes that 'the history of missions shows that theocratic ideals easily deteriorate into a secular imperialism'.

Such ecclesial-millennial hopes continued in the years 1640-1675, the 'years of the keenest and most widespread millennial expectation of any in England and America until perhaps the 1800's' (De Jong 1970:37). In England, John Owen articulated the future glory, whilst in America, John Cotton expressed the Puritan hope of a theocracy bound up with a pre-millennial expectation. The New England missions were driven by the hope for a glorious (national) church. Daniel Whitby, Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards drove forward this hope, each with their own spin. Thus the revivals during Edwards' period [1735-1776] seemed to confirm and perpetuate this hope, with the continued need to universalise the knowledge of Christ. William Carey (1792) was influenced by Edwards, and was motivated by a vision of universal proportions: the certain worldwide dominion of Christ (De Jong 1970:178; Van Den Berg 1956:161).

For many, the significant events of the late 1700's galvanised their expectations.<sup>1</sup> To some, this period portended the imminent end (Adventists) but others, 'excited by the prospects of the fall of Babylon during the French Revolution...established agencies for spreading the kingdom for which they had been praying' (De Jong 1970:198). For them, the French Revolution and the fall of Antichrist, 'were a major cause for optimism' (De Jong:197).

Back in time, the Italian Cistercian monk, Joachim of Floris [1135-1202] has often caught the attention of writers on millennial or historical eschatological matters (Froom 1950:683-701; Kromminga 1945:125-137; Glasson 1953:130-144; Kyle 1998:47-49). He broke with the prevailing Tychonian eschatological interpretation and affected a far-reaching influence upon future eschatological expectation.<sup>2</sup> He also had a major impact on the Franciscans after his death. Joachim's novelty was that he looked at the course of events in the world and the church and predicted a time of radical change for the church prior to the Parousia. According to Glasson's study on Joachim, 'the main emphasis of his teaching gave rise to the hope of a revival of the spiritual life of the Church' (:133). Thus it might not be too much of an exaggeration

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<sup>1</sup> De Jong (1970:159) mentions the following: the French Revolution, the American independence war, industrialisation, squalor of urban slums, urbanisation, and continental democratisation. The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 (Froom 1946:187) also affected the eschatological temperature.

<sup>2</sup> Froom (1950:686) credits him with influencing to some degree Dante, Wycliff, Cusa, Hus and some of the Reformers.

to say that 'Joachim was the turning point marking the return of the historical view of prophecy as opposed to the Tichonius-Augustine view' (Froom:690).<sup>1</sup> Joachim's view's could be labeled as idiosyncratic, for he subsumed the whole course of history under a trinitarian pattern of 42 generations and anticipated the imminent arrival of the age of the Spirit, which would overlap with the age of the Son for a period. In this age – which was already being anticipated by St. Benedict - revelation would be given to all. The movement of the celibates and the clerics would peak in this era, when many would be monastics in a heightened epoch of spiritual worship and experience. He expected the age of the Son to end shortly, that is, before 1260 CE (Froom:714). For this thesis, it is important to note that 'the ideas of Joachim had opened the vision of many to expect a new and better state to come' (Froom:729), a reality which relativised the prevailing Roman church and prepared many for a future reformation.

In Bohemia in late 1300's, Matthias of Janow [d. 1394] (Neander 1890:276-338) believed, on the basis of Scripture, that: 'before the end of the world the church of Christ shall be reformed, renovated, and more widely extended; that she shall be restored to her pristine dignity, and that still, in her old age, her fruitfulness shall increase' (Neander:289). Neander believed that Matthias was the 'incipient genius of those Christian principles which at a later period were unfolded, in Germany, by Luther, although the latter never came directly under the influence of Matthias of Janow' (:276-277). Matthias was influenced by Militz of Bohemiah 'who foresaw a renovation of the church by which it was to be prepared for the second advent of Christ' (Neander:256). Like Darby, he portrayed the utter corruption of the church in all her parts – the foil for his ecclesial hope. He saw the harlot of Revelation 17 as the corrupt church and the Antichrist as a religious ecclesial figure whom Christ would 'spiritually' slay prior to this glorious period. Elijah would come 'spiritually' to restore the church, who, by virtue of the magnitude of such a task, was not to be a future individual but was rather the spirit of the reform movements and their reformers. During this glorious period, the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed would be fulfilled.

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<sup>1</sup> Froom (1950:691) blames the Augustinian view for dehistoricising the faith, removing horizontal eschatology, and for placing the church in the foreground as the sole arbiter in all transitory matters. Joachim however reactivated the horizontal sense of eschatological development. With him we have a return to God's revelation in the process of history, returning to a sense of the future 'chronological' expectation beyond what is known in the present.

Amongst others, Boston's Cotton Mather [1663-1727], the first major ecumenist in American church history (so Lovelace 1979a:62), expected a glorious church to arise prior to the final advent.<sup>1</sup> Lovelace saw the brilliance of Mather in his synthesis of German Pietism and American Puritanism, 'with its component parts of spiritual renewal, cultural transformation through voluntary societies, ecumenical union among thinkers, and a concern for world mission' (:35). He was,

dedicated to the goal of ecumenical union among every Protestant and worked all his life to establish a climate and a doctrinal basis within which reunion might be possible, since for him it was an indispensable prerequisite for the parousia. Another such prerequisite, in his understanding, was the vigorous extension of the church's mission among those peoples not yet fully reached by the gospel (Lovelace:8).

He was a premillennial optimist who believed in better times for the church - an *evangelium aeternum* - when God would 'grant us the Spirit again just as once His Spirit illuminated the first Christian Church and propagated and established the Christian religion in the world' (Benz 1951:46).<sup>2</sup> According to Froom (1948:153) Mather expected the gifts of the Spirit to be restored to the church. However, toward the end of his life, his conviction that the church had to be revived before the end of time suffered attenuation (:70-72). He also came to reject any hope for a Jewish national conversion.

A contemporary of Mather, Boehm, the influential London chaplain from Halle, also articulated a 'vision of the true church as being the final aim of the history of redemption, an image to illumine the path of all missionary and ecumenical endeavors (Benz 1951:41).

Protestants, Anabaptists, Puritans, Methodists, Pietists, Baptists, 19<sup>th</sup>c frontier movements, Holiness churches, Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement and many others, can be identified as renewal movements that believe(d) in the necessity and the possibility of a pure restored church of Christ - even if they did not theologically articulate or hold to a distinct latter-day period of ecclesial glory. The Pentecostal and Charismatic renewal movements of the twentieth century arose within the context of a 'neo-postmillennial' ecclesiology (see Synan 1997). The Pentecostal movement saw

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lovelace 1979a:64-72; Benz 1951:42-56; De Jong 1970:79-115; Rooy 1965:242-284.

<sup>2</sup> Lovelace (1979a) mentions the following who antedate Mather and held out similar hopes for the church: Theodor Bibliander, Heinrich Bullinger, Martin Bucer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, John Foxe and John Jewel (:69). Among Mather's contemporaries, Boehm, Franke, Ziegenbalg and Plütschaw all held to the Pietist ecumenical vision of a restored and revived church.

itself as a return to a literal biblical Christianity as it was practiced in the NT church (Smith 1992:41), resulting in the renewal of hopes for a new outpouring or latter-day glory of the church. In Britain in the 1960's, 'the emerging Restoration movement was seen [by some] in eschatological terms as the emergence of a spotless bride fit to welcome the returning king' (Wright 1991:4). According to Wright, a key tenet of Restorationism was,

a decisive rejection of pessimistic premillennialism in favor of a form of postmillennialism which expects the restoring of the church to its NT pattern to be accompanied by a massive and final revival as the immediate prelude to the coming of Christ (:7).

Interestingly, and directly in line with this thesis, is the emphasis of Ephesians 4 in the charismatic British House Church movement mentioned by M Turner (1989:93). These Restorationists believed that the church would reach a glorious state in history and that Christ would then return for a pure bride. John 17 evinced their expectation for a visible ecclesial unity prior to the end.

Smith (1992) labels John Wimber and the charismatic Vineyard movement [1970's-] as equally restorationist. According to Smith 'the whole thrust of Wimber's teaching is that of preparing the church for Christ's return, making it purified and holy' (:237). Smith also mentions 20<sup>th</sup> century restoration movements that were premillennial and posttribulational (:41).<sup>1</sup>

In the light of all the above, we believe that the hope for the *ecclesiologia gloriae* is not at the fringe in the history of theology but rather crucial to many ecclesial groups. This thesis is in one sense a re-articulation of the Puritan hope, yet without the cultural or national connotations (a Baptist nuance). We believe that the world will be 'Christianised' or 'leavened' by the gospel and that the church of Jesus Christ will attain to an unprecedented unity and glory prior to the Parousia of Christ.

As far as our millennial position is concerned, we believe that an eclectic position (that holds to the good in each) is preferable. The theology of this thesis could be called a 'neopostmillennial-historic-premillennialist-eschatology' ! (see p 95 footnote

<sup>1</sup> The reason why Smith sees such a hope as incompatible with NT theology is in his understanding of the imminency of the Parousia in the NT. However, as we will show in the next section, such an ecclesial hope is directly compatible with the *Naherwartung* of the NT and not undermined by it. Smith went on to add that 'Wimber seems to be espousing the ancient heresy, namely, that Christ will not return until the church is spotless and the apostolic ministry is reclaimed' (:237). This pejorative labeling of Wimber's views as *heresy* has implications for the whole Protestant movement - for ecclesial restoration is the genius of Protestantism.



## 3.2 A mature church within history

In this section an attempt will be made to foreground those aspects of the inspired record that anticipate an *optimistic hope for the church of Jesus Christ within this present age*. Belief in a final 'mature' church focuses on the process of God with his people, a telic orientation analogous to the growth of a person. This underscores the process of mutual attainment and the goal of a final mode of the church, toward which the divine activity of this interadventual age is moving. Essentially, this section will be an enquiry into the theological grounds for an optimistic ecclesial hope.

As the millennial views split into three temporal views, so the ecclesial 'millennium' could also be seen in three ways: 'postmillennial' ecclesiology would emphasise the maturity of the church prior to the Parousia; 'premillennial' ecclesiology would see no fulfillment of the church mission and nature this side of heaven, and 'amillennial' ecclesiology would see the whole church-age as more or less carrying the maturity of the church, with no special pre-parousia glory but rather a final parousial glorification. The following section will argue for a 'postmillennial' ecclesiology. It is believed that such a pre-parousial glory and destiny of the church is not a speculation, but a theological hope revealed in the NT.

### 3.2.1 The Christological expectation of a mature church.

We seek here to answer our question: Did Jesus anticipate the success of his disciples in this world prior to his return? Much of the evidence in support of the affirmative answer have been mentioned in our biblical grounds for *Fernerwartung*, where we cited those factors that required a substantial period between Christ's ministry and his Parousia. We now look at those elements that indicate the success of the work he began.

### 3.2.1.1 Parables of the kingdom of God

Here we have the most patent expositions of the expected advance and future hope of Jesus' redemptive mission.

#### a) The parable of the wheat and the tares

In the parable of the wheat and the tares (Mt 13:24-30, 36-43) we have a glimpse into Jesus' expectation of the opposition to and future of the good seed he was sowing. Although modern interpreters have highlighted *one* kernel truth of each parable, this parable is allegorically and apocalyptically interpreted by Jesus (cf. Blomberg 1990:163).<sup>1</sup> If the purpose of the parables is to 'deal with the paradoxical nature of the presently dawning kingdom of God' (Hagner 1993:382), then this parable adds the element of intentional and prominent Satanic opposition to the present kingdom's manifestation.<sup>2</sup> The presence of contrary elements, juxtaposed *with* the 'sons of the kingdom' (yet not '*in* the kingdom') in its world-wide reach, are to remain until the consummation of the age. This parable is polemical in nature (explaining a mystery) and reaches its final dénouement and solution in the pictured harvest. This apical future provides insight into the present anomaly of opposition to Jesus' ministry and the nature of the present kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

For our purposes we note that the end of the age is the *harvest* of the wheat. Once the seed has reached full potential and fulfilled its purpose for being sowed, it is then harvested. *Certainty of this harvest* explains the farmer's apparent lack of concern over the situation and his toleration of the pseudo-wheat until the harvest. Correspondingly, the 'sons of the kingdom' (disciples/church) are expected to reach a

<sup>1</sup> Jesus' apocalyptic interpretation corresponds with Matthew 25:31-46 and the predicted removal of the goats from out of the kingdom of God at the Parousial judgment. In light of this intertextual reference, it seems best to take the field as the world not yet under the dominion of Christ. The kingdom in this parable thus comes later (thus Ladd 1981a:233, *pace* Blomberg 1990:199-200, 301 and Hagner 1993:393). Cf. McIver 1995:644-648 for further interpretations.

<sup>2</sup> 'Jesus never likens the kingdom just to an individual subject or object in a given parable but to the situation described by the entire narrative. Every facet of the parables' plot may thus potentially illuminate Jesus' conception of the kingdom' (Blomberg 1990:296).

<sup>3</sup> This parable does not predict that Christ's followers will always be accompanied by false brethren (so Gundry 1982:261-265) or that the church is to always consist of true and false believers (Augustine). 'This parable deals with a situation in the ministry of Jesus. It does not have in view the problem of the mixed church of later years' (Beasley-Murray 1986:198).

maturity and fulfill their purpose before the end of this age. *The time of the end of the age occurs only when the seeds have reached a harvestable ripeness.* The end of this age is pictured as coterminous with the maturity of the wheat and is contingent upon that expected event. Thus v 39 identifies the harvest, not *with*, but *as* the end of this age. The 'end' of the age (*sunteleia*) might better be translated as 'completion', nuancing the element of the *culmination of a process or execution* and not the terminal point itself.<sup>1</sup>

## b) The parable of the dragnet

Another indicator of Jesus' salvation-historical outlook is his parable of the dragnet (Mt 13:47-50). Here Jesus seems to expect his kingdom to collect incongruent elements in its anticipated broad global sweep. In this sweep, good and bad are collected. Ladd comments: 'Even the community created by the working of the Kingdom in the world is not to be a pure community until the eschatological separation....The perfect, holy community must await the last day' (1981a:241-242). Yet does this parable point to the reality of the church as a *corpus permixtum*? The parable seems limited in application, dealing only with the world-wide sweep of the gospel to all nations (so Gundry 1982:279), and the inevitable association of pseudo-believers in it. It does not deal with the nature of the church community or imply the necessity of unbelievers in the church.<sup>2</sup> Significant for our thesis though, is the temporal indicator in v 48 'when' ('*hote*'). The movement of the kingdom must reach an *optimum capacity* before the completion of the end of the age occurs - *then* the separation will occur. Only *once* the net is full, is it dragged ashore. 'The clause..."when it was full", corresponds to..."at the end of the age" (v 49) and thus

<sup>1</sup> Zodhiates (1992:1345) unpacks the semantic meaning of *sunteleia* for us: 'A culmination or completion, the bringing together of an intended purpose. In the NT, [it is] used only in the expressions *sunteleia tou aionos*, "the completion of the age", the consummation or accomplishment of its purposes'.

<sup>2</sup> Blomberg (1990:21-23) and France (1985:230) limit the period referred to in this story to only the end of the age. Yet most of the parables elucidate on the mysterious working of the present form of the kingdom and its future outworkings. Although this story has a strong future accent, the sweep of the net can describe an activity begun by Christ. Beasley-Murray (1986:200) also differs from Blomberg: 'this parable is likening the kingdom of heaven to the *whole* process of catching fish, not merely the separation'. The parable thus denotes an eschatological present and an eschatological future. 'It would be difficult to bind more closely the two aspects of the kingdom of God, present and future, grace and judgment, than they are in this parable' (Beasley-Murray:200). Church history is probably the best interpreter here.

hints at eschatological fulfillment' (Hagner 1993:399). This phrase ('when it was filled') is thus equivalent to Jesus' later saying in Matthew 24:14.

Given the apocalyptic interpretation, it is expected that the gospel of the kingdom is to extend to and affect all nations prior to the end (cf. Dan 7:14). Thus here we have a story of the optimum capacity of the kingdom of God.

### c) The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast

The two parables of the mustard seed (Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18-19) and the yeast (Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21) have been favourites of the postmillennial school (Gentry 1999:38-41; Davis 1986:51-52). Both these stories picture the expected growth of the present kingdom of God from its humble and insignificant beginnings to its disproportionately glorious and global maturity. They are 'contrast parables' *par excellence* (Beasley-Murray 1986:194). These two stories revolve around the idea that 'remarkably small beginnings produce amazingly large results', thus informing us that 'the kingdom will eventually attain to significant proportions despite its entirely inauspicious outset' (Blomberg 1990:284). They each foreground a slightly different aspect of this expected growth: the mustard seed connotes the extent of the kingdom growth, whilst the leaven nuances the nature and means of the kingdom growth (so Bailey 1999:70).

The mustard seed parable speaks of the gradual extension of the kingdom influence until it reaches global dimensions. The *extensive* aspect is conveyed by this story. With the explicit reference to Ezekiel 17:23, 31:6 and Daniel 4:12, Jesus refers to the international extent of the kingdom of God. Beasley-Murray (1986:194-195) comments that 'the mustard plant has become the tree of apocalyptic prophecy, which exemplifies the universality of a reign embracing all peoples'. In this parable one must be careful to avoid squeezing out what is not in these words (e.g. the rule of the church over the world), yet this kingdom narrative can plausibly refer to the nations receiving a blessing through the kingdom influence having reached full stretch.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blomberg (1990:286) states: 'There is no promise here that the kingdom will come in such grandeur that Jesus' followers will dominate the earth. But it does appear that the end result will be far greater than what anyone observing Jesus and his band of disciples would have imagined'. True, but the parable is suggestive of providing *blessing to the nations* (noting the intercanonical allusions). This is supported by Beasley-Murray (1986:195) who comments on the allusion to Ezekiel 31 and Daniel 4: 'it is used to represent the dominion of pagan rulers over the nations, which in each case was brought to an abrupt end by the judgment of God. It is not inconceivable that Jesus may have linked

Dispensationalists have nuanced the 'world-wide fulfillment of God's kingdom blessing' (Bailey 1998b:455), although for them this full-stretch of the kingdom has a particular Israelite determination and is only attained after the Parousia. Some commentators (Blomberg 1990:284-287; Hagner 1993:385-390) are reticent to exegete these parables in the global postmillennial fashion of ideas of growth, preferring rather to merely accentuate the truth that the kingdom 'will have an effect out of all proportions with that beginning' (Hagner:389-390). Although this is true, the OT allusions demand a more global and national interpretation. The idea of growth seems intrinsic to both pictures, *yet the resulting condition receives the focus*.

Debate also clusters around the *terminus ad quem* of the parable. Is it prior to or after the Parousia? It is more consistent to take it as continuous with the inaugurated kingdom of God, following on from its gradual growth. The parable tracks the growth of the *present mode of the kingdom*. Any parousial element needs to be cautiously inferred since the parable's center of gravity lies in the *presence* of the kingdom in Jesus and not in its futuristic elements. Although the final analogy of the birds in the tree could refer to the millennial rule (premillennialism) or the future final state (amillennialism), the point is that there is *a long process of growth and increase of what was sown*, thus favouring the postmillennial interpretation.<sup>1</sup> In this story we have the optimum extension of the kingdom.

The yeast parable accents the *intensive* aspects of the anticipated growth of the kingdom ('until it was *all* leavened').<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the present kingdom is to affect the whole world, as leaven affects the dough: secretively, intensively yet eventually transformationally. Incremental and continuous growth reaches a climax when the whole has been affected. Here the semantic sense communicated is one of contrast: Jesus clearly expected his local Galilean movement to ultimately affect the whole world. Allis (1947:271) linked this global sense with the world wide proclamation given by Jesus to the disciples in Matthew 24:14 and 28:19-20, concluding that 'the

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these examples with his use of leaven as an image of rapid growth'.

<sup>1</sup> Note however that it only entertains birds *when* it becomes fully grown, something only capable at the final stage of its growth and in line with a chiliastic interpretation.

<sup>2</sup> Allis (1947) convincingly debunked the old Darbyite and Morgan Campbell view that the leaven stood for the evil principle at work in the church, recapturing a sense of ecclesial optimism. Darby's view ended up as affirming that 'the end of the kingdom of heaven on earth is total apostasy!' (:269). The optimistic ecclesial connotations were avoided by Darby who divorced these texts from the ecclesial application and married them only to a future restored Israel.

whole world is to be leavened in this way with the gospel' (:271). In this story we thus have the optimum penetration of the kingdom of God.

Beasley-Murray (1986:195) crystalises the future global anticipations of both of these growth stories:

Such associations of the two symbols have the effect of emphasising the beginning and the end of the divine sovereignty in the parables as sheer miracle: its beginning is so small, so dubious, so questionable in the eyes of men that it seems impossible to identify it with the marvellous event depicted in the prophets; yet God is in that beginning, making the first momentous moves toward the fulfillment of his purpose for the world, which will be the revelation of his dominion in power and glory, beneath which all mankind may securely and forever rest.

#### d) The parable of the seed and the soil

The uniquely Markan parable of the seed and the soil (Mk 4:26-29) is somewhat analogous to the Matthean tares and wheat parable, yet tellingly focuses on the autonomous and fructitious ability of the soil as well as on the genetic capacity of the wheat seed. Beasley-Murray (1986:195) calls this the 'incomprehensible but effective operation of the creative process that produces a harvest out of the seed sown'. Jesus is probably informing his disciples of the inherent capacity of the word of the kingdom as it takes root and 'performs its work in [them] that believe' (1 Th 2:13). The message of the kingdom is seen to have self-sustaining power, thus 'the center of the parable focuses on the guaranteed but unpredictable growth of the seed' (Blomberg 1990:264). The terminal action of the farmer (Parousia?) is synchronised with the ripening of the harvest, no sooner and no later.<sup>1</sup> He waits inactive *until* the harvesting action is urgently warranted, once the 'full corn in the ear' and 'crop' appear all together. Through this narrative, Jesus reassures believers that '*at the end of the age the kingdom will have grown into all its fullness, after which Judgment Day will immediately follow* [italics mine]' (Blomberg 1990:266). It evinces the expected optimum production of the present kingdom of God.

In conclusion, we see that the parables embrace both present and future aspects of the kingdom. They confirm what we saw at the end of our section on the

<sup>1</sup> 'The harvest most naturally stands for the final judgment. The reference to putting in the sickle when the grain is ripe harks back to Joel 3:13, which there refers to the coming of the great Day of the Lord' (Blomberg 1990:264).

contingency of the Parousia and the relation between the present and future modes of the kingdom. All of the present activity of the kingdom 'has significance for the future Day of the Lord, when the kingdom will be consummated in all its fullness. Then all who have ever lived will be judged on the basis of their response to Jesus' person and message' (Blomberg 1990:298) - those not building on Christ's words will perish (Mt 7:24-27).<sup>1</sup> The parables delineate various aspects of the kingdom, most often providing theological comment on the relation between the present and future aspects. They unfold the 'eschatological drama' (Hagner 1993:361) and 'the paradoxical nature of the present kingdom of God' (Hagner:382). As with the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed 'the unity of the beginning and the end of God's sovereign intervention is axiomatic; it is a single saving, judging rule that is at work in Jesus and that will be powerfully revealed at the end of the age' (Beasley-Murray 1986:195). Yet all the above parables reveal Christ's fundamentally optimistic view over the future of what he came to inaugurate: *the world will be 'Christianised' with his gospel*. Although he anticipated intrusive elements into his movement, he was confident that his true followers would grow upward and outward, until they reached the zenith of their mission, thereby precipitating the the end of the age. As he predicted, the gospel was to be given to a nation that would produce its fruits (Mt 21:43).

### 3.2.1.2 Building the church

In Matthew 16:18 we have direct insight into the inner dynamic that is to work in the disciples and the church. Christ promises to build his community on Peter and his confession of faith, optimistically speaking of the invincibility of the church, even in the light of the dark machinations of the evil powers (v 18) and the shortcomings of his own followers (v 22).<sup>2</sup> This glowing hope is grounded in the fact that it is Christ himself who will be building *his* church and no one else (cf. 18:20 and 28:20). The

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this threat of judgment in this portion of scripture had *initially* a preterist interpretation. In the 'Jesus generation' (preterist) the storm came on those who rejected *the words of Christ* (70 CE) and in the 'terminal generation' the storm will come on those who reject his word again.

<sup>2</sup> Flew (1951:93) cogently concludes that the rock is Peter himself and that 'Peter is not merely one stone among many; he is a rock on which many stones will be placed. In this passage Peter is to be as it were the forefather of the New Israel, as Abraham was the forefather of the old'. For an excellent study, see Cullmann [s a]:158-238, who underscores the nature of Peter's function as that of a unique foundation that is in no way perpetual.

future indicative ('I will build') conveys the sense of certainty of ongoing activity reaching its intended goal (beginning at Pentecost and climaxing in the Parousia). Although we cannot make metaphors walk on all fours, it seems consistent to imply that the metaphor Jesus used contained the connotations of foundation, process and completion. What Christ has begun, he will complete. For as he himself said:

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish' (Lk 14:28-30).

### 3.2.1.3 The coming Elijah

In Matthew 17:11-12 and Mark 9:12 Jesus confirms the disciples' query over the coming of Elijah by saying 'Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things'.<sup>1</sup> Jesus here anticipates a future Elijah analogous to John the Baptist (Gundry 1982:347; Hagner 1995:499; Alford 1958a:180). This *logion* of Jesus has been variously interpreted. Alford anticipates a personal figure:

Our Lord speaks here plainly *in the future*, and uses the very word of the prophecy of Mal. 4:6. The *double* allusion is only the assertion that the Elias (in spirit and power) who foreran our Lord's first coming, was a partial fulfillment of the great prophecy which announces the *real Elias* (the words of Malachi will hardly have any other than a personal meaning), who is to forerun His greater and second coming (:180).

Hagner, on the other hand, sees the anticipation lying not in a person but a task:

The restoration of 'everything'...must here refer not to the eschatological renewal of the present order itself (which would make Elijah the Messiah himself, rather than the forerunner of the Messiah), as, for example, apparently in Acts 1:6....but to a preparatory work of repentance and renewal (:499).

Others see Jesus' saying in terms of a 'didactic timeless present' (so A Bruce [1951]:231) where there is no note of time, but only of the order of coming as between Elijah and Christ (countered by Gundry:437). France (1985:265) sees the future tense as that of the scribal hope, not Jesus' prediction of a still future coming of Elijah. Yet the text patently speaks of events in Jesus' future, although he links such expectations to the past ministry of John. If we follow France, we must ask: how has John the

<sup>1</sup> For comment and sources dealing with the eschatological Elijah in Jewish tradition, cf. Vena 1999:39-44.

Baptist restored *all things*? The context shows that the disciples obviously expected a restoration far more glorious than what had occurred under John's ministry – thus the mystery (of the Baptist's identification with Elijah). The interpretive phrase of Jesus (*all things*) seems to heighten the Malachi prophecy to a level surpassing the accomplishments of the Baptist.<sup>1</sup> The disciples must then have been surprised to hear Jesus correlate the scribal expectation with the Baptist who had suffered such a fate.<sup>2</sup>

Significant is Jesus' mention of both the future and past fulfillment of Malachi in one breath. He tends towards (what we would call) a typological and salvation-historical interpretation of this concept. The prophecy of Malachi was not exhausted in John who came 'in the spirit and power of Elijah' (Gundry 1974:94), as much as the abominating sacrilege was not fully fulfilled by Antiochus in 167 BCE. The Malachi prophecy does not terminate with John, but continues its forward momentum. Thus Jesus here expects a future Elijah to come to *restore all things before the end* in a way exceeding all that John did in preparing the nation for the first coming of Jesus (so also Bruce 1988a:85).

Who will effect such a restoration and what will he restore? These questions are answered variously yet they can be reduced to three: (1) An individual (Elijah *redivivus* or a John type figure) to restore Israel prior to the End; or (2) the Christian church in her mission to the world;<sup>3</sup> or (3) the expected advent of Jesus causing a restoration. The last suggestion is incompatible with Elijah as a precursor. Given the spiritual application of Elijah with John, and the fact that the early church did not apparently look for an individual Elijah to come, there is good reason to support the ecclesial application (cf. Rv 11). The church's ministry, inaugurated in the NT period, is expected to be restorative in quality and is here expected to be globally successful in quantity.<sup>4</sup> The restoration of all things begun in Christ, will be completed prior to his return. This also matches our interpretation of the parables and Jesus' own optimistic expectation of the spread of his kingdom message.

<sup>1</sup> Oehler (1999:15) believes that 'all things' is 'an expansion of Elijah's work which we find already in the earlier tradition. The *panta* in Jesus' answer combine[s] the inner restitution from Mt 3:24 and the restitution of Israel from Sir 48:10'.

<sup>2</sup> If Oehler (1999) is correct, that neither the OT nor any Jewish literary tradition linked Elijah with the Messiah but only as the ultimate precursor of God, then the disciples' confusion is understandable.

<sup>3</sup> For a combination of the two, see Ladd 1974:154.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent exposition of Revelation 11 dealing with the expected success of the church in converting the nations, see Bauckham 1993:238-337.

What the Baptist did (Lk 1:16-17; 3:4-6) the church can expect to do prior to the Parousia - the 'midpoint' preparer (John) can be correlated to the ecclesial preparer (Diagram 2). The Elijah prophecy predicts a restoration prior to 'the great and terrible day of the Lord', an occurrence to occur in the last-days in preparation for the End. If the church-age is coextensive with the 'last-days' (as most now rightly believe), then the Elijah-restoration must have been inaugurated and already be 'up and running' in Jesus' time.<sup>1</sup> The concept of 'restoration' need not imply that all are to be saved but that there is to be a harmonious ordering of events and full moral flowering in anticipation of the arrival of the Messiah, encompassing both salvation and judgment. Terrestrial and heavenly personalities and activities will be fittingly configured in preparation for the climactic return of Christ. This is analogous to John's restoration of a large number of Jews to the Messiah and his confirmation of others in their need for judgment ('axe laid at root of the tree'). Meyer (1879b:115) has provided us with a helpful understanding of the nature of this restoration in his exegesis of Acts 3:21, nuancing its moral aspect:

[The *apokatastasis* is the] restoration of all moral relations to their original normal condition. Christ's reception in heaven...continues until the moral corruption of the people of God is removed, and the thorough moral renovation, the ethical *restitutio in integrum*, of all their relations shall have ensued. Then only is the exalted Christ sent from heaven to the people....The mode in which the moral restitution must take place is, according to ver. 22, beyond doubt, - namely, by rendering obedience in all points to what the Messiah has during his earthly ministry spoken.

This 'restoration' is the full moral effect of the proper working of the present mode of the kingdom – the present kingdom at full stretch, at optimum effect.

Therefore we believe that a thematic and typological interpretation that observes lines of development which characteristically replay themselves throughout salvation-history is the most fruitful tool in understanding the futurist eschatology of the NT.

<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that the phrase 'last-days' is an OT concept and not a NT one. Remembering this places the NT *within* the framework of the OT, whilst also accentuating the restoration which was to be characteristic of the last-days (Is 2:1-4; Jl 2:28-32; Mt 4:5-6 *et al*). This was the source of the apocalyptic belief that a temporary kingdom (Messianic Kingdom) would precede the age to come (see Russell 1964:291-297).

### 3.2.1.4 Expected persecution

Matthew 10:16-42 is an extended commentary on the expected persecution of the disciples (cf. Mt 24:9; Lk 21:17). The expected persecution of the church - throughout the church-age and particularly in the terminal period - can be interpreted, not as a sign of the failure of the gospel in the world, but rather as the consequence and reflex of the world to a gospel that has triumphed and permeated society. Matthew 24:14 and Mark 13:10 link the fulfillment of the missionary task with persecution. These texts 'primarily seem to focus on the church's responsibility to endure in spreading the Gospel. The hope for complete respite from all forms of persecution is tied up with the fulfillment of that task by Christ's followers' (Rabbali 1992:199). That Jesus affirms the completion of the missionary task (Mt 24:14), can imply the perseverance of the church through these tough periods.

In the light of the Christological nature of the persecution - 'in my name' - the church's suppression could be seen in continuity with the pattern of Christ. He was first received in a more popular fashion (multitudes) but later rejected once his mission became clearer. Thus, based on the typological principle of analogy, it is not inconsistent to expect the church to have a similar period of global popularity and success followed by a reflexive period of persecution, once the ultimate demand of the gospel becomes clear.

### 3.2.1.5 The missionary mandate

Christ's missionary mandate is found in Matthew 24:14, 28:16-20 and Mark 13:10. We believe that Matthew 28:16-20 is epexegetical of Matthew 24:14 and Mark 13:10 (further comment on Mt 24:14 is found in 4.1.1). Both texts are mutually interpreting. Cullmann (1961:50) similarly asserts that in these verses (Mt 28:16-20) we have the 'eschatological character of the missionary enterprise, which must take place precisely in this form, before the end of the age'. What Jesus meant by 'this gospel shall be preached in all nations' is interpreted for us in Matthew 28:19-20. Thus the 'witness' that all nations must be exposed to is 'the recounting of the events that constitute the gospel' (Hagner 1995:695) by disciples who are living out all that Jesus had taught. 'This gospel' that Jesus preached and lived was to be communicated, through his

disciples to the whole world. Only when once this has occurred will the completion of the age occur. Once *his* gospel is presented to the world, the *raison d'être* for the interadventual age would have been accomplished, for the midpoint revelation would then have successfully been fleshed out in all the nations of the world. The above Scriptures thus point to the realisation of the Abrahamic covenant within history, which is promised by God to reach and bless all nations (see Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001:28-32; 101-106).

In these verses Jesus expects an accomplishment of this preaching and the possibility of 'discipling the nations'.<sup>1</sup> The *scope* of his command here is national and not ecclesial. The concept of 'disciplined nations' is not incongruent with the words of Jesus, and the sense of 'disciples-out-of-all-nations' seems too narrow for his expansive words. The words 'baptising them...teaching them' does though narrow this down to those who believe as individuals, thus regulating our understanding of the words 'disciple all the nations'. Thus the common translation 'make disciples of all nations' entails a broad objective with a narrow application. The promise of Christ to be with the disciples 'all the days' (Mt 28:20) until the completion of the age, provides directive force to Christ's presence with disciples in their mission. He is with them with a view to completing the gospel mandate. The connection between the authority of Jesus and the fulfilling of the tasks is made plain by the connective *ouv* in v 19. 'Jesus' authority (v 18) and his presence (v 20) will empower his disciples to fulfill the commission he now gives them' (Hagner 1995:886). Christ's authority backs the mission of the disciples (thus Eph 1:22).

Finally, noting the command to teach 'all that I have commanded you', 'makes clear that mission entails the nurturing of converts into the full obedience of faith, not merely the proclamation of the gospel' (Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001:105). Hagner (1995:887) writes:

The emphasis in the commission thus falls not on the initial proclamation of the gospel but more on the arduous task of nurturing into the experience of discipleship, an emphasis that is strengthened and explained by the instruction 'teaching them to keep all that I have commanded them' in v 20a.

<sup>1</sup> 'Christ's command to the church is not merely that the gospel be preached within nation-states, but that all people groups of the earth be disciplined through his teachings and divine authority' (Davis 1986:53). The debate centers around the nature of the mandate. Is it a more national/cultural commission (a broad view) or an ecclesial/individual commission (a narrow view)? The answer lies somewhere between the two.

In conclusion, we paraphrase this magnificent and comprehensive commission: the cosmic Lord who has been given comprehensive authority over all the created order is commissioning his disciples to bring all nations into the knowledge and practice of his gospel. The disciples are to initiate *all ethnic groupings* ('all nations') into *all the fullness of God* ('Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and teach them to faithfully live out ('to obey') *all the teachings of Christ* ('all that I have commanded you'). The cosmic Lord will be with them in this mission '*all the days*' until accomplished at the fulfillment of the age.

### 3.2.1.6 The Johannine upper-room discourse

It is particularly in the so-called 'upper-room discourse' (Jn 13-17) that Jesus reveals his theological expectations and hopes for this followers. Here he reveals the future objectives and *modus operandi* of the disciples.

Firstly, Jesus' prayer for the unity of his disciples is important for this thesis (17:20-26). It is reasonable to presume that Jesus anticipated this unity to occur in (pre-parousial) history, for the objective of the unity is that 'the world may believe' and 'may know' the truth (vv 21-23). Although his words might be considered as merely conative, the desired objective function of this unity heightens the necessity for actualisation: *the unity is crucial for the purposes of God in salvation-history and therefore requisite for God's purposes to be achieved in this world*. Its non-fulfillment would constitute a truncation of God's world-wide mission.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, Jesus' sayings, 'by this all men will know that you are my disciples', 'that the world may believe' and 'that the world may know that you sent me', imply a global and universal knowledge of the gospel and the nature of Christ.<sup>2</sup> As we shall see in the final chapter, such universalising of witness and mission is the *terminus ad quem* of salvation-history and therefore we believe associated with NT apocalyptic. Here in John, it is through the church that all are to know that Christ's love for God drove him to the cross (14:31). This is certainly not just hearing *about* Jesus but

<sup>1</sup> The primary ground for such an attainment lies in the *already provided* provision for the anticipated unity (v 22). His disciples are to reify the already given unity that is theirs in Christ and the Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> Such believing does not necessitate salvation (cf. Jn 8:31ff where 'those who believed' were of their father the devil). The above verses, together with John 13:32, can 'easily' be misinterpreted in terms of *apocatastasis*. Yet intertextual constraints (particularly 15:18-16:11) cannot be harmonised with universal salvation (see Berkouwer 1981:387-423 for further detail on *apocatastasis*).

rather implies that his life is to be *demonstrated* through the church to the world in a vivid manner.

The indwelling of the disciples (the new temple) in 14:15-24 is crucial to understand how the disciples will activate Jesus' anticipations. Jesus will disclose himself to the disciples and then in turn through them to the world. In this discourse, a quasi Johannine Olivet discourse (see Beasley-Murray 1946:98), the Parousia is not pending and Jesus is not about to reveal himself to the world (14:22); rather, he will reveal himself to the disciples who in turn will witness to the world. 'That the world may know that I love the Father' (14:31) is the statement of the cross, needed to be carried to all. Whatever the nature of the world's anticipated 'belief' and 'knowledge', the necessity of such an accomplishment is there placed in the hands of the church, requiring ecclesial obedience.

The true vine image (15:1-11) is also replete with optimistic ecclesial overtones. The metaphor of the vine carries with it the fruitfulness of the vine. Explicit in Jesus' words are the work of the vinegrower (i.e. the Father), *who ensures that the vine is growing and healthy, producing the purpose for which he planted it*. Here Christ fulfills the destiny of Israel. Yet as Israel failed, so he will succeed. Thus the vinegrower tends the vine and ensures that the branches are either fruit-bearing or removed. The vine is continually cleansed and pruned to ensure a good healthy vine and crop.

Finally, John 16:7-11 needs some attention. The context here is one of persecution, an implicit motif remains central to the pericope (Ridderbos 1997b:523). These words could have been spoken to fortify the believers in awareness of the greater purpose of their mission as it encountered implacable opposition. 'Over against this refusal to acknowledge him, Jesus now posits as the great counterweight that will vindicate him against the world, the coming and work of the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth' (Ridderbos:525). Here the Paraclete's ministry is directed to the world, using the disciples' proclamation as the instrument (so Beasley-Murray 1991:280-281). In the context of 15:18-16:11, the Spirit is expected to do to the world what Jesus did to Israel (15:21-25), and the world is expected to do to the church what it did to Jesus. The context of 16:7-11 is therefore one of preparation for implacable opposition not of hopeful repentance.

The church is here commissioned to be the bearer of the Spirit's mission of convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (15:18-16:11). Interestingly, in the larger context of the Upper Room discourse, Jesus does not suggest that the mission or witness of the church will result in the conversion of the world or individuals. The discourse context is one in which Jesus is about to face the full hatred of the world; a reality which his salvific ministry has extruded. In this way we see that the Johannine dualism is sustained throughout the book and is not collapsed in of hope world conversion.<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental concept of 16:8-11 'is that of a trial of the world before God' (Beasley-Murray 1991:281), with the Paraclete acting 'as council for the prosecution' (Bruce 1984b:318). What Jesus expects is the judicial presentation of the truth to the world that will expose and condemn them for their unbelief, thus providing legal justification for their ultimate condemnation. The Spirit (through the church) is responsible to be the prosecutor, bringing evidence to bear upon the world's latent unbelief, surfacing, *exposing* and therefore condemning it. The true condition of the world manifested in the ministry of Jesus (*vis-à-vis* sin, righteousness and judgment) is once again to be exposed due to the church mission. What happened at the midpoint period in the manifestation of the present kingdom of God is once again to be radiated out, bringing the whole world to account.

Many interpret these verses as implying that the Holy Spirit will 'bring the world to the place where it is convinced of its sin, for instance, [he] is to bring it to self-conscious "conviction" of sin, to self-conscious recognition of guilt' (Carson 1979:558). The Paraclete's ministry is seen by some as a gracious positive ministry (Carson 1979, Trites 1977:113-124). Yet the word *eleggo*, a judicial activity, implies that the Spirit will prove the world guilty with respect to sin, righteousness and judgment. Wescott (1903:228) comments on the complex semantic of the term:

<sup>1</sup> Bauckham has argued persuasively for the conversion of the Gentiles in the final apocalyptic period (1993:238-337; 1995b:99-103). This motif of the conversion of the nations is 'at the center of the prophetic message of Revelation' (1993:238); a reality which results from the witness of the church (:258). The OT prophets had foreseen a period when all the nations would finally worship Yahweh and acknowledge his rule (1993:274). Now, in the book of the climax of prophecy, the mystery (10:7) of how God achieves this is revealed. Through the witness of the church 'all nations will come and worship before him' (Rv 15:4). The well-spring of his rationale is found in Rv 11:13; 14:14-16, 15:3-4 and 21:24. Beasley-Murray (1983) also affirms such an interpretation of Revelation (:187, 236), but Beale (1999:602-608; 776-780) denies such a conversion. See also Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001:244-247. Either way, the world is characterised as being effectively presented with a revelation of Jesus through the church.

It involves the conceptions of authoritative examination, of unquestioned proof, of decisive judgment, of punitive power. Whatever the final issue may be, he who 'convicts' another places the truth of the case in dispute in a clear light before him, so that it must be seen and acknowledged as truth. He who then rejects the conclusion which this exposition involves, rejects it with his eyes open and at his peril. Truth seen as truth carries with it condemnation to all who refuse to welcome it.

Convince is therefore too weak a word. 'The reference here is rather to the world being objectively proved wrong in its inexcusable unbelief' (Ridderbos 1997b:531). The contextual metaphor is that of a forensic setting in which Paraclete as the advocate pleads Christ's case (so Ridderbos:531). The Paraclete's legal role therefore is 'to establish the guilt and sin of the world' (Brown 1970:698). Here,

God incarnate has a lawsuit with the world. His witnesses include John the Baptist, the Scriptures, the words and works of Christ, and later the witness of the apostles and the Holy Spirit. They are opposed by the world, represented by the unbelieving Jews (Trites 1977:79).

Most expositors however believe that this judicial activity is not to be interpreted solely in terms of condemnation, for 'in the Gospel of John the *kosmos*, when it refers to the world of mankind, is the object both of salvation and of condemnation' (Holwerda 1959:55). Beasley-Murray (1991:275-276) supports this view and criticises Becker, who is quoted as saying that here 'the chance of changing is taken from the world, it can only reproduce itself over against Jesus and the Church'. Beasley-Murray notes those occasions in John where the 'world' is the recipient of the gospel positively, concluding with Barrett's comment that, 'the mission of the Church will result in the same twofold response as the work of Jesus himself' (cf.12:44-50). 'There is a dialectical tension in the concept of the "world" in the gospel of John, causing it to be seen on the one hand as needing to be and capable of being saved and, on the other, as hardened, without faith and full of hatred' (Schnackenburg 1982:115). Wescott (1903:228) cautiously notes that 'the effect of the conviction of the world by the Spirit is left undecided so far as the world is concerned'.

Although we agree that there is a 'twofold' (polarising) quality to the world, yet *in this context* Beker's words (quoted above) seem apposite in the light of the characterisation of the world in 15:18-19. This sense is supported from 16:9, where the *exposure reveals the unbelief* not the latent belief of the world. The context favours a more negative concept, where the believers stand over against a world that

hates them; for in 15:18-25 'the concept "world" is given its most emphatic dualist emphasis' (Schnackenburg 1982:113; also Travis 1986:163). Thus Brown (1970:711) does not see that this 'convicting'/'condemning' of the Spirit necessitates the reform of the guilty party, and, 'moreover, the idea that the world is to be convinced by the Paraclete contradicts the statement of 14:17 that the world cannot accept the Paraclete' (:711). He understands the convicting 'of sin' as meaning that the world is entirely culpable of sin and represents a permanent choice of evil (9:41) which merits God's enduring wrath (11:36; so also Bruce 1984b:318-320). The strong realised eschatology of John also favours such a view, for in John people are to be judged *then* based on how they respond *now* to the word of Jesus: 'on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge' (Jn 12:48). We must remember that John writes of ultimate eschatological realities and decision in his gospel. The church through the Spirit now continues Christ's mission of both salvific proclamation and eschatological judgment.

These verses highlight the judicial task of the church to bring the world into a manifest and public state of guilt. Although we have argued that this verse does not favour a positive response to that 'conviction', the emphasis and primary focus is on the necessity of such a task. The world as a whole is to be legally indicted for its sin and unbelief, a function of the Advocate (Spirit) of the truth as the believers bear witness to the present mode of the kingdom. We believe that as Christ's ministry exposed and consequently condemned the world in the midpoint period, so analogously, the entire church carries out a similar mission to the world. The obedience of the church is necessitated if it is to continue this mission and prepare the world for the day of Judgment.

We conclude this Christological section convinced that Christ expected his followers to succeed in their mission in proclaiming the whole gospel to the whole world. All of Christ's future ecclesial expectations are in harmony with our thesis that a mature and obedient church is expected to greet Christ at his eagerly awaited Parousia. We now seek to show that the apostle Paul had a similar expectation in the offering on his ecclesial horizon.

### 3.2.2 The Pauline expectation of a mature church

We continue our exegetical analysis of those Scriptures which reflect the hope of a completion of the church task, internally and externally, before the return of Christ. Realising the eschatological climate (*Naherwartung*) and context in which Paul ministered and wrote (2.2.3.1), we will discover that a crucial motivation and hope for Paul in his evangelistic mission and pastoral labours was his desire to present to God a church fully representative of all the nations and corporately obedient to Christ. We will now attempt to show that for Paul, the height, length, breath, depth and all the other dimensions of the interadventual period were determined by these matters of ecclesial mission.

#### 3.2.2.1 Paul's desire to present the church as a pure virgin to Christ

In the image of the church presented to Christ as a spotless bride we have a controlling metaphor that provides direction and motivation for Paul's apostolic and pastoral labours. If we accept the conclusions of NT *Naherwartung*, then the place of such a concept is accentuated: Christ's return is pending and the churches must prepare themselves for this event. The *Naherwartung* provided the immediacy to this motif and most of the Scriptures that will be exegeted reveal Paul's expectation that the church and believers would probably be alive at the Parousia. It will be shown that the eschatological consummation of the church was associated with the metaphor of a pure and spotless virgin being presented to her husband.<sup>1</sup> However, it is on the antecedent preparation and 'grooming' that Paul focused, seeking to ensure that the church would be fit to meet Christ. Besides the individual aspect of this eschatological presentation (Travis 1986:90-101), our thesis will focus on the corporate dimensions of this motif. In this section we will seek to show that a key tenet in Paul's mission was *his desire for his churches to be in an empirical state of*

<sup>1</sup> Batey (1971:67-68) concludes his study on *New Testament Nuptial Imagery* with five interesting observations: (1) the nuptial imagery of Jesus was informed by apocalyptic; (2) the delay of the Parousia prompted the early church to reinterpret Jesus' figure of present joy into a metaphor of hope for the future - as the church was envisioned to be a Bride awaiting her future wedding; (3) the nuptial image in the NT is predominantly a symbol of the Lordship of Christ over the church; (4) the identity of the early church was defined and clarified primarily by reference to her loyalty to Jesus as the Christ; and (5) the Bride image unfolds with special clarity the nature of the unity between Christ and the Church. See Best 1955:169-183 for further insight into what Paul understood by this image.

*holiness compatible with the pending Parousia.* We will now look at how this motif is spoken of throughout the Pauline corpus and finally observing how it attains a mature articulation in the letter to the Ephesians.

### a) 2 Corinthians 11:1-2

The pastoral motif of presenting (*paristemi*) believers holy before Christ at the Parousia is explicitly mentioned in this text.<sup>1</sup> Here we observe that 'to reach the parousia unblemished [was] the goal of the community as well as the intention of God' (Plevnik 1997:240). This verse is programmatic for understanding the internal motivation for Paul's Gentile mission and is a sentence which 'points to what underlies Paul's concern for this church as for all the churches (11:28)' (Martin 1991:332). Sampley (1971) links the above idea with a common tradition, one which he considers much more pervasive than the extant early Christian literature indicates:

Colossians, second Corinthians and Ephesians manifest a configuration of terminology associated with the verb *paristemi* that portrays an eschatological presentation of Christians to Christ. Consistently the terminology associated with *paristemi* describes these Christians as pure and holy. The possibility arises that the early church had a widespread convention in which the verb *paristemi* functioned in a *heiros-gamios* of Christ and the church. The similarities in each of the three letters are clear enough to indicate that the common tradition is shared by all three and that the differences in these traditions may be accounted for by the divergent purposes made clear in the context of each letter (:137).

Under this theme, Paul's ministry is viewed here as preparatory and grooming in nature.<sup>2</sup> His apostolic grooming includes evangelistic conversion (initial engagement) and pastoral nurture (intermediate prenuptial purity), for the time between the betrothal and the wedding 'is not only a time for preparation but an opportunity to sustain devotion against the impairments of time and evil' (Batey 1971:14). Important

<sup>1</sup> Sampley (1971:132-137) lists six meanings of *paristemi*: (1) place beside or put at disposal; (2) present or represent; (3) make or render; (4) offer, bring, present (sacrifice); (5) legal/technical (judge); and (6) prove, demonstrate. Most of these aspects inhere within Paul's frequent usage of the term.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Batey (1971:16-17) for Paul's role as an agent who negotiates the marriage of the community to the Lord and its conceptual background. Furnish (1984:499) casts Paul in the role of the father 'who has pledged his virgin daughter to her future husband and is therefore responsible that she be presented to him pure and undefiled....The father of the bride-to-be is responsible for safeguarding his daughter's virginity between the time of her betrothal and the time when he actually leads her into the bridegroom's house' (also Carson 1984:85). Bruce (1971:234) mentions the possibility of a conceptual background in the Jewish conception of Moses as the *parangumphios* who presented Israel as a bride to Yahweh.

to note is that this purity is not of a future eschatological nature, but of a present ecclesial goal, requisite for presentation at the Parousia (see Martin 1991:333 and Furnish 1984:486). Further, Sampley (1971:82) interprets the word *paristemi* with the nuance of 'make' or 'render', thus, 'Paul would be understood as saying to the Corinthians that he betrothed them to Christ in order to make or render them a pure bride to their husband'. Present present ecclesial holiness among the Corinthians was considered as the *pre-condition for a pure presentation at the eschaton*. Into a context in which the church was being tempted by Satan (11:3) to follow other grooms (11:4) and thus to be led into spiritual adultery, Paul writes this letter out of jealous concern for the bride of Christ aiming to bring the church to obedient purity and to sustain it there (13:11).<sup>1</sup>

#### b) Colossians 1:28

Following on from the above, Colossians 1:28 speaks about Paul's aim to present every man perfect (*teleios*) in Christ. This text lies in the middle of 1:24-2:5 which speaks of Paul's mission and pastoral concern (O'Brien 1987:73). This pastoral concern is linked to v 22, where our motif is once again found. In an earlier work of Bruce (1980:220), he identified v 23 and v 28 as events occurring at the Parousia (also Dunn 1996a:110). He understood the perfection of v 28 as an *effect of the Parousia* rather than a *prerequisite for the Parousia* (:220). Preferable is O'Brien's interpretation who prefers the 'maturity' semantic: 'As a true pastor Paul will not be satisfied with anything less than the full Christian maturity of every believer. There are to be no exceptions, since his aim is that each one should reach perfection' (O'Brien 1987:90; also later Bruce 1984a:87).<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, O'Brien (:90) concludes that 'this [maturity] will be fully realised only on the last day, for only then will they, like the Thessalonian Christians, be completely sanctified (1 Th 5:23; cf. 3:13)'. If however we identify this 'perfection' as referring to the believer 'who inwardly and in the manifestation of his life has appropriated the content of the Christian faith in the right

<sup>1</sup> Batey (1971:13) highlights the binding nature of betrothal and the *realised* nature of the church's relation with Christ. This accents the need to remain pure in the pre-nuptial period.

<sup>2</sup> On a larger scale, Bowers (1987:194-195) concludes from this verse that 'attending to the mature establishment of believing communities...Paul declares to be integral to his assigned role in the divine economy'.

way' (Ridderbos 1997a:87), we can realistically understand such a spiritual condition as being pre-parousial. This is only possible because the power behind such an immense task, at work in Paul, was 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, it seems more plausible to take the maturity as the precondition and not the effect of the Parousia. Paul's concern is not with what will happen at the Parousia but *in what condition every man is to be at the Parousia*. Here Paul wants to bring 'every man' (context = saints, v 26, 4:12; *pace* Du Plessis 1959:198-200) to Christ in an acceptable spiritual state (v 22). Whether we call this acceptable state 'perfection' or 'maturity', the reality is the index to the word. Paul wants to bring the believers near to Christ at the Parousia in a state of perfection, as a priest would bring near the offerer's spotless victim - the terminal point in his apostolic and pastoral labours.

### c) 1 & 2 Thessalonians

It is in the Thessalonian correspondence that we have a wealth of prayers and thought that point to an expected ecclesial maturity for the Parousia. Here, in light of the pending Parousia, we have the most emphatic presentation of Paul's desired holiness for his churches. In 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13, 5:23-24 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 we have references that speak of a mature condition expected to precede the Parousia. In fact, the whole of 1 Thessalonians seems to be an extended appeal for the believers to 'complete what is lacking in [their] faith', i e, to be made ready for the Parousia.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 Paul prays that God may 'so strengthen' the hearts of the Thessalonian believers 'in holiness that [they] would be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints'. Verse 13 introduces the contemplated result of the Lord's present action resulting in an 'establishment in the present that will be disclosed in the future judgment' (Blight 1989:111). The concern of Paul is for his converts' condition in view of the impending assize. The sense is that an 'establishment' can take place in the present that will ensure their approbation on that Day.<sup>2</sup> In this Thessalonian passage 'blameless' appears to have little to do with 'imputed' or 'alien righteousness' but refers to the ethical and faithful condition of the

<sup>1</sup> For more on the nature of maturity in Paul, see Ridderbos 1977a:270-272. Du Plessis (1959:198-200) argues for a reading of 'every man' as every creature on earth, and 'perfect in Christ' as a reference to the realm of redemption in Christ and not as subsequent spiritual growth. However, the context of 1:21-2:7 requires an individual sanctification interpretation. Also, the *missiological focus* is more ecclesial here, with the v 23c mitigating the evangelistic sense.

believer in the day of the Parousia; this is supported by the judicial connotations of 'before our God and Father' (so Marshall 1990a:101-102). Lastly, as we shall see later, this pericope reveals that such a hope is grounded in the ability of *God* ('may the Lord make you increase' and 'may he so strengthen you') to ensure such a situation will occur.

The same thought is reformulated and heightened in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. As with the previous section, here the thought is that they are to be kept through all that period before the moment he comes and so implies that they are to be kept blameless *until* he comes (so Bruce 1982:130-131, Ridderbos 1997a:266; see Blight 1989:193 for corroborating commentators). Paul here prays for the continuation and completion of the sanctifying process (so Marshall 1990a:161). This text clearly shows the correlation between *Naherwartung* and corresponding moral requirements. 'Since Paul believed that the parousia could occur within the lifetime of his readers, he also believed that they could be finally prepared for it at any time' (Marshall 1990a:162). There seems no avoiding the conclusion that Paul desired God to 'sanctify entirely' the believers in the present - body and soul - and that he would keep them in this condition of completeness up until the Parousia.<sup>1</sup> Paul's prayer is that they may be preserved entirely without fault *until* the Parousia and be so found *at* the Parousia. Although the many translations translate the Greek *en* preposition of 5:23 as 'at the coming of the Lord' – suggesting a future condition - it can also be interpreted 'in the presence of the Lord'. Lenski (1946:365) comments: 'The *en* [v 23] phrase does not state the date of this being preserved, for the preservation occurs in this life and not "at the Parousia of our Lord Jesus"'. This brings out the exigent need for a present moral condition ('blameless') that will withstand the approaching judicial inspection: 'for we will all stand before the judgment seat of God' (Rm 14:10).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 'Styridzo' has the meaning of 'putting in a buttress, a support' (Morris 1982:100). That Paul prays for the establishing of their hearts in holiness suggests his desire for a work of God in the present *that will effectively produce a condition of holiness that will endure up until the Parousia*. 'Paul is not thinking of a sanctification that may last but a little time here on earth, but of one which continues at the Parousia' (Morris 1982:182). This same motif of 'establishing' in the faith is present in the prayer of Paul in Romans 16:25.

<sup>1</sup> 'Paul's language certainly implies that he prays for believers to be completely holy in preparation for the parousia (Phlp 1:10ff; 1 Cor 1:7ff). The same thought is present in 3:13 and it should be taken seriously' (Marshall 1990a:161). Sadly, Marshall calls this 'an ideal that may not be fully realised' (:162).

<sup>2</sup> Paul himself is the model for the holiness he desired to see mirrored in his converts (1 Th 2:10: 'You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers'). For the motif of Paul as model, see O'Brien 1995:104-109.

Finally, Paul confidently states (v 24) that this prayer of his *will occur*. 'He is supremely confident that what he has asked will be done' (Morris 1983:182). *God* ('he himself = emphatic position) will present his people blameless on that day because: (1) the One who has called/chosen these believers will accomplish his ends ('who calls you'; also 1 Th 2:13); and (2) he is faithful to his purposes. Paul thus grounds his ecclesial hope in the elective nature of the purposes of God and the consequent faithfulness of God to fulfill his original intentions. 'It is faith in the power and faithfulness of God, not the moral result reached in the church, that makes him [Paul] hold up blamelessness and spotlessness before the church as mandate and final goal, in the midst of all the present temptations and imperfections' (Ridderbos 1997a:272).

Lastly, in 2 Thessalonians 1:11 Paul prays that God would 'make/consider' the believers worthy of God's call. 'Even though this means to "consider" worthy it is implied by the prayer that Paul wants God to "make" them worthy. This prayer implies that Paul 'wants the Thessalonians to so live that God will be able to pronounce them worthy' (Blight 1989:223, see 1 Th 2:12).<sup>1</sup> Paul considers the suffering of the church to be part of this process (1:5) and asks God to continue the preparation for the coming kingdom inaugurated at the Parousia. Once again, Paul hopes for a congruency between the empirical condition of the church and the holy character of the revelation of the Lord and his kingdom on that Day.<sup>2</sup> God's work *now* is to ensure approbation *then*.

#### d) Philippians 1:3-11

It is often in Paul's epistolary introductory thanksgivings that we have evidence of 'the apostle's deep pastoral and apostolic concern for the addressees' (O'Brien 1977:13). His introductions have a didactic function whereby he either implicitly or explicitly instructs them in what is important *vis-à-vis* the church condition. O'Brien accents the element of maturity found in these sections: 'The manifold requests of the apostle are primarily concerned with the growth in Christian maturity of the addressees....The apostle will not be satisfied with anything less than their full Christian maturity' (:270). Since Paul's introductory thanksgivings anticipate many of

<sup>1</sup> See O'Brien 1977: 179 on the choice for 'make worthy'.

<sup>2</sup> The requirement for empirical righteousness qualifying one for entry into the kingdom is seen in Mt 5:20. A similar thought is found in Exodus 19:10-15 and Hebrews 12:14.

the concerns of the letter (like a musical overture), the content of the thanksgivings often provide a context through which the whole letter can be read (cf. Roberts 1986). In our case, this shows how requisite our motif is for Pauline thought.

In Philippians 1:3-11 we have a classical preparatory prayer introduction. The Parousia (vv 6 and 10) is the proximate event that has a dual function in this pericope: (1) it provides the ultimate goal of Paul's ecclesial hope;<sup>1</sup> and (2) it provides the present incentive for corporate holiness. Paul spurs the church on to righteousness in light of the pending Parousia. Preparation for the Parousia can hereby be seen as an apostolic and pastoral concern, the ultimate goal of Paul's prayers. This concern permeates the rest of the contents; thus Travis (1986:96) links 1:9-11 with 2:14-16, which both 'refer to qualities which Paul expects to see in his converts in this life, in preparation for (*eis*) the parousia';<sup>2</sup> and Fee (1995:87) links the 'good work' - 'the ethical dimension of salvation in Christ' - of 1:6 with the call to work out their 'salvation' in 2:12-13.

More controversially, yet integral to this thesis, Paul's words once again evince an expected corporate maturity and blamelessness *prior to* and *in preparation for* the Parousia.<sup>3</sup> The sense of his words in 1:6 unfolds his pastoral hope (and certainty) that God will keep this church in this state of corporate perfection/completion (= obedience) up until the Parousia.<sup>4</sup> Taking vv 5 and 6 together, we see that Paul's 'confidence is that their participation in the gospel "from the beginning until now," will continue until the day of Christ' (Fee 1995:86). He rejoices over the obedience of this church which was from the beginning (1:5; 2:12), and, whilst exhorting them to ongoing obedience, confidently expects God to sustain the church in that obedience up until the Parousia.

<sup>1</sup> Fee (1995:86) comments on Paul's confident hope: 'But this confidence has very little to do with them and everything to do with God, who both "began" a good work in them and will "bring it to completion at the day of Christ"'. O'Brien (1977:27) relates Paul's confidence to Isaiah 40-66 and the revelation of Yahweh who is the First and the Last, the One who will bring to completion what he has birthed.

<sup>2</sup> 'Pure and blameless' for Travis are more qualities of the character of overflowing love rather than calculating sinlessness (:96).

<sup>3</sup> 'Paul's prayer...was that the Philippians would not only *reach* the final day, but also that they might *be pleasing* to God on the occasion of the great assize' (O'Brien 1977:35).

<sup>4</sup> 'Completion' unfortunately carries a sense of static termination, yet the word should be understood in the sense of 'maturity' and spiritual completeness that fits one for service. It does not mean 'to have arrived' but rather a desired 'point of departure', characterised as ongoing obedience in 2:12. In vv 8-11 Paul qualifies the nature of this 'completion' and 'maturity' as that which will receive the 'well done' on that Day.

Of import is the impression that *from their* inception the Philippian church lived in a spiritual condition that was appropriate to the Parousia revelation. How the Philippians could remain in that obedience is articulated in the whole letter. Some, as mentioned, see the experience of the condition of 'perfection' as only occurring simultaneously with the Parousia (O'Brien 1977:28). However, the relative temporal preposition *achri* (1:6) implies an abiding state up to certain point, at which those prior conditions will reach termination or fulfillment. If Paul wanted to stress *at* or *on* the Day, he would have used the locative or instrumental 'en' for this nuance (see Fee 1995:86). Also, Paul clearly states that God had only *begun* the good work, and he is confident that God would go on perfecting it – for the Greek verb *epitelesei* is a progressive future and refers to 'an action in progress in the future' (O'Brien 1991:78). This implies that 'perfection' here is not a static attainment but a growing and dynamic condition (v 9) *to continue up until the End*.<sup>1</sup>

Our interpretation of v 6 is buttressed by co-textual constraints, especially if we correlate v 10 with v 6. What Paul has expected God to do in the church (v 6) he now, characteristically, prays into being: 'he now proceeds to give content to his prayer, indicating some specifics regarding the "good work" begun in them which he repeatedly prays that God will bring to completion on the day of Christ' (Fee 1995:96). In vv 9-11 we have a prayer that cumulatively results in a condition of holiness before God.<sup>2</sup> Here 'the concern is with present life in Christ; the orientation is toward its consummation - that they live for Christ now, and do so in light of his coming Day' (Fee:97). Here Paul is 'directly concerned with the Philippian's progress in Christian love and maturity during the remainder of this present age' (O'Brien 1977:38). This desired condition of holiness in v 10 is expressed elsewhere in the epistle (1:27; 2:1-6;

<sup>1</sup> Du Plessis (1959:36-45) shows that *telos* does not mean cessation or discontinuation when reached but rather fulfillment: 'fundamentally the term is...qualified as expressing culmination but not ultimatum, i e, a point beyond which no further action is conceived' (:37-38). *Telos* often expresses the idea of a 'turning point as opposed to ultimate finality'; nevertheless, underscoring the idea of *completion* in that attainment of this point 'marks the consummation of a particular period, stage, achievement, event or process, but admitting the suggestion of a new beginning' (:45). If the Philippians reach this point, it does not mean static perfection but rather ongoing functioning as a mature church ready for the Parousia.

<sup>2</sup> See Fee 1995:102-103 who brings out the communal and interpersonal nature of 'pure and blameless'. Ridderbos (1997a:270) rightly guards us against 'an exclusively moral interpretation...[of] the idea of a quantitative state of moral perfection flawless in all its parts'. Regarding the need for 'perfection', Ridderbos deals with the issue of 'the working out of this totalitarian imperative and the possibility of its realisation in this life' (:266) in his section entitled: 'The totalitarian point of view. Perfection' (265-272).

2:12-15) and especially in chapter 3 which contains an explicit call to emulate Paul and thus exemplify the nature of 'perfection' or 'maturity' (v 15).

Ridderbos (1997a:265-266), who has written about 'the totalitarian character of the relationship in which the church is placed...[which] pertains to the most essential and characteristic feature of the Pauline paraenesis', fittingly writes of Paul's desired holiness:

[T]his sanctification for Paul denotes a condition of moral blamelessness that comes about in the way of purification. As such it is defined further as that which is 'blameless', 'without spot or wrinkle', 'in which no fault is found'...It is precisely the intention that the church may rise in this life to such a position of holiness that at the appearing of Christ it may go to meet its Lord without blame (:266).

Such a condition of obedience is evidence of the *power of Christ* in his people (2:13) – a reality incarnated in the apostle (3:7-11), diffused throughout the body in Philippi and growing in both (1:6; 3:8-14) until the End.

#### e) 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Similar 'parousial ethics' and eschatological climax can be found in 1 Corinthians 1:4-9. Here Paul praises God that despite the problems in Corinth God will complete his work in this church. This section highlights the theological nature of Paul's ecclesial hope. Even to a church racked with problems (unlike the Philippians), Paul opens with a theological conviction that God will present *this* church 'blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Such an anomalous juxtaposition accounts for the confessional nature of this statement in v 8 (so Soards 1999:26). Thus Orr & Walther (1976:146) speak of this verse as,

the most difficult of all expressions of hope in this letter....Paul is writing to people who have been already engaged in quarrels, nourished scandalous conduct, doubted some of the basic elements of the gospel, questioned the authority of the apostle...yet here he states unconditionally that they will be blameless in the final evaluation.

Here the words 'will confirm you' of v 8 'express not a mere wish but rather a promise which God is going to fulfill' (Kistemaker 1993:41).<sup>1</sup> As in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 'the

<sup>1</sup> Fee (1989:43) notices how Paul uses the same word 'confirm' as in v 6: 'Paul says that in the same way that God first "guaranteed" our testimony to Christ while we were with you, he will *also* "guarantee" or "confirm" you "to the end"'. What God began he will finish, for he is faithful (v 9). 'Confidence and certainty for the future were based on the past action of God...As God had confirmed the *testimony* in them, so now He would confirm the *Corinthians* themselves' (O'Brien

outcome of the Corinthians "being kept strong" is that they would be blameless on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ' (Soards:27). As in Philippians, Paul expects God to confirm them until the end, i e, to sustain them in a state of 'maturity' up until the Parousia.

Du Plessis (1959:160-161) unpacks the relation of the historical and eschatological dimensions of this pericope:

The context of 1 Cor 1:4-9 is...not concerned only with exoneration on the day of judgment but includes the maintenance of believers until that day. The spiritual gifts of grace have this very purpose in view, that Christians would be secured in their religious and moral make-up by Christ to the extent of being exculpated on that day of decision. Dissociation of these various motifs means violation of the cogent representation. Fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:9) proclaims the present reality of this sustenance, and confirms to the readers that Christ's office is not a temporary or momentary one. What is done in history is entered on the account of eternity, for the day of judgment. He will sustain all the faithful until that day when He will secure them complete freedom from the censure of God.

The remarkable nature of this section is Paul's overwhelming confidence in God's relationship and work in this aberrant yet Spirit-inspired church (cf. Fee 1989:43-45). 'Paul's unswerving confidence in the Corinthian church's future is remarkable...God had begun and was continuing a work among the Corinthians that had an assured outcome because of God's own character' (Soards 1999:27). Such a hope is grounded in the fact that the Corinthian church was the church *of God* (1:2);<sup>1</sup> God's purpose in the church will be accomplished and we can thus confess that the ecclesial future is not the church's future, it is *God's future* (cf. Plevnik 1997:241). The building will be completed and the harvest will be gathered (1 Cor 3:6-9).

Before we leave these texts, we must ask the question: did these churches, toward which Paul was convinced God would 'perfect' and procure blamelessness before God at the Parousia, actually attain such a state? Our response is two-fold. Firstly, the Parousia did not occur and therefore the event of the churches entering such a state for the Parousia might not have occurred. Secondly, as with Jesus' statements as noted in 2.2.2.2, Paul could be understood as speaking prophetically and thus trans-ecclesially: his sense of God completing the work in the local churches was grounded in his conviction of God's general and total work in the trans-local church as a whole. The ultimate ecclesial hope (3.2.2.2) appears interwoven into the local and specific

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1977:126.127).

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:8-9 parallels 1 Thessalonians 5:24.

context where Paul ministered. The broader hope produced and fed the narrow hope, thus allowing the motif to survive even if its articulation at the narrow local level did not materialise. It is the grand ecclesial HOPE of which every 'local' church participates in. Such a conclusion seems justified in the light of the fact that the motif featured prominently in Paul's introductory thanksgivings and prayers and was brought to bear on all manner of churches.

We have seen the strong concern in Paul's writings for his churches to be found blameless before Christ at the Parousia. Although there will be unprecedented ecclesial glory at the Parousia, such texts provide further evidence of an anticipated pre-parousial glorification of the church. Over emphasis on a post-historical realisation of the church's potential beyond the horizon of our times can lead to ecclesial doceticism. Yet developing this NT historical hope reveals the degree to which God enters into the fallen history of humanity and gloriously transforms a community of people - even against all odds.

### 3.2.2.2 Paul's theological explication: Ephesians 4:1-16

In Ephesians Paul crystallises all his prior 'occasional' theology, especially those elements that relate to the maturity and expected goal of the church of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> It is particularly in chapter 4:1-16 that we have the crowning text that unpack this expected ecclesial perfection and hope, being arguably programmatic for Paul's evangelistic and pastoral ministry.

Firstly, we must touch on the question of the referent of *ekklesia* in Ephesians. Some commentators posit the 'universal Church, the Christian community seen in its totality' (Lincoln 1990:xciv, 67, also Giles 1995:145 *et al*). Others understand *ekklesia* as the 'heavenly gathering centered on Christ' who are corporately and representatively present before the throne in heaven (O'Brien 1999:26; 1987), 'a heavenly church which is permanently in session' (Banks 1988:47) of which the local churches participate in and represent.<sup>2</sup> Fee (1994:689) argues for a local gathered community that is the expression of the so-called universal church. It seems best

<sup>1</sup> For arguments in retaining the traditional view on authorship, see Barth 1974a: 3-61.

<sup>2</sup> A factor which mitigates the 'heavenly body' identity is the difficulty in correlating that concept with the suffering and growing metaphors in Ephesians, along with the ethical imperatives and the appeals

however to hold to a dynamic inclusive view that incorporates both vertical (heavenly) and horizontal (earthly) aspects of the *ekklesia*. The heavenly and earthly 'bodies' are all inclusive of the body of Christ, incorporating both the more static aspects and the dynamic aspects of the letter - one body in two modes.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is true that the letter's primary referent of the term *ekklesia* is the earthly, terrestrial church. The process of the upbuilding of the church is centered in the earthly church whilst the backdrop and extent of the *ekklesia* is ultimately broader.

Secondly, as far as the eschatology of the letter is concerned, the book is commonly credited with a more 'vertical' and realised eschatology (Lincoln 1990:lxxxix-xc; Smalley 1956). Regarding a more future, forward-looking eschatological perspective, a helpful observation is mentioned by Hort, quoted in Smalley. Hort identified a dual eschatological action in Ephesians, an eschatological movement that develops in two interrelated directions: a perfecting of the Christian community and an ingathering of humanity into that community (:154). Smalley himself identifies three main stages of eschatology of Ephesians: the mystery of the Gentile inclusion, the growth of the Body, and the all important end of the summing up of all things in Christ in 1:10 (:154). This temporal ecclesio-eschatological nuance of Ephesians is also brought out by Lincoln (:261):

While Ephesians makes reference to an end of history (e.g., 4:30; 5:5; 6:13), the imminence of that end is not in view in the same way as it is in some of Paul's letters. These notions of movement toward a goal [2:20, 21; 4:13; 6:13, 14], of progress, of maturing, and of growth may well function as Ephesians' equivalent to some of the future elements in Paul's eschatology. They certainly suggest that the Church's future in history is being taken seriously.

In chapter 4:1-16 we have a discourse on the unity, diversity and maturity of the Body of Christ, presenting us with realities that underlie the rest of the letter's contents (O'Brien 1999:280). It is a Christological exhortation to the believers to live worthily of their calling and to actualise the reason for the ministerial gifting of the church. The emphasis on the gifting suggests a strong earthly mode of the church as the referent of *ekklesia*. Here Paul provides us with the grand ecclesial goal that

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for unity. It is more plausible thus to identify these dynamic aspects with an identifiable group of people on earth (cf. Giles 1995:145).

<sup>1</sup> This inclusive view is warranted by 2:19-22 where the whole structure of the church is compared to a building that includes the foundation elements (apostle and prophets) and the superstructure. Also, to limit 5:22-33 to the earthly body seems unwarranted by the theological content of those verses – unless Paul is speaking representatively throughout.

obviously fired his own pastoral heart. The theological content of this section 'constitutes an indirect appeal to the readers to play their part in enabling the Church to become what it should be' (Lincoln 1990:224-225). In these verses we have the apostle's 'lucid understanding of what God wants to accomplish in the body of Christ and in the lives of its members' (Strauss 1986:260).

The temporal clause of v 13 ('until all of us...') provides us with the pinnacle of Paul's rationale for the diversity in the church, introducing us to the objective of the forward movement of the church's growth. In v 12 we have the functional job-description of the ministers and in v 13 the ultimate desired goal of that process. The two verses are thus not synonymous but climactic. The job-description of the ministers ('apostle', 'prophet', 'evangelist', 'pastor and teacher') is to 'equip/perfect the saints'.<sup>1</sup> This word *katartismos* (a *hapax legomenon*) is variously translated (see Graham 1997:31-311). Barth (1974a:439) describes it as a 'dynamic act by which persons and things are properly conditioned'. Lincoln (1990:254) states: 'It is the notion of making complete, which can include making complete by restoring or training, that best fits the context, where, in the next verse, different images for the Church's completion will be used'. Thus the primary objective and ultimate purpose of the ministers is to bring the saints to a state of completion, i e, to condition the saints, to actualise their spiritual identity. As they serve and build up the body, so they bring it to its desired goal, to the completion and complexion that is seen in Christ. So, whether we prefer a 'ministerial' interpretation of the 3 clauses (co-ordinate) or an emphasis on the ministry of the saints (as O'Brien 1999), the objective of both remains the same: the upbuilding of the body of Christ.

This upbuilding, says O'Brien,

has both an extensive and intensive dimension to it. Growth in size is implied in the mention of the gifts of apostles and evangelists, while the introduction of the body metaphor implies the notion of development of the church as an organism from within, by means of its own God-given life (1999:305).

<sup>1</sup> Are the three prepositional phrases in v 12 co-ordinate (i e, these three phrases relate only to the ministers, thus Lincoln 1990:252-253) or are the last two phrases related to the saints and their job-description once 'equipped' (i e, the focus here is on the saints' ministry not the ministers', thus Barth 1974 a:479-481)? The context seems to favour Lincoln's argument: 'the primary context here in v 12 is the function and role of Christ's specific gifts, the ministers, not that of all the saints' (Lincoln 1990:253). Yet the syntactic variation of the prepositions *pros* and *eis* favours Barth. Those favouring the former view tend to interpret *katartismos* with the telic nuance of 'completion', whilst the latter view favours the more 'preparation' translation of 'equip'. The other solution is to take the the first clause as ministerial, the second as 'ecclesial' and the third ministerial. Cf. Graham (1997:310-313) for an exegetical history of these verses.

Ridderbos (1997a:432-438) has written extensively on the Pauline theme of the extensive and intensive upbuilding of the body of Christ. Relative to the growth of the body, he speaks of a 'continuing and consummating work consist[ing] both in the bringing in of those who till now have been without (cf. Rm 15:20ff) and in the inner strengthening and perfecting of all who in Christ now belong to it (1 Cor 14:3; 1 Th 5:11, *et al*)'. He goes on to add that this process 'works toward the *pleroma*, the full number intended by God both of Jews and gentiles (Rom 11:12, 25), a perspective with which for Paul also the end of history coincides (Rm 11:25-26)' (:433). The ultimate goal lies in the unity of the body when 'it reaches perfection, i e, brings to revelation the fullness it possess in Christ' (:438). Although the upbuilding in Ephesians here includes both aspects, the subsequent intensive work receives a certain primacy and ultimate concern: 'It is thus the intensive "fullness", the adulthood and maturity of the church, toward which the entire process of upbuilding is directed' (Ridderbos:435). Thus the process reaches a pinnacle when all those in Christ are brought in and when all those who have been brought in fully actualise the fullness that is theirs in Christ.

These verses in Ephesians are exclusively ecclesial, and even evangelism is seen as extensive upbuilding.<sup>1</sup> This *process* (a building) occurring within the body of Christ has a definite *goal*: a mature man, 'the adult age of the church' (Meyer 1879b:224). This is now expatiated upon in vv 13-16. Here we move to the ultimate goal of the ministry gifts, which were first mentioned because of their essential role in the attainment of this goal (beginning in v 11 ('he gave') and ending in v 12a). In v 13 we have a strong 'teleological accent' (Barth 1974b:478), containing 'the goal of the Church's existence' (Lincoln 1990:255). 'The ministers are to carry out their task both until the whole Church reaches this goal and in order that it might reach this goal' (Lincoln:255). The relative conjunction 'until' suggests that 'the ministerial nature of these offices will continue until the Church reaches its goal' (Graham 1997:315). Here we have the eventual, expected and contemplated result of v 11, that is, the arriving of the church at the stature of a mature man, to the condition of corporate spiritual maturity.<sup>2</sup> *All* believers - which Du Plessis (1959:189) sees as the most

<sup>1</sup> Bowers (1987:188) described Paul's mission as one that 'embraced evangelism within an ecclesiological intention'.

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln (1990:256): 'The emphasis is on the mature adulthood of this person in contrast with the children to be mentioned in the next verse. The Church, which has already been depicted as one new person in Christ (2:15), is to attain to what in principle it already has in him - maturity and

emphatic assertion of the theme of maturity - are expected to arrive at a clearly defined measure of attainment. The church must *actualise* its given unity and appropriate its given knowledge of Jesus. The key motif here is on the corporate attainment, something which is therefore seen as the ultimate destiny of the church (so Schnackenburg 1994:185).

This condition is further described as the church actualising the fullness of Christ (v 15), of becoming all that she essentially is (cf. 1:23). 'The thought of the full unfolding and appropriation of what has been given in Christ and thereby of adulthood and maturity emerges very clearly in Ephesians 4:13' (Ridderbos 1997a:271). Linking this with Paul's prayer in 3:19 for the attaining of the fullness of God, we see that 'the standard for believers' attainment is the mature proportions that befit the Church as the fullness of Christ' (Lincoln 1990:257). Best (1955:141-142) affirms that,

the Church is to attain to the measure of the maturity of the pleroma of Christ; it is to attain to the measure of the maturity of the attributes and powers of Christ, that maturity which comes when the attributes and powers of Christ completely fill it and it is in actual fact the pleroma of Christ.

Meyer (1879b:225) speaks of 'the fullness of the Divinity manifest in Christ and through Him also embodied in the church'. This is theological language for the church being all she was made to be, the process of 'an increasing approximation of believers to Christ' (Lincoln:261). This objective is the driving topic of the whole pericope and the *raison d'être* for the gifts of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Of primary importance for the thesis is the answer to the question: is the church expected to attain to this maturity in her historical pilgrimage or is it only realisable at the Parousia?<sup>2</sup> O'Brien (1999:306), Bruce (1980:87-88) and Turner (1995:150) favour the view that such maturity will only finally occur at Christ's coming. Graham

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completeness'. Du Plessis (1959:188) correctly understands the idea/metaphor of 'maturity' here in physiological terms: 'There can be no doubt that the image of a physical body is an intentionally literal presentation to elaborate accurately on the idea of unity, and growth within that unity'. Cf. Ridderbos 1997a:271-272 for the Pauline summons for every individual Christian to be perfect and mature.

- <sup>1</sup> Strauss (1986:264) understands this 'fullness of the stature of Christ' in historical terms: 'The stature He attained in His incarnation, the spiritual maturity level He possessed, is the measure toward which every believer should be progressing'. That is certainly valid, yet in the context of Ephesians and especially 1:23 and 3:19, the term is best understood in terms of the organic 'body of Christ' concept.
- <sup>2</sup> Robert Nelson (1964:211-324) looks at this issue relative to the kingdom of God: 'For there is a great difference of thought among theologians today with regard to the problem of whether the Kingdom in its fullness is to be within historical time or in the realm of eternity. And upon one's decision respecting this problem depends his understanding and evaluation of the Christian life and the history of the Church' (:225).

(1997:323) lists other such expositors who believe it will only be obtained outside the present continuum, and also those who believe it may be obtained while on earth. Those of the latter include Eadie, Barry, Salmond, Ellicott, Abbott, Lenski, Meyer, Mitton and Carter. Meyer believed that the church would reach this state in a period of time just preceding the Parousia of Christ: 'But vv 14, 15 show most distinctly that Paul thought of the goal in v 13 as setting in even *before the Parousia*' (1879b:226).<sup>1</sup> Meyer (:225) lists other scholars who held to this temporal 'this-worldly' ecclesial hope: Chrysostom, Jerome, Ambrosiaster, Thomas and Luther, *et al.* Recently, Snodgrass (1996:205-206) has commented:

While the first part of v 13 may have implications for the end times, this passage makes more sense if understood as an attainable, expected goal for Christians in the present. Otherwise the focus on Christian maturity in v 14-16 makes no sense. Paul's concern is that his readers will not be blown about like babies now, not after the parousia.

In favour of this interpretation is Paul's explanation of this corporate maturity in vv 14-16. It is a maturity not to succumb to false doctrines, as is characteristic of infantile behaviour. If such a maturity was only attainable 'in heaven', it is not understandable why Paul defined the maturity as the ability to stand amidst false teaching. Du Plessis (1959:193), who has argued for a vision of an anatomical constitution as to the meaning of *teleion* in v 13, concurs:

The contents of 4:14 seem to suggest that the ideal will be realized in the present life: [v 14 is] hardly an intelligible addition if Paul had eschatological consummation in mind. On the other hand, can a correspondent identity between the stature of Christ and the Church as His body fall within the boundaries of the present *ek merous* order of affairs? Bearing in mind the objective character of the quality called for, the thought is not incongruous.

Also, if these verses only reach consummation at the Parousia (which is not implied here at all, so Schnackenburg 1994:251), then it implies that the goal of maturity is reached by Christ *then* and not by the ministerial gifts given to the church *now*. Such a conclusion would subvert the intent of the entire pericope. This section declares that the ministerial gifts (or the saints) will accomplish that maturity, not the Parousia. Also, the Parousia view posits that Christ accomplishes instantly what is actually the

<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, he links the mention of the false doctrine with the 'apocalyptically' expected Antichristian principle preceding the Parousia. In these verses he sees Paul as pointing to the state of unity of faith and knowledge, 'which sets in after the last storms...and then is at once followed by the consummation of the kingdom of Christ by the Parousia (1879b:226).

whole process of history.<sup>1</sup> But if 'the Church's final state of completion...occupies the future horizon', and we acknowledge that 'the writer is constrained to show that the exalted Christ has in fact supplied what is necessary for the Church to become what it is meant to be', then Paul's 'vision of the Church and of its calling in the world is not to be thought of as a totally impossible ideal' (Lincoln 1990:269). We believe that this goal can be related to the Parousia in a distinct way so that both events are sensitively compatible with each other.

Here in Ephesians we have a predicted attainable historical goal for the church. She has a historical goal and destiny, and these verses expect it to happen in history amidst the insidious influences of false doctrine and malicious intent. When she attains to her goal, then these verses imply that the ministerial gifts will be diffused within the whole body to such an extent that the particular gifting of those of v 11 will probably no longer be necessary. This is because *all* will have arrived at the state that the *few* were given to accomplish (e g, when your leg is healed you no longer need crutches). The particular ministerial gifts are 'given...*until* we all attain to...maturity'.<sup>2</sup> Such an ecclesial state would have profound affect upon the world and for the whole *raison d'être* of the interadventual age, suggesting its association with the terminal generation and the Parousia. We believe that this is the grand ecclesial hope of the NT.

### 3.2.2.3 'Maturity' of Christians?

Numerous texts in the Pauline corpus touch on the aspects of individual Christian maturity or perfection (1 Cor 2:6; Phlp 3:15; Col 1:28; 4:12). The contemporary tendency has moved away from the 'two classes' model, i e, the nominal Christians and mature/spiritual Christians. The Wesleyan concept of a state of sinless perfection has given way (at least theologically) to a concept of relative actualisation (Klein

<sup>1</sup> At risk of being reductionist, to transpose the fulfillment of the church to the post-temporal eschaton smacks of Platonism and Docetism and loses the pastoral actuality of this Pauline pericope.

<sup>2</sup> Thus Hodge (1960:801) writes on Ephesians 4:11-13 in light of his postmillennial views: 'The duties of the ministry...are to continue until all, that is, all believers, the whole church, or as our Lord says, all the elect, are gathered in and brought to the stature of perfection of Christ'.

1993:699-701).<sup>1</sup> This concept understands *teleios* (perfection, maturity, wholeness etc) as indicating a person or thing that has fulfilled its intended goal/destiny or function/purpose (Du Plessis 1959:124-129). Most would concur with Schippers (1976:65) that, in many incidences, the anthropological sense of the term in the NT,

does not speak of an ideal of ethical perfection which is to be realised by degrees. Rather...*teleios* signifies the undivided wholeness of a person in his behaviour...[It does not] denote the quantitative endpoint of human endeavour, but the anticipation in time of the eschatological wholeness in actual present-day living. Christian life in the New Testament is not projected idealistically as a struggle for perfection, but eschatologically as the wholeness which a person is given and promised.

As is characteristic of most of Paul's ethical injunctions, the meaning of *teleios* swivels between the indicative and the imperative. In some instances (1 Cor 2:6, Phlp 3:15) the meaning seems to be more 'forensic' indicating 'the perfection...of the absolute redemption which is in Christ' (Du Plessis 1959:199; also Fee 1989:101-102; 1995:355-356). In these cases we can justly translate this term 'perfect'. In other cases (Col 1:28, 4:12) the maturity of the believer is in focus (Peterson 2000). In these cases, those who are *teleios* are actualising their true identity in Christ and are walking as true Christians. They are not something more than a normal Christian but rather a 'normal Christian'.<sup>2</sup> Maturity here is therefore not a result of a long process of sanctification, but the essential state of devotion and volition that is consistent with the nature of being in Christ. Thus Peterson (2000:193) comments on Colossians 1:28:

What is implied by *teleios* in the context of 1:28 is not some vague notion of 'spiritual growth' or 'moral progress', but actualization of redemption in Christ in personal and corporate Christian living. Paul's idea of maturity or perfection is to be understood in the light of his inaugurated eschatology.

The translation 'maturity' is good if it is understood in a qualitative and characterising sense not in a quantitative or progressive sense.<sup>3</sup> Thus Delling (1977b:77) concludes:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Du Plessis 1959:11-12. His book discountenances the notion that perfection is an individual attainment. This is a necessary corrective - but he leans too far into the wind.

<sup>2</sup> The *teleioi* in 1 Corinthians 2:6 'are correlative with the *pneumatikoi* as characterised in the subsequent verses; and the word must therefore be regarded as a universal Christian epithet' (Du Plessis 1959:180). Thus Paul says that he is 'revealing wisdom among people who are perfect'. These are those who do not live in a state of immaturity or without *telos* but are now complete and perfect in Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 4:12 'implies that they are already *teleio* and need to be kept that way, not that they need to make progress here and now' (Peterson 2000:194; Cf. Du Plessis 1959:203-204; Travis 1986:97-101).

'One does not find in the NT any understanding of the adjective [*teleios*] in terms of a gradual advance of the Christian to moral perfection nor in terms of a two-graded ideal of ethical perfection'. As we will note later, this 'perfection' finds subjective expression in 'the obedience of faith'.

When corporately considered, the sense of 'maturity' as a quantitative and qualitative process analogous to natural human development is found in Ephesians 4:13. This can be seen as the corporate attainment of individual maturity by the believers. It is the corporate equivalent to Paul's desire to present every individual mature in Christ (Col 1:28). Understanding the subjective side of this term as 'obedience' allows for a relative fluctuation along the line of authentic Christian experience – for there are some Christians and churches which are more authentic than others, some thus more obedient than others. Paul's desire, relative to church maturity, was that his converts 'move forward towards the ultimate encounter with Christ, when the perfection of Christ himself would be fully experienced by his people together' (Peterson 2000:200). It must be noted that Ephesians 4 is at pains to press home the fact that ultimate maturity is only attainable corporately. It is not a matter of individualism or even the aggregate of individuals living in obedience. There is a 'horizontal' dynamic that is intrinsically related to the nature of the Christian and the church and which communicates the grace of God to each member (Eph 4:16; Col 2:19).

When the historical church actualises its given perfection in Christ in yielded obedience, and attains to a mature man, then we believe she will be prepared for the Parousia of Christ.

#### **3.2.2.4. Obedient churches – the goal of the Pauline mission**

Recent research into the nature of the Pauline mission has shown that Paul's mission had three foci: (1) evangelism, (2) church planting, and (3) the nurturing of emerging churches. It is especially the last dynamic that is receiving renewed emphasis (Bowers 1987, 1991; Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001:161-201; Peterson 2000). According to Bowers (1987:193), Paul had,

one task, a task proceeding through preaching and converting to the founding of churches and through the founding of churches to their firm establishment. Circumstances permitting, the completion of such a task in one area took precedence for him over begetting such a task in a new area.

*Paul's task was only complete once he had established mature believing communities, a goal integral to his role in the divine economy.* Bowers (1987:197) believed that Paul understood his mission not simply as a broadcasting of seed but also a cultivating of seedlings into sturdy plants. All such endeavour is done within a salvation-historical context of mission (O'Brien 1995:38).

Recent study has also brought out the importance of the empirical obedience of the churches as an objective in the Pauline mission (Du Toit 1991; Garlington 1990, 1991; Peterson 2000:186-188; Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001:176-177). The Pauline term 'the obedience of faith' is the idiom mostly used by Paul to encapsulate this obedience. Yet his genitival construction has been variously interpreted. O'Brien (1995:59) interprets the phrase as 'faith's obedience' or 'believing obedience', and Fee (1995:233) as 'obedience that characterises true faith'.<sup>1</sup> According to Moo (1996:52), the two terms mutually interpret one another, although obedience seems to be the term that is more foregrounded, being the direct correlate to the Lordship of Christ. Peterson (:187) sees this phrase as Paul speaking in 'a shorthand way' having in view 'their conversion and the obedient lifestyle that flows from faith in Christ'. Moo (:53) proffers that 'the phrase captures the full dimension of Paul's apostolic task, a task that was not confined to initial evangelism but that included also the building up and firm establishment of churches'. Furnish's 'faith as obedience' (1968:185) tends to undifferentiate the two. Fee (:233) interprets the meaning of this Pauline idiom in terms of his whole letter of Romans:

For Paul *faith in Christ* is ultimately expressed as *obedience to Christ*, not in the sense of following rules, but of coming totally under his lordship, of being devoted completely to him. This is the only 'obedience' to his own words that Paul cares anything about.

Du Toit (:69) trenchantly notes that the,

collocation of faith and obedience...points unequivocally to the fact that, for Paul, the indicative and imperative belong together from the very beginning of the Christian life. The promise of the gospel and its demand coincide. In the gospel God gives us everything while at the same time, through this gift, He claims everything.

<sup>1</sup> Fee further notes the almost interchangeable way Paul uses 'faith' and 'obedience' in Romans. See 1:8, 'your faith is proclaimed all over the world' and 16:19 'your obedience is known to all'.

Garlington's seminal work on the Pauline motif of 'obedience of faith' (1990, 1991) showed how the concept 'gives voice to the design of the apostle's missionary gospel' (1990:201). In this small phrase lies a world of thought. He understands this term as an 'expression of the design of Paul's apostleship [and] also a delineation of the eschatological purpose of God: it is through Paul's preaching that Jesus, the king of Israel, takes the nations in captive obedience to himself (cf. Gen 49:10, Ps 2:8ff)' (1990:203). Thus Paul believed that *now* God was bringing his purposes to pass in salvation-history, with the result that 'Paul's commissioning...is to be viewed as nothing less than the eschatological activity of the eternal plan to create faith's obedience among the nations' (1990:205). As far as the meaning of this ambiguous term is concerned, he sees it as revealing the obedient character of faith (Rm 10:3). He sympathises with the genitive of apposition interpretation ('obedience which consists in faith', as Furnish) yet wants a more inclusive meaning that calls for the inseparability of doctrine and ethics, for: 'the obedience which consists in faith cannot be abstracted from the (ethical) obedience demanded by the gospel' (1990:208). He thus settles for an adjectival genitive: 'faith's obedience' (:222; cf. Du Toit 1991).

Garlington sees that in the OT, faith and obedience are one action (1990:210); and Paul in Romans wants to secure Christian obedience to the gospel in all its diversity (:212). This is a characteristic ethical attitude of Paul: Rm 2:8; 5:19; 6:12; 16:17; 1 Cor 14:34; 2 Cor 2:9; 7:15; 10:5, 6; Eph 6:1, 5; Col 3:18, 20, 22; Phlp 2:12; Phlmn 21 and Tt 2:5, 9; 3:1. All this once again shows that the gospel has a 'more comprehensive design than the conversion of non-Christians to the faith' (:212), being inclusive of ethical demands. In sum, the term 'obedience of faith' is an 'ambiguous phrase expressing two ideas at the same time: the obedience which consists in faith and the obedience which is the product of faith' (:222).<sup>1</sup>

Thus the obedience Paul looked for is not just related to the initial salvific act but is qualitatively related to an acceptable state of obedience, on a par with the idea of discipleship in Matthew 28:19-20.<sup>2</sup> It is most likely that Paul would only be totally

<sup>1</sup> Du Toit (1991:67) nuances the polemical undertones in the term. For him, the term underscores the integral role of obedience in the faith event, which includes cognitive, reactive and submissive diagnostic features.

<sup>2</sup> Detwiler (1995), influenced by Bowers, outlines Paul's ambition of seeking to establish a community of disciples from Acts 14:21-23. Köstenberger & O'Brien (2001:180) have also shown that Paul's idea of conversion to Christ meant incorporation into Christ and thus membership within a Christian community.

satisfied once all his churches were exemplifying the character of obedience and faith that was at work within the Philippian church. The grace of God at work in that church was publicised by Paul (2 Cor 8:1-5) and was hopefully to be mirrored in the other churches. To this end Paul laboured, until Christ was fully formed in his churches.

### 3.2.2.5 Paul and salvation-history

At the time of writing Romans, Paul had a firm sense of having satisfactorily completed one stage of his ministry to the Gentile world (Rm 15:17-19, 23a). The work had been brought to completion and a local and strategic 'obedience of the Gentiles' *had been secured* (15:18), a harvest having been gathered (1:13d) (cf. Bowers 1987; Moo 1996:892-896). Paul now feels released to venture into new fields.<sup>1</sup> He had 'fulfilled the gospel' from Jerusalem to Illyricum.<sup>2</sup>

On this strategic Pauline missiological term, Bowers offers a most cogent study, concluding:

When therefore Paul states that from Jerusalem to Illyricum he has 'fulfilled the gospel of Christ', it is a formulary equivalent of an affirmation that, within the range of territories specified, churches have been brought into being and firmly set on their way in 'in the gospel' (1987:198).

To understand this strategic salvation-historical point is crucial for this thesis, *for it provides an example and specimen of the actual possibility of the accomplishment of the mandate of Christ to preach and teach the gospel in all nations*. As noted, Paul's completion of his task in this region was attained once a satisfactory status of ecclesial obedience was evinced in his churches – i e, once they were mature churches. Taking

<sup>1</sup> Bowers (1987:192) comments, relative to 2 Corinthians 10:13-16: 'The possibility of a new Pauline missionary thrust in the future is tied directly to a prior development of faith in the existing Corinthian community...his concern over an already existing church takes direct precedence over his interest in initiating a new work'.

<sup>2</sup> In this article, Bowers provides a wide interpretation to Romans 15:19's 'fully proclaimed the good news of Christ', inclusive of ecclesial maturity. His thesis seems justifiable since Paul even 'preached the gospel' to an established church (Rm 1:15 and 16:25) (cf. Garlington 1990:212; Moo 1996:896; Peterson 2000:185; Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001:184). O'Brien (1995:36-43) has dealt exhaustively with this issue, concluding with thought similar to Bowers: Paul 'has in mind the whole range of evangelistic and teaching ministry - from the initial proclamation of the gospel to the building up of the believers and grounding them firmly in the faith (:64). Thus, Paul's ministry was both evangelistic and pastoral, conceiving and maturing Gentiles in the faith. By doing this, Paul 'fulfilled the word of God' (Col 1:25).

into account the studies of Bowers (1987, 1981), and our analysis of Romans 15:18-19, 2 Corinthians 10:1-6, and Philippians 1:3-11, it is reasonable to suggest that Paul believed his task was complete because his churches were brought to a mature and obedient state. He could now (at last) look to other fields. We believe that what Paul accomplished in the Mediterranean region will be analogously accomplished by the church on a global level. The church will 'fulfill the gospel of Christ' globally, prior to the End.

Given the *Naherwartung*, some scholars have shown how this accomplishment of Paul was crucial for the final ingathering of the Gentiles (Aus 1979; Munck 1959; Vena 1999). They have shown how Paul's local missionary work played a crucial part in the larger salvation-historical purposes of God, and how he saw himself expediting the imminent End through his Gentile mission. He was the end-time Elijah (Vena, *pace* Aus:326) who's work was to 'restore all things' before the Parousia. It is particularly in Romans 11:11-25 that Paul unfolds this process of the divine economy and his crucial role in it.

Munck (1959:42-55) has helped us understand the 'eschatological significance of Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles' (:41). According to Munck, Paul regarded himself as the one on whom the arrival of the Messiah depended and who was responsible for bringing in the 'fullness of the Gentiles' (:41, 43). Munck read Romans 11 with chapter 15, coming to significant conclusions. Paul had now finished his task in the East and was looking to more distant fields. His aim was to ensure a sufficient Gentile offering (Rm 15:16) that would be the crown of his work among the Gentiles (:51). This consummate offering is equivalent to the event of the 'fullness of the Gentiles' and is identical to 'the obedience of faith' in 15:18 (:51). Yet the complete obedience of the Gentiles had not been achieved and Paul aimed at Spain in hope that a further ingathering might precipitate the End. In the light of this concept of the offering of the Gentiles as a historic event anticipated in the days of Paul, Munck dislikes the traditional 'numerical' understanding of the term 'fullness of the Gentiles' (:47-49). For him, this is not a technical number for the elect but a term referring to the representative complement of the Gentiles. Paul's aim,

consists, not in the saving of a given number of people, but in the hearing of the Gospel by the Gentile world as a whole - in a representative form certainly; that means that it consists both in the preaching of the Gospel to them, and in their hearing and believing it. This fullness, which in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 24:14; Mk 13:10) precedes the last

phase of eschatological events and the manifestation of the Antichrist, is here conceived as what precedes the final salvation of the Jews.

The term *pleroma* is also found in Romans 11:12 in relation to Israel, acting as guide in our interpretation (:48). Linking the term with Paul's desire to 'fulfill the word of God' in Colossians 1:25 and 2 Timothy 4:17 ('so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it'), we see how in three contexts, *plerow* is used of the completion of the spreading of the Gospel among the Gentiles (:48). Paul had a distinct mission to 'fulfill' the word of God among all the Gentiles representatively. Once he had accomplished this, and the harvest of obedient Gentiles was offered to God, the end would come.

Aus' study (1979), follows in the direction of Munck. Also linking Romans 15:16 with 11:25, and believing that Paul expected the end in his own life-time, Aus believed that Paul brought representatives from the Gentile world to Jerusalem as an end-time event to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 66:19-20. He identifies Tarshish with Spain (:242-246), which was in those days seen as the 'ends of the earth', with the Straits of Gibraltar being the *non plus ultra* for ships. Paul thus believed that 'only when the most distant of all the nations mentioned in Isaiah 66:19...also sends its representatives to Jerusalem, will [his] collection enterprise...be truly complete' (:242).<sup>1</sup> Paul did all this in 'hope that his fellow Jews would thus become jealous enough of the Gentile's acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah to accept him also' (:235).<sup>2</sup>

Important for understanding the term 'fullness of the Gentiles', Aus directs us to the OT and Jewish tradition of 'Gentiles of all nations coming in the end-time to Jerusalem with their gifts' (1979:234).<sup>3</sup> Consequently, 'the "full number of Gentiles" in Rm 11:25 will only "come in" when Paul has brought Christian representatives from *Spain* to Jerusalem as part of his collection enterprise' (:234). Crucial for Aus is the concept of 'representative universalism' found in Jeremiah 3:14 (:257-260). For

<sup>1</sup> Hiers (1974:155) comments on Colossians 1:23: 'There is no evidence to suggest that Luke or the Church of the first century as yet suspected the existence of Gentiles living beyond the lands to the east and north of the Mediterranean. For Luke, the *oikodemene* was the Roman world: Lk 2:1; Acts 24:5 etc.' Thus the arrival of Paul in Rome is not inconsistent with *Naherwartung*.

<sup>2</sup> Aus (:251) parallels Isaiah 59:20-21 with Romans 11:26 and Isaiah 60:5 with Romans 11:25. He draws on Isaiah 66 for 'Isaiah 56-66...deals with the question of why God's final theophany promised in 40-55 did not take place' (:253). He noted the reversing of the OT picture, for there the Gentiles bring the Jews to Jerusalem, and here Paul (a Jew) is bringing the Gentiles to Jerusalem (:236-237).

<sup>3</sup> He understands the term 'the fullness of the Gentiles' in terms of its OT background and tradition (:233): 2 Apoc. Bar 234; 2 Esdr 2:38-41; Rv 6:11; 7:4; 14:1; Lk 21:24; Tob 14:5; Is 60:5. Cf. his bibliography on p 233.

him, this concept does not necessitate numerical sufficiency as much as sufficient numerical representation. This understanding is supported by Romans 11:25-26 where the 'full number' of the Gentiles is parallel to the 'fulness' of Israel (11:12c) and 'all Israel' of v 26 (:234). Therefore, the 'coming in' of the Gentiles (v 25) is interpreted by Aus (:251-252) in terms of,

the eschatological motif of the wealth (or a 'large number') of nations/Gentiles, who are to 'come in' to the city of Jerusalem. It is possible that the exalted Lord Jesus at his parousia may be thought to come from heavenly Zion in [Rm] 11:26, yet the full number of Gentiles for Paul are in fact to enter Zion at the time the Apostle accompanies the Gentile representatives of the churches founded by him, and the gifts they bring, to Jerusalem.

This is the reason for Paul's mission plans to Spain. 'It was the Apostle's hope that when this collection was complete, when representatives from *all* the nations mentioned in OT eschatological prophecy had been brought to Jerusalem, the Messiah would return, at which time *both* Gentiles and Jews would become worshippers of the Lord' (:242).

Munk and Aus have taken seriously the influence of *Naherwartung* on Paul's mission, 'eschatologising' the missionary activity of Paul (also Barrett 1988). They have helped us move away from the traditional numerical understanding of 'the fullness of the Gentiles' to one of 'corporate representation', and 'representative universalism'. This concept helps us understand the epochal significance of Paul's mission and how he spoke of the gospel as having been preached to *all the nations* during his lifetime (Rm 10:18; 15:26; Col 1:6, 23; 2 Tim 4:17). They have also ground the term ('fullness of the Gentiles') in a historical event, albeit in terms of a future epochal event in Paul's own historical mission. It seems preferable to presume that Paul's mission was a significant contribution towards securing the offering of 'the fullness of the Gentiles'. Although Paul sees his work as precipitating the End and epochal in terms of salvation-history, he never affirms that he will accomplish it all himself or that it will happen in his time. Paul's words in Romans 11:13-14 imply that he saw his ministry as *a part* of the renewal of Israel and not totally *the* event to trigger their fullness (*pace* Munk and Aus). Paul did know of other fields (= Spain) that were not within his sphere (cf. 2 Cor 10:13-18); thus the circle of 'all nations' is surely wider than Aus believes (cf. Motyer 1989:160). Moo (1996:692) deduces from 11:14 that Paul only seeks to win 'some of them' and not the whole *pleroma*;

suggesting that Paul does not see himself as the figure who will bring in Israel's fullness. Also, Romans 15:16 need not solely apply to Paul's ministry, but could be a generic statement of the gospel's affect upon all nations, both in the first century, throughout history, and particularly at the final climactic offering in the final generation. If so, this 'terminal offering' would have already had a 'first-fruits' and proleptic anticipation in Paul's local 'offering' of Gentiles in his Mediterranean mission (Rm 15:19; Ac 20:4; 21:17-19).

If we follow Munck and Aus and link the 'fullness of the Gentiles' with the agricultural image in 15:16, then Paul anticipated a *full Gentile harvest* to come in prior to the End.<sup>1</sup> Thus, taking the term as the Gentile equivalent of the term 'all Israel', Paul anticipates a period in history when the whole Gentile mission will reach a satisfactory state of completion, on a par with his own local mission (Rm 15:16-19). This state of completion will represent the whole Gentile world both through its broad numerical cross-section and its quality of obedient faith (thus qualitative and quantitative) (so Ridderbos 1997a:511). *It implies a sufficient representative number and quality of Gentiles from all nations.* In this way, 'all the Gentiles will be saved'. The cumulative numerical interpretation of 'the fullness of the Gentiles' (cf. Moo 1996:718-719) is mitigated by the Israelite correspondent 'all Israel' – for most believe that 'all Israel' (v 25) and the 'fullness of Israel' (v 12) connotes a corporate representation of her total historical identity (cf. Wagner 1988). It is not all Israel cumulatively being saved, but the turning to God in time of a sufficient complement of Jews. The sense is of a synchronic attainment (quantity and quality) rather than a diachronic numerical sense. The translation 'fullness' and 'full measure' carries the meaning well (so Delling 1977a:302; Dunn 1988b:655).

The term 'fullness of the Gentiles' is pregnant with positive connotations for the Gentile mission. In the context, the term refers to a 'critical mass' to be reached among the Gentiles which will have salvation-historical consequences for Israel. Paul anticipates a time when there will be a sufficient harvest of the Gentiles in its fullest sense. Once this historical event transpires (it is an *event* that triggers), it will provoke Israel and trigger 'life from the dead'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thus Bruce (1985:209): 'The bringing in of "the fullness of the Gentiles" is referred to by Paul later on as his "offering of the Gentiles".'

<sup>2</sup> The term 'life from the dead' is taken as approximating the resurrection from the dead at the Parousia. Contextually, Paul has in mind here something that: (1) precedes the 'fullness of the Gentiles'; (2) is a blessing beyond 'the reconciliation of the world'; and (3) and is also a blessing beyond the gradual

It does therefore not seem too far off the mark to see the term 'fullness of the Gentiles' in a rich and broad sense. The Greek image of 'fullness' connotes that of a ship loaded with its full complement of men and goods (Delling 1977a:283-311 *passim*). It suggests a completeness, both numerically and consummatory. The semantic connotations (see Dunn 1988b:655) could allow us to understand Paul's usage in Romans 11 as that of an *eventual* presentation to God of the 'fulfillment', 'restoration' and 'completion' of the Gentiles and the Jews in the sweep of salvation-history. We have here a qualitative and quantitative optimal realisation and completion of God's salvation of among the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup> Paul here uses the term '*pleroma*' to describe the Gentiles and Israel as *corporately representative entities as they exist at a particular point in time* (synchronic) (so Moo 1996:723). God's Gentile mission throughout the entire interadventual period (diachronic) will come to a glorious culmination point (synchronic). Thus in the context of Romans 11 there is an order of 'fulfillment' and 'restoration': first the *pleroma* of the Gentiles (v 25) and then the *pleroma* of the Jews (v 12). There is the reconciliation of the world on the one hand (11:15), and the salvation of all Israel on the other (11:25). *We link this fact to the Elijah mission of the church to restore all things before the coming of Christ.*<sup>2</sup> Thus we affirm with Ridderbos (1997a:511) that 'history cannot meet its end before this fullness has been reached'. The Gentiles will be presented to God as an offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit and living in the obedience of faith.

Finally, our theme of a glorious church in history is enriched through Romans 11. Here, as we have seen, 'Paul apparently thinks that the Jews, as they see the Gentiles enjoying the messianic blessings promised first of all to them, will want those blessings for themselves' (Moo 1996:688). Something glorious is to transpire in and

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conversion of the Gentiles through the Gospel. For a good case of this reading, see Moo 1996:694-696 and Wagner 1988:103-104. Also, Wagner (1998:95) seems right in emphasising that the mystery of v 25 has to do with the *manner* of Israel's salvation, the ways in which it will come about – which Paul startlingly links to the success of the *Gentile* mission.

<sup>1</sup> A simple numerical understanding of 'fullness' is incompatible with the idea of making Israel jealous and with the event-centeredness of Paul's salvation-historical thought.

<sup>2</sup> Vena (1999) interestingly casts Paul in the salvation-historical role of the expected Elijah tradition of Malachi 3:11 and 4:5-6. The typological similarities (rapture theme, persecution, zeal, restoration, Gentiles and remnant parallels) are suggestive of their connection. 'Just as Elijah's mission was to produce the reconciliation and restoration of Israel as the people of God before the day of the Lord, so also Paul understood his mission in similar terms: to achieve the conversion of the Gentiles and through it that of Israel before the Parousia'. This identification has been questioned by Aus (1979:236). Although many of Vena's assumptions *vis-à-vis* the Elijah tradition in the church are questionable, he/she helpfully links the Elijah tradition with Paul's mission.

through the Gentile church. Thus we also have here the Pauline equivalent to Matthew 28:18-20, where Jesus commands the disciples to make all nations (Gentiles) his followers. Once this has happened (i.e., the 'fullness of the Gentiles has come in') and a representative number is living in the maturity of discipleship, then we can expect the End to come (and Israel to be saved).

In conclusion of our Pauline study, we have observed how Paul saw his mission as that of founding and nurturing mature churches that would be acceptable to Christ at the Parousia. He laboured to keep his churches in a pure condition, intending to bring them into the maturity of the faith, that ultimate destiny of the whole church. He did this with an awareness of God's promise to ensure a blameless presentation of the believers on that Day. The apostolic endeavour was accomplished under the aegis of the promised end-time mission that was to characterise the last-days period and ensure salvation for the Gentiles. The Gentiles would be reached, and a representative number would be presented obedient to God on the Day of Christ's return.

### **3.2.3 The expectation of a mature church in other New Testament writings**

#### **3.2.3.1 Hebrews and Psalm 110**

The letter of Hebrews is a 'word of exhortation' designed to fortify the believers in their pilgrimage of faith, encouraging them to hold on to their initial confidence firm to the end (3:14; 5:11; 10:23). The writer holds out the goal of personal maturity (5:14; 6:1) as the object to be obtained, exemplified in the perfection seen in Jesus' earthly life (5:9). The *Naherwartung* is reason for persevering and meeting together (10:25), with the impending judgment providing an incentive for godly living (10:26-31). Due to the spiritual condition of the recipients, the writer does not hold forth any glorious ecclesial hope. Rather, he provides a key future salvation-historical anticipation relative to the world and the church: the submission of all Christ's enemies under his feet (1:13; 2:8; 10:12-13). In 10:12-13 we have a major element in the *Fernerwartung* and a rationale for the delay of the Parousia.

Psalm 110 was a favourite of the early church. It is alluded to or quoted some 33 times in the NT (Hay 1973:15), being 'an unusually apt vehicle for expressing the ultimacy of Jesus' (Hay:17). In the NT it has a multivalent application with no uniform meaning (see Hay 1973; Loader 1978).<sup>1</sup> The Psalm's popularity could be found in its representation of a priest-king showing 'how Jesus could be the Messiah although so different from the expected one' (Callon 1982:626). Besides the thorny issues of NT interpretation, the Psalm is used (though not predominantly) in the NT in a polemical way to substantiate eschatological delay (Hay 1973:36). When this is the case, the sitting implies a passive role of the king. The implication here in Hebrews 10 is that the period of waiting anticipates the completion of the Father's activity to submit all the Son's enemies to him. The present session of the inactive waiting of the priest/king is presented as the opposite of what will occur at the Parousia, where the Son (the appointed heir of all things (1:2)), will again resume the activity of reigning (1:6-2:18). Yet 10:13 clearly implies that *the Son-Priest will only assume his rule once all his enemies are put in the place of submission to him.*<sup>2</sup> As Priest, he does not engage in the warfare as yet nor submit the enemies to himself. Rather, he waits until they are presented to him as a gift by God, in fulfillment of God's promise 'to place all things in subjection under his feet' (2:8). Then will the Son receive his inheritance of 'all things' (1:2), and will come to rule 'the inhabited earth to come' (2:5). For this the High Priest eagerly waits, as do the believers for the return of the High Priest from the Holy Place (9:28) (= Parousia). Once the Father has accomplished his task, the waiting of both parties will be over.

Here then, we have the preparation of the world by the Father for the reign of the Son. Thus Justin Martyr, in his first apology (1979:178) comments on Ps 110:

<sup>1</sup> According to Hay, 'the early Christians chiefly employed the psalm to articulate the supreme glory, the divine transcendence of Jesus, through whom salvation was mediated. It was primarily used as a symbol not of his saving work but his ultimate status' (Hay:155). Hay sees references to a 'ruling activity' as extraneous to the common NT usage of the Psalm. Loader's study narrates the development in apostolic interpretation of this Psalm from an early understanding of Jesus' enthronement and an end-time pending Messianic judgment (sitting = no activity) to a fuller interpretation, built on the delay of the Parousia, where 'his being enthroned was linked with activities on behalf of his own' (:205). Loader gives more credit to the implications of Christ's active rule and present reign than Hay, although he puts this motif at the end of a process of interpretive development in the early church.

<sup>2</sup> *Pace* Berkouwer (1981:434) who interprets this Psalm as implying that 'Christ is portrayed as at the right hand "forever"'. Yet in both the contexts of Hebrews which mention this Psalm, the Parousia is the background idea (1:2, 6, 13; 9:28, 10:11-13). The temporal force of the verse also provides a rationale for the duration of the interadventual age (cf. Berkhof 1966:68).

And that God the Father of all would bring Christ to heaven after He had raised Him from the dead, and would keep Him there until He has subdued His enemies the devils, and until the number of those who are foreknown by Him as good and virtuous is complete, on whose account He has still delayed the consummation.

It is preferable to understand the whole era after the king's enthronement as coextensive with the process of the submission of all things under his feet, rather than it being something to happen immediately prior to the Parousia. However, the subjection of all his enemies does not happen *at* the Parousia (i e, *once* the Son rises to judge the world), for Psalm 110 and Hebrews 10:12-13 speak of the session of the king/priest *as inaugurating (or anticipating) a process to reach culmination at a certain point*. *Once* that objective has been accomplished, *then* the king/priest can take up his rule.

In Psalm 110, the thrust of the declaration in v 1 deals with the justification for the temporal and limited sitting of the king at God's right hand.<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word *ad* ('until') denotes the reason for and temporal condition of the sitting.<sup>2</sup> It also 'marks the final subjugation of the enemies as a turning point with which something else comes about (Ac 3:21; 1 Cor 15:28)' (Delitzsch 1982:190). Verse 2 can be seen as the consequent action of the king once his enemies are subject, i e, action not simultaneous with the sitting but to occur on the king's active day of wrath (v 5).<sup>3</sup> The 'staff being stretched forth by Yahweh, is nevertheless in the hand of the ruler, who is surrounded by enemies and has to maintain his dominion forcibly' (Booij 1991:397). Hill (1988:315) also understands v 5 and the 'shattering of kings' not as occurring on the coronation day "but on some future "day of his wrath".<sup>4</sup> Here we have *first* a passive coronation and *later* an activity of holy war; for the 'until I make' implies an

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed summary of OT scholarship on this Psalm, see Bateman 1992; Hill 1988:313-316; Johnson 1992:430.

<sup>2</sup> Booij (1991:407) prefers: 'Sit at my right hand *while* I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'. This underscores the present activity of Yahweh during the duration of the sitting rather than the termination point of that action. 'Until' still seems to capture the full sense of the Psalm's message.

<sup>3</sup> Thus Allen (1987:79) translates v 2 as future, 'your strong sceptre will Yahweh extend from Zion so that you rule over your enemies'. He then sees most of the action of Yahweh in vv 2-7 as action of Yahweh on the king's behalf as he sits serene and secure (:86). However, it seems more plausible to interpret this as action of the king who acts as God's representative in the holy war. In salvation-history, this latter action of the king (vv 2-7) could be theophanic and linked typologically to the Parousia. If so, this could explain the lack of use of this section of the Psalm in the NT.

<sup>4</sup> Hill (:315) interprets the action of the king here in two stages, one temporal, the other ultimate. He sees in Ps 110:2 'an exercise of regal power amid existing foes for a duration prior to their final crushing-under-foot'. But the focus appears to be on the final 'crushing' event and not a protracted period of war. Throughout, 'Yahweh is portrayed as a divine warrior who, as a helper at the sovereign's right hand, crushes his enemies' (Booij:403).

interval between enthronement and assumption of full authority' (thus Bateman 1992:450; Callon 1982:633; *pace* Delitzsch 1982).<sup>1</sup> Thus Johnson (1992) understands the genius of the Psalm to lie in a picture of a priest-king who is seated in a position of honour in spite of the continuing presence of his enemies, whom he will completely conquer at some time in the future. Thus the Psalm's three main features - the honour of the king (v 1a), the submission of his enemies (v 1b) and his active dominion over them (v 2) - are quite consistent with our interpretation of Hebrews 10:12-13. These dynamics also made it a vehicle helpful in understanding the nature of Christ's lordship at the right hand of God.

This Psalm, as used here in Hebrews, implies that Jesus will only return once all his enemies are under his feet, i e., until all things are restored and fulfilled (cf. Acts 3:21) (also Bruce 1988a:85; Davis 1986:32-33; Wescott 1974:315). D Turner (1989:93) quotes Thompson, who, based on 1 Corinthians 15:24-27, concluded similarly that the Parousia would come only when Jesus had subjugated all his enemies. Thompson expected Christ to execute such a state of affairs through his triumphant earthly church, in line with Revelation 12:10-123. For us, this submission need not imply the elimination of the enemies or their compliant behaviour, but their conditioning and configuring in preparation for the direct implementation of the judgment of God (so Psalm 110) (see sec 3.2.1.3). The historical and typological analogue to such a period of rule upon 'prepared enemies' is seen in the conquests of Joshua (Gn 15:16; Jos 1-12). Only once the iniquity of the Amorites was full, was Joshua able to 'rule over his enemies'. Likewise, a plausible reading of Hebrews 10:12-13 can imply that Christ will return to a world (and church) that has been prepared by God for his reign.

### 3.2.3.2 James

James opens with an appeal to individual maturity of faith (1:2-18). Here in chapter 1 the difficulties of the believers are interpreted as beneficially producing a 'full-blown character of stable righteousness' (Davids 1983:70). The impending Parousia critiques the lifestyle of the rich (5:1-6) and induces patience in the righteous (5:7-11). With the strong *Naherwartung*, the community is urged to be found pure and spotless on

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Callon:633-634 for Rabbinic interpretation in this regard.

that Day (Penner 1996:212).<sup>1</sup> No agenda for salvation-history is present, yet the imminent Parousia radically affects the nature of life for the community.

### 3.2.3.3 1 & 2 Peter

In 1 Peter the apocalyptic suffering of the believers aids us in our understanding of the expected nature of the church prior to the Parousia. Here we see that the trials of suffering reveal the genuine nature of the faith of the community (1:7 and 4:12). The difficulties experienced by the church extrude what is ultimately valuable and praiseworthy on that Day. Suffering in the flesh results in 'finishing with sin' (4:1), and a guarantee of a future participation in Christ's glory (4:13). In this way, judgment begins first with the household of God (4:17), for God intends to prepare his people for the coming kingdom. This preparation by God of the church can be linked to God's making all things ready for the return of the now seated Son. The end result of the suffering is articulated in 5:10, which summarises the intention of the entire letter (Goppelt 1993:364): 'And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace...will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you'. This could be eschatological but probably speaks of the positive result of suffering that God brings about. 'All four verbs must belong to acts of God on them *in this life*, while these sufferings would be still going on' (Alford 1958d:386; also Clowney 1988:218-219; Goppelt 1993:365). What supports this interpretation is that the Parousia is not directly mentioned, and here it is the metered sufferings themselves that have redemptive affect. Also, a parallel thought is found in 4:1-3, which clearly speaks of the blessings (in this world) once one has suffered. Suffering matures the believer and prepares him for the eschaton. The certainty of Peter's statement (like Paul's) is grounded in God's calling of the believers and his certain purifying and preparatory process. Given the *Naherwartung* and the emphasis on our 'calling to his eternal glory in Christ', the purifying process could also be seen as preparatory for a mature presentation at the Parousia.

In 2 Peter we have the classical diffusing of the earlier intense *Naherwartung*. The apocalyptic horizon seems postponed (Beker 1980:160) or rather subject to other

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bauckham (1993:326) for biblical and extra-biblical sources for the paraenetic tradition of the moral condition of believers and the Parousia.

factors ('that none might perish'). As in James, the letter opens with an elaborate appeal to maturity of character (1:2-11). Such character is consistent with the coming kingdom. Then the author responds to the 'delay' question by stating that God's time schematic is determined by his universal salvific intent (3:9). For the writer, the delay has a positive assessment, for it is 'an opportunity to secure, through repentance, the salvation which they might have missed if the Parousia had come sooner' (Bauckham 1983:327). This portion of Scripture (3:8-178) seems to explain the delay of the Parousia as rooted in God's desire for the mockers in the community to come to salvation. Rabali (1992:152) speaks of 3:3-13 as implying 'the need for holiness concerning the Christian community's whole life'. God delays the end so that the church could evince 'ethically clean actions which will be able to emerge through the fire of that Day' (:151-152); he is having mercy now so that such a scenario will happen (:149). Rabali nuances the upbuilding of the church as a prelude to the Parousia, and arrives at conclusions remarkably similar to that of this thesis:

The implication that when this task of being holy in every sphere is undertaken with diligence by the Christian community it thereby also will be shortening the period which divine patience has granted before and thus hastening the parousia, does not seem farfetched....The Christian community 'hastens' the Day of the Lord when it is diligently concerned for both *quantity* and *quality* with regard to all the tasks assigned to it. This underscores the primary importance of obedience to the instruction of the Lord; for obedience lies at the core of holiness (:154).

The Reality of the coming conflagration must induce holiness (3:11) and the desire to be found blameless on that Day (3:14-15). That God does delay the Parousia, reveals his creative will to ensure that such a condition will be attained.

#### 3.2.3.4 Jude

Jude 24-25 evinces the familiar aspects of parousial-preparation. God is able to make the believers mature ('kept from stumbling', 'blameless') *now*, with the result that they would be able to stand acceptable to God in the pending Parousia (cf. Bauckham 1983:122).<sup>1</sup> As with Paul and Peter, it is God who is able to ensure such an eventuality. If he is able to do it, he most assuredly will act to accomplish such an end.

<sup>1</sup> Bauckham (:122) links v 24 with a common background tradition, found in 1 Th 3:13, Col 1:22, Eph 1:4 and 5:27.

### 3.2.3.5 1 & 2 & 3 John

1 John is written so that the reader may not sin (2:1 and 3:5). The writer has confidence in the 'automatic' sufficiency of the anointing and the 'genetic' identity of the child of God, to ensure that they will not sin but will rather be led into all the truth. He thus desires that his readers be found 'abiding in Him' at the Parousia (2:28), resulting in a boldness (*parresia*) in the presence of the Lord (4:17). Looking to the Parousia and its transformational effects, focuses the believer and purifies his life as Christ is pure (3:2-3). Given the nature of John's theological confidence in the dynamics operative in the child of God, it would be entirely consistent for John to expect true believers to be 'abiding in him' on that Day.

### 3.2.3.6 Revelation

The book of Revelation begins and ends with ecclesial concerns. It presents us with a consummate symbolic representation of the church and her enemies. Although the Revelation's primary purpose is to symbolise 'a theocratic vision of the coming of God's universal kingdom, contextualised in the late first-century' (Bauckham 1995b:1), the vision given of the church is cast in a strategic manner as the means and manner of the establishing of that kingdom of God on the earth. God's eschatological purpose in the nations is achieved through the instrumentality of the sacrificed Lamb and his obedient followers. The book provides us with a victorious vision of the church, although the first three chapters warn the churches of the danger of spiritual, economic and political compromise. In chapters 21:9-22:5, we have the climax and one of the central motifs of the book: a glorious vision of the church of Jesus Christ, 'the bride, the wife of the Lamb' (v 9). This ecclesial focus can plausibly be seen as an, if not *the*, organising idea within the book, even though it is framed within a larger theological context.<sup>1</sup> Dispensational teaching effectively removed any ultimate historical function for the church (see ch 1). Many believed that the rapture had occurred in chapter four or at least prior to it (see Walvoord 1966:101-112 and Svigel 2001:28-29) and from then on the obvious references to God's people referred to Israel

<sup>1</sup> Mathers (1944:13) sums up the theological essence of the book in the two verses: 'the Lord God Almighty reigns' (19:6) and 'be faithful to death and I will give you the crown of life' (2:10).

and not to the church.<sup>1</sup> Svigel (:25-53) mentions 3:10, 4:1-2, 7:9-17, 11:11-19, 14:14-16 and 19:11-20:6 as proposals for the rapture of the church in the book. He trenchantly notes that 'without first proving the pretribulation rapture, pretribulationists cannot legitimately appeal to the absence of the church in Revelation 4-18 as implying the rapture' (:33). It is clearly an assumption in the light of which the Scriptures are read.<sup>2</sup>

One's interpretation of the symbols and overall structure is crucial for understanding the message of the book and the way that these relate to the books ecclesiology. Svigel provides us with an equitable hermeneutic for understanding Revelation:

John does not see the actual events themselves, nor does he see a chronological, real-time unfolding of symbolic representations. Rather, like the OT apocalyptic literature (Zch and Dn etc) he sees episodes, one after another, arranged in a heavenly-designed order, with interludes, parentheses, reviews, and previews, through various forms of media. Thus a strict chronological approach to Revelation is not easily maintained; neither is the notion that John is seeing the future as it will actually be. Rather, he is viewing a symbolic representation of that future.

If we consistently hold to a symbolic interpretation of the book's images and words, then we notice the pivotal role the church plays in the ultimate historical destiny of the world. The Revelation's 'multi-media' images and apocalyptic features of audition and vision do not present the future reality directly and although they predict literal events, the descriptions do not portray the events literally.<sup>3</sup> Stressing the referential level of symbolism, Charles (1920) emphasises that 'the Apocalypse is not to be treated as an allegory, but to be interpreted in reference to definite concrete kingdoms, powers, events, and expectations' (:cxxxiii). The 'analogical skill' in interpreting

<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, this is the exact opposite of the Tyconium interpretation of Revelation that understood most of Revelation in relation to the Church (cf. Daley 1993:127-131).

<sup>2</sup> Gundry's book (1974) is a polemic for the posttribulationist view. The key 'rapture' Scripture used by dispensationists is Rv 3:10. In response Gundry (:57) wisely concludes: 'It would be sheer sophistry to say that the Church will be removed immediately upon entrance into the hour, for then the keeping will last only for an instant and the promise becomes devoid of real meaning'. Also Beale 1999:289-292.

<sup>3</sup> Beale (1999:53) helpfully enumerates the seven levels of communication in Revelation's symbolic genre: the linguistic level; the visionary level; the referential level; and the symbolic level. The referential level consists of the particular historical identification of the objects seen in the vision. The Achilles heel of Beale's book (and the idealist school) is his neglect of the historical-referential denotation of the book's symbolism. Thus he says 'no specific prophesied historical events are discerned in the book, except for the final coming of Christ' (:48). His flaw is surfaced in this fact: he would be consistent with his interpretation of the book if he interpreted the Parousia also ahistorically, as he does in 1:7.

metaphorical language is to draw the line between the univocal elements and equivocal/discontinuous elements of the figurative representations. Because of this difficulty, modern interpreters tend to play down a detailed exegesis and emphasise the *Gestalt* of the revelatory images. Yet to avoid historicity is to forget that the Revelation narrates events that must yet take place relative to the first century (1:1) – a point nuanced by the most preterist, historicist and futurist schools of interpretation.

There are basically five ways of reading Revelation: contemporary-historical (preterist); tradition-historical (literary approach); historicist; futurist; and idealist (Kromminga 1945:293-294; Kvanvig 1989; Beale 1999:44-49). The structure and plan of John's apocalypse taken in this thesis will be substantially that of Aune (1997), Charles (1920:clxxxiii-clxxxvii), Ladd (1983) and Mounce (1998:24-30).<sup>1</sup> With Aune (:xciii) and Charles (1920:xxii) we see the visions of the book 'constitut[ing] a single chronological narrative of the eschatological events that will soon begin to unfold'.<sup>1</sup> We follow the (Semitic) consecutive view of Gundry (1974:73-77), who understands the seventh announcement of the seals, trumpets and bowls to proleptically introduce us to the End, the contents of which are the course of the following sequence. This viewpoint disputes the recapitulationist approach (Beale 1999, Victorinus of Pettau 270 CE), both on literary (Aune:xciii) and theological grounds (Charles:1:xxii). We believe that the contents of Revelation thus deal predominantly with an impending crisis that will overtake the world, involving a traditional program of apocalyptic events (as in Daniel).

We consider the preterist and futurist hermeneutic as furnishing us with interpretive keys that do justice to both the *sitz im leben* of the churches in chapter 2-3 and the fuller eschatological dimensions (the 'unfulfilled eschatological excess', Bauckham 1995b:152). This approach is in keeping with the genius of biblical prophecy, which often has a dual referent in each composite prophecy: the imminent historical and the distant eschatological (Ladd 1981a:320-236; see also sec 2.1.5). Bauckham (:152) reminds us that,

<sup>1</sup> Beale calls this 'modified futurism' (1999:47). Beasley-Murray (1983) has a close affinity with the above, yet believes that the seals, trumpets and bowls represent similar successive time periods of the expected future tribulation. For an exhaustive review of the issues, see Beale 1999:108-151. In this work the seals are interpreted as parallel to Matthew 24:4-8, i e, events of the interadventual period preceding the final terminal epoch (thus Ladd and Mounce).

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Charles (:xxiv) understands chapters 2-3 as posing the problem of the book, i e, how to reconcile God's righteousness and Christ's redemption with the condition of His servants on earth.

biblical prophecy always *both* addressed the prophets' contemporaries about their own present and the future immediately impending for them *and* raised hopes which proved able to transcend their immediate relevance to the prophets' contemporaries and to continue to direct later readers to God's purpose for their future.

We concur with Charles (1920) that the visions 'relate to contemporary events and to future events so far as they arise out of them' (:clxxxiii). Yet because of the redemptive-historical nature of the NT eschatology (its *inauguration* of the end-times), the historicist school and the idealist school all contribute important aspects. The church-age *is* the end-time age and is for this reason characterised by eschatological events (Beale 1999). We can thus partially agree with Beale (:48) who says that 'the majority of the symbols in the book are trans-temporal in the sense that they are applicable to events throughout the "church-age"'. (For an integration of the interpretive viewpoints - an 'eclecticism' (Beale:48) - see Diagram 2). Depending on the position taken, the interpretation of the apocalyptic numbers of 1260 days, 42 months and 3.5 years will reflect prior hermeneutical commitments. We will take them as *primarily* referring to the final generation and the last-days of that period immediately prior to the Parousia (see 4.2). They are not coextensive with the church-age (as Beale) but refer to a unique apocalyptic period in history that will witness the intensification and condensation of the characteristic elements of the entire church-age period. The number is 'the conventional period in apocalyptic literature for the temporary triumph of evil before the end of the age' (Mounce 1998:215, quoting Bratcher and Hatton).

The main historical focus of the book appears to relate to future events of world history, events that crystallise and intensify forces at work throughout the entire church-age and particularly in the first century. If this is so, Revelation presents, in pictorial and imaginative form, the following: *a symbolic representation of the apocalyptic judgment of God on the Satanic kingdom of this world and the triumph of the saints of the Lamb (during that period) who are rewarded with the inheritance of the kingdom of this world*. During this time of apocalyptic wrath (6:17) - 'the hour of testing which is to come on the entire world' (3:10) - the redeemed are represented as being part of a victorious group (14:1-5) who conquer through their suffering as they maintain the witness of Jesus in the face of the lie of the Antichrist. The message of Revelation is thus essential to this thesis, *for it presents the most patent affirmation of*

a glorious church that will be ready for the return of Christ at the end of the age. Through the suffering and tribulation, the church will be purified and prepared to meet the bride-groom.<sup>1</sup> We will now look at the major sections and images that portend the church's glorious future.

### a) The churches

In chapters 2-3 we have the risen Christ addressing his church prior to the coming world conflagration. Chapter 1 records the 'ecclesial' Christophany of the Son of Man, who comes to judge and restore his church. Beale (1999:181-222) has shown that this theophany of Christ is directly related to the prophetic vocation of his bond-servants. He notes that the believers have been constituted kings together with him and share in his priestly vocation (1:6) by virtue of their identification with his death and resurrection (:192). They have been called to spiritually fulfill these offices by being faithful witnesses through mediating Christ's priestly and royal authority to the world (:193). But in this particular mode of the kingdom, the exercise begins and continues only as one faithfully endures tribulation (:201). So, in the theophany, Christ appears in a form allusive to Daniel 7, a figure who was a corporate representative of the saints with respect to both suffering and ruling (:201). He is presented to the churches as a judge, whose kingship primarily concerns his rule over the church (:205-206). 'If the churches do not maintain their role as priestly kings by faithfully witnessing to "the testimony of Jesus" in the face of suffering, then they will be judged by Christ' (:206). Beale also highlights that, as priest Christ comes to tend the temple lampstands (lamps = synecdoche = temple = church). He 'tends the ecclesial lampstands by commending, correcting, exhorting, and warning...in order to secure

<sup>1</sup> The pretribulation rapture view is untenable for the book of Revelation. Besides a questionable exegesis of 3:10, there is no intimation that the churches addressed in ch 2-3 are to be absent throughout the proceeding events. No mention is made of a rapture or aerial levitation of the church prior to the final period. It would also be superfluous to send this letter to the churches if they were not expected to go through the narrated events - it is far more than mere 'academic' interest for the church. Why bother to 'calculate the number of the beast' if it is irrelevant to the church, the audience addressed; 'the book of Revelation becomes an anachronism under pretribulationists' (Gundry 1974:69). The rapture *has to be read into the book by pretribulationists*, for without it, the whole doctrine of 'any-momentism' falls under the futuristic weight of the events pre-recorded. Finally, is not the rapture view directly opposed to Jn 17:15: 'I do not ask you to take them out of the world...?'

the churches' fitness for service as lightbearers in a dark world' (:209). So here we have the principle that judgment begins with the house of God.

Looking at the nature of the judgment of Christ on his churches (2:23), we see that he is promising to act on each church in judgment or deliverance, all to ensure the faithful witness of his communities. Christ accomplishes his purifying of the church through individual 'comings' (3:20) and ecclesiastical 'comings' (2:5,16; 3:3) (Beasley-Murray 1951:40). In the light of these 'comings' of Christ in pre-parousial judgment, the cleansing action is best interpreted as occurring prior to the impending judgment. By tracking the work of Christ on his church in the book, we can notice the transformation the church undergoes throughout the book. 'The book opens with the Church in all the empirical mixture of good and evil which her history exhibits; it closes with the Church in her eternal perfection and glory' (Kromminga 1945:338). In light of the bridal motif, encompassing the beginning and end of the letter, Bauckham (1993:167) notes that 'the general unpreparedness for the Lord's coming at Ephesus, Pergamum and Sardis, contrasts with the Bride's ardent prayer for the Bridegroom's coming (22:17)'. The Son of Man will first accomplish an 'internal work' in his church before he accomplishes the 'external' work in the world. He prepares his people to ensure a faithful presentation to himself on that Day.

## b) The 144 thousand

Prior to the wrath of God (trumpets and bowls), John is allowed a glimpse of the 144 thousand in chapter 7 (see Beale 1999:416-423 for various views). The number symbolises the 'completeness and magnitude' of the church (Aune 1966:143), where the 'Christians are portrayed...under the OT guise of the true people of God, the true Israel' (Beale:418; also Beasley-Murray 1983:140).<sup>1</sup> It symbolises the church of God in its final comprehensiveness. As far as their temporal identification is concerned, we side with Mounce (1998) who views them as 'the entire company of faithful believers who have just come through the final period of testing' (Mounce:164). 'It is not a timeless picture of the church which is here given [so Beale:412-413], but a

<sup>1</sup> That this chapter refers to the church is corroborated by 21:12 where the gates of the new Jerusalem are named after the twelve tribes of Israel. Bauckham (1995b:76) nuances the aspects of military mustering, casting the 144 000 as an army of martyrs under the leadership of the Lion of Judah. This 'image of the Messianic war describes the whole process of the establishing of God's kingdom as Revelation depicts it' (:70). See also Longman & Reid 1995:185.

representation of the Church in the climax of history' (Beasley-Murray:140). Here John shows the protection of the church from the wrath of God (vv 1-3), standing on the threshold of the dawn of the divine wrath. This posttribulation/futurist view interprets this chapter in terms of the protection of all the people of God of the last generation during the terminal *kairos* of divine wrath (thus Gundry 1974:80, *mutatis mutandis*). Although protected so that the wind of God's wrath should not fall on them, they still suffer during this period (7:14, 16-17; see Gundry 1974:49-51). This whole process of going through the tribulation results in the washing of their robes in the blood of the Lamb (7:14), which points to an identification of the saints' endurance with that of Jesus' own suffering (Beale:436). Those who compromise soil their garments (3:4) but those who endure the suffering are given white robes (6:9-11). These 'garments represent preparedness and acceptability' (Batey 1971:57), and suggest the pre-nuptial preparation of the bride. 'The tribulation has refined their faith. It has tested them, and their perseverance through trial has proven their faith as genuine' (Beale:436).

### c) The two witnesses

In chapter 11 we have the image of the two witnesses.<sup>1</sup> As chapter 7 provided us with an ecclesial interlude and proleptic preview, so 11:1-13 does something similar. In vv 1-2 we have the topic theme: the church (holy city, new Jerusalem) will be the object of suffering and persecution during this period. Yet during this period of suffering God will grant invincible authority and power to his two witnesses, to believers who are 'measured' and protected. Even though some are martyred during this period (as Jezebel had killed many prophets of the Lord (1 Ki 18:4)), the Lord will ensure that a remnant of his people is preserved to witness to the truth (as Elijah was spared) (see 13:10).

Here in vv 1-2, the outer court is 'the physical expression of the true, spiritual Israel which is susceptible to harm' (Beale 1999:558). That the two witnesses

<sup>1</sup> For a good survey of the issues, see Beale 1999:557-609 and Aune 1998:577-632.

represent the *church* during this final period of world history, is evinced by their identification as the lampstands (11:4 = 1:20) (so Bauckham 1993:285; 1995b:85).<sup>2</sup> Moses and Elijah were prophets who confronted the world of pagan idolatry, thus setting the precedent for the church's prophetic witness to the world (Bauckham 1995b:85). As *two* witnesses, the validity of their testimony is guaranteed. They are given great authority and immunity from death (vv 5-7). 'Verse 7 shows that the "measuring" in vv 1-2 guarantees the successful completion of the church's witnessing task' (Beale:587). The picture of the church is of a victorious, witnessing community endowed with the power of God for her task. Once this witness is complete, the church will experience the wrath of the Antichrist in his final attempted pogrom (11:7). With this terminal suffering, the church, like Christ (Lk 22:96, 'from now on' and Jn 13:31, 'now is the Son of Man glorified'), begins her most glorious hour and her climb to the throne.

#### d) The dragon and the church

The identity of the woman in chapter 12 is best taken as an image of the ethnic community Israel.<sup>1</sup> The dragon persecutes both her (Israel), her son (Christ) and the brothers of the child (church). Yet they overcome the dragon (v 11), the beast, the mark of his name and the false prophet.

In 12:9 we have the casting down of the dragon which is predicated upon the overcoming of the saints in v 11. His ejection from heaven seems linked to his prosecutorial function. The one who 'accuses them before God day and night' is no longer employed. We believe that the reason is found in the empirical state of the church at that time. His role of accuser becomes redundant due to the spiritual

<sup>2</sup> Wong (1997) identifies three interpretive approaches regarding the identification of the witnesses: symbolic, corporate and literal. He favours the literal (with Walvoord 1966; Ladd 1983; Svigel 2001:38); 'two persons, presently unknown, who will minister in the spirit and power of Moses and Elijah in the future tribulation period' (:347). However, the clear association of the measuring in vv 1-2 and the identification of the two witnesses as 'the two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth' (v 4), emphatically denotes their figurative and non-literal representation. The burden of proof rather lies with the literalists (*pace* Svigel).

<sup>1</sup> This interpretation seems to fit best (cf. Svigel 2001:53-74) with the unity of the narrative context. Contextually, we observe that the dragon turns *from* persecuting the woman in vv 13-17 *to* persecute the rest of her children. He thus cannot touch the woman but he can touch her children. If they are the same entity merely narrated under different theological images, the logical and narrative sense is undermined. Also, if the woman was the church, the imagery suggests that the church gives birth to the Messiah.

condition of the church. This interpretation is supported by the fact that: (1) the dragon is referred to in terms that describe his relationship to the believers ('adversery', 'slanderer'); (2) for the entire church-age to be without the accuser of the brothers is contrary to the parallel sense of vv 10 and 11 (here the 'brothers' are NT believers who have undergone a change in judicial status); (3) the condition of the church in v 11 is consistent with the presentation of the church in Revelation 6-19; and (5) to characterise the entire church of all ages in the description of v 11 is problematical. We thus identify with some futurists who believe Satan's expulsion occurs at the beginning of the final tribulation preceding Christ's second coming (Walvoord 1966:192; Glasson, quoted in Beale 1999:658). If this casting down of Satan is an event in salvation-history in the latter part of the interadventual age, then that event could well be synchronised with the ultimate obedience of the church.

#### e) The virgins

The purity and victory of the church in the final period is also graphically depicted in chapter 14:1-5. This is juxtaposed with the spiritual predicament of the churches found in chapters 2-3. Within the narrative, we are in a future time when mankind is divided under two allegiances, signified by the seals (cf. Beasley-Murray 1983:140). The virgins' spiritual purity and fidelity mitigates against a broad interpretation (all in the church-age), for the church here is 'ethically blameless' (Mounce 1998:268). These are the ones who 'have kept themselves pure from all defiling relationships with the pagan world system. They have resisted the seductions of the great harlot Rome with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication (17:2)' (Mounce:267). Most commentators understand this body to be the entire body of the redeemed (Mounce; Beasley-Murray; Beale). Bauckham (1993:229-232) identifies this body as an army of martyrs who in the end-period are faithful witnesses to the point of death. We take this as a portrayal of the 'bond-servants' of the Lamb, the church, during a future epoch, *who will consummately actuate the nature of the one Christian church*. It is the church corporately and spiritually considered in the final terminal period. That this body is the *church*, enables all saints to identify with these people; that this body is the *terminal* church, introduces the ideal condition of this body to be realised in the last epoch.

## f) The prepared bride

The church in 19:7 and 21:2 is described as a bride who has made herself ready. Bauckham (1993:167-168) shows how this eschatological image contrasts with the empirical ecclesial reality in chapters 2-3. The bride, as an eschatological reality, calls the churches to identify with Christ 'if they are to take their place at the eschatological nuptial banquet' (:167).<sup>1</sup> All the churches are thus called to become the bride as portrayed in Revelation, the bride that will be pure and ready at the Parousia. She is as the church will be at the Parousia, 'ready for his marriage, arrayed in the fine linen of righteous deeds. The Bride is thus the church seen from the perspective of the *parousia*' (Bauckham:167).

The words of 19:7-8 presage the imminent Parousia of Christ, and announce the meeting and wedding between a pure bride and a victorious groom (cf. Ps 45). The church has come through the world's travail with success and is now prepared to rule for a 1000 years. If we take a sequential view of Revelation (Charles, Aune, Ladd, Mounce) and not one of continuous recapitulation (Beale), then this angelic statement is announced immediately prior to the Parousia (19:11-16). The church is hereby announced ready for the wedding and banquet; her prenuptial preparation having been completed. This occurs within time and history prior to the consummation, at which time she is portrayed in antithetical comparison with the harlot Babylon and her immorality.<sup>2</sup> Her personal beauty is added to with the linen clothing, described as the 'righteous acts of the saints' (v 8). The reward of white clothes 'convey[s] the idea of *purity resulting from a test of persevering faith*' (Beale 1999:936). Fekkes (1990) understands the fine linen of the bride as a metaphor for the righteous deeds and her bridal adornments as 'collectively emblematic of the spiritual fidelity and holy conduct of those in the churches who overcame...for everything that the bride could do to prepare herself had to be done before the parousia, as the exhortations of the

<sup>1</sup> 'The Bride is the church in her eschatological splendour arrayed in the righteous deeds of the saints and ready to be joined to her Lord' (Batey 1971:64). Batey sees the bride theme, as found in both Revelation and Paul, as an apocalyptic image (:64). Such 'nuptial imagery' is also 'used as a means of inspiring loyalty and devotion' (:64). Further, according to Fekkes (1990:283) 'nuptial imagery is at the heart of John's evocation of the New Jerusalem'.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Fekkes (1990) for a good comparison between these two *dramatis personae*. According to Miller (1998:302), as Babylon rules over the earth, so the picture of the bride of the Lamb 'depicts a church that, as the Lamb's eschatological bride, is united with the Lamb in exercising God's rule, and that this union begins with the struggles of the churches of this age for victory over evil'. It is therefore a nuptial reign.

seven letters make clear' (:287).<sup>1</sup> Thus 'when in 19:7 John announces that the bride "has prepared herself" it is logical to suppose that included in that preparation is not only the fine linen wedding gown of 19:8 but also the bridal trappings of 21:18-21' (Fekkes:285). Also, the eternal beauty of the city, depicted in 21:10-22:5, 'reach[es] back from the future into the present and serve[s] as a symbolic testimony to the faithfulness of the earthly community' (Fekkes:286-287). Fekkes thus helpfully links chapters 2-3 with the presentation of the church in 19:6-22:4:

The eschatological union of the bride (19:7-9, 14, 21-22) and bridegroom (19:11-12; 20:4-6) consummates the relationship between Christ and his church first portrayed in Rev 1-3, which begins with a vision of Christ adorned (1:12-20), followed by his admonitions to the church to prepare herself for his appearing (chapters 2-3). Her *successful preparation* [italics mine] ends the difficult period of engagement and occasions the joyous announcement: the marriage of the Lamb has come (Rev 19:7b) (:287).

Beale (:934) relates the preparation of the bride to the Babylonian dominion on earth: 'Babylon's oppression and temptation was the fire that was ultimately used by God to refine the saints' faith to prepare them to enter the heavenly city'. Thus the theme of ecclesial preparation is consummated in this book, the climax of prophecy, for here in 19:7-8 the time of the marriage is synchronised with the preparation of the bride. Christ the Groom comes for a bride who is finally ready to meet him.

If one understands the book of Revelation through a modified futurism, the book presents us with the ultimate picture of a glorious church prior to the Parousia. In the final period, she will successfully endure as she follows the Lamb and resists the allurements of the global world-system. In this way she adorns herself with her eschatological glory and prepares herself for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Although not all the NT writings explicitly mention the end-time completion of the church's internal and external mission, they all present us with a substantially optimistic and hopeful ecclesial picture. As the early church gazed at the horizon of their future, they saw the Parousia as the limit of their 'immediate' horizon, also expecting certain events to transpire between their 'now' and that 'then'. Yet they were assured by various letter writers that the sufferings they were already experiencing were spiritually beneficial and were tailored by God to prepared them for the coming

<sup>1</sup> The preparation of the bride, the formal wedding announcement, the marriage supper, the guest invitation, as well as her clothing and ornamentation in Rv 19, all reflect contemporary wedding customs among the royalty and affluent (Fekkes 1990:284). For parallels between Joseph and Aseneth, see Fekkes:284-286.

kingdom. Their sovereign God was lord of history and was using all things, including their sufferings and enemies, for the grand cosmic purpose of presenting the church as a spotless bride to his beloved Son.

... crucial issue of the nature and completeness of the church's mission. Firstly, certain temporal factors need to be posited. It has been argued that the church will corporately attain its mature identity prior to the Parousia. This collective obedience may be both cumulative and instantaneous; both process and periodic. We believe that the whole process of ecclesial maturity will climax prior to the Parousia and inaugurate the final days of world history. We believe that at some point in the future, the various and complementary ministries of the church will be brought to their mature consummation.

What is expected to be collectively attained may depend on a number of factors, including the nature of the church during the course of church history. We find that Paul viewed the church (singular) as incomplete, though some parts were already fully attained at various times. The seven churches of Revelation, though they are churches, are more pure and others are less pure (cf. Graham, 1974: 176-177). Some churches receive approbation (Smyrna and Philadelphia), whilst others receive rebuke (Ephesus, Laodicea, etc.). Their ecclesial advancement depends on the ongoing activity of the Head of the church in bringing all the churches into the condition of a fully responding to Christ in their circumstances. Also, although each church is a distinct entity and Christ acts upon each in diverse ways, we believe that the church as a singular entity is an ecclesial unity and prepares the world for the return of the Son of Man who will be our Judge in what the Spirit has spoken in the church, and also in the symbolic number of seven churches which speak of Christ's witness to the church as a whole. Although there are processes in the world (the royal who has no end, whose dominion is the Son of Man, etc.) concerned with the state of the corporate identity.

We have seen already that Paul had more joy over some churches than others (Corinthians and Philippians). Each church Paul wrote to was in a different temporal/spiritual condition and he tailored his pastoral and apostolic response accordingly. Some required strong medicine (Colossians), whilst others, cordial exhortation (Philippians). Yet the goal of each was the same: obedience to God's effective witness to Christ, surfacing in his church (Lindbeck, 1976). Toward this end, Paul's apostolic authority was given (2 Cor 10-13) and by this reason all his actions were

### 3.3 The anatomy of a mature church

Here we must briefly deal with the crucial issue of the nature and complexion of the mature church. Firstly, certain temporal factors need to be posited. It has been argued that the church will corporately attain to a mature stature prior to the Parousia. This collective obedience can be both cumulative and climactic, both process and periodic. We believe that the whole process of ecclesial maturity will climax prior to the Parousia and inaugurate the final days of world history. We believe that at some time in the future, *the various and fragmentary diachronic process will culminate in a collective synchronic attainment.*

What is expected to be collectively attained may have, to a relative degree, been attained by some churches during the course of church history. Within that process of Christ bringing his church (singular) to completion, there have been degrees of maturity attained at various times. The seven churches in Revelation show that some churches are more pure and others are less pure (cf. Grudem 1994:873-887). Some churches receive approbation (Smyrna and Philadelphia) whilst others censure (Ephesus, Laodicea *et al*). These ecclesial admonitions witness to the ongoing activity of the Head of the church in bringing all the churches into the condition of faithfully witnessing to Christ in their communities. Also, although each church is at a different stage and Christ acts upon each in diverse ways, yet he does so *according to his singular mutual intent to maintain, purify and prepare the whole.* This is seen in the refrain, 'let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches', and also in the symbolic number of seven churches which speaks of Christ's work in the church as a whole. Although there are promises to individuals ('let anyone who has an ear', 'whoever conquers') the Son of Man is clearly concerned with the state of the corporate identity.

We have seen already that Paul had more joy over some churches than others (Corinthians and Philippians). Each church Paul wrote to was in a different empirical spiritual condition and he framed his pastoral and apostolic relation accordingly. Some required strong medicine (Galatians) whilst others cordial exhortation (Philippians). Yet the goal of each was the same: obedience to and effective contact with Christ, surfacing in 'live orthodoxy' (Lovelace 1979b). Toward this end, Paul's apostolic authority was given (2 Cor 10-13) and for this reason all his actions were

inclined toward the efficacious accomplishment of this goal. Therefore in the light of Paul's letters and Revelation 2-3, it is plausible to deduce that throughout church history, certain ecclesial groups have been more faithful in actuating the true nature of the church than others.

The ecclesial hope of this thesis is the collective attainment of what has been partially experienced by various church bodies through church history. Yet *all of God's people in a mutual state of maturity, is the ecclesial hope of the NT*. Ultimately, this accomplishment is grounded in the work of the Triune God and in the church's genetic nature; the maturity is potentially present by virtue of *who* sustains the church and *what* her given identity is. For this reason, Paul qualifies the church as *being subject* (present indicative) to Christ (Eph 5:24), thus guaranteeing the completion of the process. This submissive nature of the church is so axiomatic that Paul uses this fact as the spiritual example of how wives should be toward their husbands. Given this axiom and the power of the love of Christ, it is logical to expect a completion of this work of Christ relative to its historical unfolding. We now turn to those primary features that characterise a mature church.

### 3.3.1 Ecclesial obedience and discipline

The collective obedience of the church is the objective of the majority of the ecclesial letters.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the NT is primarily ecclesial in focus and salvific in intent (cf. Wimbush 1995:43-45). The NT can be seen as an extended exhortation for the church to actualise its given identity in Christ (see Peterson 2000; Bowers 1987).

This obedience of the church - that subjective ecclesial mode of being - is spelled out in all the injunctions and exhortations of the NT. It was historically demonstrated in the life of Jesus, Paul and many others. In Revelation, the idiom 'the faith of Jesus' occurs frequently, primarily meaning 'the witness which Jesus bore to God during his life on earth and to his faithfulness in maintaining his witness even at cost of his life' (Bauckham 1995b:72). The apostle Paul also exhorted his churches to emulate his own faith and life. The obedience needed for ecclesial maturity is seen in particular in Ephesians 5:21-33. Here, 'the dominant characteristic of the church...is her

<sup>1</sup> For example: Rm 1:5; 15:18; 16:26; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 2:9; 7:15; 10:1-6; Eph 5:24; Phlp 2:12.

submission to her Lord, Christ. She is consistently portrayed as being subject to him and the recipient of his actions on her behalf' (Sampley 1971:153). This obedience is the corollary of the headship of Christ, which Batey (1971:25) interprets in terms of the sovereign lordship of Christ over his body. As we have seen, the phrase 'the obedience of faith' is Paul's 'shorthand way' of speaking of his converts' conversion and the obedient lifestyle that flows from faith in Christ.<sup>1</sup> It is particularly in 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 that we have a clear witness of the appeal for obedience in the church (cf. Furnish 1984:499) and a hint at its consequence.

The purpose of Paul's gospel was the risen Christ's rule over the new people of God (Rm 1:5) (cf. Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001:176-177). Christ, the lord of the world, was now taking the nations captive to obedience to himself. Wright (1997) has brought out the radical nature of the lordship of Christ for salvation, even stating that the gospel itself is 'not a system of how people get saved... "the gospel", strictly speaking, is the narrative proclamation of King Jesus' (:45). The gospel of Paul was a royal announcement (:57).<sup>2</sup> The corollary of the Lordship of Christ is the obedience of the *ekklesia*. Yet, the NT qualifies this obedience by presenting the primary motivation for obedience as nuptial in nature. It is a response to divine love and not a cold or forced obedience: 'When the church completely surrenders herself unto her Lord and accepts the unsearchable riches of his preparatory love, then she may anticipate the joy of a bride found blameless in the house of her father-in-law' (Batey 1971:29). All the dynamics of the relations between Christ and the church are summed up in the nuptial imagery. It is in such a loving response that the intentions of Christ as the divine Groom in Ephesians 5:22-33 are actualised. His love is thus the constitutive power of the church, and her submission the medium through which it is perfected. Such obedience (defined by Christ's lordship and love) is the taproot of the full function of the body in power and mutual service (Col 2:19).

This obedience and maturity of the church is directly linked to the practice of church discipline. *The whole concept of church discipline presupposes the controlling idea of the necessity of the empirical purity of the church* (1 Cor 5:7) and *the authority of the church in maintaining that purity* (Mt 16:19; 18:18-20; Gl 6:1, 1

<sup>1</sup> At bottom, 'human obedience is the acceptance of one's identity as the image of God and the consequent obligation of creaturely service' (Garlington 1993:296).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Reymond 2000:85 on the confrontational proclamation of Christ as lord in a Roman context.

Cor 5:1-13, 3 Jn 9-10, Rm 16:17, Tt 1:9-16 *et al* ).<sup>1</sup> For Paul, 'the key to the apostle's approach to church discipline is his concept of obedience' (Hall 1969:24). If the church did not maintain the orthopraxy and orthodoxy of obedience and did not heed any 'gentle and meek' exhortations of Christ, Paul stepped in to effect it. He expected the church to 'judge those within' (1 Cor 5:12) and to preserve its identity as 'church', ensuring its disassociation from the world's condemnation.

In 2 Corinthians 10-13 we have the dynamics of Paul's apostolic authority laid bare. This authority is not something extraneous to the church, but representative of the authority that Christ's presence gives to his people (Mt 18:18-20; 2 Cor 13:3-5). In 10:1-6, Paul expresses his Christ-given authority which he threatened to implement in the church. Speaking of 2 Corinthians 10-13 Garland notes:

Paul says that he is prepared to carry through on his threats to come to Corinth with guns blazing (13:2); but he begs the Corinthians not to force such a showdown (10:2). If they fail to heed his warnings, however, he will resolutely confront them. He draws on the imagery of an army that is able to overcome every opposing fortress through siegeworks and then take captive and punish resistance (1989:373).

If complete ecclesial obedience (10:6; 13:9) does not occur, Paul will come 'with a rod' (1 Cor 4:21); he will come in the authority of Christ and punish every disobedience in the church, throwing down the stronghold of human reason and ensuring cognitive obedience to Christ. *Christ* will speak and act through Paul in his next visit (13:3). Some (Munck 1959:190) believe Paul is speaking of a miraculous punishment as in Acts 5:1-11 and 1 Corinthians 5:4. Best (1988) sees 2 Corinthians 10:1-10 as referring to a curse on the enemies of Paul (:89). Meyer (1879c:397) sees this as authority consistent with the gift of the apostle and mentions both excommunication and miraculous apostolic power as the efficacious vehicle. Garland (1989:373) speaks of Paul's 'divinely potent weapons in his arsenal to use against the disobedient'. All this is evidence that Paul had authority yet sought to express it in a correct and Christ-like way (Garland 1989:383; Best 1988:73-95).

Of interest for us is the fact that Paul had the authority to effect ecclesial purity. Carson (1984:50) speaks of the efficacy of Paul's authority in 2 Corinthians 10:5:

The picture is of a military expedition into enemy territory, an expedition so effective that every plan of the enemy is thwarted, every scheme failed, every counter-offence beaten. More: these designs and schemes of sinful men are captured by Christ and

<sup>1</sup> See Laney 1986; Kitchens 1991; Travis 1986 and Hall 1969.

brought under a new authority...their mental structures, their plans and schemes, are taken over and transformed as they come into a new allegiance.

Paul will exercise the authority which he had for building up (v 8). 'To build up then is to assist the church to mature in its faith and practice so that it will grow closer to the Lord. To destroy must be the opposite: to remove from the church and the hope of salvation those who have erred from their faith and closeness to Christ...disciplined but not destroyed' (Best 1988:89). Once he has secured the obedience of the church, all disobedience would be punished.<sup>1</sup> All this leads us to the following conclusion: if Paul's apostolic authority is founded on the power of Christ himself, it is not inconceivable to deduce that such a condition of corporate obedience could be affected in every Spirit-filled church. It would be tragic for such an essential condition to be entirely dependant upon the unique ministry of the apostle Paul. Rather, the gift can be seen as latent in the Spirit and could be activated by corporate discipline and obedience. The letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians are an appeal for the full obedience of the church, revealing that what Paul would come and enforce, *could be achieved by the church without him* (2 Cor 2:9; 5:20; 13:5-11). The church had all it needed to ensure the purity and obedience of its witness.

### 3.3.2 Ecclesial love & unity

The quality of the interpersonal relationships between Christians is integrally linked to the goal and perfection of the church. This ethical character is the primary feature and the very stuff of a mature church (Eph 4:16, 'for the building of itself up in love'). 'Love is the lifeblood of this body, and, therefore, the ultimate criterion for the assessment of the Church's growth will be how far it is characterised by love' (Lincoln 1990:264). In Colossians 3:14 Paul calls love 'the bond of perfection' which can be read as an objective genitive, i e, 'the bond which produces perfection' (so O'Brien 1987:204). As noticed, this focus on love is directly linked to the prayers of Paul and his preparation of his churches for the Parousia (Phlp 1:9-11; 1 Th 3:11-13). By

<sup>1</sup> Whatever such 'extra-ecclesial' punishment is is uncertain. It could be the 'alien intruders' at Corinth (Martin 1991:306; Carson 1984:54-55), and could also imply - if we take the 'all' in a broad sense and remember the *Naherwartung* - some eschatological judgment executed by Paul and others (1 Cor 6:3).

building themselves up in love the churches would evince the ecclesial perfection that will ensure that the community is found blameless on the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

An expression of this love is found in the empirical unity of the churches. The churches are properly conditioned when there is a unity of mind and spirit (1 Cor 1:10; Phlp 1:27; 2:1-11). Ephesians 4:1-6 unpacks the nature of this unity of the one Christian church. For this reason, 'Christians remain committed by their very faith to be always making efforts to promote unity and reconciliation between believers' (Roy 1997:4). As we have seen (sec 3.2.1.6), Christ anticipated his church to attain to a degree of unity in this world that would itself be a witness to the truth that is in Jesus. We believe that obedience of this intra- and inter-ecclesial dimension is requisite for the witness the church must give to the world prior to the Parousia. We thus agree with the words of Perkins (1927:91) who stated that 'the goal of the Church cannot be reached until there is a manifest unity'.

### 3.3.3 Ecclesial witness

In her relationship to the world, the church is a witness and sign of the kingdom of God manifested in Jesus. Her mission (Mt 24:14) is to present the world with the gospel preached by Jesus, irradiating out what was given in the midpoint period. The witness the world requires is the nature of Christ's ministry replicated through the church to the world; thus, 'the period of the Church is the prolongation of the central point' (Cullmann 1956a:77). Here we comment on the nature of this ecclesial witness that the world must receive prior to the end.

It seems clear from Matthew 24:14 that the nature of the ecclesial witness is directly related to the gospel of the kingdom which Jesus preached. Although it is inclusive of the future coming kingdom, the emphasis appears to be on that which was inaugurated by Jesus (cf. Mt 4:23; 9:35). The witness is to the salvific rule of God,

<sup>1</sup> The forging and community-making effect of persecution is important to note. As the church goes through persecution, especially in the terminal period, she will be brought into a greater degree of community and solidarity. It is to be observed that individualism and disinterested personal ambition are negative social products of times of external peace and social stability. In times of social upheaval, people rely more on each other.

localised and demonstrated in Jesus' life and given to the church through his death, resurrection and Spirit-baptism. Thus Jesus anticipates the kingdom which was present in him (Lk 17:21) to be effectively presented to all nations. This is the ubiquitousness of the midpoint revelation through the church, the salvation-historical continuation of what began in the ministry of Jesus (cf. 1 John 2:6). When the church truly reflects in word and deed the nature of the kingdom as done by Christ, then we can expect a similar effect and consequence in the world. *Thus the standard, form, nature and power of the kingdom that was spelled out in the life and teaching of Jesus, is programmatic for the church.*

The degree to which the church can transform the world or redeem it prior to the Parousia is still a live issue.<sup>1</sup> Many postmillennialists were driven by the Puritan vision for the religious grounding of all aspects of life in a *corpus christianum*. The Puritans, according to Rooy (1965:325), had a threefold divine mission: the redemption of the soul, the perfection of society, and the accomplishment of history. Society was to be Christianised and brought under the universal lordship of Christ, resulting in a Christocratic society. This emphasis was often,

a protest at a narrowing of the message to the territory of the soul [and] a resistance against a Hellenistic spirituality on the ground of the Israelite-realistic character of biblical revelation. The OT knows no salvation of the soul only *the earth filled with the knowledge of the glory of God* (Van Den Berg 1956:191).

Thus all the OT Scriptures of a terrestrial rule of Christ in society were celebrated in many of the Puritan societies. Van Den Berg (1956) brought out the equivocal character of the *corpus*: its negative side was the temptation to adapt the life of the church to the forms of the world; the positive was the totalitarian dominion of Christ, for God is the God of the whole of life (:190).<sup>2</sup> It is easy to forget the brokenness of this world and the ineradicableness of the fall, and that the church 'only has a place in this world under the shadow of the cross' (:192). Thus,

when it [the church] ignores this fundamental brokenness and tries to overcome it by anticipating upon a form of life that cannot be realised within the dimensions of the world of to-day, the anticipation of the coming realm of God turns into the reverse and leads to a secularisation of the idea of the kingdom (Van Den Berg:190-191).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Colson 1999:296-297; Rooy 1965:242-284; Van Den Berg 1956:110-112;180-193; Lovelace 1979b:184-200; 401-435.

<sup>2</sup> Thus the words of William Law: 'The world by its favours has destroyed more Christians than it ever did by its most violent persecutors'.

Van Den Berg appeals rightly for a 'modest aim', a 'relative theocracy', whereby the church does not attempt to anticipate the future state of salvation but realistically brings life in all its fullness under the healing dominion of Christ (:192-193). This still provides the church with a world-affirming and comprehensive goal: it needs to be soteriological (Christ's rule starts in the heart); ascetic (rejects fashions of the world); eschatological ('anticipatory' status of work); and comprehensive, where she, as a sign of the future full realisation aims to bring life *now* to a new integrative unity under Christ (so Van Den Berg:193). More recently Colson (1999) has effectively argued for a transformation of culture through Christian values and a Christian world-view: 'We are to bring "all things" under the lordship of Christ, in the home and the school, in the workshop and the corporate boardroom, on the movie screen and the concert stage, in the city council and the legislative council' (:296-297). He foregrounds the cultural mandate to build societies, create culture and once again return to our original purpose to reclaim that entire created order for the present dominion of Christ (:298). His popular book *How Now Shall We Live* provides a comprehensive world-view that integrates all aspects of life within the kingdom of Christ.

Yet Colson and others have to reconcile themselves with the reality that 'there is not even a hint in the NT that Christians are called to change the secular order by the application of their moral principles' (Owen 1962:378) – a fact linked to the *Naherwartung* (Owen:377). For this reason, believers walk the line between leaving the world as it is and forcing change in it (Owen:381). Moreover, the ultimate aspect that reduces the primacy of the 'cultural mandate' is that the gospel Jesus himself preached did not contain within it the command or mission to transform society. The disciples were clearly commanded to penetrate communities, yet they were not commanded to effect comprehensive community transformation. It may be a consequence of the gospel transformations but is not the primary mandate of the church.

We believe that the church must be a vital and credible sign of the kingdom in all nations before the end, in a way related to community transformation; for 'the eschatological vision of a world full of the knowledge of God and peace and righteousness is to be foreshadowed through the Christian church's endeavours' (Rabali 1992:245). The degree however to which society will be changed due to the

effect of the gospel, is clearly secondary and consequential. The priority of the church is its 'kingdom mission', which does not include cultural, national, or terrestrial transformation. It is primarily spiritual.

Beyond the individual transformation, the NT expects the kingdom of God to create *a community of faith*. Giles (1997:195) reminds us that the 'goal of Christian mission [in the NT] was not to save individuals...but to call out a people for God's name'.<sup>1</sup> This emphasis on the community of believers, however, has received less attention in Protestant circles than in Catholic ones.<sup>2</sup> The witness of Matthew 24:14 is not merely of personal salvation through repentance and faith but the *very communal nature of God displayed in the community of faith*. The nature of God implies that love and unity are foundational for the mission of the disciples, a reality nuanced in the Johannine writings (cf. Köstenberger 1998:189-190). In John, 'the disciples' internal relationships are...presented as foundational for their potential impact on the world and for the possible belief resulting from their proclamation of the message about the Messiah' (Köstenberger:189). These factors demonstrate that the ecclesial witness is to be that of the kingdom of God not only preached but practiced in community. Lofink (1985) has also stressed these social dimensions of the Christian faith and mission. To him, 'the decisive task of the church is...to build itself up as a society in contrast to the world, as the realm of Christ's rule in which fraternal love is the law of life. It is precisely through the church's doing this that pagan society will grasp God's plan for the world' (:145). This 'divine contrast-society' is seen in John 13-17 (:128). The church is thus to be the effective sign of the kingdom of God and God's salvation in the world. Heyns (1988) writes with a corresponding emphasis on the communal dimension: 'The innermost core of genuine biblical faith is something that is communal' (:1). He also expands on the significance of the church as the *sign* of the kingdom by stating that 'the Church is able to tell the world that it has seen and understood the world's significance and destination: *the Kingdom of God*...The Church is summoned to be the militant vanguard of God's kingdom in an

<sup>1</sup> Neglecting this essential communal responsibility, one forgets that if interpersonal transformation cannot be achieved in the community of faith *first*, then there is little hope of achieving it elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> See also Tate (1994) and Grenz (1994a, 1994b) for writings by some who have underscored this communal dimension. Grenz (1994b) sees communities as mediating a new cognitive framework, a new identity, a new value system and a new allegiance. Of interest to Baptists, is the comment of Andrews (1957:519) that the 'initial Baptist intent [was] that the corporate hope of the Kingdom be constitutive of Church life'.

ecclesiastical way' (Heyns:26-27 *passim*). Due to the eschatological nature of the church mission, 'when the church obscures this sign, it impedes the work of salvation and disfigures the true nature of God. If, on the contrary, the church lives by the truth of the gospel, then the name of God is glorified among the nations, and God's plan for the world progresses' (Lofink:178-179).<sup>1</sup> There was a profound communalism in the early church which was itself a sign of the kingdom of God and a message to the world of the truth (Ac 4:32-35). Mere verbal witness is insufficient.

The anatomy of the church described above mentions certain characteristics and Christological lineaments that will be seen in the church as her 'true colours' come to the fore. As she is obedient and faithful to her internal and external mission, so she will confront those not in her community with the true nature of God's kingdom and rule. As she does this, she will (as a reflex) characterise the world and extrude either latent faith or hatred for that kingdom, affecting a global condition. It is in this light that we now link the final terminal apocalyptic events of the NT to the mission of the church - for it is the mission of the church that is to determine the timing of the final terminal period of world history. *Her witness to the kingdom in mission and obedience precipitates and determines the nature and timing of the final apocalyptic period.*

<sup>1</sup> Lofink underscores the importance of this communal witness, when he answers the Jewish polemic – 'how can the Messiah have come if nothing in the world has changed?' - by pointing to the existence of the social reality in the church (:176). Also, see his catalogue of key features of the post-apostolic church's distinct social/communal witness, pp 149-180.