A Seventh-day Adventist Understanding Of The Church And Its Mission

Viesturs Rekis
Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin

Recommended Citation
Dissertation Projects DMin. 435.
https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dmin/435

This Project Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertation Projects DMin by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.
ABSTRACT

A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST UNDERSTANDING
OF THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSION

by

Viesturs Rekis

Faculty adviser: Russell Staples
The purpose of this study is to investigate the biblical background of the Christian church and its mission, in order to better understand the implications for Adventist mission in the Baltic countries. This study is intended to equip ministerial students with basic knowledge and to stimulate further studies of the church and its mission. Implications are drawn from the findings of the investigation to stimulate the mission of the church in the Baltic Union Conference.

The first part of the dissertation deals with the origins, nature, and functions of the Christian church within a biblical and theological perspective. Consideration of the Old Testament origins leads into a
study of some of the New Testament images of the church and their significance. This is followed by a consideration of the major ontological and functional models of the church and the significance of several of these for the Adventist church in the Baltic states.

The second part deals with the mission of the church within a biblical and historical perspective. A major part of this section is devoted to a presentation of the historical development of the Seventh-day Adventist church and the theological basis of its powerful sense of mission. A brief survey is given of the development of Adventist missions, the Adventist missionary message, and the status of the Adventist Church in the world today. Suggestions are made regarding the task remaining, and strategies and methods that may be relevant to the work of the church in the Baltic Conferences.

There are several ways to reach people in the Baltic countries, such as friendship evangelism, small Bible study groups, and others. However, the main concern for the Adventist church in the Baltic countries is to remain Christ-centered and loving, and to refocus from numbers to real people with real needs. The church as a community of faith, which worships together, may be one of the best methods to attract people to the Gospel.
A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST UNDERSTANDING
OF THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSION

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Viesturs Rekis
May 1998
A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST UNDERSTANDING
OF THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSION

A dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Viesturs Rekis

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

Russell Staples
Adviser, Russell Staples
Nancy J. Vyhmeister
Ricardo Norton

Dean,
SDA Theological Seminary

Ricardo Norton
Date approved

June 16, 1998
To Valda, Elina, Juris, and Valdis

with love
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ........................................... vii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................... viii

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION. ................................................. 1

  Purpose for the Study .......................................... 1
  Justification ..................................................... 3
  Personal Presuppositions ....................................... 7
  Methodology ...................................................... 9
  Limitations of the Project .................................... 10

II. TOWARD A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE CHurch ..................... 12

  Introduction .................................................... 12
  The Beginning .................................................. 13
  The Covenant People .......................................... 14
    Noah ........................................................... 15
    Abraham ....................................................... 16
    The Nation of Israel ......................................... 18

  The Basic Old Testament Terms Describing
    God's People ................................................ 19
    Qahal .......................................................... 20
    'Edhah .......................................................... 21

  Church in the New Testament .................................. 22
    Jesus and the Church ........................................ 22
    The Beginning of the Church according
       to Acts .................................................... 26
    The Development of the Church ................................ 27
    The Structure of the Church .................................. 30
    Governance of the Church .................................... 31
    The Life of the Church ....................................... 33

  New Testament Images of the Church ............................ 36
    The People of God ............................................. 36
    The Body of Christ ........................................... 39
    Temple of God ................................................ 42
    The Salt of the Earth ........................................ 45
    Other Images of the Church ................................... 46

  Summary .......................................................... 48
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>SOME MAJOR CONCEPTS OF THE CHURCH AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ontological Understanding of the Church</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divine Institution</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church as Sacrament</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Church as Community of Faith</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implications of Ontological Views</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Functional Understanding of the Church</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Herald Model</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church as Servant</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implications of the Functional Views</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implications of Models of the Church for Seventh-day Adventist Mission</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implications of Seventh-day Adventist Ecclesiology</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>UNDERSTANDING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Old Testament and Mission</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Universal Motif</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Missionary Motif</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Redemption of Israel</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The New Testament and Mission</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Universal Motif</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jesus and Israel</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jesus and the Nations</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jesus and Redemption</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missionary Motivation</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lordship of Jesus Christ</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proclamation of the Kingdom</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Second Advent</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AND MISSION</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adventism in the World</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical Overview</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missionary Message</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status of Adventist Missions</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Task Remaining</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategies and Methods</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ...................... 141

Summary .............................................. 141
Conclusions .......................................... 147

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................... 149

VITA ..................................................... 157

vi
**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BBE</td>
<td><em>Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td><em>Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Terms</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDBW</td>
<td><em>An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISBE</td>
<td><em>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDAChM</td>
<td><em>Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDAE</td>
<td><em>Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZPEB</td>
<td><em>The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I thank God for the opportunity to study at Andrews University and thus fulfill my dreams and desires. It is an answer to my prayers. I thank God also for being my sponsor and making it possible to finish my studies after I lost church sponsorship as a result of new political developments in the former Soviet Union, with the Baltic Union Conference returning to the Trans-European Division. He indeed is a loving God and caring Father, and no words can describe my gratitude.

Many others have helped me reach this goal. I thank the church for sending me to Andrews University and giving me time to finish the studies. I thank my colleagues at Zaokski Theological Seminary and my friends and associates in Latvia for their contributions to my thinking and moral support. I especially thank Elder and Mrs. Viktors Geide for their support during my studies.

I thank my teachers at Friedensau Theological Seminary who taught me the basics of theology and prepared me for this study, especially Dr. Manfred Böttcher, who stimulated my interest to study the biblical concept of the church and mission.
At Andrews University and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary I thank Dr. Bruce Bauer and the Department of World Mission for moral and financial assistance during my studies. The Chan Shun Foundation also gave generous financial support. Special thanks are due to the seminary dean, Dr. Werner Vyhmeister, for his wise counsel and friendship.

Several professors also influenced the direction of this dissertation and offered inspiration, especially Raoul Dederen, Robert M. Johnston, and Antonio Bueno.

I am deeply grateful to Russell Staples, my faculty adviser, for many hours of discussion and well-considered counsel. I highly value his encouragement, friendship, and promptings to higher excellence. His enthusiasm and love for world mission have been an inspiration for me. Thanks are due also to Nancy J. Vyhmeister for her advice and support during my studies and writing of this dissertation. Especially I am thankful to Mrs. Madeline Johnston, Mrs. Joyce Jones, and Mrs. Bonnie Proctor for editing this dissertation.

I am grateful to my late father, Edgars, for his input in my life, teaching me high work ethics. And I thank my mother, Ilga, for her prayers, even during hard times in her own life. I thank also my whole family for their support.
I thank Dr. and Mrs. Arno Lejnieks for moral and financial support during my studies at Andrews University and for useful suggestions for the future work in Latvia. I also thank my friends, the Galenieks family, for their encouraging spirit, prayers, and worshiping together.

Finally, and most significantly, special thanks are due to my beloved wife Valda and our three children, Elina, Juris, and Valdis. Our children sacrificed many interests of their young lives and patiently waited for time that I could spend with them. They loved me and prayed for me, and I thank them for honest prayers and an interest in my studies, for their smiles, laughter, and love, which were so important during my studies.

As for Valda, there are no words describing all her love, support, and willingness to sacrifice her own interests for the sake of my studies. Without her understanding and loving support I would not be able to finish my studies. She loved me, believed in me, and patiently picked up my burdens. She will celebrate with me, and I am convinced that a great reward awaits her in heaven. To her I give my love.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose for the Study

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry project was to develop a book entitled A Seventh-day Adventist Understanding of The Church and Its Mission for the ministerial students of an external studies program in the Baltic Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the biblical background of the Christian church and its mission, in order to better understand the implications for Adventist mission in the Baltic countries. This book is intended to equip young ministerial students with basic knowledge and to stimulate further studies of church and its mission.

1The Baltic Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of the constituent levels in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It includes Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. See footnote 1 on p. 4 for an explanation of the administrative structure of the Seventh-day Adventist church.
This book grows out of the author's experience as a teacher in both the Zaokski Theological Seminary,¹ Russia, and in the external studies program for the upgrading of ministers in the Baltic Union Conference. Two themes are developed in parallel in this book: the biblical understanding of the church, and the missionary responsibility of the church.

The church and its mission are inseparable. My practical experience, both pastoral and teaching, indicates that the study of these issues—the nature of the church and its mission—in the territory of the Baltic Union Conference is necessary. This book may help students to understand better the place of the church and its mission in today's society. It is hoped that it will lead to some ideas that are useful for the church in the development of new programs to reach the people in the Baltic states with the message of God's kingdom.

It may also help to build bridges between longtime church members and new ones. If the church can find ways that promote mutual understanding and cooperation in the life and work of the church, the mission of the church will be more successful. God's character will be revealed in a better way, and the church will become a

¹The Seventh-day Adventist Seminary in Zaokski, Russia, was dedicated December 2, 1988. It is an educational institution preparing pastors and church leaders for the countries of the former Soviet Union.
guiding light leading many to find salvation in Jesus Christ.

**Justification**

For approximately fifty years the three Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It is well known that this state was atheistic. Communism was upheld not only as an ideology but even as the state religion. To put it briefly, in the Marxist state there was clearly repression of religion, with no possibility of a college education for pastors and church leaders.

The state representatives exercised deep control over religious organizations, and it was not only extremely difficult to be a Christian and church member, but even more so to become a pastor or church leader. Pastors were required to be registered with the state officials to receive credentials.¹

For several decades people were accustomed to receiving political information and directions authoritatively from the leaders and state representatives. Everyone was expected to accept those directives without questioning or doubt. The same style of leadership was adopted by some church administrators as well.

¹It is not the purpose of this study to research and describe the history and development of the church and state relationships during the communist period, although this would be an interesting study.
However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, people do not wish to accept the earlier styles of leadership and communication. People are suspicious of any form of authoritarianism. They regard it as a danger that threatens their freedom. The same is applicable to the style with which the church practices its mission. The majority of people do not easily accept an authoritarian form of preaching the Gospel. They want to think for themselves and are more open to forms of friendship evangelism and to practical demonstrations of the regenerating power of the Gospel in the lives of believers.

There was no regular ministerial training during the communist government. However, the need for new-style pastors and church administrators was urgent. To meet these needs, a three-year combined correspondence and summer-session course was established at Zaokski, Russia, in 1988. This program was designed for pastors already working in the church. Several pastors from the Baltic states were fortunate to study and be a part of this program.

In January 1994, the Baltic Union of Seventh-day Adventists joined the Trans-European Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.¹

¹Among Seventh-day Adventists there are four constituent levels, leading from the individual believer to the worldwide organization of the work of the church:
Participation of pastors from the Baltic countries in the Zaokski Theological Seminary programs was terminated. It would thus be logical for students in the Baltic Union to look forward to study at Newbold College; however, this is not possible, because neither the church nor students are financially able to pay tuition and/or sponsorship.

The Baltic Union was granted a summer-session extension program for three years with Newbold College visiting professors. However, this program was not entirely successful because of language barriers. A new program has been developed to educate pastors from the former Soviet-bloc countries now under the administration of the Trans-European Division. Only the future will show the pluses and minuses of this program.

The Seventh-day Adventist church in the Baltic countries is growing, and new pastors and church leaders

1. The local church, a united organized body of individual believers.
2. The local conference, a united organized body of churches in a state, province, or territory.
3. The union conference, a united body of conferences within a larger territory.
4. The General Conference, the largest unit of organization, embracing all unions in all parts of the world. Divisions are sections of the General Conference, with administrative responsibility assigned to them in designated geographical areas (SDACHM, 38).

Newbold College, founded in January 1902, is a coeducational senior college operated by the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists, located 30 miles west of London, in Bracknell, Berkshire. It offers both undergraduate and postgraduate studies. (For more information see SDAE, 1975 ed., s.v. "Newbold College."

Hereafter, often referred to as Adventists.
are needed to nurture the new congregations—leaders with a new vision of mission that addresses the current needs of society. This indicates the need for short-term programs for the formation of adequately equipped pastors and evangelists who can function effectively in a secular society and in the midst of the recent political and religious developments in the Baltic countries. The aim of this program is to provide pastors with biblically based academic and practical skills to enable them to address the needs and challenges of contemporary society.

The years of isolation from the world church and inadequate theological education have led to a certain narrowness of vision. Some have been inclined to feel that salvation can be reached only by becoming a member of the Adventist Church and following a certain lifestyle with restricted rules. In such cases, mission was turned away from the real source of salvation—Jesus Christ.

The majority now coming into the church are accepting our Lord Jesus Christ as Savior but are not always willing to accept the narrow traditions generally held by the long-term church members. This sometimes leads to clashes between the church members.

I have been involved in these developments, serving as a pastor, educator, and in different positions and levels in the administration of the church organization. This background has led to the development of this book. Its purpose is to help the church gain a
scriptural understanding of why God called the church and what its mission in the world should be.

In addition, it should be mentioned that the leaders of the Baltic Union have requested me to write this book as a study aid for a course on the church and its mission, which I will conduct for ministerial students, church pastors, and leaders.

Personal Presuppositions

This dissertation, as mentioned above, is not a result of some presuppositions without a context. The ideas researched and discussed in this dissertation are born in the context of my background, experience, and values. The material thus produced will be applicable in the context of the student's experience and background.

There are several presuppositions behind this study guide:

1. The Adventist Church believes that the Bible is God's inspired Word and is the basis for a person's faith and life. The Bible is regarded as the authoritative document of God's self-revelation. It describes God's interaction with the world, both with believers and nonbelievers. Divine inspiration does not mean that it is accepted by everybody as a source of enlightenment, or is easily understandable.

---

1 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19-21; Heb 4:12.
2. The Adventist Church accepts that revelation is progressive and open to new light and this has encouraged me to undertake this particular study. God has spoken to the human race, and we need to constantly seek to understand the intended meaning of the original propositions.

3. The Adventist Church sees itself as a community called by God to proclaim His coming kingdom, salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, and judgment. Adventists believe that God has called them to proclaim the Gospel and build bridges between people and God, and that the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the flesh is a wonderful example for them to follow in identifying with people.

4. The Adventist Church believes in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in the near future and understands its mission in the context of that event. This is based on a linear understanding of history from Creation and the inception of sin to the new creation and the restoration of a sinless society. Adventists believe it is their responsibility to proclaim God's judgment and coming kingdom.

These are some of the presuppositions that I, as a Seventh-day Adventist, have had in mind in developing this written aid for students in the process of ministerial formation.
Methodology

The research methodology of this study relates to the purpose of the dissertation. The book is developed for students in the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and thus addresses questions they may have.

The focus of attention is on the church and its mission. It is a biblical study to provide insights into the development of God’s relationship with people. The method is not exegetical or the proof-text method, although some biblical passages are exegetically expounded. The method used in this study is that of heilsgeschichte or salvation history. Using this method, I look back to the events highlighting God’s activities to reach the fallen human race. The main point of attention is God’s purpose of mission as solving the problem of sin, with concentration upon the promise of the Messiah and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Salvation history examines God’s activities with people in different stages of human history and leads from God’s covenant people to the covenant nation of Israel, and finally to the church as His agent to fulfill His purpose.

I use historical materials to reveal the growth of the church and its mission. In chapters 2 and 4, attention is given to the theological bases defining the church and its mission. Selected biblical passages build the main story. Chapters 3 and 5 deal with implications
of those basic themes. There is an application to the practical needs of the church for its mission.

The above themes are selected with the specific situation of the Adventist Church in the Baltic states in mind. Sources are quoted generally for reference purposes and to assist in the interpretation of various developments and ideas. Answers are given to many questions; however, it is designed to lead the reader to the creative process of further study of the Scriptures for him/herself.

There is a short summary at the end of each chapter. The book ends with a brief summary of conclusions and suggestions for further studies. The bibliography may help students to find literature for further research.

**Limitations of the Project**

This book is written with the circumstances of the Adventist Church and its ministers in the Baltic Union Conference in mind. Developments and problems in these countries constitute the basis for both the selection of the subject matter of the study and the solutions suggested. It is thus a fairly narrowly focussed study. Concentration is upon those passages of Scripture which deal most directly with the biblical background and development of the church. The same applies to a study of the biblical images of the church.
There is no attempt to make an exhaustive study of these themes in Scripture.

The same focused approach is employed in a study of the models of the church. Rather than conducting an exhaustive study of the implications of each model, there is concentration upon those features which seem most applicable to the Adventist church in the Baltic countries.

The word "mission" is used in many contexts and may be given several meanings. The usage of the term in this study is restricted to the biblical understanding of mission as God's mission—i.e., as the communication of the Gospel of salvation and the responsibility of the people of God to engage in this mission.

The study of the developments of the Adventist mission in the Baltic countries is based on limited sources. The purpose of this study is not to investigate every aspect of the development of the Adventist mission, but to give an overview, which provides perspective and facilitates understanding of the present status of the church and its mission in the Baltic countries.

All Greek and Hebrew words are given in English transliteration without diacritic and are underlined.

All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.
CHAPTER II

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE CHURCH

Introduction

The church and its mission have become a much discussed matter. After long years of silence during the Soviet regime the church is again the focus of attention. The recent democratic developments in Baltic countries have brought the church and also its mission to the forefront of attention.

The place and role of the church in society need some clarification. On the one hand people are interested in the church and its mission, but this is mostly in the context of social development. On the other hand, there is a negative attitude towards the church if it does not take the kind of action expected by people. There is an openness toward Jesus Christ; however, this is not in the context of the church. These different views relate to understandings of the church and its mission.

The best source for a true understanding of the church, and God’s purpose for it, is the Bible. Relevant passages of Scripture in this chapter are analyzed in an attempt to show briefly how, when, and why the church was called into existence.
The Beginning

There is no evidence in the Bible that God intended from the beginning to build the church. God created the world perfect, and, according to Scripture, it was His plan that everybody would live in His presence, in freedom, and in harmony with His law. Although the Bible does not record how long and how directly God communicated with people, the Creation story of Gen 1:26-31 tells us that there was a time of direct relationship between God and people.

After this wonderful beginning there came a dramatic turning point in the history of mankind. Gen 3 reports painful changes in the relationship between God and people. The first couple doubted God's word and sin occurred. They opened the way for Satan to bring evil into the world and to alienate humans from God. The people could no longer openly answer God's love. "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Gen 3:8).

Even in this dramatic situation, God did not turn away and abandon His people. On the contrary, He called them: "But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Gen 3:9). This question was not necessary for God to clarify the situation. He already knew what had happened and where they were. This question was necessary for the
people: to help them think about their action and its consequences— their separation from God.

In the state of sin people were not able to continue a pure, trustful, and loving relationship with God, or even one with another. The nature of mankind had changed, and there was a place of evil and alienation in people's hearts.

The new stage of history required new principles of managing the relationship between God and people. The old "golden days" were gone, and a new, harsh, rough reality rapidly pushed people away from God (Gen 6:1-8). However, God created new ways to lead mankind out of this stage of alienation and sin into a new relationship and back to Him, to His kingdom.

The Covenant People

The principles of God's law were not changed but an arrangement was made to meet the people and their needs in those new conditions. For that purpose God covenanted with them to participate in His actions of salvation and judgment.

A covenant is an agreement between two or more partners. It includes promises that will be fulfilled within the limits of the covenant. A covenant develops
relationships involving mutual obligations, and is sealed with some kind of sign.¹

Noah

In the time of deepest corruption, God chose Noah to proclaim His message of judgment and salvation. But the people to whom Noah made an appeal did not see the seriousness of this message until the consequences of the judgment hit them.

Noah was a righteous man (Gen 6:9). His response to God's call and his willingness to be God's witness made him a suitable vessel for the fulfillment of God's purposes. God asked Noah to become His partner, and made a covenant with him. "But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark--you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you" (Gen 6:18). God included the whole family of Noah in His covenant. This is an illustration of how God deals with people: He leads whole families to responsible relationships. By faith, Noah was able to listen to God and follow the instructions for building the ark (Gen 7:5).

There were two stages in God's covenant with Noah. The first was the covenant made before the flood, when God

said, "I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark" (Gen 6:18). He saved Noah and his family from death. The second was after the flood. This covenant included not only Noah but also his descendants in agreement with God (Gen 9:1-17).

The whole initiative in these covenants came from God; there were no conditions. God sealed His covenant to never again to destroy the earth by a flood with the special sign of the rainbow.

Abraham

The next point of interest in the history of the Old Testament is God's covenant with Abraham. There were three phases in this covenant, and at the end even Abraham's name was changed.

In the covenant relationship between God and Abraham (Abram), the first phase is God's call to Abraham to leave his country. Calling Abraham out, God made several promises:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen 12:1-3)

---

1Read Gen 8:20-9:17.
God asked Abraham to leave the settled world and become a pilgrim with God. God gave blessings to him without any conditions, and through him to his whole family, and even to all mankind. Once again, God was the initiator and actor in calling and establishing covenant relations with Abraham. There is no evidence of any special conditions, only that these people were ready to listen to God and accept His call.

Gen 15:1-21 describes the next stage of that covenant, and this also included Abraham's descendants. "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here" (Gen 15:16). This passage of Scripture is another witness to God's unconditional love and salvational activity. In this we see that God always is deeply interested in the salvation of His people and creates ways of building relationships with people who are often not ready for such grace and communication with God.

The third phase is described in Gen 17:1-27, in which promise God is very clearly seen to be Abraham's God. This phase includes the condition of circumcision. Circumcision is not a magic wand of salvation; it is a sign of loyalty and love, of a readiness to respect and serve God.¹

¹Gen 17:9-11. The apostle Paul also comments on this aspect of the covenant sign in Rom 4:11: "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."
The Nation of Israel

The nation of Israel is portrayed as the people of God in the Old Testament. Deut 4:20 bears witness to this statement: "But as for you, the Lord took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are."

God chose and called Israel into relationship with Him (Deut 7:6-8). There is no time limitation to this call; it is to the end of time. God's people were slaves in Egypt without prospects of a better future. Their call was a clear continuation of God's covenant with the patriarchs.¹ The reason for God's call was not to be found in them, it was because God was faithful to His covenant. They were to be His special agents in a special time of history—a people for His own possession who were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.²

The basis of this covenant relationship was God's love for them, not some special conditions they needed to 

¹The election of Israel follows upon the election of the patriarchs. God had chosen Israel and Jacob. Israel is called first of all to fellowship with God and then to affirm the mission to the nations. God does not choose Israel just in order to use them, but because He loved them. See Edmund P. Clowney, "The Biblical Theology of the Church," in The Church in the Bible and the World, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 27-29.

²See Exod 19:3-6.
meet.¹ God wanted them to feel the warmth and beauty of His love and, as a result, to become witnesses of His love to the other nations. They were to participate in His plan of salvation. And God blessed them. Even their enemies could not deny that and blessed them,² however, Israel repeatedly disappointed God by disobeying His covenant. Notwithstanding, God continuously blessed them and stood true to His covenant.

Israel, the people of God, was a nation, and not an institutionally organized church. God’s call had completely changed the people’s lives and status from slaves to a free nation. God continues to lead people to respond to His call, to enter into covenant relationship with Him, and become His people.³

The Basic Old Testament Terms
Describing God’s People

The church, as we think of it today, did not exist in Old Testament days. But God’s people—the nation of Israel—were also a worshiping community. They were part of the reality of the relationship between God and mankind. They were to fulfill God’s purpose of preparing nations for the coming of the Messiah. As such, there is continuity

¹"'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son'" (Hos 11:1).

²See Num 23:6-12 for how Balaam blessed Israel.

³Deut 30:19-20.
between Israel and the New Testament Christian community, the church.

There are several basic terms in the Old Testament describing the worshiping communities.

Oahal

Oahal, which means "assembly; company," describes and emphasizes the assembly of God's people—Israel. The term qahal occurs 123 times in the Hebrew Bible.¹ Already the first occurrence of the word bears the connotation of a large group of people: "And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude [qahal] of people" (Gen 28:3 [KJV]).² Oahal describes the assembled congregation of God's people. It points to God's people as a worshiping community participating in a covenant relationship with God. Edmund Clowney comments:

Of the two words commonly used for the congregation of God's people in the Old Testament, qahal views the congregation as actually assembled while edhah refers to the congregation whether assembled or not.³

---


²Ibid.

Qahal denotes to assemble or to gather, to call an assembly together. This is a God-fearing community, gathering for worship.

Edhah

The second major term used in the Old Testament to describe God's people is Edhah. The Edhah is translated as synagogae—gathered together—and is used 149 times in the Old Testament. This is a worshiping community which is not specially assembled together to hear God’s law and to worship him.

Edhah gives the picture that after the dynamic action of God’s calling and the people’s response they have a special relationship not only with God, but also with one another. They experience blessings together in community, in their everyday life.

Those who are called out or gathered together by God always have a special purpose. As seen already in the Old Testament, God called the people or the nation of Israel to proclaim His judgment, salvation, and coming kingdom.

---


2 According to An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, s.v. "Edhah": the most frequent reference is to the "congregation of Israel" (9 times), "the congregation of the sons of Israel" (26 times), "the congregation" (24 times), or "all of the congregation" (30 times).

3 See 2 Chr 20:5; Ezra 10:12; Neh 5:13.
However, the nation of Israel had not completely fulfilled the mission, so God made a new covenant, calling people from Israel and later from other nations to become His people. The New Testament people of God have the same purpose as the people of God in the Old Testament.

**Church in the New Testament**

The New Testament continues to point out God’s way for the salvation of His people. Jesus Christ—the Messiah—in His mission called people to follow Him. This is a continuation of God’s call to the nation of Israel. Israel rejected this new opportunity, and God made a new Israel—the church. Jesus Christ was the center of the church.

There is also a discontinuity with the Old Testament nation of Israel. Israel was a nation and people were born or proselytized to be members of this nation. The church, in contradistinction, is a voluntary gathering of people joining the assembly of God’s people.

**Jesus and the Church**

There are several passages in the New Testament which bring insights explaining how Jesus Christ related to the beginning of the church. It is clear that Jesus Christ began an interesting and powerful movement which became known as the church.
Jesus Christ began His mission by calling His disciples. He prepared and trained them to be His apostles. "He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14). The twelve apostles were the nucleus around whom God gathered other people. The number twelve maintained continuity with Old Testament Israel, which had twelve patriarchs.

We read in Matt 16:18 that Jesus Christ intended to establish the church. He proclaimed, "I will build my church." The church Christ established is a universal church—this is signified by the use of the singular form of ekklesia. Christ did not say that He would build churches, but His church. Jesus Christ gathered people around Himself

---

1 See Matt 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:2-11; John 1:35-42.

2 See also Luke 6:12-16.

3 This is a controversial passage because of the question, Who is the foundation of the church? In this study we are not dealing with this question. However, there are some points I will mention. The church is built on the rock. There are several possibilities to define the rock on which the church is built. In the New Testament, Christ is always the Cornerstone of the building. We can see this, for example, in Matt 21:42; 1 Cor 3:11; 1 Pet 2:46.

Chrys C. Caragounis explains, that "The analysis of the structure of the text confirms the conclusion reached from the context, that the semantic highlight is on Jesus and his Messianic office, and not on Peter." Peter and the Rock (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 118. He supports the idea that Christ is the rock on which the church is build. The apostle Peter just had confessed that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus mentions this foundation. The church definitely is not the body of Peter but of Christ.
and established this divine institution. This makes the church a divinely founded institution with a human constituency, and Christ in the center.

The apostle John, in several passages, reveals that Jesus wished to gather His people together. He uses the analogy of the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep.¹ Jesus is the shepherd and His followers are the sheep. John 10:16 reveals that Jesus desired His sheep to belong to Him and to be in one fold. This is one of the many pictures Jesus uses to describe His intention to establish the church.

Another clear evidence of Jesus’ intention to build the church is found in John 17. In this chapter, John describes Jesus’ prayer before His arrest. This was a very serious moment in Jesus’ life and He opened His heart. Jesus prayed for His disciples who would remain in the world and also for all who would believe in Him—for the church.² This clearly shows that Jesus was preparing everything for the church to grow. He wanted them to be one in love and to give glory to God.

Matt 28:16-20 refers to Jesus’ commission to His disciples to go and to start the church. The church is growing where there is a commitment to Christ. The gathering of His people was an important part of Jesus’ mission on the

¹See John 10 and 13.
earth. This intention received its fulfillment in Pentecost (Acts 2).

The foundation for this new community was the covenant which was sealed with Jesus' blood. Jesus gathered His disciples together for His last Passover with them and gave them the signs of covenant (Mark 14:22-25). The apostle Paul later in 1 Cor 11:25 calls this "the new covenant."¹ There is continuity between the church and the old Israel, and at the same time discontinuity, because the seal of the new covenant is Jesus' blood. The blood symbolized His life, which was given as a ransom for sins. This covenant places people in a new relationship with God.

The church is the continuation of Israel. It is the new Israel. In the parable of the wicked tenants (Matt 21:33-43), Jesus explains that Israel was not willing to fulfill God's covenant and therefore God gave this mandate to the church. In 1 Pet 2:4-12, the apostle Peter, referring to the New Testament people of God, uses terminology referring to Israel. He compares them and explains that there is a continuation. The church is appointed as the new Israel for the specific purpose of proclaiming the kingdom of God and the Messiah.

¹Allusion to Jer 31:31.
The Beginning of the Christian Church
According to Acts

The book of Acts portrays the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to build His church. It describes the beginnings of the New Testament Christian church. According to Luke, the author of this book, apostles and some women formed the nucleus of the church. Interestingly, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was among those praying with His disciples.

The disciples form the central core of the church in the book of Acts (Acts 6:1; 11:26; 14:22; 18:23). Those were God's called people, chosen by Jesus Himself. The people of the new covenant who formed the church were called by God to fulfill His purpose. The initiative for the call was from God, and not necessarily based upon the intrinsic virtue of those called. They were people who responded to God's call and were ready to serve others.

This first church was a worshiping community with a Jewish background. According to Luke, the birthplace of the Christian church was Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost. He writes that in the beginning there were about 120 believers in the Christian church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15). It seems possible that the 120 believers were all located there,

'See Acts 2, especially Acts 2:41-47, where it is clear that the Christian church had formed around the twelve apostles. In reality, after Jesus' death there were only eleven apostles, but after Jesus was taken up into heaven, they chose Matthias to replace Judas (Acts 1:12-26). It was Peter who argued that the number of witnesses must be twelve.
perhaps in the house where the apostles were staying (Acts 2:2-4). The Spirit had filled each of the disciples, and the effect was immediate. They began to preach, and three thousand believers repented, were baptized, and became members of the church (Acts 2:41).

People of fifteen nations gathered together on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:47). And the last statement in this chapter is that "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). In Acts 4:4, Luke mentions there are already five thousand believers. The Holy Spirit was actively participating in the church's formation and growth.

The first church understood that Israel's heritage had moved to them and the people continued to live in the bonds of Judaism (Acts 2-6). However, they saw themselves as the church, the people of God, and not as a sect in Israel.

The Development of the Church

The first twelve chapters of the book of Acts show the church as a group of Christians in Jerusalem. After Stephen's death, the church was persecuted in Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 8:1), and apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Philip, one of the seven chosen elders in the church at Jerusalem, went down to Samaria and preached the gospel (Acts 8:4-8). People believed his message and were baptized (vs. 12). Peter and John were
sent to Samaria (vs. 14), and after they prayed and laid hands on believers in Samaria, those people also received the Holy Spirit (vss. 15-17). This could be considered a second Pentecost, because they also received the Holy Spirit as had the disciples earlier in Jerusalem.

The next stage in the early history of the church was preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. A parallel mission, it began with Peter's calling to go and preach in Cornelius's house (Acts 10). There we find the third Pentecostal event. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles (Acts 10:44). It was a big surprise for Peter and other Jewish believers (vs. 45), but after this event the Gentile believers were baptized as well (vs. 48).

After the beginning of persecution in connection with Stephen's preaching and death, some believers began to travel to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Antioch is the first place were the disciples were called Christians (Acts 11:26). Antioch also provides the first clear picture of the acting Christian community---church. This church was constituted of believers from different countries. This was a community which was not only active in preaching the gospel but also in providing practical help to other churches. This was the church which commissioned Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem and take the gifts with them. This church commissioned them and sent Paul and Barnabas on

the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3). This church seems to have been a well-structured community of believers.

Beginning with chap. 13 in the book of Acts, Luke shows the work of the apostle Paul and his friends and coworkers. In every place Paul preached to Jews and to Gentiles. His desire was to visit Rome and to preach there. Rome, as the capital of an empire, was a symbol of the ends of the earth (Acts 19:21).

The book of Acts ends with the message that Paul had preached in Rome (Acts 28:30-31). According to Luke, the commission given by Jesus Christ to the disciples was fulfilled. The Christian church had found a place in the whole earth as known to the apostles at that time.

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost sealed the new covenant rooted in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. God is active through the Holy Spirit. In the new community of God's people there is a place not only for the old covenant people, Israel, but also for the other nations as well.

That is possible only because of the unique action of God through the Holy Spirit, uniting people in a new community of faith. Olsen describes it this way:

The church is in a unique sense the community of the Holy Spirit. No one can make the confession that "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3). Those "who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Rom 8:14). Church membership
meant "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 13:14; Phil 2:1).¹

To better understand this community some aspects of the nature of the church are discussed.

The Structure of the Church

It is clear from New Testament records that the early churches were organized. However, we do not have a full picture of the church’s organization. The apostles believed that Jesus would return to earth in their lifetime, and this may be one of the reasons why a special pattern of church organization is not revealed in the New Testament.

The church in Jerusalem was obviously the mother church. According to Acts 2:37-41, the believers knew the number of members. Use of "added" implies that there was an organized group of believers. Some organization was required for them to baptize and nurture 3000 souls.

There were people from fifteen countries and they needed a place to stay to be instructed. Acts 2:44-45 may refer to this particular situation. Also Acts 6:1-7 shows the church as an organized institution. After the apostles sought to improve the work of the new believers, the church chose seven, and the apostles ordained them for a special ministry in the church. This is evidence of an organized church.

¹V. Norskov Olsen, Myth & Truth about Church: Priesthood and Ordination (Riverside, CA: Loma Linda University Press, 1990), 19.
There were churches also outside Jerusalem and, as mentioned above, they were connected through the work of apostles and elected leaders. Acts 15 records the meeting of the council at Jerusalem. There arose a danger of doctrinal uncertainty, therefore the church called a council at Jerusalem to address the issues and come to certain conclusions regarding doctrinal unity. The council issued a letter to Gentile believers to assure them of their support in their spiritual life. The worshiping community needed a structure and some governance to fulfill its mission.

Outside Jerusalem local meetings took place. The teaching and instructing of the church were structured in some way, because we read in Acts 18:24-28 that the leaders "wrote letters" to the leaders of another church.

The above leads us to the question of the governance of the New Testament church.

Governance of the Church

The New Testament church consisted of communities of faith which assembled to pray and worship God together. They were driven by a zeal to proclaim Jesus Christ and call persons into fellowship with Him. This church also had some direct organizational structures from the beginning.

The New Testament church had the office of the apostles. They were eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul, affirming his apostleship, asks, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor 9:1). Also Acts 1:21-22
mentions this qualification as necessary to be an apostle. If in the beginning the Twelve were called apostles, then later so were Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:14).

Besides the apostles we can mention the seven who were chosen to serve the church in Acts 6:1-6. The church elected them and they were ordained by laying on of hands. The Seven dealt not only with the material needs of the church, but they also preached and taught the Gospel.

Some of the churches did not have an elder or other high leader. This could have been the case in Corinth. In the later epistles, however, the apostle Paul mentions other leaders such as overseers and deacons (Phil 1:1). In 1 Tim 3:1-7 he mentions the same office of overseer and in vss. 8-12 the deacons. This epistle can be regarded as one of the first-known church manuals.

The ministry of the church can be described as led by the apostles, bishops, and deacons. However, this is not a case of hierarchy. They were equal before God but had different tasks to fulfill in the mission of the church.

The apostle Paul shows that there are specific spiritual gifts including those of the leaders. In fact, we can see that there were leaders because of their gifts. There were also leaders because of appointment. In the early church, however, those who had gifts were appointed for an office and those who were appointed to office

—

1See 1 Cor 12:1-11.
received the spiritual gifts necessary to exercise the given task.¹

The fourth Gospel speaks of two major functions of leaders. One is to be shepherds of Christ’s flock (John 21:15-17) and the other to bear witness (vs. 24).

We can see some major guidelines in the governance of the church. The church was a united body acting in different places and different circumstances. The New Testament reveals that the church was flexible in the contextualization of the message. This is an example the church should follow through the ages. To fulfill the given task, to participate in God’s mission, the church must remain open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament reveals the church as an organism that was open to choose the form of leadership useful for the mission in a given time.

The Life of the Church

The New Testament church assembled regularly to worship God. The New Testament does not give us a description of the worship form. Proclamation of the teachings of Jesus Christ and of his life as the Messiah was a part of the worship. Public reading of Scripture, preaching, and teaching are mentioned in 1 Tim 4:13.

¹For example, read 1 Tim 4:14.
Another part of worship was singing (Col 3:16). In Eph 5:19 Paul encourages the church, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord." He continues instruction, "Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 20). This lets us assume that thanksgiving and prayers were an important part of worship as well.

One can assume that the worship style varied from place to place. The believers met in many kinds of places, halls, and houses, later in the catacombs. It was the presence of God that was important, not the place. Paul gives us a picture of some of the services in Corinth (1 Cor 11-14). Although Paul is in some aspects critical of a lack of leadership, showing concern for proper relationship during the worship, we can see the traditions. Paul mentions prayer, prophesy, speaking in tongues with an interpretation, the Lord’s Supper, and singing as parts of the worship.

Baptism is another important part of the life of the church. After people believed in Jesus Christ as Messiah they were baptized (Acts 8:12). The believer dies with Christ in baptism. In Gal 3:27 Paul mentions, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."1 The meaning of baptism is to show the

1See also Rom 6:3-11; 1 Cor 12:13.
relationship with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection, accepting him as Savior. There is an identification with the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom 6:3-4).

Identification with Jesus Christ is the most important part. With baptism, the believer enters the realm of Jesus’ Lordship. Jesus Christ wanted baptism to exist until the end of time (Acts 2:38-39). Baptism marks entry into the church and is necessary for maintenance of unity in the church.

Another very important ritual in the life of the New Testament church was the eucharist, meaning to give thanks. There are not many references to the eucharist in the New Testament. In some cases this rite is described as the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:20). In 1 Cor 10:16, it is called thanksgiving. Acts 2:42 speaks of the "breaking of bread and fellowship." 1 Cor 10:21 calls it the "Lord’s table."

This ritual was introduced by Jesus Christ Himself.¹ The church celebrated the Lord’s Supper in remembrance of Christ’s death and resurrection. The Lord’s Supper includes three aspects: There is the past, which asks for remembrance. There is the present—belonging to Christ in the new covenant. There is also the future—it points to the coming of the Messiah. In sum, we can think of it as having fellowship in Christ’s body.

¹Matt 26:17-30.
The New Testament church is not imaginable without its mission. The apostles and the church followed Jesus’ Great Commission: "make disciples, baptize them, teach them" (Matt 28:16-20). As the apostle Peter described it, the purpose of mission was to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9-10). The New Testament church saw itself as obligated to gather together people for God.

Some of the New Testament metaphors of the church help us to understand this community better.

**New Testament Images of the Church**

The New Testament authors used several images to describe this unique entity--the church. It is conservatively estimated that there are at least eighty,¹ however, we will look at only a few of the dominant images here and seek to understand their significance.

**The People of God**

One of the most-used images of the church in the New Testament is the "people of God." This term is used by several New Testament authors. Paul uses this expression to describe both ancient Israel and the new Israel as God’s people,² and he applies it to those who had accepted Jesus


²See Rom 9:25; 11:1; 2 Cor 6:16.
Christ as the Messiah (Tit 2:14). Peter uses this metaphor in his appeal to the "chosen people"—Gentiles (1 Pet 2:9-10; 2 Pet 2:1; 3:11). The apostle John also uses the image of God's people in the book of Revelation (Rev 18:4; 21:3). Hans Küng is right when he explains:

The concept of the people of God is at the heart of Judaism. Fundamentally the whole faith of Judaism can be summed up in the single phrase: Yahweh is the God of Israel and Israel is the people of Yahweh.¹

And Lesslie Newbigin adds the element of purpose to this:

The whole core of Biblical history is the story of the calling of a visible community to be God's own people, His royal priesthood on earth, the bearer of His light to the nations. It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community. I think that we Protestants cannot too often reflect on that fact.²

From the beginning, the church in the New Testament is important as a community of faith acting as God's agent, proclaiming salvation in Jesus Christ. It is God who calls people into this new community. Paul Minear, in his significant work on the New Testament images of the church, states: "The accent must be allowed to fall on the God who creates this society as his people by his choice of them."³

We see this in Peter's letter to the scattered and


³Minear, 69.
persecuted Gentile Christians in Asia. God called them from darkness into his light and made them his own people:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:9-10)

This gave them both a sense of belonging and purpose for as God's people they were to share the praises of God with those who know him not.

In New Testament times, God did not call a single nation to be a partner in His covenant and an agent for the proclamation of salvation, as He did in Old Testament times. Everybody who accepts His Son Jesus Christ as the Messiah becomes God's partner in His new covenant and one of His people.¹

The church as the people of God is in continuity with the covenant nation of Israel. Newbigin states: "It belongs to its true nature [the church's] that it is a continuing historical society, that society which was constituted and sent forth once for all by Jesus Christ."² It is God who calls people into the church to fulfill His purpose.

¹Ibid., 71.
²Newbigin, 60.
The Body of Christ

The image of the church as the body of Christ and its many members not only suggests that the diverse people of God can function in harmony, but also graphically emphasizes the connection of the church with Christ. This is therefore an extremely meaningful image. This was a common and understandable metaphor in Hellenistic-Roman society at the time of the birth of the church. The apostle Paul, however, gives it a deeper meaning and makes it the dominant image of the church in his writings. This metaphor is so powerful in its essence that some theologians regard it as the definition of the church.

The metaphor of the body of Christ shows the whole church as the body of Christ. Jesus Christ Himself is the Head of that body. "And he is the head of the body, the church" (Col 1:18). The Head directs the body and gives energy (Col 2:19; Eph 4:16). In Eph 1:9-10 Paul says that all things are to become unified in Jesus Christ. This Head is perfect and gives meaning to the whole body because it belongs to Him.

---

1See J. Christian Beker, Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 307. Beker is positive that Paul applies this metaphor to the church in order to guarantee its health and cohesion.

2Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 557.
There is a deep mystical sense of being the body of Christ. Paul states, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ" (1 Cor 12:12). The oneness with the head shows that Christ is the One who includes in His body the believers. The church is the resurrected body of Christ on earth. Jesus needed a body that could fulfill His mission on earth. The body of believers is this agency able to fulfill the given task under the leadership of Jesus Christ.

The body image is one which emphasizes the role of Jesus Christ in God's plan of salvation. Through Jesus Christ, God calls people and through accepting this call they can really see who they are and experience conversion as members of "Christ's body." This image emphasizes that the church is the locus of Christ's activity.¹

The image of the body shows the difference that Christ brings into the lives of believers. He is the basis for their faith and hope of salvation, and as a result they become members of His body—the church. The church is a visible sign of Christ living in believers. The apostle Paul writes: "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

¹See Millard Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 1036.
People who respond to God's call and dedicate their lives to Jesus Christ give themselves to the leadership of Christ. They begin to function as one body, using different talents and possibilities. Everybody has a certain place, function, respect, and meaning as a part of God's plan of salvation, because everybody is vitally important as a part of Christ's body.

Several important meanings are included in the image of the body of Christ. As the apostle Paul states: "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor 12:27). Clearly, God wants people to understand that various members of the church should care about one another.¹ The basis of the church's uniqueness is that every member functions serving other members. Everybody is connected with Christ because everybody is a member of His body. This point fundamentally rejects one of the common ideas in today's society—yes to Christ but no to the church. If somebody wants to be with Jesus Christ, that person cannot ignore the body of Christ—fellow believers.²

Everyone, Jew or Gentile, can belong to this body, and everybody is invited to become a part of this wonderful

¹Read the whole passage in 1 Cor 12:12-31.

²Erickson states, "The image of the body of Christ also speaks of the interconnectedness between all the persons who make up the church. Christian faith is not to be defined merely in terms of individual relationship to the Lord. There is no such thing as an isolated, solitary Christian life" (1037).
experience (Eph 2:15-16). The church as the body of Christ is an essential reality, a vital agent proclaiming the kingdom of God in this corrupt world, and God’s judgment and salvation in Jesus Christ. Belonging to this unique body brings major changes in the lives of its members.¹

This image of the church suggests that the church is closely connected with Christ’s ministry. The metaphor of the body of Christ is used to describe both the local congregation and the universal church. In 1 Corinthians and Romans it applies to the local congregation. In Colossians and Ephesians it applies to the universal church. The church is Christ’s body on earth fulfilling His ministry.

**Temple of God**

Another metaphor used in the New Testament to describe the essence of the church is that of the "temple of God".²

¹Paul Minear mentions some differences that belonging can bring to believers’ lives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Adam</th>
<th>In Christ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* all die</td>
<td>* all shall be made alive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* death rules</td>
<td>* all reign in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* all sin</td>
<td>* all receive gift of righteousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* sin rules</td>
<td>* grace rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* men’s bodies are instruments of wickedness</td>
<td>* men’s bodies become instruments of righteousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* the law of sin and death enslaves men</td>
<td>* the law of the Spirit frees men</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See Minear, 175.
God." The apostle Paul inspired believers in Corinth using this metaphor:

For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. . . .
Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple. (1 Cor 3:9, 16-17)

This image is very similar to the image of the body, in that it emphasizes togetherness, being made up of many different individual details.

The temple was a meaningful metaphor for new Christians. It was connected with worship, with God’s direct presence—not only for Jewish Christians but also for the others, because the main religious groups had temples.

Christ is the cornerstone, upon which the temple is supported. It gives shape to the whole building. Peter names Christ as the cornerstone of a temple built of living stones. He calls Christ "the living stone" (1 Pet 2:4-8). The living stones are believers gathered to Christ. The real cornerstone is and can be only Jesus Christ Himself, and that without doubt is the most significant part in the whole building. The apostle Peter develops his ecclesiology by showing the believers that they are living stones, for whom the most important point is to keep together with the cornerstone. Basically there are only two possible attitudes toward the Cornerstone: either to trust in Him or to reject Him.
The apostle Paul mentions in Eph 2:20 that the apostles are also foundational stones because of their preaching and witnessing. This temple is growing and developing, because is not ready and perfect at once. The growing element is the believers—living stones. They can be living stones only while being in "the living Stone"—Jesus Christ.

The new Jewish Christians possibly saw in the image of the temple the new Jerusalem, the new presence of God, a closeness to God, and the beginning of new relationships with God and one another. The apostle Paul wrote in Eph 2:19-22 that the church is God's household, a holy temple in the Lord.

Jesus, Peter, and Paul see the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isa 56 in the church. Isaiah foretold a time of salvation for the foreigners and they will be accepted in God's temple. God's house will be called a house of prayer for all nations (vs. 7). The foreigners were not allowed to enter the temple beyond the Court of the Gentiles. The church replaces the Jewish Temple and becomes a place of God's presence. The church becomes a real shelter for the tired people of this world.¹

¹Alfred Kuen mentions: "Though the construction of a building may be important, it is only a means, one step. The purpose is to give man a home, a shelter against cold and rain, protection against danger, a peaceful and safe place where he can be refreshed, where he can find rest and love. This is the purpose of the local church as well. In the midst of a 'faithless and perverse generation,' the
The three metaphors we have seen deal more with the being of the church, what it is, than with what the church does. They indicate that the church is a divinely called-out people, which is entrusted with the mission of proclaiming God's kingdom.

Jesus Christ in His Sermon on the Mount uses one of the elements—salt—as an illustration of the church. This image has to do with the work of the church. Jesus said: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men" (Matt 5:13). If salt is concentrated in one place as in the jar, it is still salt, but its usefulness is limited. You can see that it is salt, even enjoy its clearness and purity, but it has no practical usefulness unless the jar is opened and used to flavor or preserve something.

There must be somebody who knows where and how to use the salt, because too much salt can become a poison and too little will not do the proper work. Jesus Christ applies this metaphor to His followers as a group, as a church, and not only to individuals.

child of God needs a heaven of peace where he can renew his strength, find shelter, participate in communion with God and the brethren, and find the needed warmth and affection necessary for life, which the world cannot give him." Alfred Kuen, I Will Build My Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 89.
Christ definitely wanted His church to be a useful, practical tool to communicate God’s love to all people on the earth. The image of salt gives the meaning that the church is God’s agent to proclaim salvation.

Other Images of the Church

There are other images which are of significance to our understanding of the church. These include "light of the world," "vine and branches," and "bride." These New Testament images of the church help us to understand the nature and mission of the church. They describe the church as a living, functioning organism. These images describe the connection between God and His church, and clarify the message of salvation the church is to bear.

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:14). In fact, Jesus Himself is the "light of the world" (1 John 1:5). The Apostle Paul brings it together, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light" (Eph 5:8). Those who belong to God, Who is "light," are able to become part of this light and give this light to the world. The church is the light of the world as reflectors of Christ and his mission.

In John 15, Jesus uses the image of the Vine and the Branches. He is the Vine and believers can be fruitful only in union and fellowship with Christ. Union with Christ is absolutely necessary for the future of His followers. The
church without Christ is dead. The church must have a living relationship with Christ who glorifies the Father.

The church as a living organism is represented also as a bride. Jesus Christ is the bridegroom. This image is also used in the Old Testament.¹ In 2 Cor 11:2 Paul said, "I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him." The full splendor of the church as a bride of Christ will be seen only when Christ, the bridegroom, returns and receives her unto Himself.

However, in the meantime, we must not forget that the church is engaged in a battle with the powers of darkness (Eph 6:12). The fight is with the enemies not only outside the church but also inside (1 Tim 4:1). The war will be until the end of time as described in Rev 12:12-17.

These images show that the church as a living organism must remain in unity with Jesus Christ who will enable it to stand until the final victory of God. The church should be a place where everybody can find peace and encouragement in the pilgrimage of life. The church is called to be a light-bearer in the darkness of the world, pointing to Jesus Christ the Messiah. This is very important also for Christians today.

¹See Hos 2:19; Jer 3:14.
Summary

The central message of the Scriptures is that, from the beginning, God has taken the initiative in opening the way of salvation for His people. He calls His people to have fellowship with Him and be His witnesses.

God has made covenant promises with His people which have defined His relationships with them. The purpose of these covenants is to assure His people that God is on their side and to direct them in the exercise of loyalty to Him. Scripture records the covenants with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the nation of Israel, and, in the New Testament times, with the Christian church.

The Christian church has its roots in the Old Testament and is a continuation of God's called people, but at the same time there is a new development. It is the body of Christ Himself in the world, people who have dedicated their lives to Jesus Christ and are willing to proclaim God's kingdom.

Jesus Christ expressed His intention to build His church. The church started at Pentecost and was a growing community. It is divinely organized but consists of people on earth. The New Testament church is led by Jesus Christ Himself as the head of the church. The church in the New Testament had apostles, elders, bishops, and deacons to serve and lead it. The decisions were made by the local
congregations and then approved by these authorities. The church in Jerusalem was a central authority.

Several different images are employed to describe various aspects of the New Testament church. In this way Scripture reveals the many possibilities for, and responsibilities of, God's people. These New Testament images help us to better understand God's plan of salvation and the uniqueness of the relationship between Christ and the church for the benefit of the human race.
CHAPTER III

SOME CONCEPTS OF THE CHURCH
AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The concepts mentioned in this chapter are intended to give insights into some of the theological understandings of the church and its mission to people in Baltic countries. It is hoped that this will prepare readers to better understand the structure and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church. It also may help us to understand the place of the Seventh-day Adventist church in the variety of theological models of the church.

Understandings of the church can be expressed in several ways and studied from various angles. One way is to look at the church in terms of certain historical models or types. This helps us to understand the essence and functions of the church. Describing the church in terms of models also has limitations. Each model emphasizes, or is concentrated on, a certain aspect of the church; each model shows only one line of possible development, not the whole picture of the church.
One cluster of the models of the church developed below emphasizes the ontology, or being, of the church:\(^1\) models in the other cluster describe churches which lay emphasis on function.\(^2\)

**Ontological Understanding of the Church**

Ontological understandings basically deal with the nature of the church. The church, in this view, may be seen as *Christus prolongatus*—the continuing presence of Christ on earth in a mystical sense. This is a high view of the church, based on 1 Cor 12:12. The Christological dimension of ontological understandings accents the high calling of the church, the church’s connection with Jesus Christ, and the implications of that connection. The church and its ministry are founded in Jesus Christ Himself. I describe several selected dimensions of the church below.

**Divine Institution**

The typical model of the church as the divine institution is the Roman Catholic church in the high

---

\(^1\)Ontology literally means study of being. Ontology is concerned with being as its subject matter. Ontological questions include: What is real and what is mere appearance? Is there a reality beyond the things that could be seen, tasted, touched, and heard? Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 711-712.

medieval period. This church was understood as Christus prolongatus—the mystical presence of Christ on earth. Only the clergy constituted the church and not the people.

According to Dulles, the institutional outlook reached a culmination in the second half of the nineteenth century; after that, it weakened. The Roman Catholic church understood itself as a perfect society far above other human societies. In fact, this was a monarchy ruled by an infallible Pope. This view of superiority over all other organizations or institutes was endorsed in the documents of Vatican Council I.¹

The church as divine institution took the place of God on earth. This was an Augustinian concept of the mystical body of Christ. Eric G. Jay writes, "The incarnate body of Christ, the eucharistic body, and the body which is the Church are three realizations of the same mystery."² The church as mystical body of Christ saw its mission as bringing the whole world under the rulership of Christ. The church regarded itself as containing the fullness of God and as the highest authority on earth (Eph 1:22-23).

This understanding of the church as a divine institution led to a case where salvation is found only in the church. There is no salvation outside the church. The

¹Ibid., 36-37.

church was closely identified with the kingdom of God. Because the church was regarded as the means of salvation its missionary orientation was that of planting churches.

The church as a divine institution exercises a threefold authority: governing, teaching, and salvific. The church's clergy were regarded as those who understood the truth, and believers were obligated to believe what they taught. Clergy were seen also as ones who could open or shut the valves of grace. The governing of the church also was in the hands of clergy.

The church as a divine institution differed from the New Testament church. Even more, it was the opposite of Christ's purpose. The New Testament clearly stated that Christ is the head of the body of believers, constituting the church. The church as a divine institution took Christ's role and wrongfully identified itself with the kingdom of God. The bonding force was not love but an external institution. The holiness of the church became extremely important because it was seen as a place of salvation.

Dulles evaluates this model of the church as a divine institution as a "... deformation of the true nature of the Church--a deformation that has unfortunately affected the Church at certain periods of its history."¹

¹Ibid., 35.
Church as Sacrament

The church as sacrament is descriptive of another major Roman Catholic concept of the church. The Second Vatican Council gave support to the idea of the church as sacrament.¹ This understanding points to the church as an instrument of unity with God and with all mankind. This idea originated in early Catholicism; however, only in this century have attempts been made to bring clarity to this type of high ecclesiology.²

To understand this ecclesiology we must first define sacrament. Avery Dulles, speaking of the church as a sacrament, describes sacrament as a sign of something really present, a visible sign of an invisible grace. A sacrament points to something really present.³ The idea of the church as sacrament, then, reveals the understanding that the grace of God operates only within the borders of the church.

The Church therefore is in the first instance a sign. It must signify in a historically tangible form the


²Especially Henri de Lubac made a contribution to this theory. He associates the divine and the human in the Church. His major argument is that Christ is the sacrament of God and the Church is a sacrament of Christ. He states that the Church makes Christ present in the life of this world. For more information, see H. de Lubac, Catholicism (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1950), 29.

³See Dulles, 66-67.
redeeming grace of Christ. It signifies that grace as relevantly given to men of every age, race, kind, and condition. Hence the Church must incarnate itself in every human culture.¹

In contemporary Roman Catholic theology, the church is regarded as the sacrament of the world. God is present to the world in the church. The church as sacrament signifies the presence of Christ and His grace in a living community. The church is seen as the universal sacrament of salvation.

This model is of interest to our study as the current model of the Roman Catholic Church. Considering that the Roman Catholic Church is dominant in Lithuania and in the eastern part of Latvia, it is helpful for us to understand the people and their customs in those countries.

The church as sacrament leads people to look for a visible form of God's grace. Eric G. Jay writes,

In the idea of the Church as the sacrament of the world, then, we have the concept of a society instituted by God which is itself in microcosm what the world must be, and which exists to enable it to be that which itself is, the body of Christ.²

The church sees itself as the only place where people can be reconciled with God. The church is seen as the only place where God can communicate with them, and the church mediates salvation. Being in the church is like being in a ferry—it takes one into the kingdom of God.

¹Ibid., 69.

²Jay, 326.
The Church as a Community of Faith

The model of the church as a community of faith is typical of Protestant churches with a high ecclesiology. The community of faith model stresses the experience of worship—the corporate expression of devotion to God. The celebration of the eucharist in the community of faith is more than a dry doctrine. The Church is an expression of salvation. This is a model of high Lutheran and Anglican understandings of the church.

In fact, the sense of community already had deep roots in the Old Testament. One has only to remember Israel as God's own people. In several New Testament passages, references are made to the *ekklesia* as a new Israel. In the community of faith, every member is free to develop a relationship with the head of the church—Jesus Christ. The basic meaning of the community of faith can be described as *koinonia*—fellowship or participation. There is a sense of common values, common religious self-understanding, and practice. The fellowship includes sharing these values.

The church as a community of faith includes people of different social classes, different languages, and various cultures. All are connected by God's call, which

---

1Read especially Rom 9:23-26; Heb 8:10; Jas 1:1; and 1 Pet 2:9. There the church is described as a community of faith or a new people of God.

2See Acts 2:42. Acts 4 and 5 also describe communalism in the early church.
leads them to a new kind of relationship. The biblical images of the body and the people of God allow us to see the close connection between the head and the body. However, this image also shows how the different parts of the body depend more on each other for the sake of the whole, and the healthy functioning of the body. The one image accents the close relationship of the head to the body, whereas the other accents the individuals and their relationships towards one another and to the society where they are located.

The oneness of the church in the New Testament was a oneness of fellowship in worship and life. This is not a religious club or social gathering. There is active participation in the life and mission of the church. Unity was internal rather than external.¹ The Seventh-day

¹Ladd comments: "However, the oneness of the Church in Acts was a oneness of life and fellowship, not of organization. The modern tendency is to place the emphasis on the external unity. Such an unity did not exist in the early church. On the contrary we find many independent local congregations scattered around Mediterranean world, yet held together by a strong bond of fellowship with all other believers. This is a meaning of the gifts first sent by the Antiochene Christians to Jerusalem, and then by the churches of Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem. No organization or missionary society existed to meet these needs. No legal demands were laid upon the churches to minister to others. The ministry was a labor of love expressing the oneness in Christ. We need to be constantly reminded that organizational openness must be founded upon a prior oneness of life and fellowship or it is an empty thing. Organizational and external union is not an end in itself. In fact, it would be quite meaningless unless it were the external expression of a oneness of faith and life." George Eldon Ladd, The Young Church (London: Lutter Worth Press 1964), 89.
Adventist church needs to work toward becoming much more like this model.

**Implications of Ontological Views**

I mentioned some possible ontological models of the church. One of the ideas stressed is that the relationship of the church with Jesus Christ accents the high calling and the being or nature of the church.

The models that epitomize this relationship are: the church as a divine institution, the church as sacrament, and the church as community of faith. This typology points to the tendency to divinize the church. Both positive and negative connotations and developments are evident in that understanding.

The church as divine institution is far from the New Testament model of the church. The wide division between clergy and laity is itself a dangerous, secular thought. The understanding that the church is the granter of salvation leads people in the wrong direction. Within this view, Jesus Christ hardly has a place as head of the church. The believers are closed to the Gospel because the Roman Catholic Church is an absolute monarchy under the control of an infallible Pope who regulates the doctrine, worship, and governance of the church. The clergy are the representatives of the church and Christ, and the voice of truth. This leads to a closed mind and an inability to evaluate the questions of life and salvation.
The church as sacrament is the current Roman Catholic understanding of the church. This is a milder form of the divine institution; however, the same hierarchical form of papal monarchy remains. The orientation of this model is to explain that the church is a place of grace. The church as sacrament sees itself as the transforming power to make its members like Christ. However, this is not a biblical principle. The important part for the believers in this model is to find external forms to express their faith.

The institutionalized church is usually interested in planting churches because the church is closely identified with the kingdom of God, and therefore the church seeks to bring the world under God’s rulership. Since respect and clarity already are present in the relationships between the members and the organization, this sense of mission is usually clearly formulated.

Paying too much attention to perfection of the organization, the church itself may become its primary interest, with a resultant loss in attention to God, His grace, and salvation. This form of idolatry can develop where the role of Savior is taken away from God and assumed by the church as an institution.¹ This would show

¹This is a violation of God’s commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me," and "You shall not make yourself an idol in a form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to the to worship them" (Exod 20:3-4).
hostility towards God, because God has no visible form and any idol would misrepresent Him. Further, if all attention is given to the church, God is no longer the primary source of attention and mission; He may be given less importance in people’s lives. The mission becomes subordinate to the church.

If we conceive of the church in terms of the model of a community of faith, significant emphasis is placed on the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and God’s grace in a living community. Seventh-day Adventists need to stress this aspect more in their self-understanding. The church as a community of faith fosters a great sense of togetherness. The community of faith is concentrated on developing a higher level of spirituality and of uniting its members into a well-knit society. The church is like a sign pointing to the necessity of God’s grace; it helps to develop a strong sense of loyalty to God. The missionary motivation arises from the Cross and salvation in Jesus Christ.

However, some adverse developments are possible. Undue concentration on the worshiping community can lead to unhealthy self-centeredness. And when different peoples share their understanding of some aspects of Scriptures as

---

¹The history of the medieval church gives a good illustration of the dangerous developments possible in the hyper-institutionalization of the church. It fosters the desire to usurp all religious and political power into the hands of the church, and thus attempts to turn the church into God’s kingdom.
fundamental and salvational and building groups around a leader, this opens the way for sectarianism.

**Functional Understandings of the Church**

**The Herald Model**

Another way to consider the church is to regard it as a functioning entity. In this case, the accent is not on what the church is but on what the church does. One common model of this is that of the herald. The herald model of the church is typical of some evangelical Protestant churches including the Seventh-day Adventist church.

The primacy in this model is upon the activity of preaching the Word of God. The Word is very important as giving rise to a personal faith in Jesus Christ. The Word of God is seen as leading to acceptance of Christ’s promised salvation. This leads to the church’s full involvement in mission and evangelism.

A herald is one who brings good news or is a defending counsel. Such an understanding is based on the idea that the church is formed by the Word of God and the mission of the church is to proclaim that Word. The key scriptural basis used to support the understanding of the church as herald is the Great Commission of Matt 28:16-20.

---

The basic image in this text is that of a herald—one who receives the message from someone who has authority and who brings this message to the people. Roman Catholic theologian Avery Dulles states that this type of ecclesiology is radically centered upon Jesus Christ and on the Bible as the primary witness to him.¹ What the church does is concentrated on witnessing, the sharing of the Gospel of salvation, and the proclamation of God’s kingdom to all people of the earth. Church as herald is directly understood as God’s called entity to fulfill God’s mission.

The herald model leads to preaching God’s message of love and salvation. The church as a herald is seen as a sign of the kingdom of God (Matt 24:14). The emphasis is to call people to conversion from sins, leading them to a decision to accept Jesus Christ as Messiah. The preaching is not possible without accenting the kerygma—teaching, message. This includes also teaching people to reach for higher moral standards and values. This model also includes nurturing the people to whom the Gospel message is directed. The acceptance of the message depends very much on the love shown by the messenger.

The herald model of the church is closely connected with eschatological² expectations. Jesus Christ Himself is

¹Dulles, 76-77.

²Eschatology traditionally is defined as the doctrine of the "last things" (Gr. eschata), in relation either to human individuals (comprising death, resurrection,
the hope and fulfillment of the "last things." The apostle Peter assures everybody that there is a hope in Jesus Christ: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3).

The apostle Paul continues this thought and writes: "But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim 1:10). The church as herald is seen as preparing people for the coming of Jesus Christ.

The herald model is characteristically applicable to the Seventh-day Adventist church. In fact, almost everything that the Seventh-day Adventist church does is related in one way or another to the proclamation of the Gospel. The same is an important part of the church's life in the Baltic countries. For a long time, preaching and teaching Scripture was forbidden in the former Soviet countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Now it is time to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. The people of those countries also have the right to hear the Gospel.

__________

judgment, and the afterlife) or to the world. In this latter respect, eschatology is sometimes restricted to the absolute end of the world, to the exclusion of much that commonly falls in the scope of the term. See DET, s.v. "Eschatology."
Jesus Christ saw His own mission as that of a herald. In Luke 4:18-19 we read:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.¹

Jesus Christ explains the Messiah’s ministry of preaching, healing, and reconciliation.

As partakers of the ministry of Jesus Christ, the church is called to be a herald of the Gospel. As Jesus Christ called people to follow Him, He said, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60). The spiritually alive should proclaim the kingdom of God.

The weakness of the herald model is that it sees the other models of the church as less important or ignores them as not necessarily needed. Corporate fellowship is not necessarily regarded as an important part of the church’s life. More attention needs to be paid to the community aspect in order to balance the herald model.

Church as Servant

The church as servant model accents that God must be honored not only in some religious activity, but in the world where people are in need. The church in that model is

¹This quotation is from Isa 61:1-2 and alludes to the Year of Jubilee. Once every 50 years, in the Year of Jubilee, slaves were freed and debts were canceled.
expected to become an agent of reconciliation between the Gospel and society. Service and social responsibility are assumed to be an expression of the nature of the church.

The church is seeking a special place and opportunity for dialogue with persons in contemporary, secularized society. It is not an easy task. Many suggestions have been given regarding how to make people more church friendly or the church more people friendly. One popular suggestion is for the church to assume a Servant role in society.

It is no secret that people, especially in the post-Communist countries and so-called third world, are in deep need of social, practical, and material help to supplement the needs of everyday life. The idea is that the church will come closer to the people and open them for the Gospel by helping to solve their problems. Then, as people change in their individual and social lives, they will be more skilled in bringing the message of salvation and God's kingdom to the members of secular society. One can look to Jesus Christ who served society in different ways as an example.

In Matt 25:31-46, Jesus speaks about the sheep and the goats. In that parable, we read that the people on earth will be separated. One reason for the separation is people's actions.

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your
inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. (Matt 25:34-36)

To the peoples' question of how this was possible, the King (Jesus) answered: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (vs. 40).

The next step—a warning from the opposite side:

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. (Matt 25:41-43)

To the protests and surprise at such an unpleasant result, the King answers, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me" (vs. 45).

Then Jesus concludes: "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (vs. 46). This passage, of course, shows the connection between faith and practical service to needy people. There is a general message that says rewards in the kingdom of God are given for service without thought of reward because God gives us His grace without questioning whether He will have anything returned to Him.
There are many areas in the Baltic countries where the church can become a solution to many problems. There are people who do not have enough food. The church can help by organizing soupkitchens. There are children who cannot attend school. The church can organize programs to deal with illiteracy. There are possibilities to organize free medical examinations for elderly people. Prison ministries are another field where help is needed.

This understanding of the church is not aimed at direct recruiting of new members for the church. First, attention is directed toward being brothers and sisters to those in real need. And when the hearts of those needy people are warmed they are more willing to listen to the Gospel of salvation. In this way, the church reaches those who today are angry, disappointed, and closed to the good news of God's provided salvation.

With regard to Jesus Christ as the example for the servant model, one can say that Jesus Christ, indeed, was not a servant to the world. On the contrary, He was His Father's servant. The servant passages of Isaiah show that the servant is one who is "a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in the darkness" (Isa 42:6-7). This is a real challenge for Seventh-day Adventist Christians not only in the Baltic countries but also in
other parts of the world. The need for spiritual freedom is tremendous.

The church is not called to participate in the politics of the world but to serve people. The church will not change the world into a perfect place but the church can prepare people for God’s kingdom. This is its mission.

Implications of the Functional Views

In functional views of the church, the emphasis is more on the church’s missionary activities, not on ontological self-understanding. The function of the church as a people called by God is stressed. The question is more upon what the church does than what the church is. The church is regarded as an agent of God called to participate in His mission.

Both the herald and the servant models deal with the missionary functions of the church. The herald model points to the church as a Gospel-proclaiming community which lives for its given task. Its main interest is to proclaim the Gospel of salvation and the coming kingdom of God to all the world.

Here again, there are possibilities for positive and negative developments. On the positive side, the herald model transfers the emphasis from the church to the Gospel of salvation and to God, the Author of salvation. Another positive aspect is the concentration of resources for the
missionary task and on raising people's faith in Jesus Christ.

But there can be a hidden danger. The proclamation of the Gospel of salvation and the coming kingdom of God can become isolated from other aspects of life. Walter Douglas notes that "one of the major criticisms against the herald model is precisely on this point—that it treats the other functions of the church as peripheral and not as necessarily contributing to the life or faith of the community."  

Another negative aspect is that not enough attention may be given to love, nurture, and care. People need not only the message of salvation but also a community where they can learn it and feel welcome. In fact, it is impossible to proclaim the message of salvation to people for whom we do not care.  

The foundation of the servant model is the ministry of Jesus Christ as Servant. He serves as the example of how the church should minister to society. This model stresses obedience, service, and love. The church, in fact, is missionary oriented and ready to develop contacts with the wider community. The church as servant is oriented to help people in socially unjust situations and to bring an earthly

---


2Ibid.
salvation by serving the needs of society. The servant church is interested in going to the people wherever they are.

One danger of the servant model is that it can lead to the false expectation that the church will solve all social injustice and similar problems. The church is not called to change the world but to bring the loving message of God’s kingdom. Other dangers are that the church may elevate secular values to a primary position and relegate salvation by faith in Jesus Christ to a secondary position.

Implications of Models of the Church for Seventh-day Adventist Mission

We now consider the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the church. This is not easy because of the diversity of understanding and practice. The "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists" state:

The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, for service to all mankind, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. . . . The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her.1

This statement uses biblical images to define the church. We see the "people of God" and the "body of Christ" as the main images describing the church. These points are very important for the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the church. Historically, Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as a people called by God\textsuperscript{1} for a special purpose—to proclaim the Gospel of salvation, judgment, and Jesus' second advent.\textsuperscript{2}

The other image involved in the statement of beliefs is that of the "body of Christ." This image stresses unity

\textsuperscript{1}The history of Seventh-day Adventists is not addressed in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{2}Walter B. T. Douglas mentions: "This point is of paramount importance for the development of an SDA ecclesiology. It seems safe to say that the history of our church reflects this notion of the 'called-out' people of God. Furthermore, as in the New Testament model, early Adventists perceived of themselves as a religious community with Christ as its Head. They did not regard themselves as the organizers of a religion. They did not form an association or set up a society to solicit support for their own religious views. Far from it. The fact that they assembled together, and worked and prayed and lived together, was not the result of their own design at all. It was a response to a summons which came from beyond themselves and gathered them together. Both in the early Christian community and in the early Adventist community, the church included people of differing language and social class. But the basis of this "People of God," the decisive point for its existence, was found in the divine call which assembled it. What its members had essentially in common was nothing any of them brought to its life but was the call itself. This call not only gathered them but also brought them into a new set of relationships, some of which they did not always have an easy time handling" (Douglas, 69-70).
in diversity as a part of the nature of the church.\(^1\)
Seventh-day Adventists understand that the diversity of spiritual gifts and the usage of those gifts in God’s mission through the church are not a dividing element but, on the contrary, a unifying one.\(^2\)

The herald model is the most common for most Seventh-day Adventists. It seems obvious to many that Adventists have a simple task, to proclaim the Gospel. Mission and evangelism are watchwords passed on from generation to generation. Here we see one of the Seventh-day Adventist strengths and one of the fundamental beliefs.\(^3\)

\(^1\)In the "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists," we find the statement under the title "Unity in the Body of Christ": "The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children" (SDACHM, 27).

\(^2\)Douglas, 74.

\(^3\)"The Remnant and Its Mission" states: "This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. . . . Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness" (SDACHM, 26).
However, if too much attention is paid to a perfection of organization and its functions, the church itself may become the primary point of interest, with a resultant loss in attention to God, His grace, and salvation. The proclamation can become more important than relationships with Jesus Christ and of revealing His character.

Another functional image is the servant model. Seventh-day Adventists believe that service naturally grows out of the nature of the church. They feel responsible to continue the mission of Christ and to follow His example. However, this is not a dominant view of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

To summarize, we can say that Seventh-day Adventists, like other Christians, believe in the church as a society called out by God for a special task and purpose. Adventists’ understanding of the church includes elements of both the ontological and functional models. Ontologically, Adventists see themselves as a community of faith; functionally, as both herald and servant to the world. However, the Seventh-day Adventist church needs encouragement to see itself as a community of faith. The weak point is the involvement of believers in the practice of worship. We do not adequately know how to worship God with active involvement of all believers.
The Seventh-day Adventist community of faith regards itself as a people called by God. It is a community with human errors, but which sincerely seeks to bear witness to God's power and character as it is revealed in Jesus Christ.

Implications of Seventh-day Adventist Ecclesiology

There may be some differences among Adventists regarding practical interpretations of the ideas presented here of theological models of the church. Interpretation may depend on which of the models is emphasized, and this may be related to the cultural and social backgrounds which influence thinking.

One can overemphasize the institutional side of the church. This is especially true in countries of the former Soviet Union. Lifestyle and practice cannot be changed in a day. The danger of this emphasis stems from stress on human power and leadership. This leads to the division of the church into the ruling clergy and passive laity. Such a division can lead to the next step, the erroneous teaching that the clergy is more spiritual and knowledgeable than the laity. This tends to paralyze the work of the church and hinder the fulfillment of its mission.¹

¹This tendency had some side effects on the Seventh-day Adventist mission in the Baltic countries. This needs to be corrected and new developments need to take place. The church needs to understand that the organization is not of primary importance, rather it is God's grace and salvation in Jesus Christ. Tensions among the different church levels and among church members can easily cause confusion.
Within this view, the church may be regarded as the place of salvation and mission, the planting of new churches as places of salvation. In addition, emphasis is placed on the preaching and teaching of doctrine somewhat to the detriment of building a relationship with the living God.

An apologetic for such intentions serves to emphasize the need to separate the church from the world and to make the church a fortress to protect from evil. But the idea that the church can protect from all errors, temptations, and sin is erroneous. The belief that participation in different programs and ministries run by the church will secure eternal life is also wrong.

Some church members are tempted to see the world as an enemy which needs to be defeated, but that is not the way Christ sees the world. In John 17:14-19, Jesus prays,

*I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.*

Christ reminds us here of a different mind-set. The world's mind-set is evil, self-concentrated, but the mind-set of Christians is to fulfill God's mission and to obey Him by proclaiming reconciliation. Jesus Christ in His prayer identifies the mission field, into which He sends believers, as the world. Those who are born by the Spirit
can bring a difference into the lives of others by showing the real source of life-changing power—the living and loving God.

Jesus promises protection, not in the church but in the mission field. With His death, Jesus consecrated His followers for the service to which God called them. That is why concentrating all the attention on the church and making it an unreachable fortress is wrong.

Another implication can be an overemphasis in the opposite direction, that is, denying the need of organization and emphasizing individual relationships with God outside the church. Such an approach is wrong. The "people of God" and "body of Christ" images should eliminate such ideas. Christ in His prayer, noted above, also mentions the unity principle to be practiced by His people.¹

The herald model may be distorted into an understanding of mission as proclamation without due regard for the people who are to be reached by the message. The danger is that the main attention may be focussed upon proclamation. This may lead to such side effects as manipulation of numbers, the gaining of popularity, and an inappropriate use of finances. Separatism and individualism easily lead to sectarian developments and false leaders who split and divide the church and bring about unnecessary

¹See John 17:20-26.
trouble for the people of God. In such cases the image of
God's character may be distorted and the message of
salvation twisted.

One of the implications of the servant model is that
it may lead to overemphasis on the task of changing the
world and rectifying existing social injustice. That is not
the goal of God's mission. God does not need us to change
the world. He is the Creator and will create all things
new.1 He calls His people to be witnesses of the miracle
of salvation.

On the other hand, God's people need to be open-
minded and to look for those who are in need and provide
help. The truth is that people cannot live on bread
alone,2 but they also need their daily bread.3 The problem
is to bring God to the people and to fulfill the mission by
serving them.

Yet, this is not the center of the church's mission
to the world, as some theologies imply. Not only are those
on the lower social levels ready to be God's disciples. God
is looking for people in all levels of society, not only
those whose needs are most evident. People in all levels of
society have needs.

---

1Read for example Rev 21.

2See Matt 4:4.

3Matt 6:11.
As described above, undue emphasis on the herald and servant models can lead to one-sided understandings of mission. Focus upon a single aspect of mission may lead to a distorted interpretation of Scripture and an inadequate concept of the church. This shows the real necessity of maintaining balance in theological evaluations. The main emphasis remains—to be God centered and open to leadership by the Holy Spirit.

Summary

To summarize this chapter, we can say that it is helpful to develop an ecclesiology from different models for a better understanding of the church. Models can be helpful in reexamining the nature and mission of the church and in the development of new approaches to mission.

There are two fundamental types of church models—ontological and functional. In ontological models, the basic concern is what the church is. Investigation revolves about the nature or essence of the church and the way it is related to Christ who is its head. On such views the church is generally regarded as being more than simply a human institution. For Adventists, there is a need to stress an understanding of the community of faith. The basis for such a model is the biblical images of the church as the body of Christ and the people of God.

Functional conceptions of the church revolve about the divinely assigned work the church does in society to
accomplish God’s mission. For Seventh-day Adventists, the closest models of the church are those of herald and, in a limited way, as servant.

However, the basic emphasis when discussing the church and its mission is to combine elements of both ontological and functional models while avoiding the excesses of each. In fact, each model reveals only some of the aspects of the church. In the final analysis, the being of the church cannot be separated from what the church does in society.

The church is God’s instrument to proclaim the Gospel of salvation on earth and to witness to His great love and mercy. The Seventh-day Adventist church as a worshiping community of faith is also an institution with a stable system of organization. But it is the people rather than the institution who constitute the church. Institutions are agents to manage the church’s existence and mission to the world. It is also fair to mention that the Adventist church as an institution has been highly committed to the fulfillment of its mission. Its worldwide membership of some ten million is testimony to this.

The Gospel of salvation and God’s love and mercy are driving forces in the church’s mission. But Seventh-day Adventists regard themselves more particularly as heralds, proclaiming the soon return of Jesus Christ the Messiah.
CHAPTER IV

UNDERSTANDING THE MISSION
OF THE CHURCH

Introduction

After brief consideration of the biblical and theological understandings of the church, we proceed to the next, most important issue— the mission of the church. To better understand the mission, I have searched both the Old and New Testaments to find precedents for, and the meaning of, mission and how to apply these to the church and the situation in the contemporary world.

Mission is a popular term with a variety of meanings, often used in both religious and secular concepts. According to one dictionary, the word "mission" means a "sending forth."¹ Webster’s *Collegiate Dictionary* defines mission as

a sending out or being sent with authority to perform a special duty; specifically, the sending out of persons by a religious organization to preach, teach, and

---

Larkin describes "mission" as "the divine activity of sending intermediaries, whether supernatural or human, to speak or do God's will so that His purpose for judgment or redemption are furthered."  

In this chapter, *mission* is used in the sense of furthering God's interests on the earth. The main attention is given to God's missionary action and the response of His people to those activities.

Because mission is the "heartbeat of the church" and the hallmark of what it means to be a Christian, the study of mission is an important subject.

**The Old Testament and Mission**

Mission is not an idea and prerogative only of the New Testament. Its roots are already in the Old Testament, even if one cannot immediately recognize much missionary activity there. However, mission has a stable scriptural foundation and one can agree with missiologist David Howard's explanation:

---


The missionary enterprise of the church is not a pyramid built upside down with its point on one isolated text in the New Testament out of which we have built a huge structure known as "missions." Rather the missionary enterprise of the church is a great pyramid built right side up with its base running from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. All of the Scripture forms the foundation for the outreach of the gospel to the whole world.¹

The Old Testament is the basis for the New Testament; they cannot be separated. Verkuyl suggests several motifs in the Old Testament which are basic to the understanding of the church’s mission.²

The Universal Motif

One of the motifs in the Old Testament vital for understanding mission is the universal motif. There is no sense of mission without universalism. This motif, first of all, shows God’s interest in all people and all nations on earth. God is a transcendent God. He is Creator, Ruler of the universe, Redeemer of all people. The universal motif reveals God’s interest in restoring harmony in the whole universe.


²Verkuyl suggests four motifs in the Old Testament which form the indispensable basis for the New Testament call to the church to engage in worldwide mission work: the universal motif, the motif of rescue and saving, the missionary motif, and the antagonistic motif. For more information, see J. Verkuyl, Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 91.
The concept of universalism, as it is employed here does not mean that everybody is saved. It does mean that only in Christ is there salvation and that everybody is included in God's plan of salvation.

This preliminary study has shown that the Old Testament is not primarily a book about Israel and their God. God identifies Himself as the God of the patriarchs (starting with Abraham); then of the nation of Israel, and finally the horizon is expanded to include the entire world.¹ The Gen 3:15 message includes the descendants of Adam and Eve in the context of the Great Controversy between God and evil and includes everybody in the circle of God's missionary activities. Sin has touched everybody, and there is a universal need for salvation. God is a universal God, He is the beginning of all things, and He is the end of all things.²

One can summarize the Old Testament idea of God's global interests with eight claims about God in the forty-fifth chapter of the prophet Isaiah: He is (1) the only God (Isa 45:5-6, 14, 18, 21-22; (2) the Creator (vs. 18); (3) the God of the human race (vs. 12); (4) the only judge (vs. 8); (5) the God of history (vss. 11, 21); (6) the God of revelation (vs. 19); (7) the God of salvation for all men

¹Ibid.

²See parallels in Rev 5:9-10 and 7:9-17 where all nations are included in God's salvational activity.
(vs. 22); and (8) God is Lord of all men (vs. 23).¹ All eight of the attributes affirm the universality of the purposes of God, and this universality is the foundation for God's purposes with the nations through Israel.

Because of the universal result of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God,² God's care and salvation reach out universally.

The Missionary Motif

The Old Testament is a book describing God's mission. In Gen 3 there is a clear message that God reaches out to fallen people and does not wait for people to come to Him. The Old Testament concludes with God's promise for a special missionary, who "will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal 4:6).

The missionary motif of the Old Testament is expressed with God calling people to Himself for a special relationship. As shown in chapter 2, there were several stages in this mission: the calling of the covenant people and the calling of the nation of Israel. The purpose of God's actions was mission. Those called, and later the


²See Rom 5:12-21. The text shows that Adam's sin involved mankind in condemnation and death.
nation of Israel, had a special task. They were called to reveal the power and the grace of God to other inhabitants of the earth.

To summarize, we can say that the Old Testament has a missionary motif. Even though missionary activity in the form of going out to proclaim the message to the nations is rare, there is an expectation of salvation. The Old Testament is thus not a book of foreign mission in the usual sense because it is not a witness of human activities but of divine initiative for the redemption of Israel and the nations.

The Redemption of Israel

The messianic expectations of Israel have an important place in the understanding of the missionary character of the Old Testament. The Messiah is a symbol and culminating point for the expectation of salvation.\(^1\) Blauw writes:

> The Messiah figure is a divine figure who will bring to expression the actual royal lordship of God in the future. Therefore the Messiah is not so much the bringer and author of salvation as He is its representative. The Messiah is the visible manifestation of God himself.\(^2\)

The Old Testament is a book of the hope and expectation of Israel. The expectation of Israel is God


\(^2\)Ibid., 47.
Himself because only He is the God of salvation. He is the only One able to redeem from sin and suffering.

The prophet Jeremiah puts it this way:

O Hope of Israel, its Savior in times of distress, why are you like a stranger in the land, like a traveler who stays only a night? Why are you like a man taken by surprise, like a warrior powerless to save? You are among us, O Lord, and we bear your name; do not forsake us! (Jer 14:7-8)

And later he repeats:

O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water. (Jer 17:13)

In the Psalms there is the same hope: "For you have been my hope, O Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth" (Ps 71:5). The Lord is Israel's hope because He is the One who brings redemption to Israel. Israel's God is a God of history because of His covenant relationship with Israel, and those covenant relationships bring expectation for the future.

The past of the acts of Yahweh thus never really becomes past in the sense of finished business. The past is never only past; it is also a powerful witness for the active presence and power of Yahweh today, and therefore also a promise for Yahweh's future activity.¹

The whole purpose of God's actions was redemption. For this purpose, He manifests Himself in different ways and on different occasions. He redeemed Israel with the expectation that they would be the main instrument to prepare the way for the coming Messiah (Deut 4:6-7).

¹Ibid., 35.
To summarize, we can say that the Old Testament reveals God's universal missionary purpose. Israel was the main instrument to lead the nations to a knowledge of God and to bring them to a new relationship with Him. Israel did not fulfill these expectations. However, God continued faithful to His purpose and sent the Messiah to open the way of salvation for all people.

The New Testament and Mission

The New Testament is a book of mission, and Christianity is a missionary religion. The Old Testament expectations are fulfilled and come alive in the New Testament. This is not something new, but rather, it is the progression of God's universal purpose.

The Universal Motif

As in the Old Testament the foundation for mission in the New Testament is the universal motif. Jesus Christ is the Savior of all and only through Him is there salvation. In this there is both diversity and continuity between the Old and the New Testaments. There is great unity in that both reveal God's unchanging purpose for Israel and the church. Diversity can be seen in the lack of a direct commission for proclamation to the nations in the Old Testament. The commission to proclaim salvation, on the other hand, is explicit in the New Testament.
The most powerful expressions of God's universal purpose in the New Testament are those of the apostle Paul in Eph 1:8-10 and 3:8-12. Paul declared with great confidence that God's purpose is to "bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph 1:10). Everything will come to meaningful relationship and order in Christ. This divine universal purpose will be accomplished in Him. Both Jews and Gentiles are to become one in the body of Christ, the church. This is the divine mystery--His will to his people. God wants the church to be a participant in His universal mission.

God has chosen the church to display His plan of salvation. Paul wrote to Ephesians, "this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8). It is amazing how the apostle Paul gives insights into the depths of God's plans for the church. In plain words he reveals the universal scope of God's purpose. He calls it "mystery hidden in God" (vs. 9). Although the truth is far beyond what we can know, God reveals it in Christ. Paul connects this divine mystery primarily to the new body, the church, where Jews and Gentiles can be united. The church is observed by spiritual powers, but Christ is above all, and the church united with Him is able to portray God's wisdom and spread the gospel. Proclamation of the gospel is proclamation of Christ's universal Lordship.
The apostle Paul discusses Christ's universal power also in the Epistle to the Colossians. In Col 1:15-23 he reveals Christ's supremacy. This passage is a very clear witness to Christ as Creator of "all" and Savior of "all." Reconciliation of "all" does not mean that Christ by His death has saved all people. He made peace with God possible for everybody.

Paul, in his apologetic of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15, declares the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ as the basis for the hope of resurrection. Christ is bearer of "all" power, even over death (1 Cor 15:20-28). Christ is the great turning-point of history. He is the risen Lord and a ruler of the universe. He declared that the whole universal authority had been given to Him (Matt 28:18). This is a powerful statement, and it reveals the new Messianic status of Jesus Christ.

His authority is not one of a high position. He is the bearer of authority. The authority which rules the universe is henceforth the authority of the exalted Jesus Christ. The missionary mandate reveals the universal purpose to spread the gospel of salvation to all nations. "All" is an indicator of God's universal triumph.1

1See ibid., 83-87.
Jesus Christ was God's sent Messiah. He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic expectations. He came to earth to further God's universal missionary purpose. However, as already noted in the Old Testament covenant, God chose Israel as the covenant people to fulfill His purpose for all nations.

There are several different approaches to Jesus' mission orientation. Some see His mission as directly Israel-oriented. And we can agree that some passages in the Scripture seem to support such an idea. However, we need a proper understanding of Jesus' mission.

All His life was a mission but He acted first of all in the frame of God's covenant relationship with His people. He was acting in the historical context of revelation. Jesus came into the world as a Jew. He was acting in the traditions of the Old Testament prophets. He had come to "fulfill them" (Matt 5:17). In Jesus Christ, salvation history was moving toward its climax. In His mission to Israel, Christ was keeping in mind the whole world.

---

1 See, for example, Mark 7:24-30.
2 Blauw, 68.
3 See, for example, Rom 1:3; 15:8.
The context in which Jesus was acting implied that God's kingdom would first be fully revealed in Israel. This is why Jesus' motivation toward the Israelites cannot be seen as nationally oriented. His respectful parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is a good illustration of His attitude.

Considering the above we can better understand Jesus' explanation to the Canaanite woman: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt 15:24). Jesus was directing His ministry against corruption in Israel. This was a sign of God's faithfulness to His covenant relationship with the people of Israel. The major emphasis in Jesus' mission was on the religious relationship between God and Israel.

The same context reveals why, in the early phase of their mission, the disciples received instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6). This early preaching to the Jewish community is part of a larger, universal picture, paving the way for universal mission.

God's plan was that the Gospel must spread out from Jerusalem to the nations. Jesus' concern for Israel was a matter of strategy. He wanted to turn their minds from

---

1As the woman returned home, her daughter was healed (Mark 7:30).

2See Blauw, 67-71.
nationalistic expectations toward God's universal messianic purpose. The mission in their understanding was to make others formally Israelites, but such was not God's plan. Jesus was radically against it. Israel thought that the main point was their quality, not God's, and that led to intense ethnocentrism. In Matt 23:15 we can see Jesus warning the leaders of Israel of their practice and the results of their missionary activities.¹

Christ was concerned about Israel; He wanted to protect them and He spoke in love. George Knight summarizes, "Matthew 23:37 finds some of Christ's tenderest words towards His fellow Jews." He also explains why. "Chapter 23 can be seen as an illustration of 'tough love,' a love that uses desperate tactics in its attempt to break through to its hearers before it is too late."²

¹William Hendriksen comments: "It was not the purpose of the Pharisees merely to change a Gentile into a Jew; no, he must become a full-fledged, legalistic, ritualistic, hair-splitting Pharisee, one filled with fanatical zeal for his new salvation-by-works religion. As Jesus implies, soon this new convert would even out-Pharisee the Pharisees in bigotry, for it is a fact that new converts frequently outdo themselves in becoming fanatically devoted to their new faith. This explains why Jesus can say, 'and when he has become one [a proselyte], you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are yourselves.'" "Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew," New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 829.

Jesus and the Nations

Jesus Christ as Messiah in His mission was universally oriented. He made it clear speaking to the Pharisees, "I have other sheep that are not from this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). This is a clear statement that God in His purpose is open to both: the covenant people, and every nation. Everybody has a place in His plan of salvation.

Jesus' teachings and mission manifest His interest in the salvation of Gentiles. The parables of the marriage feast (Luke 14:7-14) and of the great supper (Luke 14:15-24) affirm that God's kingdom is open also to Gentiles. Jesus revealed that salvation includes nations as well. His mission to Israelites became a practical witness to all nations.

We need to remember that the nations as described both in the Old and New Testaments differ from God's covenant people religiously. However, that is not the reason why Gentiles do not have a place by God. There is no place for national revenge or privilege before God. Jesus

1Jon Paulien writes, "The 'other sheep that are not of this sheep pen' (vs. 16) probably refer to the incoming of the Gentiles, of whom the first fruits are acknowledged in John 12:20-22. In fact, the arrival of the Gentiles to see Jesus seems to signal to Him, that the time of His death has come (vss. 23,24)--the time when He is about to draw, not just the Jews, but everyone to Himself (vs. 32)." John, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1995), 174.
promises the Gentiles a share in salvation. Revelation foretells that in the end-time there will be a great multitude from every nation, and all tribes and peoples will stand before the throne of God (Rev 7:9). They are victorious, together, and before God.

We should remember that there will be a new song which the saints will sing before God's throne and the Lamb. In the Old Testament, the new song symbolized the act of divine blessing and salvational activities. The New Testament new song is a song of God's victory (Rev 5:9). The nations acknowledge the central role of Christ's sacrifice in their salvation.

It is obvious that the nations are not excluded from salvation in the New Testament. Jesus' mission was messianic and He used the messianic title "Son of Man."

---

1 In Matt 12:41-42, Jesus speaks about the resurrection of the Gentiles. See also Matt 10:15; 11:22-24. Jesus shows that the faith is important and in Matt 8:5-13 we can read that the Roman centurion had greater faith than the Israelites. "When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him. 'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith'" (vs. 10).


3 The Old Testament prophet Daniel describes one of his messianic visions (Dan 7:13-14). This is the first description of the Messiah as son of man. Jesus, using this title, shows that God has given Him the whole authority to bring salvation to everybody. Jesus is also portrayed as coming in the clouds of heaven (Mark 14:62). Also in the Revelation, John sees Jesus coming as the Messiah (Rev 1:7).
This messianic title indicates the universal character and dominion of the Messiah. This messianic tile included also the atoning death of the Messiah (John 3:16-17). This is one of the bases leading to Jesus' commission to His disciples.

Jesus began His ministry in "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Matt 4:15). He sometimes stayed in Gentile territories and helped non-Jews (Matt 8:5-13). He also began to prepare His disciples for mission to the nations. As teaching tools He used parables, He gave them a personal example, and He spoke for the larger mission foretold by the prophet Isaiah.

To summarize Jesus' attitude toward the nations, we remember the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20). Jesus authorized the Gentile mission, saying, "go and make disciples of all nations" (vs. 19). This is an answer to the question of Jesus and the nations. Jesus is the hope for all people. Through Him everybody may be reconciled with God by faith.

\footnote{For example, we can mention the Parable of the Net (Matt 13:47-50). Every kind of fish gathered from the sea is a symbol of all nations gathered before God. Also in Matt 25:31-33, Jesus speaks of every nation gathered before God.}

\footnote{Jesus was willing to help the Canaanite woman on the basis of her faith, which was shown very persistently. See Matt 15:21-28.}

\footnote{See Matt 12:17-21. This quotation from Isa 42:1-4 was a prophecy understood by the Jews as messianic.}
The New Testament speaks about Jesus Christ as "Redeemer." Paul reminded the Romans, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:23-24). Redemption was an understandable word for the people of ancient times. This word described release by paying ransom. It referred to deliverance of slaves and captives. In Eph 1:7 we read, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." The ransom was the death of Christ.

Jesus Christ announced the purpose of His mission—to proclaim and accomplish spiritual deliverance (Luke 4:43; John 3:34; 8:42; 10:36). If redemption in the Old Testament was a hope for the future, the New Testament gives the perspective that the redemption of Israel and the nations from the bondage of sin is possible in Jesus Christ. He sees Isa 61:1-2 fulfilled in Himself (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus Christ is the Redeemer. Even His birth was preceded by a missionary proclamation (Matt 1:20-21). Jesus brings God's redemptive purpose to culmination with His sacrificial death and resurrection.1 Now a new stage of

1George Eldon Ladd concludes: "Because of this crisis in the person and mission of Christ, the future Kingdom is not only guaranteed, but people may already experience the powers of the future Kingdom and the reality of its soteriological blessings." A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 182.
mission starts in the history of Israel and the nations. This redemptive reality becomes the basis for proclaiming the Gospel. The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that by this gospel they are saved (1 Cor 15:1-5).

Paul explains that the heart of the Gospel is Christ's death for our sins and His resurrection from the dead. However, Paul clearly states that he (Paul) is not the source of this teaching. The sources are Old Testament Scripture and eyewitnesses of Christ's death and resurrection. The same Gospel is still important today and deserves the same attention and treatment.

The heart of the Gospel is that Christ died for our sins to set us free. He is the sacrifice for our sins. Heb 7:27 gives us an explanation of Christ as the High Priest who had given His own life as a sacrifice: "Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself."

Redemption includes both Israel and the nations. The Old Testament expectations shown by daily animal sacrifices are clear evidence that these sacrifices never finally dealt with sin. There was a need for a real redemptive Sacrifice--Jesus Christ. The Levitical priests brought daily sacrifices to God. Jesus Christ sacrificed
Himself once for all time. He had no personal sin, and that makes His priesthood superior.

This sacrifice by Christ is the basis for the faith and life of God's people. The process of redemption comes to a conclusion with the second advent of Jesus Christ.¹

The apostle Peter reminds us, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet 1:18-19).

The New Testament brings the idea of redemption and mission together. Both are closely bound together because God's mission is to redeem His people from sins and to give them the new opportunity of life together with God. The kingdom of God is brought near through Jesus Christ to everybody who accepts this redemption.²

Missionary Motivation

Lordship of Jesus Christ

The bases for missionary motivation in the New Testament are closely related to those of the Old Testament. They are not identical, but the New Testament missionary motivation is in continuity with the Old. If the Old


²See also Rom 3:24; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col 1:14; Heb 9:12.
Testament missionary motivation was expressed with God calling people to Himself for a special relationship, for the redemption of Israel and the nations, then the New Testament missionary motivation is universal, bringing the concept of the Old Testament to fulfillment in Jesus Christ. ¹

The Lordship of Jesus Christ is a vital aspect of the New Testament missionary motivation. He has the full recognition and authorization of God to represent God to the people. One of the purposes of His incarnation² was to reveal God the Father (John 1:18). Jesus represented Him fully (John 12:44-45). Jesus explained to the disciples that He and the Father are one (John 14:9-14). This is the basis for Jesus' universal Lordship.

The Lordship of Christ was a drawing force directing the church to bear witness of His authority as an expression of their faith. At the heart of mission is the proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. One of the old Christian hymns recorded in Phil 2:9-11 states that God had exalted Christ above every name. God gave Jesus Christ a glorious position and desires that people everywhere accept Jesus Christ as Lord. He invites everybody to worship Christ as

¹Hedlund, 152.

²We can also mention the purpose to destroy the devil (1 John 3:8), and to save the world (John 3:16-17).
Lord. Jesus Christ is savior and Lord of all people and of all the universe.

Not only does Jesus declare that He has authority, but those who heard Him teaching also affirmed it. "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law" (Matt 7:28-29). The difference was in the source of the teaching. Teachers of the law were busy with their own teachings, but Jesus had divine authority.

Jesus not only had authority to teach but also to forgive sins. "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Matt 9:6). This authority was God-given and the people realized it. "When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men" (vs. 8).

Another aspect of Christ's divine authority is His power over the forces of nature, demons, sicknesses, and even death.¹

Jesus' Lordship is revealed also in His exaltation. The apostle Peter, speaking to the crowd on the day of Pentecost, refers to this. "Therefore let all Israel be

¹See, for example, Matt 8:23-27 which shows how Jesus calms the furious storm. Matt 8:28-34 testifies how Jesus heals a demon-possessed man. Matt 9:1-8 is one example for healing power, and John 11 speaks of Jesus Christ raising Lazarus from the dead. Many more examples in Scripture portray Christ's power.
assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). The author of Acts remarks that, after Peter brought this evidence, the crowd was cut to the heart and made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as Lord.¹

Ladd mentions in his *Theology of the New Testament* that the Lordship of Jesus becomes especially actual after His resurrection.² In principle, this is the very basis for the Great Commission in Matt 28:16-20.

Proclamation of the Kingdom

Another aspect of mission in the New Testament is proclamation of the Gospel of salvation. Proclamation is a very necessary part of mission for the simple reason that salvation needs to be appropriated by each individual. Salvation is not a group decision, exercise, or practice. The apostle Paul stated that everybody needs to hear the Gospel to be justified before God by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:22-26).

¹See Acts 2:37-41.

²Ladd uses the Gospel of John to explain the significance of the word "Lord." He writes: "The clue to the history of the word is found in John's Gospel, where the word is used of Jesus in narrative portions of the first nineteen chapters only three times, but in the resurrection stories of the last two chapters it is used nine times. The Evangelist feels free to speak of Jesus as Lord after his resurrection but does not feel the designation is appropriate in the earlier ministry. This suggests that the title belongs primarily to Jesus as the Risen and Ascended One" *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 375.
Scriptures teach that faith comes from proclamation. Proclamation is a necessary tool to fulfill God’s mission. The apostle Paul addressed this issue and wrote that proclaiming will lead to confession which is a necessary part of receiving salvation (Rom 10:6-10). Therefore, proclamation is a motivating aspect in mission.

The apostle Peter also speaks about the necessity of proclamation to fulfill the missionary task (2 Pet 1:16-21). According to this text the proclamation of the kingdom has two foundations—the voice of God at Christ’s transfiguration and the testimony of Scripture. In Scripture, both God and men were active participants, and in its proclamation, both are to be actively involved.

Mission is concerned fundamentally with the reign of God and is the proclamation of His Kingdom. The

1Here the apostle Paul uses the quotation from Deut 30:12-13 and transforms from the word of law to the Christ, making it clear that Christ is the fulfillment of the law. The law is basic for the kingdom of God, and Christ is the one who brings the kingdom of God to us.

2According to George Eldon Ladd, the hope of the kingdom of God is at the very heart of the Christian religion. He writes: "The Hebrew-Christian faith expresses its hope in terms of the Kingdom of God. This Biblical hope is not in the same category as the dreams of the Greek poets but is at the very heart of revealed religion. The Biblical idea of the Kingdom of God is deeply rooted in the Old Testament and is grounded in the confidence that there is one eternal, living God who has revealed Himself to men and who has a purpose for the human race which He has chosen to accomplish through Israel. The Biblical hope is therefore a religious hope; it is an essential element in the revealed will and the redemptive work of the living God." The Gospel of the Kingdom (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 15.
proclamation of the Kingdom of God was at the center of Christ's mission. "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'" (Matt 4:7). God's reign was near in the person of Jesus Christ and His ministry.

The kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus is God's authority, kingship, and His reign. This authority and reign is expressed in different ways in different stages of history. He proclaimed the kingdom of God as the realm of the future, but at the same time, the kingdom is there as a spiritual blessing of God's reign. The same message is given as the basis for the Great Commission and must be

1Christ's ministry was to show people how to enter the Kingdom of God. For example he stated: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpass that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20). Even more concrete are these words: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 7:21). Christ taught that his followers need to think about God's kingdom when they pray: "... your kingdom come" (Matt 6:10).

The kingdom of God was also Jesus' promise to His followers: "And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29-30). Jesus promises: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ... Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world'" (Matt 25:31, 34).

proclaimed to all nations to prepare the people for Jesus’ second advent.

The Second Advent

Now we move to the third basic point for an understanding of the New Testament basis of mission. This is the understanding that history is coming to an end, and a new stage in God’s relationship with people will begin. The eschatological motif of God’s mission will culminate in the second advent of Jesus Christ. "'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty'" (Rev 1:8).

In this regard one of the driving forces for the missionary motivation of the New Testament church can be seen in Matt 24:14. There the proclamation of the Gospel is closely connected with end-time expectations. The church must be the witness of Jesus Christ in the whole world before His advent.

The advent of Jesus Christ will be the end of the history of mankind. This event is connected with the eternal destiny of the people and, as such, it becomes a driving source for mission. God has set an end for evil and will transfer His people to a new level of God-human relationship. This conviction is staunchly proclaimed by John in the book of Revelation. The closing chapters of Revelation are a song of God’s triumph and of the new life. Here is the fulfillment to the desires of ages. Jesus is
coming again and with Him, a new life. This will be a start for full blessing for redeemed man.

Scripture does not invite one to calculate an exact time setting for Jesus' coming and final salvation. It is not necessary to know the time. More important is having a relationship with God, proclaiming the kingdom of God, and letting people decide to allow God's power to rule their lives. John describes Jesus Christ as a soon-coming Lord who restores perfect harmony in the universe (Rev 22:12-15).

The mission of Jesus' followers is to follow the guidance of the Spirit and invite people to that new relationship. "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (vs. 17).¹

An eschatological insight is also revealed in John 14:1-4 where Jesus comforts His disciples with a statement which primarily refers to His second advent:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you

¹The next passage gives a special warning (vss. 18-19). The warning relates first of all to the book of Revelation but we also can bring parallels to the whole Gospel of the kingdom and salvation. God invites us to proclaim the Gospel as it is revealed in Scriptures and not to speculate with human theories and traditions.
to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.\textsuperscript{1}

The New Testament supports the concept that God is in control of redemptive history. This concept brings in the missionary motif and the expectation of the second advent of Jesus Christ. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews, who seems to be well educated in the Old Testament and an authority in the church community, justifies the missionary emphasis on the grounds of the second coming (Heb 9:27-28).

The duty of Christians is to proclaim that everybody faces judgment, but there is glorious victory and fullness of salvation in Jesus Christ. As the Israelites were waiting for the high priest on the Day of Atonement while he was in the Most Holy Place, so we are waiting for the High Priest, Jesus Christ, to come and make real what we believe and expect.

Summary

As a conclusion to this chapter, I summarize some of the thoughts discussed. One of the first basic steps in forming a missionary vision based on Scripture is to clarify whose mission it is and to whom the mission is oriented. The purpose and goal of the mission are very important. In this chapter, we have clearly seen that mission, as

\textsuperscript{1See also Matt 24:27; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess 4:16; Rev 1:7.}
explained in both the Old and the New Testaments, is God's mission.

God is a God of love and salvation. He is One who is interested in restoring the broken relationship with the human race after sin entered this world and the human heart. In His mission, God is an active participant to open new possibilities for the human race to come into harmony with Him. He is the One who calls people and gives missionary strategies for the different stages in history. Not all that God's people or His church does is mission or missionary oriented. Doubtless, God's mission—the salvation of the fallen human race—is much broader than the mission of His people.

We found that the Old Testament is a book of mission even though there is little overt missionary activity in the form of going out to other peoples. However, the Old Testament has a universal missionary motif. The God of the Old Testament is the only God, and the whole human race has His full attention. Sin has touched everybody, thus the need for salvation is universal.

God's calling of the patriarchs had a universal intention. He is the Savior of all peoples and His promise of salvation has its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament shows development of the concept of mission from the patriarchs to Israel and then to the nations. The universality of God's reign and purposes is the missionary
motif. This missionary motif is indicated with the calling of covenant people and later the nation of Israel for a special task to reveal the power and grace of God to the other inhabitants of the earth. Thus the Old Testament is not only a book of expectations for Israel but for all the nations. Israel was chosen as the agent to fulfill God's purposes with the nations.

The New Testament witnesses that Christianity is a missionary religion. It shows how the Old Testament expectations are fulfilled in Jesus Christ and how Jesus, in His personal ministry, continues God's plan for mission in the fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel. However, Jesus is the One who gives the Great Commission to His followers to go and proclaim the kingdom of God to all people. God's kingdom is closely related to the redemption of His people. Jesus Christ as Lord is the assurance of redemption because He gave Himself as a sacrifice to death to secure the redemption of the human beings He created.

Finally, we can say that Scripture clearly shows that there are both present and future elements in the biblical teaching regarding salvation. Therefore, mission is a present- and future-oriented activity. The culminating point of God's mission will be Jesus' second advent and the full restoration of God's kingdom.
CHAPTER V

THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AND MISSION

Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist church understands that mission is the main reason for its existence. Born in the context of evangelical Protestantism, it inherited the Reformation through the Wesleyan revival. Early Adventists were people of a living faith who believed God called them into existence to warn the world of the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the foundation for their existence as a special people. From small beginnings Adventists have grown into a worldwide church and are one of the fastest-growing Protestant denominations. This has taken place because of its strong missionary motivation and self-understanding as a herald of the Lord. Jesus' words on the Mount of Olives, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come," are the driving force of Adventist mission.

As time passes, we look back and see how God has blessed His people in this church. There have been stages in the development of the Adventist understanding of their
mission, and God has led them and patiently revealed widening horizons of their place in the fulfillment of His purpose.

This chapter deals with selected issues of the Adventist mission in the world. There is, first of all, a short overview of the status of the Adventist church in the world today. There is also a discussion of the task yet remaining and of some of the strategies and methods appropriate to the accomplishment of the God-given task to proclaim the coming Kingdom to all the world.

**Adventism in the World**

**Historical Overview**

The Seventh-day Adventist church arose in America among the religious revivals of the mid-nineteenth century. It grew out of the Millerite movement which believed that Christ was coming to the earth to claim His own in October 1844. The Millerite Movement was an interdenominational

---

movement in the 1840s. It was based on distinctive prophetic interpretation and attracted many people anxious to find out the truth about the end of time and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The wonderful excitement of this expectation gave way to a great disappointment when Christ did not return.¹ The Seventh-day Adventist church grew out of this disappointment and has become the largest of the groups of denominations classed as Adventist bodies. In the beginning, this group grew slowly. It was organized as a church only in 1861.²

Before and around the time of the anticipated return of Christ, the missionary vision of the Adventists was concentrated on preparing people for Christ’s soon return. They understood the mission as calling people out of "Babylon" and warning them of Christ’s advent. "Babylon," they believed along with other Protestants, was the papacy.³

After the disappointment that Christ did not return on the expected date in October 22, 1844, Adventists started to rethink what happened. There were several suggestions. One was that nothing had happened on the expected date of Christ’s return. Under the leadership of Joshua V. Himes,


²Schwarz, 97.

³Ibid., 47.
many believed that the expected event was correct, only the calculations of time had been wrong. Another group gave a spiritual interpretation of the expected event. They believed that Christ had returned to earth on October 22 but in spiritual way. The third group claimed that the date was correct, but the event was not the expected one.¹

To move forward Adventists needed to find out what had really happened at the expected time. They were confused and longing for some clarity. One of the answers was given on the next day, October 23, 1844. Hiriam Edson, a Methodist farmer, after a prayer session with other believers went to encourage other disappointed believers. Crossing a cornfield, Edson saw a vision of the Heavenly Sanctuary where Christ as High Priest had entered the Most Holy place instead of coming to the earth. This vision explained the disappointment and gave joy and hope to believers.²

God wanted His people to be aware of what happened and of His purposes. Adventists believe that He called a seventeen-year-old—Ellen Harmon (White after her marriage in 1846)—to the prophetic ministry. After the disappointment, she was ready to give up her faith, but in December 1844 during prayer she received a vision. In this

²Ibid., 22-23.
vision God showed her that something important had happened in October 22, 1844. He also revealed that believers must keep focused on Jesus Christ as Savior. Ellen G. White was faithful to God and preached His love and soon-coming for seventy years, from 1844 until her death in 1915. She had a decisive and guiding influence in the theological and organizational development of the church, establishing publishing work, and giving a world-wide missionary vision.¹

God patiently led Adventists to new and deeper doctrinal discoveries which were necessary for their future mission. One of these early discoveries later became a characteristic mark of Adventists. In 1844, a number of Adventists, influenced by the Seventh-Day Baptists, started to observe the seventh day as the Sabbath of the Decalogue. Rachel Oakes, a member of the Seventh-Day Baptist church, challenged pastor Frederick Wheeler to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. Pastor Wheeler, a Methodist Adventist, began to keep the Sabbath in the spring of 1844. Several members joined him and this became the first Sabbath-keeping Adventist congregation. Only after the great disappointment was the message of the seventh-day Sabbath given a prophetic and eschatological meaning. Joseph Bates, ex-sea captain and one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church, accepted the seventh-day Sabbath in 1845. He shared the

¹See SDAE, s.v. "White, Ellen G."

Sabbath message with other Adventist leaders, and in 1846 he introduced this message to Ellen and James White. They also became Sabbatarian Adventists. By the end of 1846, Adventists were united in understanding Christ’s ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary and the seventh-day Sabbath. Bates connected the Sabbath with the prophetic messages of Rev 11-14. It became not only the day for worship but also a part of the message to be proclaimed to the world.

During the decade following the Disappointment, Adventists grew to understand the necessity of some form of organization in order to enforce the work they felt called to do. A lack of organization made it difficult for them to hold property, conduct their publishing work, and achieve legal standing. One of the leaders pushing towards organization was James White. After long discussions and step-by-step developments, several local Conferences were organized. Finally in May 1863 at Battle Creek, representatives from local Conferences established the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists with John Byington as president.

Shortly after the General Conference was formed, J. White started to orient the church toward its missionary task. There were hopes of sending a missionary to Europe,

1See Knight, Anticipating, 29-32; Schwartz, 58-59.
2Damsteegt, 137.
3See Knight, Anticipating, 50-51.
but the new organization did not have enough power to achieve this. However, there were new developments. In 1868, John N. Loughborough and D. T. Bordeau were sent to California to open the work there. Shortly after their arrival the work started to grow rapidly in California and other Western states. One of the key figures in the development of missionary outreach was also E. G. White. She received messages from God that Adventists had a message not only for the people of the Advent faith (i.e., the Millerites), but for others also.

There were people ready to go as missionaries to other continents. One of them, a former Polish Roman Catholic immigrant, M. B. Czechowski, wanted to go to Europe. In 1864, he asked J. N. Loughborough to intercede with the General Conference to send him as a missionary to Italy. Church leaders, however, advised him to remain in America because of several personal questions. Then he went to the First-day Adventists in Boston, who raised money and sent him on a mission to Europe. He spent over a year preaching in the Piedmont valleys. After both Catholic and Protestant opposition arose, Czechowski went to Switzerland. He proclaimed the seventh-day Sabbath and the soon return of Christ. In the Swiss village of Tramelan, he organized a church of nearly sixty believers. One of them, Albert Vuilleumier, found a copy of the Review and Herald and
discovered a religious organization in America that held the same beliefs they did.

Vuilleumier began to correspond with Adventists in America and this correspondence led to the invitation of the Swiss representative to attend the 1869 General Conference session. James Erzberger was sent as a representative from Switzerland to this General Conference session. A year later, he returned to Europe as an ordained Adventist minister.¹

The first official Seventh-day Adventist missionary, J. N. Andrews, was sent to Europe in 1874. His message was simple: the Sabbath, warning of the coming judgment, and calling God's people to obey the law.² This small beginning eventually led to the expansion of Adventism into all the world.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Adventist mission to the world was a growing phenomenon. Outside the European missions, Adventists established General Conference-sponsored missions among the European Protestants of Australia in 1885 and of South Africa in 1887. Both of those countries had had lay members prior to the arrival of missionaries. Both Australia and South Africa (along with


America and Europe) became strategic bases for further missionary developments.¹

The era around the 1890s was perfect for further outreach because this was a time of general expansion of Christian missions. In 1886, D. L. Moody appealed to college students to become missionaries. This appeal led to the founding of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions. The idea was that missionaries need to go and reach the people.² Those events indirectly stimulated the Adventist vision to proclaim the three angels' messages, to educate people, publish books, and establish medical institutions.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Adventists were slowly becoming a worldwide church. Work had begun in Europe, Australia, and South Africa and many other places. G. Knight states, "By the end of the 1890s Adventism had been established on every continent and on many of the islands of the sea."³

The growth of the church and the expanding missionary enterprise led to a staged series of organizational developments in patterns of leadership and administration. At the General Conference session of 1901,  

¹Knight, Anticipating, 69.


³Knight, Fat Lady, 71.
major changes were made. Union Conferences were organized. At the General Conference more responsibility was given to an executive committee and the power of the president somewhat curbed. The decision was made to support missions financially and to administrate missions under the supervision of the General Conference executive committee. A. G. Daniells was elected as chairmen of the executive committee, and W. Spicer as the corresponding secretary.¹ This led to a dramatic increase of missionary activities. In 1901 alone, 183 new missionaries were sent to mission fields.² In fact, underDaniells and Spicer, the whole Adventist church was turned into a large missionary agency. The fire for missions burning in the hearts of these and other leaders inspired the believers to give of their best to fulfill God's mission and to proclaim the Gospel of salvation to every nation on earth.

The end of the nineteenth century was a significant era for Adventists in the Baltic states as well. That was the time for the beginnings of mission in those territories. The beginning of Adventist work in Latvia is closely connected with the missionary eagerness of German Adventists, and particularly with the leadership of L. R. Conradi, a man with a great missionary vision. He was sent to Europe in 1886 and established headquarters for the

¹See Oliver, 173-176.

²Ibid., 176.
German church in Hamburg. He organized a training institute for colporteurs and Bible workers and established Friedensau Missionary Seminary near Magdeburg. From Hamburg, he traveled to many European countries to establish an Adventist presence there.¹

In 1896 after a trip to Russia, he visited Riga and baptized the first group of believers there. This was the beginning of Adventism in the Baltic states. A year later, the church was established in Estonia. The new converts were also missionary oriented and started to spread the Gospel in their countries. The church grew steadily, and today it is present in all three Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Willingness to serve the Lord Jesus coupled with a vision of God’s mission resulted in marvelous growth from a small group to a missionary church.

After the proclamation of independence of the Baltic states after World War I, Adventists in those countries gained legal status. The Latvian and Estonian Conferences were organized in 1920. The Lithuanian Field was organized in 1921. In 1924, the Baltic Union Conference was organized. The same year marked the opening of the Mission Seminary near Riga, Latvia. The church was full of missionary zeal until the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states in 1940.

¹See Schwarz, 218-219.
The Baltic Union Conference and local Conferences were reorganized in 1989. After this reorganization, missionary work slowly began to rise again. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the church began to grow more rapidly and has nearly doubled in the last five years.¹

Missionary Message

To accomplish God's mission to proclaim the gospel of salvation, Adventists need a clear outline of the missionary message. The three angels' message of Rev 14:6-12 is considered by Adventists as an important appeal to the world. They see in these messages God's answer to the satanic deception before Christ's return.

Adventists understand that the first angel (Rev 14:6-7) symbolizes God's remnant, carrying an everlasting Gospel to the world. This Gospel is the same that the apostles proclaimed and reveals that sinners need to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ. This message leads to a special emphasis for glorifying God (John 15:8). This can be accomplished by repentance. Rev 14:7 stresses the process of judgment and points to Christ's ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary.

The first angel's message also calls to the worship of the Creator. This is a special call, because Rev 13:8

¹See General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives and Statistics, Annual Statistical Reports (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1997).
points to the fact that inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast. This is a message calling for a choice between true and false worship. Adventists believe that Rev 14:7 calls attention especially to the commandment of the seventh-day Sabbath. The Sabbath is seen as a sign of God's creation, and by accepting it people glorify God as Creator.

The next message, Rev 14:8, proclaims the fall of Babylon. As already mentioned, Adventists, together with other Protestants, understood Babylon as the papacy. Even more, Babylon symbolizes power that is rebellious against God. In the context of Rev 13:15-17, it symbolizes apostate religious organizations which reject the first angel's message. Adventists see themselves as called to warn people to come out of apostasy and to open their hearts to God and His love.

The third angel's message, Rev 14:9-12, is God's warning against worshiping the beast and his image, which rejects righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ. Adventists understand that this beast symbolizes the church-state union that dominated the Christian world for centuries. The apostle Paul described it as "man of sin" (2 Thess 2:2-4). This image shows that there will be a time when churches will unite with the state to force people to accept their teachings.

The third angel's message also shows that persons will be constrained to make a choice between submission to
human authority or God's authority. This will lead to 
polarization into two different classes. One will lead to 
worshiping human authority; the other to worshiping God. 
This is an important point of the Adventist message, because 
this choice, in either case, will lead to suffering. Those 
who accept God's righteousness will suffer from human 
resistance. Those who accept worship of human authority 
will suffer eternal death (Rev 20:14-15).

Adventists understand that God called them to 
proclaim the three angels' messages to the world. Matt 
24:14 has functioned as the driving power, for Adventists 
understand that the Gospel will be preached throughout the 
world, and then Jesus Christ will return as Lord. 
Adventists believe that these messages place them in 
prophetic history. The three angels' messages of Rev 14:6- 
12 have been a powerful force in inspiring the Adventist 
mission.

Adventists recognize that the center of the 
Christian church is Jesus Christ and accent this in their 
mission. If Jesus Christ is the center, then, vertically, 
the church must reach upward toward God and His kingdom;

---

1 For more information, see Ministerial Association General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 152-170.

2 Ibid.
horizontally, they must reach outward toward the people and their needs.

The Adventist vision is that of a worldwide message to all the inhabitants of earth, warning of a judgment that is at hand and calling all to prepare for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Adventist missionary message can be summarized as "the everlasting Gospel," the basic Christian message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, revealed in the special setting of the three angels' messages from Rev 14:6-12.

Adventists are convinced that Christ will return very soon. This is a driving force in the Adventist message. The proclamation of the Gospel is symbolized by the three angels of Rev 14: 6-12, flying in the midst of heaven, and every believer is expected to participate in the spreading of the message.

Status of Adventist Missions

From small beginnings Adventism has grown both in self-understanding and missionary practice. Adventists are eager missionary people all around the earth. Similar to the small beginnings of the Christian church at the time of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Seventh-day Adventist church began with a small group of confused believers who were disappointed in their eschatological expectations of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the small nucleus of disciples developed into the worldwide Christian church, so
the small group of disappointed Adventists grew into a missionary church, bringing its message of salvation and the soon return of Jesus to the whole world.

The Seventh-day Adventist church has passed through several different stages of growth in becoming a mature missionary-oriented church. However, this is not the time to stop. There is still much to do and many to reach, and there is always the need to become more Christ-like and dynamic.

When the church was organized in 1863 there was a group of about four thousand members. Today the church's official membership is around ten million believers. This does not include those who call themselves Adventists but are not practicing members. There are more then 41,000 local congregations in 204 of the 230 officially recognized countries of the world.

The following figures reveal the growth of the Seventh-day Adventist church in global perspective.

---

Membership statistics have been compiled from reports in following sources: Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 1870-1879; Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, 1890; General Conference Bulletin, 1900; General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, Annual Statistical Reports, 1910-1997.
TABLE 1
SDA CHURCH GROWTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>5,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>14,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>29,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>67,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>184,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>504,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1,245,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3,308,191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>9,479,718</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This membership growth indicates that the missionary self-understanding has spread to the newer congregations all over the world and they have joined in the chorus declaring the messages of the three angels.

Adventists are known in the world as Christians eagerly proclaiming the three angels' messages to all people. However, missionary methods have included much more than a ministry of proclamation. From their early beginnings, Adventists have been interested in Christian education as a way of character formation and an
instrumentality of mission. Today, in the late nineties, the Adventist church operates more than 5,500 schools. Included are 81 colleges and universities.

Medical work has also been employed as a way of establishing contact and demonstrating the meaning of the Gospel for every dimension of human life. Today, some 150 hospitals and sanitariums, and 350 clinics and dispensaries around the world are operated by the Adventist church. One needs to add nursing homes and retirement centers, orphanages and childrens homes to get the whole picture.

The Adventist church is known as a publisher of fine Christian literature. More than 50 publishing houses around the world distribute literature in more than 700 languages. Missionary work is also conducted through means of radio and TV. To fully develop the picture one needs to refer to ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency), which supports people in times of great human need and catastrophe without regard to their religious affiliation. Above mentioned shows that the Seventh-day Adventist church is well known in many parts of the world.

Adventism in the last decade of this century is more concerned about its mission than ever before. Since 1990, thought about the unreached has undergone considerable change. Early missionary programs were oriented to numbers

---

¹General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1997 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1997).
of believers and thought revolved about missionary work in nations, but recent thought has to do with unreached people groups. The "Global Mission" program is oriented to establish an Adventist presence in each of the untouched people groups. The goal is to plant a church in each of those unreached segments of population with the belief that those churches too will spread the Gospel. Even if we do not know what the result of those missionary efforts will be, it is clear that Adventists are becoming more, and not less, involved in missions.

The Seventh-day Adventist church in the 1990s has become one of most international Protestant denominations. In the beginning, the Adventist church was a North American church. Today, statistics reveal that most of the members are concentrated in Latin America, Africa, and parts of South Asia, and the church continues to grow rapidly in those territories.

After this short review of the spread of Adventism in the world, we concentrate on a smaller part of this world, the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The population of these three countries together makes around eight million people. The Seventh-day

---

"Research tells us that there are some 5000 ethno-linguistic or population groupings of one million people each on the planet. Adventists have at least one church in about 3200 of those groups. That leaves approximately 1800 in which the denomination has absolutely no presence. Those 1800 groupings represent more than two billion people." Knight, Anticipating, 124.
Adventist membership is around seven thousand. Church growth in these countries has become more rapid since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its atheistic marxistic ideology.

The Adventist church is not a church of the majority in the Baltic countries; however, it has good potential for continued growth. During the last decade, church membership is increasingly composed of younger and more educated people. There is the potential for further growth because of the eagerness of these young people who still have the flame of "first love" and are enthusiastic about sharing the Gospel with others. The prestige of Adventists is growing, and people have recognized the efforts of the church to help people during economic hard times and political transition from one system to another.

To summarize, we can say that the Adventist church has its place in the spectrum of Christianity on this earth. We believe God called this church into existence for a special purpose and the Holy Spirit is adding people to it daily. However, there is a large task remaining before Jesus comes.

The Task Remaining

Jesus Christ gave His followers the mandate to go into the world and to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything Jesus' had commanded (Matt 28:19-20). The task of the Seventh-day
Adventist mission is to display the sovereignty of God to the world. As the apostle Paul expressed it, God's purpose is to bring everything under Christ's lordship (Eph 1:10). To fulfill such a task, the Seventh-day Adventist church must recognize fully that the basic message to proclaim is the message of salvation for all people in Jesus Christ. But it is not enough only to know the truth; people must know that God is open to build new relationships with everybody who is ready to receive Him. Real fellowship and relationship includes both hearing and responding to the message.

The task of proclaiming the Gospel of salvation is the first duty of the church. Both Jesus' commission and the record of the apostles' activities reveal this. It is a great privilege for the Adventist church to fulfill this task. The salvation experienced leads to sharing it in further proclamation of the Gospel.¹ God wants His church to display the message of salvation and gives an opportunity for everybody to be His witness. It is a great privilege to communicate salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ to others. To proclaim God's deeds, nothing more is needed than an inner necessity to share the experience.

The proclamation of the Gospel includes such ministries as teaching and making disciples of Jesus—the

same aspects that have been in Christianity from the beginning and have been faithfully respected by Adventists.

The mission of the Adventist church is a global—universal—mission. The church is a witness to the whole world, to every people group, to every individual. This is achievable by proclamation and by living example.

The definition of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church today is formulated as follows:

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Rev 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4; 2 Cor 5:10; Jude 3, 14; 1 Pet 1:16-19; 1 Pet 3:10-14; Rev 21:1-14).

A real challenge to the Adventist church today is not to be judgmental but to become a place where people can find a loving attitude and the kind of kindness which God shows to His people through Jesus Christ. The example of Jesus Christ should always have a central place in Adventist missionary outreach.

God's mission will culminate with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Adventists from the beginning have

---

understood themselves as people called to be Christ’s heralds. The task of the Seventh-day Adventist church is to continue to proclaim the "everlasting gospel" of Rev 14:6-12. As Matt 24:14 reveals, this proclamation of the Gospel is a sign of the nearness of the end. The task of the church is to proclaim the warning that everybody faces God’s final judgment but that there is also a splendid opportunity to be saved. Jesus Christ is Savior and He asks people only to believe in Him and accept salvation by faith.

The church must remember that it is possible to fulfill such a vast task only by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. God called Adventists into existence to further his mission on earth, not the interests of some leaders or groups of people. Adventists as a part of God’s universal church need to remember that it represents the kingdom of God on earth. Russell Staples suggests that the church should

think of itself more positively as a present eschatological reality. It is a sign on earth of the coming kingdom of God. Its worship, what it believes, what it hopes for, everything about it, points forward to the kingdom. It is a living witness to the future that God has proposed for His people.¹

The possibilities for the church to glorify God, Creator and Savior, with proclamation and witness are endless. However, God’s mission will be fulfilled, not by our own achievements

or power but driven by the Holy Spirit. Then the Lord Jesus will come again to fulfill the plan of salvation. There will be no more sin and separation but a triumphant and glorious new beginning. What is seen today only by faith will become reality and triumph.

God's mission of salvation and adoption is coming to the final stage, and the Adventist church has Christ's mandate for mission: "Go to the all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

There is a world waiting for this good news. The challenge is tremendous. There are around two and a half billion people who need to hear a clear, personal presentation of the Gospel of salvation in the context of the three angels' messages. From a human point of view, there is not a chance of fulfilling this calling. There are countries such as China and India in which only a small percentage of the population are Christians. But Jesus promised that He will be with His followers every day until the end; and the Holy Spirit leads God's mission. Adventists are not alone in their mission.

The special guidance of the Holy Spirit will be needed to complete the task in those countries where 60 percent of the world's population are Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim.

1This area of the earth is called the 10/40 window. The name is taken from the area's northern and southern boundaries--40 degrees southern and 10 degrees northern
If we turn to the Baltic countries, which are traditionally Christian, there is a tremendous challenge because of the people groups that have never heard the good news about God. The Adventist church needs to face the task and proclaim the Gospel of salvation to each of these people groups as this becomes possible.

The task still remains to communicate the gospel to many people in an understandable way. It means contextualization. The world is rapidly changing. This decade has been a witness to dramatic social and cultural changes in the Baltic countries. The people today are in a state of uncertainty. They do not know what to expect in the future or where to look for relief and hope. It is the task of Adventists to bring to these people the hope of the bright future open to all in Jesus Christ.

**Strategies and Methods**

As we regard the challenges mentioned above, it is clear that we need to think about strategies and methods of fulfilling the task given to us by God. The church is responsible for mission. The example of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26) reveals that each local community of believers is responsible for mission. The apostles aimed to establish local congregations which were able to further latitude. The region stretches from Africa in the West to Japan in the East. This window touches parts of 82 countries in northern Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific Rim.
God’s mission. The local believers were responsible for the continuation of the task begun by the apostles and to baptize and teach new converts.

This example leads us to the point that local congregations are to be instrumentalities of God’s mission in the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Ellen White revealed God’s purpose: "The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world."¹

This suggestion means that the local congregations should start to plant churches. The planting of churches leads to cooperation between local congregations. A strategy is needed. The apostle Paul had the vision that local churches in all strategic centers would reach out further and further. To make this possible, it is necessary to have people able to fulfill this task. There is a need for lay leaders who will be able to carry out this strategy. The apostle Paul already gave such a suggestion to the church. In Eph 4:11-13 he mentions different gifts for different missionary tasks.

To fulfill the task of proclaiming the "everlasting gospel" it is necessary to have a right relationship with God. Relationship with God brings a missionary sense to

believers. Jesus Christ promised that He will be with His witnesses "always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:20). He stressed the necessity of union with Him, using different images. He described His people as salt of the earth, light of the world, vine and branches, shepherd and sheep. All of these reveal that only being related with Christ makes His people alive. The New Testament also uses the images of the body of Christ and the people of God. These stress different patterns of relationship. These relationships will lead to the fruit of the Spirit in believers' lives (Gal 5:22-26). It will attract the people and they will desire to have those fruits in their lives also.

Consideration of these biblical images of the church leads to the theological models of the church described in chapter 3. Besides the dominant Adventist model of the church as herald, proclaiming the Gospel of salvation in the context of the three angels of Rev 14:6-12, there is also the model of the church as servant. In Matt 25:31-46, Jesus accented the servant idea as a missionary tool. However, a combination of both is necessary to fulfill the task. Another powerful model is that of the church as a community of faith. This high Protestant understanding of the church can become a key for further Adventist missionary activities. The church as community of faith gives an opportunity for every member to develop a relationship with the head of the church—Jesus Christ. The sense of common
values, religious self-understanding, and worship bring people closer together. Togetherness is one of the strategic moments of mission, because a community practicing loving, forgiving relationships is very attractive. Secularized people are missing this sense of togetherness, which values every member of the community and gives peace and security.

To fulfill the missionary task the Adventist church needs to refocus from numbers to real people with real needs and real possibilities. This will make the mission successful. The church is called to witness and serve, and not to force the people. This is especially true today when people in the Baltic states face issues of political nationalism, religious fundamentalism, increase of secularism, and economical pressure. Adventists need to be very sensitive to people's hurts and to avoid extremes to reach these people with the Gospel of salvation.

God's purpose is love and salvation. The church needs to explore all possible ways of revealing the Lord Jesus Christ. This is vital for its mission. In John 12:31-32, Jesus Christ reveals that He will be the driving source in missions: "Now is the time for the judgment of this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." Christ will draw people to Himself without regard to nationality, ethnicity, or social status.
To do this, Adventists need to see that other Christians also are interested in God's mission and to find a common ground to proclaim the kingdom of God. There are several guidelines on how to relate to other religious organizations. The General Conference Working Policy suggests:

We recognize those agencies that lift up Christ before men as a part of divine plan for evangelization of the world, and we hold in high esteem Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ.¹

The strategy to fulfill our task in the world and the Baltic countries in particular leads to the idea of recognizing and cooperating with sincere Christians who are winning souls to Christ.

One more suggestion and guideline is mentioned: the need to remember that the Gospel is not restricted to special areas, places, or people groups. The Gospel commission leads us to proclaim the "everlasting Gospel" to all people regardless of race, social class, and nationality.²

To fulfill this great challenge of proclaiming the Gospel, we can mention some methods. The most common and long-living in the Baltic countries is evangelization. The standard model is open proclamation for a certain period of


²Ibid., 377.
time in a certain place. More recently some have used Daniel and Revelation seminars. However, recent developments and cultural peculiarities indicate that both of these methods are no longer the best to fulfill the task. The church needs to look for new possibilities.

An alternative may be small-group Bible study sessions with interested people in family or household settings. This may be an easier way to reach neighbors or relatives than through public meetings. Friendship evangelism can also be successful in some areas where other religious powers prevent Adventists from obtaining permission or facilities for evangelistic meetings. A group practicing an attractive Christian lifestyle may be a powerful witness.

There are several other possible ways of reaching people in the Baltic countries, but one thing must remain constant and clear: the message must be Christ-centered and loving. God in His mission acts with love and His people should reflect this divine love to others.

Summary

The greatest task of the Adventist church is to participate in God’s mission. To fulfill this mission, God provides opportunities, means, and power. God Himself is with His church and leads the mission in the person of the Holy Spirit. There is a place for everybody in God’s
chuch, because He loves us and wants everyone to be His son or daughter.

Adventists believe that as a church they have a special place in God's plan of salvation. They are called to proclaim and set an example of how to relate to God's call and how to obey the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The church is an educator and a witness to God's glory and power on earth. There is no other or higher calling than to become God's people and to carry forward His purpose.

God wants His church to become a place where people can feel His love and mercy. The Adventist church is called to proclaim God's judgment but not to be judgmental. This is possible if one's heart is warmed by God's love; then one experiences the miracle of salvation. This is made possible by stressing the community-of-faith model. Love is the power that leads people in mission. People are lost in this hectic world and do not have inner peace; many are looking in the wrong direction. Our mission is to help them to hear the good news about the coming kingdom of God and salvation by faith in Jesus Christ our Lord and savior.

Adventists have been successful in the mission of proclamation as God's heralds. The church in the Baltic countries has experienced marvelous growth, but this is not the time to stop. There still are people in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as in other places of the earth, who have not heard the good news of salvation.
Seventh-day Adventists have grown from a small group to a worldwide church. The basis for this has been faithfulness to the Scriptures and identity with the three angels' messages. Faithfulness to God's purpose in the future requires Adventists to remain faithful to the Scriptures and zealous in the proclamation of the coming Lord Jesus Christ.

There are many different strategies and methods. Most important is that the local church is the church of mission. Everybody according to his or her gift must be involved in mission. However, believers need to be open-minded toward people and situations and able to contextualize the message. Only the message that can be clearly understood and which touches people where they are will be accepted. May the Lord Jesus Christ be glorified.
Summary

The purpose of this dissertation was to develop a book to help ministerial students in the Baltic Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church explore biblical insights into the church and its mission.

In chapter 2, guidelines are established for discovering the Old Testament background of the Christian church. This is necessary to build a bridge for the understanding of mission.

The central message of the Scripture is that, from the beginning, God has taken the initiative to open the way of salvation and to communicate it to His people. He made covenant promises to assure His people that He is on their side. These covenants gave direction to His people in the exercise of their loyalty to God. Scripture records the covenants with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the nation of Israel, and, in New Testament times, with the Christian church.

The conclusion is that the Christian church has its roots in the Old Testament; it is a continuation of God’s
called people. At the same time, there are new developments because Jesus Christ, who opened the way of salvation for all, stands between Israel and the church. The church is presented in the New Testament as the body of Christ in the world; as people who have dedicated their lives to Jesus Christ and are willing to proclaim God's kingdom. This allows us to conclude that God not only calls His people but also chooses the form of their relationships and mission in specific historic settings.

Jesus Christ expressed His intention to build the church. The church started at Pentecost and was a rapidly growing community of believers. The New Testament church is divinely organized but consists of people on earth, led by Jesus Christ Himself as the head of the church. Several different images are employed to describe various aspects of the New Testament church. In this way, Scripture reveals the many possibilities and responsibilities of God's people.

God is never bound by certain forms or traditions as are people. He is the sovereign majesty. One must consider seriously whether Christians should not be more concerned about a live relationship with God than with some human tradition. It is a great privilege and opportunity for human beings to be participants in God's mission. It is a great honor to be witnesses to God's love as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.
Chapter 3 provides insights into possible theological models of the church. There are two fundamental types of church models—ontological and functional. Ontological models describe the church in terms of its nature or being. Functional models describe the church by what it does. Both stress its connection with Jesus Christ as head of the church. In fact, the different models discussed in Scripture only enlighten different aspects of this Christian community called church. The basic emphasis when discussing the church and its mission is to combine elements of both the ontological and functional models while avoiding the excesses of each. In the final analysis, the being of the church cannot be separated from what the church does in society.

The Seventh-day Adventist church can be described ontologically as a community of faith, and functionally as a herald, proclaiming the Gospel of salvation. However, in some places, one can possibly say that the servant concept of the church, which communicates the Gospel by personal example and service, is emphasized more than that of the herald. In the Baltic Union area today, more emphasis needs to be placed on the ontological understanding of the church as a community of faith. The ontological images of the church as the body of Christ and the people of God are sometimes neglected and more emphasis is given to the herald functions. The ideal would be to have a balanced view
of the church as the worshiping community of faith of which Christ is the head, and, at the same time, zealously heralds its Master's coming. It is also fair to say that the Seventh-day Adventist church as an institution has been highly committed to the fulfillment of its mission.

After clarifying some biblical insights describing the being and functions of the church in chapter 4, I discussed some scriptural insights concerning mission. The conclusion is that there is only one mastermind of mission, God Himself. Because it is God's mission, it is and will be the very heartbeat of the church.

The whole Bible, from Gen 1 to Rev 22, forms the foundation for the outreach of the Gospel of salvation to the whole world. God is interested in restoring the broken relationship with the human race. He calls people out of this world to open their hearts to Him and allows them to participate in the fulfillment of His plan of salvation.

The Old Testament is a book of mission even though there is little overt missionary activity in the form of going out to other peoples. The Old Testament has a universal missionary motif because God is the only God and He is the only hope of salvation.

The New Testament witnesses that Christianity is a missionary religion. It shows how the Old Testament expectations are fulfilled in Jesus Christ and how Jesus, in His personal ministry, continues God's plan for mission,
fulfilling God's covenant with Israel. Jesus Christ also gives the Great Commission to His followers to go and proclaim the kingdom of God to all nations. He gave this task because He is the assurance of salvation. He gave Himself as a sacrifice to secure the redemption of His people. Mission is a present- and future-oriented activity leading toward Jesus' advent and the full restoration of God's kingdom.

This leads to chapter 5, which provides insights regarding Adventist mission. This chapter reveals some of the points in the history of Adventist mission and message. We could see that from small beginnings this church arose to become a worldwide church. The greatest task of the Seventh-day Adventist church is to participate in God's mission. To fulfill this mission God provides the opportunities, means, and power. God leads the mission of the church in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Adventists believe that they have a special place and task in God's plan of salvation. This church is called to proclaim the three angels' messages of God's judgment and salvation. The church in this case is an educator and a witness of God's glory and power on earth. Adventists have succeeded in many areas of this great task, but there still are areas where improvement is needed. The Adventist church is rethinking its missions approach and strategy, pointing
not only to nations but to specific people groups who never had an opportunity to hear the Gospel of salvation.

To fulfill this great task, the best methodology is to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit. To better succeed in mission, Adventists need to rethink the possibilities inherent in being a community of faith, as a place where true love and forgiveness are practiced, and that attracts people into its midst. The church as a community of faith gives opportunities to every member to develop a relationship with the head of the church—Jesus Christ and with one another. The sense of common values, religious self-understanding, and worship draws people closer together and leads to missionary expressions.

There is no doubt that the church is called to proclaim God’s kingdom and salvation in Jesus Christ. It is called to set an example of how to relate to God’s call and how to obey the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The church is an educator providing knowledge of God and His plan of salvation, and it is a witness of God’s glory and power on the earth. There is no higher calling than to become God’s people to carry forward His work.

Adventists believe they are called to proclaim God’s judgment, mercy, and salvation, giving hope to the people on this earth, starting with own families, neighborhoods, and countries. One of the greatest needs of Seventh-day Adventist church members is to understand that God has
called them into a pluralistic world. There is a need for Adventists to understand and accept their relatedness to the whole of Christianity without losing their own uniqueness. God calls His people to make salvation actual to individual people and to whole societies.

The church must think seriously about the contextualization of theology and mission. God's actions in history are an excellent example of this. If the church does not find a place in society, it will not have much success in mission.

Conclusions

I personally can say that the study of the church and its mission in the light of Scripture has helped me. My desire is that it may be a help for ministerial students in the Baltic Union Conference as well. Possibly the church may benefit from this study, and pastors may find some ideas regarding ways to better equip their congregations to fulfill God's purposes.

My prayer is that the Seventh-day Adventist church in the Baltic States and in whole world will become a place where people can see the love of God revealed among His people, not only in words but in real-life experiences. I believe that the church can be a place were diverse people are united as the body of Christ on this earth and that they will stay united for eternity.
However, one must stress that this is not the last word on the subject. Much more not only needs to be studied and said, but also done.

Some suggestions for further study would include the area of Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology, the theology of mission, and studies in the contextualization of the Gospel in the Baltic countries.

These suggested areas could help us to a better understanding of the task of the Seventh-day Adventist church in the Baltic countries. This could lead to greater success in its mission of disciple-making and of proclaiming God's kingdom.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


________. "Tomorrow's Church, Truly a 'Remnant.'" *Adventist Review*, 9 January 1986, 8-10.


General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives and Statistics. *Annual Statistical Reports.* Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1997.


Loughborough, John N. *Rise and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists*. Battle Creek, MI: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1892.


VITA

Name: Viesturs Rekis

Born: July 22, 1954 in Talsi, Latvia

Married: August 22, 1976 to Valda Jakabsone


Education:

1961-1968 Elementary School in Talsi, Latvia
1969-1972 Secondary School in Riga, Latvia
1981-1984 Friedensau Theological Seminary, Germany; Diploma in Theology (B.Th.)
1991-1994 Andrews University on campus of Zaoksky Theological Seminary, Russia, and Berrien Springs, MI; MA Religion
1994-1998 Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI; Doctor of Ministry

Professional Experience:

1979-1989 Pastor; Latvian Conference of the SDA Church
1989-1991 Different offices in the Latvian Conference, and the Baltic Union Conference of the SDA Church
1992-1993 Dean and vice-president, Zaoksky Theological Seminary, Russia
1997- Executive Secretary, Latvian Conference of the SDA Church