

# **ECCLESIOLOGY**

## CHRISTOLOGY AND ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE PRISON LETTERS

### Introduction

Although imprisonment is mentioned in other Pauline letter (e.g., 2Cor 11:23), the letters called prison or captivity letters are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In all of these Paul calls himself a prisoner or talks about his chains/his imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> In other words, Paul claimed to have been in captivity when he wrote these letters. The Book of Acts points to three different imprisonments of Paul, namely in Philippi (Acts 16), in Caesarea (Acts 23-26), and in Rome (28). Some have suggested an imprisonment in Ephesus, which is difficult to support.<sup>2</sup> The imprisonment in Philippi can be ruled out as the one during which these letters could have been written. The Letter to the Philippians mentions the emperor's household (Phil 4:22). Therefore, at least for Philippians Rome would be the place of Paul's imprisonment.

We distinguish two imprisonments of Paul in Rome. The first one lasted approximately two years. During this time he seems to have written the captivity letters that we are about to discuss. Although he had some liberties and lived in his own rented quarters guarded by a soldier (Acts 28:16,30), the imprisonment was a taxing experience for the apostle. Nevertheless, he left us some of the finest letters of the New Testament. After the two-year period he was released, only to be imprisoned later again and being executed.<sup>3</sup>

### I. Ephesians

#### 1. General Background

The Letter to the Ephesians claims to be written by Paul. This name is found in Eph 1:1 and 3:1. Pauline authorship was not questioned until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then many New Testament scholars have suggested that a disciple of Paul has written the letter, and they count it among the so-called deuter-Pauline epistles. Some have proposed that Paul's letters were collected and that the

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<sup>1</sup>Eph 3:1; 4:1; Col 4:10; Philem 1:1,9,23; Eph 6:20; Phil 1:7,13,14,17; Col 4:18; Phil 1:10,13.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion and rejection of this view, see, Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 472-478.

<sup>3</sup>See, Siegfried Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1960), 828-832.

collection of Pauline letters was prefaced with the Letter to the Ephesians in which a Paulinist, someone who regarded himself a disciple of Paul, summarized Paul's theology.

Although the external evidence for Pauline authorship is extremely strong,<sup>4</sup> it is denied based on a number of internal arguments. It is claimed that on linguistic and stylistic grounds Ephesians cannot be attributed to Paul. The close relationship to Colossians is seen as the work of an imitator. Different usage of the same words and usage of words not found in other Pauline writings, a different doctrinal emphasis, the mistaken claim that the author must have been a Gentile, and others are listed as reasons to reject Pauline authorship. But none of these objections can be maintained beyond reasonable doubt. It is, for instance, true that Ephesians is more reflective than other Pauline writings. However, this would fit very well the situation of Paul's imprisonment.<sup>5</sup> We must allow an author to use different words, different meanings of words, and different concepts in different situations. And why should Paul not grow in his theological understanding and express his knowledge of the gospel and the church with somewhat new terms and concepts? Even critics admit that Ephesians is close to Paul's other epistles. Therefore, they refer to the author as a Paulinist. "When all the objections are carefully considered it will be seen that the weight of the evidence is inadequate to overthrow the overwhelming external attestation to Pauline authorship, and the Epistle's own claims."<sup>6</sup>

In case the prison letters were written in Rome and Paul expressed his confidence to be released soon (Philem 1:22; Phil 1:25; 2:24), his first imprisonment is the likely time. Therefore, we date them to the years 62/63 A.D.<sup>7</sup>

The Greek title of the first of the prison letter in the New Testament canon reads in almost

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<sup>4</sup>See, Francis D. Nichol, et al., eds., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 6:994.

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed discussion, see, Guthrie, 490-508, and D. A. Carson, D.J. Moo, and L. Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 305-309.

<sup>6</sup>Guthrie, 507. In Francis D. Nichol et al., eds., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), 5:182-183, the following statement is found: "Ernst Percy . . . has shown by an extensive study of Ephesians as compared with Paul's other epistles that in language, style, and particularly in theological concepts Ephesians is so much in agreement with the other letters that on purely critical grounds the evidence of its authenticity is much stronger than are the arguments that may be brought against it . . ."

<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of date and place, see, Carson, 309; Guthrie, 515-516, 555-558; Nichol, 6:994.

all extant manuscripts and in all versions “To the Ephesians.” However, Marcion, the great heretic of the early church, used the heading “to the Laodiceans.” The idea behind this suggestion may have been that Paul’s letter to the Laodiceans mentioned in Col 4:16 was actually the letter of Paul to the Ephesians. Marcion altered biblical manuscripts and created his own limited New Testament canon. Therefore, we should be careful with him.

Yet, although there is no need to follow Marcion, we notice that some old manuscripts lack “in Ephesus” in Eph 1:1.<sup>8</sup> The early church agreed that this letter was addressed to the Christians in Ephesus. Still, the absence of a specific church, to which the letter was addressed, needs to be discussed. Furthermore, the tone of the letter is impersonal. Although Paul had worked for quite a while in Ephesus and must have known many people there (Acts 19-20)—he also had a farewell meeting with the elders—before he went to Jerusalem, where he was taken into custody—he does not mention his friends there as he does in other letters.<sup>9</sup>

The basic suggestions with regard to the recipients are the following:

- (1) It was a letter for the church in Laodicea.
- (2) It was a letter sent to the church in Ephesus.
- (3) It was a circular or encyclical letter sent either to the Christian churches in general or to the churches in Asia Minor.

The last two suggestions are the most plausible ones. They may even be combined. Ephesus was the most important city of the Roman province of Asia. It would have been reasonable to send a letter to this city first and then allow for its circulation in the entire area.<sup>10</sup>

It is not easy to find out the special reason why Paul decided to write this epistle. Whereas in Colossians a specific heresy is addressed, nothing of that sort is found in Ephesians. Paul writes basically about Jesus and the church. Thus, we may not be able to determine precisely why Paul wrote this letter. If we look for its main theme ecclesiology, or Christ and the church, or unity have been suggested. All of them are related to each other. During his imprisonment Paul may have

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<sup>8</sup>E.g., Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, and p<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>9</sup>Compare, e.g., with Romans 16 and Phil 4.

<sup>10</sup>For a detailed discussion, see, Guthrie, 508-514.

reflected on the church, its relation to Christ, its function and ministry, and its future. The letter he wrote is one of the peaks of the New Testament.

## **2. Content and Structure**

After the introduction (Eph 1:1-2) Paul immediately describes the salvation that is ours through God in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3-13). This wonderful passage assures us that we are already saved, are heirs, and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. The next part contains a prayer in which he stresses the importance of wisdom and knowledge, especially knowledge of Jesus, before summarizing the life of Jesus from incarnation to glorification and ending with Jesus as the head of his church (Eph 1:15-23).

Having introduced the church, the apostle focuses on the individual believers and contrasts their former life with the gift of salvation and grace that they have received freely (Eph 2:1-10). Good works are the consequence of salvation not its means. The second half of the second chapter shows what the church is all about emphasizing the corporate aspect (Eph 2:11-30). However, it is Jesus who abolished the barrier between Jews and Gentiles and made the church a holy temple.

In chapter 3 Paul talks about his own ministry, namely the proclamation of the mystery now revealed and the proclamation of the riches of Christ before showing that the wisdom of God is now to be made known through the church (Eph 3:1-13). Another prayer and a doxology follow (Eph 3:14-21).

Chapter 4 calls for the unity of the church. Although believers have received different spiritual gifts, they are to further the building up and the unity of the body of Christ, the church (Eph 4:1-16). The rest of chapter 4 and chapter 5 consist of admonitions. The old self is contrasted with the new self and the life in the light is portrayed (Eph 4:17-5:20). Relations in the Christian family, namely between wives and husbands, children and parent, and slaves and masters are discussed (Eph 5:21-6:9). Paul does not call for a revolution but for a reformation. There is again a strong emphasis on the church.

Chapter 6 ends with the Christian armor and call for prayer, because a war between the wicked spiritual powers and us is going on (Eph 6:10-20). The letter ends with a reference to Tychicus and a benediction (Eph 6:21-24). Here is an outline of the Letter to the Ephesians:

## Introduction Eph 1:1-2

- I. Doctrinal section (Eph 1:3-3:21)
    1. Doxology: Blessings of the believers (Eph 1:3-14)
    2. Thanksgiving and prayer for the church (Eph 1:15-23)
    3. The greatness of Christian salvation (Eph 2:1-10)
    4. The reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-22)
    5. The privilege of proclamation (Eph 3:1-13)
    6. Prayer for the church (Eph 3:13-19)
    7. Doxology (Eph 3:20-21)
  - II. Practical Section (Eph 4:1-6:20)
    1. The plea for unity (Eph 4:1-16)
      - a. Call for unity of the church (Eph 4:1-6)
      - b. Spiritual gifts and the church (Eph 4:7-16)
    2. Newness of life (Eph 4:17-5:20)
      - a. The old life (Eph 4:17-22)
      - b. The quality of the new life (Eph 4:23-32)
      - b. Life in the light (Eph 5:1-21)
    3. The Christian home life (Eph 5:21-6:9)
      - a. Wives and husbands (Eph 5:22-33)
      - b. Children and fathers (Eph 6:1-4)
      - c. Slaves and masters (Eph 6:5-9)
    4. Christian warfare (Eph 6:10-20)
      - a. The Christian armor (Eph 6:10-18)
      - b. Prayer (Eph 6:19-20)
- Conclusion and benediction (Eph 6:21-24)

### 3. Some Contributions

- (1) *Theology.* H. W. Hoehner stresses that Ephesians is a Trinitarian letter in which the activity of the Trinity is found in eight passages (Eph 1:4-14,17; 2:18,22; 3:4-5,14-17; 4:4-6; 5:18-20).<sup>11</sup> “It is the Father to whom believers direct their prayers and the one who is over all and plans and initiates all things. It is the Son through whom believers pray and the one who carries out the Father’s plan in redemption, reconciliation, and the unification of believers. The Holy Spirit is the one who seals, indwells, and empowers believers.”<sup>12</sup>  
The term “father” is found ten times in the epistle. Eight times it refers to God as our Father (Eph 1:2,3,17; 2:18; 3:14; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23) surpassing all other Pauline letters. Although God

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<sup>11</sup>Hoehner, 106.

<sup>12</sup>Hoehner, 17.

is the ruler of the universe, in Ephesians he is very close to his children, and we are his “beloved children” (Eph 5:1)

- (2) *Christology*. Ephesians has a high Christology.<sup>13</sup> We are blessed in Jesus Christ. The adoption as God’s children is ours in Jesus (Eph 1:5). All things are summed up in him (Eph 1:10). Jesus was incarnated, raised from the dead, seated at God’s right hand, all things were subjected to him, and he became the head of the church (Eph 1:20-22), which is his body (Eph 4:12). Therefore, some authors speak of a “cosmic Christology”<sup>14</sup> or an “exaltation Christology.”<sup>15</sup> In Christ we are made alive (Eph 2:5). He has saved us and seated us in heavenly places (Eph 2:6). We are created in Jesus Christ for good works (Eph 2:10). He is our peace (Eph 2:14). We are brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:20). He is not only the head of the church but also the cornerstone of the spiritual temple (Eph 2:20). The mystery of Christ is that the Gentile believers are fellow heirs and members of the body (Eph 3:4-6). Jesus may dwell in our hearts (Eph 3:17). His love is unsurpassable (Eph 3:18-19; 5:2). He is truth (Eph 4:21). We give thanks in the name of Jesus (Eph 5:20) and love Jesus (Eph 6:24). The marriage is a symbol for the relation between Christ and the church (Eph 5:21-32). Thus, Jesus is eternal and divine, the cosmic Lord and the head of the church, who loves us, has saved us, and sums up everything.<sup>16</sup>
- (3) *Pneumatology*. In Ephesians more than ten direct references to the Holy Spirit are found (Eph 1:13; 2:18,22; 3:5,16; 4:3,4,30; 5:18; 6:17,18). The Holy Spirit is the guarantor of our inheritance (Eph 1:13). He indwells the new temple, the church (Eph 2:22) and has revealed God’s mystery to the prophets and apostles (Eph 3:5). He strengthens us (Eph 3:16). Believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; 4:30) and should not grieve the Spirit (Eph 4:30), who therefore must be a personality and not just an impersonal power. Christians

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<sup>13</sup>The term “Jesus” is found 20 times in Ephesians and the term “Christ” 45 times.

<sup>14</sup>See, Keck, 127, Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), xc-xci; Lincoln and Wedderburn, 97.

<sup>15</sup>See, Georg Strecker, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 567.

<sup>16</sup>For further discussion, see, Carson, 314; Hoehner, 108-109, Lincoln, xc-xci, Lincoln and Wedderburn, 129-130; Strecker, 566-568.

are called to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Eph 6:17). The Holy Spirit has a prominent role and is indispensable for our life as Christians.<sup>17</sup>

- (4) *Ecclesiology*. “The Letter to the Ephesians represent the church as the goal of the Christ event in a way that is unique in the New Testament.”<sup>18</sup> The term *ekklēsia* is found nine times in this short letter (Eph 1:22; 3:10,21; 5:23,24,25,27,29,32). But the church is also described with other terms. It is the body of Christ, and Jesus is its head (Eph 1:22-23; 4:12). It is the new person or new humanity (Eph 2:15; 4:13), the holy temple and building (Eph 2:21), God’s household (Eph 2:19), and Christ’s bride (Eph 5:23-32). The church has apostolic and prophetic roots and Christ as its foundation and cornerstone (Eph 2:20). Church members, the saints (Eph 1:1), are fellow citizens (Eph 2:19). Christ has brought Jews and Gentiles into one church, which is a mystery (Eph 2:11-16; 3:4-6). He has established a united church, and the unity of his church must be maintained (Eph 4:3-6). Through baptism people are incorporated into the church (Eph 4:5). Having received spiritual gifts and offices the church is “a growing and dynamic organism”<sup>19</sup> (Eph 4:7-16). Its members have been saved (chap. 1) but are called to live up to their high calling (chaps. 4 and 5) and demonstrate also in their household relations that Christ is their Lord (chaps. 5 and 6). In Ephesians the church is not a local entity but the universal church. Therefore, this letter is so important. Paul wants us “to catch the splendid vision of one church, thoroughly united in the Lord, though it contains members of various races and is equipped by God to render significant service in this world.”<sup>20</sup>
- (5) *Unity*. The term “unity” is found twice in the book, namely in Eph 4:3 and 13. The context is Christology. But the concept of unity is not limited to these verses which contain a call to unity and the goal of unity for the church. The numeral “one” is used in a number of places

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<sup>17</sup>See, Hoehner, 109-110.

<sup>18</sup>Strecker, 569.

<sup>19</sup>Hoehner, 111.

<sup>20</sup>Carson, 315. Since ecclesiology may be one of the main themes of this letter, see, Hoehner, 111-112; Lincoln, xcii-xcv; Lincoln and Wedderburn, 91-126, 132-133, 137-141, 151-156, 158-161; Strecker, 568-575.

to express unity. The second chapter describes how Jesus formed his church by making two groups, Jews and Gentiles, into one breaking down the barriers between them and destroying their enmity (Eph 2:14,15). Now they are one body (Eph 2:16) and have access to God in one Spirit (Eph 2:18). In Eph 4:4-8 seven times the numeral is repeated stressing the unity of the church: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father. In Eph 5:31 the marital relationship is compared to Christ and the church. As a couple becomes one flesh, so the church and Jesus do in a symbolic way. Paul “was writing to a church (or churches) consisting of Jew and Gentiles, Asiatics and Europeans, slaves and freedmen—all symbols of a disrupted world that was to be restored to unity in Christ. This would necessitate unity of person, family, church, and race. The restoration of individual unity in the life of each believer assures the unity of God’s universe.”<sup>21</sup>

## **II. Colossians**

### **1. General Background**

Paul has not founded the church in Colossae, and we do not have further information of how the church came into being. Paul preached the gospel in Ephesus. It may have been there that he met Epaphras and Philemon, two citizens of Colossae (Col 4:12; Philem 1:1), who were converted and became followers of Christ (Philem 1:19). They may have taken the gospel to Colossae. Epaphras is suggested as the possible founder of the Colossian church (Col 1:7) by a number of scholars.<sup>22</sup>

During Paul’s imprisonment Epaphras was with him. He may have visited Paul in order to inform him about the church in Colossae and solicit his counsel about the heresy threatening his home church.

The main purpose for writing this epistle was undoubtedly to help the church members in Colossae face the heresy with which they had to deal. We do not know precisely what the heresy was all about, but we can try to reconstruct it by looking at Paul’s refutation.

Obviously, this false teaching was detracting from the person and status of Christ. Colossians

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<sup>21</sup>Nichol, 6:995; see also, Keck, 128-133.

<sup>22</sup>See, Carson, 335; Guthrie, 545, N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 22.

portrays Jesus in highest terms showing his preeminence. The heresy must have downplayed the importance of Jesus. This may be a trace of early Gnosticism which developed more fully in the second century, but is also found in 1John.

Secondly, in Col 2:8 Paul warns against “philosophy and empty deception.” This may point to Hellenistic elements in this heresy. Colossians also employs certain words such as “mystery,” “knowledge,” and “fullness” used as technical religious terms in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Gnosticism and applies them in a new and Christian way.

Thirdly, we find angel worship (Col 2:18) and “the elements of the world” which can be understood as elementary spirits or elementary teaching (Col 2:8, 20). It would be referring to “the powerful spirit-world” or if it means “elementary teachings” and “would presumably describe a purely materialistic doctrine concerned only with this world.”<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, extreme forms of asceticism may have accompanied that heresy (Col 2:16), and finally, the heresy contained Jewish elements such as circumcision (Col 2:11; 3:11) and references to feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths (Col 2:16). The “human tradition” of Col 2:8 may also be a Jewish element. Therefore, it is best to understand this heresy as a mixture of Jewish and pagan ideas. Such types of syncretism were attractive to many people at that time including some church members.<sup>24</sup>

## **2. Content and Structure**

The content of Colossians is to a large degree similar to Ephesians. A major exception is the heresy dealt with in this shorter letter. After a short opening salutation (Col 1:1-2) Paul engages in thankfulness and prayer for the church in Colossae (Col 1:3-14) stressing in a remarkable way the present reality of the church members’ salvation (Col 1:12-14). Then he praises the greatness of Jesus (Col 1:15-23) who is the image of God, the creator of all things for whom all things are made, the sustainer, the head of the body, namely his church, the first one, the reconciler, savior, and

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<sup>23</sup>Guthrie, 548.

<sup>24</sup>For a discussion of the heresy, see, Carson, 335-337; Guthrie, 546-551; and Francis D. Nichol et al., eds., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 7:184. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 17-26, takes a somewhat different position.

peacemaker. Nobody surpasses Jesus.

A section on Paul's ministry follows (Col 1:24-29), in which he mentions the "mystery" which in Colossians stands for Christ and Christ in us (Col 1:27; 2:2). In chapter 2 Paul deals with the false teaching threatening the church. The passage includes a section on baptism and stresses the divinity of Jesus. In Jesus the fullness of God dwells (Col 2:9). He is the head of all authorities (Col 2:10) and has brought about the forgiveness of our sins (Col 2:13-15). Once more his headship in relation to the church is mentioned (Col 1:11). The Colossians are warned against false forms of worship or worship with wrong motifs (Col 2:16-19).

With the third chapter the practical part starts. We find a discussion on the old life and the new life and its practical implications. The household code follows. Colossians 4:1 is better taken with chapter 3, for it is addressed to the second part of the three pairs, the masters of the slave. These pairs are found at the end of the preceding chapter—husband and wives, children and fathers, slaves and—4:1—masters. The beginning of the fourth chapter stresses prayer, thanksgiving, and graciousness.

Finally, commendations, greetings, and blessings follow and conclude the letter (Col 4:7-18). A number of names of Paul's fellow workers are mentioned. For a possible outline see below:

Introduction Col 1:1-2

- I. Doctrinal section (Col 1:3-2:23)
  1. Thanksgiving and prayer for the church (Col 1:4-14)
  2. The greatness of Christ (Col 1:15-23)
  3. The ministry of Paul (Col 1:24-29)
  4. The false teaching and its antidote (Col 2:1-23)
- II. Practical Section (3:1-4:6)
  1. The old life and the new life (Col 3:1-17)
  2. The Christian home life (Col 3:18-4:1)
    - a. Wives and husbands (Col 3:18-19)
    - b. Children and fathers (Col 3:20-21)
    - c. Slaves and masters (Col 3:22-4:1))
  3. Prayer and speech (Col 4:2-6)

Commendations, greetings, and blessings (Col 4:7-18)<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>For other outlines, see, Guthrie, 559-562; Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 185-186; Nichol, 7:185; Wright, 44-45.

### 3. Some Contributions

Because Colossians and Ephesians are quite similar, the contribution these two letters make is also similar. Both are strong in Christology, although Colossians makes even stronger statements about Jesus than Ephesians does.

On the other hand, the ecclesiology of Ephesians is more developed than that of Colossians. The strong emphasis on the unity of the church is not found in Colossians.<sup>26</sup> It also seems that in Colossians Paul had in mind the universal church (Col 1:18,24) as well as an individual congregation (Col 4:15-16), whereas in Ephesians he focused on the worldwide church mainly. But both emphasize that the church is the body of Christ and Christ is its head.<sup>27</sup> Growth of the church is also stressed (Col 2:19).<sup>28</sup>

Both have wonderful statements about salvation, although again Ephesians is more elaborate. In Col 1:12-14,21-22 Paul stresses the present reality of our salvation with different words. In Col 1:5 and 23 he joins the concepts of hope and gospel. His eschatology is therefore a present and a future eschatology. The future aspect occurs in Col 1:22,28; 3:4,6,24 and indirectly in Col 1:18, when another resurrection is expected.

The ethical concerns of Ephesians are also reflected in Colossians. In Col 3 a list of vices (Col 3:5-10) and a list of virtues (Col 3:12-17) is found followed by the household code. The latter is shorter in Colossians and does not contain the comparison of the husband/wife relationship with the relation between Christ and the church. Love is also quite important in Colossians, although the respective terms—with the exception of the adjective—are not used to that extent in Colossians as they are in Ephesians.<sup>29</sup>

(1) *Christology*. Many scholars believe that Col 1:15-20 is a hymn concentrating on Jesus. Here is an outline of the passage:

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<sup>26</sup>But see, 2:19.

<sup>27</sup>See, Col 1:18,24; 2:19; 3:15.

<sup>28</sup>See, Strecker, 558.

<sup>29</sup>The noun “love” (agapē) is found in 1:4,8,13; 2:2; 3:14, the verb “to love” in 3:12,19, and the adjective “beloved” in 1:7; 4:7,9,14.

- A He is { the image of God.  
the firstborn of creation,  
for in him all was made: in heaven and earth.  
All things were made through him and for him.
- B He is before all things.
- C All things hold together in him.
- B' He is the head of the church.
- A' He is { the beginning,  
the firstborn of the dead,  
for in him it was the pleasure for all the fullness to dwell.  
All things were reconciled through him to him: in heaven and earth.

This passage is indeed very important and seems to have relations to other parts of the book. A close study of the passage indicates that verses 15-16 correspond with verses 18b-20. Identical words and phrases are used. For instance, in the first passage Jesus is the firstborn of creation (1:15). In the last part, he is the firstborn of the dead (1:18b). Whereas in 1:16 all things have been created through him and for him, in 1:20 through him all things were reconciled to him. And the extent of his sphere of influence is heaven and earth (1:16,20). Therefore, some speak in this context about the cosmic Christ. “As the first strophe points to the cosmic authority of Christ, the second expresses a soteriological perspective.”<sup>30</sup> The middle section consists of three sentences: (1) Jesus is preexistent (1:17a). “His temporal priority to the universe” is expressed.<sup>31</sup> (2) Jesus is the sustainer of all (1:17b). (3) Jesus is the head of the church (1:18). Thus, the passage emphasizes Christ as a preexistent divine being, as the creator, sustainer, as the one who was crucified and raised from the dead, who reconciles us, and as the cosmic Lord and Savior. The term “firstborn” stresses his dignity and does not mean that he was born.

Since Jesus is called the “firstborn,” it is argued that he is born. Two facts militate against

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<sup>30</sup>Strecker, 552.

<sup>31</sup>Peter O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*. Word Biblical Commentary 44 (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 47.

such a view. (1) According to Col 1:16 everything is created by Jesus. Therefore, he cannot be created himself. (2) The term “firstborn” has a special meaning for Hebrews. David being the latest child becomes the firstborn--Psalm 89:20,27. The second line of the parallelism tells us that it means to become the most exalted king. See also the experience of Jacob (Gen 25:25-26 and Ex 4:22) and Ephraim (Gen 41:50-52 and Jer 31:9). The firstborn was the leader of a group of people or a tribe, the priest of a family, and the one who received twice as much of the inheritance that his brothers received. He had certain privileges and responsibilities. Sometimes, the idea of being born or being the first one did not play any role. The time element was deleted. Important was only the special rank and dignity of the person called the “firstborn”. In the case of Jesus, this term refers to his exalted position and does not tell us about a time at which he supposedly was born.

The glorious mystery of God which was hidden in the past but now revealed is Jesus Christ (Col 1:27; 2:2). In him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). And “in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9). “He is the head over all rule and authority” (Col 2:10). He has canceled our record of sins (Col 2:14). He is our life (Col 3:4). Why does Paul exalt Jesus in such a way? While he tries to show who Jesus really is, he wants his audience not to fall prey to false teaching. Real knowledge is found in Jesus, not in philosophy. The real Lord is Jesus, not the angels or other beings. What we have in him is sufficient and cannot be offered by anyone else. On the other hand, “the Colossian hymn represents the indicative of the Christ event . . . From the presence of the saving reality there follows the imperative of ethical action.”<sup>32</sup>

- (2) *Baptism.* Baptism is mentioned in Col 2:12. It is the Christian counterpart to the rite of circumcision (Col 2:11) and it is linked to Jesus. To be baptized means to participate in Christ’s death and be buried but also raised with Christ. In Col 3:1-4 the reference to baptism is still visible. The text does not talk about baptism directly but addresses those who have “died” (Col 3:3) and have been raised with Christ (Col 3:1). Undoubtedly these are baptized Christians. Because they were raised, they seek things above (Col 3:2), await the

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<sup>32</sup>Strecker, 555.

consummation and glory to come (Col 3:4), and live a life which corresponds to their experience of salvation.<sup>33</sup>

- (3) *Opposition to all forms of syncretism.* Syncretism is very much in vogue today, but Paul was strongly opposed to it. To combine Christian ideas with Greek philosophy, human traditions, strict asceticism dishonors the supreme Lord, Jesus Christ and questions his power, sufficiency, and uniqueness.<sup>34</sup> A quite difficult passage in the discussion of syncretism is 2:14-17. Some have concluded that Paul here shows that among others the law of clean and unclean food as well as the weekly Sabbath are abolished. This seems to be a hasty conclusion. Rodríguez writes: “We can conclude that Paul is simply condemning ‘not the principle of Sabbath keeping but its perversion’ or ‘superstitious observance.’ [99] We have already indicated that such type of Sabbath observance may have been quite common outside Jewish circles. Therefore, based on Col 2:16 one cannot theorize that Paul was promoting or teaching the abolition of the Sabbath commandment. [100] He was rejecting the attempt of the false teachers to impose their views on believers concerning how to observe it. [101] They were misusing the commandment but its misuse does not invalidate the commandment itself. [102]”<sup>35</sup> Nothing should “be allowed to eclipse Christ, the Sun of Righteousness,” not even correct Christian doctrines, divinely ordained practices, or a Christian way of life.

### **III. Philippians**

#### **1. General Background**

Paul’s letter is addressed to the saints in Philippi. This city was the first European place

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<sup>33</sup>See, Lincoln and Wedderburn, 48-53; Strecker, 562-563.

<sup>34</sup>Wright, 43, states: “Christ is not one deity . . . among many. He is supreme over all. Monotheism has always been a scandal, as Paul well knew when he confronted Corinthian polytheism with the claim ‘for us there is but one God . . . one Lord’ (1 Cor. 8:6). This is his great claim in Colossians, too. It stands over against all idolatry, modern or ancient, and all theological relativism.”

<sup>35</sup>Angel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Biblical Sabbath: The Adventist Perspective,” <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org/documents/sabbath-catholic2002.htm>; see also, Jon Paulien, “An Exegetical Overview of Col 2:13-17: With Implications for SDA Understanding,” <http://www2.andrews.edu/~jonp/colossians2.htm>; Frank B. Holbrook, “Did the Apostle Paul Abolish the Sabbath?: Colossians 2:14-17 Revisited,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13/2 (2002): 64-72.

where the gospel was preached. Paul met Lydia and a group of women and later the jailer, who were converted and formed the nucleus of the church in Philippi. On his third missionary journey Paul stopped at Philippi. The letter that Paul later sent them indicates that the church was led by bishops and deacons and thus had a certain degree of organization. The Philippian Christians had sent Epaphroditus with gifts to Paul. They had a close relationship with the apostle and supported him in his ministry. After Epaphroditus had recovered from his serious illness, which brought him close to death, Paul sent him back to Philippi. The church in Philippi may have experienced some persecution and apparently had to face false teachers and their doctrines. Nevertheless, it was a caring community, and Paul was eager to meet the church members again.

The epistle is a letter from a friend to friends. Therefore, it seems difficult to pinpoint a single purpose. It may well be that Paul had in mind more than just one purpose. G. F. Hawthorne lists eight:<sup>36</sup>

- (1) Paul wanted to write his friends, and when the opportunity arose that somebody could take a letter to them, he set out to write the epistle (Phil 2:25-28).
- (2) He wanted to express his gratitude and appreciation for the Philippians' gift (Phil 4:10-20).
- (3) He wrote the letter to inform them about his situation, his suffering, the danger he was in, but also his confidence that he would be released soon and expected to be able to see them again (Phil 1:12-26; 2:24). In spite of the sad circumstances Paul portrayed an optimistic outlook.
- (4) Paul felt it necessary to inform the Philippians about Epaphroditus, their representative, who served him but had been so sick that he almost died. Through the grace of God he had recovered and would see them soon (Phil 2:25-30).<sup>37</sup>
- (5) Paul wrote them to warn them against false teachers, in this case obviously of a Jewish background (Phil 3:2-21).
- (6) He wanted to prepare them for persecution, suffering, and martyrdom and secure their complete dedication (Phil 1:27-30).
- (7) Although the church in Philippi may not have had doctrinal differences and problems, the

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<sup>36</sup>Hawthorne, xlvii-xlviii.

<sup>37</sup>See, Achtemeier, 392.

church members had problems on the personal level, and their unity was endangered. Paul wanted to restore unity and true fellowship (Phil 1:27; 2:2-4; 4:1-3).

- (8) Joy plays an important role in this letter. Paul admonished the church members to rejoice even under difficult circumstances. He himself had set the example that they were encourage to imitate (Phil 2:18; 3:1; 4:4).

In addition "the phrase 'in Christ' is used repeatedly, and when joined with the thought of joy, well expresses the theme of the epistle."<sup>38</sup> All of these purposes may have played a role in the composition of the letter.

## **2. Content and Structure**

Paul starts with greetings to the church and its officers (Phil 1:1-2). As also found in a number of other Pauline letters he then engages in thanksgiving and prayer for the church (Phil 1:3-11). Jesus is mentioned repeatedly. Then a report is given on the present circumstances in which the apostle finds himself (Phil 1:12-26). This includes not only information about his imprisonment but also shows his personal attitude toward the imprisonment. Whatever may happen to him, the goal of his life is the glorification and exaltation of Christ. Jesus is his life. A section on worthy conduct, unity, self-denial, and obedience follows (Phil 1:27-2:18). This part includes the famous christological hymn (Phil 2:5-11) to which we have to return later. The rest of the second chapter reintroduces Timotheus and informs the readers about Epiphradotus.

In Phil 3 Paul warns against Judaizers and against worshipping one's belly. He presents the goal for which believers strife and talks about Christ's and his own resurrection and the citizenship in heaven "from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:1-21). Further admonitions about unity, steadfastness, and joy in the Lord follow (Phil 4:1-9). Before Paul concludes with greetings and a benediction (Phil 4:20-22) he acknowledges the gifts of the Philippians (Phil 4:10-20). Here is an outline:

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<sup>38</sup>Nichol, 7:139.

Introduction (Phil 1:1-11)

1. Salutation (Phil 1:1-2)
2. Thanksgiving (Phil 1:3-11)

I. News about Paul (Phil 1:12-26)

II. Exhortations to unity, self-denial, and obedience (Phil 1:27-2:18)

III. News about Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:19-30)

IV. Warnings against false teachers and a false attitude (Phil 3:1-21)

V. Exhortations to harmony and joyfulness (Phil 4:1-9)

Conclusion (Phil 4:10-23)

1. Acknowledgment of gift (Phil 4:10-19)
2. Salutations and benediction (Phil 4:20-22)

### **3. Some Contributions**

- (1) *Christology.* In this letter we find a heavy emphasis on God the Father, but especially on Jesus Christ. Paul expects the day of Christ (Phil 1:6,10; 2:16). He talks about his chains in Christ, the privilege to suffer for him (Phil 1:13, 29), and the proclamation and the gospel of Christ (Phil 1:15-18, 27). His goal is that Christ may be exalted by his life or his death (Phil 1:20). Indeed, Christ is his life (Phil 1:21), and he would like to be with Christ (Phil 1:23).

Christians are called to follow the example of Jesus in humility and service as it is portrayed in Phil 2:5-11. This so-called hymn consists of two major parts, the first one describing the activity of Jesus (Phil 2:6-8) and the second one the activity of God in favor of Christ (Phil 2:9-11). Verse 5 can be considered to be an introduction connecting Christ's experience to Paul's audience. The call for imitation refers only to the first part. Whereas this part describes the double humiliation and the faithful service of Christ which led him to the very cross, the second part describes his exaltation. In the first part some words are difficult to understand and to interpret, but the meaning seems to be: Although Jesus possessed "equality with God and could have exploited it to his own advantage, he did not use it . . . We seem led to the view that the person lays aside the prerogatives of supreme sovereignty in order to take up the position of a servant. It is not a question of giving up divine attributes or nature."<sup>39</sup> It is the famous statement about the "self-emptying" of Christ. After having

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<sup>39</sup> Karl P. Donfried and I. Howard Marshall, *The Theology of the Shorter Pauline Letters*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 132-133

stressed pre-existence, incarnation, and the cross, the exaltation follows. But was Jesus exalted to a position higher than he had before? Being God, this is difficult to see. The idea seems to be that “just as he was openly put to death, now he is openly exalted . . . and made the object of universal worship.”<sup>40</sup>

5	Have this attitude in yourselves	
	which was also in Christ Jesus,	
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ who,</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• existing in the form of God,</li> </ul>	
	did not regard equality with God a thing	
	to be grasped,	
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ but emptied Himself,</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• taking the form of a bond-servant,</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• and being made in the likeness of men,</li> </ul>	
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being found in appearance as a man,</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ humbled Himself</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• by becoming obedient to the point</li> </ul>	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> <div style="font-size: 2em; vertical-align: middle;">{</div> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> of death, even death on a cross. </div> </div>
<hr/>		
9	For this reason also, God highly exalted Him,	
	and bestowed on Him the name	
	which is above every name,	
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow</li> </ul>	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> <div style="font-size: 2em; vertical-align: middle;">{</div> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> in heaven and on earth and under the </div> </div>
earth,		
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ and that every tongue will confess</li> </ul>	
	that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.	

Paul continues by referring to the interests of Jesus Christ (Phil 2:21), which we should seek after, and to the work of Christ (Phil 2:30). We are called to rejoice in the Lord (Phil 3:1; 4:4) and count as loss for the sake of Christ whatever things were gain to us (Phil 3:7). It is more important to know Christ Jesus our Lord and gain him (Phil 3:8), the righteousness

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 134-135; see, Achtemeier, 395-396, who points out that the title Lord, which is God’s own name Yahweh, is attributed to Jesus.

coming through faith in him, and the resurrection which is dependant on his resurrection (Phil 3:9-11). While we have not reached the goal yet and are pressing on (Phil 3:12,14), we should know that we were laid hold of by Christ Jesus (Phil 3:12). Never should we become enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil 3:18) but expect our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven (Phil 3:20). Therefore, we stand firm in the Lord (Phil 4:1) and receive his blessings such as peace (Phil 4:7), strength (Phil 4:13), provision (Phil 4:19) and grace (Phil 4:23). The phrase “in Christ” and equivalents is very important in Pauline writings and is used 21 times in Philippians. It is used in four ways: “The basis and foundation of Christian experience lies in Jesus . . . Jesus is seen as the channel through which God carries out his work in the lives of the believers . . . Christian behavior is determined by ‘the Lord’ . . . Christians are closely linked to Christ both now and at the judgment so that what is true of him becomes true of them.”<sup>41</sup> The Christian life is to be completely dominated by Jesus Christ.

- (2) *Joy and suffering.* The letter is not silent on suffering, on the contrary. Suffering is normal for Christians and is even regarded as a privilege because it is for Christ’s sake (Phil 1:29). Paul himself suffers during his imprisonment. Nevertheless, he rejoices. The note of joy and rejoicing permeates the entire letter. The word family is found 16 times in this short letter (Phil 1:4,18,18,25; 2:2,17,17,18,18,28,29; 3:1; 4:1,4,4,10). The life of Christians is a life of deep inner joy even if the external circumstances are less than ideal. Bengel suggested as the content of the letter “I rejoice, (now) you rejoice!”<sup>42</sup>
- (4) *Ecclesiology.* Although the term “church” is only found in Phil 3:6 and 4:15, other terms such as “saints” (Phil 1:1; 4:21,22) refer to it. In Philippians we notice a concern for unity and peace (Phil 4:2-9). There is some quarreling in the church. There is also external pressure which may split the church. We have already mentioned false teachers, whom Paul calls dogs and evil workers (Phil 3:2). In addition, there are those whose stomach is their god. But unity is important to allow for good personal relationships among the church members, for the

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<sup>41</sup>Donfried and Marshall, 143. For further discussion, see, pages 138-144; Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 47.

<sup>42</sup>Quoted in Martin, 45.

proclamation of the gospel, and for growth.<sup>43</sup> Fellowship is another crucial term in Philippians (Phil 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; cf. 1:7; 4:14-15). Fellowship means that people share with each other a common possession. It is much more than warm feelings or some time spent with each other at a social meeting. There is fellowship in the gospel (Phil 1:5) and the fellowship of/with the Spirit (Phil 3:1), even the fellowship of Christ's suffering. Thus, fellowship extends toward the Lord and the fellow believers and creates a bond between them. It also includes a monetary aspect, namely support of each other and the church.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the church in Philippi had already some structure. People were called to serve as elders and deacons, a situation which will be addressed again in the Pastoral Epistles.

- (5) *Eschatology*. The hope of the return of the Lord runs like a thread through the entire letter and shapes the Christian community. Paul expects the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6,10; 2:16). The christological hymn ends with the perspective that at a certain point in the future every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:10-11). In Phil 3:20-21 the motif of Christians as heavenly citizens is introduced who are still living in a foreign land and eagerly wait for their Lord and the transformation that accompanies his coming. Finally, in Phil 4:5 Paul assures us: "The Lord is near."<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

Jesus takes center stage in many NT books. The information about him differs from writer to writer. But the different aspects about him help us to establish a broader picture of him and enter into a meaningful relationship with him. Therefore, we appreciate the unique contributions by the authors of the NT.

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<sup>43</sup>See, Donfried and Marshall, 157-161.

<sup>44</sup>See, Martin, 48-52; Donfried and Marshall, 149-152.

<sup>45</sup>See, Martin, 46

## Appendix 1: Christology and Ecclesiology in Other Pauline Literature

### I. First Corinthians

- (1) *Christology.* 1Corinthians makes a definite contribution in the area of Christology, the doctrine that deals with Jesus.
  - (a) *The Theology of the Cross.* Jesus is highlighted as the crucified Lord right in the first chapter of the letter. Paul goes even further and says: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” The word of the cross is put center stage. Whether or not the Greek or the Jews or whoever is willing to accept this Jesus, we have to proclaim the crucified Lord. Some people prefer to stress Jesus as our example. But this is too little. An example may encourage us to live a moral life, but first of all we need to be saved before we can set out to follow Jesus. First we need the cross, and only then can we talk about the example. Which is also done in 1Corinthians when Christians are charged: “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” Though Jesus is both savior and example, the gospel is set aside if we stress the example only. This crucified Lord has become wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption for us. He can unify the church. He is the foundation of the spiritual temple, his church.
  - (b) *Lord’s Supper and Christ’s Resurrection.* In addition to the first chapters of 1Corinthians, in which Jesus is found, He is dealt with in 1Cor 11 and 15. 1Cor 11 reports about the Lord’s supper and preserves Jesus’ words about the bread and the wine including his reference to proclamation and his Second Coming. In 1Cor 15 the historicity of his resurrection is claimed and eyewitnesses, who have seen the risen Lord, are listed. Thus, all major statements on Jesus are linked to his suffering and death. In the section on the resurrection Jesus is also portrayed as the first fruit and the second Adam. All resurrections past and future are dependent on him. As the first Adam has brought death to the human race, so the second Adam through his death and resurrection guarantees life and the future resurrection. In addition, the resurrection of the believers is linked to Jesus’ second coming. At least since Paul Christian Theology must therefore be a theology of the cross.

- 4) *Ecclesiology*. The doctrine of the church in 1 Corinthians is especially important.
- (a) *The Unity of the Church*. The unity of the church is significant and is stressed right from the beginning.
  - (b) *The Church as Temple*. The church is presented as the temple of God which should not be destroyed. Whereas in the OT the temple is basically the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary, the NT adds a new dimension and interprets the temple Christologically; Jesus is the temple (John 2:19-21). Paul points out another dimension, the ecclesiological dimension. The church as well as the individual believer are the temple (3:16-17; 6:19-20), a sanctuary.
  - (c) *The Church as a Body*. Furthermore, the church is a body consisting of many members. All are needed. All are different, but united. This unique image of the church as a body stresses unity in diversity (1Cor 12:12-31).
  - (d) *Church Discipline*. The issue of church discipline is mentioned and its real meaning is revealed. Church discipline is the last means that the church has to work toward the salvation of the sinner. At the same time is church discipline a way to protect the church against the dangerous leaven of sin (1Cor 5).
  - (e) *Spiritual Gifts*. An entire section on worship issues (chapters 11-15) focuses on the church. The church has spiritual gifts. The most comprehensive lists and the most comprehensive treatment of spiritual gifts in the entire NT are found here. Spiritual gifts need to find their rightful place and should not be overemphasized.<sup>46</sup> There are also offices in the church. The question of leadership comes to the forefront.
  - (f) *The Lord's Supper*. The Lord's Supper is part of the worship service of the church. “. . . 1 Corinthians is also notable for being the only New Testament writing, except for the Synoptic Gospels, in which the words of eucharistic institution are cited (11.23-25).”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Cf., Keck, 95-100.

<sup>47</sup>Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 131. The Lord's Supper is also found in 1Cor 10:14-22.

## II. Pastoral Letters

The Pastoral letters make some significant contributions to New Testament theology, but also to practical aspects such as church organization.

- (1) *God*. Although God is called Father in the Pastoral Epistles, much more frequently he appears as Savior. Six out of the eight occurrences of this designation in the New Testament are found in these letters (1Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Tit 1:3; 2:10; 3:4). We also hear about God's saving grace (Tit 2:11). In addition the verb "to save" is used with God being implied (e.g., 2Tim 1:9). But Jesus is also called Savior (2Tim 2:10,13; Tit 1:4; 3:6). Thus, there is a strong emphasis on God's initiative in saving humankind. God and Christ are associated. Whereas in 1Timothy God is called Savior, in 2 Timothy only Jesus is the Savior, and in Titus both are. In the Pastoral Letters God is also the Creator/giver of life (1Tim 4:4; 6:13), the King of the universe (1Tim 1:17), and the King of kings (1Tim 6:15). God is imperishable, unseen, the only God. He "alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light (1Tim 1:17), whom no man has seen or can see" (1Tim 6:16). Thus, God is the sovereign ruler, who seems to be far away, almost unapproachable for human beings. And yet he "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1Tim 2:4). By stressing his transcendence as well as his saving activity both God's distance and difference as well as his closeness and his interest in us are balanced.<sup>48</sup> It is very reassuring to read about God's goodness and loving kindness (Tit 3:4).
- (2) *Christ*. We have already mentioned that Jesus is portrayed as Savior. The title "Lord" is applied to him. "In this Letter [1Timothy] where, as we have seen, 'Savior' belongs to God, God's title, *kyrios*, is usually applied to Christ."<sup>49</sup> Jesus is our hope (1Tim 1:1), our only mediator (1Tim 2:5), our judge (2Tim 4:1), and we wait for his appearance (1Tim 6:14). "He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2Tim 2:13). "As mediator, Christ is the immanence or appearance of the invisible God, which means that in a real sense Christ stands for God, taking over God's functions, with the focus on judging, it would seem, in 2

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<sup>48</sup>See, Strecker, 582-583; Frances Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 48-55.

<sup>49</sup>Young, 59.

Timothy, and on saving in Titus.”<sup>50</sup> The term “mediator” is applied to Jesus only in 1Tim 2:5 and in Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24, where a connection to the priesthood concept is found. Although the priesthood of Christ is not envisioned in the Pastoral Epistles, together with Hebrews they share an important aspect of Christ’s work, namely his role as mediator. The phrase “in Christ”<sup>51</sup> points to our fellowship and union with Jesus. All three letters contain major Christological sentences or hymns that shape the respective books. In 1Timothy, chapter 1:15-16 and chapter 2:5-6 are important. 1Tim 2:5-6: “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.” The first clear and more extensive statement, however, is found in 1Tim 3:16.

(Christ Jesus)  
  
was revealed in flesh,  
vindicated in spirit,  
  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among Gentiles,  
  
believed in throughout the world,  
taken up in glory.

The hymnic character is evident in the six lines structured as three antithetic parallelisms, the chiasmic structure (ab/ba/ab) juxtapose the heavenly (Spirit, angel, glory) and the earthly (flesh, peoples, world) spheres.”<sup>52</sup> The hymn starts with Jesus’ incarnation and ends with his glorification. The universality of the Christ event is underlined. In 2Tim 1:10; 2:8,11-13; 4:1 and Tit 2:13-14 other such statements are found. 2Tim 1:10: “but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and

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<sup>50</sup>Young, 63.

<sup>51</sup>1Tim 1:14; 3:13; 1:1,9,13; 2:1,10; 3:12,15.

<sup>52</sup>Strecker, 580.

immortality to light through the gospel.” 2Tim 2:8,11-13: “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel. . . It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.” 2Tim 4:1: “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom.” Tit 2:13-14: “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” The Pastoral Epistles stress Jesus’ descent, incarnation, confession before Pontius Pilate, his atoning death, resurrection, his function as judge, and his appearance.<sup>53</sup>

- (3) *The Church and Its Offices.* The term “church” is only found three times in the Pastoral epistles (1Tim 3:5,15; 5:16), however, others terms such as “saints” and “believers” point to it. The church is described as the “pillar and support of the truth.” It is a stronghold against the positions of the false teachers. On the other hand, the church is compared to a household, which is further developed in both 1Timothy and Titus. The reference to church offices such as bishops/elders and deacons as well as the discussion of the relations to older church members, widows, and masters must be seen in this context. The image of church members as valuable or less valuable vessels belongs also to the household metaphor (2Tim 2:19-21). The church is a household which is guided by certain leaders and which should function harmoniously and as an example for the non-Christian society.

We find several lists describing the qualifications for bishops/elders, deacons and probably deaconesses (1Tim 3:1-7, 8-13; 5:17-20; Tit 1:5-9).<sup>54</sup> The emphasis is more on character than

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<sup>53</sup>See, Strecker, 584.

<sup>54</sup>The women in 1Tim 3:11 can be either the wives of the deacons or deaconesses. Because qualifications for these women are mentioned, whereas the wives of bishops are not even mentioned, and because in Rom 16:1 a female deacon is found it seems to be more reasonable to understand these women as deaconesses. This view is rejected by Strecker, 588, but supported by Achtemeier, 452; and Young, 113.

on their responsibilities and duties.<sup>55</sup> “It is usually agreed that the elder and the bishop were identical in the church of this period. Paul does not equate them in this letter as he does in Titus 1:5-7, but he does not differentiate them either, and there is no reason for taking 5:17-19 as referring to anyone else than the bishops of chapter 3.”<sup>56</sup> In addition to the deacons the ministry of Timothy and Titus and Paul’s ministry as an apostle is referred to. The administrative structure of the church is necessary to maintain its goals and its unity and to provide for preaching, teaching, supervision, and administration. However, it is not mandatory or necessary and not even desirable to create a strict ecclesiastical hierarchy and assign to bishops an authority which makes them autocratic rulers. This would militate against the priesthood of all believers. The church order<sup>57</sup> in the Pastoral Epistles helps us with our attempts to create a church organization which is true to the New Testament example. Furthermore, leaders have great responsibilities and should be examples and models of the Christian lifestyle. Timothy in his ministry is compared to a faithful teacher, soldier, athlete, and farmer (2Tim 2:1-7). He is called to be courageous and use his spiritual gifts (2Tim 1:6-9; 2:1). His ministry includes suffering (2Tim 2:3). To a large certain extent the qualifications mentioned for church officers apply also to all of us and we should exhibit them and strive for them.

The church is the community of believers and as such it helps it’s poor and disadvantaged, for instance, the widows. However, benevolent acts on the part of the church are not to be

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<sup>55</sup>There is a distinction between the qualifications in 1Tim 3 and those in Tit 1. According to 1Tim 3:13 a bishop should not be a new convert. Such a qualification is not found in Titus, and this is understandable. The church in Ephesus was well established, but the situation was different in Crete. In a newly founded church, in which all members are new converts, one or more of them must function as bishops.

<sup>56</sup>Carson, 375. See, however, Young, 99-111. He makes such a distinction and understands the elders in 1Tim 5 as the older community members, who are involved in teaching and preaching and also receive remuneration for their ministry. They form the presbyterion or council of elders (1Tim 4:14) which appoints the bishop. However, it is the bishop who is the leader of the church. Young works with certain assumptions. He states, for instance: “The heart of their [the Pastoral Epistles’] theology is only understood properly if their pseudonymity is acknowledged.” However, this position shapes to a large extent the results of his investigation. In Tit 1:5,7 and in Acts 20:17,28 elders and bishops are called so interchangeably. Both seem to have the same functions, and elders are paid. Even the occurrence of bishop in the singular in 1Tim 3 and of elders in the plural in 1Tim 5—see, Strecker, 588--does not necessarily militate against this view, since the discussion on bishops in 1Tim 3 is introduced with a statement in the third person singular (“whoever/if anyone,” verse 1), and it is only consistent to continue with the singular (“bishop,” verse 2).

<sup>57</sup>See, Achtemeier, 452-453; Drane, 363-364.

misused (1Tim 5:3-16).

According to 2Tim 2:2 the gospel has to be passed on. There is a chain of witnesses which starts with Paul. He has passed on the gospel to Timothy and Titus who in turn are charged to entrust it “to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” In this way the gospel has reached us, and we are asked to pass it on to others, even if it is difficult.<sup>58</sup>

## **Appendix 2: Christology and Ecclesiology in the Petrine and Johannine Letters**

### **I. 1Peter**

- (1) *Christology.* Throughout the epistle christological statements are made. They encourage and strengthen the reader.
  - (a) *The Christ--His Blood, Resurrection, and Second Coming.* In 1Pet 1:2-3 the blood of Jesus, his death, and his resurrection including the results for us are already mentioned. According to 1Pet 1:7-8 the readers of the letter love Jesus, believe in him, and seem to expect his Second Coming. The sufferings of Jesus are introduced in 1Pet 1:11 and are found again and again in the letter. However, Peter does not stop with the sufferings but points to the glory of Jesus.
  - (b) *The Spotless Lamb.* A longer christological passage is found in 1Pet 1:18-21: “knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” Jesus is represented as the lamb which redeemed us not with silver and gold but with his blood. Jesus suffered innocently, but he was also spotless and unblemished. Peter will come back to this thought later

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<sup>58</sup>Carson, 383, stated: “The gospel is for the most unpromising of people.” In Tit 1:12-13 Paul quotes a Cretan author and agrees with him saying, “One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true” (Tit 1:12-13). Evangelism among them must have been difficult. Indeed, it is strange that even church members seemed to be addicted to wine (Tit 2:3), had a hard time to love of husbands and children (Tit 2:4), stole from their masters (Tit2:10), and were slanderers (Tit 3:1-2) to name some issues. For more information about Crete, see, Nichol 7:355-356.

and show that Jesus was sinless. Jesus death's was not an accident but was part of the plan of redemption which was laid out even before the foundation of the world. This christological statement goes on to talk about his resurrection and glorification. Therefore, we who belong to him have hope.

- (c) *The Living Stone.* In 1Pet 2:4-8 Jesus is presented as the living stone, a precious corner stone. He was rejected, and yet whoever believes in him will not be disappointed. Jesus is the foundation of the spiritual house in which we may be included as living stones.
- (d) *The Shepherd and Bishop.* After having addressed the slaves, Peter introduces another important christological argument (1Pet 2:21-25). This is probably the most explicit text on Christ's suffering in 1Peter. Slaves and servant are called to be submissive even if it includes suffering. Reason: "This finds favor with God" (1Pet 2:19). How are they able to do that? The answer is provided in 1Pet 2:21-25. Jesus is the example and Savior. Even if Christians are enslaved and bruised, they are those who are healed, healed through Christ's wounds. They do not go astray and are lost anymore. They have returned to the Lord and have found the Father's house. Jesus shepherds and guides them. This passage indicates that Jesus suffered innocently. He was completely without sin, but carried our sins to the cross. While he suffered, he did not hate nor did he desire to get revenge. He suffered for us as our substitutionary sacrifice. Other lords make their servants suffer for them. Here the Lord suffers for his servants. Therefore, Christians accept sufferings and ask the Lord to strengthen them to work through it as Jesus did. Two images stress the importance to follow Jesus. The first one is to exactly copy the lines and patterns that Jesus has written and painted. The second is to follow the path he went and the footsteps he left us.
- (e) *The King.* The next extensive christological argument is found in 1Pet 3:18-22. In both cases, in chapter 2b and in chapter 3, Peter interrupts his advice and adds an entire passage about our Lord in order to motivate Christians to live a holy life. Nevertheless, there are differences between the two passages. In the first Jesus' earthly history is emphasized; in the second a heavenly aspect is added: Jesus is the

Lord. In the first paragraph Jesus appears as a shepherd, in the second as a king. However, in both cases it is through Jesus that humans have been offered healing and salvation. In verse 18 we hear about Jesus' suffering for our sins and his death, but also about his resurrection. The last part of verse 21 again starts with Jesus' resurrection and verse 22 continues: Jesus' death was not the end. He went to heaven and reigns. Verse 18 describes the earthly aspect of the life of Jesus, whereas verse 22 describes the heavenly aspect. This is the main focus of this passage: From suffering to glorification. Jesus is the true Lord. He supports his afflicted children. Verses 18 and 22 form a kind of parenthesis in which several other verses are inserted. This insertion consists of verses 19-21. It talks about Christ's proclamation (19-20) and Christ's salvific action in baptism (20-21).

- (f) *The Suffering Christ.* 1Pet 4 mentions Jesus two times. No extensive argument is built as in the previous cases. Jesus is the suffering Christ (1Pet 4:1,13). However, his suffering is limited to the "flesh" that is his earthly existence.
  - (g) *The Chief Shepherd.* In chapter 5 Peter addresses the elders as a fellow elder and calls them shepherds. Peter along with his fellow shepherds is responsible for caring for the churches that are entrusted to them. But above all of them is Jesus the Chief Shepherd, who cares for the flock and the shepherds and who will come again and bestow the crown of glory on the elders (1Pet 5:4). In 1Pet 5:10 Jesus is found the last time. Through him we may participate in the eternal glory.
- (2) *Ecclesiology.* In chapter 2 Christ is the foundation for the spiritual house, the church. There is the people of God (1Pet 2:10) who formerly had not been a people. The judgment starts with the household of God (1Pet 4:17). The elders are called to shepherd the flock of God (1Pet 5:2). Elders point to some degree of organization within the early church. In 1Pet 2:9 the privileges of Israel are applied to the Christian community. Now the church is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." Along with the privileges comes the responsibility to proclaim "the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The importance of the Christian community as the house of God

being an underlying theme throughout the letter is stressed by Elliott.<sup>59</sup>

## II. 1John

- (1) *Christology.* The major problem with the false teachers in John's churches was that they had erroneous ideas about Jesus. Therefore John emphasizes that Jesus is the Word that was in the beginning. As his gospel starts with Christ so does his first epistle. John as an eyewitness testifies that Jesus is the life (1John 1:1,2), the Christ (1John 2:22), that is, the Messiah, our advocate (1John 2:1), and the Son of God (1John 5:5). The letter refers to Christ's incarnation (1John 4:2,9) and his death (1John 1:7). His death is clearly salvific. "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1:7). "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1John 2:2). ". . . he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin" (1John 3:5) ". . . the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil" (1John 3:8). "God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him" (1John 4:9). ". . . he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins" (1John 4:10). ". . . the Father sent his Son as savior of the world" (1John 4:14). Jesus' incarnation is clearly attested. Jesus indeed shed his blood and was not just a phantom (5:6). Whether we want to hear it or not, it is the cross of Jesus, it is the blood of Jesus that saves us—nothing else. "Saving knowledge of fellowship with God is achieved only by confessing that the Son is the atonement for sin."<sup>60</sup> As a consequence of our relationship with him we "walk just as he walked" (1John 2:6).
- (2) *False Teachers and Testing.* The false teachers and prophets had a problem with Jesus which

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<sup>59</sup>John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter: Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 233: ". . . the Christian community constitutes a home for the alienated and the estranged. If, moreover, this community was to endure and grow, then it was essential that its distinctive features be preserved at all costs, even at the cost of conflict and suffering . . . Union with Christ, in turn, assured union with God and with all those who constituted the household of faith. . . The chief unsettling and debilitating experience of the addressees was a sense of homelessness in an increasingly hostile environment. In a letter of consolation and confirmation the authors respond by assuring these Asia Minor Christians that in the Christian community alle the homeless have a home in the household of God . . . The strategy of 1 Peter, therefore, was to motivate the communal self-consciousness and to mobilize the solidarity and steadfastness of the audience by appealing to them as uniquely graced and honored members of the household of God." See also, 148-150, 220-233, 282-288. On page 285 he talks about the "accentuation of the specifically familial and household character of the Christian community."

<sup>60</sup>R. Alan Culpepper, "1-2-3 John," in *The General Letters: Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, 1-2-3 John*, ed. by G. Krodel, Proclamation Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 139.

let to ethical error. Obviously, these people denied that Jesus had “come in the flesh” (4:2). According to 2:22 an antichrist is one who denies that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. Smalley suggests that there were four different groups within the churches that John addressed. (a) There were faithful Christians that followed the apostolic gospel. (b) Some were Jewish Christians which did not accept Jesus as the divine Messiah. (c) Some Gnostics had problems with the humanity of Christ. (d) In addition, there were secessionists who had begun to break away from the church.<sup>61</sup> Others would only suggest two groups, faithful Christians and those who had problems with the nature of Jesus.<sup>62</sup> Church history tells us that there were groups which at least partially espoused the ideas found in 1John. That is not to say that John is referring precisely to these groups. Every attempt to reconstruct the original group or groups is a conjecture. Nevertheless, it is helpful to look at movements maintaining similar ideas without claiming that the false teachers in 1John are precisely these groups. One of these movements was Docetism, a branch of Gnosticism. It assumed that Jesus only seemed to have a real human body, suffered, and died, but in reality Jesus was not human as we are. The church fathers responded by claiming that the incarnation, suffering, and death of Jesus were historical events and that Jesus had really come in the flesh.<sup>63</sup> Another movement was Cerinthianism, started by a certain Cerinth. His idea was that the divine Christ entered Jesus at his baptism and left Jesus before he died on the cross.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the human Jesus and the divine Christ were kept separate. Such teachings do not only destroy the picture of Jesus that the Bible paints but affect other doctrines, especially the understanding of the plan of salvation and the doctrine of salvation.

These old erroneous ideas are oftentimes brushed up and sold again in our days, e.g., in the

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<sup>61</sup>Cf., Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary 51 (Waco: Word Publishers, 1984), xxiv-xxv; John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 47-48.

<sup>62</sup>Cf., Carson, 454-455. The problem with the suggestion of heretics Jewish Christians is that John must warn against sinning and admonish to keep the commandments of God. He does not quote the OT either. These observations are not in favor of the suggestion made.

<sup>63</sup>Cf., Achtemeier, 539.

<sup>64</sup>Cf., Carson, 453.

New Age Movement but also in Christian circles. “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9). 1John is very much needed because in our days the biblical testimony on the nature of Christ is being questioned again. John calls his audience not to believe everyone and not to accept uncritically new doctrines, but to test individually and corporately whether or not a doctrine is truly biblical. Discernment to distinguish truth from error is needed. “. . . John lays his emphasis on three marks of authentic Christianity, namely belief in Jesus as the Christ come in the flesh, obedience to the commands of God and brotherly love.”<sup>65</sup> “John’s ultimate aim in his first Epistle is to give his readers solid grounds for assurance that they have eternal life through belief in Jesus Christ”<sup>66</sup> as proclaimed in Scripture. It contains the possibly clearest text of Scripture about the certainty of salvation (1John 5:11-13). According to this text we must not that we are saved.

### **Appendix 3: Christology and Ecclesiology in the Gospels**

#### **I. Matthew**

- (1) *Christology.* Matthew’s irreplaceable contribution contains the Sermon on the Mount and other large teaching blocks of Jesus. It narrates the birth narrative from Joseph’s perspective. It uses the OT extensively and shows that the NT is a fulfillment of the OT. Both belong together and find their focal point in Jesus the Messiah. The eschatological discourse (Mat 24-25) contains parables that we would not want to miss such as the parable of the ten virgins, of the talents, and of the goats and the sheep. And Jesus is Immanuel, the God who is always with us (Mat1:23; 28:20).

William G. Johnson mentions the following unique features and emphases: Jesus as royal lawgiver, king, new Moses, and the personification of wisdom; the important issue of discipleship including benefits and challenges; the better righteousness which is expected from disciples and which must match the nature of Christ’s kingdom; the church and its authority; the kingdom which has already come and yet is still to come, namely in glory; and

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<sup>65</sup>Stott, 55.

<sup>66</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 55.

the issue of the cross, which is not just Jesus' cross but a cross for each one of his followers.<sup>67</sup>

As already mentioned Matthew has a strong messianic interests. He quotes a lot from the OT—the LXX as well as the Hebrew text—and points to the fulfillment in Jesus. Thus, it becomes evident that OT and NT belong together, that Christianity is inseparably tied to the OT. Finally, the great commission includes all peoples and individuals on the globe (Mat 28:18-20).

- (2) *Ecclesiology*. Matthew has an interest in the church. “Matthew, alone of the Gospels, records any specific teaching about the Church. Here only does the word ἐκκλησία [ekklēsia, church] occur attributed to Jesus.”<sup>68</sup> The texts are Mat 16:18 and 18:17-18 in which the authority of the church is mentioned, an authority which is always dependent on God and cannot be used against his Word. The gathering of two or three in the name of Jesus and his presence with them may also point to the church (Mat 18:20), and the great commission can only be fulfilled by the church and not by some individuals.

## II. Mark

- (1) *Christology*. The Gospel of Mark is a Gospel of action. The author is more interested in Jesus' deeds than in his words. There are some narrative passages placed into other narratives (e.g., Mark 5:25-35; 6:17-29). This feature is used “to produce dramatized irony . . . It is as though the author uses intercalation as a tool to address the reader's own situation. . . . intercalation serves to bring the reader at the end of the Gospel to the place where he must answer for himself who Jesus is and what his own discipleship requires.”<sup>69</sup>

Mark has a high Christology. Jesus is the Son of God, the Son of Man, and the redeemer. Divine and human sides of Jesus are pointed to, although in a somewhat concealed manner. In a special way this suffering is stressed. He is the suffering Son of God. There is an element

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<sup>67</sup>Cf., William G. Johnson, *Religion in Overalls* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1977).

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>69</sup>Tom Shepherd, *Markan Sandwich Stories: Narration, Definition, and Function*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 18 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1993), 384, 387.

of secrecy which some authors call the messianic secret (e.g., Mark 1:25,34,44; 5:43; 7:36; 9:9). This is not a psychological trick intended to indirectly motivate his audience to mission. Jesus may have wanted to avoid early conflict with the Jewish leadership and misconceptions in the audience about his ministry. “Outside of Galilee (Mark 5:19; 9:27) and during the closing days in the Jerusalem area (Mark 10:52) no such restriction was needed.”<sup>70</sup>

### III. Luke

- (1) *Christology.* Both Luke and John mention Martha and Mary, Annas, and a disciple named Judas in addition to Judas Iscariot. Both have an interest in Jerusalem generally and in the temple. Both speak of Satan as being active in the betrayal of Jesus (Luke 22:3; John 13:27), say that the ear that Peter cut off the slave in Gethsemane was the *right* ear (Luke 22:50; John 18:10), and tell us that Pilate three times declared that Jesus was innocent (Luke 23:4, 14, 22; John 18:38; 19:4,6).<sup>71</sup>

Luke is one of the two gospels that contain Jesus’ birth narrative. However, Luke is even more detailed than Matthew is. The Gospel of Luke starts with the birth narrative of John the Baptist which is found nowhere else. This birth narrative prepares the way for the birth of the Messiah. When it comes to the birth narrative of Jesus Luke contains many details not found in Matthew.

Luke is the only gospel containing a brief spotlight on Jesus before he starts his public ministry.

Luke shows Jesus’ marked interest in people. He focuses on individuals, social outcasts, children, and the poor and disreputable. “Most of the parables peculiar to Luke centre attention on people, whereas Matthew’s focus upon the kingdom.”<sup>72</sup> This can, for instance, be seen in the birth narrative. Luke mentions Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna. In other places he tells us about Mary and Martha, Zaccheus and Cleopas. Jesus does not mind

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<sup>70</sup>Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 188.

<sup>71</sup>Carson, 120.

<sup>72</sup>Guthrie, 91.

being anointed by the woman who is a sinner. He meets Zaccheus, is interested in the criminal crucified next to him, tells about the prodigal son, the two debtors and the publican. He does not share the Jewish prejudice against the Samaritans. “Luke mentions thirteen women not mentioned elsewhere in the Gospels.”<sup>73</sup> Jesus welcomed children, blessed them, spoke about them, and presented them as an example. Children seem to have enjoyed the company of Jesus.

Jesus came from a poor family. In his programmatic sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21) as well as in his message to John the Luke Baptist (Luke 7:22) he includes the poor. There is a beatitude for the poor in Luke 6:20. It is not poverty which is praiseworthy but the helplessness of the poor requires interventions, and their decision to rely on the Lord is honored. On the other hand, Jesus warns repeatedly against riches (Luke 6:24). Jesus dines with the Pharisees, but he also “receives sinners and eats with them” (15:2). Luke contains a number of Jesus’ parables not found elsewhere.<sup>74</sup>

#### **IV. John**

##### **(1) Christology.**

(a) *Jesus the logos.* Right in the beginning of the Gospel of John Jesus is introduced as the logos, the word. The same term is applied to Jesus also in 1John and in Revelation. In John this logos is God. However, it is not identical with God the Father. John carefully distinguishes between the different persons of the Godhead. In his writings the concept of the trinity is expressed quite clearly. John 1:1-3 reads: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” That the “Word” represents the

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>They are the two debtors (Luke 7:41-43), the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21), the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9), choosing places of honor (14:7-11), the great banquet (Luke 14:16-24), building a tower and going to war (Luke 14:28-33), the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), the dishonest steward (Luke 16:1-9), the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the unprofitable servants (Luke 17:7-10), the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8), the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9-14), and the pounds (Luke 19:11-27).

Son is evident from John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” Thus, we can substitute the term “Word” in John 1:1-3 with Jesus: “In the beginning was the Word/*Jesus*, and the Word/*Jesus* was with God, and the Word/*Jesus* was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”<sup>75</sup>

Some have suggested that John was influenced by Greek philosophy and especially by Philo when he talked about the Word. “The Logos-doctrine of Philo is intended to bridge the gulf between the purely spiritual God and the material world, and also to explain the presence and action of God in the soul.”<sup>76</sup> This is quite different from John. In Philo the *logos* is an intermediate power, which is not strictly divine. It is not the savior as it is in John. However, there are some connections between John and the theology of the Word of God in the OT, although John surpasses this OT concept. “The word of God is not merely a creative and conservational force . . . , but the bearer of salvation an new life . . . The word of God uttered at creation, through the mouth of the prophets . . . and in the law . . . has a number of functions which may very well be compared with those attributed to the Logos of John.”<sup>77</sup>

- (b) *The Pre-Existence of Jesus.* The pre-existence of Christ is assumed in different places. According to the prologue Jesus was in the beginning with God, whenever this beginning was. In John 1:30 John the Baptist confirms: “This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me.’” Jesus himself claims: “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). In the high priestly prayer

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<sup>75</sup>By using the term “God” once with article and the next time without article John differentiates between God the Father and God the Son. A literal translation would read: “In the beginning was the Word/*Jesus*, and the Word/*Jesus* was with the God, and the Word/*Jesus* was God.”

<sup>76</sup>Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1982, 1990, 1:486.

<sup>77</sup>Schnackenburg, 1:483. He also discusses the proposal that John may have used an ancient myth which flowered in Gnosticism, but he concludes, 1:493: “The Johannine hymn to the Logos is, in the main, much closer to Jewish and primitive Christian thinking than to Gnosticism, and this must have been the main reason for the choice of the title Logos.”

(John 17:5,24) he again stresses his pre-existence, and there are a number of other places, in which it becomes evident that Jesus had existed prior to his incarnation (e.g., John 6:33,50-51; 8:14).

(c) *The I-Am-Sayings*. These sayings fall into two groups. First, there is the absolute use of the expression in John. Probably the clearest is found in John 8:58: “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” With this statement Jesus does not only claim pre-existence. Maybe the Jews would still have tolerated this idea. What was intolerable for them is that Jesus claimed divinity. The I am is God himself. The expression may go back to Isa 43:10,13 and possibly to Ex 3:14. The I am is the God of the OT, Yahweh. Even texts such as John 6:20; 18:5-6,8; and 13:19 contain and require this theological meaning. Second, there is the predicate use of the formula: “I am the bread of life” (6,35,48), “I am the light of the world” (8:12), “I am the door of the sheep” (10:7,9), “I am the good shepherd” (10:11,14), “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25), ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life “ (14:6), and “I am the true vine” (15:1,5) Even in these sayings the idea of a divine being is present.<sup>78</sup>

(d) *Other Christological Titles*. John uses the titles “Son of man,” “Son of God,” simply “Son,” and “God.” Jesus is the “Christ,” “the Lamb of God,” “the King,” and “the Lord”, which in some cases stands for Yahweh, namely when an OT prediction talking about Yahweh is applied to Jesus (e.g., John 1:23).

Another title is “the only Son” or “the only begotten Son.” It is suggested by some that the word *monogenēs*, “only,” points to a literal begetting of Jesus and should be translated “only begotten.” But the same term occurs also in Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38 and points to an only child. In Heb 11:17 Isaac is called Abraham’s *monogenēs* son. Isaac was not even Abraham’s only son, but he was the unique son, the only son of promise. There is no emphasis on birth. These texts including those of John and 1John are the only ones in the NT to use the Greek term. They suggest that the translation “only” or “unique” is to be preferred. The translation “only begotten” may

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<sup>78</sup>Cf., Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 107 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 130-155.

have originated with the early Fathers. The Vulgate may have influenced later translations. The normal term for begotten is *gegennēka* which is found in Heb 1:5 and may point to Christ's resurrection or incarnation.

R. Brown writes: "The Synoptic emphasis on the *basileia* [kingdom] making itself felt in Jesus seems to have become in John an emphasis on Jesus who is *basileus* ("king") and who reigns. John refers to Jesus as king fifteen times, almost double the number of times that this reference occurs in any of the other Gospels. . . . If the Synoptic *basileia* is like leaven working in a mass of dough, the Johannine Jesus is the bread of life. If there is a Synoptic parable of the shepherd and the lost sheep, the Johannine Jesus is the model shepherd. If the Synoptics record a parable where the *basileia* is like the vineyard which shall be handed over to others (Matt xxi 43), the Johannine Jesus is the vine."<sup>79</sup> In any case, the Gospel portrays Jesus as fully divine and fully human.<sup>80</sup>

- (e) *The Miracles as Signs*. The Gospel of John contains seven particular miracles. They are called signs. But the term occurs seven-teen times in total. "The signs are important works of Jesus, performed in the sight of his disciples, miracles, in fact, which of their nature should lead to faith in 'Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.'"<sup>81</sup> They are comparable to the miracles of the Exodus. They point to the saving work of Jesus. "If faith bursts forth in consequence of what is revealed in the signs, well and good: signs legitimately serve as a basis for faith (e.g., 10:38). In contrast, people are excoriated for their dependence on signs (4:48). It is a better faith that hears and believes rather than sees and believes (20:29)."<sup>82</sup>
- (f) *Exaltation and Glorification of Jesus*. It has already been mentioned that the terms

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<sup>79</sup>B Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, The Anchor Bible 29 and 29A (New York: Doubleday, 1966, 1970), 1:cx.

<sup>80</sup>For more titles and a list of titles of Jesus see, George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), lxxxi..

<sup>81</sup>Schnackenburg, 1:515.

<sup>82</sup>Carson, 176.

“to exalt” and “to glorify” are used in John to describe Jesus’ suffering and death. The normal word family for suffering is not employed to describe Jesus’ passion in John. What looks like a great defeat in human eyes, is the greatest victory.<sup>83</sup> Salvation has come, and our lives can be meaningful again.

(2) *Ecclesiology.*

(a) *The Foot Washing.* The last supper is mentioned by the Synoptics but not directly by John. Some think that the discourse on the bread of life may allude to the Lord’s supper. On the other hand, the evangelist reports that the foot washing took place and gained a special theological meaning, surpassing any normal washing of feet (John 13). Both events, the Lord’s Supper as well as the foot washing are important. The respective contexts reveals some overlap pointing to the fact that these to symbolic acts belong together. Again the different gospels supplement each other.<sup>84</sup>

(b) *The People of God.* In John the term “church” is not used. Nevertheless, John knows the Christian community. Jesus is the shepherd and cares for his sheep. The group of disciples is characterized by love. The image of the vine and the branches may point to Jesus and his people. The farewell speeches are not found in the Synoptic Gospels. They prepare the disciples for what is to come. These farewell speeches contain large sections on the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-26; 15:26-27; 16:5-15).

(3) *Other Great Themes.* These themes are already found in the prologue and developed in the main body of the Gospel. “Unlike the teaching in the Synoptic Gospels the teaching in John tends to present abstract themes such as light, life, love, truth, abiding, which recur at intervals throughout the book.”<sup>85</sup> For instance, the term “light” is found 16 times in John, whereas “life” occurs 32 times in the Gospel. The word family “to love” (*agapaō*) is found 44 times not counting synonyms. Love is very important in the farewell discourses and in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to Peter and the six other disciples. Christ’s followers

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<sup>83</sup>Cf., Schnackenburg, 2:398-410.

<sup>84</sup>For a more detailed explanation see, Schnackenburg, 3:33-47.

<sup>85</sup>Guthrie, 239.

are called to love each other (13:34-35; 15:12,17). Love toward Jesus is manifested by keeping his commandments (14:15,21,23-24; 15:10). Jesus loves the Father (14:31). The Father loves Jesus (15:9). Jesus loves his disciples (15:9, 12). The Father loves his children (16:27; *phileō*). And Peter is asked about his relationship to Jesus (21:15-17) as are we.

## Summary

It is very interesting and enlightening to notice the different christological and ecclesiological emphases of the NT writers. Almost each book makes a unique contribution in some way or another. Of great importance are the christological hymns. Why are they found in the NT? Here are some possible reasons:

- (1) Jesus is the center of the NT. It is natural that Jesus is praised for what he has done and that his followers are reminded of his life and work.
- (2) Early Christianity had to come to grips with who Jesus was. Jewish Christians who had accepted monotheism may have had a harder time to believe in an additional person of the godhead while maintaining monotheism. They had to understand that the system of sacrifices had been fulfilled in Jesus and had become obsolete. The temple had lost its importance as had some ancient rites. In Hebrews we find that they were in danger to give up their faith in Jesus, the Messiah, and fall away from him and the Christian church. They needed to be reminded of Jesus and his achievements again and again. Although gentiles came from another background, they also needed to be exposed to Jesus as often as possible. The hymns and other christological statements may have been of great help. Some of them can be memorized easily and could have served as a confession of faith.
- (3) The early church had to wrestle with quite a number of false teachers. The NT is full of reports about different heresies. A number of them were christological in nature. The majority of the NT letter may have been written because churches had to deal with false teachers, strange doctrines, and false theological emphases which affected the unity of the church and the life style of the believers. In this context, christological statements supported the apostolic proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They may have served as correctives and may have become a standard against which it was possible to measure false doctrines.

- (4) Christological statements and hymns were also used to motivate believers to live a truly Christian life, endure evil, suffering, and persecution, and exhibit holy conduct. What else can motivate a disciple to follow Christ's footsteps if not a reminder of salvation brought about by Jesus and the exemplary life of the master!

The great number of christological titles, images, and statements highlights the life, the work, and the authority and greatness of Jesus from different perspectives and give us glimpses of Jesus' character, achievements, and activities. We do not consider them to be in contradiction to each other but rather to be complimentary. There is unity in diversity. Although some NT authors use unique titles not found elsewhere, there is also always an overlap with other authors when it comes to Christology. Thus, a NT perspective of Jesus is portrayed as well as of his church.

## GOD'S CHURCH AND HIS CHURCHES

### Introduction

Ecclesiology is a doctrine that has not been studied as extensively as Christology and Theology have been. It had to be addressed during the Reformation period. It has come to the forefront again in our days.

The ecumenical movement has challenged the different Christian denominations to reflect on the questions as to what the church is, what it stands for, and how the different denominations relate to each other.<sup>86</sup> The August 6, 2000 Roman Catholic declaration *Dominus Iesus* stresses the uniqueness of the Catholic Church and “maintains that particular churches (above all the Reformation churches) are ‘not churches in the proper sense’ (*sensu proprio Ecclesiae non sunt*).”<sup>87</sup> The Seventh-day Adventist church has been involved in dialogues with different Christians churches. It cannot avoid to wrestle with these issues and address them.

Furthermore, its tremendous growth in non-Christian areas has brought up questions such as, Is it necessary for a Muslim to become an Adventist? Whom does Christ's church include? What is the role of the Adventist church and how does the remnant concept impact us?

Christian churches use different models of government. Individualism, pluralism, nationalism, as well as gender and race issues influence also the Adventist church and may suggest to lean toward a congregational approach of church government and a strengthening of national churches accompanied by looser ties to the worldwide Adventist church.

Thus, it is crucial that the Seventh-day Adventist church takes a fresh look at ecclesiology. In this paper we will be dealing with one major issue only, namely the issue what the New Testament teaches about the local church and the universal church and how the two relate to each other. The limitations of this study do not allow us to study other pertinent questions such as those mentioned above. Looking primarily at the use of the term *ekklesia* in the New Testament we will discuss the local church and the universal church and will ask ourselves how they relate to each other.

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<sup>86</sup>Cf., Wolfgang Klausnitzer, “One Church or Unity of the Churches?,” *Theology Digest* 48 (2001): 227-231.

<sup>87</sup>Medard Kehl, “The One Church and the Many Churches,” *Theology Digest* 49 (2002): 34.

## I. The Local Church and the Universal Church

In secular Greek the term *ekklēsia* designated a gathering of people, for instance, the assembly of citizens as a political entity. In the Septuagint the word is most often employed as a translation of the Hebrew word *qahal*, “gathering,” “congregation,” or “assembly.” In the New Testament it normally describes the group of those, who believe in Jesus Christ and accept him and his teachings.<sup>88</sup> They “are joined to the organization originated by Him”<sup>89</sup> and are his disciples and followers called to minister to each other and the world and to proclaim what he has commanded them (Mat 28:20).<sup>90</sup> *Ekklēsia* as it refers to the Christian church is used for “(1) a church meeting (1 Cor 11:18), (2) the total number of Christians living in one place (1Cor 4:17), (3) the church universal (Mt 16:18).”<sup>91</sup> It is the community of the Holy Spirit and the people of God. Whereas “universal church” refers to the church in general which is not limited by a geographic location and a certain century A.D., the local church is defined as a local congregation in a city or village, which may also be limited in time.

### 1. The Church in the Gospels and in Acts

#### (1) *The Synoptic Gospels*

The term *ekklēsia* is found in the Gospel of Matthew only. It does not occur in Mark, Luke, and John, however, quite frequently in Acts. Although it is disputed whether or not Jesus talked about his *ekklēsia* (Mat 16:18; 18:17–twice),<sup>92</sup> the evidence in the Synoptic Gospels shows that

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<sup>88</sup>Cf., Erwin Fahlbusch, “Church. Subject, Tasks, and Problems of Ecclesiology,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, edited by E. Fahlbusch et al. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 1:477-478; and Jürgen Roloff, “Church. Historical Aspects,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, edited by E. Fahlbusch et al. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 1:481.

<sup>89</sup>Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979), 210.

<sup>90</sup>Cf. G. Gloege, “Gemeinde. Begrifflich,” in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, edited by Kurt Galling (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1958), 2:1325-1329.

<sup>91</sup>Horn, 210.

<sup>92</sup>Cf., Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament, Volume 1: The Ministry of Jesus in Its Theological Significance* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 213, who maintains that “The saying to Peter in Mt. 16:17-19 distinguished itself so greatly from all other comparable sayings of Jesus that it could not have come originally from him.” See also the discussion in Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove:

“Jesus intended to create a visible community. . . He came to give birth to a fellowship of men and women under the Kingship of God, a religious community of which He was the leader. . . As the destined Messiah Jesus gathered a remnant community to Himself. . . A Messiah without a community was unthinkable to the Jewish mind. The concepts of disciples, a remnant, and messiahship were constitutive of a new community, a people of God, which is the Messiah’s possession.”<sup>93</sup> Although Jesus was probably not talking about an organization, but rather about his specific people—“my church”—his sayings prepared the way for the church as we later find it in Acts and in the New Testament epistles.

The concept of Jesus’ church is not limited to the term *ekklēsia*. Jesus’ call to individuals to become his followers (Mat 4:19; 8:22; 19:21; Mark 2:14; 10:21; Luke 5:27; 9:59; 18:22), the election of the Twelve out of a larger group of his disciples, their designation as apostles, their sending out on a mission trip (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:13-16; Mat 10:1-20),<sup>94</sup> Jesus’ particular teachings such as the Sermon on the Mount addressed to his disciples (Mat 5-7), and his sayings about his flock (Luke 12:32, Mat 26:31) and his family (Mat 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21) indicate that the Synoptic Gospels are well aware of the fact that Jesus was gathering a special people, his church.

## (2) *The Gospel of John*

The Gospel of John agrees with the Synoptics. According to John 1:43; 21:22 Jesus called people to follow him and to become or remain his disciples. In John 15:1-8 Jesus compares himself with a vine and his community with its branches and challenges them to remain in him. There is an extended section on Jesus as the good shepherd of his sheep (John 10:1-18). At the end of the Fourth

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InterVarsity Press, 1981), 711-712; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 109-111, 342; and K. L. Schmidt, “καλεω, κλησις, κλητος, αντικαλεω, εγκαλεω, εγκλημα, εισκαλεω, μετακαλεω, προκαλεω, συγκαλεω. επικαλεω, προσκαλεω, εκκλησια,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 3:518-526.

<sup>93</sup>Raoul Dederen, “The Church,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, edited by Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 540. Cf., Raoul Dederen, “Wollte Jesus eine Gemeinde gründen?” in *Die Gemeinde und ihr Auftrag*, Studien zur adventistischen Ekklesiologie, 2, edited by J. Mager (Lüneburg: Saatkorn-Verlag, 1994), 36-40, 43-47.

<sup>94</sup>See also the mission of the Seventy (Luke 10:1-17).

Gospel, Jesus charges Peter to tend his lambs and his sheep (John 21:15-17). Thus, there is a Messianic community, Christ's church.

In John 10:16 Jesus makes an interesting statement: "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd." Jesus looks ahead and sees that in the future there will be other believers. These Gentile believers will not form a Gentile church separate from a church consisting of Jewish believers. "They are to become united in one flock. And they all stand under the leadership of one shepherd. The unity is not a natural unity but one brought about by the activity of the Shepherd in 'bringing' them."<sup>95</sup> Tasker adds that this "flock will be universal in character."<sup>96</sup> In John 10:16 as well as in Jesus' saying about his church in Matthew 16 we have a future dimension and at the same time a universal dimension.<sup>97</sup> Jesus knows about his church as it will grow and expand. It will be one church, a universal entity.

### (3) *Acts of the Apostles*

In Acts a number of terms are used to describe the church such as "brothers" (Acts 1:15), "believers" (Acts 2:44), those "who call on your name" (Acts 9:14), "flock" (Acts 20:28,29), etc. However, the word *ekklēsia* is found 23 times, and thus we can concentrate on it. Twice it is used in the plural. In the other instances the singular is employed. In Acts 7:38 *ekklēsia* occurs in an Old Testament quotation. Three times *ekklēsia* is a political entity, the assembly of citizens, and has nothing to do with the church of God (Acts 19:32,39,40).<sup>98</sup> In all the other places it refers to the community of believers. When in Acts *ekklēsia* describes the church it is normally the local church, the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1; 11:22;15:4), the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1); the church in

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<sup>95</sup>Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 512; cf. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 2:299.

<sup>96</sup>R. V. G. Tasker, *John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 130.

<sup>97</sup>Cf., Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book Publishing Company, 1998), 1044.

<sup>98</sup>See, Schmidt, 505.

Caesarea (Acts 18:22), the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17), or the churches in Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41). Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23). Acts informs that on Pentecost the church was empowered by the Holy Spirit and set out on its mission. Whereas Jerusalem originally was the seat of the Messianic community, soon churches were established in other places and countries. A tremendous growth took place. Some organization became necessary and was established. In addition to the apostles the Seven were chosen and elders were elected to serve local congregations.

However, the question must be asked whether or not Acts with its strong emphasis on local congregations also contains a universal dimension and knows about a universal church. Before responding we must affirm that the churches mentioned in Acts are in line with Jesus' expectations about his future church. "An important point is that the same word is used for the Jewish Christian congregation at Jerusalem and the Gentile congregation at Antioch. . . . To the ἐκκλησία belong all those who are His."<sup>99</sup>

Twice in Acts the term "the whole church" is used, but in Acts 5:11 the expression seems to refer to the Jerusalem church. In Acts 15:22, although in the context of the Jerusalem council, it may again refer to the church in Jerusalem,<sup>100</sup> which to some extent would explain why the apostles and elders in the very same verse as well as in verse 4 are mentioned separately. The council would consist of delegates and members of the Jerusalem church.

A broader view of the church is presented in Acts 9:31: "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase." Though Luke does not yet speak about the universal church, an important step into that direction is made. The churches in a certain area are the church. "The local connection is not the decisive point. This is shown by the further references to the ἐκκλησία in Judaea, Galilee and Samaria. . . . It is not that the ἐκκλησία divides up into ἐκκλησίαι. Nor does the sum of the ἐκκλησίαι produce the ἐκκλησία. The one ἐκκλησία is present in the places

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<sup>99</sup>Schmidt, 505.

<sup>100</sup>Cf., F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 297.

mentioned . . .”<sup>101</sup>

A rich text and the last one in Acts to contain the term *ekklēsia* is Acts 20:28, which is part of Paul’s farewell speech addressed to the elders of Ephesus: “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” The verse is unique insofar as it contains the phrase “the church of God,” not found elsewhere in Acts, and the term “flock” introduced here and found in Acts 20:28,29 only. In addition it is stated that this church of God was purchased by his blood. It seems appropriate to understand this text as referring to the church in general rather than to a local congregation only. Jesus has purchased his church. He called it his “flock”<sup>102</sup>

The church is described as a *flock*, a familiar Old Testament metaphor for God’s people (Ps. 100:3; Is. 40:11; Je. 13:17; Ezek 34) which was taken up by Jesus (Lk. 12:32; 15:3-7; 19:10; Jn. 10:1-30). The picture is applied to the church and its leaders . . . The church belongs to God because he himself bought it . . . The thought is of the act of redemption by which the church became God’s special property, and is based on the picture of God redeeming Israel in Isaiah 43:21 (*cf.* Ps 74:2, which significantly follows a verse in which Israel is likened to a flock).<sup>103</sup>

Whereas Jesus may emphasize the universality of his church, Acts especially mentions local congregations, however, without denying the larger picture.

## 2. The Church in the Pauline Literature

For Paul the church is a local entity as well as the universal group of believers. Yet, his emphasis differs from letter to letter. We will take a look at those letters first, which put a stronger stress on the local church, before moving to those who emphasize the universal church. At the same time we acknowledge that a number of Pauline epistles do not have much to say about ecclesiology and may not even address the issue at all in which we are interested.

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<sup>101</sup>Schmidt, 505.

<sup>102</sup>The same noun for “flock”--*poimnion* instead of *poimnē*--is used here and in Luke 12:32.

<sup>103</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 333-334. Cf., Schmidt, 505.

**a. Emphasis on the Local Church**

(1) *Romans*

In Romans *ekklēsia* is found five times. It appears in the last chapter only. The church is either a local church (Rom 16:1) or a house church (Rom 16:5, 23) which also is local. All the churches of the Gentiles give thanks in Romans 16:4, and all the churches of Christ greet the Christians in Rome (Rom 16:16). However, the concept of the church is also expressed with terms such as the saints (Rom 1:7; 15:25; 16:2), those being called (Rom 8:30), and those who were chosen (Rom 8:33). In Romans 9-11 Paul discusses the election and unbelief of Israel and its relation to Gentile Christians. He mentions a remnant (Rom 9:27), uses the example of an olive tree in which wild branches, Gentile Christians, are being crafted in, and states that “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26). The latter statements as well as the reference to “one body” in Romans 12:4-5 may contain a universal dimension of the church.

(2) *1 Corinthians*

In 1 Corinthians the church occurs frequently. The term *ekklēsia* is found 22 times, six times as a plural. In most of the cases the term refers to the local church (e.g., 1Cor 1:2; 16:19). But in addition to the church in Corinth there are other Christian churches (1Cor 4:17; 7:17), such as the churches of Galatia (1Cor 16:1) and of Asia (1Cor 16:19). These churches are “the churches of the saints” (1Cor 14:33) and the “churches of God” (1Cor 11:16).<sup>104</sup> Are we able to detect a universal element? There are at least three texts, in which *ekklēsia* may cross local boundaries and express a universal concept—1Cor 10:32 mentioning Jews, Greeks, and the church of God, 1Cor 12:28 talking about functions and spiritual gifts in the church in the context of the body metaphor,<sup>105</sup> and 1Cor 15:9 in which Paul admits that he has persecuted the church of God. Goppelt suggests: “According to Paul, the designation *ekklēsia* was applicable to three different possibilities. (1) In I Cor. 10:32 it meant the people of God in its entirety. (2) In I Cor. 1:2 it meant the particular local community. (3)

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<sup>104</sup>The phrase “church of God” in the singular occurs another four times (1Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9).

<sup>105</sup>Cf., Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 174.

In I Cor. 11:18 it meant the worshipping assembly of the community.”<sup>106</sup> G. Fee while commenting on 1 Corinthians 15:9 states: “This is one of the rare instances in Paul’s earlier letters where he uses ἡ ἐκκλησία with the qualifier τοῦ θεοῦ to refer to the church in a more universal sense rather than to a local body (cf. Gal. 1:13 and the plural in v. 22).”<sup>107</sup> Thus, 1 Corinthians seems to contain a universal element, although the local church is stressed.<sup>108</sup>

### (3) *2 Corinthians*

2 Corinthians employs *ekklēsia* nine times, once referring to God’s church as it was in Corinth (1:1) and eight times to other churches or all churches (8:1,18,19,23,24; 11:8,28; 12:13). All of the references describe local churches as probably does the term “saints.” The letter is addressed “To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia” (2Cor 1:1). A glimpse at the universal church may be found in chapter 6:16 where Paul states: “We are the temple of the living God.”<sup>109</sup> In 1 Corinthians the image of the temple had already been used and applied to believers, namely in 3:16 to the Corinthian church and in 6:19 to the individual Christian. The difference in 2 Corinthians is that Paul here includes himself by speaking about “we” instead of “you” and thus enlarges the image of the temple of God by possibly including the entire Christian community.<sup>110</sup>

### (4) *Galatians*

In Galatians the churches of Galatia (1:2) and the churches of Judea (1:22) are mentioned.

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<sup>106</sup>Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament, Volume 2: The Variety and Unity of the Apostolic Witness to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 144.

<sup>107</sup>Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 734.

<sup>108</sup>Schmidt, 506, points out that saying addressed to the church in Corinth also apply to the church as a whole, because “each community, however small, represents the total community, the Church.”

<sup>109</sup>Cf., Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary 40 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1986), 202.

<sup>110</sup>Cf., Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 138.

Furthermore, Paul refers to his persecution of the “church” (1:13). The latter text must be understood in a universal sense. R. Fung holds that Paul’s reference to the church of God, which he wanted to destroy, is “a reference to the universal Church as the messianic people of God in its entirety, which is, however, to be met with in various local ‘churches of God’ (1 Cor. 11:16; 1 Thess, 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4) representing the one universal Church.”<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, the phrase “household/ family of the faith” which is contrasted with “all people” (Gal 6:10)<sup>112</sup> and the phrase “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16)<sup>113</sup> seem to have universal connotations.

(5) *Philippians*

Philippians with two occurrences of *ekklēsia* has one reference to the local church (Phil 4:15) and one reference to the universal church which Paul had persecuted (Phil 3:6). The church members are again called the “saints” (Phil 1:1; 4:21,22).

(6) *1 and 2Thessalonians*

In the Thessalonian correspondence “the church of the Thessalonians in God the/our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1Thess 1:1; 2Thess 1:1) is found twice. In addition “the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea” (1Thess 2:14) and “the churches of God” (2Thess 1:4) are mentioned. The church consists of “brothers” (1Thess 5:1,4,12; 2Thess 2:1; 3:1) and “believers” (1Thess 1:7; 2:10; 2Thess 1:10). However, the universal church is not directly present in the Thessalonian literature.

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<sup>111</sup>Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 55; cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41 (Dallas: WordBooks, Publisher, 1990), 28.

<sup>112</sup>Cf., Fung, 298-299; Longenecker, 283: “The expression ἡ πίστις (‘the faith’) is used here as a locution for the Christian movement (cf. 1:23; see also 3:23, 25).”

<sup>113</sup>See the discussions by Fung, 310-311, who suggests to understand the phrase as “the new Israel, the new people of God—both Jews and Gentiles being included . . .” and Longenecker, 298-299, who states “that what the Judaizers were claiming to offer his converts they already have ‘in Christ’ by faith: that they are truly children of Abraham together with the Jews who believe, and so properly can be called ‘the Israel of God’ together with all Jews who believe.”

(7) *The Pastoral Epistles and Philemon*

In the Pastoral epistles specific situations and problems are addressed that Timothy and Titus had to face. 2Timothy is concerned about Timothy and his ministry and provides a report on Paul's own situation and imminent death. The term *ekklēsia* is missing in this letter. References to the troublemakers in the church (2Tim 2:17-18; 3:1-9; 4:14-15) point to a local flavor. However, the image of the church as a household containing different types of vessels (2Tim 2:30-21) and the references to God's firm foundation and his awareness of those who are his (2Tim 2:19) may be more universal in nature.<sup>114</sup>

The Letter to Titus does not employ *ekklēsia* either but is interested in church order, namely the appointment of elders in different cities (Tit 1:5-9) and the question of how to deal with false teachers (Tit 1:10-16; 3:8-11). But Titus 2:14 seems to broaden the perspective when Paul talks about Jesus "who gave himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."<sup>115</sup>

1Timothy deals also with church order, the appointment of bishops and deacons (1Tim 3:1-13), false teachers including ascetic tendencies in the church of Ephesus (1Tim 1:3-11; 4:1-5; 6:20-21), and proper conduct within the Christian community (1Tim 5-6). Three times the term *ekklēsia* is used (1Tim 3:5,15; 5:16). In 1Timothy 3:15 we hear about "the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." This is the only reference which could be understood in broader terms. However, the absence of an article before *ekklēsia* may suggest "that the local community is again primarily in mind, yet conceived of as part of the larger whole."<sup>116</sup>

Paul's letter to Philemon knows of a local church, a house church only (Philem 1:2).

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<sup>114</sup>Cf., Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 162-163.

<sup>115</sup>Cf., Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 213.

<sup>116</sup>Guthrie, 99. That the local community is the focus of 1Timothy 3:15 is supported by Ralph Earle, "1, 2 Timothy" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 11:369, although he states that "the general church of Jesus Christ may also be in view;" Gottfried. Holtz, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 13 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1980), 88; and William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 220-221;

(8) *Summary*

The Pauline letter discussed so far have a strong emphasis on the local church, however, interestingly enough a number of them are also aware of the larger picture of the universal church. Paul maintains that there are local Christian congregations, there is also the church in a certain region, and there is the universal church which we already encountered with Jesus. We now turn to those Pauline letters which emphasize the universal church.

**b. Emphasis on the Universal Church**

(1) *Ephesians*

The most prominent letter to stress the universal church is Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. In almost all extant manuscripts and in all versions, the Greek title of the first prison letter of the New Testament is "To the Ephesians." However, some old manuscripts lack "in Ephesus" in Ephesians 1:1 and just address the saints.<sup>117</sup> We also notice that the tone of the letter is rather impersonal. Although Paul had worked for quite a while in Ephesus and must have known many people there (Acts 19-20) and although he had a farewell meeting with the elders of Ephesus before he went to Jerusalem, where he was taken into custody, he does not mention his friends there as he does in other letters.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, we would suggest that Ephesians is a letter sent to the church in Ephesus which was also intended to be used as a circular or encyclical letter for the Christian churches in general or at least the churches in Asia Minor.<sup>119</sup> This suggestion would also explain the special nature of ecclesiology and its universal scope in Ephesians.

In this letter Paul writes about Jesus, salvation, and the church. During his imprisonment Paul may have had time to reflect on the church, its relation to Christ, its function and ministry, and its future. The epistle he wrote is one of the peaks of the New Testament. At the end of Ephesians 1 Paul summarizes the life of Jesus from incarnation to glorification and ends with Jesus as the head of his church (Eph 1:20-23). The second half of the second chapter shows what the church is all

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<sup>117</sup>E.g., Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, and p<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>118</sup>Compare, e.g., with Rom 16 and Phil 4.

<sup>119</sup>For a detailed discussion, see, Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1970), 508-514.

about emphasizing its corporate and universal aspect (Eph 2:11-30). It is Jesus who abolished the barrier between Jews and Gentiles and made the church a holy temple. In chapter 3 Paul shows that the wisdom of God is now being made known through the church (Eph3:10-11). Chapter 4 calls for the unity of the church. Although believers have received different spiritual gifts, they are to further the building up and the unity of the body of Christ, the church (Eph 4:1-16). The relationship between wife and husband reflect the relationship that exists between Christ and his church (Eph 5:21-33).

“The Letter to the Ephesians represent the church as the goal of the Christ event in a way that is unique in the New Testament.”<sup>120</sup> Here we find more explicitly a Pauline doctrine of the church. Schmidt notes that “Christology and ecclesiology are reciprocally related.”<sup>121</sup> Ephesians presents a “christological ecclesiology.”<sup>122</sup> The term *ekklēsia* occurs nine times in this short letter. In all texts *ekklēsia* refers to the universal church. Jesus is head of the church (Eph 1:22; 5:23). The wisdom of God is “made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10). To God the Father “be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever” (Eph 3:21). The church is subject to Christ (Eph 5:24). Jesus does not hate but loves the church and gave himself up for her (Eph 5:29,25) so that he may present her holy and blameless (Eph 5:27). The relationship between Christ and the church is a mystery (Eph 5:32).

But the church is also described with other terms. It is the body of Christ, and Jesus is its head (Eph1:22-23; 4:12). The church is identified with Jesus. “His presence and authority pervade the new community.”<sup>123</sup> Relationship, “co-ordination and subordination”<sup>124</sup> on the part of the church are expressed. The church is also the new person or new humanity (Eph 2:15; 4:13), the holy temple and building (Eph 2:21), God’s household (Eph 2:19), and Christ’s bride or wife (Eph 5:23-32). The church has apostolic and prophetic roots and Christ is its foundation and cornerstone (Eph 2:20).

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<sup>120</sup>Georg Strecker, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 569.

<sup>121</sup>Cf., Schmidt, 509.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 511.

<sup>123</sup>Cf., Roy B. Zuck,(ed.), *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 305.

<sup>124</sup>Schmidt, 509.

Church members, the saints (Eph 1:1), are fellow citizens (Eph 2:19). Christ has brought Jews and Gentiles into one church, which is a mystery (Eph 2:11-16; 3:4-6). He has established a united church, and the unity of his church must be maintained (Eph 4:3-6). Through baptism people are incorporated into the church (Eph 4:5). Having received spiritual gifts and offices the church is “a growing and dynamic organism”<sup>125</sup> (Eph 4:7-16). Its members have been saved (Eph 1) but are called to live up to their high calling (Eph 4 and 5) and demonstrate also in their household relations that Christ is their Lord (Eph 5 and 6). In Ephesians the church is not a local entity but the universal church.<sup>126</sup> Therefore, this letter is so important. Paul wants us “to catch the splendid vision of one church, thoroughly united in the Lord, though it contains members of various races and is equipped by God to render significant service in this world.”<sup>127</sup>

The term “unity” is found twice in the book, namely in Ephesians 4:3 and 13. But the concept of unity is not limited to these verses which contain a call to unity and the goal of unity for the church. The numeral “one” is used in a number of places to express unity. The second chapter describes how Jesus formed his church by making two groups, Jews and Gentiles, into one breaking down the barriers between them and destroying their enmity (Eph 2:14,15). Now they are one body (Eph 2:16) and have access to God in one Spirit (Eph 2:18). In Ephesians 4:4-6 seven times the number “one” is repeated stressing the unity of the church: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. In Ephesians 5:31 the marital relationship is compared to Christ and the church. As a couple becomes one flesh, so the church and Jesus do in a symbolic way. Paul “was writing to a church (or churches) consisting of Jews and Gentiles, Asiatics and Europeans, slaves and freedmen—all symbols of a disrupted world that was to be restored to unity in Christ. This would necessitate unity of person, family, church, and race. The restoration of

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<sup>125</sup>Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 111.

<sup>126</sup>Cf., Erickson, 1044.

<sup>127</sup>Carson, 315. See also, Hoehner, 111-112; Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), xcii-xcv; Andrew T. Lincoln and A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 91-126, 132-133, 137-141, 151-156, 158-161; Strecker, 568-575.

individual unity in the life of each believer assures the unity of God's universe."<sup>128</sup>

Thus, Ephesians presents the church as the universal church which is one and is united in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, i.e., the Trinity.

## (2) *Colossians*

Although Ephesians and Colossians are quite similar in content, there are also differences. The letter is addressed "to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae" (Col 1:2). It should also be read in Laodicea (Col 4:16), but it is not a circular letter. It deals with problems in the church of Colossae, especially syncretism containing Jewish and pagan ideas as well as ascetic tendencies. Nothing of that sort was mentioned in Ephesians.

In Colossians the term *ekklēsia* is employed four times. Twice *ekklēsia* refers to a local church (4:15,16). On the other hand, Colossians 1:18 and 24 describe the universal church which is the body of Christ and he is its head.<sup>129</sup> The ecclesiology of Ephesians is more developed than that of Colossians. Whereas in Ephesians Paul focuses on the worldwide church, in Colossians the universal church as well as the individual congregation are on his mind. Ephesians' strong emphasis on the unity of the church is not found in Colossians to that extent.<sup>130</sup> But both Ephesians and Colossians emphasize that the church is the body of Christ, and Christ is its head.<sup>131</sup> Growth of the church is also stressed (Col 2:19).<sup>132</sup> G. E. Ladd summarizes:

Paul uses the metaphor of the body to express the oneness of the church with her Lord. The

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<sup>128</sup>Francis D. Nichol et al., eds., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), 6:995; see also, Leander E. Keck and Victor Paul Furnish, *The Pauline Letters* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 128-133.

<sup>129</sup>Cf., G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 215, who states: ". . . *ekklēsia* is twice used of the universal Church without any immediate local reference." Cf. also, Ladd, 537.

<sup>130</sup>However see, Col 2:19.

<sup>131</sup>See, Col 1:18,24; 2:19; 3:15. The body of Christ was also found in 1Cor 12. However, there is a difference between this concept in 1Corinthians and the same concept in Ephesians and Colossians. In all texts the church is compared to a body, but whereas in Ephesians and Colossians the head represents Christ, in 1Corinthians the head represents individual members of the body. They are described as eyes and ears. 1Cor 12:21: "And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" Cf., Ladd, 546.

<sup>132</sup>See, Strecker, 558.

church is not a body or society of believers but the body of Christ. . . . Paul obviously goes beyond the ordinary analogy of the physical body and its head, for the body is pictured as deriving its nourishment and unity from the head (Col. 2:19); and the body is to grow up in every way into him who is the head (Eph. 4:15). This emphasizes . . . the complete dependence of the church upon Christ for all its life and growth. This also means that the church is the instrument of Christ in the world. . . . This metaphor emphasizes also the unity of the church, especially since *ekklēsia* in Ephesians and Colossians refers to the universal church rather than the local congregation.<sup>133</sup>

The universal aspect of the body language is also stressed by D. Guthrie: “This development of the body metaphor applied to the church emphasizes particularly its universal aspect.”<sup>134</sup>

### (3) *Hebrews*

The Letter to the Hebrews uses *ekklēsia* twice. The first text containing the word is an Old Testament quotation (Heb 2:12). The second text is unique: “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect” (Heb 12:23). Both texts describe a congregation. “The term is thus used in v23a in the nontechnical sense of ‘a gathering’ or ‘an assembly’ of the redeemed people of God.”<sup>135</sup> D. Guthrie describes those whose names are “enrolled in heaven” as “the officially accepted members of the heavenly Jerusalem,”<sup>136</sup> whereas Nichol calls them “the church invisible.”<sup>137</sup> This *ekklēsia* cannot be understood as a local church on earth.

In Hebrews 4:9; 11:25 “the people of God” is mentioned, in Hebrews 8:10 “the house of Israel” and “my people,” and in Hebrews 10:30 “his people.” The last two references are found in Old Testament quotations. All of them should be understood in the context of the new covenant.

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<sup>133</sup>Ladd, 545-546.

<sup>134</sup>Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 745.

<sup>135</sup>William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary 47B (Dallas: WordBooks, Publisher, 1991), 468. For further information see, 467-471.

<sup>136</sup>Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 262,

<sup>137</sup>Nichol, 7:487.

Guthrie suggests that “the people of God” “is a comprehensive term, suitable for the universal community, which embraces both Jews and Gentiles. . . . A new community, devoted to hearing God’s voice and obeying it, has displaced the old Israel which failed in the time of testing.”<sup>138</sup>

(4) *Summary*

When Paul talks about the church, he seems to understand it in two main ways. For Paul the church is the community of believers in a certain place. For him the church is also the universal church of Jesus Christ, his body, bride, people, and temple/house.

### 3. The Church in Other New Testament Documents

(1) *James*

James uses *ekklēsia* once. When talking about prayer for the sick and about anointing them, he mentions the elders of the church (Jam 5:14). “The reference is not to a single congregation, but to the community as a whole, since this is a catholic epistle.”<sup>139</sup> In James 2:2 the Christian assembly is called synagogue.<sup>140</sup>

(2) *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*

Peter’s letters as well as Jude’s epistle do not employ the term *ekklēsia*. In 1 Peter the church consists of the “elect” who are “strangers” in the world (1Pet 1:1). In chapter 2 Christ is the foundation for the spiritual house, the church. The believers are “living stones” and form “a spiritual house for a holy priesthood” (1Pet 2:4-5).<sup>141</sup> In 1 Peter 2:9 the privileges of Israel are applied to the

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<sup>138</sup>Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 115; cf., 176, where he explains the phrase “the house of Israel” and proposes that it is “an expression ideally inclusive of the whole people of God.”

<sup>139</sup>Schmidt, 513.

<sup>140</sup>Cf., Douglas J. Moo, *James*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 89-90; Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary 48 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 61.

<sup>141</sup>John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter; Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), suggests that an underlying theme throughout 1 Peter is the Christian community as the house of God. On page 233 he states: “. . . the Christian community constitutes a home for the alienated and the estranged. If, moreover, this community was to endure and grow, then it was essential that its distinctive features be

Christian community. Now the church is “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” Along with the privileges comes the responsibility to proclaim “the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Gentiles, who formerly had not been a people, have now become the people of God (1Pet 2:10), because they believe in Jesus. The church is “the brotherhood” and the “brotherhood throughout the world” (1Peter 2:17; 5:9). The judgment starts with the household of God (1Pet 4:17). The elders are called to shepherd the flock of God (1Pet 5:2-3). The existence of elders points to some degree of organization within the early church. The “she” of 1Peter 5:13 may refer to the church in Rome.<sup>142</sup>

1Peter belongs to the general epistles. These letters are not addressed to one particular church or they are sent to many churches, not necessarily limited to one particular region. 1Peter is supposed to reach believers throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. The terms being used in 1Peter such as “people of God” and “flock” have a universal character in other New Testament writings and seem to have the same meaning here. “The command to ‘shepherd the flock of God’ echoes the command of Jesus to Peter himself according to John 21:16: ‘Shepherd my sheep’ . . . The ‘flock’ belongs neither to the elders nor to Peter. The emphasis of John’s Gospel is that the flock belongs to Jesus . . .”<sup>143</sup> R. Michaels seems to suggest that “‘the flock’ of God is universal in scope.”<sup>144</sup> Obviously, the famous text about the priesthood of all believers in 1Peter 2:9 must also be understood universally. Israel’s privileges recorded in Exodus 19:6 are applied to all Gentile Christians. Finally, the “brotherhood throughout the world” (1Peter 5:9)<sup>145</sup> points to the universal church of God.

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preserved at all costs, even at the cost of conflict and suffering . . . Union with Christ, in turn, assured union with God and with all those who constituted the household of faith. . . The chief unsettling and debilitating experience of the addressees was a sense of homelessness in an increasingly hostile environment. In a letter of consolation and confirmation the authors respond by assuring these Asia Minor Christians that in the Christian community all the homeless have a home in the household of God.” See also, 148-150, 220-233, 282-288.

<sup>142</sup>Wayne. *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 201.

<sup>143</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary 49 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 282.

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>145</sup>*Cf.*, *Ibid.*, 301.

(3) *The Johannine Letters*

The term *ekklēsia* is found in 3John 1:6,9,10 only. In all cases it refers to the local congregation. The second letter is addressed “to the chosen lady and to her children whom I love in truth” (2John 1:1). This lady receives greetings from her “chosen sister” (2John 1:13). Some understand her to be an individual<sup>146</sup> whereas others prefer to speak about a church. This would be a local church.<sup>147</sup>

(4) *Revelation*

In Revelation a strong emphasis on the church prevails.<sup>148</sup> The term *ekklēsia* is found 20 times and is used in both singular and plural. In each case *ekklēsia* stands for groups of believers. The Apocalypse contains a letter frame (chapters 1-3 and chapter 22b). All the references to *ekklēsia* are found in the letter frame only, not in the apocalyptic part, however, nineteen out of twenty in Rev 1-3, i.e., right in the beginning of the book, and one in its conclusion.<sup>149</sup> In Revelation 1 only the plural is found. Four times we hear about the seven churches. This changes with Revelation 2 and 3. At the beginning of each of the seven messages the singular is used in order to address the respective local church. However, at the end of each message the formula “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” connect the churches with each other. Church number four, the one found in the middle of the seven churches, contains an additional plural of the term *ekklēsia*: “And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve” (2:23).

In these passages we hear about local congregations. The *ekklēsia* in Revelation is a local entity. On the other hand, the number seven and the mix of singular and plural forms of the word *ekklēsia* in each message to these churches may point to completeness and interdependence of the churches and may tell us that there are not only local congregations but also a universal church. This

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<sup>146</sup>Cf., Nichol, 7:684, who mentions both options.

<sup>147</sup>Cf., Carson, 451; John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 451.

<sup>148</sup>Cf., Ekkehardt Mueller, “Introduction to the Ecclesiology of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12 (2001): 199-215.

<sup>149</sup>Rev 1:4,11,20,20; 2:1,7,8,11,12,17,18,23,29; 3:1,6,7,13,14,22; 22:16.

is more evident in the apocalyptic part of Revelation (Rev 4-22a). In spite of their shortcomings the seven churches are still God's church. The majority of them may have to face temporal judgment, but they are not yet totally separated from him. Thus, the term *ekklēsia* in Revelation always points to some sort of relationship with God. It also always refers to the *ekklesia militans*, the church involved in battle, which toward the end of the book is depicted as the triumphant church, yet without the particular term *ekklēsia* being applied to her.

In the main body of the Apocalypse the term *ekklēsia* is replaced by symbols such as the woman clothed with the sun (Rev 12), the holy city (Rev 11:2), and the 144,000 (Rev 7:4-8; 14:1-5). These entities underline the universal nature of the church. Other terms related to the church or representing the church are the lampstands (1:20), fellow servants, brothers, servants (7:3; 12:10; 19:2,5; 22:3,6), priests and a kingdom (1:6; 5:10; 20:6), those who overcome (2-3; 15:2; 21:7), the remnant (2:24; 12:17), those in white clothes (3:4-5; 6:11; 7:9,13), the saints (5:8; 8:3-4), those who are called, chosen, and are faithful (17:14), the great multitude (7:9-17), my/his people (18:4; 21:3), and the bride (21:9; 22:17). Revelation also presents a counterpart to the church. It is Babylon, the great harlot, also named the great city (Rev 16:9; 17:1,18; 18:16). Babylon persecutes and kills true followers of God but will be judged. Finally, only the bride of the Lamb, the holy city, New Jerusalem will remain. Babylon and the true church are universal entities.

Revelation also knows about the remnant and especially emphasizes the end time remnant. The conflict between the Satanic trinity and the end-time remnant is described right in the middle of the book, in Revelation 12-14. Satan wages war against this remnant. He also uses the sea beast and the beast coming out of the earth in his attempt to annihilate this remnant. The picture is quite bleak. It seems as if none of the true believers could survive. Yet, they are depicted with Jesus on Mt. Zion. Revelation 15-22 reports about the consequences of the conflict between God's remnant church and the Satanic trinity/Babylon. Characteristics of the remnant are among others faith in Jesus, keeping the commandments, endurance or patience, and the testimony of Jesus (12:17; 13:10; 14:12).<sup>150</sup>

Thus, in Revelation there are local churches, and there is a universal church. Jesus walks

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<sup>150</sup>Cf., Ekkehardt Mueller, "The End Time Remnant in Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11 (2000): 188-204.

among the churches, i.e., he is very close to them and cares for them, sending them messages of rebuke, recognition, and comfort. He loves the church. God's church has certain characteristics and tasks, encounters internal and external difficulties, and receives divine appeals and promises. The church in Revelation is the church militant and triumphant. It is visible and yet also partially invisible. It is local church, but especially a universal entity. There is a strong emphasis on the end time church.

#### **4. Summary**

The church is the community of believers. It stands in close relationship to God and Jesus. Jesus himself has founded the church, and his sayings already contain the notion of a universal church. Although in many places in the New Testament the local church is emphasized, the idea of a universal church was never lost. It is found in many Pauline epistles, but especially in Ephesians. It again emerges in some of the general or catholic letters of the New Testament. Both the local aspects as well as the universal church are strongly emphasized in the last book of the Bible. Therefore, we cannot neglect one aspect and focus on the other only. When we discuss ecclesiology the local church as well as the universal church must find their place.

## **II. The Relationship Between the Local and the Universal Church**

### **1. Suggested Models of Church Government**

The question is not whether or not Christians recognize the twofold nature of the church. Normally, they do. The question is, however, how they understand the relationship between the local church and the universal church and how they apply their insights to the process of choosing different forms of church government or modifying existing ones. Behind these questions looms the other one, which we cannot discuss here, namely as to how different denominations or individual Christians relate to the church of God in general or to the universal church.

In a recently published article K. Koch discusses the relationship between the local/particular church and the universal church from a Roman Catholic perspective.<sup>151</sup> First, he discusses the

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<sup>151</sup>Cf., Kurt Koch, "The Church–Community of Many Nations," *Theology Digest* 50 (2003): 3-11.

“Universal *communio*” by using a couple of Bible texts as a springboard, especially John 21 with the reference to the 153 fish, which are interpreted in a kind of allegorical way. Then he approaches “The church as sacramental *communio*.”

The basic sacraments are baptism and the eucharist, and from these Sacraments the universality of church *communio* is most clearly revealed. . . . More than ‘socialization into a community,’ baptism is reception into the universal church on the way to reception in to a concrete community. . . . In baptism, where the one universal church assumes the local and baptismal church, we find the deepest basis for the fact that in the church there can be no division into residents and aliens. . . . Just as does baptism, the eucharist proceeds from but does not end with the local church. . . . *Communio ecclesiology* is thus intrinsically eucharistic ecclesiology. . . . Because there is only one Christ and one body of Christ, the eucharist, even when celebrated at specific locations, is always at the same time universal.”<sup>152</sup>

Before he concludes his article with a section on “Multicultural communities,” Koch deals with “*Communio ecclesia et ecclesiarum*.” In this part he reaffirms *Lumen Gentium*: “the one and unique Catholic Church exists in and is formed out of the particular churches” and warns against “ecclesial globalism” as well as against “a particular church federalism.” In his opinion these dangers can only be overcome “in the light of the mystery of the trinity,”<sup>153</sup> which forms a model for the relation between the universal and the local church.

Thus also, the church, in its true essence as *communio ecclesia et ecclesiarum*, is the concretization and realization of the one universal church. . . . There must be a living bridge of two-way communication between the particular churches and the universal church. The bishop, as pontifex, is the bridge-builder between his diocese and the universal church. . . . What the bishop is at the regional level, the pope is at the universal level.<sup>154</sup>

Although Koch warns against the danger of overemphasizing the universal church, it seems that the universal aspect is the predominant one in his article. Furthermore, when he talks about local or particular churches, apparently he is not really interested in church communities in certain cities, but seems to focus on national churches or dioceses.<sup>155</sup> Obviously, his concern is that these entities do not become too independent from Rome and the pope. “The Pentecost event shows that the church,

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>153</sup>Koch, 6.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid, 6: “‘. . . The idea of a national church is, in itself, a contradiction.’ Every local church, then, with all its uniqueness, is always also a particular church within the universal church . . .” See also the heading of his article.

from its very beginning, was universal and is, therefore, a faith community with a catholic horizon that values diversity in unity and unity in diversity.”<sup>156</sup>

In his *Systematic Theology* W. Pannenberg has a section on “The Church as the Fellowship of Believers and Body of Christ.” In this section he briefly touches on ecclesiology in church history and recent discussions on ecclesiology especially within the Catholic Church. He states that “the understanding of the church as *koinōnia* in terms of the eucharistic worship of the local community has become increasingly the focus of interest. This is especially true of Roman Catholic theology from the time of Vatican II.”<sup>157</sup> He refers to J. Ratzinger several times and notes:

Ratzinger, however, also points to the specifically Roman Catholic nuance with which the council took up this basic thought when it stated that the church of Christ is truly present in all regular fellowships of believers that are in union with their shepherds and that the NT itself would thus call churches. The stress on legality and on union with their shepherds means that the church is not simply present in full in every congregation that celebrates the Eucharist. With this emphasis, indeed, the thought of a hierarchical *communio* that governs the *communio* concept of *Lumen Gentium* as a whole finds its way already into the description of the local situation of the worshiping community inasmuch as from a Roman Catholic standpoint union with the shepherds implies the whole ministerial hierarchy right up to the pope.<sup>158</sup>

The logical conclusion is that “in none of the churches that are now separated . . . is there a full presence of the one Lord in their separate eucharistic celebrations.” And he continues:

Ratzinger’s thought that the eucharistic fellowship includes fellowship with the whole church, and hence also with ministers in the various levels of the church’s life, is one that we must affirm. But explicating this matter more precisely is something that theology and ecumenical dialogue have yet to do, for the whole subject of the place of the church’s ministry in and not over the congregation stands related to it. On the view of ecclesial *communio* in the early church the fellowship of local congregations finds expression in mutual recognition of the ministers who represent them, especially when they assemble at a council. We are not, then, to see the fellowship of local congregations as if these were subsequently brought together in a federation. As local churches they are always already manifestations of the one church of Christ. This one church is not secondarily made up of local churches. Instead, the fellowship of local churches rests on the unity in the one Lord

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>157</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 104.

<sup>158</sup>Pannenberg, 105.

that is already there, and that is present in a special way in the celebration of the Eucharist. . . . At worship when the pure gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered, there is always a manifestation of the one church that is made holy by Jesus Christ, that goes back to the apostles, and that is catholic in its apostolic mission.<sup>159</sup>

Although Pannenberg partially agrees with Ratzinger and accepts a eucharistic ecclesiology, he seems to have a different understanding of the role of ministers, namely as being part of the church and not forming an entity above the church. Furthermore, he mentions the preaching of the pure gospel in addition to the eucharist.

Protestants have oftentimes defined the relationship between the local church and the universal church in the following way: “. . . the local congregation is not regarded as merely a part or component of the whole church, but as the church in its local expression. The whole is in the part. The local visible *ekklēsia* is the whole church expressed locally in a particular time and space.”<sup>160</sup>

T. Oden writes:

“The local, visible *ekklēsia* is the whole (holy, catholic, apostolic) church expressed locally in a particular time and space. . . . The congregation does not merely belong to the church catholic, it is the church catholic celebrating the good news in some spot. The whole church is convened and called to being in that locale. . . . This is why the notion of an Asian church or a proletarian church or a black church or a white church is prone to be ethnocentrically misleading. . . . The church is by definition one. . . . The church is not made universal by adding up all the local churches and getting the sum, for the whole *communio sanctorum* is already there expressing itself locally by responding in faith to the call of the gospel.”<sup>161</sup>

As Scriptural support Oden points to 1Corinthians 1:2,<sup>162</sup> and we could add 2Corinthians 1:1. According to Ephesians 2:11-21; 4:3-16 the church is one. Nevertheless, there are many churches. But, for instance, the church of Corinth, though a local congregation, is “the church of God which is at Corinth.” The wording is important, because the text does not talk about the church of Corinth, but literally “the church of God being in Corinth.” Thus, the Corinthian church is the church of God, and yet there is also a universal church of God which surpasses the Corinthian congregation.

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 105-106.

<sup>160</sup>Dederen, “The Church,” 542, cf. 560. Quite similar, Erickson, 1043-1044; Ladd, 537; and Schmidt, 506.

<sup>161</sup>Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology: Volume Three* (Peabody: Prince Press, 1998), 283.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

It seems to us that whereas the Roman Catholic church exploits the concept of the universal church to the extent that the local congregation in a specific time and place is somewhat neglected, some of the Protestant definitions stress the local church to such an extent that the universal church may not be sufficiently emphasized. However we understand the relationship between local and universal church, it has practical implications and will determine the form of church government which we choose. W. Grudem, for instance, acknowledges that Christians have “to work for the unity of the visible church,” however, he does not believe in “one worldwide church government over all Christians” but is content that different ministries and organizations work next to each other. “. . . the unity of believers is often demonstrated quite effectively through voluntary cooperation and affiliation among Christian groups.”<sup>163</sup> R. L. Omanson after stating that the New Testament calls for unity of the church, concludes that unity does not demand uniformity, and that the local churches mentioned in the New Testament “had neither uniformity of worship nor structures, or even a uniform theology.”<sup>164</sup> Therefore, we should not apply higher standards today than those being used in the first century A.D.

The four basic types of church government are episcopal, presbyterian, congregational, and non-government, which are sufficiently discussed in dictionaries and systematic theologies so that we do not need to repeat them here.<sup>165</sup> The most highly developed system of episcopal government is found in the Roman Catholic Church with its strict hierarchical structure, which leaves little or no room for the priesthood of all believers. By the way, the strong emphasis on the sacraments downplays the role of Scripture. On the other side of the spectrum are congregationalism and non-government, in which individualism on a personal or a local level is prevailing. Dederen presents a much more balanced view and has correctly concluded:

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<sup>163</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1994), 877.

<sup>164</sup>R. L. Omansen, “The Church,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by W. A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 232.

<sup>165</sup>Cf., Dederen, “Autorität der Gemeinde: Ihr Ursprung, Wesen und Wirken,” in *Die Gemeinde und ihr Auftrag, Studien zur adventistischen Ekklesiologie*, 2, edited by J. Mager (Lüneburg: Saatkorn-Verlag, 1994), 59; “The Church,” 553-554; Erickson, 1080-1097; L. Morris, “Church Government,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by W. A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 238-241.

The Scriptures do not warrant the existence of an episcopal system, structuring the church along monarchical, if not imperial, lines. Nor do they call for a pattern in which each church or congregation is the complete church, independent of every other, rejecting any authoritative organizational structure over the local congregation. It appears rather that the biblical data set forth a basic representative form of church government in which much is made of the priesthood of all believers and of the gifts of grace bestowed by the Spirit, while recognizing the authority of representative bodies.<sup>166</sup>

This brings us to the question whether or not the local church represents the fullness of the church, in other words, Is the local church complete in itself?

## **2. The Fullness of God's Church**

Even if we can agree that there are local churches and there is a universal church, that the local churches are the church of God in a certain time and locality, and that the universal church is not just the sum of the local churches, the questions still remain: Is the local church the fullness of the church? And can it exist independently?

The second question is answered more easily than the first one. Obviously, in the later New Testament writings we have a stronger emphasis on the universality of the church than in the earlier. The climax is found in the Book of Revelation. One may wonder whether or not in the middle sixties and at the end of the first century A.D. the situation in the churches had grown worse and a stronger emphasis on the universal church had become necessary. At least in Corinth factions were found within the church, and in Rome the Gentile Christians may have boasted and looked down upon the Jewish Christians. Although the local church exerts authority when it comes to church membership and other matters,<sup>167</sup> the New Testament is concerned that the different churches work together and that there is unity within the universal church. Just as an individual Christian cannot live in self-chosen isolation, so a Christian church is part of the sisterhood of churches. Living one's own life separate from others is unhealthy to say the least. Christians churches in a certain area form the church of that area and are also part of the larger body of Christ.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 554.

<sup>167</sup>Cf., Dederen, "The Church," 560.

<sup>168</sup>Cf., idem, "Autorität der Gemeinde," 59.

With regard to the first question the answer may be yes and no. The local church is the church of Christ in a specific time and place, and as such it is complete. On the other hand, a number of considerations suggest that the local church is not the full expression of the church. There are elements and ministries that transcends the boundaries of the local congregation.

- (1) The body of Christ is not complete if the church of God has an expression at one time and in one place only. The existence of a universal church, the body of Christ with Jesus as its heads implies that separation of churches from each other cannot be God's will, unless there is apostasy. The Corinthians were reprimanded because of their independence: "Was it from you that the word of God *first* went forth? Or has it come to you only?" (1Cor 14:36). On the contrary, the New Testament stresses unity. Therefore churches exchanged greetings (Rom 16:16), shared documents sent by the apostles (Col 4:16), were hospitable to traveling brothers (1Pet 4:9; John 1:5-10), and supported persecuted Christians which were not members of their respective local church (Acts 28:13-15).<sup>169</sup> Especially during large scale persecutions in church history, it was crucial that local churches would support each other. Aquila and Priscilla moved from Rome to Corinth (Rom 16:3; Acts 18:2) and were involved with the Christian church in both places.
- (2) The New Testament teaches that God has given to his church different spiritual gifts and functions (1Cor 12). Yet, not all gifts are found in one local church. Some gifts surpass the local level. This is true for administrative gifts such as the gift of apostleship. It is also true for the gift of prophecy. In Acts 11:28 several prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, the prophet Agabus, predicted and proclaimed a great famine. This prophecy was fulfilled some time later. Thus, Agabus did not only serve his own local church but also another church. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (Acts 14:23) as obviously Timothy and Titus did also (Tit 1:5). Their sphere of influence surpassed the local level, but the local church was helped through their ministry and did not reject them. Thus, there is a ministry—namely that of Timothy and Titus in addition to that of the apostles--which is not limited to the local church.

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<sup>169</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, 60.

- (3) Some issues of theology and Christian life style could not be solved on a local level and required decisions by the church in general. Such a situation is portrayed in Acts 15. Judaizers had come from Jerusalem and had caused problems in Antioch having confused church members. Paul and Barnabas as delegates of the church of Antioch were sent to a meeting, the church council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:2). So, larger issues and questions of doctrines are best discussed on a level which is broader than that of an individual church.<sup>170</sup> “Major assemblies that address matters pertaining to the church in general and that concern the preservation of unity, therefore exercising authority on a broader and more extended scale than a local congregation, are unquestionably warranted by Scripture.”<sup>171</sup>
- (4) In the New Testament local churches received directives. The actions of the Jerusalem council were not just recommendations but were meant to be binding.<sup>172</sup> In Acts 16:4 Luke reports: “Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.” The letters of the New Testament contain many exhortations and admonitions which were expected to be taken seriously by local churches. The rejection of the gospel or the alteration of the gospel received from the apostles was so serious that those being involved were *anathema* (Gal 1:8-9).<sup>173</sup> Paul states: “And so I direct in all the churches” (1Cor 7:17).
- (5) The Great Commission (Mat 28:18-20) cannot be fulfilled by a local church. Resources and personnel of local churches must be pulled together in order to proclaim the gospel on a worldwide scale. In 1Corinthians 9:1-14 Paul claims the right as an apostle and missionary to be financially supported by local churches. This seems to be a reference to tithing. The Philippians have supported him, although at that time he was not in Philippi but elsewhere (Phil 4:10-19). The Colossians sent Epaphras to him as a coworker (Col 1:7; 4:12). The

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<sup>170</sup>Cf., *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington D.C.: Ministerial Association of the General Conference, 1988), 145.

<sup>171</sup>Dederen, “The Church,” 561.

<sup>172</sup>Idem, “Autorität der Gemeinde,” 63.

<sup>173</sup>Cf. Heb 6:4-6.

Great Commission surpasses what local churches can do. Only a universal church has a chance to deal with such a comprehensive task that Jesus has given to his church. What is true for the great commission applies likewise to the proclamation of the Three Angels Messages of Revelation 14:6-12. The challenge is enormous to reach all living humans with God's final message. ". . . the NT insists on the universality or catholicity of the church. . . . The church is meant to embrace all nations (Matt. 28:19; cf. Rev. 14:6). It is not bound to a particular time or place, but encompasses believers of all generations, nations, and cultures. . . . The church teaches universally and from first to last all the teachings Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:20). . . . The universal nature of the church has clear missionary implications."<sup>174</sup>

- (6) Aside from the mission outreach there are other tasks for the church that surpass the capacity of a local congregation. In the first century A. D. it was the collection for the church members in Jerusalem (1Cor 16:1-4; 2Cor 8-9). Local congregations in the areas in which Paul had worked supported their fellow believers. They saved money, it was brought together, and a delegation took it to Jerusalem. Today, humanitarian work worldwide challenges the church to help as Jesus had helped.. "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). Humanitarian work applies to the needs of the church itself in certain regions of the world as well as the needs of non-church members. By getting involved in large scale projects around the world, the local church supplies experts, support staff, and financial means.
- (7) The collection of the books of the New Testament and the formation of the canon of the New Testament can probably be attributed to the fact that there was--aside from other factors--a concept of a universal church among local congregations. Churches did not just keep the letter or letters sent to them by an apostle, but shared them with other churches, which apparently copied them. On the other hand, the incompleteness of local churches becomes evident. If they had to rely on their own correspondence only, some churches would not have

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<sup>174</sup>Dederen, 'The Church,' 563.

received any part of the New Testament and others only a quite limited part.

### **3. Summary**

One's view on the relationship between the local and the universal church determines to a large degree the form of church government one chooses and, therefore, has practical consequences. Obviously, not all forms of church government are equal and not all reflect the data found in the New Testament equally well. A strictly hierarchical and episcopal approach as well as a congregational or a non-government approach clash with certain elements of ecclesiology as presented in Scripture.

On the other hand, while we admit that the local church is God's church in its time and place related expression, that does not mean that the local church completely represents the fullness of the church.

## **III. Implications**

### **1. Seventh-day Adventists and the Universal Church**

What are some of the implications of our study for the Seventh-day Adventist church? Although the Seventh-day Adventist church is a worldwide church with many local churches, Adventists do not claim to be Christ's universal church. The universal church is broader than any denomination. It is visible and invisible insofar that it consists of those who believe in Jesus and follow him.<sup>175</sup> We cannot discuss here the issue of visibility versus invisibility, but it may suffice to say that if membership in Christ's church depends on a personal decision of individuals, the universal church cannot simply be equated with an organized church of our days in which both saints and even notorious and unrepentant sinners are living next to each other and in which not all the true believers may be gathered yet.<sup>176</sup> Although the church as the assembly of followers of Christ has

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<sup>175</sup>Dederen, 546, states correctly: "The church, according to the NT, is not an invisible entity, nor a mental image. . . . At the same time the church can be described as having an invisible dimension . . ."

<sup>176</sup>Some would claim that there is no invisibility of the church. The church is found where the Eucharist is celebrated in a certain way and with a certain theological understanding. However, such a view is forced to maintain a sacramental view of the Communion which comes quite close to the position of *ex opere operato*. It does not seem to do justice to the New Testament emphasis on the decision of individuals to accept Jesus and follow him nor the problem of apostasy within the church and even apostasy of churches and /or it has—at least to some extent—to separate the organizational structure of the church, which becomes the real church, from the members of the church.

visible aspects, there is also an invisible dimension. This problem is heightened when we take into consideration the problem of apostasy among Christians, which is pointed out especially in the Book of Revelation. The pure church of Revelation 12 in its historical dimension is contrasted with the “harlot” of Revelation 17, Babylon the great city, which in turn is contrasted with the bride of the Lamb, the holy city or the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21 and 22 in its consummated dimension. Whereas, in the first century the universal church may have been quite visible, it is much more difficult and complex to see it, for instance, during the Medieval Ages, that is throughout large parts of church history.

Therefore, Adventists do not limit the concept of God’s true church to their own denomination nor do they automatically extend it to other Christian churches.<sup>177</sup> God’s true church consists of those individuals who truly believe in him. God knows them. Adventists, on the other hand, claim that they are God’s special visible end time remnant of Revelation 12:17 found also throughout Revelation 12-14 and being in opposition to the “Babylon” of Rev 14-18. In the Book of Revelation the remnant has a local as well as a universal character.<sup>178</sup>

Although today a worldwide church cannot be easily equated with the universal church, it seems to us that the New Testament principles governing the relationship between local churches and the universal church can and must be applied to the worldwide Adventist church and its local congregations. The New Testament also reminds us that the Christian churches in a certain area are the Christian church of that area. By analogy local Adventist churches throughout the world, are the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist church.

## **2. Recognizing the Importance of the Local Church**

Thus, the first implication of our study is that we have to take seriously the local congregation. It is on the local level that the most intense contact with the “world” occurs. It is the local church in which real growth takes place and persons are changed. We cannot neglect the local church and consider it less important than the universal church. Decisions must be made by

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<sup>177</sup>This raises the question as to how Adventists relate to other Christian denominations and other Christians.

<sup>178</sup>Rev 2:24 and 12:17.

involving the local church and not by bypassing it. If, however, the administration of the church becomes the real church, the priesthood of all believers is forgotten and the administration assumes a role which was never meant to be its role.

On the other hand, some people focus so much on the local church that whatever transcends it, is neglected, forgotten, or rejected. A specific local congregation becomes--so to speak--the center of the world and the universe. Congregationalism and independence triumph. Personal freedom and self-actualization have become the highest good ruling out everything else. Although not officially accepted and espoused by the Adventist church, Congregationalism is not a concept which is far removed from it. Even within Adventism it is promoted here and there. Some local churches have played with the thought to become independent from the church organization and the sisterhood of churches. They want to withhold their tithe percentage and pay their own pastor directly. Others develop their own theology. "Congregationalism" may also be practiced on national level creating some kind of national churches. It is the spirit of independence which is opposed to the unity of the universal church.

### **3. Accepting the Worldwide Church**

Two sides must also be considered with regard to the worldwide church. First, we have to take seriously and accept the worldwide church. Because Scripture upholds both the importance of the local congregation and the significance of the universal church, we too have to stress both aspects. In western cultures individual church members as well as local churches sometimes have a hard time to accept worldwide church leadership and the idea of a worldwide church. Furthermore, it is not easy to be subject to the decisions of a worldwide church council--especially if one holds different opinions<sup>179</sup>--and trust its wisdom and its guidance by the Holy Spirit.

The topic of submission is important in the New Testament. In Hebrews 13:17 we read: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." In 1 Corinthians 16:16 Paul admonishes "that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone

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<sup>179</sup>Cf., for instance, the question of the ordination of women to the ministry.

who helps in the work and labors.” Submission is again stressed in 1 Thessalonians 5:12: “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.” While being faithful to Scripture we are called to give up self-sufficiency, practice humility, and foster unity. Although the local church is God’s church, it is not fully complete in itself. There is a ministry such as the one of Timothy and Titus which is not limited to a local congregation and which is important to a worldwide church.

But there is also the danger that authority and power may be misused. The leadership group of a worldwide church may assume too much and may directly or indirectly suppress the local church. Church hierarchy may dominate, and church leaders may rule like emperors or CEOs and expect all others to be subject to them. Although there are committees and councils, the decision of one leader may overturn and undo what others have decided in long and careful processes. Nobody may dare to speak up when the respective leader states his opinion, but many are frustrated because of his/her kingly rule and power and the political maneuvers. Leaders must not be manipulative.

#### **4. The Issue of Power**

The Adventist Church is quite diverse and yet still remarkably united. However, tensions are recognizable here and there. In some western cultures a trend toward a more congregationalistic approach to church government is discernible on the local level. On the other hand, the influence and the power of presidents have increased during the last decades. Even within the administration of the church two different layers have evolved, the group of the officers and the group of the departmental people, with quite different authority in or access to decision-making.

Thus, whereas in some local churches a trend toward congregationalism is noticeable, on the administrative level of the church a trend toward episcopal church government and a stronger emphasis on the hierarchy of the church can be observed. Although these trends seem to be contradictory, they have in common the issue of power and may condition each other. The stronger local churches advocate Congregationalism, the more the administration of the church tends to stress its influence, power, and rights. And the more the administration stresses these various factors, the more the local churches try to become independent.

Peter points toward a solution of this problem when he says: “Therefore, I exhort the elders

among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1Pet 5:1-5).

A struggle for power would destroy God’s church. All of us are therefore called to listen to each other, to accept each other, to let go the desire to exert power, and to be humble. Leaders are challenged to follow Christ’s example of servant leadership and become an example for church members. And church members are exhorted to accept their leaders and be subject to them. We have to overcome the dangers of fragmenting as well as of institutionalizing the church. We must not lose sight of what the church of Christ is all about. It is the group of those, who believe in Jesus Christ and accept him and his teachings, his disciples and followers, who are called to service and mission.

## **Conclusion**

The New Testament contains a considerable amount of data on the church. In this paper we were interested in one topic only, namely the question what the New Testament teaches about the local and the universal church and how they relate to each other. We have found that different terms are used to refer to the church. A crucial term is *ekklēsia*. It describes the local congregation in the singular and plural, the church/churches in an area and the universal church, the body of Christ. Both expressions of the church, the local and the universal, are needed. Although the local is not in all respects the complete church, we enjoy fellowship with Christ and with brothers and sisters on the local level, but also in different churches worldwide. The right balance between the local and the universal, between the local and the worldwide church must be maintained.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

### Introduction

The Book of Revelation does not only have a rich theology--it focuses strongly on God the Father--and a strong Christology, but it has also a lot to say about the church. John the apostle communicates a profound ecclesiology.

In this lecture we will look at the names of and images for the church as found in the Apocalypse. We will ask us, where in the book the church is found and what is her significance. We may want to look at characteristics of the ideal church and tasks for the church as well as appeals and promises to the church. In Revelation the church has to face tremendous difficulties. These are internal as well as external challenges. The external difficulties include opponents and a system called Babylon, which stands in contrast to the church. Important is God's relationship to the church as well as his care for the remnant. Finally, the church is pictured as being victorious. Because she belongs to the Lamb, the Lamb will guarantee a positive outcome of her struggles. Some practical implications will be drawn.

### I. Names of and Images for the Church

A church consists of a number of individual believers, who together form a larger organism which NT writers call in a metaphorical sense a body. In the Book of Revelation, these individual believers and groups of believers form the Christian church, are part of her or are in some way related to her. They are introduced with a variety of different designations.

- |    |                                     |   |  |
|----|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. | Fellow servants, brothers, servants | - | 1:1; 2:20; 6:11; 7:3; 12:10; 19:2,5; 22:3,6                      |
| 2. | The church ( <i>ekklēsia</i> )      | - | 1:4,11,20; 2:1,7,8,11,12,17,18,23,29; 3:1,6,7,13,14,22; 22:16    |
| 3. | Priests and a kingdom               | - | 1:6; 5:10; 20:6  |
| 4. | Lampstands                          | - | 1:20   |
| 5. | The overcomer                       | - | 2-3; 15:2; 21:7  |
| 6. | The remnant                         | - | 2:24; 12:17  |
| 7. | Those in white clothes              | - | 3:4-5; 6:11; 7:9.13  |
| 8. | The saints                          | - | 5:8; 8:3-4; 11:18; 13:7; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20,24; 19:8; 20:9 |

9.	The 144,000	-	7:4-8; 14:1-5
10.	The great multitude	-	7:9-17
11.	The holy city	-	11:2
12.	The woman	-	12; 19:7; 21:9
13.	Those that are called, chosen, faithful	-	17:14
14.	My people and His people	-	18:4; 21:3
15.	The bride	-	21:9; 22:17
16.	The 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of the Lamb	-	21:12,14

The harlot (Rev 17) and the worshipers of the beast and its image (Rev 13-15) are contrasted with the true church.

It is interesting how many designations for the church or in relation to the church are found. These different names and titles point to different aspects of the church. We will now briefly focus on some of them.

### 1. The Term *ekklēsia*

The term *ekklēsia*, church is found twenty times in Revelation. In each case it stands for the group of believers. It is remarkable that this expression occurs nineteen out of the twenty times in Rev 1-3, i.e., right in the beginning of the book, and once in its conclusion. (Rev 22b). The Book of Revelation is a letter and a prophecy addressed to seven churches.

The distribution of the singular and the plural forms of this term is interesting. In Rev 1 only the plural is found. Four times we hear about the seven churches. This changes with Rev 2 and 3. At the beginning of each of the seven messages the singular is used in order to address the respective local church. However, at the end of each message the formula “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” connect the churches with each other. Church number four, the one found in the middle of the seven churches, contains an additional plural of the term *ekklēsia* : “And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve” (2:23).

In these passages we hear about local congregations. The church is a local entity. On the other hand, it is true that the number seven and the mix of singular and plural forms of the word *ekklēsia* in each message to these churches point to completeness and interdependence of the churches and tell us that there are not only local congregations but a universal church. The local congregations form

one universal church. This is more evident in the apocalyptic part of Revelation (Rev 4-22a).

In spite of their shortcomings these churches are still God's church. The majority of them may have to face his temporal judgment, but they are not yet totally separated from Him. Thus, the term *ekklēsia* in Revelation always points to some sort of relationship with God. It also always refers to the *ekklesia militans*, the church involved in battle, which toward the end of the book is depicted as the triumphant church, yet without the particular term *ekklēsia* being applied to her.

The term "overcomer" or "victor" is found in each one of the messages to the seven churches and points to the fact that not all church members may belong to the church triumphant and that individual decisions are to be made. Church membership does not save. Whereas *ekklēsia* stresses the corporate aspect, other terms such as overcomer point to the individual aspect.

## **2. Saints**

The expression *hagios* (holy, saint) is used in Revelation for God (3,7; 4,8.8.8; 6,10), God's city (11,2; 21,2.10; 22,19), God's angels (14,10), and most frequently for the church (5,8; 8,3.4; 11,18; 13,7.12; 14,12; 16,6; 17,6; 18,20.24; 19,8; 20,6.9; 22,11).

Holiness or sanctity is one of God's attributes. Therefore, whatever stands in a relationship with God and is directed toward him is holy. Since God is holy and the believers, the church is also holy the special relationship between God and his people is pointed out, and it is emphasized that the church focuses on her Lord. Throughout the Apocalypse "holy" is a positive term, and all those who are thus designated belong together. In the center of the book the saints seems to be a synonym for the faithful end time remnant of God.<sup>180</sup>

## **3. The 144,000 and the Great Multitude**

As an answer to the question of Rev 6:17 "... the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" the 144,000 and the great multitude are introduced, a twofold scene in Rev 7. This is part of the sixth seals which deals with the heavenly signs prior to and at Christ's second coming and the Day of the Lord. Rev 6:15-16 portrays people who are not able to survive the day of the

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<sup>180</sup>See discussion below.

wrath of God and the Lamb. On the other hand, Rev 7 points to people who are able to stand it.

The context of Rev 7 suggests that the 144,000 as well as the great multitude are God's end time people that is going to be saved. Obviously, the 144,000 and the great multitude which will be found before the throne of God in his sanctuary refer to the same group.<sup>181</sup>

- (1) As in 5:5 John hears about Jesus as the lion, however, in 5:6 sees a lamb, so in 7,4 he hear the number of the sealed, but in 7:9 sees the great multitude of the redeemed.
- (2) The answer to the question of who will be able to stand (6:17) is provided by the entire seventh chapter. The 144,000 as well as the great multitude have to go through difficult times. The 144,000 are sealed before the winds blow and have to stand the succeeding difficulties. The great multitude has come out of the great tribulation. Thus, the 144,000 are introduced as an immediate answer to the question of 6:17, whereas the great multitude receives a more detailed description and is depicted as standing before God.

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<sup>181</sup>See, for example, Richard Bauckham, "The List of the Tribes in Revelation 7 Again," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 42 (1991): 102-103; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 424-426; George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 139-141; G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 94-96; R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1920), 1:201; J. Comblin, "L'Épître (Ap 7,2-12): Le rassemblement de l'Israël de Dieu," *Assemblées du Seigneur: Catechèse des dimanches et des fêtes* 66 (1966): 22-23, 25; Klaus-Peter Jörns, *Das hymnische Evangelium: Untersuchungen zu Aufbau, Funktion und Herkunft der hymnischen Stücke in der Johannesoffenbarung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1971), 77; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, The Moffat New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1940), 138-139; Gerhard A Krodol, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 184; George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 116; Richard C. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 244-245, 254; Alfred Loisy, *L'Apocalypse de Jean* (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1972), 164; Beatrice S. Neall, "Sealed Saints and the Tribulation," in *Symposium on Revelation--Book I: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. F. B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6 (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 245, 269-270; William S. Sailer, "Francis Bacon Among the Theologians: Aspects of Dispensational Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Journal* 6 (1988): 80-81; Kenneth Strand, "The 'Spotlight-On-Last-Events' Sections," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 27 (1989): 206; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1917), 97; Cornelis van der Waal, *Oudtestamentische priesterlijke motieven in de Apocalyps* (Goes, Netherlands: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre N. V., 1956), 116-117; and Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 80-81. This view is rejected, for example, by Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 287; Balmer H. Kelly, "Revelation 7:9-17," *Interpretation* 40 (1986): 289-290; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Revised ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 161; and John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 139-149. The different options are discussed by David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 439-447, and Neall, 267-272.

- (3) The 144,000 are the fullness of God's end time church on earth. The great multitude is the consummated end time church, which after the great tribulation is found in heaven. The sealing would be incomplete if it would not lead to the final consummation.
- (4) The 144,000 are "servants of our God" (7:3). The great multitude "serves" God (7:15). Both Greek terms are used for the same group in 22:3.<sup>182</sup>

These and other considerations support a symbolic understanding of the 144,000.<sup>183</sup>

The 144,000 are found again in Rev 14 in the context of the satanic trinity, which is specifically dealt with in the central vision of the Book of Revelation (11:19-14:20). In this section, the 144,000 of Rev 14 seem to be a synonym of the remnant of 12:17. Since this remnant apparently comes into existence after the 1260 days, which according to Adventist understanding have ended in 1798 A.D., the clear connection of the 144,000 to the second coming of Christ as found in Rev 6 and 7 is not as obvious. This may be due to the fact that John does not see much time elapsing between the appearance of the remnant, the universal worship of the beast and its image including the death degree for those who worship God only, and the final salvation and glorification of the faithful ones.<sup>184</sup>

The 144,000 enjoy a special relationship with the Lord. Being virgins they have not defiled themselves with women, i.e., they have not entered into a relationship with false religion or they

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<sup>182</sup>For more information see, Ekkehardt Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4-11*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, Volume 21 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1996), 254-269.

<sup>183</sup>Here are some additional reasons:

- (1) The immediate context is clearly symbolic (7:1-3) as is the extended context (see, e.g., the four horses, the martyrs under the altar) and the parallel passage in 14:1-5 ("who have not defiled themselves with women," "virgins," "lamb"). Therefore, symbolic language is also expected for 7,4-8.
- (2) The number is symbolic (12 times 12 times 1,000) and points to the fullness of the people of God (see, 21:12-14).
- (3) The enumeration of tribes is unusual. The tribe Dan is missing, whereas Manasse should already be contained in Joseph. Ephraim is not mentioned, however, Levi is counted. Judah is found in first place. Such as list is not found elsewhere in Scripture.
- (4) Most of the twelve tribes do not any longer exist today.
- (5) The NT knows about a spiritual Israel (Rom 2:28-29; Gal 6:16).

<sup>184</sup>In Mt 24 a similar phenomenon is found. Jesus does not directly indicate that a long period of time lies between the destruction of Jerusalem and his *parousia*.

have separated from it.<sup>185</sup> They follow Jesus every step of the way (cf. John 10:27-28) and are transformed through God's grace. The Lamb and these 144,000 stand on top of Mount Zion. Those, who have been condemned and persecuted in chap.13, now triumph with the Lamb.<sup>186</sup> Instead of the mark of the beast on their foreheads, these people bear the name of the Lamb and of the Father. They belong to God. He keeps them. They are similar to Him. They have been purchased. Even though they were unable to buy or sell (13:17), Jesus has bought them. They are the remnant of God that will survive the end time.

#### 4. The Remnant

The term remnant (*loipos*) is found a number of times in Rev. In some cases it has no direct connection to the church, for instance, when talking about the remaining trumpets (8:13), the survivors (9:20; 11:13), and a group of people who are subject to judgement (19:21; 20:5). In several cases it is linked to the church. Once it is connected to the church in a negative sense (3:2), once possibly in a positive sense (11:13),<sup>187</sup> and twice clearly in a positive way. There is a faithful remnant in the church of Thyatira (2:24) and God's end time remnant in 12:17.<sup>188</sup>

When we look at Rev 12, we notice that it comes in three parts. The first and the third part correspond and are in many ways parallel, although there are also differences.

<b>A</b>	The woman, the son, and the dragon (12:1-6)
<b>B</b>	Michael and the dragon (12:7-12)
<b>A'</b>	The woman, the remnant, and the dragon (12:13-17)

In both of them the same time span occurs, namely the 1260 days or 3½ years. A chronological

<sup>185</sup>Cf. the woman in chap. 12 and the harlot in chap.17, Jezebel in 2:20, furthermore, 2:14 and 18:2.4.

<sup>186</sup>Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Das Neue Testament Deutsch, Neues Göttinger Bibelwerk. Vol. 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 84, labels Zion as "die Stätte der endzeitlichen Bewahrung" (the place of en time preservation).

<sup>187</sup>The survivors of 11:13 are terrified and give glory to God. In light of 14:7 they seem to turn to God and become a faithful remnant.

<sup>188</sup>A faithful remnant is apparently mentioned in Rev 3:4. Yet the word in use here is not *loipos* but *oligos* - in the plural "some", "a few". See also Gerhard Hasel, "The Remnant in Scripture and the End Time," *Adventists Affirm*, Fall 1988:11, and "Who are the Remnant?," *Adventists Affirm*, Fall 1993:9. For a more detailed discussion on the remnant see Ekkehardt Mueller, "The End Time Remnant in Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11(2000):188-204.

outline looks the following way:

<b>A</b>	12:1-5	-	Early conflict between dragon and woman
	12:6	-	Medieval conflict between dragon and woman
<b>B</b>	12:7-12	-	Conflict between Michael and the dragon in heaven
<b>A'</b>	12:13-16	-	Medieval conflict between dragon and woman (continued)
	12:17	-	End time conflict between the dragon and the woman <sup>189</sup>

There is a descendant of the woman in the first part of Rev 12, and there is another descendant of the woman in the last part of the same chapter. The woman has brought forth Jesus, the Messiah, and the woman, the church, brings forth the remnant. In 12:17 we read about the “remnant of her seed.” The term seed does not occur again in the Apocalypse. An identical phrase is not found in the entire Bible, but the seed is mentioned quite often and may refer to the seeds of plants (e.g., Mt 13:24,27,32), to descendants or children (especially of Abraham and David, e.g., Lk 1:55; Mk 12:19-22; Jh 7:42), or to Jesus himself (e.g., Gal 3:16,19). The first and the last part of Rev 12 allude to Gen 3:14-15. In both passages, the woman, the serpent, the seed, and the enmity between them are mentioned.<sup>190</sup> Rev 12 including its second section seems to be the fulfillment of that promise in Gen 3. It may very well be that the seed in Rev 12:17 alludes to Jesus, since this verse is based on Gen 3:15. Jesus is the descendant of the woman. The remnant of her descendant is not only structurally juxtaposed to Jesus, but stands in a special relationship to him, the true seed.

Although Gen 3 lies behind Rev 12, this does not mean that the woman must be understood as Eve or Mary. Already the time spans, to be understood according to the year-day principle and lasting for more than a thousand years rule that out. John is creative in combining OT and NT imagery. The woman should be understood as the church.<sup>191</sup>

Thus, Rev 12 presents a survey on the conflict between the church and the dragon, the Messiah and the dragon, and the remnant, which appear only after the 1260 years, and the dragon. Thereby, it sets the stage for the next chapters. In the first part of Rev 13 the sea beast attacks the

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<sup>189</sup>Cf. William H. Shea, "Time Prophecies of Daniel 12 and Revelation 12-13", in *Symposium on Revelation - Book I, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, Volume 6*, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 349.

<sup>190</sup>Kurt Aland et al., eds. *Nestle-Aland: Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985), 655, lists Gen 3:14 and 15 with Rev 12.

<sup>191</sup>Cf. Eze 16, 23; Eph 5.

saints. The expression “remnant” is not found. The focus is on the time after 1798 A.D.<sup>192</sup> Later the beast out of the earth follows, and those who do not participate in the universal worship of the beast and its image are threatened with death. They do not receive a specific name. Chapter 13 looks so bleak that one could fear that no faithful believer would be able to survive. Therefore, the first part of Rev 14 depicts the 144,000 in the presence of the Lamb.

Obviously the remnant, the saints, those who do not receive the mark of the beast and do not worship the beast and its image, and the 144,000 are the very same group. Why?

- (1) The dragon went *poiēsai polemon meta tōn loipōn* (to make war with the remnant--12:17). The sea beast is given power to *poiēsai polemon meta tōn hagiōn* (to make war with the saints) and to overcome them (13:7). The two groups are linked on the literary level.
- (2) Not only are Rev 12:17 and Rev 13 a linked, also the different part of Rev 13 and 14 are connected. The formula “here is” appears at the end of each section.
  - A. The beast out of the sea (13:1-10)
    - (1) "I saw . . . "
    - (2) Description of the beast and its activity
    - (3) "*Here is* patience and faith . . . "
  - B. The beast out of the earth (13:11-18)
    - (1) "I saw . . . "
    - (2) Description of the beast and his activity
    - (3) "*Here is* wisdom . . . "
  - C. The 144,000 and the three angels' messages (14:1-12)
    - (1) "I saw . . . "
    - (2) Description of the 144,000
    - (3) "I saw . . . "
    - (4) Three angels' messages
    - (5) "*Here is* patience . . . faith . . . "
- (3) Furthermore, in Rev 12-14 three texts are interwoven that describe the main characteristics of the remnant. The references are Rev 12:17, Rev 13:10, and Rev 14:12. The last two belong to the “Here is” statements.

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<sup>192</sup>Cf. Ulrich B. Müller *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar, vol. 19 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1984), 247, who states that chap. 13 develops what it means that the dragon cast out of heaven battles against Christians and starts a final assault against those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus (12:17). See also Shea, 354-359.

<u>Rev 12:17</u> Keep the commandments Testimony of Jesus	<u>Rev 13:10</u>  Patience Faith	<u>Rev 14:12</u> Keep the commandments  Patience Faith of Jesus
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If it is true that the 144,000 and the remnant are the same group, then the characteristics of the 144,000 mentioned in 14:1-5 are additional characteristics of the remnant. We keep in mind that the remnant, who basically seem to be a visible group, appear at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereas the 144,000, although they represent the remnant, are those who live at the second coming—at least according to Rev 6 and 7. Probably, John does not describe in a detailed way the passing of time since the appearance of the remnant. In Mt 24 a similar phenomenon is found. Jesus does not directly indicate that a huge time span lies between the destruction of Jerusalem and his *parousia*. Because of the information of Rev 7 about the 144,000, we may conclude that the 144,000 of Rev 14 seem to be those remnant that will experience Christ's coming.

## II. Places in Revelation in Which the Church Is Found

The different designation for the church are found in many chapters of Rev. However, we also notice that there are chapters in which we find a heavy concentration on the church, whereas other chapters contain little to nothing about God's people.

### (1) *Letter Frame and Apocalyptic Part*

The term *ekklēsia* occurs only in the first three chapters and in chapter 22. This is the letter frame of the Apocalypse. This letter frame is somewhat different from the apocalyptic part of the book, which starts in chapter 4 and ends in chapter 22a. The letter frame contains less symbols than the apocalyptic part. When it comes to the apocalyptic part *ekklēsia* is avoided and replaced with symbols and images such as the 144,000 (7:4-8; 14:1-5); the holy city

(11:2); the woman (12; 19:7; 21:9); the bride (21:9; 22:17).<sup>193</sup> In this case there is also a strong emphasis on the worldwide church rather than on individual congregations.<sup>194</sup>

(2) *Spotlights on Last Events*

A heavy concentration on the church is found in the so-called spotlights on last events.<sup>195</sup> These are expansions of those sections of visions two to four that precede the respective last element, namely the culmination or glorious climax. The first spotlight on last events is Rev 7, the expansion of the sixth seal. It contains the 144,000 and the great multitude. On one hand it is God's army opposed to the demonic army of 200 million beings under the sixth trumpet (9:16). On the other hand it is the surviving church. The next spotlight is the expansion of the sixth trumpet in Rev 10 and 11a. John with his sweet-bitter experience seems to be a representative of the end time church. The stress is on the proclamation of the Gospel. The holy city in Rev 11:2 points also to the church. The last spotlight occurs in Rev 14a. It again depicts the 144,000 and presents God's end time message.

(3) *The Center of the Book*

The center of the Apocalypse, Rev 12-14, contains the strongest emphasis on the church. It is a description of the attempt of the satanic trinity to destroy the church. Therefore, the church especially in the form of the remnant is found in all these chapters.

(4) *The Eschatological Part*

In the eschatological part of Revelation, i.e., in chapters 15-22a, Babylon is contrasted with the New Jerusalem. But Babylon and the New Jerusalem are not only cities. They are pictured as women. In addition to the woman of Rev 12 Babylon is a woman, yet a harlot,

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<sup>193</sup>We observe a similar phenomenon in Christology. In the letter frame Jesus appear under this very name and is also called Christ. His specific and predominant name in Rev, however, the term lamb, used 28 times, occurs only in the apocalyptic part

<sup>194</sup>Rev 1b-3 has connections to both sections. On one hand, it is part of the letter frame, because seven churches are addressed similarly to the way that Paul addresses his churches. The seven churches have already been mentioned in 1:4. On the other hand, this seven series reminds of the other seven series of the book, which follow immediately, and somehow link the seven messages to the other septenaries. Furthermore, Rev 1b-3 depicting the church militant has a counterpart at the end of the book, the church triumphant.

<sup>195</sup>The term was obviously coined by Strand, 201-221.

and the New Jerusalem is the bride of the Lamb. In other words, the church and her counterpart are featured in the second half of the Apocalypse.

This short survey shows us that Rev has an extensive ecclesiology. This is all the more remarkable since the book contains a very elaborate theology, i.e., doctrine of God, and a very high and exalted Christology. On the other, if the Lord is so much stressed it is quite natural to focus also on those who belong to him. Secondly, in Rev individual Christian congregations are addressed, however, the stress seems to be on the church as a whole. Furthermore, the focus is not so much on the churches of the first century or on the church throughout history, but especially on the end time church. Therefore, this book is so relevant for our times. Finally, a conflict between Babylon, the satanic trinity and the remnant, is described, a conflict between apostate churches and the faithful community. Although difficult times are predicted, the positive outcome is promised.

### **III. Characteristics of the Ideal Church and Tasks for the Church**

The Apocalypse describes the characteristics of the ideal church. These qualities are at the same time challenges and tasks for God's church on earth. Therefore, we will not sharply distinguish between them but list them together. The church has high privileges. Great promises are given to her. Along with the privileges come responsibilities.<sup>196</sup>

(1) *Being Saved (1:5; 5:9)*

The church is freed from sin. Its members are purchased by the blood of the Lamb. The church is the community of those being saved.

(2) *Being a Kingdom and Reigning as Priests (1:5-6; 5:10; 20:6)*

The church is God's kingdom and has priestly functions. Her reign is one of mediation between God and the world. She lets the world know who God is and how God is. In the name of God the church addresses those who dwell on earth in order that many may repent and turn to God

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<sup>196</sup>Cf., 1Pt 2:9. In this verse Peter first lists the fourfold privilege of the NT church, privileges originally given to the Israel of the OT. They are contained in the main clause. The subordinate clause continues to describe the responsibilities resulting from the privileges: "that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

(3) *Love (2:4-19)*

The church in Ephesus is reprimanded, because she has lost her first love. Jesus expects his church to manifest love.

(4) *Works and Service (2:1,3-5,19; 19:8)*

The church serves God and humans. Thus she brings forth good works. Because Jesus has saved the church and has made her a kingdom and a community of priests it is natural that the church produces works. She is motivated by faith and love. She serves because Jesus has served, and she tries to serve in the same way as Jesus has served. Therefore, the term servant is used quite frequently. Believers are servants of God (7:3; 19:2; 22:3) and fellow servants (6:11). The church consists of those who serve each other and the world. According to 19:8 the bride of the Lamb is clothed with the righteous deeds of the saints.

(5) *Patience (2:3,19; 13:10; 14:12)*

Patience is stressed in two passages, in the letters to the seven churches as well as in the vision about the evil powers or satanic trinity. The church is characterized by perseverance.

(6) *Dissociating from Heresies (2:6)*

For example, the Nicolaitans are mentioned. The church of Ephesus is opposed to the teachings of this heretic group, and Jesus praises the church for rejecting false doctrines. The idea that the church is a pluralistic society in which some may believe in God and in certain biblical doctrines and others do not, in which church members have life styles totally opposed to each other, is not biblical. Certainly, there is some latitude, but there are also limits and boundaries. Not everything is possible. The church challenges heresies, because she is persuaded to have found some gems of absolute truth. If there is no truth any longer, if everyone is correct, heresies cannot be opposed any longer.

(7) *Overcomers / victors (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7)*

The topic “victory” runs throughout the entire Book of Revelation. It is prominent in the messages to the seven churches. It is found with the redeemed that stand around the sea of glass. It is found at the end of the book and in other places.

(8) *Faithfulness until Death (2:10; cf. 6:9)*

The church is faithful to Jesus, even if it may require to lay down one’s life. This deep

commitment to the Lord is a response to his ultimate commitment until death.

- (9) *Holding on to Jesus and Professing Jesus (2:13,25; 3:8)*  
The church does not deny Jesus. She does not give in easily. The church holds on to Jesus. She professes the Lord even under difficult circumstances.
- (10) *Faith (2:19; 13:10; 14:12)*  
Right in the beginning of Revelation as well as in its central part dealing with the satanic trinity faith is mentioned as one of the characteristics of God's church. Biblical faith in Jesus and His teachings is one of the characteristics which separate the church from those who worship the beast and its image.
- (11) *Prayer (5:8; 8:4)*  
The church prays. She turns to God in confession, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession. She expects him to do great things. Prayer is not a nice addition to the activities of the church. Prayer is not only an appropriate part of the worship service. Prayer must be a kind of ministry of the church.
- (12) *Living as Brothers and Sisters (6:11)*  
The church is special because her members are brothers and sisters. The church is a family, and its members serve, support, and encourage each other.
- (13) *Worshiping and Praising God (7:9,10; 14:3)*  
Worship and praise of God are a characteristic of the church in this age as well as of the triumphant church. In 15:3-4 God's children stand around the sea of glass and sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb: "Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!" Therefore, Revelation contains many hymns. A church without worship is unthinkable. Her center is always the One who sits on the throne and the Lamb.
- (14) *Fearing God, Reverence (11:18)*  
To fear God describes the right kind of relationship with God. Reverence and respect and accepting God as the supreme Lord may be implied. While the church fears God she proclaims to the world: "Fear God and give him glory . . ." (14:7).
- (15) *Testimony (12:11) and Testimony of Jesus (12:17; 20:4)*  
The overcomers have conquered the dragon "by the word of their testimony." The church proclaims the gospel and is a witness of Jesus. This may also be alluded to by the statement

in the beginning of the book when the seven churches are compared to lampstands which have the function to give light to the environment. In addition, the church has the testimony of Jesus. She treasures the prophetic Word of God, and the gift of prophecy is found within her ranks.

(16) *Keeping the Commandments (12:17; 14:12)*

In the vision of the satanic trinity the issue of worship and the law of God play an important role. While the saints persevere and keep the commandments and the faith of Jesus, the rest of humanity makes a decision to worship the beast and accepts its mark. The church is obedient to her Lord.

(17) *Virginity (14:4)*

The 144.000 and thus the church consists of virgins. That means she is not engaged in religious or political systems that in the end damage the church's relationship to its Lord.. The church stays away from what her Lord would avoid. Her thinking and her life is directed towards Jesus.

(18) *Following the Lamb (14:4)*

Jesus form the center. The church follows Him and tries to imitates His life to a certain degree. We talk about "a certain degree," because the life of the Savior was and will always be different from that of the saved ones. What He was required to do is different from the requirements for his disciples in important aspects.

(19) *No Deceit, Blameless (14:5)*

On one hand, even believers commit sins and sometimes make terrible mistakes. In themselves they are not perfect; only in Christ they are. This is also true for the church. In Jesus the church is perfect, in herself she is not. On the other hand, this phrase may call us to live a holy life and pursue sanctification (Heb 12:14).

Interestingly enough, the just listed characteristics and tasks are normally connected with the church or groups of believers representing the church rather than individual believers. Therefore, the

Apocalypse does not strongly stress spiritual gifts and different functions in the church.<sup>197</sup>

#### **IV. Appeals and Promises to the Church**

##### **1. Appeals**

In the Apocalypse, God addresses his people and calls them to certain actions, to changes of attitudes, and to maintaining their relationship with him.

(1) *Listening to the Holy Spirit (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22)*

First of all, Jesus calls the churches to listen to the Holy Spirit. Seven times this appeal is made: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

(2) *Remembering the Previous Situation (2,5; 3,3)*

Sometimes it is better to let rest the past. But sometimes, it is wiser and more helpful to remember previous times. In case that growth in faith has not taken place, the church is challenged to look back to those times when she received the gospel, when her relationship with the Lord was still vibrant, and when she considered it a joy to serve God and fellow human beings. Such a look back may motivate the church again and may lead her into a renewed connection to the Lord.

(3) *Repenting (2:5,16,21; 3:3,19)*

Repentance means to turn around, to turn away from whatever is wrong and destructive, and to turn toward God. The challenge to repent is not only addressed to the world, but also to the church.

(4) *Doing the first works (2:5)*

Not only quantity is asked, but even more so quality. The church has to evaluate her ministry and service. The question is how much she is involved in mission outreach and in care for

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<sup>197</sup>The gift of prophecy is referred to in the Apocalypse. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (19:10). However, the prophetic gift is connected to the entire church. In the church the gift of prophecy is manifested, yet, not in such a way that each individual believer possesses this gift. Functions that are listed in Rev are apostles, elders, and prophets. However, the apostles (18:20; 21:14) are predominantly the Twelve. The elders (4:4,10; 5:5,6,8,14; 7:11,13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4) are limited to 24 and are found in heaven only. Prophets (10:7; 11:10,18; 16:6; 18:20,24; 22:6,9) are with the exceptions of the false prophetess Jezebel (2:20) understood in a positive way. This is also true for the words "prophecy" (1:3; 11:6; 19:10; 22:7,10,18,19) and "to prophesy" (10:11; 11:3). The frequent use of this word group shows that John in Rev stresses the Prophets more than any other group within the church.

fellow humans. But the issue is also the motif of her service. She must ask herself whether or not this motif is love toward God and humans.

(5) *Fearlessness (2:10)*

In spite of persecution the church does not need to be afraid. Jesus knows her, and his promise of everlasting life is valid.

(6) *Faithfulness until Death (2:10)*

Believers may not be able to escape death, but the second and eternal death does not affect them. Jesus guarantees eternal salvation to those who remain faithful.

(7) *Keeping and Not Losing the Crown (2:25; 3:11)*

The church is called to keep what has been bestowed upon her and not to lose the crown of victory, which already has been given to her. This certainty of salvation is very important and must not be given up. In spite of surety of salvation, the motto “Once saved, always saved!” is not true.

(8) *Waking Up and Strengthening the Others (3:2)*

We are not only responsible for our own life, but also for others. Christians are not content to care for their own little world but turn toward others.

(9) *Purchasing Gold, White Garments, Salve for the Eyes (3:18)*

To purchase gold, white clothes, and eye salve means to accept God’s good gifts and not to rely on one’s own works or righteousness. The church recognizes her dependence on God.

(10) *Separating from Babylon (18:4)*

This call is directed to God’s people, not the remnant, who are not part of Babylon. However, God’s church does not enter into questionable relations.

(11) *Joy (18:20)*

Finally, the church may rejoice over the judgment, not because she enjoys the punishment of the evil ones, but because judgment means liberation from all enemies and final salvation.

## **2. Promises**

Appeals are important. Promises may be even more crucial. The Apocalypse does not only contain calls and charges. John relates to us God’s promises.

(1) *Jesus’ Second Coming (1:7; 2:25; 3:11; 22:7,12,20)*

The immediacy of Christ’s second coming is the first, last, and most frequent promise to the

church. The second coming brings about fellowship with God in an unprecedented way. At the same time it starts the eradication of all that is evil and undesirable.

(2) *Eating from and Partaking of the Tree of Life (2:7; 22:2,14)*

The church can be sure of everlasting life.

(3) *No Second Death (2:11)*

The church is not affected by the second death, because Jesus has suffered this death in her place.

(4) *Manna, a White Stone, and a New Name (2:17)*

God grants spiritual and everlasting life. Believers become new creatures in Christ..

(5) *Power over the Nations, Receiving the Morning Star (2:26-28)*

The church participates in Christ's rule. According to Rev 22:16, the morning star is Jesus himself.

(6) *White Garments, Name in Book of Life, Jesus Confesses Their Names (3:4,5)*

Again final salvation is promised to the church. The repetition of the promise of salvation by using new symbols manifests how important it is..

(7) *Keeping from Hour of Trial, Pillar in God's Temple, Designated with the Names of God, the New Jerusalem, and Jesus (3:10-12)*

Jesus promises spiritual protection and a place in God's immediate presence. The pillar may also remind of strength and stability. Furthermore, God identifies with the church. She belongs to him and has a special relation to him.

(8) *Dining with Jesus, Sitting with Jesus on His Throne (3:20,21)*

Jesus offers his friendship and fellowship, which will be fully realized at the marriage supper (19,9). But even before that the church experiences Christ's love. Finally, she is allowed to participate in his rule.

(9) *Being a Kingdom and reigning as Priests upon the Earth (5:10; 20:6)*

What in the perspective of the world may look small and insignificant counts a lot in God's eyes. His people are depicted as the real rulers of the earth. A similar formulation was already found in 1:6 and may go back to Ex 19:6, which Peter then takes up in 1Pt 2:9. John notes that the church has been set in a new state.

(10) *Sealing (7:3)*

Being sealed means to be property of the one who has initiated the sealing. At the same time it points to protection. Before the last crisis on earth takes place the church is sealed. This does not mean that believers do not have to face difficult times, but that they are protected spiritually. Furthermore, God's wrath does not affect them.

(11) *Being before the Throne of God, No Hunger, Thirst, or Heat Any More, Living Water, Tears Being Wiped Away (7:15-17; cf. 21:3-7; 22:1-5)*

Whatever is negative will be done away with. The last verses of Rev 7 remind us of the first verses of Rev 21. However, there is a difference. Whereas in Rev 7 the redeemed are pictured before God's throne in his temple, Rev 21:22 informs us that in the New Jerusalem no temple was seen and that God and the Lamb are the temple. Rev 7 may therefore refer to the time during the Millennium, whereas Rev 21 describes the time after the Millennium.

(12) *Reward (11:18; 22:12)*

This reward may be final destruction or final salvation. The faithful church will experience the latter.

(13) *Standing on Mount Zion (14:1)*

It is not only important to be saved but to be in the presence of the Lamb. Then a new song will be sung. The end time church will have won the victory over all evil powers.

(14) *Standing at the Sea of Glass (15:2)*

The sea of glass is already mentioned in 4:6. It is located in front of the throne of God. Now the redeemed are found there presenting their song of redemption.

(15) *Judgment over the Persecutors of the Church (14-19)*

It is part of God's justice that he executes judgment. For his enemies the judgment is terrible. For his own people it means liberation from all oppression and all oppressors.

(16) *New Earth and New Jerusalem (21-22)*

Rev 21 and 22 is much more detailed than the last part of Rev 7 is. At the beginning and the end of this long passage the close fellowship of the believers with God is stressed. The new earth and the New Jerusalem will surpass our wildest imagination and all of our expectations.

(17) *Seven Beatitudes (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14)*

- (a) Blessed is who reads and hears the Apocalypse and keeps its words (1:3).
- (b) Blessed are who die in the Lord from now on (14:13).
- (c) Blessed is who stays awake and keeps his clothes (16:15).
- (d) Blessed are who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9).
- (e) Blessed is who takes part in the first resurrection (20:6).
- (f) Blessed is who keeps the words of the Apocalypse (22:7).
- (g) Blessed are who wash their robes so that will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city (22:14).

## **V. Difficulties for the Church**

As we have already seen, the church has to face difficulties. To belong to God does not mean to be free of all problems and challenges. Oftentimes the opposite seems to be true. Jesus had to suffer, and his children are not exempt from suffering. Unfortunately, suffering is quite normal. The church has to face internal and external difficulties. They can be quite threatening. Both kinds must be mastered, and God offers his help. In case of the internal difficulties Jesus points to the problems and thus allows for a change of behavior. In case of the external challenges God oftentimes intervenes or gives strength to cope with them.

### **1. Internal Difficulties**

Internal difficulties include the following:

- (1) A lack of love (2:4; Ephesus)
- (2) False teachers and false doctrines (2:6,14,15,20-24; Thyatira and Pergamum)
- (3) Spiritual death (3:1; Sardes)
- (4) Lukewarmness (3:15,16; Laodicea)
- (5) Self-deception (3:17; Laodicea).

### **2. External Challenges**

Internal difficulties of the church are reported in Rev 2-3, namely in the letter frame of the Apocalypse. External difficulties, however, are found in both the letter frame and the apocalyptic part of Revelation.

- (1) Blasphemy (2:9; Smyrna)
- (2) Tribulation and persecution (2:9,10; 6:9-11; 7:14; 12:13-17; 13:7,16,17; 17:6; Smyrna)
- (3) Death and martyrdom (2:10; 6:9;13:15)

Just as the term “*ekklēsia*” is limited to the letter frame so are internal difficulties. They are not found in the other part of Rev. On the other hand, external challenges for the church occur throughout the book. Although they start already in the letter frame these difficulties are intensified in the prophetic-apocalyptic section of Rev, in which oftentimes rich and vivid imagery is used.

### 3. Opponents of the Church

A number of opponents of the church occur in the Apocalypse. Of special importance is the satanic trinity. We have already noted that Satan persecuted the church and turned his wrath in a special way toward the remnant of the true church. He continues to work against the saints through the sea beast and against those who do not accept the mark of the beast and do not worship his image—actually the same group--through the land beast.

These three evil powers we call the satanic trinity which imitate the divine trinity of Rev 1:4-5. The false trinity will force humanity into universal false worship, probably a mixture of genuine and false elements. Those who do not participate are going to be persecuted.

In Rev 14, Babylon occurs for the first time by name. Obviously, Babylon is nothing else than this satanic trinity.<sup>198</sup> It is presented as the great city and at the same time as a woman. There are four important women figures in Rev: Jezebel, the woman of Rev 12, Babylon, and the New Jerusalem. Two are found in the first half of the book, the historical part, and two in the eschatological part. In each part one is negative and the other is positive. Three of them belong to the apocalyptic part. Thus, Babylon is encompassed by the true church of Rev 12 and the New Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb as found in Rev 19, 21 and 22. Babylon is the evil counterpart of both women and resembles them in many ways. Clear parallels and contrast can be found between the woman of Rev 12 and the harlot of Rev 17 and the bride of the Lamb and the harlot. The latter two are also contrasted as cities, the great city and the holy and beloved city. The New Jerusalem has a precursor and an opponent in

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<sup>198</sup>Its sudden appearance in the message of the second angel (14:8) suggest that it comprises the before mentioned evil powers. This seems to be supported by rev 16.

the present time. The precursor is the holy city of 11:2, which is nothing else than the woman of Rev 12. The opponent is Babylon. The book clearly distinguishes between the church and Babylon or the remnant and Babylon. Therefore the remnant should not be called Babylon. It is not the remnant that is called to go out of Babylon, but “God’s people” that is still in Babylon (18:4).

## **VI. God’s Relationship to the Church and Her Final Victory**

We need to ask one more question, namely how God the Father and Jesus relate to the church. Indirectly we have already touched on that topic. Let us therefore briefly summarize!

(1) *Jesus Loves the Church (1:5)*

Jesus’ love to us has led to our salvation. Jesus has given us tremendous privileges and responsibilities.

(2) *Jesus Stands in the Middle of His Churches (1:13,20; 2:1)*

Jesus cares for his local churches. He praises and reprimands them in order to help them. Christ’s love is evident even when he announces judgment. He wants us to return to him.

(3) *God Answers Prayers (6:10→11; 8:3-4)*

Prayers of the saints are mentioned in 5:8 in connection with the Lamb. In 6:10 the martyrs turn to God in prayer. In 6:11 they are given a preliminary answer. A further answer are the trumpet judgements upon those, who dwell on earth.

(4) *God Seals His Church (7:3-4)*

God commands the sealing of his church. He intervenes for her. He does not want anybody to be lost.

(5) *Jesus Has Saved the Church (7:14, cf. 12:11; 14:3)*

Salvation is possible because Jesus has shed his blood for us. He came so close to us that he died on the cross in our stead. Now we should come close to him.

(6) *Jesus Is Shepherd of His Church (7:15-17; cf. 21:3-4)*

He provides more than what we need.

(7) *Jesus Comes Forth from the Church (12:2,5)*

His incarnation points to his closeness with his saints.

(8) *Because of Their Relationship with the Holy One the Believers are also Holy (16:5-6)*  
Again a close relationship is indicated.

(9) *God Raises the Faithful Ones in the First Resurrection (20:4,6)*  
The church follows Jesus in suffering but also in the resurrection. God gives eternal, incorruptible life and allows us to take part in this rulership.

(10) *The Church Will See Her Lord Face to Face (22:3-4)*  
This is the final goal. This promise can comfort in difficult times.

All these statements point to the fact that God loves his church, that he enjoys her fellowship, and that he will secure her final victory. The church will triumph, because Christ has triumphed.

## **VII. Practical Implications**

Finally, what are the practical implications?

(1) *Revelation Points to the Importance of the Church*

Although the book contains the individual aspect, there seems to be a strong accent on the corporate aspect. The author seems to take it for granted that a Christian can not live his or her Christian life in self-chosen or self-inflicted isolation. Christians are members of Christ's church. God oftentimes works through his Church. She is his army on earth. Thus, we are challenged to take it seriously and willingly get involved in mission outreach and caring relations.

(2) *In Revelation the Church is a Local Congregation and the Universal Church*

A congregationalistic approach to church structure does not seem to be in harmony with the Apocalypse. There are local churches in Rev and yet there is a worldwide church, to which the others belong. Therefore, the unity of the church must be promoted. E.g., we should be careful not to create national, racial, and gender-based theologies that hinder the unity and progress of the church. Believers will support their local congregation as well as the fellowship of the sister churches.

(3) *In Revelation the Church is the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant*

The struggling church with her weaknesses may catch our attention today and may irritate

us. Therefore Rev 1-3 is contrasted with Rev 19-22. We need the larger picture. We need to see the final outcome. As a church we do not excuse sins and mistakes, but confess them. As individuals we support the church in spite of her shortcomings. These are our shortcomings! If we expect the church to be a club of angels, I should leave and you probably too. Pointing out problems in the church may not be wrong, it even may be necessary. However, the questions are: In which spirit it is done? Do I mention problem areas in order to help the church or to criticize her? Do I consider myself and maybe some friends right and all other church members wrong so that I cannot learn anything from their viewpoints? Do I have to start my own ministry in opposition to the church? Am I impatient to see the church making changes? God will see to it that his militant church will become his triumphant church. This is what Rev tells us. We trust him.

(4) *In Revelation the Saints Do Not Abandon the Church*

Rev does not teach us to leave God's church when problems arise. It does not teach us to form a new group when some church member espouse false teachings or live a questionable life style. It does not tell us to give up when the church could be considered dead. But it tells us to challenge false doctrines and not to allow them to flourish in the church, to do whatever we can to help the church, and to take responsibility for others.

(5) *In Revelation the Church Seems to Be Visible, and Parts Seem to Be Invisible*

The church and the remnant are basically visible entities. Characteristics help to identify the remnant. Time prophecies support that. The church must be visible for others to join it. But the group of Rev 18:4, called "my people" is obviously not a visible entity. Our concept of the church must allow for the visible and invisible aspects.

(6) *Revelation Emphasizes the End Time Church*

Ecclesiology is a pressing topic today. It is very important for all of us, as we draw nearer to the end of time. This is precisely what Revelation tells us. The Bible can prevent us from building our own constructs of ecclesiology. We need to listen to her voice. It also tells us that there is a clear distinction between Babylon and the remnant and that there is not remnant of the end time remnant.

(7) *Jesus loves His Church*

So do we!