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1.1   Introductory remarks

The research of this thesis is founded on the supposition that it is imperative for the church to maintain a healthy balance between the identity thereof and its relevance within our contemporary culture. This hypothesis is based on the fact that the church has to do with the rapid change of internal and external circumstances; the ever changing socio-political situation; the innovative progress in science and technology and also new theological challenges aimed not only at dishonouring the authenticity and credibility of the Bible, but also at the trustworthiness of its Founder, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in this context that the church must remain relevant, yet not at the cost of forfeiting its identity. On the other hand, the church must preserve its identity at all costs, while at the same time being careful not to be ensnared by tradition, thereby sacrificing its accountability of being relevant and contextual.

Identity however, involves assumptions about the nature or essence of things, while relevance involves pertinence or bearing to the matter in hand[1]. In view hereof it is postulated that a clear understanding of its essence is essential for the church prior to its endeavour to achieve balance relational to identity and relevance.

If the church were advancing at a pace faster than the modern world, there would be no need for a research paper of this nature. As a matter of fact, a pace equal to the modern progress would be adequate so as not to alarm the theological world. Nevertheless, the motive for this research stems from the notion that due to its seeming failure to keep up with the pace of modernity, the need arises for the church to assess whether or not an internal crisis exists in relation to its sustaining the balance between identity and relevance. Should it be evident that such a crisis does exist, remedial answers need to be found. This is said with particular reference to the church's calling and mission, which is inseparably linked to its identity and relevance.

With the speedy changes that are evidenced in the contemporary world with regards to the political, economic, ethical and religious systems, the church seems to be more vulnerable than most people may think. This implies that a greater longing for

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[1] For a more detailed discussion of the terms *Identity* & *Relevance* see point 2.3 & 2.4 on pages 8 and 9.

trustworthiness and stability in all spheres is normality. By no means is the church exempted from this longing for reliability. Both theologians and church members are asking critical questions about the logic of the religious tradition with regards to its identity and relevance amidst a swift changing world, longing to establish how that tradition can meaningfully address the modern world.

1.2   The research problem

The research problem is based on the perception that although identity and relevance within the context of the church should be inseparable, as they are unyieldingly linked to the birth and mission thereof, modernization has seemingly succeeded in isolating the one from the other. The bipolar tension between ecclesiological methodology and current secular trends has, to a great extent, been influential in this division. Two facets play an important role within this tension. On the one hand, it may be said that it is unacceptable to maintain that the church is moving in the right direction just because it adapts itself to the contemporary situation. Adaptation to the contemporary situation may imply conformity to secular trends and methods that could mean adapting to anti-spiritual elements leading to indifferentism. This would result in relevancy at the cost of identity loss.

On the other hand, it may be said that the church is moving in the right direction as long as it upholds the past. Unfortunately, this could result in ignorance of the changing world while conveniently holding on to past traditions because these are less disruptive. This results in identity being conserved, while relevance is sacrificed. From this it becomes perceptible that adjustment to the present situation may stimulate the church towards the risk of uniformity to modernism. Likewise, it would be no better if the church should hold on to the methodology of the past, as this would enthuse traditionalism. In view of this, it is the purpose of this study to take a fresh look at the church's nature, essence and calling, so as to establish a method of balancing church identity and relevance within the modern context. Such a fresh consideration may assist in establishing a criterion whereby many factors relative to identity and relevance can be weighed. A thorough comprehension of the essence of the church is imperative to determining such a criterion. In view hereof, this research is compelled to reconsider the origin and characteristics of the early historic church relevant to this project. Such consideration may present us with the required criterion and a recommendable theological solution, by which the church may eliminate the

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problem. Furthermore, it may be added that a re-examination of the historical church's influence on the world of its day, will most likely lead us to understand how the church can preserve balance between identity and relevance, irrespective of the era in which it exists.

1.3   Stimulus

The dawn of the twenty-first century has brought with it many questions with regards to theology and the church. All the questions that are being asked however, could be summed up in one question, namely: "Does the church of our day have a future?" Put another way, we may ask whether the church is still true to its original purpose; does it have any influence on the public domain and is it preserving the essential balance between identity and relevance in a manner that will assure its future continuance, amid the modern character of our day. The "how" regarding balance between identity and relevance, is a burning issue in need of urgent discussion. The ever-increasing inclination towards secularism, together with the amplification of individual needs over those of the group and the critical opposition of authority and authoritative institutions, emphasize the need for research. The research problem with regards to identity and relevance compels one to ask whether theologians still speak about God in a credible and comprehendible fashion. The modern culture, wherein God, the Bible, Christianity and the church are the centre of suspicious crossfire, calls for the categorical clarification of the essence of the church and for a consistent balance between the identity and the relevance thereof.

1.4   Methodology

Primarily a literary study has been undertaken with regards to the method of research, while an awareness of the contextual situation was present at all times. The recommendations that resulted from this are that the church must always be cognizant of its nature and purpose in order to maintain the balance between its identity and its relevance. This balance can be upheld if the church remains faithful to its original mission, while at the same time remaining identifiable with its founder, the Lord Jesus Christ. This implies that the church can be what it was called to be – the body of Christ (identity), which functions in the midst of society and practices its faith from that characteristical conviction (relevance). Thus the church's message and its methodology can either remain or where necessary, once again become relevant, while bringing about Bible based spirituality to the people of its age. It is suggested

that the recommendations are achievable and in step with modern developments. The point of departure for the hypothetical approach fundamental to this project, is based on the author's convictions that balance between identity and relevance, although seemingly not perceptible at all times, is both possible and essential.

1.5   Purpose

Although the author is a member of a Pentecostal denomination in South Africa, the scope of this study is not limited to the Pentecostal tradition, but is primarily concerned with the mainline Protestant and Pentecostal[2] churches in the South African context, yet not exclusively. The discussion also includes references to the church within both these traditions that are situated beyond the South African borders.[3]

In view of the new contextual challenges presented to the church by postmodernism, it is important to theologically reconsider the identity and relevance of the church. This research may produce recommendations that have pragmatic value for the interpretation and implementation of theology, thereby contributing to the fortifying of the church within the modern world in which it finds itself. These recommendations can be advantageous for both the church as denomination and the church nationally. Furthermore, the desired purpose of this research is to assist in bringing the church within the South African context in line with international theological developments, while at the same time being a directory for countries that are wrestling with similar predicaments.

The existent bipolar tension between the church and the modern world is a threat to the survival of the church and as such, it is envisioned that this research will contribute to the prevention of the irrelevancy of the church by presenting a

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[2] Although Pentecostalism is considered to be part of Protestantism by most theologians, some still differentiate between the two. Lederle (1990:10) explains that there is a long tradition of dividing Christendom into three: Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. He argues that such a classification has its merits, although problems occur as soon as one tries to define the respective groupings. There are major divisions amongst the Orthodox, depending on whether they accept the Christological formulations of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon (321 and 451 respectively) or not. There have been numerous though minor splits within Roman Catholicism. In Europe it is customary to make a further distinction between Protestant and Free churches. This regularly includes Pentecostals, Adventists, Mennonites, Nazarenes and Baptists, but may also encompass the more main line or conciliar groupings such as the Methodists. Nevertheless, all subsequent references to the church within this study imply both the Protestant and Pentecostal traditions, unless specified otherwise.

[3] Besides Protestantism and Pentecostalism, the necessity occasionally arises to refer to the Roman Catholic tradition within this thesis. This is due to historical facts concerning the early church.

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recommendation whereby the identity and relevance of the church remains balanced and intact. A further purpose of the research is to specifically address the matter of identity and relevance in such a way so as to demonstrate the close relationship that it has to other areas relative to the church as indicated in point 3 below.

2.   Terminology

Terminology is concerned with the body of specialised words relating to a particular subject, or the defining of such words. As this dissertation is primarily concerned with the terms *church, essence, identity* and *relevance*, the implied meanings of these four words in relation to this study will be explained below. It must be borne in mind that a lengthy discussion of each term will not be possible here, although each term may justify such an extensive explanation. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this research only a brief explanation of each term will be presented here, although the accompanying chapters will expand more thereon.

2.1   Church[4]

In the context of this thesis, the term *church* demarcates that group of individual persons who are depicted as the people of God in the New Testament (1 Pet 2:9). Paul describes the church as *the body of Christ* because of its union with Christ (Eph 1:22-23). Ferguson & Wright (1988:141) state:

> The church may be defined as God sees it, the so-called 'church invisible'. This is composed of all whose names are in the Lamb's book of life (Rev 21:27). The 'church visible', on the other hand, is the church as we see it, the family of believers. This distinction guards against equating membership in the church visible with salvation, or, on the other hand, disregarding public identification with God's people.

The local church is understood to be part of the universal church, yet the church proper. The Nicene Creed confesses 'one holy catholic and apostolic church'. It is *one* because God who binds it to himself by Word and Spirit is the one creator and redeemer making the church an instrument for the redemption of mankind. It is *holy* because God is holy and through Jesus Christ has sanctified the church by making it his body, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is *catholic* because it is universally present proclaiming God's salvific act to humanity wherever it is. It is *apostolic* because the Word of God that creates and sustains the church is the gospel primarily and

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[4] I am aware of the theological implications concerning the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the church. Reference is made thereto in Part 1 of this study on page 17.

normatively borne witness to by the apostles, making it community[5] based on the foundation of apostolic teaching. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, as recipients of revelation (Eph 3:4-5), Jesus Christ being the Chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20). Membership of the church is restricted to individual persons that have experienced rebirth (Jn 3:3) and as such have been baptised into Christ's body by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). The church is nothing less than the body of Christ – the organism to which he gives spiritual life and through which he manifests the fullness of his power and grace.

Therefore the church cannot be defined in merely human terms, as an aggregate of individuals associated for social, benevolent or even spiritual purposes. There is a transcendent element in the church. It is the great company of persons whom Christ has saved, in whom he dwells, to whom and through whom he reveals God (Eph 1:22, 23). Union with Christ is the presupposition of the church. This alone transforms the sinner into a Christian and this alone makes possible that vital and spiritual fellowship between individuals, which constitutes the organising principle of the church. The indwelling Christ makes the church superior to and more permanent than all humanitarian organisations. They die, but because Christ lives, the church lives also.[6]

2.2 Essence

Within this thesis the term *essence* does not refer to the identity of the church (local or universal) based on cultural or historic expression, but rather to the biblical essence thereof. By focusing on the biblical essence of the church, the tendency of viewing it with cultural or historic attachments is reduced. The biblical essence of the church is indissolubly linked to God's redemptive grace available to humanity. Apart from this the church cannot exist. Gove (1961:777) defines essence as:

> The properties or attributes that every member of a species or class of things must necessarily have, in order to belong to that class.

Grenz, Guretzki & Nordling (1999:46) offer the following definition for essence:

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[5] The fact that the church was intended to be a community rather than an institution is discussed on page 127, point 3.

[6] For a more detailed discussion on the biblical use of the term *church*, the origin and founder thereof, see page 24, point 2.

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> Essence is the fundamental nature of something apart from which the thing would not be what it is. Essence, then, is the core of what makes something what it is without being something else.

Consequently, the essence of the church implies that there is a property or attribute that every member of the church universal must necessarily partake of in order to belong thereto. Apart from this property or attribute, no person can claim to be part of the church, nor can the church claim to be the church without such persons. It is from this essence of the church that all other attributes thereof develop. Christ stated that he would build his church (Mt 16:18), which forms a significant part of the kingdom of God. In order for any individual to enter or see the kingdom of God, he or she must be born again (Jn 3:3-5). From this it may be argued that the essence of the church is indissolubly linked to the new birth.[7]

Heyns (1982:317) describes the essence of the church as follows:

> Essence here implies the core of the church, which if removed or not present will mean that we no longer, or never have anything to do with the church. The church is not the building where services are held, nor the minister or church council and even more so, not the meeting of the synod. Article 27[8] states that the church is a meeting of all who truly believe in Christ, all who expect there total redemption in Jesus Christ and are washed in his blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost. It is clear that the church consists of people, but not of all people on earth. Of the people that do belong to the church and as such constitute the church, the following is said: a. They truly believe in Christ; b. They have been washed in his blood; c. They form a meeting; d. They expect their total redemption in Jesus Christ and, e. They are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament the church is described by various images such as a building, or a body. In his discussion of the essence of the church, Julien (1998:148-153) maintains that the two principal images used by Paul in Ephesians are the spiritual building and the spiritual body. They are so closely related that Paul occasionally mixes his metaphors, speaking of a building that grows (Eph 2:21) and a body being built (Eph 4:12). In reference to the building, Peter refers to the members thereof as being *newborn babes* and *lively stones* (1 Pet 2:1,5). Poole (1990:903) maintains that Peter, pursuant to his earlier discourse (1 Pet 1:23) where he speaks of his listeners as being born again, here refers to them as *newborn babes* as opposed, not

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[7] See the detailed discussion of the new birth on page 60 point 7.1.
[8] The late Prof Heyns was a member of the Dutch Reformed church, therefore this article refers to their confessional documents.

to adulthood, but rather to their former unregenerate state. This implies that in their unregenerate state they were not *lively stones* built into the spiritual building, namely the church. However, seeing that they are born again (newborn babes), they have now become lively stones and are built up a spiritual house (church). In view of the definition of essence as presented above, namely that it is the fundamental nature of something apart from which the thing would not be what it is, it becomes clear that the essence of the church is irrevocably linked to the new birth or regeneration.[9] Therefore it seems that regeneration may be said to be the permanently valid, constantly binding and indispensable element of the church[10].

2.3   Identity[11]

Sykes (1976:533) defines identity as: *absolute sameness; individuality, personality; equality of two expressions for all values of the literal quantities, expression of this, e.g. $(x+1)^2 = x^2+2x+1$.* From this we may assume that the term 'identity' implies the sameness or likeness of personal being to oneself or of one thing to another, providing that similar characteristics are present in both.

Williamson (2000:675) states that the occurrence of misjudgements of identity is possible because one thing can be presented in many guises. He continues by saying,

> Identity judgements often involve assumptions about the nature of things. The identity of the present mature tree with the past sapling implies persistence through change.

The above statement may ring true to the church. The identity of the church may be misjudged because of its many guises, yet the identity of the 'mature' church of the twenty-first century with the early church of Pentecost, may imply persistence through change. The many guises of the church could therefore be the result of change brought about by persistence, to such an extent, that the church seemingly may be deprived of its identity. This deprivation of identity, as defined above, will thus imply the lack of sameness or likeness of personal being to oneself or of one thing to another, as similar characteristics are seemingly not present in both. The term

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[9] See the discussion of the concept "born again" on page 60, point 7.1.

[10] Obviously, the abiding substance of the faith of the church is Jesus Christ. The point under discussion here, however, concerns the qualities or characteristics that form the essence of the church, thus the focus is on the church itself, rather than on Christ.

[11] A more detailed discussion of the terms identity and relevance is found on page 92, point 2 of this study, including amongst others reference to Moltmann's theological view thereof.

identity - in relation to the church - within this thesis indicates sameness or likeness of one thing to another, providing that similar characteristics are present in both,[12] despite persistent change. Potgieter (1998:1) defines identity as "the collective presence of a set of characteristics by which something is clearly recognisable and distinguishable".[13] An assessment of the church is presented within this research, whereby the reader may verify whether it (the church) conforms to the above definition or not.

2.4   Relevance[14]

Relevance is defined by Sykes (1976:946) as: Bearing on or pertinent to the matter in hand. The metaphor "in hand" within this definition implies that which is relevant is that which is in reach, that which can be handled, that which has direct practical application to one's present state and needs. In view hereof, the term *relevance* within this thesis is employed to indicate the measure of the church's direct practical application of its conviction and purpose to the present state and needs of the world.

Obviously *relevance* may also be described as an absolutely relative term. In his definition of the term, Mautner (1996:481) maintains that "a statement, a consideration that is said to be relevant, must be understood to be relevant to something: *relevance* is always relational." Consequently it is a term that cannot function independently. Hence it is appropriate to give it a reference point like: relevance to knowledge, relevance to experience, relevance to life in general or relevance to meaning and identity. Since the church is made up of individuals as explained above,[15] church relevance will therefore include something that is perceived as having a useful or an important bearing on individual lives. It may be the quality of an experience, belief, theory or value that is pertinent and useful and which bestows or enhances personal meaning by providing new or potentially interesting insights.

Synonyms of *relevance* listed by Kirkpatrick (1996:672) include: applicable, pertinent, apposite, appurtenant, germane, admissible, appropriate, apt, fitting and to the

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[12] Later discussion reveals that *both* - within this study - refers to Christ on the one hand and the church on the other.
[13] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.
[14] See note 11.
[15] See the discussion of the term *church* on page 5, point 2.1.

point/purpose. From this list it may be perceived that the criteria for determining what qualifies as relevant, will vary from culture to culture and from one age to the next. As a result, a criterion for relevance of the church is open to cultural and dative evaluation. This criterion will be adhered to in this study.

3. Relational important areas

Under this heading follows a brief explanation of the close relationship between identity and relevance to other areas relative to the church.

3.1 Identity, relevance and God

A clear understanding of the *Cause* of Christianity is imperative before we can speak of identity, relevance and God - he who is the *Cause*. It seems that many people do not fully accept the truth of God, but rather, are unenthusiastic about him because of the church's apparent failure to demonstrate the reality of God via its activities. This failure leads to a total misconception of Christianity, which if God is true, should also be true. The truth of Christianity is not based on its creeds – though it should be true to its creeds. Nor is Christianity a *product* of the Bible, though it should be true to the inspiration of Scripture. The basis of Christianity is that it is true to *what is really there*. Christianity's task is to explain the truth about humanity and the universe – the origin and *cause* thereof – the truth that God *is there*. Christianity assumes that this God is not impersonal, but personal and that Christians can have a personal relationship with God. This suggests the possibility of identity with God for all Christians. This identity must advocate an intellectual knowledge and integrity that can be utilized within the modern environment in which Christians find them. Conversely, this knowledge must be practical and lead the Christian on into adoration of God, with all of themselves, including their intellect.

However, we have to ask, "Is a personal and practical relationship possible with the God who *is there* and how do we know that God *is there?* Is Christianity misrepresenting God because of a lack of understanding? Moreover, is this not perhaps the reason why there is no reality either in our individual or corporate Christian living and spiritual life?" Belief in God as a personal God with whom twenty-first century Christians may have a personal relationship, would mean that God would be a relevant God that is active in our day and age. This would imply that if God were relevant, his church should also be relevant, for is it not the church that is

instructed to convey God's plan of salvation for all humanity, to all nations, with the surety that God will be with them unto the end (Mt 28:19)? The final product of the church's proclamation of the Gospel message should therefore be salvation for those that hearken thereto. Yet is seems that there are many *listeners* (church members) but few that *hearken*. Can this be because of the church's failure of understanding God or is it due to the irrelevancy of God? On the contrary, if God is irrelevant it would nullify the existence of the church and its message, while Paul's words would become a reality to humanity, namely that *we are to be pitied more than all men* (1 Cor 15:19).

These introductory questions illustrate the need for research vis-à-vis the balance between identity and relevance within the modern church.

3.2   Identity, relevance and community

In this chapter community refers to the church as a community. Dulles (1987:47) explains the term community well when he states that,

> In postmodern-modern sociology it has become commonplace to contrast two types of social relationship: a formally organised or structured society and an informal or interpersonal community. The two types are often referred to by their German names, *Gesellschaft* (society) and *Gemeinschaft* (community). *Gesellschaft* is a human association characterised by formal organisation, structures and office, such as the secular state, the school, the hospital, and the hotel. The organisation is maintained by competent authority, which is normally institutionalised in the form of office ….. Since the institutionalised categories ….. cannot do justice to the full reality of the church, it is to be expected that theologians would turn to the other member of the pair to illuminate the nature of the church.

From here he goes on to explain that Charles H. Cooley developed the term *Gemeinschaft* further in his description of primary groups.[16] The chief characteristics of these groups included face-to-face association; the unspecialised character of the association; relative permanence; a small number of persons involved and relative intimacy among the participants. Examples of such groups suggested by Cooley were the family, the household and the old fashioned neighbourhood. He maintains however, that what is distinctive to the church is the vertical dimension – the divine life disclosed in the incarnate Christ and communicated to humanity by the Spirit. It is this element that differentiates between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft.*

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[16] For further reading see Charles H Cooley, 1909. *Social Organisation.* New York: Schocken Books.

In order to preserve and demonstrate identity and relevance, the church must be a community (*Gemeinschaft*) in which others see what God has revealed through the Spirit and by the teaching of the Word. The message and the event of Calvary concerning reconciliation brought about by Christ's death and resurrection – though way back in history – must be seen as relevant by others through the community's identity with Christ's death.

The message of the cross, namely salvation – transmitted to humanity by means of the Holy Spirit - creates community between God and justified sinners, while also creating community among believers. The question as to what the nature of the people are that make up this community, is answered by the many references pertaining to the term *"one another"* as contained in the Bible, some of which are indicated below:

> The members of the community love *one another* (I Jn 4:12; Rom 13:8).
>
> The members of the community serve *one another* (Gal 5:13).
>
> The members of the community pray for *one another* (Ja 5:16: 1 Jn 5:16).
>
> The members of the community care for *one another* (1 Thes 5:14; Eph 4:2).

The above are examples of some of the characteristics whereby the community of believers is identified and which must be practised at all times. This enables it to display its unique nature and "otherness" through firm solidarity, thereby demonstrating its relevance irrespective of the era wherein it finds itself.

Jesus gave a new commandment to his disciples, namely: *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another* (Jn 13:34). This commandment not only requires that the community of believers love one another, but in a certain sense it gives those outside the community a directive whereby they may measure the identity and relevance thereof. Stated in a simpler way, it can be said that the world has a mandate from God whereby it can distinguish the disciples of Christ. If they are not identifiable with his love and their love for one another is not displayed as a

characteristic of the community, it implies that they are not his disciples and as such, can never be relevant to the extent that Christ is relevant.

The above becomes problematic when one takes into account the existence of so many differing denominations within the church. The matter of *loving one another* seems to be totally irrelevant and impossible within such a scenario. The question that immediately comes to mind is, "Can it be denied that there is not one church, but many?" This seems to imply that if every local church is *the community*, the multiplicity of these *communities* may be a bad thing in itself, as this could lead to a crisis situation with regards to the balance between identity and relevance within the church. It most assuredly will be asked, "Which is the true church in light of the differing interpretations applied to Scripture by the various denominations?" This state of affairs is problematic as it does not seem to demonstrate Christ's intended love of one another and as such demands the attention of the theologians of our day - a problematic situation that justifies a research of this nature.

3.3   Identity, Relevance and Christian

The church community discussed in the previous chapter is made up of individuals. From this it is logical to deduce that if balance between identity and relevance is necessary for the community to function true to its calling, then each individual member of the community must surely maintain this balance. This implies firstly that the individual must be *in Christ* – identifiable and steadfast. No individual can be included in the membership of the church apart from Christ. The peculiarity of these individuals is their association to the person of Christ.

From this it follows that, prior to becoming a member of the community, the individual must first of all become a Christian. Unless we understand what *Christian* means, we will find it difficult to understand the meaning of *community.* It must be stressed that individuals do not become Christians on the basis of their horizontal relationship to the community. This would indeed mean that individual Christians would have no more value than any other individuals horizontally related to a secular community. To illustrate this point, it can be said that an individual is a member *of the local golf club* due to the horizontal relationship with that club. There is no prerequisite demanding that such an individual must be a golfer before becoming a member. Contrary to this, no individual can become a member of the church community until first becoming a

Christian. This is brought about by a vertical relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, but is this what the church is teaching? Do people understand that *Christian* is defined to mean a follower of Christ, not a member or follower of a church?[17]

Furthermore, the individual that is *in Christ* should faithfully demonstrate the characteristics of Christ, namely the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) as befitting all his disciples. This entails a Christ-like relevancy in the individual's actions, corresponding to the community's mission. Yet it seems that in many instances, both the life of the Christian and the life of the community are not based on the existence of a vertical relationship with God. Any concept of a vertical relationship with God must be based on the fact that God exists and is personal, and that the individual - who is made in his image (Gn 1:26) - is therefore also personal.

In view hereof, it is not an unnatural thing to be in a personal relationship with God. How the Christian functions can therefore never simply be in a scholastic orthodoxy, but rather, must reveal the balance between identity with God and relevancy within the world by virtue of this personal relationship. This balance should be demonstrated by the stress on biblical truth and doctrine in practice. From this we deduce that our understanding of the term *Christian,* will to a great extent determine how we experience and practice our relationship with God. This demands that this research includes an investigation into the importance of a vertical relationship between God and the individual – an indispensable relationship if balance between identity and relevance is to be a reality.

3.4   Identity, relevance and dogma

The church is founded on Christ, who is the head[18] thereof (Eph 5:23; Mt 16:18), while the message that it proclaims is founded on the content of the Holy Bible (2 Tim 3:16). This implies that the Bible, which is God's word,[19] is the only norm by which theologians can continually test the soundness and purity of the church's message, which must always be measured and determined thereby. This foundation never

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[17] Obviously a Christian cannot be Christian and not belong to *the church*. But here I am attempting to stress the fact that being a Christian is impossible as a member of *a* church (denomination) only, yet without Christ.

[18] The question: "Who is Christ?" is debated on page 39, point 4.4

[19] I am aware of ongoing debates on the question of, whether the Bible is the Word of God or whether it only contains the Word of God. Although this problem is not the theme of this research, it may be said that irrespective of what one's view may be in this regard, the Bible still remains the only basis for Christian doctrine.

changes (Eph 2:20; Heb 13:8; Mt 24:35) and should therefore always be the basis applied in the formulation of dogma.

 Theologians, in order to indicate an ecclesiological formulation of a facet of God's revelation that is authoritative and should be accepted as such, use the term 'dogma'. In simpler terms it may be said that 'dogma' is a core biblical truth, formulated by the church and confessed with authority. The church must be careful to stand clearly for truth, both in dogma and in practice, even when it is costly. Two religions that teach exactly opposite views may both be wrong, but they most certainly cannot both be right. Anything that is contrary to God's revealed truth is not true, even if it is couched in Hindu terms or traditional Christian terms with new meanings.

The identity and relevance of the church is inseparably linked to both the founder and the dogma thereof. This statement already proves the necessity of balance between identity and relevance, in that the church must be identifiable with the Author of its only dogmatic norm - the Bible - and this dogma must remain relevant to its context at all times. The above necessity is supported by the truth that Paul presents Christ as the head of the church (Eph 5:23). Illustrating this by the image of marriage, wherein the man and the woman become one (v.31), Paul goes on to compare this to the oneness of Christ and his church (v.32), the Head and the body, which are inseparable. With this in mind, it is clear that there can never be autocephalous or autonomous churches. The body (church) can only exist in total dependence on the Head (Christ). The dogma of the church is the consequence of the Word as delivered to it by the Head.

In view hereof, the church must execute its dogmatic convictions in a relevant way, addressing the problems of the day and age dynamically and meaningfully, since every successive century brings with it a new worldview. At the same time the church must identify itself with these convictions. The dogma of a church should be deducible from its activities. This may require a change in emphasis from the church's necessity of dogma to the necessity for the church's identity therewith. An example illustrating the importance of this statement is found when the dogmatic conviction of the church's belief in the existence of God is contrasted to the God-is-

dead theology - prompted by secularisation and scientific progress - and asserted by prominent theologians.

It is evident from the above that the postmodern climate is totally different to that of the past, introducing new challenges and problems that need to be addressed. The answers to these new challenges and problems will most certainly shed more light on the importance of constant balance between identity and relevance within the postmodern church. However, to arrive at these answers will require that this research investigate the balance between identity and relevance within the early church, the challenges it faced and the climate and challenges in which the postmodern church needs to function.

This will imply that an analysis be included of contemporary needs in the light of the fact that the cultural, political and religious ideologies of today could obviously not be addressed in previous eras. On the one hand, this endorses the fact that the theme of this research is crucial for determining whether theologians, theology and the church are still able to speak of God in a trustworthy way, without forfeiting either identity or relevance. On the other hand, it forces the church to give a credible and theoretical account of the viability of preserving the balance between its identity and relevance amid the situation.

1   Introductory remarks

With the passing of time in current secular history, the time-bound ecological global crisis and the consequent global depletion of resources have dwarfed all other world problems. For the serious theologian, a comparable crisis would be concerning the church. Sumithra (1989:3) is of the opinion that never before in either sacred or secular history has the Christian church been asserted to be so sick, so irrelevant universally, particularly in those regions and histories where Christendom is a dead corpse (although every now and then heart pacers have been vigorously attempted). The world is perennially searching for a paradigm, which can give meaning to human society, but for one reason or another the church has not been a candidate. This has left the theological sphere filled with the dust of unanswered questions such as: Should not the church always remain militant or a *little flock*? Is it not antiquated? How best and radically should the church be restructured in order to be salvaged? After all, Jesus gave himself to us as the way, not the church; and so the questions go on and on.

The twenty-first century church has in all probability received more attention from theologians, than in any other preceding age. This attention is not without reason, for seen in the whole, it seems as if it is not going well with the church. Throughout its history, the church has survived many a crisis and just as many onslaughts. It appears that there never has been a period within its history, wherein the church was not threatened by dangers, temptations and even the possibility of internal and/or external degeneration. Nonetheless, it seems as if today's church finds itself facing a distinctive crisis that it has never experienced before. De Klerk (1998:13) states that,

> It is not an exaggeration to say that it is becoming a crisis: a faith crisis, because God is disappearing from life's experiences; a theological crisis, because new ideologies are challenging old traditional doctrines to debate; a church crisis wherein the church is scrambling and bending backward to hush the anxiety of its people.[20]

During the last three centuries, the church has found itself to be the centre of disparaging criticism. This has been brought about by the development of modern

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[20] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

realism together with the emancipation of the human spirit, as expressed through secularisation. Since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, this development has caused not only the Christian faith but also the Christian church, to be the focal point of critical crossfire. Obviously this has brought with it unprecedented problems for the church. However, whether the Enlightenment alone is to be seen as the initial cause of the situation is debateable.[21]

Jonker (1987:3) maintains that it brought about a noteworthy falling-away of individuals from the church, especially in the Western world. At first it seemed only to be the intelligentsia, philosophers and the scientists that distanced themselves there from, but the numbers continued to increase and by the nineteenth-century a mechanically materialistic worldview took the place previously occupied by the Christian-life worldview. From then on the disapproval of the church and Christianity becomes an everyday phenomenon. Where previously, breaking bonds with the church was considered to be a matter of conscience and the church experienced a biting opposition, the advancement of secularisation and the visible dechristianisation of large sectors of public and personal life in the West, brought about a change of attitude. The church no longer (except in communist countries) seems faced with open opposition, but rather finds it facing a disinterested people and the conviction that the church is no longer meaningful to modern humanity.

Nel (2003:18) maintains that it is clear from statistics and the available literature, that church abandonment is becoming a huge problem. According to him, 35,000 people leave the church every Sunday in Europe. He also quotes Richter and Francis[22] as saying that 1,500 people are leaving British churches every week. This figure does not include those that have died or those that move from one church to another.[23]

Brown (2001:3) has the following to say about the decline of Christianity in Britain:

> What scholars have imagined is religious decline as a long-term process that has left today's Britons with a residual Christian belief but no churchgoing habit. In all of these cases, Christian decay in Britain has been perceived as a decline without an imagined end. (This book imagines the end.)
> The first and most obvious manifestation is the Christian churches in crises. In the year 2000 less than 8 per cent of people attend Sunday worship in any week, less than a quarter are members of any church, and

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[21] See discussion in part three of this thesis, on page 122.
[22] This quotation is apparently taken from their book, *Gone, but not forgotten.*
[23] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

fewer than a tenth of children attend a Sunday school. Fewer than half of couples get married in church, and about a third of couples cohabit without marriage.

The church in South Africa finds itself in a similar position to that in Britain and Europe, namely that of Christian decay. In a recent inaugural speech, Hendriks (2003:5-11) highlighted the current trends in South Africa. Amongst others, he commented that it was evident that all the established churches that came to South Africa from Europe and that have retained their European identity and theology have basically lost their share of the Christian market. He elaborates hereon, mentioning the fact that the significant characteristic in the white and the coloured population groups is that the Reformed and Anglican Churches have lost their market share in favour of the Pentecostal/Charismatic[24] new generation Churches. According to Hendriks statistics indicate that the Reformed family of churches, of which the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) family comprises over ninety percent, have lost their share of the market in all population groups. This also applies to the Presbyterian Church.

Strauss (2001:37) maintains that the church, on the Southern tip of Africa, is under pressure because for many people its continued existence is irrelevant as it no longer addresses human problems, answers their questions or stimulates their imagination.[25] Obviously, this is not a problem limited to the tip of Africa, but an international problem that is presenting theologians, all over the globe, with new challenges. In an editorial article, Bray (1995:195-196) maintains that it seems, after reading newspaper articles over the past months, that at last, the chickens are coming home to roost. He argues that a generation has now gone by in which it was generally assumed that the church would have to make itself relevant to the younger generation, if it was going to survive the next century. In practise, this meant abandoning most of what could be called traditional styles of worship and exchanging long, expository sermons for short, snappy presentations whose appeal would not be lost on the lazy and uneducated.

Apparently, the purveyors of this approach were never quite trendy enough to match the secular media, which always seem to be just that much glitzier than their

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[24] Although these churches have gained numerically, they have declined spiritually. This is discussed in the concluding part of this study on page 186.
[25] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

Christian imitators. Nevertheless, it was almost accepted as dogma in certain circles that, without jeans and a guitar, no one would be won for the Lord. The seriousness that marks so much evangelistic work in the 1950's has all but disappeared, and it is now extremely difficult to find a church that consistently offers meaty sermons for mature Christians to digest.

Critics of these developments have long hinted that all the froth and bubble would evaporate one day, leaving precious little behind. We have perhaps not reached that point yet, but at the same time we ought to recognise that there is no smoke without fire, and that behind the various assertions and criticisms there lies a fundamentally wrongheaded approach to "doing" church.

From this, the question concerning the identity and relevance of the church within a modern world is brought to the forefront. If the church is currently experiencing decay, it implies that the church has more than likely lost its identity and has become irrelevant. It is not too serious a situation for the church to be opposed or challenged to give account of the hope that is within it. But it is disastrous for the church to be totally ignored or considered worthless by the world.

Such a judgement will obviously be a painful accusation for the church to accept, because it is the church that is called to be instrumental in the salvation of the world and it is indeed normality for the church to believe that it may never loose its identity or become irrelevant. On the one hand, the church can never doubt that its message of salvation has the ability to present the world with answers to the most searching questions. Given that the church bears witness to the love of God for the world and the kingly reign of Jesus over the entire world, it can never accept being marginalized and irrelevant. On the other hand, the church cannot ignore the fact that within postmodernism, many consider it to have lost its identity and relevance.

Even though the church knows that Christian faith will not be realised in every individual (2 Thes 3:2), implying that there will always be those who will reject the message of the church, it also knows that the gospel is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16). Therefore there will always be those that are regenerated by its message and added to the church. The church also believes that the Word, which it proclaims, holds the answer to the disquieting questions of humanity. In view hereof

the church must endeavour not to be side-lined by irrelevancy, but to create opportunities to proclaim its message in the public arena, so as to show that it does have meaning for the totality of human existence.

Indeed, the Bible does mention the fact that in the last days[26] there will be an abandonment of the faith in the church (1 Tim 4:1). Yet, because the church does not know the time of the Lord's return, it may never at any point in time, decide that its period of witness has now expired and thereby allow itself to be manoeuvred to the margin of society. Further, the church cannot ignore the fact that there seems to be so many witnesses against it claiming that for scores of people, it has lost its identity and become irrelevant. In view hereof it should continually be intensively occupied in identifying the causes while at the same time seeking viable solutions therefor.

This indeed is important, as the possibility always exists that the church may have lost its identity and relevance, either because of deeds of its own, or due to society's lack of understanding of what the church and its calling really is. The fact that faith is a gift of God and that the church itself cannot furnish the salvation of which it testifies,[27] does not imply that the church has no responsibility as to how the message is delivered to the world. It is possible that the church, through its own disobedience, short-sightedness, lethargy and secularisation can degenerate to an inoperative tool in serving the purpose of God and his kingdom and that its chandelier may be removed from its place (Rev 2:5). If the church has lost its identity and become irrelevant to society, it must ask itself whether this situation is merely due to society's intolerance of the unadulterated Word of God, or is it perhaps because of God's wrath revealed against the church as a result of its disobedience; or are there other possible causes?

The above facts, together with the critical situation in which the church finds itself, not only in South Africa but also worldwide, stimulates self-examination by the church. It must again consider its role within a secularised society, always keeping in mind the question of how the world can be reached, how its doubts can be answered and how it can be helped to understand that for which the church stands. This is of vital importance for it. Unless the church finds satisfactory answers to these questions, it

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[26] See second paragraph under point 1 on page 123 for a discussion of the "last days".
[27] This view is opposed by Roman Catholicism, which maintains that there is no salvation apart from the church.

will most certainly be - if not already so - at a loss of identity and become irrelevant, or, if already so, will remain sidelined to irrelevancy.

Some theologians may believe the cause to be the inevitable spread of secularisation (a world-view necessarily without God) and an unparalleled abundance of material wealth. In any case, for Bible-believing Christians the nature and relevance of the church in the contemporary world is the key issue, as myriads of publications and discussions on the subject in the last decade reveal. It is suspected that these inquiries will become more intensified, more numerous and more urgent everywhere in the coming decade. A common nostalgic view aired in many church circles is the loss of influence by the church in the public domain. Older Christians can remember when churches were impacting the world and were renowned as "light-houses" in the community. Sadly, it seems that this is no longer the case, although the African Initiated Churches (AIC)[28] might be impacting or influencing their society in some relevant way.[29]

McManus (2001:30), elaborating on the effect of "churches that meet our (the community) needs", is of the opinion that the church has become a refuge from the world rather than a force in the world. From this it seems that there is some confusion as to the essence, identity and relevance of the church. To say that there is a great deal of confusion about the essence of the church is certainly an understatement. By reading the material that comes from "theological" pens today, it seems that many have never come to grips with just what the church of the Lord is. It should come as no surprise that some theologians have problems understanding what the true nature of the church is. Perhaps this could be ascribed to a want for seeking biblical authority for what they believe, say, and do.

With this in mind, this thesis focuses on understanding the essence of the church together with hermeneutical considerations for maintaining balance between the

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[28] The term "African Instituted Churches" (AIC) is an academically accepted term for church groupings founded and led by Africans with no or little missionary support.

[29] It is obvious that within any discussion of the church, the matter of culture and race will play a significant role. As I am not discussing ecclesiology itself within this study, but rather addressing the problem relative to identity and relevance within Protestant and Pentecostal churches (see point 1.5 on page 4), the element of culture and race in not included here. Therefore the relevant statement above does not include the AIC as they, according to Tshelane (2000:138), have been contributing to the spirituality of liberation for the past one hundred and twenty years. Nonetheless, I do believe that a similar study concerned with the far reaching implications of culture and race within Christianity could be warranted in the future.

identity and relevance thereof. At the outset it is essential to clearly distinguish or explain what the author perceives, implies and understands by the term *church.* It must be explicably stated that this study does not include a functional or organisational approach to understanding the church, as these approaches seem to rely heavily on the social sciences. Although these sciences may be helpful, the primary focus of these perspectives emphasise the human dimensions of the church life. However, the church is more than just another human organisation. The church exists in the world as a human enterprise, but it consists of the redeemed people of God, a people who God created by the Spirit to accomplish his redemptive purpose in the world.

Moltmann (1992:1) explains that the church is the people of God and will give an account of itself at all times to the God who has called it into being, liberated it and gathered it. It is therefore before the divine forum that it will reflect upon its life and the forms that life takes, what it says and what it does not say, what it does and what it neglects to do. But the church is at the same time under obligation to humanity (Rom 1:14). Consequently it will at all times render an account to humanity about the commission implicit in its faith and the way it is fulfilling that commission. It will reflect on its life and the expression of its life in the forum of the world.

In the community of the incarnate God and the exalted man Jesus Christ there can be no division here. The church will always have to present itself both in the forum of God and in the forum of the world, for it stands for God to the world, and it stands for the world before God.

Nonetheless, before the church can accomplish or fulfil God's redemptive purpose on earth, it needs to understand its essence, or put another way, we need to understand what it means to be church. In order to do this we must start from a theological perspective. The church is before all a *faith-community* with inalienable characteristics, which can never be separated from its institutional form. The critical question is: "What is the Church?" To answer this question we firstly need to understand the meaning and application of the word *church*. This is explained below, followed by a progressive discussion of relative aspects related to the church. These,

amongst others, include a discussion of the relationship of the church to the kingdom of God.[30]

2.   The word *church*[31]

The word church is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia.* According to Jay (1977:3), its first occurrence as applied to a group of Christians is in the first verse of Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians: *Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, to the church (ekklesia) of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* First Thessalonians is the earliest extant Christian document, being written about 50 CE,[32] some fifteen years before the earliest date which scholars are prepared to assign to Mark's Gospel. There are a number of aspects about the church, which can be learned from this document. Several assertions could be made relying on its internal evidence alone:

    i.   The church includes a group of people in Thessalonica, a town in Macedonia, which Paul had visited some months before (2.1).

    ii.   At the time of this visit he had communicated to them the gospel of God (2.2,9). This gospel was also the gospel of Christ (3.2). It declared that one named Jesus, whom Paul calls *Christ* and *Lord,* is the Son whom God the father has sent into the world to bring salvation to it (5.9). Jesus had suffered and died (2.15), but he rose again (1.10; 4.14) and will come again to *establish* them before God (3.13) so that they may be with their Lord (4.17).

    iii.   This group in Thessalonica had accepted this gospel and had become believers (2.13). As a consequence they had received power and inspiration from the Holy Spirit (1.5-6; 5.19), and had become imitators of Jesus, of Paul and other apostles and of other churches in Judea, especially in the courageous enduring of suffering (1.6; 2.14). In turn they had proclaimed and spread the same gospel to others

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[30] Within this chapter the terms "kingdom of God" and/or "kingdom of heaven" are used interchangeably, unless the context implies otherwise. Furthermore reference to these terms may at times be quoted as "kingdom" only.

[31] A brief definition of the term *church* is given on page 5, point 2.1. Nevertheless, it is necessary to say more on this theme in the light of the purpose of this thesis. I must emphasise that a detailed discussion of ecclesiology, or for that matter any one of the other theological disciplines, will be too enormous for this paper. Therefore the ecclesiological discussion in this chapter is comparatively short, however, the purpose being only to illustrate the author's understanding and interpretation of the term for the purpose of this study.

[32] Some have argued that it was written later, from Ephesus, on Paul's third missionary journey, but the earlier date of 50 BCE, from Athens, gains the widest acceptance.

(1.8; 4.10). An outgoing love had become characteristic of their lives daily (3.6,12; 4.9-10), motivated by the desire to please God (4.1), and they lived in expectation of the coming of Jesus, their Lord, who would bring them to their final salvation (1.10; 5.1-11).

iv. The group of people whom Paul addresses is a local church. It is the church of the Thessalonians, but it is not a self-contained group isolated from other Christian groups. It is actively in contact with *all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia* (1.7; 4.10). Paul conceives of them also as having an intimate relationship with *the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judaea,* despite the difference in race (2.14). Paul himself and Timothy, who had recently paid them a second visit (3.2), provided their main links with the churches in the more distant places.

v. The group met together regularly. This is implied by the references to prayer (5.17), prophesying (5.20), mutual encouragement (5.11) and by Paul's assumption that there would be opportunities for his greetings to be conveyed and his letter read to the brethren.

vi. The church of the Thessalonians evidently regarded Paul as a person of authority. He himself, though he addressed them as *brethren* (1.4), thought of himself as a father over them who not only had the duty of exhorting, encouraging and charging them while he was with them (2.11), but also claimed the right to do so by letter when he was absent (5.12 ff). That this claim was recognised is shown by the content of the report that Timothy, after his second visit, had brought back to Paul (3.6-8). Nevertheless, the community had its local leaders, *those who labour among you and are over you* [*proistamenoi humõn,* literally *those who stand before you*] *in the Lord and admonish you,* whom Paul charges the Thessalonians to respect and esteem (5.12-13).

These six paragraphs summarise what we could learn about the church if 1 Thessalonians were the only document at our disposal. The letter has much to tell us about what the members of this church believed and how they acted, but little about its essence and constitution. Fortunately 1 Thessalonians is not our only documentary evidence for the church. Within a few years the church had been

planted in many places, from Palestine and Syria westward to Italy. A lively literature grew up within the next few decades to which Paul contributed several more letters. These were collected together in what we now call the New Testament. From these, more information relevant to the essence and constitution of the church can be collected. A useful examination of the word *ekklesia* will be helpful to establish the essence of that to which it refers.

3.   The word *ekklesia*

As previously mentioned, the word that is translated *church,* is the Greek word *ekklesia* in the New Testament. Vine ([1940] 1985:83) explains that the word *ekklesia* is derived from *ek* (meaning out of) and *klèsis* (meaning a calling - *kaleò,* to call). Vine explains the biblical usage of the term further by adding that:

> It was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens gathered to discuss the affairs of the State, (Ac 19:39). In the Septuagint it is used to designate the gathering of Israel, summoned for any definite purpose, or a gathering regarded as representative of the whole nation… It has two applications to companies of Christians, (a) to the whole company of the redeemed throughout the present era, the company of which Christ said, "I will build my church"…. (b) in the singular number (e.g. Mt 18:17 … "congregation"), to a company consisting of professed believers.

It is a known fact that there are contextually - after the resurrection of Christ - many New Testament verses that contain the word *church,* which refer to congregations of Christians in a given locality. For the purpose of this chapter however, reference is not made to all of these, as this will entail an enormous study of its own. Nonetheless, the references cited below are considered adequate in order to explain the point of departure within this thesis, namely that the term *church* relates to the church universal.

Orr (1915:231) explains that the word "church," which is derived from kuriakos (of or belonging to the Lord), represents the Greek word *ekklesia* (Latin, *ecclesia*) in the English Bible versions of the New Testament. It is the signification of this word *ekklesia* (as it meets us in the New Testament) and the nature of the society that the word is there used to describe, that the present chapter is concerned with.

3.1   The pre-Christian history of the word *ekklesia*

Although ekklesia became a distinctively Christian word, it has its own pre-Christian history; and to those, whether Jews or Greeks, who first heard it applied to the

Christian society, it would come with suggestions of familiar things. Throughout the Greek world and right down to New Testament times (compare Acts 19:39), *ekklesia* was the designation of the regular assembly of the whole body of citizens in a free city-state, "called out"[33] by the herald for the discussion and decision of public business. Orr (*ibid:232*) maintains that the Septuagint translators, again, had used the word to render the Hebrew *qahal*, which in the Old Testament denotes the "congregation" or community of Israel, especially in its religious aspect as the people of God. In this Old Testament sense we find *ekklesia* employed by Stephen in the Book of Acts, where he describes Moses *as he that was in the church* (the Revised Version, margin "congregation*") in the wilderness* (Acts 7:38).

The word thus came into Christian history with associations alike for the Greek and the Jew. To the Greek it would suggest a self-governing democratic society; to the Jew a theocratic society whose members were the subjects of the heavenly king. Unger (1988:189) suggests that the word is employed to express various ideas, some of which may be scriptural, others not. It is used to signify: (1) the entire body of those who are saved by their relation to Christ; (2) a particular Christian denomination; (3) the aggregate of all the ecclesiastical communions professing faith in Christ; (4) a single organized Christian group, or (5) a building designated for Christian worship. The pre-Christian history of the word had a direct bearing upon its Christian meaning, for the ekklesia of the New Testament is a "theocratic democracy", a society of those who are free, but are always conscious that their freedom springs from obedience to their king.

3.2   The adoption of the word *ekklesia* by Jesus

The term *church* is only used twice before the resurrection, namely in Matthew 16:18: *And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church…* and in Matthew 18:17: *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church…* According to Matthew 16:18, the name *ekklesia* was first applied to the Christian community by Jesus Himself, the occasion being that of his blessing Peter at Caesarea Philippi. It is true that Jesus had up until then described the community he came to found as the "kingdom of God" or the "kingdom of heaven,"[34] a designation which had its roots in Old Testament teaching and which the messianic

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[33] See Vine's explanation of the word in point 3 on page 26.
[34] See discussion on page 73, point 8, concerning the kingdom.

expectations of Israel had already made familiar. Nevertheless, now that it was clear that he was to be rejected by the Jewish people (compare verse 21), and that his "body" must move on independent lines of its own, it was natural that he should employ a new dimension for this *body* which he was about to create and thus should say to Peter, on the ground of the apostle's believing confession: *Upon this rock I will build my church.* The church at this point was still a futuristic entity.

Du Plessis (2003:207) supports this view, stating that in Matthew 16:18 Christ is referring to the church which was *still to come* and therefore was still futuristic. Furthermore, he emphasises the significance of the Greek word for Peter, namely *petros* (stone)*,* and that for rock, namely *petra.* From this he maintains that Peter was not the rock upon which Christ would build his church, as he was only a stone. Christ's intention was to build his church on Peter's confession, namely that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God (Mt 16:16). Jesus is the *rock* (cf. 1 Cor 10:4).

The Roman Catholic interpretation of this text implies that Christ built the church on Peter,[35] and this is why their interpretation of the word *church* is so vastly different to that of Protestantism. Nonetheless, Jesus did not disclose the essence of the futuristic church as a mystical body here, as it was still a mystery. The disciples more than likely understood the term as referring to the Jewish *ekklesia* as presented in the Old Testament.

3.3   The use of *ekklesia* in the New Testament

Apart from the passage just referred to, the word ekklesia occurs in the Gospels on one other occasion only, namely in Matthew 18:17. Here, moreover, it may be questioned whether Jesus is referring to the Christian church or to Jewish congregations commonly known as synagogues (see the Revised Version, margin). The latter view is more in keeping with the situation, but the promise immediately given to the disciples of a power to bind and loose (v.18) and the assurance *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them* (v.20) are evidently meant for the followers of Christ. If, as is probable, the *ekklesia* of verse 17 is the Christian ekklesia of which Christ had already spoken to Peter, the words show that he conceived of the church as a community possessing powers of self-

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[35] See the second paragraph on page 129 concerning Romanism

government, in which questions of discipline were to be decided by the collective judgment of the members.

Concerning Matthew 18:17, Du Plessis (2004:261) explains that Christ is talking to his disciples about forgiveness and explains it as follows:

> He (Jesus) said: if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the *church (ekklesia)*; And if he refuses even to listen to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. The reference to tax collector probably reminded the disciples of the Jewish assembly of believers. Also, in this passage Jesus did not reveal the essence of the coming church as the mystical body of Christ comprising both Jew and Gentile (see Mt 18:15-17).

From this expounding of the word *church*, it seems that Christ referred to a future body in Matthew 16:18, while referring to a present assembly of believers in Matthew 18:17 that were to act as judicators. This is also Chafer's (1988:203) understanding of the word *church* which he also explains is taken from the Greek word *ekklesia* meaning 'assembly'. He goes on to say that:

> In the history of Greece the assembly of citizens to consider legislation in a Greek town was called *ekklesia,* meaning an assembly of people gathered in one place. It is used in this sense of the assembly of the Jews in the desert. In the New Testament it is also used of congregations of Christians in a given locality and is used in this sense at least a hundred times. In some instances however, it is used of the church or the body of believers regardless of geographic location.

In addition to the above, Chafer (*ibid:*203) explains that due to the Septuagint's use of *ekklesia* for assemblies in the Old Testament, some have argued from this that the church is also in the Old Testament. He maintains that a study of the Hebrew words translated *ekklesia* demonstrates that "the word is never used in the Old Testament in a religious sense and is used only of a geographic assembly of people whether it has a religious connotation or not." However, a careful reading of the New Testament reveals that *ekklesia*, which refers to assemblies that were churches, is used in a purely religious sense of *all* those who were united by faith in Christ since his resurrection.

3.3.1 The use of *ekklesia* in Acts

In Acts the ekklesia has come to be the regular designation for the community of Christian believers, but is employed in two distinct senses. First in a local sense, to denote the body of Christians in a particular place or district, as in Jerusalem (Acts 5:11; 8:1), in Antioch (13:1; 15:22), in Caesarea (18:22), a usage which reappears in the Apocalypse in the letters to the Seven Churches. Then in a wider and what may be called a universal sense, to denote the sum total of existing local churches (9:31), which are thus regarded as forming one body.

3.3.2 The use of *ekklesia* in the Pauline Epistles

 In the Pauline Epistles both of these usages are frequent. Thus the apostle uses the word *ekklesia* of all Christians in a city. In Thessalonica, for instance, there were no doubt a number of house churches. He speaks of these together as *the church of the Thessalonians* (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1), *the church of God which is at Corinth* (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1). Consequently it is natural for him to use *ekklesia* in the plural when he wishes to refer to all the Christian communities in an area: *the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea* (1 Thess 2:14); *the churches of Galatia* (Gal 1:2); *all the churches of Christ greet you* (Rom 16:10).

Indeed, Paul also localizes and particularizes the word by applying it to a single Christian household or to little groups of believers who were accustomed to assemble in private houses for worship and fellowship. He speaks of *the church in your house* (Phm :2); he sends greetings *to Nymphas and the church in her house* (Col 4:15). He also employs the word for a group of Christians assembled for worship (1 Cor 11:18; 14:19). The universal use, again, may be illustrated by the contrast he draws between Jews and Greeks on the one hand and the church of God on the other (1 Cor 10:32) and by the declaration that God has set in the church apostles, prophets, and teachers (12:28).

In his later epistles Paul has another use of ekklesia peculiar to himself, which may be described as the ideal use. The church now is the body of which Christ is the head (Eph 1:22 ff; Col 1:18, 24). It is the medium through which God's manifold wisdom and eternal purpose are to be made known not only to all men, but to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Eph 3:9-11). It is the bride of whom Christ is the heavenly bridegroom, the bride for whom in his love he gave himself up,

that he might cleanse and sanctify her and might present her to himself a glorious church, a church without blemish, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing (5:25 ff).

This church is clearly not the actual *visible* church as we know it on earth with its divisions, its blemishes, its shortcomings in faith, love and obedience. It is the *invisible* holy and catholic church that is to be the bride when the bridegroom has completed the process of lustration, having fully *cleansed it by the washing of water with the word* (Eph 5:26). It is the ideal which the visible church must keep before it and strive after, the ideal up to which it shall finally be brought by the Divine in working power that is able to conform the body to the head, to make the bride worthy of the bridegroom, so that God may receive in the church the glory that is his (Eph 3:21).

In summary it may be said that the whole thrust of the New Testament is that the *ekklesia* is the fellowship of the risen Christ, a body of believers that are neither equal to, nor a continuation of Israel of the Old Testament, but rather a distinct entity – an extension of the ministry of Jesus Christ. This body could not exist before the resurrection of its *Head*[36] from the dead, namely Jesus Christ, he being the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20). Küng (1968:73) maintains that for all the New Testament writers the church is conditioned by the death and resurrection of Christ. Not until Jesus is raised from the dead, do the first believers speak of a "church."

## 4.	The origin and nature of the church

This thesis is not focused on a specific church denomination,[37] but rather primarily on the South African protestant churches and themes pertaining to the identity and relevance thereof. However, since the protestant churches in South Africa include a variety of denominations - each with their own identity, theology and understanding of ecclesiology - it demands that the point of departure herein include, on the one hand, a review on the origination of the church.[38] This is essential for determining the immutable element/s of the church, the core and fundamentals thereof, as identity

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[36] See discussion concerning "Christ as head of the church" on page 52, point 5.1.

[37] For purposes of clarity and illustration within this study, occasional references are made to specific denominations.

[38] I am aware that there are differing views as to the origin of the church, therefore I do not claim the view presented herein to be absolute. Nevertheless, I trust that irrespective of ecclesiological differences, this study will theologically be beneficial to many.

and relevance are relationally involved with the nature or essence of things wherewith they are associated.[39]

As is explained by van Gelder (2000:14), the church most certainly is more than a physical structure. It is more than a programmed event that we attend a certain time each week. It is more than a set of policy choices that define how resources are allocated and more than one's personal relationships with other believers. The church is more than an historical denomination, more than a particular type of organisational structure and more than a set of communally affirmed confessional beliefs. The church exists in relation to all these meanings, but it is more than anyone of them. In fact, it is more than all of them combined.

On the other hand, it is imperative to this study to establish who constitutes the church. When we encounter the church, we move into spiritual territory that occupies earthly terrain. We encounter the living God in the midst of our humanity. We encounter the Spirit of God dwelling in the midst of a people who are created and formed into an unique community. Knowledge of who make up this community is very important, as only those that represent the church could be identifiable and relevant therewith and as such, able to maintain the balance between this identity and relevance.

The diversity of the church may at times cause us to lose sight of its uniqueness as the creation of the Spirit. In a certain way we are forced to try to make sense of a complex array of denominations, each with their own theology and which all claim to be part of the Christian movement. In view hereof, we need to find an acceptable answer to the question: *What* is the church? This involves the need to determine w*ho* founded the church and *when* was it founded. *Who* and *when* also demands a *why –why* was it founded?

In the following chapters an attempt is made to provide substantial, although brief, answers to these questions in order to evaluate whether the modern church is identifiable with its Founder and with the early church, an exercise that is essential if relevancy is to be determined.

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[39] See points 2.3 & 2.4 on pages 8 and 9 for a definition of *identity* and *relevance*.

4.1   Who founded the church?

It is widely accepted by theologians that Jesus Christ is the founder of the church,[40] the conviction being based on Christ's words as recorded in Matthew 16:18.[41]   In answer to Christ's question regarding his identity, Peter's affirmation, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* (16:16), provided opportunity for Jesus to inform the disciples of the new community (church) that he would build. Jesus said, "I *will* build My Church." The future tense of the verb indicates that the building of the church had not yet begun when Jesus spoke these words, as it was prior to his crucifixion and resurrection.

Küng (1968:73) commenting on the text in Matthew 16:18, agrees with the above stating:

> The saying at Matthew 16:18, of which authenticity and interpretation have been much debated – and which in any case was not a public utterance – is the only time in the gospels when Jesus speaks of an ecclesia as a total church; and these words precisely situate the building up of a church not in the present but in the future.

This implies that we cannot speak of the church unless we speak of Christ first. The church is always the result of Christ's conciliatory work and of his gospel. Only Christ qualifies every term and concept related to the church. It is because of this that Ecclesiology should always emanate from Christology - never vice versa. Möller (1998.4:48) says the following in this regard:

> The church does not take preference over Christ. It is not a case where a number of interested people come together and form a community, and then Christ is introduced to them. It is not an institution which is established and in which it is endeavoured to bring people to Christ… In this regard we should particularly note the expression: "Of Christ". Christ is there first and foremost, and then instituted the church for himself as his body. That is why the church is known as the body of Christ.

Moltmann (1992:66) agrees with this by stating that,

> Without Christ, no church. There is only a church if and as long as Jesus of Nazareth is believed and acknowledged as the Christ of God…. Thus ecclesiology can only be developed from Christology, as its consequence and its correspondence with it.

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[40] This statement will not be fully debated here as it is generally accepted by most theologians, yet a brief discussion follows in order to emphasise the importance of the fact.

[41] See discussion of this text under point 3.2 on page 27.

In order to understand the founding of the church, we therefore need to have a clear understanding of *who* Christ is. This is discussed after the following two chapters in which the *when* and the *why* relevant to the founding of the church is explained.

4.2   When was the church founded?

The called disciples were to become the 'foundation' whereon Christ would build the church, he himself being the cornerstone (Eph 2:19-22). Paul teaches that God has appointed in the church first *apostles…* (1 Cor 12:28). The appointment of the twelve, who were to become the foundation of the church, was most certainly done before Pentecost (Acts 1:15-26). Yet, they were still functioning on an individual basis and not as a body. The body, of which Christ was to be the head, could only come about after Christ's resurrection (Eph 1:20-23).[42]   When he breathed on them (not individually but as a group; Jn 20:22), these Apostles (as a group) that already were believers by faith, became a living organism (the church) and on the Day of Pentecost, this living organism received power to fulfil its great mission. Verster (1980a:92) agrees with this view, saying the following:

> The phrase, " breathed on them", is the Greek word *emphusao*, meaning "breath in" and only appears here in the New Testament. However, the same word appears in the LXX in Genesis 2:7. Here God breathes life in (to) the nostrils of the 'clay body' and it became a living soul or a functional body. Similarly, Christ breathed power of life in (to) the group - not as individuals - and as a group they became a functional body. Here the disciples as a body received life *(zõe)* and on the Day of Pentecost they individually received power (*dunamis*).[43]

If the church was constituted on the Day of Pentecost, it implies that the called disciples, who had already received the Holy Spirit when Jesus breathed on them, received it a second time on the Day of Pentecost. John records Christ's appearance to the disciples after his resurrection and writes: *And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said unto them, receive ye the Holy Ghost* (Jn 20:22).

In contrast to the more common conviction held by many theologians, eg (Strong, Chafer, Pentecost) namely that Christ constituted the church on the Day of Pentecost, I am of the opinion that it was at this point – when he breathed on them - that he constituted it, and on the Day of Pentecost this newly formed church was

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[42] This implies that the church did not exist before the resurrection of Christ and is therefore distinct from national Israel. For a detailed discussion of this subject see chapter 9 of my previous study (Van Wyk 2002:162).

[43] The translation of this passage from Afrikaans to English is my own.

empowered by the Holy Spirit to enable them to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). Thus, the *ekklesia* – consisting of those whom he had chosen prior to his death and resurrection – were constituted into a living organism (the church) the day Christ breathed on them. A parallel may be drawn here with God's breathing into man in Genesis 2:7 and man becoming a living soul. Holdcroft ([1962] 1999:51) describes the breathing of Christ upon his disciples as the insufflation and states,

> What the disciples actually received at this time is not described, but there appears to have been a specific transaction, for as Stanley Horton[44] points out, "the language used in John 20:21-23 does not fit the idea that nothing happened." The consequence of the divine breath – the capacity to declare the remission of sins (cf.v.23) – suggests the imparting of a significant new spiritual and lethal status.

In expounding on this status, Holdcroft (*ibid:*51-52) maintains that the insufflation conveyed spiritual and moral authority, and the Holy Spirit was to be to each one the universal principle of divine life. This life would enable them to function together as a single organism through the Church of Jesus Christ. The church is *launched* and the prerogative belongs to the church to establish rulings and standards by which human behaviour can be evaluated. By this event, Jesus gave recognition to the disciples' authority (as members of his body) to declare the forgiveness of sins to those converts who fulfilled God's terms by repenting of their sin and accepting Christ as their saviour. By virtue of this newly bestowed authority, Peter could proclaim on the Day of Pentecost, *Repent and be baptised … in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins* (Acts 2:38). Holdcroft (*ibid:*53) continues by stating:

> Jesus preceded his act of breathing by declaring, "As the Father sent me, I am sending you" (Jn 20:21). The Father sent Jesus by giving him the Holy Spirit at the beginning of his public ministry. Jesus was now demonstrating to his disciples that in the same way the Father would empower them for their ministry… Pentecostalism is reinforced by interpretations that see all the elements of the church – a company of born again believers comprising the visible and invisible church – prior to the Day of Pentecost.

In summing up this paragraph, it can be said that although theological views differ as to the exact point in time at which the church was constituted - many believing that it was on the Day of Pentecost – it seems clear that the insufflation prior to Pentecost is the moment in time that Christ constituted his church and it became a living organism with legal status and authority before God.

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[44] Stanley M Horton. *What the bible says about the Holy Spirit, Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1976, page 128.*

4.3   Why was the church founded?

Van Gelder (2000:23) believes that failing to understand the purpose of the church can introduce a number of problems. For example, if the church is defined functionally – in terms of what it does – our perception may be shifted away from understanding it as a unique community of God's people. This implies that the church then becomes a series of ministry functions such as worship, education, service and witness. Seen from another angle, defining the church organisationally – in terms of its structures – may shift our perception away from the spiritual reality of the church as a social community. The church becomes a patterned set of human behaviours to be structured and managed. These approaches reduce the church to a set of ministries administered through management skills to maintain effectiveness, or to an organisation designed to accomplish certain goals.

These functional and organisational approaches can seduce leaders into placing too much confidence in their managerial skills or in their use of organisational techniques. To avoid any infiltration of such problems into the pages of this thesis, I will approach the subject from a totally different angle. The purpose of the church must be understood within the context of God's initial purpose with humanity. Möller (1998, 4:41) explains it as follows:

> In Ephesians 1:9-11, 22-23 we see that the mystery of God's will exists in the fact that everything and in this case specifically the faithful, should be united as one body under one head, namely Christ… As a result of the fall, man lost his sublime status and calling to live in God's presence and for God… It is only because of the expiatory work of Christ that man could again be restored in God's grace. Only through Christ's work of conciliation could God's eternal plan and purpose with man be realised. However, this does not mean that all mankind automatically shares in the communion with God through Jesus Christ. It only includes those in this iniquitous world who have reacted to God's call and have dedicated themselves to him. Out of that emerges the concept of the church that consists of the aggregate of believers gathered from all times, all nations and all languages (Rev 5:9).

As was stated previously, Christology should always precede Ecclesiology.[45] In order to meaningfully answer the question as to the purpose of the church, it is imperative to understand the purpose of Christ's incarnation.[46] The generally accepted and confessed theological reason for the incarnation of Jesus Christ and of everything he

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[45] See point 4.1 on page 33.
[46] This theme is too immense to be included in this study, therefore only a brief explanatory paragraph is included here.

said and did was to bring about reconciliation between God and fallen humanity. This reconciliation was only realised through the suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. From this it is deduced that the coming of Christ to earth, his incarnation, identification with humanity, suffering and death on the cross, his resurrection and ascension, is God's act to reconcile humanity to himself. Conciliation therefore is what God did through Jesus Christ for fallen man to pave the way to forgiveness of sin and unification with him. Thus human beings may inherit salvation through believing in what Christ became and did for them.

The church as the body of Christ indicates the vertical bondage to him. The church as community of the faithful implies the horizontal dimension of the mutual connectedness of believers. In Ephesians 2, Paul teaches about God's corporate, churchly plan of salvation and about the significance of the church in this plan. In essence, Paul is saying to a group of Gentile Christians, who along with Jewish Christians are part of his universal church, that it has been God's plan since the beginning to create a church which was not simply Jewish, but contained both Jews and Gentiles. Indeed, people from both every tribe and tongue, people and nation, would be gathered into this church and the two groups, which were once in opposition, once hopelessly and helplessly divided, would now be made into one body.

In other words, Paul is saying that the corporate dimension of God's plan of salvation is inescapable; it is not simply that God desires to bring individual Christians into saving relationship with himself through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit; it is that God intends to bring Christians into relationship with one another, especially expressed within the context of the local church through his plan of salvation, even Christians as different as Jews and Gentiles. It is to be the glory of God to the world to demonstrate people, who are different from one another in various and dramatic ways, living together in harmony, loving one another, caring for one another, serving one another, witnessing together, building up the same kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ together. The church has to glorify God by being a witness to this effect within

the world. The church then is a display of God's glory. [47] The church, being the body of Christ, implies that Christ reveals himself on earth through the church.

The body is therefore, the vehicle whereby the Gospel of salvation is to be transported to the ends of the earth. In a previous study (Van Wyk 2002:188), I included the following paragraph in explaining the purpose of the church:

> This church, which is a living organism – the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-14) - comprising of many members, has been given a great commission, namely to go into all the world and to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people, baptising them and teaching them whatsoever Christ had taught his disciples (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15). What can be said of the physical body is equally true of the spiritual body, namely the church. As the physical body exists to reveal the character and personality of the person (head) of that specific body, so too, the spiritual body (Col 1:18) exists to reveal the character and personality of Christ to the world (Gal 2:20).

There are abundant portions of Scripture that point to God's principal purpose in the out-calling of the church, the Body of Christ, from both Gentiles and Jews (Acts 15:14-18). This pivotal passage from Acts indicates God's divine purpose in taking out from among the Gentiles a people for his name. The gospel has never anywhere saved all, but in every place it has called out some. The church is thus, in a certain sense, still in the process of growth, principally from among Gentiles with comparatively few Jews, according to the election of grace (Rom. 11:5). When the *body* of Christ is complete and has fulfilled the purpose of its existence, it will be removed, or translated from the earthly scene (Lk 21:6; 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thes. 4:15-17; 2 Thes. 2:1;).

After this out-taking of the church (also referred to as the Rapture of the church) from the earthly scene, the end-time apocalyptic judgments will fall upon both unbelieving Gentiles and Jews. However, a remnant will be saved out of this "time of Jacob's distress" (Jer. 30:7), and the advent of Christ in glory will mark the setting up of the millennial kingdom with the nation Israel reinstated in priestly communion and blessing (Zech. 3:1-10) as the light of the world (4:1-14). [48]

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[47] It must be mentioned here that the limited, humiliating, sinful and incomplete state of humanity (the flesh) restricts the display of the full glory and power of Christ. This limitation may contribute to the reason why Christ is not *seen* or *heard* in the church, as perhaps he should be.

[48] The Rapture of the church is not a view supported by all protestant churches (denominations). Rather, it is a doctrine common to pre-millennialism and is only mentioned here for explanatory reasons.

4.4   Who is Christ?[49]

Burridge and Gould (2004:3) mention the fact that both London and Broadway are having revivals of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's rock opera, *Jesus Christ Superstar.* This has Judas Iscariot as its main character, complaining that Jesus' followers have 'too much heaven on their minds'. The musical contains very little of Jesus teaching, but follows the last week of his life, using particularly John's Gospel. After Judas has betrayed Jesus, he sings the showstopper song, "Jesus Christ Superstar," in which he says that he does not understand who Jesus is or what is going on; he wonders whether Jesus himself knows who he is and what he has sacrificed. Burridge and Gould (*ibid:4)* then comment that in many ways, Judas echoes the voice of Tim Rice, the playwright, but also the voice of many people who ask the question, "Who is this person?" Elsewhere in the opera Mary Magdalene sings a beautiful love song, "I don't know how to love him," in which she says that Jesus is just a man, but in a way that suggests she's beginning to think that maybe he is not just a man.

The questions 'mentioned' in this opera represent present-day questions that urgently need to be answered. Moltmann (1974:83) agrees with this statement in saying:

> Christians and non-Christians have quite often produced an image of Jesus, which suits their own desires. They have idolised Jesus, and then have taken away the idolisations of believers and humanised him again. He has become the archetype of the divine authority and glory that men have longed for. He has become the teacher of a new morality to mankind. He has become the resistance fighter from Galilee. An analysis of the changing ideas of Christ and portraits of Jesus in history shows that they correspond so much to the needs of their age, place of origin and intended purpose that one cannot avoid the suspicion that they are illusory and artificial. The question then arises: Who was Jesus to himself, and what does he himself signify at the present day? Do we know Jesus, and who is he in fact for us at the present day?

The problematical nature of these questions has given rise to the current academic debate and various new ideologies that discard the orthodox Christian belief and confessions related to Christ. In view hereof the some of current ideologies are discussed below.

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[49] Obviously this question calls for a Christological study of its own which will exceed the limits of this thesis. Therefore only a brief discussion is included here to make the reader aware of other theological and non-theological views of Christ.

4.5   The current academic Jesus debate

At the risk of oversimplification, the current debate can be polarised in two ways, between those who put Jesus in a Greek philosophical background and those who put him within the background of first century Palestinian Judaism. This first view is represented by John Dominic Crossan[50] and by the 'Jesus Seminar',[51] chaired by Robert Funk.[52] The second school of thought stresses Jesus' Jewish background, with a lot of argument on the historicity of the gospels. This is the view held by most Protestant and Pentecostal theologians (eg Calvin, Barth, Möller, Horak, Du Plessis). Since the sixteenth century, and particularly the eighteenth century, the traditional teaching about Jesus (divine and human) has been subject to a number of challenges. Jesus has often been reinterpreted, and understandings of his person have been put forward, which are not as dependent as orthodox Christian teaching on the theological tradition of the early church which was crystallised in the doctrines of the councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon.

Sadly though, these reinterpretations have not been confined to non-Christians or to popular movements of protest against Christianity or the church. Some well-informed theologians with influential insight into the Christian gospel and biblical teaching, have also been moved to question the traditional view. In simpler terms it could be stated that the current academic debate centres on how we are to interpret Jesus and understand Jesus today. All in all this is a vast debate, with vast numbers of books being produced and conferences convened. These are focused on questioning not only the traditional doctrines about Jesus, but also the reliability of the gospel portrait of Jesus as a supernatural figure, a miracle worker who was raised from the dead.

4.6   The historical quests for Jesus

As was mentioned above, the past centuries have been marked by challenges from liberal thinkers all over the world, aimed at the historical doctrines of the orthodox Christian faith. The most harmful of these to the church, have been the never-ending

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[50] Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, DePaul University, Chicago.

[51] The Jesus Seminar is a consortium of New Testament scholars, directed by Robert W Funk, which was organised in 1985 under the auspices of the Westar Institute of Sonoma, California. Scholars meet twice a year to make pronouncements about the authenticity of the words and deeds of Christ. See point 4.7 on page 43 for a further discussion.

[52] A recognized pioneer in modern biblical scholarship, having led the Society of Biblical Literature as its Executive Secretary from 1968–1973.

quest for the historical Jesus. According to Elwell (1984:584), the beginning of the quest for the historical Jesus can be dated to 1774-1778 when the poet Lessing published posthumously the lecture notes of Herman Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768).[53] These notes challenged the traditional portrait of Jesus found in the New Testament and the church. For Reimarus, Jesus never made any messianic claim, never instituted any sacraments, never predicted his death nor rose from the dead. The story of Jesus was in fact a deliberate imposture of the disciples.

According to Pearson (1996:5), Albert Schweitzer began his classic work, *The Quest of the historical Jesus* from the work of Reimarus. He adds that Reimarus saw in Jesus of Nazareth a Jewish messianic revolutionary whose failure led his followers to steal his body[54] and create a new story of Jesus based on aspects of Jewish messianism.

In so portraying Jesus, Reimarus raised the question, "What was Jesus of Nazareth really like?" And so the quest to find the "real" Jesus arose. The quest for the Jesus of history has continued throughout the past two centuries, taking on many different shapes and forms. In fact, the past two centuries have seen "three" different quests for the historical Jesus.

4.6.1 The first quest

McKnight (1995:53) explains that the first quest for the historical Jesus, often referred to as the "old quest" by theologians, began with Reimarus (around 1775) and extended to Bultmann (around 1920). This period is noted by a concern with the religious personality of Jesus, the environments in which he was raised and how they influenced his beliefs, and the desire to throw off the veneer with which Christian theologians had covered him. During this period, studies about the historical Jesus were important because scholars believed theology rested ultimately on what could be demonstrated as historical reliable. That is, the theological framework rested on a historical foundation. And, it was argued historians could get back to the real Jesus.

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[53] Herman Samuel Reimarus, *Fragments: The intention of Jesus and his disciples,* ed. Talbert, C H. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.

[54] Reimarus is indebted to explain how the body of Christ could be stolen from the tomb considering the presence of the Roman guards and the sealing of the tomb (Mt 27:66).

During the earliest part of the nineteenth century, the dominating method of research was rationalism. Attempts were made to "rationally" explain the life of Christ. McDowell (1999:560) mentions a major change that came about with the publication of D F Strauss's "The Life of Christ" in 1853. Strauss, pointing out the futility of the rationalistic approach argued that the miraculous in the gospels was to be understood as non-historical myths.

McKnight (1995:54) adds that with Rudolph Bultmann a new angle was attempted. He argued that theology did not rest on the vagaries of historical reconstruction. Rather, to demand that our theology be founded on the history, was theologically perverse. Furthermore, he contended that what we can actually know about Jesus and the development of his religious personality was so minimal that we could never build anything of any consequence theologically. Furthermore, McKnight maintains that as a result of Bultmann's scepticism about both the possibility of finding Jesus and the sufficiency of the methods used in finding who he was, this period of study has been described quite accurately as the "no quest" period.

Elwell (1984:585) cites several reasons for the demise of the quest: for one, it became apparent, through the work of Albert Schweitzer, that the liberal Jesus never existed but was simply a creation of liberal wishfulness. A second factor that added to 'end" the quest, was the realisation that the gospels were not simple objective biographies that could easily be mined for historical information. Still another reason for the death of the quest, according to Elwell, was the realisation that the object of faith for the church throughout the centuries had never been the historical Jesus of theological liberalism, but the Christ of faith, i.e. the supernatural Christ proclaimed in the Scriptures.

4.6.2 The second quest

In 1953 under the instigation of Ernst Käsemann[55], a new quest began. Käsemann feared that the discontinuity in both theory and practise between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith was very much like the early docetic heresy. He proposed that some interest in the historical Jesus is theologically valid since the Lord of the church cannot be viewed completely as a mythological being, unconnected to his historical

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[55] A student of Rudolf Bultmann.

existence. As a result he argued that it was necessary to establish continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. He also pointed out that the present historical scepticism about the historical Jesus was unwarranted as some historical data was available and undeniable.

Pearson (1996:9) makes the following comment:

> Käsemann set in motion what came to be called the "New Quest of the historical Jesus". This quest was "new" in the sense that scholarly interest in the historical Jesus, eschewed by Bultmann, was coupled with Bultmann's existentialist hermeneutics. In this view there is, after all, a connection between the eschatological message of Jesus and the Christological kerugma (proclamation) of the church.

According to Elwell (1984:585), the results of this new quest have been somewhat disappointing and the enthusiasm that greeted it can be said, for the most part to have disappeared.

4.6.3   The third quest

Pearson (1996:10) mentions that more recently a "third quest" developed exemplified by a spate of books continuing unabated. This "third quest", unlike the "new" one, lacks an unifying theological agenda, but it is also distinguishable from the first two quests in claiming to lack any theological agenda. The unifying factor in such works is the claim that critical-historical research, involving careful sifting of the sources, can lead to positive knowledge about who Jesus was. In a discussion concerning the quest for the historical Jesus, Geisler (1998:385) states that the third quest is multifaceted, including some from the radical tradition, a new perspective tradition and conservatives.

The conservative ideology rejects the idea that the image of the New Testament Jesus was somehow 'painted' by Hellenic Saviour cults. The new perspective group places Jesus in his first-century Jewish setting. The Jesus Seminar and their interest in the Gospel of Thomas and the Q document exemplify the radical tradition. This is discussed in the following chapter.

4.7   The "Jesus Seminar"

Jeffrey (1999:19) writes that the Jesus Seminar is a group of seventy-five New Testament liberal scholars that meet semi-annually in America to determine whether or not any of the gospel quotations of Jesus' words are authentic or credible. They

see Jesus as a philosophical teacher of Greek wisdom, and put the blame on Mark and the gospel writers for inventing the Jewish myth of Jesus. According to Burridge and Gould (2004:17), the most recent book to emerge from the Jesus Seminar is "The Five Gospels", an edition of the four canonical gospels plus the *Gospel of Thomas*. What caught media attention, was the colour coding in which the text was produced. The Jesus Seminar votes on the accuracy of Jesus' sayings by using coloured beads.

Geisler (1998:387) makes the following comments in this regard:

> The group has used coloured beads to vote on the accuracy of Jesus' sayings. A red bead means words that Jesus probably spoke. Pink indicates words that could probably be attributed to Jesus. Grey represents words that probably, though not certainly came from later sources. Black indicates words that Jesus almost certainly did not speak. The vote was based on a variety of Christian writings other than the four canonical gospels, including the fragmentary *gospel of Peter,* the supposed but not extant Q or quelle (source) documents, the second century *gospel of Thomas*, and the non-extant *secret Mark*. *Thomas* is usually treated as a fifth gospel, on a par with the four canonical books. The result of their work is the conclusion that only fifteen sayings (2%) can absolutely be regarded as Jesus' actual words. About 82% of what the canonical gospels ascribe to Jesus is not authentic. Another 16% of the words are of doubtful authenticity.

Commenting on this voting system, Geisler (*ibid:388*) adds, "Truth is not determined by majority vote". Janson (2001:97) remarking on the same subject states, "The most interesting (and most ironic) of it all concerns the Seminar's own colour-test for historical genuineness. The *Gospel of Thomas*, which is so highly acclaimed and even esteemed above the canonical gospels, fares worse in their colour scheme than some of the canonical gospels. The Jesus seminar's colour voting just about out-voted all the *logia* (words of Jesus) in Thomas."[56]

According to Geisler (1998:387), the radical conclusions of the seminar that affect the historic orthodox Christian faith is:

1. The "old" Jesus and "old Christianity" are no longer relevant.
2. There is no agreement about who Jesus was: a cynic, a sage, a Jewish reformer, a feminist, a prophet-teacher, a radical social prophet or an eschatological prophet.

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[56] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

3. Jesus did not rise from the dead. One member, Crossan, theorises that Jesus' corpse was buried in a shallow grave, dug up and eaten by dogs.
4. The canonical gospels are late and cannot be trusted.
5. The authentic words of Jesus can be reconstructed from the so-called "Q document," *The Gospel of Thomas, Secret Mark* and *The Gospel of Peter.*

The Jesus Seminar does not give any real evidence for their scepticism, just speculative theories of how the faith of the disciples led to their belief in the resurrection of Jesus and everything else in the New Testament. Yet, biblical evidence illustrates the opposite, namely that the faith of the disciples did not lead to the resurrection, but that the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus led to their faith.

4.8   The New Reformers

A contemporary South African view that is, in a certain sense, very similar to that of the "Jesus Seminar", is that of the New Reformers. This group, under the leadership of Prof Izak Spannenberg[57], recently separated themselves from the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). In an article that appeared in a local South African daily newspaper ("NG Kerk moet weer dink oor Bybel as woord van God." Beeld 5th September 1996)[58] Spannenberg maintained that the DRC must reconsider their confession that the Bible is the word of God. In a later responsive article of the same newspaper ("Opslae oor Bybel as egte woord van God." Beeld 6th October 1996), it was stated that the various reactions to Spannenberg's view ranged from "crucify him" to "he could be the antichrist".

A number of years have passed since Spannenberg first crossed swords with theologians from the DRC. He has since, however, together with theologians supportive of his view, established "The New Reformers", a new "denomination" in South Africa. In a critique of the New Reformers, published in a newspaper article ("Kruisdood is vir hulle afskuwelik. Nuwe Hervorming ry maar op ou donkies," Beeld 28th March 2002),[59] professor Adrio König,[60] stated:

> The announcement of the New Reformers has only reached us now, but in the USA a number of documents are readily available with regards to what the content of the reform must be. Robert Funk and John Spong's list of

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[57] Izak Spannenberg is a South African theologian of the Reformed tradition
[58] The "Beeld" is an Afrikaans Newspaper. Translations to English are my own.
[59] See http://www.webwoord.co.za/egk/egkblad/jaargang56-529/einddeformasie.html for full article.
[60] Adrio König is a South African theologian of the Reformed tradition.

that which must be removed are surprisingly similar. Piet Muller (*a New Reformer*)[61] has a similar list. God must be removed. Also the creation, original sin, the virgin birth, all the miracles, the evil powers, the meaning of the cross, the resurrection, the second advent of Christ, prayer, general ethical norms. What remains?

Instead of prayer we should meditate and give attention to the needs of our neighbours. Instead of trusting God, we must trust the order in creation and the inherent goodness of our neighbours… The New Reformers present clear-cut reasons as to why a new Reformation is necessary. They believe that prayer is worthless and miracles are an offence to the justness and integrity of God. Jesus' rank must be lowered. He is not divine, he did not "drop out of heaven" and free people from the power of sin. The meaning of his death by crucifixion is atrocious, and his resurrection does not mean that he arose from the dead… It is unacceptable to them that God had his son killed to forgive people. According to them, this is part of an age-old sacrificial system of the old Near East, which is unacceptable for modern humanity. As for the resurrection, modernists have no objection to Christ's "spiritual" resurrection … but to the fact of him being restored to life? Modern humans know that this does not happen.

One short statement by Funk helps one to understand the meaning of all this. According to him "All supernatural elements must be removed from the Christian agenda". [62]

These statements are so unbiblical, blasphemous and abominable that any further explanation of the inherent evil therein is unnecessary. It results in a total rejection of the basic principles of the Christian religion. In contrast to the above rejection of the resurrection, Paul emphasised the necessity of the resurrection (cf. 2 Cor 15) and amongst many other warnings said, *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men* (v19).

Surely we must pity the New Reformers and others who have similar beliefs. How can they ever be identifiable with Christ or relevant to the world? It is an absurdity to even think this possible in any way. In line with biblical teaching, Moltmann (1974:2) drives this truth home by stating:

There is an inner criterion of all theology and of every church that claims to be Christian, and this criterion goes far beyond all political ideological and philosophical criticism from outside. It is the crucified Christ himself… it is the criterion of their truth, and therefore the criticism of their untruth.

4.9   Jesus and the shaman concept

One could most certainly add to the various lines of theological thought within the "third quest," the ideology surrounding the concept of *Jesus as shaman*. I cannot

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[61] Italics are mine and are added for explanatory purposes.
[62] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

describe this theological theme in its totality in this study, nor is it my concern, so I shall merely mention an aspect or two thereof. According to this line of thought, Jesus is seen as a social type of shamanic practitioner. Craffert (1999:324), in explaining the term *shaman,* says:

> Whatever the origin of the term *shaman*, it has been widely adopted by anthropologists and scholars of comparative religion to refer to specific groups of religious practitioners in diverse cultures, including medicine men, witchdoctors, sorcerers magicians, healers and seers.

In a study by Rossaeau (1993:129-153), on Jesus as exorcist of a kind, three features in the Jesus tradition which correspond with shamanic traits are identified. Jesus was accused by some of insanity (Mk 3:21), some blamed him of being possessed by an evil spirit (Mk3:30) and the habit of withdrawal (Mk 1:12-13; Mt 4:11; Lk 4:1-13). The fact that Rossaeau seems to equate Jesus with shamanic traits (e.g. possessed by an evil spirit) is actually sufficient proof that shamans operate through evil spirits.

Craffert (1999:337) maintains that several of the main functions ascribed to the shaman are well attested in the Jesus tradition. Among those he mentions, are healer, prophet, exorcist, teacher and sage. This view of Jesus seemingly being equated with a shaman is totally rejected by the author.

Hunt & McMahon (1985:123) in discussing the subject of "Shamanism Revived," make the following statement:

> Visualization and guided imagery have long been recognised by sorcerers of all kinds as the most powerful and effective methodology for contacting the spirit world in order to acquire supernatural power, knowledge and healing. Such methods are neither taught nor practised in the Bible as helps of faith and prayer. Those who attempt to do so are not following the leading of the Holy Spirit or the word of God, but are practising an ancient occultic technique… Strangely enough, a number of Christian leaders teach and practice these same techniques in the name of Christ, without recognising them for what they are.

From the above discussion it is deduced that a shaman is a counterfeit of the Divine. The Bible declares that the devil *was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it* (Jn 8:44). The devil is always an imitator (the Antichrist) of Christ. This is seen in the early history of Israel when the sorcerers of Pharaoh imitated the wonders performed by God through his servants Moses and

Aaron, only to be proved impostors. (Ex 7:10-12). In the New Testament Jesus warned of their appearance, saying: *there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect, (*Mt 24:24).

It is of interest to note that amongst the miracles of Jesus, the synoptic Gospels record various instances where Jesus performs *exorcisms*. The method he applied was relatively simple. With the demonic in the synagogue at Capernaum (Mk 1:21-28; Lk 4:31-37) the demon is rebuked by Jesus and commanded to leave the demonic. This pattern is very similar in all the other accounts of Jesus *performing exorcisms*. The account of the Gerasene demonic (Mk 5:1-20; Mt 8:28-34; Lk 8:26-39) teaches that Jesus commanded the demon to come out of the possessed individual. In the case of the Syrophoenecian woman's daughter who was demon possessed (Mk 17:24-30; Mt 15:21-28), Jesus exorcised her from a distance without using any special technique or complicated incantations, usually used by other exorcists. From these and other accounts of Christ's expulsion of demons within the Synoptic Gospels, it is deduced that he never used any incantations or paraphernalia to help in his expulsion of demons. He controlled demons by simple command. Lee (1999:255) makes the following significant statement concerning the demons that were confronted by Jesus:

> It is interesting to note that throughout the Synoptic Gospels, the demoniacs are frequently prophetic and confess that Jesus is the son of the most high God (Mk 5:7; Mt 8:29) or the Holy One of God. (Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34).

The question that arises here, is: "What source or power does Jesus use for casting out demons?" Herrick (2003:274) makes the following significant statement in this regard:

> Tribal shamans around the world have for millennia claimed to have contact with demons and spirits offering a wide range of instruction and, importantly, power over one's enemies.

Unlike any shaman or the Devil himself, Christ operates through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is clearly declared and explained by Christ in Matthew 12:22-28 where it is reported that he healed a demon-possessed man. In reply to the opposition of the Pharisees, he distinguishes between Beelzebub, the prince of the demons and the Spirit of God and confronts them with a rhetorical question, namely, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" (Mk 3:23). Jesus hereby implies that he does not

employ demonic power to cast out demons. That his authority is the Holy Spirit, is strongly implied in Mark 3:28-30: *Truly I tell you people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin. For they had said, He has an unclean spirit.*

The fact that Christ distinguishes between the two implies that he acknowledges that besides the miracles that he performed through the power of the Spirit, there are also other powers (evil) present. Geisler & Turek (2004:212) agree that besides the miracles performed by God, an unusual event could be caused by other spiritual beings. Since God exists, it is possible that other spiritual beings also exist, they argue. Yet they insist that Satan and demons have limited power. Why? Because, according to them, it is impossible that there be two infinite beings. Since God is infinite, no other being can be infinite.

5. The traditional Christian view

The traditional Christian view of Jesus is that he is divine and human, or God incarnate – God come to earth; Emmanuel, God with us (Mt 1:23). The gospel accounts of the eternality of Christ and his revelation of God (Jn 1:1-2, 18) are accepted as fundamental by adherents of this view. What is central to this view, amongst many other facts, is the significance that God had raised Jesus from death on the third day after his crucifixion. The *Apostilicum*[63] contains the Christian church's traditional confession of Jesus Christ. Together with saints of all ages we confess:

> *I believe in God, the Father, the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth.*
> *And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord,*
> *Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,*
> *Born of the Virgin Mary,*
> *Suffered under Pontius Pilate,*
> *Was crucified, died and was buried,*
> *And descended into hell,*
> *Was raised from the dead on the third day,*
> *Ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God, the almighty Father,*
> *Whence he will come to judge, the living and the dead.*
> *I believe in the Holy Ghost.*
> *I believe in one holy, catholic Christian church,*
> *The communion of the saints.*

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[63] The Apostilicum is a concise summary of Christian belief and is included here for explanatory purposes only, as a full description of the Christian confession and belief concerning Christ, namely Christology, will demand a study of its own.

I believe in the forgiveness of sins.
The resurrection of the dead.
And life everlasting.

Christianity does not distinguish itself from other religions in that it has a message about God, about humanity and its salvation, or about the ethical behaviour of humans. These themes are present in the teachings of all religions. What makes Christianity unique is that its elaboration on these themes is based on a *central figure.* This *figure* is not merely an idea or a believed truth used as an axiom, but rather a historical *person*, namely Jesus Christ, who was born, lived and died in Palestine, but of whom it is confessed that he is the Living One that transcends history and leads it to a glorious consummation. This means that the essence of the Christian faith is belief in Christ Jesus. He is the centre around which Christianity is formed.

Potgieter (1998:1) agrees with the above, attributing the peculiar distinctiveness of Christianity to its association with Jesus Christ. He goes on to say, "Tragic as it may seem though, within Christianity there is a difference of opinion as to who Jesus is and the manner of the church's association to him. For some he is eternally the true Son of God, while for others he is nothing more than an unique person whom others should follow.

This has given rise to the Christological problem,[64] namely how such a central position within religion can be ascribed to a *human being*? Does this not imply that God is removed from the centre of interest? Is God not robbed of his honour and glory when Christianity calls upon Christ Jesus in prayer and trusts in him only for salvation? All these questions could be answered positively if Christ Jesus was a *normal* human being. Christianity, though, is convinced of the opposite, namely that Christ and God are *one* in such a significant way, that it is in fact God himself who in Christ came to the world, so that all worship and honour of him, is in fact worship and honour of God. Thus faith in Christ is parallel to faith in God. Christianity confesses that Jesus Christ is *vere Deus et vere homo.*[65]

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[64] I am fully aware of the immensity of this problem, but I am only briefly discussing it here in order to justify further discussion on the authority of Christ.
[65] Truly God and truly man

This confession does, however, involve a Christological problem. It implies firstly that Christ is God and does not emanate from himself, but that his deity exists therein that he is generated or born of God (Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16; 5:26; 1 Jn 4:9; Heb 1:5). However, this generation did not take place within the precincts of time and space, as is the case with normal human birth or generation. This means that he was not generated as the Son of God at some specific moment in time. Therefore it may be said that there never has been a period of time in which he was not the Son of God. Similarly, there never has been a period of time that he, as the Son of God, was not equal to God. In other words, we may say that it is an eternal generation, that is, a generation as it exists in God himself.

Secondly, it implies that Christ is human and as such, like all humans, has a human body. When he was on earth, Christ was enveloped in human corporeality and became flesh and dwelt among humanity in a visible bodily form (Jn 1:14; 1 Jn 1:1-3). Nevertheless, in the state of flesh he remained the Son of God, intimately conjoined and equal to God. He was still God although his deity was enveloped in his fleshly body on earth. The transfiguration bears witness to this (Mt 17:1-7).

Jonker (1983:8) agrees that a Christological problem is found in this twofold confession, namely that Jesus Christ is *vere Deus et vere homo*. He explains that on the one hand an over-emphasis of Christ's divinity could threaten his humanity. Likewise, an over-emphasis of Christ's humanity could threaten his divinity. These two lines of theological thought are known as *Ebionism* and *Docetism.*[66] According to Strong (1965:669), the Ebionites denied the reality of Christ's divine nature and held him to be merely man, whether naturally or supernaturally conceived. This *man,* however, held a peculiar relation to God, in that from the time of his baptism, an unmeasured fullness of the divine Spirit rested on him. Ebionism was simply Judaism within the pale of the Christian church, and its denial of Christ's Godhead was occasioned by the apparent incompatibility of this doctrine with monotheism.

The Docetae, like most of the Gnostics in the second century and the Manichees in the third, denied the reality of Christ's human body. This view was the logical

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[66] Besides Ebionism and Docetism, there were also other sects who shared similar views. They are mentioned here just for informative purposes. These were the Arians, the Nestorians, the Apollinarians and the Eutychians.

sequence of their assumption of the inherent evil of matter. If matter is evil and Christ was pure, then Christ's human body must have been merely phantasmal. Docetism was simply pagan philosophy introduced into the church. Jonker (1983:10) explains that throughout history, Christological thought has been influenced by the bi-polar tension of Ebionism and Docetism. The purpose of the church's confessional statements is, however, to avoid both these heresies and in obedience to the witness of the New Testament, to hold fast to the confession that Christ is truly God and truly man.

5.1 Christ the head – the Church the body

A close examination of New Testament imagery applied to the church, reveals that the essence thereof is irrevocably linked to a *person*. This *person* is Christ Jesus. The church's existence is rooted in his crucifixion and resurrection, and in his leadership as head of his church through his Word and Spirit. In view hereof, the church is described, amongst others, as the body of Christ, he being the head thereof (1 Cor 12:27; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:30; Col 1:24).

Obviously this is a metaphorical expression used to illustrate the mystical relationship that exists between Christ and the church. A metaphor implies speaking of one thing/concept as if it were another (eg Christ *is the lamb*), but not implying a literal similarity. [67] In addition to this it is notable that every metaphor used to describe the relationship between Christ and his church, is deficient. As with many of the parables, the metaphor with its image is used to express a truth, but the totality of the image is not always applicable to the subject. Thus it becomes necessary to use other metaphors to describe other aspects relevant to the subject.

Clowney (1984:95) explains this as follows:

> No single metaphor used in Scripture provides an adequate model to incorporate the cognitive elements of all the other elements of all the other metaphors. The two best candidates, "people of God" and "body of Christ," demonstrate this by their very juxtaposition, for neither is adequate to express the full content of the other.

Moller (1998:51) describes the inter-relatedness of Christ and the church as follows:

> In Ephesians 5:23 and Colossians 1:18, Christ is called the Head of the congregation. This does not mean that Christ is the cranial part and the

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[67] See the explanation of metaphors on page 114, under point 5.2.1.

congregation is the rest of the body; no, the head, however important it might be, is also part of the body, but this is not true of Christ. He exists in the eternal Divine Trinity and he is not dependent on the church, called his body, for his existence. His position as head of the body only means that the body belongs to him, that he abides in it through the Spirit, that he controls it and that it is in his service.

Through the Holy Spirit, Christians know that they belong to Christ (Rom 8:16) and by the witness of his word that he abides in them and they in him (Jn 15:4). As this implies that he abides in all believers, individually and collectively, and reveals himself through them and rules over them, they can be his body here on earth. Because it is the same Spirit that abides in all believers, they all jointly constitute the spiritual body in which Jesus Christ abides through the Holy Spirit. It is in this sense that the church is the body of Christ on earth.

With regards to the relationship between Christ's incarnation and the church as his body, Macqurrie (1977:349) says,

> We see also that it is correct to talk of the church as an "extension" of the incarnation. However, this expression has to be used with great care… While the church may properly be called the extension of the incarnation, this must not be understood to put it on the same level as Christ or to attribute to it an exaggerated status and authority. The church is Christ's body, but he is the head of the body. The incarnation, which reached its completion in him, is in process in the church.

God, out of love, identified himself with iniquitous humankind through the incarnation of his son, Jesus. He took upon himself all the limitations and humiliations of humanity, empting himself of his glory, to be on the same level as humankind (Php 2:7). He became their substitute, taking upon himself the sin and guilt of humanity and died on the cross in their stead, in order that they may be redeemed from sin (2 Cor 5:21). With his resurrection and ascension, Christ was transformed back into the glorified, eternal and spiritual existence as it was before he came to earth (Jn 17:5).

In so doing, though, Christ did not alienate himself from humankind. His body incarnate, through which he identified with humanity, was incorporated in his glorified body. Thus it became possible for Christians who are united with him through his incarnation and expiatory death, also to be united with him in his resurrection power. Although while on earth he emptied himself to such an extent that he could, like any other human being, only be with others at a certain time and a certain place, his glorification nullified the human limitations. As the risen Christ, he now, through the

Holy Spirit, abides is all believers at all times and places (Jn 14:16-20; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19).

Christ's incarnation implies that he became flesh and dwelt amongst us (Jn 1:14) in order to minister to humanity. Similarly, the church must become "flesh" – meaning making Christ visible and experimental amongst the people – in order to minister. Christ reveals himself by means of the church, the vehicle for demonstrating God's love of humanity. In this regard Peter so aptly declared, *But ye 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* (1 Pet 2:9).

A body's head determines the action thereof. The church in action is the execution of the *Head's* contemplation. In simpler terms we may say that the church is an extension of, or a continuation of the work of Christ. The church therefore must *work the works* of its Head. The builder and founder of any organization is a most important factor. Jesus, as builder and founder of the church, sets the church in order functionally and gives it a code of operation. Although Küng (1968:72,73) argues that in the pre-Easter period of his lifetime, Jesus did not found a church, he admits that the *new people of God* – as distinct from the old – in the first place is revealed by the preaching of the Apostles; but it is also the church which is made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus. He adds that for all the New Testament writers the church is conditioned by the death and resurrection of Christ. In view hereof, we may speak of Christ as the founder of the church who, by the Holy Spirit, gives to it a code of behaviour (Jn 16:13). This behavioural code is deduced from Christ's characteristics.

6.   Some characteristics of Christ[68]

Although there is to my knowledge no trustworthy tradition or document concerning the bodily or physical appearance (looks) of Jesus, the Gospels present us with many examples of his daily interactions with humanity. In these interactions Jesus manifested certain qualities, some that were only rationally perceived, while others were perceived by faith. Both are explained in the following two chapters, the

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[68] I am aware of the fact that many characteristics of Jesus are contained and explained in the numerous titles and/or names ascribed to him. Once again, though, to discuss these are not the purpose of this study, therefore reference is limited to those characteristics described within this paragraph, as these will suffice for the purpose hereof.

purpose being to reach an illustrative conclusion of what *Christ-like* characteristics should be present within the church.

6.1   Christ's rational perceived qualities

Determining Christ's character appears to be an impossible task, as it is so many-sided and seems to elude all description. The contrasting images between command and sympathy, power and charm, authority and affection, cheerfulness and gravity, are some of the aspects that add to the problem of analysing the character of Jesus. To the unbeliever the Gospel is foolishness (1 Cor 1:18), seemingly without method or principles, everything being fragmentary. Yet despite this apparent foolishness, people rationally perceive certain qualities of Christ's character therein. Among these are his *strength, poise* and *grace,* which are briefly discussed below.

6.2   Christ's strength

The manner of Christ's life reveals his strength, especially through his *decision* and *authority*. His rugged, nomadic life has no room for weakness or sentimentality. He said: *The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay his head* (Mt 8:20).   He rejects indecision on numerous occasions with statements such as: *No man can serve two masters…*(Mt 6:24); *He that is not with me is against me* (Mt 12:30); *But seek ye first the kingdom of God…* (Mt 6:33). In these statements the quality of his sense of purpose is clearly seen. Concerning his personal decisiveness he said: *My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me…* (Jn 4:34); *I came not to do my own will…but the will of Him that sent me* (Jn 6:38). From at least his twelfth year his decisiveness was apparent. This is deduced from the words wherewith he addressed his parents, namely: *How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?* (Lk 2:49).

The authority of Jesus is manifested in his teaching. He does not argue, threaten or try to prove, like the Pharisees, *for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes* (Mt 7:29). The power of this authority is seldom questioned. He calls men to follow him from their boats and tax-booths. Without question they immediately do so. He commands the wind and the sea to be still and they obey him (Mk 4:39). Before his ascension, Jesus said: *All power is given unto me in heaven and earth* (Mt 28:18). Luke states that *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and*

with power (Acts 10:38). Wherever Jesus went, the authority invested in him was displayed.

6.3 Christ's poise

The strength of Christ's character is revealed to us in another quality, which may be called his *poise.* Poise is that characteristic that brings about equilibrium between emotions and reason. A lack of balance in poise causes emotionalism. In a relevant discussion, Möller (1975:156) presents us with an interesting explanation of emotionalism and that which psychology teaches:

> By this (emotionalism) we mean the emotional excitement during which a person experiences strong emotional elements (such as joy, sadness, hate, fear, etc.) while there is not sufficient rational explanation thereto, or where it is totally exaggerated in comparison to the intensity of the outer stimulus that gave cause thereto. It usually occurs when feelings run high during mass situations, where people are carried away, overwhelmed and subjected to a "group-spirit" created by various mass suggestions. During such an experience, sober thoughts and the sense of responsibility is, to a great extent, eliminated, and one will easily say and do things in a way contrary to the way its done in normal situations. Such a condition lasts for a little while only after which it returns back to normal.[69]

The poise of Jesus was strong enough to keep a perfect balance between his emotions and his reason. This is clearly observed in the Garden of Gethsemane where his emotions and reason are wholly subservient to the will of the Father. *Reason* may be likened to the sails of a boat, the *will* to its rudder and the *emotions* to the waves beating against its sides. Although his reason and will were tried to the utmost by the waves of accusations against him, his poise brought about total contentment, his nature revealing unalterable peace – a peace that might be disturbed, but never destroyed by inward emotions or outward encounters. He admitted that his soul was exceedingly sorrowful, (Mt 26:28) nevertheless, his thoughts remained sober as he prayed *Oh, my Father…*and *His* sense of responsibility remained intact as he added, *let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thy will* (v.39).

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[69] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

6.4 Christ's grace

A third characteristic of Christ rationally perceived, is his grace.[70] Grace may be defined as undeserved favour, the unconstrained expression of the self-forgetting and kindly mind. Grace flows through the channel of compassion and the abundance of Christ's sympathy testifies to the profusion of his grace. Jesus has compassion for all classes of people whether rich or poor, learned or ignorant, happy or sad. His grace is noticeable among all classes of society. For an enquiring Pharisee he has a word of encouragement (Jn 3:1-6); he treats publicans and sinners as his friends (Mt 9:10); he chooses common fishermen to be the foundation whereon to build his church (Mt 4:19). That nobody is excluded from his grace, can be clearly seen in his teaching. He continually uses the term *whosoever*, indicative of the availability of his grace to all. In the apocalyptic revelation, John visualises the twenty-four elders falling down and worshiping the Lamb, because he had redeemed them with his blood *out of every kindred and tongue, people and nation* (Rev 5:9).

This all-inclusive grace is not restricted to men only, but is also extended to women and children. This is seen throughout the gospel record, which contains many examples of Christ reaching out to women in need. He ministers to a Samaritan woman, offering her to drink of his water (Jn 4:7-15). He consoles the sorrowing sisters, Martha and Mary (Jn 11:25), and he heals the mother-in-law of Peter. (Lk 4:38). Of the children he said: *…for of such is the kingdom of heaven … he took them up in his arms, put his hands on them and he blessed them* (Mt 19:14; Mk 10:16).

6.5   Christ's qualities perceived by faith

The author of the letter to the Hebrews defines faith as: *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Heb11:1). Love is not tangible, neither is it a visible substance. Yet in the light of faith, the life of Christ is an uninterrupted series of acts of love. It was love that impelled him to take on human nature, though he did so with the full consent of his Father: *For God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son* (Jn 3:16). When his public ministry began, Jesus simply spent himself for the good of his neighbour, *doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil* (Acts 10:38). He shows a boundless compassion for all the infirmities of the body; he uses his miraculous power to heal the sick, to free the

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[70] Obviously, the grace of Christ is also perceived by faith (see Ephesians 2:8), but for the purpose of this discussion it is included under this heading.

possessed, to resuscitate the dead. The moral weaknesses of humanity move his heart still more effectively; the woman at Jacob's well, Matthew the publican, Mary Magdalene the public sinner and Zacheus the unjust administrator are only a few instances of sinners who received encouragement from the lips of Jesus. He is ready with forgiveness for all. In his work of teaching he is at the service of the poorest outcast of Galilee as well as of the theological celebrities of Jerusalem. His bitterest enemies are not excluded from the manifestations of his love, even while being crucified he prays for their pardon. The Scribes and Pharisees are treated severely, only because they stand in the way of his love.

Come to me, all you that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Mt 10:28) is the message of his heart to poor suffering humanity. After laying down the rule: *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends* (Jn 15:13), he surpasses as it were his own standard, by dying for his enemies. He freely meets his sufferings which he could have easily avoided (Mt 26:53), undergoes the greatest insults and ignominies, passes through the most severe bodily pains and sheds his blood for men *unto remission of sins* (Mt 26:28). But the love of Jesus embraced not only the spiritual welfare of men, it extended also to their temporal happiness: *Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, *and all these things shall be added unto you* (Mt 6:33).

It seems clear from the above and especially the last statement, that in the first instance, Jesus Christ had a well-balanced vertical relationship with the Father. This was followed by his well-balanced horizontal relationship with the world around him. From this it can be argued that Christ was identifiable with the Father and that his actions, which were relevant in the circumstances that he encountered in the world, were the corollary of this relationship. In view of these characteristics of Christ and his relationship to the Father (his Head), it logically follows that these characteristics should be qualities identifiable within the church (his body), because of its initial vertical relationship to Christ (its Head). These qualities should also then be horizontally functional and relevant to the world wherein the church exists.

7. Who constitutes the church?

From all that has been said thus far, the church is understood to be a New Testament entity, constituted after the resurrection, the moment Christ breathed on the disciples.

Subsequently, on the Day of Pentecost they were empowered for service. The question that immediately comes to mind, is: (a) "Who were the first members of the church constituted by Christ, and (b) what *qualifications* for membership were required of them and is required of future members?" As this study is concerned with understanding the essence of the church constituted by Christ after his resurrection from the dead, all synthetic or denominational requirements for membership are set aside, while in the subsequent discussion we turn our focus to the Bible - the only divinely inspired source concerning membership of the church.[71]

This discussion is crucial to the theme of this thesis as the crux of the church's identity and relevance is enclosed herein. It needs to be emphatically stated that unless human beings fully grasp and experience the initial prerequisite to membership of Christ's church, their so-called membership will be nothing more than an analogy to membership of any modern-day social club. Individuals join tennis clubs to play tennis, but individuals do not (cannot and should not) "join" the church in order to "play church". God adds individuals to the church (Acts 2:47). Thus church membership is a serious matter as it implies a relationship with God and in addition, it must be borne in mind that the church is not an end in itself, but rather the means to an end – the vehicle to accomplish the ultimate purpose and plan of God (Eph 1:10).

In order to answer both parts of the question posited above [(a) "Who were the first members of the church constituted by Christ, and (b) what *qualifications* for membership were required of them and is required of future members?"], it is imperative to have a clear understanding of the concept *born again,* as the essence of the church is irrevocably linked to this concept. It is impossible to discuss church identity and church relevance unless we understand the implied meaning of this concept. With this in view, the following chapter is concerned with the concept *born again* and presents the reader with answers to questions (a) and (b). Furthermore, it may be said that the subsequent discussion is rather extensive, as the comprehension of regeneration is essential to the process of establishing a viable solution to the problem addressed in this thesis.

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[71] Membership here does not refer to denominational membership, but rather to membership of the church universal.

7.1 The concept "born again"

The "born again" concept was introduced by Christ himself. He employed it in answer to Nicodemus' question regarding entrance into the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3). Later in this thesis it is argued that the church is the spiritual manifest of the kingdom.[72] Entrance into the church would therefore demand the same requirement as entrance into the kingdom. Put another way, it can be said, 'if Christ is the head of the church,[73] membership thereof must imply relationship or devotion to Christ'. This relationship presupposes belief in Christ as Saviour by the believer.

The New Testament concept of this belief, which includes more than merely intellectual belief, is referred to as *born again, born of God* or *regeneration* (new birth).[74] Therefore, at the centre of this discussion is the term regeneration, which seems to be the most significant of all words for describing *salvation*. Viewed from a different angle, salvation can be said to include the terms *regeneration*, *new birth*, *born again*, etc., and many other similar theological terms used in this regard. In the following discussion the word "salvation" and the terms mentioned above, are used as synonyms for simplification of the matter.

7.2 Salvation

In view of the fact that this study concerns the essence (that *one* property or necessary attribute)[75] of the church, it is of utter importance to discuss the nature and means of salvation. The reader will appreciate the fact that the discipline of Soteriology is multifaceted and that the doctrine of salvation comprises enough literature to fill more than a library. Nonetheless, the subsequent discussion, though comparatively limited, is included so as to explain the author's interpretation of this biblical concept, which is imperative for discerning the problem addressed within this study.

It is of utter importance that we acknowledge the importance of the doctrine of salvation, as, according to Jesus, there is no other way of becoming a Christian[76] or

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[72] See discussion of the kingdom and the church on page 73, point 8.

[73] See discussion on page 52, point 5.1.

[74] These concepts are synonymous and are used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

[75] See the definition of the term "essence" on page 6, point 2.2.

[76] In our day the meaning of the term "Christian" has become beclouded by other definitions thereof, foreign to the Biblical implication. The understanding of the term in this thesis is explained under point 7.2 above.

of entering the kingdom of God. Salvation implies sin,[77] or stated differently, sin is the precondition of salvation. If one does not enter by regeneration (implying salvation), one does not enter at all.[78] As to the origin of salvation, there is universal agreement among orthodox theologians: God is the author of our salvation, for whereas human sin originated with human beings on earth (Rom 5:12,19), salvation originated with God in heaven (Jonah 2:9). But what is salvation? In the following chapter I seek to articulate theologically the meaning of salvation, with special emphasis on the term regeneration. In treating this question, it will be noted that I am not treating the Soteriological question, that is how it is that Jesus merited salvation for us (an issue that belongs to Christology), but rather, what salvation is.

7.2.1 Salvation/Regeneration

When we speak of salvation, we must bear in mind that salvation implies more than the salvation of the individual or personal salvation. The whole of creation needs to partake of salvation. Often terms such as regeneration, born again, sanctification, etc., are used in relation to humans only, while the total sphere of biblical salvation includes the regeneration (renewal) of structures, the heavens and the earth. Perhaps this is the motivational factor of the Lord's Prayer, namely, "Thy kingdom come". This kingdom implies peace, happiness, joy and life eternal. Salvation therefore must lead to, amongst others: peace, happiness, joy and eternal life. Nonetheless, although all of creation needs to share in salvation, the purpose of this study concerns the essence of the Christian church and thus only salvation relative to the church and its members is discussed here.

7.2.2 A definition of regeneration

Duncan (1991:132) defines regeneration as follows:

> Regeneration is the act of God which imparts spiritual life to the repentant sinner as he receives the Lord Jesus Christ (Tit 3:5). It is a supernatural act which takes place the instant the sinner receives Christ. Not only does the repentant one receive divine life, but also a new nature (2 Pet 1:4). Thus he becomes a new creation.

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[77] Anthropology and Hamartiology are not discussed in this study, as it is not the purpose thereof. However, Soteriology is discussed here as it is of great importance to both the purpose of this study and in order to explain the authors perception thereof. This will enable the reader to fully perceive what is implied by the concepts "born again", "regeneration", etc. as used in this thesis.

[78] I am aware of the current debate on religious pluralism. This however is excluded here as the chapter focuses on entrance into and membership of the Christian church.

König (1983:132) has the following to say concerning regeneration:

> Regeneration means to be born anew or to be recreated, to receive a new life, to become a child of God. This applies a distinctive radical character to the regeneration experience. It means that an individual is not good enough as he/she is and more so, that he/she needs more than just a little improvement. In a sense God needs to remake the individual.[79]

It must be noted that in regeneration it is the Holy Spirit who *quickens* those who are spiritually dead (Jn 6:63; Rom 8:1-10; Eph 2:1). Duncan (1991:133) quotes John Wesley as saying that "regeneration is that great change which God works in the soul when He brings it into the life of righteousness." In this act, then, God quickens spiritually dead people by the Holy Spirit and plants spiritual life in them. These people experience spiritual renewal, restoration and re-creation. The Holy Spirit has regenerated them.

7.2.3 The nature of regeneration

The concept *born of God* is more prominent in the Johannine literature of the New Testament than in any other biblical source. As was stated earlier, Jesus, during his discussion with Nicodemus, uncompromisingly asserted the need of being *born again* as a prerequisite to entrance into the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3). As the church is an indissoluble part of the kingdom of God, the implication is that regeneration is the prerequisite of entrance into the church.[80]

7.2.3a   A passive experience

In regeneration people are relatively passive. Their responsibility in regeneration may be compared to the relationship that exists between a doctor and a patient. The doctor cannot proceed with an operation until the consent of the patient has been given. However, once this is given the doctor assumes complete control. Nevertheless, no patient is ever completely passive, because the doctor does not begin until the patient is in agreement. In regeneration we face the same situation. God does not act until we are in agreement.[81] He takes the initiative of convincing individuals of their lost condition (Jn 16:8; Ph 2:13).

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[79] The translation of the referred text from Afrikaans to English is my own.
[80] See discussion on page 73, point 8 concerning the church and the kingdom.
[81] See footnote 82 on page 64.

7.2.3b   A sudden experience

The experience in which new life is divinely imparted to the souls of believing people, takes place suddenly. Birth is always a crisis and spiritual birth is no exception to the rule. Each of us can point to a specific day as the date of our physical birthday. We came into the world *suddenly*, at a certain moment. In the same way the spiritual birth is a crisis experience. It may take a while for us to get to the point of the crisis, but when it happens, it happens suddenly. Spiritual birth is the same. It may take a while before we *believe,* but once we do**,** the new life is imparted suddenly. Paul's conversion on the Damascus road was such a "crisis experience". The exact manner of his regenerating experience was unique. The manner did not set a norm for future "regenerations". Each person's regenerative experience is unique. Nonetheless, each person needs to be regenerated in order to obtain salvation and eternal life. Regeneration therefore is a definite and decisive experience, and partakers thereof become members of the body of Christ (church) (Rom 1:12).

7.2.3c   A mysterious experience

New spiritual life also appears mysteriously. Jesus did attempt to explain both the *how* and the *why* of the new birth (Jn 3:3-8). His words, *Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit* (v.6) implies that the physical and the spiritual belong to two different realms. One cannot produce the other: the human nature can reproduce the human nature, but only the Holy Spirit can produce the spiritual nature. Christianity is not merely a system of ethics or a moral code; it is the giving of new life: the life of God is implanted in the heart of man by the operation of the Holy Spirit. In his sovereign way, the Holy Spirit suddenly and mysteriously moves upon a person's inner nature and brings life and light where once there was darkness, death and barrenness. In this mysterious operation of the Spirit a new creature is born. It is only when people have been born of the Spirit that they receive a new nature. This new nature makes people suitable for entering heaven and that is why Jesus stated the unchangeable principle, *you must be born again* (Jn 3:7).

From this it is evident that salvation is not determined by ancestry or heritage, neither by tradition or good works. John is clear on this when he states: *To all who received him* (Jesus), *to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God* (Jn 1:11-13). To the rich young ruler, who enquired about the

requirements for obtaining eternal life, claiming to have upheld the law, Jesus said: *One thing you lack, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor… then come and follow me* (Mk 10:21).

Although regeneration is a mysterious experience, it is nevertheless a reality. Jesus explained that *the wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit* (Jn 3:8). We can see the results of the wind (a paper or leaves blown down the street), but we cannot explain it. Similarly we can see the results of regeneration in the regenerated life, but we cannot fully explain all of the operation.

7.2.3d   A developing experience

Finally, even though new spiritual life comes suddenly, it develops progressively. This development is referred to as sanctification. It must be emphatically stated, though, that sanctification is not equivalent to regeneration, but the natural result thereof. There are three aspects of sanctification that need to be identified here, namely positional, experiential and ultimate.[82] Positional sanctification is not related to a person's spirituality and in it there are no degrees. One person is not more sanctified positionally than another. Positional sanctification means a change of position by which a corrupt sinner is changed to a child of God (Jn 1:12). It is one finished work, for Christ has become our holiness or sanctification (1 Cor 1:30). On the other hand, experiential sanctification is directly related to a person's spiritual development. Moreover, in experiential sanctification there are degrees. One person may be more sanctified (progressively) than another.

Two portions of Scripture present the complete biblical position on positional and experiential sanctification. In the first (1 Cor 6:9-20) Paul speaks of what the Corinthian believers were before they came to Christ. He reminds them that at the time of their conversion, they were washed, sanctified and justified (v 11), which brought about the *necessity* for pure living as well as the *possibility* to live pure lives. It must be noted that he speaks about washing, sanctifying and justifying in the past tense, for these actions were the result of their regenerating experience. In Colossians 3:1-10, however, Paul links the believers' position with the finished work

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[82] Only positional and experiential sanctification are briefly discussed here.

of Christ and asserts this experience *must* result in godly living in contrast to their former life-style. Their new life-style, their walk according to the Spirit, is one marked by progress in Christlikeness as they move toward a more complete knowledge of God.

There are several implications of progressive sanctification. First, it is developmental, since the Christian is admonished to become progressively more Christlike. Second, since it is a progressive experience, the implication is that it is a lifelong process. Therefore it does not lead to absolute or ultimate perfection in this life. This is only realised in the life hereafter.

Concerning human spirituality, Schaeffer (1982:199) argues that no matter how complicated, educated or sophisticated we may be, or how simple we may be, we must come the same way insofar as being a Christian is concerned. As the kings of the earth and the mighty of the earth are born in exactly the same way physically as the simplest man, so the most intellectual person must become a Christian in exactly the same way as the simplest person. This is true for all men, everywhere, through all space and time. There are no exceptions. Jesus said a totally exclusive word: *No man cometh unto the Father but by me* (Jn 14:6).

The reason for this stems from the fall of Adam and the sin which he passed on to the human race. All people bear the marks of the Fall, which implies depravity (Rom 3:23; 1 Cor 15:22). Due to the Fall, people lost their communion with God. Yet, through the work of Christ on Calvary, the results of the fall were rectified. As people repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, receive him as their saviour and are converted, their spiritual life or communion with God is restored. Regeneration is thus the restoration of spiritual life. It is the instant supernatural change brought about by the Holy Spirit in the life of the person who has repented and believed.

God exists, God has a character, God is a holy God, and when men sin (and we all must acknowledge we have sinned not only by mistake, but by intention), they have true moral guilt before God who exists. The guilt is not just the moral concept of guilt-feelings, a psychological guilty feeling in the individual. It is a true moral guilt before the infinite- personal, holy God. Only the finished, substitutionary work of Christ upon the cross as the Lamb of God – in history, space and time – is enough to remove

this. Our true guilt, which stands between God and us, can be removed only upon the basis of the finished work of Christ *plus nothing* on our part.[83]

The Bible's whole emphasis is that there must be no humanistic note added at any point in the accepting of the gospel. It is the infinite value of the finished work of Christ - the second person of the trinity, upon the cross, *plus nothing -* that is the sole basis for the removal of our guilt. When we thus come, believing God, the Bible says we are declared justified by God (Rom 5:1); the guilt is gone and we are returned to fellowship with God – the very thing for which we were created in the first place. Schaeffer (ibid:200) adds to this by stating,

> There is no way to begin the Christian life except through the door of spiritual birth, any more than there is any other way to begin physical life except through the door of physical birth…. The new birth is the most important thing in our spiritual lives, because we are not Christians until we have come this way.

A New Testament text that explicitly refers to regeneration is 1 Peter 1:3: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* Toon (1987:25) states that the expression *born of God* means *begotten of God.* From this it may be argued that *begotten again* as used in this verse, is equal to *born again*.

Evans (1972:151) maintains that too often we find other things substituted by humans for God's appointed means of entrance into the kingdom of God. Among those he identifies are baptism and reformation. He argues that regeneration is not baptism for if it was, Paul would have made more of this rite (compare 1 Cor 1:14 and 4:15). In the second passage Paul asserts that he had *begotten* them through the gospel, while in the first passage he declares that he baptised *none of them* save Crispus and Gaius. From this it is deduced that baptism could not be the means through which they had been begotten again. Similarly, Simon Magus was baptised (Acts 8), but was he born again? Cornelius (Acts 11) seems to have been born again even before he was baptised.

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[83] I am aware of the contrasting theological views of Calvin and Arminius concerning predestination and total depravity. This however is not the concern of this study, but rather regeneration itself.

It is further argued by Evans (*ibid*:152) that reformation is not regeneration. According to him,

> Regeneration is not a forward step in man's development; it is a supernatural act of God; it is a spiritual crisis. It is not evolution, but involution – the communication of a new life. It is a revolution – a change of direction resulting from that life. Herein lays the danger in psychology, and in the statistics regarding the number of conversions during the period of adolescence. The danger lies in the tendency to make regeneration a natural phenomenon, an advanced step in the development of a human life, instead of regarding it as a crisis. Such a psychological view of regeneration denies man's sin, his need of Christ, the necessity of atonement, and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

In contrast to Evans' view as cited above, John Calvin understood regeneration to mean the entire process[84] of redemption from the first union with Christ to sanctification.[85] Others, like Evans, maintain that the term is usually taken to mean the initial infusion of spiritual life from God. Berkhof (1941:468) defines regeneration as the act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted to man and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. Lewis (1984:35), in his discussion of regeneration states that:

> Similar terms and metaphors however, are found throughout the New Testament and serve to reinforce the doctrine. They include such phrases as: "born again, born from above, newness of life, made alive in Christ, a new creation, as new born babes and being raised from the dead". It is not difficult to trace the common features in all of these expressions and to arrive at the conclusion that they refer to the initial work of God on the sinner's heart by which he is regenerated.

As deduced from the above statements, the terms r*egeneration, born again* and *born of God* describe the inner renewal by the Holy Spirit, which takes place when a person becomes a Christian. This important concept relates the Christian firstly to God and secondly to fellow believers. The decisive historical grounds for this renewal are the coming of Jesus Christ and his vicarious death (Tit 2:12; 3:4,6; Jn 3:16). A person receives forgiveness of sins through belief in Christ and is *born again* to a life characterised by faith, love and hope. Best (1975:3) explains that regeneration is absolutely necessary because:

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[84] This process, known as the order of salvation *(ordo salutis),* is not discussed in this study as it is too encompassing and requires a study of its own.

[85] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* III, 3,9. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers Co. 1949) Vol I, 658. His summary statement reads: "Wherefore, in this regeneration, we are restored to this righteousness of God from which we fell in Adam. And this restoration is not accomplished in a single moment, or day, or year, but by continual advances".

(1) God is holy and if man is to have intercourse with the holy God he must be regenerated, by the Holy Spirit, and thus become holy in the imputed and imparted righteousness of Jesus Christ.

(2) Man is unholy. He is corrupt and sinful throughout. Natural man is totally unable to do anything spiritually good. He is dead in sin, and his will is enslaved to his evil nature.

(3) Jesus Christ died on the cross to save his people. He did not die in vain. The transgressions he bore were those of his people and the wounds and death he suffered was his. Therefore Jesus Christ suffered vicariously for un-regenerate people the Father had given him.

From the above it is inferred that regeneration presupposes depravity.[86] By depravity is meant, on the one hand, the lack of holy affection toward God, while on the other hand, the corruption of the moral nature, or bias toward evil and the inability of self-recovery is implied. Non-existent spiritual life cannot give being to itself. Light is not brought out of darkness; neither does love come from hate. Every seed bears its own kind. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit* (Jn 3:6). Ezekiel (cf. Ezek 16) brilliantly displayed the inability of humans to self-recovery. Israel is symbolised under the figure of a woman who was taken when she was an abandoned and vulnerable baby, disposed to the vultures of the world. God found her in her own blood – her natural lost condition. He loved her and cleansed her and made her, his own. Without assistance from *another source*, the helpless infant would die in the field. Similarly, the lost sinner is not regenerated by combined efforts of God and self. The record states: *And when I passed by thee and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live* (Ezek 16:6).

7.3   The Old Testament saints and regeneration

As illustrated previously, the church did not exist in the Old Testament period.[87] Nevertheless, although this study is concerned with the church, it is imperative to our understanding of regeneration that we consider its presence (or absence) within the Old Testament dispensation. This entails a question, namely: "Were Old Testament individuals *born again* apart from the church?" Many theologians believe that there could not have been any instance of the new birth in the Old Testament or before

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[86] There are different theological views related to hamartiology and soteriology regarding human depravity. This however, is not crucial to this thesis for irrespective of one's theological understanding of depravity, regeneration remains essential.

[87] For a detailed discussion of this subject see chapter 9 of my previous study (Van Wyk 2002:162).

Pentecost. They base their argument on the understanding that the Lord had not yet given his Spirit to the church.[88]

Chafer (1948:73) is one of these theologians and states,

> Of the present ministries of the Holy Spirit in relation to the believer – regeneration, indwelling, baptizing, sealing and filling – nothing indeed is said with effect of these having being experienced by the Old Testament saints. Old Testament saints are invested with these blessings only theoretically… The Old Testament will be searched in vain for record of Jews passing from an unsaved to a saved state, or for any declaration about the terms upon which such a change would be secured. … The conception of an abiding indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which every believer becomes an unalterable temple of the Holy Spirit belongs only to this age of the church, and has no place in the provisions of Judaism.

According to this, regeneration therefore belongs only to the members of the church, which followed the day of Pentecost. There are reasons, however, for not only questioning this point of view, but for denying its validity. Using careful exegetical methods, adequate evidence can be found in the Bible to illustrate that the saints of the Old Testament did indeed experience regeneration. In a study for this purpose, Lewis (1984:36-43) presents five arguments that he discusses in detail, to prove the issue in hand. These arguments are the following:

1. The expressions found in the Old Testament describing forgiveness are so similar to their New Testament counterparts that it is reasonable to assume that the experience was the same. (This evidence he calls the language of regeneration.)

2. The evidence of the convicting, converting and sanctifying work of the Spirit in the lives of the Old Testament saints led to the logical conclusion that the Spirit's regeneration work was operative also.

3. The high regard for the true elect of Israel found in the New Testament and their union with all believers in Christ strongly supports the essential oneness of their initial reception of salvation.

4. The Gospels teach that the gift of eternal life for all who believe was actually experienced by many before the advent of Pentecost. Most of the disciples were born again during Christ's ministry at the time they met his simple conditions of faith and repentance.

5. The coming of the Holy Spirit to the 120 praying Christians in the upper room, as described in Acts, chapter two, is best interpreted not as a regenerating gift, but rather as a prophetic and evangelistic gift.

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[88] This is discussed on page 81, point 10.

For explanatory reasons, some of the main points addressed in these five arguments are briefly quoted below.

1. The language of regeneration in the Old Testament

   Moses made a clear distinction between two kinds of people in Israel, those who 'walked after the stubbornness of their hearts' and for whom there was no pardon (Deut 29:19,20) and those whose hearts had been 'circumcised' by the transforming love of God. He said: *The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your children, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live* (Deut 30:6).

2. The operations of the Spirit of God in man

   In the process of drawing individual souls to God, the Holy Spirit follows a definite sequence of steps or operations. First come the conviction of sin and guilt, then the repentance of faith which comprises true conversion to God, then the actual regeneration of the heart, making the sinner come alive spiritually and then the sanctifying growth toward holiness. If any one of these steps is left out it is hard to see how the others can exist. If the soul's regeneration is really an integral part of the process, then wherever the other steps are in evidence, regeneration must always be assumed to have taken place. Conviction of sin and guilt is a common experience among the people of the Old Testament. The first clear example is the generation of Noah, fabled for the sins of materialism and violence. With them in mind, God said: *my Spirit shall not forever contend with men* (remain in, abide with, judge, or convict; Gn 6:3). However the obscure verb is translated, it refers to the Holy Spirit's task of struggling with man prior to his salvation.

3. The New Testament view of the saints of old

   The third argument which points in the direction of Old Testament regeneration is the high regard the writers of the New Testament hold for the children of God in former times. Jesus taught that Father Abraham was godly in his deeds, not like the group of Pharisees who tried to confound him (Jn 8:39). Believers from all nations will join the redeemed of the past in the kingdom: *Many will come from east and west and sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 8:11). This leads to

the conclusion that all of God's children share a life from above – God's gift of grace in response to their faith.

4. The regenerating ministry of Christ

According to many Jesus lived and preached under the old dispensation before the Pentecostal inauguration of the church. He taught that *the Spirit had not yet been given* (Jn 7:39). *Unless I go away, the counsellor will not come to you* (16:7). *Wait for the gift of my Father…in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit* (Acts 1:4).   Chafer (1948:45), commenting on these statements of Christ, wrote: "There could be no church on earth until the advent of the Holy Spirit. It is regenerated, baptised and sealed by the Spirit."

This interpretation, however, leads us to conclude that not even the ministry of Christ was supported by the regenerating function of the Holy Spirit. If Nicodemus had asked in faith for the 'life from above' on the night of his conversation with the Master, Jesus would have replied, "Wait, Nicodemus; only a few months (or years) remain until the Spirit will be given and then you may be born again".

Even a cursory examination of Jesus' teaching will show that this is not what he meant. The kingdom of God had come with his appearance and souls were entering even as he preached (Lk 16:16). Yet no one enters the kingdom of God unless he is born again, explained Jesus to Nicodemus. Furthermore, the gift of eternal life is given at the time of faith and conversion, since *whosoever believes in him shall not perish but has eternal life* (Jn 3:15). Salvation is like a resurrection, said the Lord. *The time has now come* (when the spiritually dead) *will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear shall live* (5:25). *Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, has crossed over from death to life* (5:24).

The Apostle John opened his Gospel with the incarnation of the Word and his coming to his own. All who received him were given the authority to become the children of God, *who were born not of natural descent…but were born of God* (1:12,13). Clearly John had in mind the believers who came to the Lord during his earthly ministry as well as those that followed through the preaching of the church.

What this adds up to, is that Jesus simply taught that all people of all dispensations *must be born again*.

5. The Pentecostal gift of the Spirit

In order to arrive at the biblical purpose of Pentecost, we must consider the words of three inspired sources: the words of the Prophet Joel, the statements of Jesus about the Spirit's coming and the explanation of Peter in Acts, chapter two. None of these makes any reference to the gift of regeneration, except indirectly as part of the outcome of the event: *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved* (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21). To make this possible the Old Testament prophet saw the day when all of God's true followers would receive prophetic vision and power, both the old and the young. So we find that 120 praying followers of Jesus were all filled with this prophetic gift, which enabled them to become evangelistic and witness to the Jewish citizens and pilgrims in Jerusalem, speaking to them in the various languages represented. Nothing in Joel's words suggest that these spokesmen would be unsaved or unrighteous people in need of the new birth.

Jesus made it very clear that something highly unusual was about to happen to his disciples when the Holy Spirit came. He said, *Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high* (Lk 24:49). He also explained that *when he comes he will convict the world in regard to sin, righteousness, and judgement* and would also *guide you into all truth* (Jn 16:7, 13). But the fact of the matter is that the disciples by the close of his ministry had all come to saving faith and true relationship with the Father. Therefore, they were not waiting as dead souls for the new birth, but as born again believers for the Spirit's power, which would impel them out as witnesses to the end of the earth.

Peter is the third source of information about the meaning of the Baptism that took place at Pentecost. Confirming the fulfilment of the prophetic word to Joel, he spoke for all of the praying company of believers as he preached the message of the cross, the resurrection and the ascension in the power he had just received. Three thousand responded to the call of God's Spirit and to these new believers the gift was indeed the regenerating of their hearts. But for the followers already saved, the arrival of the Holy Spirit was a common or a community experience, shared by everyone in the group. Abraham Kuyper[89]

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[89] Abraham Kuyper, *The works of the Holy Spirit.* New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1900. page 120.

called Pentecost "the extension of the Spirit's ministry (from individuals) to a company of men organically related".

From the above arguments it seems clear that the Old Testament saints were regenerated. They were declared righteous despite the fact that the New Testament church was non existent in their lifetime.[90]. In view hereof it becomes clear that, irrespective of whether reference is made to persons before or after the death and resurrection of Christ, association with God requires regeneration. If this is not so, then Jesus made an untrue statement when he said: *Except one is born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God* (Jn 3:3). As Christ is the head of the church, association with him therefore indisputably requires regeneration.

8.   The kingdom and the church

Küng (1968:43) maintains that a disturbing fact for ecclesiology is the matter concerning the word "church." This he says because it only appears twice in the New Testament – and, moreover, in two passages of the same gospel (Mt 16:18; 18:17). On the other hand, the words "kingdom of God" appear about a hundred times. He then refers to a statement made by Alfred Loisy,[91] namely: "Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and what came was the church", and asks: "Are we forced to agree with this ominous and often quoted comment?" Most certainly not. What we need to do though, is to distinguish between the two concepts, namely *kingdom of God* and *church*. My understanding of the relationship between the two is presented in the following chapters. Obviously, the theme of the relationship between the kingdom and the church deserves a study of its own; nonetheless it is cardinal to the purpose of this dissertation to include a concise discussion herein.

Pentecost (1958:427) has the following to say of the theme of the kingdom of God:

> God's kingdom program occupies a large body of Scripture. But, in spite of all that the Scripture has to say on this subject, one is faced with a great variety of interpretations and explanations as to the nature and purpose of the kingdom program of God. To some the kingdom of God is synonymous with the eternal state, or heaven into which one comes after death, so that it has no relationship to the earth whatsoever. To others it is a non-

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[90] See the introductory paragraph of point 7.3 on page 68.

[91] A Loisy, L'Evangile et l'Eglise, Paris 1902, p.111: "Jésus annonçaìt le royaume et c'est l'Eglise qui est venue." Küng adds that this quotation is always taken in the wrong, i.e. a negative sense; Loisy meant it as a positive statement.

material or spiritual kingdom in which God rules over the hearts of men, so that, while it is related to the present age, it is unrelated to the earth. To still others the kingdom is purely earthly, without spiritual realities attached to it, so that it is a political and social structure to be achieved by the efforts of men and thus becomes the goal of a social and economic evolution to which men press. To others with the same general concept, it has to do with a nationalistic movement on the part of Israel that will reconstitute that nation as an independent nation in the political realm. Then there are those who view the kingdom as synonymous with the visible organized church, so that the church becomes the kingdom, this making the kingdom both spiritual and political. In addition there are those who view the kingdom as the manifestation, in the earthly realm, of the universal sovereignty of God, in which he rules in the affairs of men, so that the kingdom is conceived as being both spiritual and material in its concept. Through this maze of interpretations it is almost impossible to make one's way.

As can be deduced from above, there are a variety of theological views relative to the relationship between the kingdom and the church.[92] Nonetheless, it is accepted by most theologians that all God's acts are irrevocably linked to one another. Thus whether one speaks of his providence for creation, his salvific acts in humanities redemption, or his self-revelation, one cannot isolate one from the other, as they are all interrelated. Should this principle be ignored, it may lead to a prejudiced understanding of the isolated act itself and inexorably the disfigurement of the other acts of God. Therefore, when we reflect on the church we must adhere to this principle. Two South African theologians, namely the late Prof J Heyns of the Reformed tradition and Dr I G L du Plessis of the Pentecostal tradition, support this principle.

In his introductory remarks concerning the kingdom and the church, Heyns (1980:4) illustrates the inter-relationship of all God's acts by comparing it to the totality of a tree. As no part of the tree can survive without the tree, so too he argues, no act of God can 'survive' if isolated from the totality of his acts. Similarly, Du Plessis (2004:1-10) contrasts God's acts to that of a house, where each separate portion of the building, although distinguishable from the others, together form a complete home. As the foundation without the roof is not a house, so we cannot speak of church without speaking of the kingdom or vice versa.

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[92] To discuss all these views within this study will be impossible. For purposes of clarity on the author's view, a brief discussion is included, bearing in mind that the author is aware of the other views.

The term 'kingdom of God' implies that God has a kingdom with subjects, over which he rules as the sovereign king. This kingdom is the universe and this major biblical truth (Ps 11:4; 24:1; 103:19; 145:13; Is 6:5; Rom 13:1) forms the point of departure for our discussion. Scripture clearly states that God is the king, not only over his own people, but also over the whole universe. Obviously this statement is problematic, because it immediately gives rise to the question of theodicy. The recent (26th December 2004) tsunami disaster in Asia is an excellent example hereof.[93] The implications of theodicy are not discussed here, suffice it to say that a thorough understanding of the concept "kingdom of God," will make such events more comprehensible.

It must be borne in mind that with the revolt of Satan[94] against God, (and the Fall) Satan took the dominion, which God had given to Adam, away from him. This resulted in the whole world currently being subjected to the control of the evil one (1 Jn 5:15). Paul refers to this control when he declares *that we are not ignorant of the devices of Satan* (2 Cor 2:11). When Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world, he laid claim to dominion over it (Mt 4:8-9). It is significant that Christ did not challenge Satan's right to make the offer to surrender these kingdoms. He viewed them as in Satan's domain, so that Satan had the right to do with them as he willed.

Further support for this theory is found in the Old Testament book of Daniel. Therein it is implied that Satan's demons have dominion over the countries of the world. The prince of the Persian Empire resisted God's sent angel for twenty-one days (Dan 10:5-6,13). In contrast hereto, Jesus, prior to his resurrection, said that all power (authority) in heaven and earth had been given to him (Mt 28:18). Yet, despite this statement it seems that Satan controls secular systems. Even so, the unfolding of God's progressive acts with humanity, illustrates how Jesus progressively regains all "lost" things, to once again, place them under the sovereign rule of God and within his kingdom (Eph 1:10).

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[93] Soon after the disaster the question Where was God?" was asked of theologians and church leaders. An Eastern Cape daily newspaper included a ¾ page headlined with the words, "Waar was God?" (Die Burger, 7th January 2005, p7).

[94] This revolt is believed by many theologians to be the theme of Ezekiel 28. Satan is considered to be the leader of apostasy and Ezekiel 28:15-17 seems to describe his fall.

8.1   The kingdom from above and below

To understand this, it is important to bear in mind that there are two perspectives from which the kingdom of God must be understood. Firstly, God's kingdom must be understood "from above*"* and "from below". Viewed from above – from the transcendental as God views it - God rules over the universe, a kingdom that spans the ages. Dunn (1992:10), in discussing the word *kingdom,* as applied to God's kingdom by Jesus, maintains firstly, that Jesus spoke Aramaic and secondly, that the Aramaic implication of the word *kingdom* is broader than our English translation thereof. He explains:

> …it is important to realize that in Aramaic versions of the Old Testament "the kingdom of God" was equivalent to God himself in the exercise of his sovereignty. All this means that we really need a different translation than kingdom and explains why most New Testament scholars prefer to speak of God's rule or God's "reign".

What the above statement infers is that Jesus meant the exercise of royal power and authority when speaking of God's kingdom. When he spoke of God's kingdom there was no thought whatsoever of a territory[95] where the king's rule was merely nominal (absentee landlord). Precisely the opposite is meant. What he was actually talking about was God's effective rule, God acting as king. That is the kingdom seen from above.

Viewed from below – from the historical progress of God's acts with humanity - we notice various consecutive images of the kingdom. Briefly it can be stated that the *theocracy* of the Judges, the *monarchy* of Israel in the Old Testament, the *church* (as a spiritual kingdom) in the New Testament and the futuristic *Millennial* kingdom, all form part of the manifestation leading to the culmination of the universal kingdom of God within the precincts of God's salvation history.

The monarchial reign of God, during the period of the kings of Israel, ended after Solomon. The kingdom was then divided into the Southern (Judah) and Northern tribes (Israel). Both Judah and Israel were taken into captivity, the former by the Babylonians and the latter by the Assyrians. But prior to this God had promised to establish David's throne forever (2 Sam 9:6; Ps 89:4,5). Nevertheless, history progressed and included the succession of the Babylonian Empire by the Medo-

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95 Obviously the term "territory' must be understood as relative to the context of this statement. I am aware of the fact that God's universal rule can be viewed as a territory.

Persian Empire and the return of the Jews to Israel after seventy years of captivity. They, however, remained under Persian rule until the Greek's, led by Alexander the Great, defeated the Persians. The ensuing Maccabean revolt in 2 BCE restored independency for Judah, but this was soon overthrown by the Roman Empire. Jesus was born in Bethlehem while the country was under Roman rule.

8.2   The Messianic kingdom and the church

The Old Testament abounds with promises of the resurgence of the ancient Davidic kingdom in the form of the Messianic kingdom (cf. 2 Sam 7:13; Ps 2:45-48; Is 9:1-7, 11-10; 55:3-4; Jer 23:5,6; Ezek 37:22; Dan 7:22; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:7; etc). It is on this point, concerning the time of the re-emergence of David's kingdom that theologians seem to differ in their hermeneutical interpretations. On the one hand, for example, some theologians of the Amillennial School are inclined to interpret this as being fulfilled in the present age through the church. Walvoord (1991:99) makes the following comment in this regard:

> Conservative amillenarians interpret the covenant with David to be a covenant with the people of God, that is, the church. In doing so, they equate the throne of David with the throne of God in heaven, and they equate the people of Israel who were ruled by David as the people of God in general, (*church*)[96] not Israel.

Many theologians of the Reformed tradition view the fulfilment thereof as taking place in the New Earth. An example hereof is König (1999:62) who maintains that it is nonsensical to view the futuristic resurgence of David's throne as a millennial event, as believed by Dispensationalists. This he argues, will (according to Dispensationalist theology) be a time wherein there will still be unsaved people on earth, and at the end of which there will be a massive rebellion against Christ's rule. Thus, he argues that the peace referred to in Isaiah 9:7 must be realised in the New Earth.[97] Theologians from the Premillennialism school, on the other hand, differ with the above view ascribing the fulfilment of this promise to the Messianic reign of Christ - the millennium. The latter view is that which is supported by the author, as is described below.

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[96] Italics my own added for emphasis.
[97] König (1999:63) rejects belief in a literal millennium, maintaining that the Bible only refers thereto once and as such it is of no importance. Whether this is a logical argument is debateable. I do not agree with König on this matter, but will not debate the matter here.

8.3   One Messiah - two comings

A thorough study of the Old Testament passages that are related to the resurgence of the Davidic kingdom, reveal the expected Messiah as the *suffering servant* (Ps 22:2, 7-9,12,14-19; Is 53; Zech 9:9) and as the *reigning king* (Ps 2; Is 2:2-5; Zech 14:2-4,9,16). It was these two images of the Messiah, as presented by the prophets that could not be reconciled by the Old Testament Jews.   Du Plessis (2004:104) referring to these images of Christ states:

> The Messiah would therefore appear as a servant and as a king. He would come to die and he would come to reign eternally. This description of the Messiah would have been correct, because it was how the Old Testament portrayed him. However, this double profile confused the Jews… because of this confusion some expositors erroneously adduced that there had to be two Messiahs, or even worse, several Messiahs.

The confusion referred to above was caused by the Jews' failure to grasp that the ministries of the Messiah as *servant* and as *king*, were separated by the church period. According to Paul (Eph 3:1-6), the church was a mystery[98] in the Old Testament era. In other words, the Old Testament prophets did not distinguish between the two comings of the Messiah. They constantly described events related to his first advent and those related to his second advent as one multifaceted situation. An example hereof is found in Isaiah 9:6-7, at which time the prophet had said that *unto us a child is born…* the coming Prince of peace will sit on the throne of David and forever rule over his kingdom.

Some theologians interpret the "throne of David and his kingdom" to be the church.[99] Thorough exegesis, however, shows this to be very unlikely for various reasons. The most obvious of these is the fact that the text states that when the Prince of peace governs, there will be peace without end. In contrast hereto, the church period bears the scars of many wars. In fact, wars and rumours of wars are features of the church period (Mt 24:6). Furthermore, the church is never called the kingdom of David in the New Testament. This is but one passage of Scripture that clearly illustrates the fact that the Old Testament prophets did not know that God had the church in mind, the *spiritual kingdom*.

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[98] For a detailed discussion of this subject, see chapter 9 of my previous study (Van Wyk 2002:162), listed in the bibliography of this study.
[99] See point 8.2 on page 77.

A careful reading of the Old Testament prophecy as recorded in Isaiah 61, confirms the above argument. When the first seven verses are compared to the record of Luke 4:16-21, it becomes clear that only the first two versus of Isaiah's prophecy were fulfilled by Christ at his first advent, but the rest are futuristic and will be fulfilled at his second advent. Thus I conclude this paragraph with the understanding that the church as a *spiritual kingdom*, is a part of the kingdom of God, but is not to be equated with the kingdom of God as one and the same.

8.4   The political kingdom

It is clear from Scripture that the Jews were expecting the restoration of the political Messianic kingdom. The Old Testament repeatedly testified to the resurgence of the throne and kingdom of David and this expectation is also presented by the gospels. The angel Gabriel announced the coming of the Davidic kingdom with Jesus reigning on the throne of his father David (Lk 1:32). Zechariah was filled with the Holy Ghost and predicted the coming earthly kingdom. He said that God has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (Lk 1:67-71). John the Baptist proclaimed the Davidic kingdom (Mt 3:2; Lk 1:77). King Herod feared the political kingdom of the Messiah and for this reason he had the baby boys killed (Mt 2:16). The Jewish crowd expected the Messianic kingdom. After the miracle of the loaves and the fish they intended making Jesus king by force (Jn 6:15).

That the Pharisees were expecting a political kingdom[100] is clear from their question addressed to Jesus (Lk 17:20).[101] They expected it to come visibly. Jesus answered them by saying that the kingdom would not come with observation. He illustrated this further by stating that no one would be able to say, "here it is" or "there it is". Why? Because the kingdom would in essence be in the believer (Lk 17:21). The question asked by the disciples of Jesus in Acts 1:6 is supportive of this theory. They were expecting Christ to establish a political kingdom – namely, the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. Christ's answer is proof enough to deduce that the church was not the restoration of David's kingdom, or he would have told them so.

Walvoord (1991:100, 105) makes the following statement in this regard:

> The throne of David is a symbol of authority in a political kingdom, not a universal kingdom… if there were any time when a correction of the prevailing expectation of Israel for the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant in

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[100] The resurgence of the Davidic kingdom.

[101] See also Lk 19:11 for confirmation of the fact that the Jews expected a political kingdom.

a literal and political way would be required, it would be at the outset of the New Testament narrative, beginning with the birth of Christ. Mary, along with all other people of Israel at that time, was expecting the coming One who would deliver Israel politically from Rome and, according to the prophets, would bring in a glorious kingdom.

9. Summation

In spite of the differing views mentioned above, they all agree on the fact of the kingdom of God and that it is inclusive of the church. From this brief discussion it is also deduced that the church is a spiritual kingdom and that the character of the church is spiritual and immanent. As a kingdom implies a ruler with subjects, so the church implies the Lordship of Christ (head) and the church (body) his subjects. Furthermore, it is inferred that God has a universal kingdom (seen from above), which is manifested in history (seen from below) in various ways, namely, as a theocratic kingdom during the time of the Judges; a monarchical kingdom during the monarchy of Israel; a spiritual kingdom during the church period, and the political Messianic kingdom during the millennium - all these being various facets of God's universal kingdom.

Much more can be said of the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. Yet, the above discussion, although brief, clearly illustrates that within the context of this thesis and in the mind of the author, the church forms an intricate part of God's universal kingdom. It is the spiritual manifestation of the kingdom, yet it is not the kingdom itself. It is one of the forms in which God's sovereign rule over the universe is displayed. Macquarrie (1977:369) agrees with this statement by saying that the kingdom of God is already present in the world, but it is not to be identified with the church, though one may hope that the church, together with any other communities of the Spirit, might be, so to speak, the spearhead of the kingdom in the world.

Heyns (1980:22) compliments this by saying:

> Kingdom and church are not identical. The kingdom must not be restricted to the church (as has happened so often in the history of theology) for the kingdom is much wider than the church, and the church is much narrower than the kingdom. But it is wrong to set the two dualistically over against each other, as if they have nothing in common.

The kingdom of God will indeed, in the end time, have its appearance in visible glory. But in its essence it is the royal estate of God in general, his sovereign kingship as

the ruling and saving God, which sovereignty he displays in different times and dispensations in ever-new forms. Therefore the term "kingdom of God" includes, of course, the theocratic kingdom, the monarchical kingdom, the spiritual kingdom and the millennial kingdom - but at the same time comprises much more than this. Only the immediate context can make clear from case to case what particular historical aspect of the kingdom is meant, e.g. whether the theocratic, the present spiritual (church), the future millennial or the eternal universal kingdom. These past, present and future aspects of the kingdom cohere not as two or more kingdoms but as the one, universal kingdom of God, manifested in successive stages.

10.   The importance of Pentecost for the church

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon earth and the empowering of the Christian Church followed ten days after the ascension of Christ to heaven. The Pentecostal event was the necessary result of the Passover event. The equipment of power referred to by Christ in Acts 1:8, is directly connected to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The Day of Pentecost refers to the feast that the Jews celebrated in thankful acknowledgement of the finished harvest. This feast is celebrated fifty days, or seven weeks after Easter (the Greek word *pentekoste* means fifty, Lv 23:15-22) and it is the second important annual feast of the Israelites.

It is often said that the day of Pentecost marked the birth of the church. This claim has certain validity, since Pentecost provided the anointing upon the disciples that equipped them to launch into their mission as a church. The Pentecostal anointing did not, however, bring into existence a church that had never existed before. The apostles had been instructed, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19), but they were not equipped to fulfil that task effectively until they had been endowed with Holy Spirit power. Thus, Jesus promised, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses." The Pentecostal baptism provided the final element in equipping Christian believers to achieve their role in the church, but there was already a company of Jesus' followers - a church – prior to Pentecost.[102]

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[102] See discussion on this theme on page 34, point 4.2.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out on the 120 disciples with the accompaniment of the sound of a rushing mighty wind, the appearance of cloven tongues like fire and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4). This was the fulfilment of that which John the Baptist had referred to when he stated that he baptised with water, but that one was to come that was more powerful than him and he would baptise them with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt 3:11). From this we deduce that John baptised people in water, but Christ would baptise people in the Holy Spirit. Möller (1997:2) explains the baptism in the Holy Spirit as follows:

> Just as John the Baptist baptised people in water, so Christ will baptise believers in the Holy Spirit and with fire. The Greek preposition *en* usually means *in* and is used as a *dative of place*, for instance when one is baptised *in* water. This preposition can sometimes mean *with* and is used as a *dative of instrument*, expressed as "to baptise with water". We prefer the translation "in water" because it links up with the symbolism of the water-baptism (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12). Therefore we prefer to speak of Baptism in the Holy Spirit. The expression *equipped,* used in Luke 24:49 in connection with the Pentecostal experience, is the translation of the Greek word *enduo* which means to clothe or to put on.

From the above, Möller maintains that as one is dressed or wrapped in clothes, so one can also be baptised in the field of force of the Holy Spirit in order to be completely controlled by him and as a result thereof, one is equipped with spiritual power to live a life wherein one can be a more effective witness for Christ.

It is important though, that we understand that prior to the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit *was* active in the Old Testament and also in the life of Christ, from his conception through to his resurrection as is evident from many Old Testament passages (Jdg 6:34; 1 Sm 10:10; 2 Chr 24:20). Nonetheless, according to John 7:38-39, Jesus said: *"Whosoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive."* John ends verse 39 by adding, *"Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not been glorified."* This last sentence, namely *"up to that time the Spirit had not been given,"* may seem to imply that up to that particular point in time the Spirit had not yet come. If this were the case, it would lead to profound implications.

It must be clearly understood though, that in our interpretation of Scripture it is important to constantly distinguish between the *person* of the Holy Spirit and the *power* of the Holy Spirit. A detailed discussion of this subject will prove too lengthy to be included here, but suffice it to say that the *person* of the Holy Spirit (God the Holy Spirit) is omnipresent. It is the *person* of the Holy Spirit that indwells the believer at rebirth (1 Cor 3:16; Rom 5:5).

Thus, the *person* of the omnipresent Holy Spirit could not be poured out on the Day of Pentecost, as he was already present. Therefore John was referring to the *power* of the Holy Spirit – which up to that time had not been given - that would equip the disciples for their ministry. On the Day of Pentecost the disciples, who already had the *person* of the Holy Spirit indwelling them, received Holy Spirit *power* for their ministry (Ac 1:8; 2:38,39). Thus, on the Day of Pentecost, the church - which Jesus constituted when he breathed on them - was empowered for its service.

In his discussion on John 7:38-39, Verster ([1974] 1975:41) maintains that these texts do not emphasize the coming of the person of the Holy Spirit, but rather the Spirit's ministry as Comforter. He explains his view as follows:

> The term "Comforter" is derived from the Greek word *parakletos,* which is also interpreted "advocate" in 1 John 2:1. The literal meaning of the word is: *"called to one's side". Para* = beside; *kaleo*= to call*.* This implies *"one that is called to the side of another",* with the emphasis on helping and assisting as an advocate would do in a court. As Comforter, he has now taken Jesus' position in order to eradicate the loneliness of the disciples so that in their situation, that which Christ had done for them could be realised. Christ regained the honour and glory for us all, which we had lost in the first Adam and the Spirit is now progressively working in us, thereby enabling us to continually grow in the likeness of Christ, the last Adam - an example of the perfect person that God initially intended us to be – so that ultimately we will become that which Christ is now (Rom 8:29; Phlp 3:20-21; 1 Jn 3:2). In other words, after Christ's departure the indwelling Spirit has taken his position and ministry so as to exert in us with power, that which Christ has done on the cross[103].

Besides the above, Verster adds that a comparison of Joel's prophecy in 2:23-31 and Peter's words on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:16-20, demonstrate that it was not the *person* of the Holy Spirit that came at Pentecost, but rather his *power*. From the copula *"afterward"* at the beginning of Joel 2:28, concerning the outpouring of the Spirit, which links it to the context of verses 18-27, it is deduced that Joel's prophecy

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[103] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

(2:28-32) will be fulfilled after *(-ward)* something else has happened. This "something else" is the restoration of Israel to their land. This did not happen at Pentecost, as Israel was not restored to their land at that time.

Thus, the prophecy of Joel was only partially fulfilled at Pentecost. Peter (Ac 2:17), confirms this when on the Day of Pentecost he quoted Joel, but rephrased the words by saying, *"In the last days, God says, I will pour out __of__ my Spirit…",* while Joel actually declared*, "I will pour out my Spirit"* (all of it). From this Verster argues that Peter's inclusion of the word *"of"* cannot refer to the person of the Holy Spirit, as there can never be a segmentation of the person of the Spirit. Rather, this __of__ is related to the power of the Spirit. All the power was not poured out on the Day of Pentecost, but will be poured out after Israel is restored to her land, which will be during the Great Tribulation. Joel unites the totality of the outpouring of the Spirit (all of it) with the time that the sun will be darkened and the moon turned to blood (30-31), which inevitably points toward the tribulation period. That the Holy Spirit will be active in the tribulation period is apparent from several passages of Scripture. Amongst others, Zechariah (4:1-6, 11-14), which refers to the two witnesses of Revelation 11 who will preach for three and a half years during this period. Zechariah writes that their preaching will be in the power of the Spirit.

The Pentecostal event could never have taken place without the preceding resurrection and ascension of Christ (Jn 16:7). It was the first act of the mediatorial reign of the exalted Redeemer in heaven (Acts 2:33) and the beginning of an unbroken series of manifestations in fulfillment of his promise to be with his people *always, even unto the end of the world* (Mt 28:20). His ascension was only a withdrawal of his visible local presence and the beginning of his spiritual omnipresence in the church, which *is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all* (Eph 1:23).

From this it is deduced that the church is not a continuation of the Old Testament Israel, but rather an extension of the mission of Jesus Christ. As Christ, at his incarnation required a body wherein to manifest himself, so too, the Holy Spirit requires a body wherewith to manifest himself. This body is the church, which has the mission of furtherance of the gospel message of salvation, which was initiated by Jesus. The continuance of the Pentecostal event within the church as experienced

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on the Day of Pentecost seems to be sufficient proof that the church is to be the continuation of the work initialized by Christ. Acts 2:4 declares, *and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit…* Apparently, this is the real inward miracle, the main fact and the central idea of the Pentecostal narrative.

To the apostles, it was in a certain sense their baptism with power, confirmation and ordination, all in one, for they received no other.[104] To them it was the great inspiration that enabled them hereafter to be authoritative teachers of the gospel by tongue and pen. Not that it superseded subsequent growth in knowledge, or special revelations on particular points (as Peter received at Joppa and Paul on several occasions); but it appears that they were endowed with such an understanding of Christ's words and plan of salvation, as they never had before.

Apparently what was dark and mysterious now became clear and full of meaning to them. The Spirit revealed to them the person and works of the Redeemer in the light of his resurrection and exaltation and took full possession of their mind and heart (Acts 2:14-36). They had now but one desire to gratify, but one object to live for, namely, to be witnesses of Christ and instruments of the salvation of their fellow human beings, that they too might become partakers of their inheritance *incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven* (1 Pet 1:3-4).

Nevertheless, the communication of the Holy Spirit was not confined to the Twelve. It extended to the brethren of the Lord, the mother of Jesus, the pious women who had attended his ministry, and the whole brotherhood of a hundred and twenty souls who were assembled in that chamber (Acts 1:13-14). They were *all* filled with the Spirit and *all* spoke with tongues (2:4) and Peter saw in the event the promised outpouring of the Spirit upon *all* flesh, sons and daughters, young men and old men, servants and handmaidens (2:17)

It is characteristic that in this spring season of the church, the women were sitting with the men - not in a separate court as in the temple, nor divided by a partition as in the synagogue, but in the same room as equal sharers in the spiritual blessings. The beginning was a prophetic anticipation of the end and a manifestation of the universal

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[104] See point 4.2 on page 34 concerning the insufflation.

priesthood and brotherhood of believers in Christ, *in whom all are one, whether Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female* (Gal 3:28).

This new spiritual life, illuminated, controlled and directed by the Holy Spirit, manifested itself first in the speaking with tongues (Acts 2:4). The mysterious gift of tongues, or glossolalia, appears here for the first time, but became, with other extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, a frequent phenomenon in the apostolic churches (10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor 14:5).

The supernatural experience of the disciples broke through the confines of ordinary speech and burst out in ecstatic language of praise for the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11). It was the Spirit himself who gave them utterance and played on their tongues, as on new tuned harps, unearthly melodies of praise (2:4). The glossolalia was here, as in all cases where it is mentioned, an act of worship and adoration, not an act of teaching and instruction,[105] which followed afterwards in the sermon of Peter. It was the first *Te Deum*[106] of the newborn church. It served as a significant sign to all and arrested their attention to the presence of a supernatural power.

From the chamber of their empowerment, the disciples went out to heal the sick and to call sinners to repentance, just as their Master had done. The continuation of Christ's work was their immediate action subsequent to the Pentecostal experience. This explains the importance of Christ's command that they should tarry in Jerusalem until they had received the promised power from on high (1:4, 8). This power was promised, not only to those present at the Pentecostal event, but to *all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call* (2:39). This implies that this power has always been available for the church and as such, it is also available for the church of today. This topic could also shed more light on the subject when considering the maintaining of balance between the identity and relevance of the church. The significance thereof could possibly be the subject of a subsequent thesis. [107]

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[105] It is my opinion that the Bible never teaches of a "message in tongues" as believed by most Pentecostalists, implying teaching or instruction. Paul is clear on the matter that the gift of speaking in other tongues is always directed to God, implying worship and adoration (1 Cor 14:2).

[106] Expression of thanksgiving or exultation.

[107] Personally I envisage such a study in the future.

11. The body in action

Christ's divine nature along with his teaching and the sacrifice of himself on the cross and his shed blood gives the church its life (Acts 20:28). To be true to its founder and builder, the church must reflect the spirit and ideals of its founder (Phil.2: 5). Moltmann (1992:6) makes the following significant statement in this regard:

> If, for the church of Christ, Christ is the 'subject' of the church, then the doctrine of the church Christology will become the dominant theme of ecclesiology. Every statement about the church will be a statement about Christ.

In Acts 10:38 we read that *…(Jesus) went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil for God was with him.* We also read that Jesus preached, taught and worked many miracles among the people, especially miracles of healing (Mk 1:38; Mt 5:2; Jn 12:37). He described his own ministry with the following words:

> *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised* (Lk 4:18).

> Referring to his Father in John 9:4, Jesus said: *I must work the works of him that sent me.* Later, addressing the disciples, he said: *…peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you* (Jn 20:21).

> In his first Epistle, John states that the *Son of God was manifested that he may destroy the works of the devil* (1 Jn 3:8).

> Jesus said: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father* (Jn 14:12).

These sayings of Jesus are the expression of his purpose for the church to be the continuation of that which he began. In one of his eschatological references, phrases such as *feeding the hungry,* giving *water to the thirsty* and *clothing the naked* is used as the norm for dividing the *sheep* from the *goats* (Mt 25:31-46). It may be argued that these concepts are applicable to the spiritual life only, yet, in view of the fact that Jesus was a sympathetic person, it seems unlikely that his actions and words were disassociated from the actual human needs of the day. This is clearly illustrated by his miraculous literal feeding of five thousand *men besides women and children* with the five loaves and two fish (Mt 14:14-21).

As was mentioned above, Luke tells us that Christ *went about doing good*. If the church is an extension of Christ on earth - his body - should it not also be *doing good*

and healing all that are (were) oppressed? The continuation of *the work that I do* (the words uttered by Jesus) may, to a certain extent, be described as the relevancy of the church. If the church is not continually engaged in these works, its relevancy is questionable. A questionable relevancy obviously implies a questionable identity.[108] Yet these seem to be only one side of a many faceted theological problem, namely the practical side.

The church must be careful not to step into the trap of preaching a social gospel – where it goes to the extreme of only supplying material needs - while neglecting the spiritual life-enriching value of its message. The principle laid down by Christ is to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to us as well (Mt 6:33). This means that the practical and spiritual sides thereof are inextricably related to the church's relevancy and identity.[109] Paul, in his letter to Titus, states: *…he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those that have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone* (3:5-8 NIV).

Bunyan (s.a.: 550) explains this portion of Scripture as follows:

> From this Scripture, therefore, I do gather these things observable. First, that good works do flow from faith. Second, That everyone that believeth should be careful that his or her works be good. Third, that every believer should not only be careful that their works be good, and for the present do them, but should also be careful to maintain them; they should carefully study to keep in a constant course of good works.

From this Bunyan argues that the believer's good works do flow from faith because of the impossibility of it flowing from any other thing. They must either flow from faith, or not at all. In support of his argument he quotes a number of passages from Scripture, namely Romans 14:23; Hebrews 11:4,6; Matthew 7:16,17 and Colossians 1:4-6.

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[108] See the discussion on identity and relevance on page 92, point 2.

[109] This side of the problem is the crux of this thesis and is discussed fully in the progression of this study.

This argument posited by Bunyan is that which constitutes the spiritual side mentioned above, without which the church could never maintain balance between identity and relevance. The fundamental note is *faith*. It was to Peter confessing his faith in Christ that the promise came; *upon this rock I will build my church*[110] (Mt 16:18). Primarily the church is a community of believers whose faith culminates in witness and worship.

Hence, we find that the terms *believers* or *they that believed,* are constantly used as a synonym for the members of the Christian church (e.g. Acts 2:44; 4:32; 5:14; 1 Tim 4:12). Consequently, the rite of baptism, which from the first was the condition of entrance into the apostolic church and the seal of membership in it, was recognized as pre-eminently the sacrament of faith and of confession (Acts 2:41; 8:12,36; Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 12:13). This church-founding and church-building faith, of which baptism was the seal, was much more than an act of intellectual assent. It was a personal laying hold of the personal Saviour, the bond of a vital union between Christ and the believer which resulted in nothing less than a new creation (Rom 6:4; 8:1-2; 2 Cor 5:17).[111]

Furthermore*,* it is acceptable from the above that the church (body), in order to be identifiable with Christ and relevant within the world, should manifest the same characteristics as those displayed by its Founder (head). The idiomatic expression "like father like son" should always be visible in relation to Christ and his church. Unfortunately, this is not always observable. Thus, to establish the nature of these characteristics we need to take a closer look at the characteristics displayed or manifested by Christ, in order to identify with *his* character and thereby determine what the character and behaviour of his church should be.[112] Put another way, we may say that the church must be identifiable with Christ. Christ's behavioural pattern must always set the pace and the example that the church should follow. This means that the church should be an expression of the character of its founder at all times and in every situation. This is only made possible through the indwelling Christ.

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[110] See discussion of this text on page 27, point 3.2.
[111] See discussion of the term "born again" on page 60, point 7.1.
[112] A detailed character study of Christ is not the purpose of this study, yet it is important to mention some traits of his character that should be visible in the church.

12.   Conclusion

From this introductory chapter on the church, it is hypothetical that the contemporary church is in a critical situation regarding its identity and relevance. The church as a spiritual kingdom is not identical to the kingdom of God, yet an intrinsic part thereof. In this sense, the church is identical with the spiritual kingdom of God; both signify that redeemed humanity in which God in Christ exercises actual spiritual dominion (Jn 3:3, 5). Thus the church is a spiritual body, consisting only of those persons regenerated by the Spirit of God. As was stated earlier,[113] it is nothing less than the body of Christ – the organism to which he gives spiritual life, and through which he manifests the fullness of his power and grace (Eph 1:22-23). The same divine life, which ensures the pardon and the perseverance of the believers, unite them to all other believers. The church is believed to be the body of Christ, while Christ is the head thereof. Participation or "membership" of the church demands personal or individual regeneration. This is the essence of the church.

Being the body of Christ, the church should at all times display characteristics identifiable with those of Christ, the head thereof. However, it is logical that unless the church can identify with Christ it cannot be relevant. Moltmann (1974:18) makes the following significant statement:

> The question of relevance arises only where identity is a matter of experience and belief. When something can be identified, it is possible to ask whether it is relevant to anything else and whether it has any connection with anything else. Where the Christian identity of faith is abandoned, this question no longer arises.

From this statement it is clear that unless people can identify with Christ through regeneration, relevance will be non-existent. This is the key factor concerning the essence of the church. Regeneration is the one property or attribute that every person must partake of in order to belong to the church. As was mentioned earlier,[114] apart from this property or attribute, nobody can claim to be part of the church, nor can the church claim to be church without such persons.

The importance of this discussion on regeneration together with the whole of this chapter on the church becomes meaningful in the subsequent chapters of this thesis related to the criteria and requisites of maintaining balance between identity and

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[113] See page 5 point 2.1.
[114] See definition of *essence* on page 6 point 2.2.

relevance within the church, and the presentation of a probable solution. In the following chapter though, the effect that change and time brought upon the church is discussed in order to establish the cause for the church's apparent lack of identity and relevance.

IDENTITY-RELEVANCE DILEMMA, CHANGE AND TIME

1.   Introductory remarks

The crucial question that needs to be answered is: What caused the church to be in the critical situation as briefly described in the introductory remarks to part one of this study?[115] Prior to answering this question, a number of issues need be discussed for purposes of clarity with regard to the content of this study. Among these are the current identity-relevance dilemma and the meaning of the concepts *identity crisis* and *irrelevancy*.

2.   Identity-relevance dilemma

Moltmann (1974:7) describes the current church crisis as follows:

> The Christian life of theologians, churches and human beings is faced more than ever today with a double crisis: the *crisis of relevance* and the *crisis of identity*. These two crises are complementary. The more theology and the church attempt to become relevant to the problems of the present day, the more deeply they are drawn into the crisis of their own Christian identity. The more they attempt to assert their identity in traditional dogmas, rights and moral notions, the more irrelevant and unbelievable they become. This double crisis can be more accurately described as the *identity-involvement dilemma*.

From all that I have said in part one of this study concerning the identity/relevance crises of the church, the keen reader will note that my line of thought is similar to that of Moltmann's as stated above. In view hereof I want to adopt the term that Moltmann uses to describe this double crisis, namely the *identity-involvement dilemma,* with one minor alteration and apply it to the rest of this study. The alteration concerns the use of the word 'relevance' in place of 'involvement'. Thus I will describe the double crisis as the *identity-relevance dilemma.* This is done in view of the fact that on the one hand, my understanding of *identity* within this context is similar to that of Moltmann's as applied in the quoted source. On the other hand, Moltmann's application of the term *involvement* within the quoted source, is not precisely the same as what is envisaged in this study, although there most certainly are similarities.

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[115] The cause of the problem is discussed in part 3 of this study on page 122.

For Moltmann, (*ibid*:4) the term *involvement* implies "going beyond a concern for personal salvation, and to inquire about the liberation of man and his new relationship to the reality of the demonic crisis in his society." This point of departure seeks to answer the question concerning the external activity of the church, that is, its involvement within society. Contrary to this, however, within this study the term *relevance* is concerned more with the internal ecclesiological crisis, namely personal salvation itself. This is said in view of the fact that unless the church is identified with Christ through salvation, its external involvement in society is equal to the involvement of any other institution within society. Hence, from this point forward the double crisis will at times be referred to as the *identity-relevance dilemma.*

Firstly, we will deal with a brief explanation of what is implied by the term "identity crisis". Unless the meaning thereof is fully appreciated, the reader may not be sensitive to the purpose of this study, or may not grasp the challenging intensity of the problem. The purpose of this study is, after all, to firstly elucidate on the problem of the current situation and secondly to draw attention to the fact that the church and theology cannot detach themselves therefrom. In view hereof an attempt is made below to explain the term "identity crises". This is followed by a discussion of the term "irrelevancy", trusting that this will illuminate what it means to be relevant in relation to the church.

2.1   Defining "identity crises"

At the outset of this discussion the following definitions of "identity crisis", as found in various sources,[116] are presented.

1. <u>identity crisis</u> *n.*
A temporary period during which an individual experiences a feeling of loss or breakdown of identity.
(From *The Oxford American Dictionary of Current English in* English Dictionary & Thesauruses).

2. <u>identity crisis</u>
(Psychiatry) - a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society.
(From *The Oxford Dictionary of English* in English Dictionary & Thesauruses).

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[116] These definitions were taken from the internet:
  http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/BOOK_SEARCH.html

3. identity crisis

This concept is most fully developed by the American psychoanalyst Erik Erikson. He uses it to refer to a crisis, having interlocking psychological and sociological aspects, in an individual's sense of self.
(From *A Dictionary of Sociology* in Political & Social Sciences).

4. identity crisis *n.*

A state of confusion arising from an inability to reconcile conflicting aspects of one's personality. The concept was popularised by the German-born ego psychologist Erik H. Erikson (1902–94) in his book Identity: Youth and Conflict (1968). (From *A Dictionary of Psychology* in Political & Social Sciences).

From the above definitions, even though they are more descriptive of an individual's crisis of identity, it is possible to formulate a few significant inferences relevant to the church. The common factor present in the above definitions is that of uncertainty related to identity. This implies a loss of what or who an individual or, in the context of this study, the church is. A simplified explanation will suffice to describe identity.

Every individual has an identity related to his parents. He/she knows where he/she came from (*origination*), knows his/her name (*identity*) and knows place of residence (*destiny*). A crisis exists when the individual experiences a temporary loss or breakdown of identity. This may result in a situation wherein the individual does not know where he/she came from, why he/she is there and where he/she is destined. Similarly, the church has (or should have) a specific identity that is relational to Christ, the founder thereof. It knows where it came from (*origination*), it knows its (His) name (*identity*) and it knows where it is heading (*destiny*). As the individual described above, experiences a crisis, so too, a crisis exists when the church experiences a loss or breakdown of identity.

Frei (1975:38) describes the term "identity crisis" as follows:

> This term often indicates that a person may lack a sense of identification with something else – a meaningful community or some other significant point of reference for his life. But, more significantly, the term may also refer to the lack of identification a person senses within himself concerning his own past, present and future. A "crisis" of identity in this sense is said to exist when a person senses an alienation from his own past to the extent that it is possible to say that the present self is not related to the past self. The person may arbitrarily and artificially reconstruct his past or suppress it altogether. Identity, without this type of crisis, means that a person is one and the same over a period of time, that there is a connection or unbroken relationship between the past and present experience of the same self.

A parallel may be drawn with the inferred current identity crisis of the church. The church, it seems, is suffering from a temporary identity loss of its origination, its purpose and its destiny, or as referred to above by Frei, its past, present and future. This can result in the church attempting to artificially reconstruct its past or suppress it altogether. It is my belief that the church has, in a certain sense, artificially reconstructed its past, while on the other hand it seems to have suppressed it altogether. Some of the factors that have led me to this conclusion and the implied identity crisis, are discussed in the following paragraphs of this study.

2.1.1 Identifying an identity-relevance dilemma

But how does one identify an *identity-relevance dilemma* in the ecclesiological context? What factors are or are not present to create such a crisis situation? Surely there will be or are notable internal and external signs revealing that a crisis exists. It is to these that this paragraph refers with a dual purpose in mind, firstly, as a help for understanding the problem and secondly, for progression toward a viable criterion by which an existent crisis situation can be identified. It must be borne in mind that although this study is primarily focused on the Protestant family of churches in South Africa, these do include a variety of denominations each with their own interpretation of Scripture. This interpretation will determine each group's individual identity. A deviation therefrom may imply an identity-relevance dilemma for that particular group or church only. In view hereof this study does not discuss individual crisis situations but, rather, will aim at noting the broad-spectrum of signs common to most Protestant churches. No doubt, there are numerous signs indicative of the existence of such a crisis, but only a couple are mentioned here, so as to give the reader an idea of what is meant by these concepts.

2.1.2 The dilemma and authoritative structures

An identity-relevance dilemma exists when there are more than just sporadic appearances thereof and where they are not limited to a certain locality. This does not mean that local churches are exempt from experiencing such a crisis. By implication this can happen, but within this thesis a national dilemma is the focal point. An identity crisis can almost always be related to an authority crisis, where people no longer feel obligated to subject themselves to authoritative structures. In this thesis the *authoritative structures* imply God and his Word. We have seen in part

1 of this study, how such a crisis is birthed by movements such as the New Reformers and the Jesus Seminar[117] that have totally reinterpreted God's word.

2.1.3 The dilemma and theology

Although there is room for theological difference within the unity of Protestantism, such differences must still be within the borders of the common confessions of faith adhered to. An identity-relevance dilemma exists when a departure from the ecclesiological confession leads to a public debate between theologians and when, for example, a participating theologian reduces the word of God to nothing more than a book of moral standards. A further example is often found in the sphere of Christology. The virgin birth is denied and Christ is often spoken of as *one of many ways* leading to God. This happens when the absolutes of the Christian faith are discarded in favour of the relatives.[118]

2.1.4 The dilemma and liturgy

My personal experience within Pentecostalism has often permitted me to hear members complaining about liturgical worship styles. Complaints centre on the fact that church services have been transformed from a respectful time of holy worship into nothing more than a modern-day pop concert. Church leaders, who view themselves as the "called of God," seem to be members of the contemporary entertainment business, rather than Holy Spirit anointed bearers of the gospel message. In contrast to this my experiences also include people of the Reformed tradition complaining of lacklustre church services wherein nothing *spiritual* is experienced. All they remember of the service is the insincere tedious sound of the preacher's voice.

2.1.5 The dilemma and ethics

One of the most neglected areas of the postmodern church is found within the ethical arena. Members are concerned over the fact that theologians and church leaders are not standing up to defend the faith which they so sternly teach and proclaim within the precincts of their comfort zones, namely church seminaries, universities and pulpits. This leads to an identity-relevance dilemma, as these academics offer no guidance to the church laity concerning what is good and what is bad; what is right

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[117] See points 4.7 and 4.8, pages 43 & 45.
[118] More of this is said in part 5 of this study on page 164.

and what is wrong; what is sin and what not. What the church says today may not apply tomorrow. This implies a church with no criterion.

2.1.6 The dilemma and out-moded structures

Kellerman (1998:45) maintains that an identity problem arises when out-moded church structures that are no longer functional in contributing to the success of specific ministries, are maintained purely for the sake of tradition. The viability of these ministries and structures are questioned when:

- noteworthy social and cultural changes have taken place (political, economical, sociological, ethical and religious)
- the church no longer satisfies peoples needs through its ministerial functions and current structures whereby the ministries are practised,;
- the vision and mission dims to such an extent that the church no longer seems to know where it is headed;
- individualism is present among church leaders and their leadership, resulting in them doing as they please without consideration for the broader church; and
- traditionalism (the unfounded maintenance of out-moded traditions) hampers any renewal).[119]

2.1.7 The dilemma and the crucified Christ

Moltmann (1974:2) maintains that the crises of the church in present-day society is not merely the critical choice of either assimilation, or otherwise, retreat into the ghetto, but the crisis of its own existence as the church of the crucified Christ. From this significant statement, it is inferred that all other concepts and factors, ministries and structures, mentioned in an attempt to describe the identity-relevance dilemma, are incorporated herein. They are all present where the crucified Christ is not the central figure, but his presence implies their absence. Thus, the central issue for the church is its continued identity with the crucified Christ. Unquestionably, only by Christ is it possible to tell what is a Christian church and what is not. That which determines its identity is whether Christ is Lord thereof or alien thereto.

2.2 Defining "irrelevance"

For explanatory reasons the following definitions of "irrelevance", as found in various sources,[120] are presented below:

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[119] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.
[120] These definitions were taken from the internet:
  http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/BOOK_SEARCH.html

1. irrelevance *n.*
Inapplicability, unrelatedness, inappropriateness, inappositeness; unimportance, incon-sequentiality, insignificance; formal impertinence.
(From *The Oxford Paperback Thesaurus* in English Dictionaries & Thesauruses).

2. <u>irrelevance</u>
Both words are in use and there is no distinction in their meaning, but irrelevance is more common.
(From *Pocket Fowler's Modern English Usage* in English Language Reference).

3. <u>irrelevant</u> *adj.*
Not relevant; not applicable (to a matter in hand).
(From *The Oxford American Dictionary of Current English* in English Dictionary & Thesauruses).

4. irrelevant *adj.*
Not connected with or relevant to something: an irrelevant comment/theory can sometimes be hastily dismissed as irrelevant to.
(From *The Oxford Dictionary of English* in English Dictionary & Thesauruses).

In an earlier chapter[121] reference was made to Sykes' definition of relevance that included the following: - "…that which has direct practical application to one's present state and needs". In view hereof, the term "relevance" within this thesis is employed to indicate the measure of the church's direct practical application of its spiritual conviction and purpose to the present state and needs of the world. Of course we must agree that the church ought to be relevant to the people to whom it is trying to speak. But what is relevance?

Most people know the meaning of the word in its usual sense, but the meaning of the word in this context is to be judged not by conformity to the charts, but by faithfulness to the word of God – a very different matter. Relevance means talking about sin, about righteousness and about judgement. It means facing human beings with the awful reality of what they are when they have rebelled against God, and where they are heading. It means pointing them to a Saviour who has taken our place on the cross and offered up himself for us. It means challenging people to be serious about themselves and about the world in which they are called to live. The church is not here to play games or to indulge in dubious forms of entertainment. It is here to offer men and women the gospel of salvation, praying that the Holy Spirit will use its feeble efforts to win them for Christ.

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[121] See page 9, point 2.4.

Bunge (1999:248) defines relevance as follows: Object A is relevant to object B if A makes some difference to B, or B depends upon A. Applied to the church and society it implies that the church can only be considered relevant if it is making some difference to society, or if society depends upon the church. Put another way, it may be asked: "Will society be aware of a vacuum should the church be removed?"

The antonym of relevance is irrelevance, which obviously implies the opposite of relevance as can be seen from the above definitions. With this in mind it is inferred that *church irrelevance* implies that the church is not impacting the modern world or secular society in any momentous way.   When one bears in mind that the word "relevant" means: 'appropriate to the purpose, meaningful, to make sense'; it implies that when the church is spoken of as irrelevant, it is not appropriate to the purpose, is meaningless and does not make sense.

In reference to the church, irrelevance thus means that it will no longer have any influence on society. The image projected will be (or already is) that of the church no longer being, as seemed true of the early church, a foundational pillar for society providing an indispensable service. Rather, it will be that of an antiquated institution that has survived its period of real worth, now only existing on the margin of society. It will no longer be able to make sense of life's everyday realities or contemporary world events. At best, it would only be fulfilling a function for those who have, due to some reason or other, also been marginalized by society.

From this brief discussion above, concerning the identity-relevance dilemma of the church, it is concluded that no matter from which perspective one approaches these two concepts, one fact always seems to ring true. This is the fact that the two terms are irrevocably linked to one another. It is impossible for the church to fulfil its purpose if either one of identity or relevance is absent. As love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage, as sung by Frank Sinatra, so do identity and relevance. You can't have one without the other.

3.   Church identity and relevance

As was stated previously, the church has a specific identity that is relational to Christ,[122] the founder thereof. In addition to this it also has a specific mission, which is the proclamation of the Good News. Identity implies a vertical relationship with Christ, while the proclamation of the gospel implies a horizontal relationship with the world in which the church exists.

The prolongation of this identity and the fulfilment of its mission in a relevant way is no simple task for the church. The reason being that the church is in the world, but not of the world (Joh 17:14), a world that is subjected to sin through the Fall and change through time. Nevertheless, the measure of the church's spiritual health must be examined by its stewardship in relationship to a world that is lost and broken. The Bible views the church's claim to love God and its actions toward the world as inseparable (1 Jn 4:20).

Therefore, as was previously mentioned, the identity and relevance of the church are forever related to one another. They are two sides of the same coin. Wherever the church upholds its identity with the crucified Christ, it will be relevant.   In no other way but this will it be considered to be relevant. Where the church does this, identity and relevance will function in equilibrium. The identity-relevance dilemma arises when one of the two is emphasised more than the other. This results in one benefiting from all the attention, while the focus on the other is muted. If church identity alone is to be the emphasised, the church will become alienated from the world. This will result in the church becoming so unique and autogenous that it would be totally bizarre to the world. On the other hand, if only church relevance is accentuated, the identity of the church will suffer loss. In such a case the church, in order to be relevant, may become so *worldly* inclined that it blends into its surrounds to such an extent that it is unidentifiable with Christ and loses all sense of identity.

In order to circumvent the problem it is essential to maintain a healthy balance between church identity and church relevance at all times. The question that needs to be answered is, how? What theological criteria if any, can be employed by

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[122] See page 97, point 2.1.7.

theologians to maintain such a balance? Perhaps a more logical question here would be: "What is the balance?"[123]

The problem becomes more intense when one realises that the church is in a world in which there are certain elements, both without and within the church, that have an enormous influence on bringing about a disproportion between identity and relevance. Obviously, should either identity and/or relevance cease to be a factor of the church, it ceases to be church. As this seems to be the current situation of the postmodern day church, and as such, a motivational factor to the necessity of this thesis, it is essential that the cause (or causes) of this situation be discussed.

An overview of the continuous changes in all spheres of life, brought about by passing time, exemplifies the impact that these changes have had on the church. In the following chapters these are discussed so as to verify that the cause of the church's seeming loss of identity and relevance, is most probably related to these changes, yet the changes themselves are not exclusively the cause of the implied situation. The cause (or causes) is discussed in part 3 of this study.

4.   The relationship between change and time

It is often been asserted that the church as a community of faith is not of this world. However, the church exists, lives and works within this world. As such this world and its inhabitants are subjected to change. This change has embraced all sectors and systems and to no small extent has affected the Christian church. What has made that change not only perceivable but also seemingly acceptable, has been the other partner in the process - time. Change is defined by time and also represents the passage of time. Specifically, change occurs when something is not the same at one point in time as it was at another point in time. Thus, in a certain sense, change can only be perceived through the use of time. In support it may be added that there would not be any perception of time if nothing ever changed. The fact that knowledge is being gained is a change due to progression and thus relevant to time.

For theologians, an important factor emerging from our perception of change and time and the consequences thereof, is the fact that everything is progressive - *the*

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[123]As these questions are directly related to the theme and purpose of this study, they are answered progressively.

world moves - and what we do in this changing world is important for coming generations. Change is a component of our universe, a defining feature in the analysis of matter, space and time. The nature, radicality and pace of change may fluctuate according to the relative situation or subject, but it is an undeniable fact that it is present. It is common knowledge that change influences us individually and corporately, biologically and socially. Change is a feature of both a growing child and of seasons, for they are both related to time. If time could be halted there would be no change. All would remain as it is. This implies that change and time are inseparable.

The changes brought about by the passing of time, may be experienced positively or negatively. "Wonder and sadness is the lot of change", says the poet.[124] Change may on the one hand bring with it hope, a new beginning, gain, improvement and the rectification of errors. On the other hand, it may include jeopardy, loss and uncertainty. As time passes on, change is brought about that causes us to leave behind something that was part of us (whether good or bad) and we are confronted with something new that will inevitably become a part of us (whether good or bad). In view hereof, change may be considered to be ambivalent. It is this ambivalence that calls for an urgent theological investigation into the importance of identity and relevance within ecclesiology. This is said bearing in mind the fact that the rapid pace of change is pressurising the Christian church more than ever before in its entire history. This pressurising has a suspicious influence on church identity and relevance, to such an extent that it calls for urgent hermeneutical considerations.

Since time entails change and change implies past experiences, it may be argued that the church is only the sum total of its past experiences, although it is continuously being transformed (because of change brought about by time) into *something not yet -* a radical change that makes little sense of talking about past experiences. With this in mind, together with the awareness that change is unrestrained, the need of balance between church identity and relevance is realised more intensely than ever before. As mentioned above, should the church be at a loss for identity, it would cease to be church (die) and obviously relevancy will be nonexistent. The knowledge that in the process of time life is irrevocably replaced by

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[124] Francis Thompson in *The hound of heaven.*

death, presents theologians with a new and complex challenge. If the church in itself is a living organism (life) subjected to change through time, the possibility of its eventual *spiritual death*[125] cannot be excluded.

(Barna 2001:17) cites that biologists provide us with a powerful equation: *the absence of change is death.* In other words, the presence of change is a sign of life, a necessary component of being alive. There is no such thing as stasis for living entities – including human beings. Intellectually, emotionally and spiritually we must either be changing or be dead; there is no in-between. The possibility of *spiritual death* must continually be replaced by the assurance of identifiable relevance. Consequently, theologians need to find a biblical founded solution for maintaining a healthy balance between identity and relevance, amidst progressive change.

On the other hand, however, theology also has to do with the unchangeable. The fact that God is immutable and as such not subjected to change (see Rev 22:13; 2 Pet 3:8) or affected by time, implies that certain aspects relative to God (and the church) are ageless or unalterable. In view hereof and in order to attain equilibrium between church identity and church relevance, it is important to distinguish between the variable and the invariable, or put another way, the absolutes and the relatives.[126] This is said with the understanding that certain commodities of the church are subjected to *change* through time – the relatives. Alternatively, it is said with the understanding that certain commodities of the church are *unchangeable* despite time – the absolutes. In the following paragraphs an attempt is made to distinguish and explain these commodities, a distinction that is of cardinal importance in relation to the subject of this thesis.

5.   The changing and the unchanging

5.1   The changing

Consciously or unconsciously, change takes an attitude toward the time preceding it. It may improve upon it, abandon it, transform it, castigate it, but it can never simply repeat it. Repetition would simply imply maintaining the *status quo.* Change, however, implies dissimilarity from what went before. Ecclesiology has functioned and is still functioning within certain historical and present time-periods. The more

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[125] *Spiritual death* in this context refers to a loss of identity and relevance.
[126] These are discussed briefly on page 161, point 4.

popular division of these periods of time acknowledged by theologians, are the pre-modern, modern and postmodern periods. These consecutive periods are briefly discussed here to illustrate the reality of change through time. However, in a subsequent chapter more is said of the various features related to postmodernity and their affects on the church[127].

5.1.1 Pre-Modernism

Pre-modernism refers to the period from creation to modernism. According to Du Toit (2000:15), the people in this age understood the world to be flat. Above the earth was a dome studded with various sized lights (sun, moon and stars). The dome also had windows from where the elements - rain, hail and wind was poured out upon the earth. God dwelt above the dome, people on the earth, and beneath the earth was the abode of the evil powers. The sea and everything beneath it was an evil place, the abode of evil powers and monsters. These evil powers caused the sea to be turbulent at times, causing massive waves against which the people had no power. This worldview determined the life view of the people. Life was determined by the inter-relationship of two powers within creation. On the one hand there was God, the creative and good power that rewarded those who live in obedience to his will. On the other hand there were the evil powers that were focused on destroying people and subduing them to their power.

Du Toit (*ibid*:14) maintains that almost all religions originated during this pre-modern era and that many religions still function within pre-modern societies, such as those found in Africa, the East and South America. He goes on to say that the Jewish, Christian and Islam religions all originated in this period, as is evident by the fact that the original writings on which these religions are based (Old and New Testaments and the Koran) date back to the pre-modern era. Thus, it is logical that the authors of these writings never had the knowledge that later became available to modernists, even though they were with their limited knowledge, required to make statements and to maintain certain stances about God, life and history.

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[127] See the discussion on page 152, point 3.

5.1.2 Modernism

The 16th century ushered in the end of pre-modernism and the beginning of modernism. Up to that stage, broadly viewed and besides the final schism between the Eastern and Western churches in 1045 (whereafter the main seat of the Eastern Orthodox church was established at Constantinople), there was only one Christian church in the Western world, with the city of Rome as headquarters. In 1517 Martin Luther presented his 95 articles of faith and thereby put an end to the authoritative grip of the Roman Catholic Church. This was followed by John Calvin's 'Institutes of the Christian Church' in 1536 and the declaration by Copernicus that the earth was not flat but round.

Up to this point, the absolute authority of the pope and the church over all matters was accepted unchallenged. Obviously this authority was based on the literal understanding of the Bible, which was only available in Latin. Part of this authoritative hold upon human thinking was lost due to the protests of Luther and Calvin. This was followed by the telescopic observations of Galileo Galilei in 1609, which cast doubt on the Ptolemaic geocentric theory of the universe that was, according to Roman Catholic interpretation, confirmed by Scripture.

Other influential thinkers such as Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant appeared on the scene at this time. Descartes, with his famous phrase – *cogito ergo sum* (because I think, therefore I am), made a great impression on human thinking. He doubted everything except his own mind. This led to the ideology that only that which can be proved experimentally, can be accepted as true and believed.

The critical idealism of Kant opened a way for a critical rationality. Kant was mainly interested in the theory of knowledge or epistemology, as it is also called. Epistemology is concerned with the question: "How do we know what we know?" This laid a foundation for the enterprise of the natural sciences.

In 1859 Charles Darwin published his "The origins of the species" and with his theory of evolution, challenged the biblical description of the creation of man. It was also in this period that Louis Pasteur developed the first antibacterial medicine and Alexander Flemming discovered penicillin. These medicines proved that there were other causes to sickness than the suffering caused by evil powers. Other influential

personalities at that stage were people such as Einstein, Fuerbach, Nietzsche, Freud and Hubble with his "Big Bang" theory, which placed the creation of the universe within the field of natural science.

Du Toit (*ibid*: 34) states that,

> These challenges of scientific developments and also the breaking of the authoritative grip held on the church by the Protestant movement, undermined the faith that church members had in the biblical doctrines, as well as the acceptance of the authority that the church held in just about every area of life: the world view of pre-modernism was radically and irrevocably changed. The worldview in terms of the explanation of tragedies, sickness and death, as well as the progress of history, was radically challenged by the new discoveries.[128]

This led to the understanding that apart from the view that life was controlled from the spiritual world (God and the anti-God powers), there was now the possibility of a logical explanation for certain experiences and conditions. Events could now be explained scientifically. This had far reaching effects on the church. On the one hand there were those who uncritically supported the scientific view and interpreted their faith according to modernistic rules. Among these were the mainline churches (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Reformed). On the other hand there were those who accepted the literal interpretation of the Bible as the only solution to the scientific era. These were the fundamentalists, which included the Pentecostal and the charismatically orientated churches.

Although we may rightfully speak of the pre-modern era as pre-modernism and the modern era as that of modernism, adding the suffix 'ism' to both terms (due to them being philosophical ideologies), I am not so sure whether we should speak of the postmodern era as postmodernism, as it seems to me that the postmodern era may only be an extension of modernism. By this I mean that the postmodern era's scientific knowledge is based on the knowledge gained since the 16th century. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the change from the pre-modern to the postmodern world in which the present day church has to function, has greatly impacted the church as will be seen in the following paragraph.

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[128] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

5.1.3 Postmodernism

The term postmodernism refers to the time period following modernism, or the contemporary world. Heroldt (1998:215) states the following with regard to postmodernism:

> Postmodernism is the global trend that may very well influence the way we think in a very profound way. The term "postmodernism" suggests the distinct period after modernism, yet postmodernism is more than a time period. It indicates possible progress, a new way of doing science. Probably this movement warrants the term "postmodern" because, in many ways, it follows an opposite approach to that which is distinctly categorised as "modernist".

At the outset I want to sketch some of the more salient features of postmodernity and the circumstances leading thereto, bearing in mind that this project must be heavily circumscribed due to its unlimited scope. For that reason analysis and critique, if any, will be minimal.

It appears that both the processes leading up to postmodernity and eventually postmodernity itself, has swept the Christian church away from its unique place and role in society. The consequence is that it seems to have become marginalized and irrelevant. These processes have had an alarming effect on the place and role of the church, especially when one considers the church in the contemporary European society. So radical were these changes that Küng (1991:2) refers thereto as a *paradigm shift*. Events following the Enlightenment have in no uncertain terms paved the way for this new paradigm in which the church's role has been drastically reduced.

5.1.4 Features leading to postmodernity

5.1.4a Secularisation

In contrast to the first three centuries, in which the church remained an insignificant minority - enduring persecution and marginalisation – the next seventeen centuries saw the church changed into a highly successful force in Christianising Western Europe and establishing a Christian culture. This was due to its introduction into the public arena by Constantine,[129] who officially gave recognition to the church. Unfortunately, elements within this culture gradually led to its *secularisation.* Secularity knows only a reality that is accessible through sensory perception. This

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[129] See the discussion of the church and Constantine on page 136, point 7.

resulted in a general loss of meaning because values and transcendent reality that helped to constitute meaning, do not lend themselves to the scientific criteria of verification. Heroldt (1998: 216) maintains that secularity also involves a strong reliance on human endeavour and competence. The world and the future are seen to be in the hands of human decisions. This often causes a strong conflict in Christians who believe that God is directly in control, that he causes things to happen. Runia (1994:303) adds that the consequence of this secularisation was that the Christian worldview became normative, although still dominant.

The French Revolution at the end of the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution during the 18th and 19th century, together with the two devastating World Wars in the first half of the 20th century, further accelerated the process of *secularisation* in Western Europe. Runia (*ibid*:304) maintains that various factors contributed to the literal decrease of Christianity and its replacement by secularisation. These factors included an increase in prosperity, higher levels of education for all, more leisure time and the impact of the media, particularly that of television.

One of the main characteristics of secularisation is that of the *differentiation* process, which it prompted in society. The lives of society and its individual members were characterised by unity and coherence up until the last part of the 19th century. Families pursued a trade or profession, mostly from their home or from a building adjacent to it. Nonetheless, this changed drastically after the Industrial Revolution. Technological development led to the separation between family and profession and eventually also between home and office. Runia (*ibid*:306) concludes:

> Gradually nearly all aspects of life became independent and occupied their own world: the arts, education, medicine, economics, etc. The same also happened to religion: it too became a separate world, confined to the sphere of private life.

Newbigin (1984:22) in analysing the secularising effect of the Enlightenment maintains that for most people the Christian faith became a private matter, separated from the public spheres of politics and economics. Herms (1994:135) maintains that the secularisation process caused a progressive marginalisation of the church from being an all-encompassing socialising structure to that of a society for religious leisure-time entertainment. Carrell (1994:355) argues that a secular society is not anti-religious, but merely insists that faith matters be private concerns, restricted to

certain places and occasions, and never intruding into the everyday life of society. This privatising of faith obviously leads to an identity loss and irrelevancy.

Another characteristic of secularisation is *autonomous freedom* for individuals with regard to society. Heroldt (1998: 216) maintains that if people believe that God is no longer in control, they are inclined to assume control themselves. A secular person therefore, does not pray for healing. He or she visits a doctor. According to him secularity does not accommodate transcendence; providence is exchanged for coincidence and the idea is to assert yourself as the architect of your own destination. This progressively led to people being more and more independent from one another and from the community. People were permitted to speak their own mind, (*democratisation)* and to exercise their own choice *(subjectivisation)* and to plan their own future (*rationalisation).*

5.1.4b Pluralisation

The result of all these processes was an ongoing *pluralisation* of society. Although religion, economics, politics and science had each developed a field of their own, each having its own values and norms, they were at the same time also interrelated – each with all the others. Herms (1994:142-146) believes that it is therefore necessary, when considering the relevance of the church, that we do not deal with these spheres in separation, but that we take all spheres into account simultaneously, due to their interrelatedness. There is no such thing as pure politics or pure religion. Economic matters always have political, religious (ethical), educational and scientific dimensions, while religion always has political and economic dimensions. This interrelatedness needs to be taken very seriously.

The process of pluralisation has also entered and changed the monolithic character of each of these spheres (*ibid*:144). The ways in which these spheres establish themselves are continually differentiating so that the model of integration can be tailor-made to suit the taste of each individual. Fewer and fewer people are willing to be herded/flocked together as if they had the same questions and could therefore be served with the same answers.

In the sphere of religion, pluralisation confronts each of the religious traditions with the assumption that truth is present in all religions and that all share a common goal. This poses a tremendous challenge to the truth claim of the Christian faith. The

plausibility structure in which the gospel used to be presented has been destroyed through time and change.

5.1.4c Relativisation

A further characteristic of the process is *relativisation.* Postmodern society accepts no absolutes. With God removed from the apex of authority humans have the right to decide for themselves what is true, acceptable and necessary. Carrell (1994:356) in describing the situation says:

> There is no authority outside our own consensus to which we are accountable… Doubt in such a world is more acceptable than dogma; searching than discovery; feelings than thoughts; departing than arriving. The heretic is the hero, the saint the sinner.

In view of the above, Runia (1994:306) maintains that we are living in a post-Christian world, generally characterised by such secular presuppositions as: only scientific knowledge or value free facts are true knowledge; all convictions are equally valuable and legitimate; religious convictions belong to private life; sin is an antiquated, at most a personal view; life is restricted to this world.

It is in this world that theologians need to establish a method for maintaining a balance between church identity and church relevance.

5.1.5 Technology

The last twenty years has brought about unprecedented change in all spheres of life, including the technological arena. The increase of technological knowledge has had an immense impact on society, particularly in the more advanced societies. Nash (1997:2) describes these dramatic changes as follows:

> We have moved from record albums and 8-track tapes to compact discs, from electric typewriters to Pentium computers and from board games to Super-Nintendo. America's towns and cities have become global communities, with Muslim mosques, Buddhist temples and New Age bookstores competing with Christian churches for the faith loyalties of the American people.

Barna (2001:20) states that the rate of change in the technological arena has been so phenomenal in America, that by the time you get used to your working with DVD's or CD's, they'll be passé.

The situation is no different in many other countries, including South Africa. In fact, since the publication of the above, the world has progressed even further - from compact discs (CD's) to digital videodiscs (DVD's). There are major, rapid and interconnected changes in information technology, globalisation, work and employment practices, consumerism and family structures, all of which affect humanity deeply, ambivalently and at every level. An example hereof is perceptible in South Africa, where postmodern ideology has to a certain degree abandoned all laws related to architectural structures. Squatter camps (indicative rather of pre-modern than modern homes) are seen all over the country and seem to be the order of the day, reminiscent of the lyrics to Paul Seeger's song, "*little boxes, little boxes on the hillside, and they're all made out of ticky-tacky, and they all look just the same.*[130]

In no uncertain terms these technological changes have impacted not only the secular world, but also the Christian church. Church members have been influenced by technological advancement to such an extent that it seems that unless the church can *produce* something very similar, it will most certainly stagnate and die. Subsequently, in contrast to traditional liturgical styles of worship, new modernised styles have been introduced. The Corpus-Christi model has replaced the traditional shepherd-flock model, where the priest/pastor was exclusively focused on God, while the members were only onlookers.

Devoted music has been replaced with more upbeat music and digital projectors have replaced overhead projectors and hymnals.[131] Liturgical style has been fashioned to conform to secular trends. Consequently, it seems that many of these modernised churches are experiencing an unprecedented increase in membership; while membership statistics within churches that have maintained the *status quo* by not adopting the *new-style* liturgy*,* seem to be diminishing. In this electronic age it seems that modern humanity has become an entertainment-orientated community. Even church attendees are going to church with a certain sense of expectancy for being *entertained* rather than to worship, therefore it appears that the liturgical style of worship is attuned to fulfil this expectancy. Perceptibly, this has to a large extent negated the content of the Bible message. But when all is said and done, the

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130 From the album: We shall overcome by Pete Seeger. Released 1963. Little Boxes written by Malvina
    Richards.
[131] A full discussion of all the new trends that include modern dancing, blowing the shofar, etc., is not the
    purpose of this thesis. These here mentioned are merely for illustrative purposes.

essential thing is that the church should not lose its grip on the Gospel itself. Christians bear the name of Christ, and it is he whom we are called to represent in this world.

5.1.6 Theology

Theologians are aware of the fact that theology is progressive and this progression implies change. Without necessarily debating the origin of theology to emphasise the progressiveness thereof, I will only mention more recent developments that substantiate the argument. Prior to the Sixties, theology was subdivided according to ecclesiastical traditions, such as Catholic Theology, Lutheran Theology and Reformed Theology. During the sixties, however, new developments were perceptible within theology and "theologies" such as theology of hope, of revolution, of liberation emerged. Some of these theologies have in turn branched out into a number of subdivisions. An example of this is found within Liberation Theology, which has been subdivided into Latin-American Liberation Theology, Black Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, Womanist Theology, African Woman's Theology and Ecological Theology.

In the introductory paragraph of their book, Maimela & König (1998:1), maintain that some new theologies have developed recently, namely Pentecostal Theology, Charismatic Theology and, to a lesser extent, African Initiated Churches Theology. The result is that we have to cope with a virtually incalculable number of theologies - each with a character of its own, each with a biblical interpretation of its own. To expound on these here, would be impossible due to the vastness of the subject. Brief outlines of the major lines of thought will, however, provide the reader with a better understanding of the similarities and dissimilarities found therein. Potgieter (in Snyman 1998:2)[132] presents the following description of these major lines of thought:

> Roman Catholicism views the church as the continual incarnation of Christ and associate the gifts of God with the seven sacraments, wherewith the church literally accompanies the church member from the cradle to the grave.
> Eastern Orthodox thought features distinct mystical elements in its worship: an internal unity with Christ that is presented in the liturgy, while icons play an important mediating role.
> Within Protestantism, important distinctions can be noted: the reformed tradition which is strongly based on Calvin's four solisms: *sola Scriptura,*

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[132] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

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sola gratia, sola fide and *solus Christus:* the Scriptures only, only by grace, only by faith, only by Christ.

Lutheranism**,** which is characterised by its strong Christ-centric line of thought and a dual order doctrine; the spiritual order of the Gospel wherein God by the power of his Word, renews people; the world order wherein God governs through intermediators (such as the government).

Pentecostalism, which lays great emphasis on the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit from apostolic times, maintain these must still be the sign of a true Spirit-infilling.

Evidently, the latest development seems to be Postmodern Theology that reflects a new way of doing theology in which some of the basic presuppositions of theology over the past centuries are dismissed

Much may also be said of the *odium theologicum* that exists between theologians. Brought about by, amongst others, these differing theological views and hermeneutical methods, these have in some instances lead to public or even televised debates. The Latin phrase *Odium theologicum*, literally meaning "theological hatred", is the name given to the particular rancour and hatred generated by disputes over theology. The atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell explained *odium theologicum* in the following way:

> The most savage controversies are those about matters as to which there is no good evidence either way. Persecution is used in theology, not in arithmetic, because in arithmetic there is knowledge, but in theology there is only opinion.[133]

The difference between hatred and odium is that we express hatred and we endure odium. One is active, one passive. *Odious* characterizes the qualities that inspire hatred. Foss explains it well in his poem: *Odium Theologicum* [134]

> They met and they talked where the crossroads meet,
> Four men from the four winds come,
> And they talked of the horse, for they loved the theme,
> And never a man was dumb.
> The man from the North loved the strength of the horse,
> And the man from the East his pace,
> And the man from the South loved the speed of the horse,
> And the man from the West his grace.
>
> So these four men from the four winds come,
> Each paused a space in his course
> And smiled in the face of his fellow man

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[133] Taken from "An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish'" in *Unpopular Essays* 1950.
[134] The poem, "Odium Theologicum" by Sam Walter Foss as published on the internet:
  http://holyjoe.org/poetry/foss.htm

And lovingly talked of the horse.
Then each man parted and went his way
 As their different courses ran;
And each man journeyed with peace in his heart
 And loving his fellow man.

They met the next year where the crossroads meet,
 Four men from the four winds come;
And it chanced as they met that they talked of God,
 And never a man was dumb.
One imagined God in the shape of a man.
   A spirit did one insist.
One said that nature itself was God.
   One said that he didn't exist.

They lashed each other with tongues that stung,
 That smote as with a rod;
Each glared in the face of his fellow man,
 And wrathfully talked of God.
Then each man parted and went his way,
   As their different courses ran;
And each man journeyed with wrath in his heart,
   And hating his fellow man.

The church is under suspicion to those that are on the *outside* because they do not see that which the church proclaims, put into practice. A link seems to be missing between theory and practice.

5.2   The unchangeable

The previous discussion has been concerned with the changeable, that which does not remain the same. The focus is now turned toward the unchangeable, that which cannot change. It is essential for the purpose of this study to clearly distinguish between the two, as will be noted in the concluding part of this thesis.

5.2.1 God

One cannot speak intelligently of the unchanging without speaking of God. With the knowledge that the subject of God's immutability is no trivial theme, it must, however, briefly be discussed here in order to give meaning to the arguments later posited in this thesis.

That God is unchangeable in his nature has solid support in biblical, historical, and philosophical theology. Despite many anthropomorphic[135] expressions, the Bible has clear and repeated references to God's immutability.

The biblical basis for God's unchangeability is found in various texts. Consider the following: *God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should change his mind* (Num 23:19). *He who is the glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man that he should change his mind* (1 Sam 15:29). *They will perish, but you remain, they will all wear out like a garment…but you remain the same, and your years will never end* (Ps 102:26-27; cf Heb 1:10-12). *I the Lord do not change. So you, o descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed* (Mal 3:6). *[They] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles* (Rom 1:23). *God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie…* (Heb 6:18). *Resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time* (Tit 1:2). *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows* (Jas 1:17).

It is clear from these verses that not only does God not change, but also that it is impossible for him to change. There are things he cannot do, namely, He cannot act contrary to his immutable (unchangeable) nature.

Strong (1907:257) defines God's immutability as follows:

> By this we mean that the nature, attributes, and will of God are exempt from all change. Reason teaches us that no change is possible in God, whether of increase or decrease, progress or deterioration, contraction or development. All change must be to better or to worse. But god is absolute perfection, and no change to better is possible. Change to worse would be equally inconsistent with perfection. No cause for such change exists either outside of god or in God himself.

From this it is concluded that God is unchanging, immutable and absolute. Yet, because metaphorical descriptions of God are used throughout the Bible, the danger

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[135] In addition to figures of speech, the Bible employs three basic kinds of metaphoric statements about God. First of all, there are anthropomorphisms, which depict God in human form, such as having eyes (e.g. Heb 4:13), ears (2 Chron 6:40) and arms (Deut 5:15). Next there are antropopaphisms, which picture God having changing human feelings like anger and grief (Eph 4:30). Finally, there are anthropoieses, which attribute to God human actions such as repenting (Gen 6:6) and forgetting (Is 43:25; Job 11:6). These metaphoric statements assist humanity in understanding the transcendental characteristics of God, which surpasses human language, by means of immanent expressions.

always exists that God can be understood to be mutable or, put another way, relative. This would lead to grievous error and even heresy. The following is a sample of what can happen if metaphors are not properly understood and are taken literally:[136]

- *The Lord repented* (Ex 32:14) can lead to a denial of his immutability.
- *The eyes of him* (Heb 4:13) can lead to a denial of God's immateriality.
- *He is the rock* (Deut 32:4) can lead to a denial of his infinity.
- *Whom he foreknew* (Rom 11:2) can lead to a denial of his eternality.
- *The Lord became angry* (1 Kings 11:9) can lead to a denial of his impassibility.
- *The Lord came down to see* (Gen 11:5) can lead to a denial of his omniscience.

Geisler (2003:27) maintains that there are various reasons for using metaphorical expressions when speaking of God. They are the following:

> First, metaphors often inform us what God *can do*, not what He *is*. They often describe his abilities, not His attributes. Thus, He is like a strong tower or shield that can protect us, or He has wings that can hold us up, etc.
> Second, metaphors communicate what God is like in an *indirect* and *non-literal* way. The non-literal actually depends upon the literal. We know God is not literally a stone, since we know He is infinitely an infinite spirit, and a stone can be neither infinite nor a spirit. But once we know that God is not literally a stone a metaphor does tell us what He literally is, namely, stable and immovable.
> Third, metaphors (similes and other figures of speech) are often *evocative* even though they are not literally *descriptive*; that is, they do not literally and directly describe God. Even so, they do evoke a response to Him (while metaphysical descriptions often do not). Hence, metaphors are frequently used in the Bible because God wants a response from us.

From the above Geisler (*ibid*:29) maintains that any term that loses its meaning when stripped of its finitude cannot be applied to God literally, but only metaphorically. To take metaphorical descriptions of God literally leads to heretical views of God.

If God is immutable it implies that certain commodities eternally related to him may also be immutable. Although there may be several others, only those discussed below are mentioned here because they are of cardinal importance to this study as will be noted in the concluding chapter hereof.

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[136] See footnote 135 on page 115.

5.2.2 God's word

It is not the purpose of this chapter to debate the subject of whether the Bible is inerrant or not, but rather to illustrate the immutability of God's *word* or God's expression. The Bible, in reference to Christ, declares: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning* (Jn 1:1). The Scriptures enlarge our conceptions of Christ by giving to him in his pre-existent state the names of the Logos, the Image and the Effulgence of God. The term 'Logos' combines in itself the two ideas of thought and word, of reason and expression.

While the Logos as divine thought or reason is one with God, the Logos as divine word or expression is distinguishable from God. Words are the means by which personal beings express or reveal themselves. Strong (1907:335) holds that since Jesus Christ was the *Word* before there were any creatures to whom revelations could be made, it would seem to be only a necessary inference from this title that in Christ, God must be from eternity expressed or revealed to himself; in other words, that the Logos is the principle of truth, or self-consciousness, in God.

Words may be defined as the expression of thoughts made audible by sound. Should one take away the sound, what is left is simply the thought. There would be no words or expression. From this it is deduced that Christ, the *Word,* is the expression of God. In other words, Christ reveals the thoughts of God to humanity. God the Father can only be known through his Son (Mt 11:27; Lk 10:22). In John 1:18 we read: *No one has seen God at anytime. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.* In view hereof, it is accepted that since Christ is one with the Father, who is immutable, Christ, the *Word* or expression of God, is also immutable.

5.2.3 Truth

The Bible claims to be true. The psalmist declared: *your law is truth* (Ps 119:142) and Jesus prayed, *Sanctify them by Your truth, Your word is truth (Jn 17:17).* Yet Pilate's question remains: *What is truth?* (Jn 18:38).

The nature of truth is crucial to the Christian faith. Not only does Christianity accept that there is absolute truth (which is true for everyone, everywhere, always) but it also insists that truth is that which corresponds to the way things really are. For example,

the statement "God exists" means that there truly is a God outside the universe, an extra-cosmic being. Likewise, the claim that "God raised Christ from the dead" means that the dead corpse of Jesus of Nazareth supernaturally vacated its tomb – alive – after its burial. Christian truth claims actually correspond to the state of affairs about which they claim to inform us.

Geisler (2003:356) defines truth as follows:

> The Hebrew word for "truth" (*emeth*) means "firm," "stable," "faithful," "reliable," "correct". The Greek word for "truth" (*aletheia*) means "truthful", "dependable", "upright," "real". In brief, the term "truth," as used in Scripture, means that which, because it corresponds to reality (the facts, the original), is reliable, faithful, and stable. *Used of words, truth is telling it like it is.* True statements are those that correspond to reality and, hence, are dependable. By contrast, falsehood is telling it like it is not (1 Jn 2:21) and, therefore, is not reliable. False expressions do not correspond to reality, and the devil is the father of all lies (Jn 8:44). Truth is absolute: God cannot lie (2 Cor 1:18; Tit 1:2; Heb 6:18), and His Word cannot pass away (Mk 13:31; c. Ps 117:2).

If God's *Word* is immutable it implies (bearing Christ's prayer above in mind) that truth is also immutable, as Christ said that God's word is truth. If truth is immutable, then that to which Christ bore witness, namely truth (Jn 18:37), is still the same today. This implies further unchangeables, namely the predicament wherein humanity finds itself and the solution to this predicament.

5.2.4 Humanities predicament

If God, the Word and truth are all immutable, it is inferred that humanities predicament, namely, the need of a Saviour due to the Fall, is also immutable.[137] The fact that through sin humanity was separated from God and need to be reconciled to God, is an unchanging biblical truth. The disobedience of the original humans brought death into the world. There are three kinds of death: spiritual, physical and eternal. Adam and Eve died spiritually the moment they sinned. They also began to die physically that very day.[138] Had Adam and Eve not accepted God's provision of

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[137] Obviously this is said with the understanding that individuals that have accepted Christ as their saviour are no longer as individuals subject to this predicament. But here I am speaking of humanities overall or general predicament, that is immutable.

[138] Adam eventually died physically many years later (Gen 5:5).

salvation,[139] they would eventually have died eternally, which would have meant everlasting separation from God.[140]

Spiritual death implies spiritual separation from God. Isaiah said: *Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear* (Isa 59:2). The instant Adam sinned, he experienced spiritual isolation from God. This is evidenced by his shame and his hiding from his Creator (Gn 3:7-8). Paul explains that by one man (Adam) sin entered the world, yet by one man (Jesus Christ) the gift of God's grace has come to the world (Rom 5:12-15). Since Adam's separation from God, every descendant of his – every person born of natural parents since the fall – is spiritually dead (Eph 2:1). Thus Jesus said to Nicodemus: *I tell you the truth; no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again… No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at me saying, "You must be born again"* (Jn 3:3,5-7).

5.2.5 Regeneration

The new birth of which Jesus speaks is the act of regeneration,[141] whereby God imparts spiritual life to the believer's soul (1 Pet 1:23). Paul says of this, *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having hope of eternal life* (Tit 3:5-7).

Regeneration or the new birth is immutable in that it is the only way of satisfying God's holiness and his righteousness. Jesus said, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (Jn 14:6). From this it is deduced that Christ is the only way leading to salvation - there is no salvation apart from him.[142]

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[139] It appears that they did accept it, since God covered them in the skins of animals (Gen 3:21), which had undoubtedly been sacrificed for their sins. Further, in an act of faith, Adam called Eve "the mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20). Finally, Eve expressed her faith in the messianic promise of the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15) when she said at the birth of Seth that he was a "seed" from the Lord (Gen 4:25).

[140] In Revelation 20:14 this is called the second death.

[141] Also see the discussion on page 60, point 7.1.

[142] I am aware of the current implications of religious plurality, implying that there are more ways than one leading to salvation. This view, implying that Christ made an untrue statement, is totally unacceptable to me.

6. Summary

So what has happened? On the one hand, the progression of time (from the pre-modern to the postmodern era) has brought about change. With the change also came various lines of thought, leading to arguments and schisms in the theological and ecclesiological arenas. Notably, traditional liturgical methods have been transformed; methods of *doing church* have changed. This change gives rise to a very important question imploring theological attention namely, "Is the church *still* relevant despite this change?"

The adverb *still,* leads to a number of consequential implications. Firstly, it may imply that at a certain point in time the church was relevant, a relevancy that is now under suspicion. Secondly, it may imply that the possibility exists that the relevant church may become irrelevant or that it is already so. This leads to a further question, namely "If it is presently irrelevant, when did it become irrelevant and if indeed so, was it a progressive process in time as described above, or was it due to a definite event such as Pentecost or the Reformation?"

We also need to ask: "If it is irrelevant, is it only irrelevant to the *inner circle* or perhaps only to those on the *outside looking in,* or to both?"[143] Furthermore, if the church is irrelevant or heading in that direction, we need to ascertain on the one hand, the cause: "Is it because of theological pronouncements, dogma or something else?" "Could this *something else* perhaps be the technological explosion?" "Is the church surrendering the Holy Spirit to technique, resulting in loss of identity, while seemingly appearing to be relevant?" Put another way "Does the church lose its identity by utilising the inventions of technological innovation?"

These questions are supportive to the purpose of this thesis. They imply that while we are *doing church* all over the world, the possibility exists that the church is, or is becoming irrelevant and as such, Christians are part of a *house on fire.* Put another way, perhaps while thinking that they are doing the work of God, they are living in a fool's paradise. A perfect example of this is found in Acts 9. Saul of Tarsus thought that he was doing God a favour, only to discover that instead of doing good deeds, he was actually persecuting Christ.

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[143] *Inner circle* and *outside looking in* respectively refer to theologians within the church and critics outside the church.

On the other hand, despite change brought about by time, there are certain absolutes, which remain unchanging despite the progression of time. These are the immutable that must not and cannot be relinquished by the Christian church. These are the cardinal factors that are essential to this investigation into the how of maintaining balance between identity and relevance. Postmodernism has, however, brought with it new challenges aimed at the immutables. The spirit of the age, which incorporates, secularistic humanism and relativism,[144] has cast a shadow of doubt on the absolutes of Christianity.   It is these challenges that need to be addressed by theologians and solutions sought after. Considering all the factors above one cannot but acknowledge that, amidst it all, the church has the gargantuan assignment, not only to remain faithful to its identity and relevant to its mission, but also, of maintaining equilibrium between the two.

Before this can be done, it is firstly necessary to establish the cause of the current implied problem of this study. Part three of this study is devoted to this purpose.

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[144] See the discussion of Postmodernism on page 107, point 5.1.3

1. Introductory remarks

The aim of this chapter is to establish the roots of the problem that has landed the church in the seemingly crisis situation. Although one is (at first sight) inclined to seek the cause for the church's current irrelevancy and identity loss within modernisation, it seems clear that the problem has historical roots that extend as far back as the church of Acts. From Acts 2:24-27, it is deduced that God's plan for the church is that it be a community of believers in order to carry out a four-fold purpose. That four-fold purpose is to teach and preach the apostles' doctrine; to practice biblical fellowship; to worship together and share the Lord's Supper; to pray together. Although this was the practice of the first church, several elements acted upon it and later forced the church to become something that God never intended it to be, namely a hierarchical religion.

In this chapter these elements are discussed in order to reveal the severe influence they had on the church. The foremost of these elements were firstly an identity crisis for the church concerning what it was and how it was to be structured, the result being the adoption of a sacerdotal structure. Secondly, external heresies and doctrinal attacks forced the church to codify its thought into a system of belief controlled by the priesthood. Thirdly, severe persecution, occurring in sporadic intervals over several hundred years, created the need to handle apostates who wanted to be readmitted to the church. The eventual outcome of this process was the establishment of an unbiblical system of penance supervised by priesthood.

Even during the apostle's lifetime in the late first century, these elements acted upon the church to cause it to begin to drift away from God's original purposes. These elements were humanistic and diabolical, internal and external, simultaneous and long lasting. Previously Jesus had warned of false teachers and had prayed for the church's protection from the evil one (Mt 7:21-33; Jn 17:14,15). Paul spoke of preachers with a "different gospel" (Gal 1:6) and of people that would not endure "sound doctrine" (2 Tim 4:3); Peter warned against those who would turn believers from the faith (2 Pet 2:1-2).

Some theologians like Pentecost (1958:155), argue that the events referred to by Paul and Peter above, are events relevant to end of the church age, basing their argument on the premise that the term "last days", implies the days at the end of the church age, prior to Christ's return. This is an inconsistent argument when compared with the text found in Hebrews 1:1, where it states, *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and at various ways, but in these "last days" he has spoken to us by his Son…* It is also inconsistent when compared to Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17) - which is believed by many theologians to be moment that the church was born – saying, *In the **"last days"**, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.*

In contrast to Pentecost's view, König (1980:7) maintains that the term "last days" is also used in reference to Christ's first advent. He bases his argument on Hebrews 1:1. Furthermore, König (*ibid*:9) also maintains that the term is used in reference to the descent of the Holy Spirit as described in Acts 2:17. From this he deduces that the "last days" concerning the church had already begun at the constitution of the church. It is clear from many other references that the term "last days" as used by the New Testament writers, although it may have a futuristic element in it, also refers to the period in which they were living. This becomes clear when we consider Paul's words in 2 Timothy 3:1. Although he warned Timothy that there would be terrible times in the ***"last days"** and that People will be lovers of themselves…,* he also warned Timothy not to have anything to do with such people (v5). Thus, Timothy also lived in the last days.

From the above statements it becomes evident that the early church of Timothy's day did experience, amongst others, terrible times and even then people were *lovers of themselves*, etc. It was this church (which was also in the last days) that experienced an identity crisis, doctrinal problems and persecutions. Richardson[145] quotes Phillip Schaff,[146] as saying while commenting on the external pressures upon the early church,

> The persecutions of Christianity during the first three centuries appear like a long tragedy, first, foreboding signs, then bloody assaults of fiendish hatred, now and then a pause, at last a fearful struggle of the old pagan empire…. besides the external conflict, Christianity was called to pass

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[145] Andy Richardson (internet article at www.familybiblefellowship.org/doctrine/whatever/).
[146] Phillip Schaff in History of the Christian church, page 79.

through an equally important intellectual and literary struggle with the ancient world, and from this also it came forth victorious.

To agree with the statement that the church emerged victorious over the old pagan empire, is not possible, for the church was drastically changed by this struggle and the fact of the matter is that the "empire" or world-system did, in fact, absorb and compromise the early church. Certainly, the empire changed radically as well, but the fact of the emergence in Constantine's lifetime of an empire-wide state church, run by a political military ruler in league with an unbiblical priesthood, speaks loudly for which side was victorious.

In the following paragraphs the elements that exerted pressure upon the church, are discussed and the actual outcome of the situation described, so as to substantiate the premise that the roots for the cause of the current situation are indeed historical.

2.   An identity crisis in the early church

The first identity crisis experienced by the church occurred within the apostolic church of Acts. This is inferred by the concluding debate of the council of Jerusalem. Here the Holy Spirit helped the apostles through an identity crisis (Acts 15). The debate concerned whether the newly constituted church was to remain a Jewish institution, patterned along Old Testament lines, or, whether it would become a dynamic new community of believers in Christ.

In his comments on the council of Jerusalem, Latourette (s.a.:120), claims that it was natural that the first major conflict within the church should be over the issue of whether Christianity should remain within Judaism as one of the many sects of the faith, or whether its genius demanded that it become an independent and distinct religion. If Christianity was simply a variant of Judaism, Gentile converts to it should submit themselves to circumcision as an excepted initiatory step for admission to the Jewish community and as essential to sharing in the special covenant, which Jews believed had been made between God and their progenitor. They should also observe all aspects of the Jewish law, including the Sabbath and the distinctions between clean and unclean. This was the conviction held in moderation by their leaders, but more extremely by others of the majority of the Christian community, which remained in Jerusalem after the persecution that began with the stoning of Stephen.

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On the other hand, an increasing number of Christians, of whom Paul was the outstanding spokesman, maintained that to insist that all disciples of Christ become members of the Jewish community and submit themselves to the Jewish law was utterly to fail to grasp the essence of the Gospel. They declared that in Christ and the Gospel, God had done something quite new, foretold, to be sure, in the Jewish scriptures, but a fresh and unique act. They said that men were to enter into the fullness of life, not by earning it through the observance of God's commands as expressed in the Jewish law, but by faith in the love and forgiveness of God as seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This new community would include Gentiles, without them being bound by the Mosaic Law (Acts 15). This position was confirmed at the council of Jerusalem with the result that during the decade 50 – 60 CE there emerged a strong Gentile community. The direction given by the council of Jerusalem meant that the church was not to be tied to the Jewish Christian nationalism nor was there to be any division between circumcised and uncircumcised at the Eucharistic table. An "universal consciousness" was thus developing within the Christian community. That God wanted them to be such a community and not an institution was confirmed by the council with the solemn declaration that: *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden…"* (Acts 15:28)*.*

According to Pillay & Hofmeyr (1991:2), the Christians in Jerusalem fled to Pella, a Gentile city in the Transjordan, during the Jewish insurrection against Roman rule. After 70 CE, following the destruction of the temple and the re-establishment of Roman rule, Jewish nationalism was entrenched in the worship of the synagogues and in the strict observance of the law. This, in turn, led to the rigid exclusion of Jewish Christians from the life of the Jewish community. By 70 CE the Jewish Christian community in Palestine had become a small dwindling body of believers, separated from institutional Judaism. The future of the church came to be tied more and more to Gentile, rather than to Jewish, Christianity.

Jewish Christianity divided into two groups: the Ebionites, who perpetuated the old pharisaic Jewish-Christian position and who would have nothing to do with Gentile Christians and the Nazarenes, who maintained the Jewish-Christian tradition of Peter, Paul and James - remaining in communion with the Gentile church, but

becoming more and more an isolated and restricted segment of the Christian community.

These developments reflected the first great crisis in the life of the Christian community. The result was that Christianity became a religion within the Graeco-Roman world, and the centre of the church moved from Jerusalem to Rome. This resulted in Christianity being confronted by the political structure, religions and intellectual culture of the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, the first generation of post-apostolic Christians allowed themselves to be drawn back into the already resolved identity debate. Confronted with the same questions as the apostles (community or institution), the early church, which should have never questioned this aspect of its existence, slipped into an institutional mind-set and the results were catastrophic.

Moltmann (1992:69) remarks concerning Christ's relationship to the church,

> His choosing, gathering, and protective activity creates the church, not as an institution for salvation or a cultic group, but as a brotherhood (*community*)[147] to which the individual can profess loyalty as a 'living member'. If the church sees itself as an institution established by Jesus, and the Christian religion as a religion devised by a particular individual, then it was called into life by a legal act. At the same time it was given an unalterable testamentary definition. This is fixed by the founder's intention and determines the form of the institution's administration. The church then does not derive from the free "coming together of individuals who have been born again".

The above remarks clearly illustrate that God intended the church to be a community of born again believers, not a humanistic institution. Pillay & Hofmeyr (1991:21), commenting on the early structural developments of the church, stresses the importance of remembering that early Christianity was not primarily a philosophy or a doctrinal system, even though it used philosophy to express its faith and articulated doctrine to defend itself against heresy. Christianity was first of all and primarily a worshiping community. The keyword here is community - community with one another. This community is a living organism based on community with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

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[147] Italics are my own and are added for emphasis.

3.   The church - community or institution?

The notion that the church is a community does not imply that it has no structure or organisational elements. The church existed in germ before the day of Pentecost,[148] otherwise there would have been nothing to which those converted upon that day could have been *added* (Acts 2:47). Among the apostles, regenerated as they were, united to Christ by faith and in that faith baptised (Acts 19:4), under Christ's instruction and engaged in common work for him, there were already the beginnings of organisation. There was a treasurer of the body (Jn 13:29) and as a body they celebrated for the first time the Lord's Supper (Mt 26:26-29). To all intents and purposes they constituted a church, although the church had not yet received Christ's insufflation,[149] nor was it fully equipped for its work by the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2) and by the appointing of pastors and deacons. The church existed without officers, as in the first days succeeding Pentecost.

That provision for these offices was made gradually as exigencies arose, is natural when we consider that immediately after Christ's ascension the church was under the tutelage of inspired apostles and was to be prepared by a process of education, for independence and self government. As doctrine was communicated gradually yet infallibly, through the oral and written teaching of the apostles, so we are warranted in believing that the church was gradually but infallibly guided to the adoption of Christ's own plan of church organisation and of Christian work (cf. Eph 4:11).

The organisation of the church is at times confused with institutionalism - that is the view that defines the church primarily in terms of its visible structures, especially the rights and powers of its officers. Institutionalism, as I here discuss it, is not the same thing as its acceptance of the institutional or organisational element in the church. As was mentioned in the previous paragraph, the church could not perform its mission without some stable organisational features. Dulles (1987:35) agrees with this view, stating,

> Throughout its history, from the very earliest years, Christianity has always had an institutional side. It has had recognised ministers, accepted confessional formulas, and prescribed forms of public worship. All this is fitting and proper. It does not necessarily imply institutionalism, anymore than papacy implies papalism or law implies legalism, or dogma implies dogmatism. By institutionalism we mean a system in which the institutional

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[148] See discussion on the constitution of the church on page 34, point 4.2.
[149] See discussion on page 34, point 4.2.

element is treated as primary. Institutionalism is a deformation of the true nature of the church – a deformation that has unfortunately affected the church at certain periods of its history, and one that remains in every age a real danger to the institutional church.

Unfortunately, the post-apostolic church was under great pressure to pattern itself after the institutional model of a hierarchical priesthood.[150] They began to envisage themselves as an organisation, rather than a community. This implicated two principal elements, namely:

   a) A hierarchy of leaders known as priests, separated from the people, with an emphasis on the priests' authority; and

   b) A highly developed liturgy, or style of worship, with an emphasis upon the merit and mystery of the sacraments.

Ogden (1990:65), noting the results of this identity crisis, remarks that historically the church has been trapped in institutionalism. This institutional church resembles a corporation with the pastor as its head. Locked into a hierarchical structure, the clergy are ensconced at the apex of the pyramid. They are the experts of religion. In his discussion of the church as institution, Dulles (1987:39) remarks that at the first session of Vatican II, Bishop Emile De Smedt spoke of the pyramidal pattern in which all power is conceived as descending from the pope through the bishops and priests, while at the base the faithful people play a passive role and seem to have a lower position in the church. In contrast to this view, the bishop reminded the conciliar Fathers that in the church all have the same rights and duties, so that popes and bishops, together with laypersons, are to be reckoned among the people of God.

Despite this speech by Bishop De Scmedt, historical evidence substantiates the idea that the early church patterned itself after the model of priesthood, rather than the biblical model of community. By looking back through church history one clearly sees that the church did, in fact, become institutionalised far beyond the biblical requirements. Richardson[151] comments that a fully developed institution can be seen by the year 445 CE in an edict issued by Valentinian III, recording the so-called

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[150] Andy Richardson (internet article at www.familybiblefellowship.org/doctrine/whatever/) maintains that these pressures were caused amongst others, by the models of the Old Testament priesthood (Judaism) and the mystery religions of Babylon. The details of these pressures are not the subject of this study and thus are only mentioned here for explanatory purposes.

[151] Andy Richardson (internet article at www.familybiblefellowship.org/doctrine/whatever/)

primacy of the Pope. In this edict, Valentinian claimed the following remarkable things:

a) The city of Rome is the site of the apostolic see;

b) The Roman church is apostolic because of the "merit" of Peter;

c) It is also apostolic because the "holy synod" says it is so;

d) The Pope is the ruler of that synod;

e) Churches "everywhere" must acknowledge this supremacy of the Pope; and

f) That no bishops anywhere can minister apart from the "authority of the venerable Pope of the eternal city".

This Romanist theory holds that all local churches are subject to the supreme authority of the bishop of Rome, as the successor of Peter and the infallible vicegerent of Christ, and as thus united, constitute the one and only church of Christ on earth. The theory of apostolic succession was developed by the early church leaders to prove the power and authority of the priesthood. Küng (1968:458) confirms this by the following statements:

> The continuation of the Petrine primacy: Vatican I (D1824f) deduces from the primacy of Peter the permanent continuation of this primacy. This primacy, appointed for the eternal salvation and the continuing good of the church, must, according to the appointment made by Christ, necessarily continue. There are no quotations in Scripture in support of this, simply the declaration: "Whoever asserts that blessed Peter's permanent successors do not have the chief place in the whole church, appointed by Christ the Lord, that is by divine right… let him be Anathema."
> The continuation of the Petrine primacy in the bishop of Rome: Vatican I (d1824f) sees the permanent continuation of the Petrine primacy realized in the bishops of Rome: "Anyone following Peter in this Episcopal see, receives from the institution of Christ himself Peter's primacy over the whole church … Therefore whoever maintains… the bishop of Rome is not the successor in this primacy… let him be anathema."

. In reply to the Romanist theory, Strong (1965:909) opposes it with the following arguments:

1. Christ gave no such supreme authority to Peter. Matthew 16:18 simply refers to the personal position of Peter as first confessor of Christ and preacher of his name to Jews and Gentiles. Hence other apostles also continued the foundation (Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14). On one occasion, the counsel of James was regarded as of equal weight with that of Peter (Acts 15:7-30), while on another occasion Peter was rebuked by Paul (Gal 2:11), and Peter calls himself only a fellow elder (1 Pet 5:1).

2. If Peter had authority given him, there is no evidence that he had power to transmit it to others.

3. There is no conclusive evidence that Peter ever was at Rome, much less that he was bishop of Rome.

4. There is no evidence that he really did so appoint the bishops of Rome as his successors.

5. If Peter did so appoint the bishops of Rome, the evidence of continuous succession since that time is lacking.

6. There is abundant evidence that a hierarchical form of church government is corrupting to the church and dishonouring to Christ.

Gordon (1964:131) supports Strong's view as listed above. In contrast to the Romanist view that the Pope is the only mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit, he contends that:

> The Spirit has been given to the church as a whole, to the body of regenerated believers and to every member of that body according to his measure. The sin of sacerdotalism is that it assumes for a usurping few that which belongs to every member of Christ's mystical body. It is a suggestive fact that the name $\kappa\lambda\hat{\eta}\rho o\varsigma$ "the charge allotted to you," which Peter gives to the church as "the flock of God" (1 Pet 5:2), when warning the elders against being lords over God's heritage, now appears in ecclesiastical usage as "the clergy," with its orders of pontiff's and prelates and lord bishops, whose appointed function it is to exercise lordship over Christ's flock…. but committees and majorities may take the place of the Spirit, just as perfectly as a pope or a bishop… this is the reason why the light has been distinguished in many a candlestick… the body remains, but the breath is withdrawn.

The results of the institutionalisation of the church, and empowerment of a priestly caste of bishops, impacted the church's understanding of its nature in an unprecedented way. Rather than remaining true to the biblical truth that the church is a spiritual community of regenerated believers, the church was altered almost beyond recognition. This obviously implied a major identity crisis. The church was no longer the divinely intended community of born again believers identifiable with Christ, but rather, an institution ruled by a humanistic priesthood.

4.   The church and heresy

It must clearly be understood that it is not simply because the church faced an identity crises that it became an institution rather than a spiritual community. At the very time that it was transforming itself into a hierarchy of priests it was also under relentless doctrinal attack on several fronts. This resulted in a greater urgency to organize and control doctrinal thought while hastening the need to institutionalize.

Bearing in mind that the church's primary task was the accurate transmission of God's truth from one generation to the next, one can appreciate the church's desire to combat heresy. In fact, had this not been the case, succeeding generations would have been disinherited of an accurate doctrinal creed whereby to defend the faith.

The historic situation of the church in the early second century was not only vibrant, but also rather perplexing. God's plan was for the gospel to spread to the entire world (Mt 28:19) and according to the biblical record the early church was rapidly accomplishing this task. The apostles were far flung across the globe and persecution of believers was fanning the flames of church growth. Missionary activity was proceeding at a torrid pace, and for the church leaders who desired to maintain a respectable control over this growth, the situation was both bewildering and frustrating. As far back as the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, there was a debate about both the extent of the growth and the content of the message, and this debate, as has already been noted,[152] did not go away. Rather, it amplified in direct response to the increase of heretical movements, for as the church grew, so too did false groups grow in number and take advantage of the dynamic situation.

Three of the most threatening of these heretical movements were Gnosticism, Marcionism and Montanism. As the purpose of this study is not to elaborate on heresies themselves, but rather on the church's response thereto, these three are only briefly outlined below as presented by Pillay & Hofmeyr (1991:19). Obviously there were more heretical movements present in the context of the early church that are not discussed here.[153]

4.1   Gnosticism
Gnosticism was a diffuse, syncretistic, pre-Christian religio-philosophical mind-set, rather than a system or organised movement. Drawing on Jewish, Greek and Oriental ideas, it developed into various schools of thought including a form of Christian Gnosticism, which came into prominence during the second century. All of its schools had certain ideas in common: e.g. salvation through knowledge (Gk *gnosis* "knowledge"); a chasm between the good world of the spirit and the evil world or matter; the creation of this material world by a lesser God; a spiritual element in the human being, which yearns to free itself from the body and ascent to

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[152] See discussion on page 124, point 2.
[153] Among these were Monarchianism, Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianisn and Monophysitism. For further reading see Sinclair, B F & Wright, D F, (eds) 1988. New Dictionary of Theology. (p.291-292). Intervarsity Press: Leicester.

the true, ultimate God; mediators who descend down the aeons, or heavens to help the spiritual man back to God. Christian Gnosticism was an acute Hellenisation and in a sense, was a radical form of contextualisation, which had lost touch with the apostolic roots of the faith.

4.2   Marcionism

Marcionism was a theological interpretation and religious community derived from Marcion, a second century theologian. Deeply influenced by certain Gnostic ideas, Marcion denied that Christ was truly man, but only seemed to be a man (Docetism from the Greek word *dokein* meaning "to seem"). Marcion made a radical distinction between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament, between Law and Gospel. He denied the resurrection of the body, rejected the Old Testament and retained only ten Epistles of Paul and a truncated version of Luke's Gospel. His theology was in effect, an exaggerated and debased form of Paul's theology.

4.3   Montanism

Montanism was a movement originating in Phrygia, based on the teachings of Montanus, a former ministry-cult priest who had become a Christian and who had two female companions, Prisca and Maximilla, who claimed to be prophetesses inspired by the Spirit. Montanism was characterised by an apocalyptic consciousness that the end of the world was near by extreme ascetic practices, a desire for martyrdom and by the claim that Montanus and his two prophetesses had received a special, unique and final revelation.

5.   The church and persecution

The purpose of this chapter is not to elaborate on the persecution of Christians as such, but to explain how these persecutions impacted the theological thought of the early church. Struggling for identity was a challenge on its own, but struggling for your life is altogether different. During the early church period, the constant factor for both the orthodox and the heretic was the prospect of persecution and perhaps martyrdom. Once again it is the response of the church to this situation that is of interest. It must be understood that even in the midst of such great personal courage on the part of so many Christians, the church went far astray in its beliefs and practices. The main periods of persecution were those under Nero in 64 CE, Domition in 95 CE and Diocletion in 303 CE.

6.   The church's response

In various ways each of the heretical movements challenged the church to express its mind on important theological issues, to formulate it's understanding of continuity

and to establish the criteria of loyalty to the apostolic tradition. Wand (1974:49) states that in answer to this the church set up a threefold defence. It emphasised the importance of bishops as the guarantors of tradition (after all, who was more likely to be in possession of an apostle's authoritative teaching than the one who had succeeded to his see?); it began to fix a canon of scripture; it condensed fundamental Christian doctrine into a creed that could be easily memorised by all. It was in response to these challenges that primitive Catholicism emerged, built on three pillars, namely tradition, scripture and the episcopate.

6.1 Tradition

It seems that the idea of tradition as a criterion of apostolicity was already found in 2 Thessalonians 2:15. In the second and third centuries this tradition led to the emergence of embryonic confessions of faith. The threat of heresy greatly accelerated the process by which the church distinguished between authentic and unauthentic tradition. Later this would be expressed as a creed, developed to combat heresy.

6.2 Scripture

The primitive Greek-speaking churches used the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, as their scripture. Gradually there also emerged the canon of New Testament scripture. These were writings understood as having in some sense, apostolic authority and as being in accord with apostolic tradition. Marcion had created his own canon of scripture and in this way was instrumental in forcing the church to clarify what belonged to its own New Testament writings.

6.3 Episcopate

The episcopate, as was earlier explained, was the church's organisational response. An ecclesiastical structure emerged, which according to Pillay & Hofmeyr (*ibid*:21), was so widely established by the beginning of the second century that in his letters, Ignatius of Antioch could both assume and appeal to the existence of the mono-episcopate in his struggle against heresy and schism.

Commenting on the church's response to heresy, Richardson[154] maintains that not only was the institutionalism of the church furthered by its response to heresy, but several of the men who fought the battles over doctrine were overcome personally as well: Tertullian the anti-heretic wound up a Montanist himself; Origen's extension of Clement's system of allegorical interpretation of the Bible led him ultimately to deny the reality of hell; Cyprian's view that salvation exists only within the official institution of the church, "one cannot have God as his Father who does not have the church as his Mother," also led him to believe in infant baptism and the infernal doctrine of penance. Thus, the fight against heresy not only accomplished the adoption of creeds and canons and an established priesthood, but it saw the ruin of many a great Christian man.

In addition to the above and as a result of the persecutions, the church's response to the death of the martyrs was to honour their memories and eventually to revere them as saints. Richardson[155] states that,

> Aristides remarked in a letter to Antoninus Pius that the Christians "honoured the martyrs among them," and it mentioned that Polycarp was the first to be venerated as a "saint" and martyr. The word, *"VIDICATIO"* began to appear on the graves of the martyrs. Christians felt that their prayers would be answered more favourably if they prayed at the graveside of a martyr, and by the third century, official and liturgical veneration of the martyrs had begun. That means that in their worship services, prayers to the martyred saints were offered by the now official priesthood.

Pillay & Hofmeyr (*ibid*:25) agree with the above, stating that:

> During this early, pre-Constantinian period, the newness of Christianity also expressed itself in the beginnings of the veneration of the martyrs. The first undisputable witness to this is to be found in the martyrdom of Polycarp (c156). Anniversaries of martyrs came to be observed as early as the mid second century; their commemoration preceded in time that of all other saints. Early Christians had a sense of continuing fellowship with the departed, as is witnessed by the supplication "pray for us" in the graffiti of the Roman catacombs. During the first three centuries there seems to be no distinction made between praying for the departed and asking for prayers of the departed – any of the departed.

Furthermore, Richardson explains that by 190 CE, any person who "confessed" their desire for martyrdom and then was imprisoned and killed, was determined to have acquired ministerial rank in the church. Thus, the biblical qualifications for an elder in

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[154] Andy Richardson (internet article at www.familybiblefellowship.org/doctrine/whatever/)

[155] Andy Richardson (internet article at www.familybiblefellowship.org/doctrine/whatever/)

the church were laid aside in the face of martyrdom. When by chance a martyr was released before he could be killed, he was allowed to remain in official status in the church. Some opposition to this process was generated, but it was weak in effort and easily overcome.

In addition to this special status within the church, saints and martyrs were supposed to be endowed with spiritual powers not available to the average Christian. For instance, even Irenaeus believed that the prayers of a martyr could forgive sins, and Alexander, a released confessor-martyr of that time, used his new found status in the church to exercise the power to bind and loose sin. The story of Perpetua[156] is well known: how she prayed for her dead brother, how she had a vision of him thirsting and how after her prayers, she had another vision of him as satisfied with all the water he could drink. This was generally interpreted to show that the prayers of the martyrs could forgive sins, even beyond the grave. Thus, by the time Constantine appeared (313 CE), the supposed first Christian emperor, the church had not been institutionalized; it had been compromised. Bernhardt (1994:72) explains it as follows:

> Tertullian gave the church ample grounds for understanding itself as the sole guardian of God's truth. His pupil Cyprian developed them into a new understanding of the church, which immediately became normative. For Cyprian, the church was no longer primarily the spiritual communion of saints (i.e. those who truly believe and thus are saved) but an institution with a hierarchical organization under the leadership of the bishop.

Secondly, a difficult issue quickly arose as to what to do with those persons who had "lapsed" in their faith while undergoing persecution. Many of these "lapsed" folks asked for re-admittance to the church, but the church was split over what to do with them. It was because Cyprian had declared "outside the church there is no salvation," that a great clamor arose for the lapsed to be allowed back into the church. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, was urged to readmit the lapsed on the basis that the dead martyrs had earned special merit, and thereby prayers in their name could be offered for the forgiveness of the apostate.

Rejecting this approach (although it later became the official position of the Catholic Church), Cyprian decided that those who had lapsed in their faith should be put under probation for a period of time to prove that their faith was now genuine.

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[156]See article in On-line Catholic Encyclopaedia: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06029a.htm

Therefore, a graded system of penance was devised so that the formerly apostate could now "prove" their seriousness of belief. Upon completion of the ordeal, the bishop would pronounce forgiveness, and the fallen would be accepted back into the good graces of the church.

Shelley's (1982:45) remarks are appropriate: "Along with baptism and the mass, the Catholics now had a new sacrament; it was still without form, but they relied upon it as a thing which had form, and considered themselves justified in applying it in almost every case - it was the sacrament of penance. By a simple ceremony the church could administer forgiveness, and the bishop now controlled the Spirit."

7.   The church and Constantine

Though there had never been a Christian uprising against the empire and Christianity held aloof from politics to a remarkable degree, the church was rapidly growing in numbers and strength. Two courses lay open for Constantine, either to force it into submission and break its power, or to enter into alliance with it and thus secure political control of the growing organism. The latter was to be the method of Constantine. Bernhardt (*ibid*:69) comments as follows on this issue:

> With the so-called Edict of Milan (313 CE), Constantine the Great brought about a change in Christianity, which was to transform it from being a persecuted religion into a recognised religion and then the sole state religion. In 341 CE superstition and sacrifice carried the death penalty, and in 346 CE the non-Christian temples were closed. 'Now began an attack on the temples which unleashed the wildest fanaticism of the Christian mob'.

With this change the church was now free from persecution. Its steadfastness, its faith and its organisation had carried it through its perils. But, in winning its freedom from its enemies, it had come largely under the control of the occupant of the Roman imperial throne.

Latourette (s.a.:92) states that it is uncertain whether Constantine was a Christian from political motives only or from sincere religious conviction. This subject, he adds, has been hotly debated. Küng (1996:176, 177) says of Constantine that he was not a Christian himself, but a man of power; neither a pious Christian nor a hypocrite, rather a statesman who coolly took Christianity into the calculations of his power politics. Kromminga (1945:50) maintains that the aim of Constantine can readily be

understood. He would aid the church, but the church must also aid the government. It must help to bind the empire together, but in order to do this, it must itself be united.

To recognise what we now would call various denominations of Christians, did not fit in with this aim. So he recognised only the great Catholic Church and all Christian minorities descending from it came under the displeasure of the government. All through the empire people could now join the church without fear of having to suffer for it. This shift of favour drew many into the church who would have stayed outside if the church had not become privileged by the government. The church now grew by leaps and bounds, but the spirituality of its members diminished. Wand (1974:135) agrees with this, remarking that the ease with which Christianity could now be practised brought many unworthy elements into the church and helped to lower its standard.

Walker (1949:127) remarks that in 380 CE emperor Theodosius issued an edict that "all should hold the faith which the holy Apostle Peter gave to the Romans," which he defined as those taught by the existing bishops. Henceforth there was to be but one religion in the empire, namely the Christian. Benhardt (1994:69) agrees with this, stating:

> On 28th February 380 Theodosius the Great then enacted the edict *Cunctos populos*, which stated: 'It is our will that all people over whom we exercise a mild and moderate government should persevere in the religion which the divine apostle Peter… has handed down to the Romans… namely, that according to the instruction of the Apostles teaching of the gospel we believe in one Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in equal majesty and holy Trinity. We command that only those who follow this law may be called Catholic Christians…

The prohibition of all non-Christian cults in 391 CE made the Christian church the state church and paganism and heresy a state crime. This policy of Christian governments to recognise only one church and to frown on all dissenters, became the rule in most Christian countries. Jonker (1987:13) maintains that the state churches that exist in the various European countries are rooted way back in history and represent the heritage of the so-called *Corpus Christianum,* as it was established in the fourth century. He goes on to say that at this time, the church experienced an enormous increase of its membership, but at a price that the members often were not members due to conviction, but rather, due to civic duty. What used to be a

dangerous choice in the first century now became an obligation and as matter of course, implied obedience to any government law, such as paying of taxes.[157]

Latourette (s.a.:93) agrees with this, stating that many people now sought admission to the church from other motives than purely religious conviction. Official favour and even wealth could be hoped for where formerly persecution, always in the background, tended to give pause to all but those impressed by the truth of the faith.

8.   The church and Protestantism

Lest the discussion hitherto be thought of simply as an anti-Catholic diatribe, the results of the Protestant reformation are briefly considered. Having grown so corrupt that even her monks had to protest against the church, Martin Luther and the other reformers returned to the principles of salvation by faith alone based solely on the truth of the Scriptures. This was, of course, important and revolutionising. Jonker (*ibid*:14) adds the following:

> Theologically, the reformers thought purely of the church. They define the church in a way that elucidates the fact that membership of the church, was based on personal faith and that it was not something that is attained by civil relationship. In practice, however, the reformation did not eradicate the state church character of the middle-age church.

Nonetheless, the question must be posited, namely: "What of the organization and mysticism inherent in the Catholic Church? Were the new Protestant churches really that much different from the institution from which they had broken away?" Looking at Protestantism, one sees a hierarchical structure organized and administered by professional staff, for the purpose of giving the people the spiritual food they need, only this time the form of the food is a sermon rather than a wafer. Pastors of many Protestant churches today wear robes to distinguish themselves from the regular folks of the church, and there is no more dictatorial bishop in any Catholic church than some strong-minded Protestant preachers in small congregations.

The mind-set of both the Priest and the Preacher are alike, and the attitudes of Catholic and Protestant lay people are exactly alike when it comes to their idea of where the centre of action is regarding the ministry. They both know that the place to be on a Sunday morning is in the church building. The average Protestant lay person

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[157] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

is as dependent on the Sunday morning service for his spirituality as is the Catholic lay person dependent upon the magic of the mass for his. It seems that the Protestants have allowed the same forces of institutionalism and ecclesiasticism that corrupted the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches to shape their churches.[158]

9.   Summary

From all that has been discussed above it is deduced that the cause of the church's current crisis can be traced as far back as the book of Acts, or at least to the post-apostolic period shortly thereafter. The church had experienced an identity crisis; heresy had influenced its theological thought, which resulted in the articulation of the creeds and the completion of the New Testament Canon. Persecution led to the veneration of martyrs and the doctrine of penance. These factors contributed to the crisis of the church, but these were not the only contributing factors. Once the church had become a state church under the rule of Constantine, who for the first time in Christian history (during the Donatist[159] controversy) intervened in the decision making process of the church – the church in a certain sense had become secularised. Meant to be a spiritual community of regenerated Christians with a four-fold ministry of teaching, sharing, worship and prayer, the church became a bureaucratic, mystical institution run by a priesthood in league with the political rulers of the Roman Empire.

The discussion thus far is important to the theme of this study, as it casts light upon the fact that the seeming current church crisis cannot be ascribed to one or two causes, nor easily solved by simple reorganisation.[160] Consequently, identifying the cause of the problem is bound up with defining what the church was before it became what it seems to be now, namely a church without equilibrium between identity and relevance. What actually happened to the church can only be appreciated by taking a vantage point from which we can perceive what has been lost and when was it lost. This is why a review of the primitive church is most important. We have to look at the starting point of the church and reassess its character and essence. In concluding this chapter it must be said that although the above factors played a major role in

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[158] This is discussed in more detail in part 4 of this thesis on page 141.

[159] A discussion of the Donatist controversy is not included here. Reference thereto is made solely for illustrative purposes.

[160] See part 4 on page 141.

contributing to the church's loss of identity and relevance, they also, in a certain sense, had a positive influence on the church. The positive and fateful influences of all these factors on the church, together with the influence of postmodernism, are fully discussed in part four of this thesis.

1.   Introduction

In order for us to grasp the intensity of what the modern day church seems to have lost, we need to determine what the church of Acts had. To propose that it is possible, let alone happened or is happening, that the church no longer has something that the primitive church of Acts had, may be disturbing to many modern day theologians. After all, modern theology has benefited from the various scientific fields of study to such an extent that it seems they have left no stone unturned. Yet, despite all the knowledge obtained through centuries of study, it seems that a link is missing between the church of Acts and the modern day church.

Lest the reader may assume that I am hypercritical of the modern day church, I will briefly explain here my angle of incidence. My hermeneutical considerations are based on the hypothesis that the Church of Jesus Christ, namely the body of which he is the head (Eph 4:14), will not be annihilated, cease to exist or be defeated, but will always be present in the world and will continue to be functional until the second advent of Christ. This positive approach is based on an unwavering faith and personal experience, together with the fact that Jesus Christ, who is the chief cornerstone and head of the church proclaimed …*I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Mt 16:18).

Nonetheless, it is perceptible that the modern day church is experiencing an identity crisis and as such has lost the great influence and respect that the primitive church seemed to have had upon the world and enjoyed (Acts 2:41-47). Hannah (1996:155), commenting on the state of the modern church, remarks:

> Something is out of focus in the life of the modern church. This is an observation that requires little reflection. A host of scholars – from sociologists, with their statistical and cultural analysis, to theologians, who are concerned over the loss of truth – have written about this.

In view hereof and in order to establish what (if anything) is out of focus in the life of the modern church, we need to revert back to the primitive church and examine the characteristics thereof. These are discussed below.

In 1926 Fritz Lang, produced a film, namely *Metropolis.* It was a warning that humanities' dependence on technology may one day make them technology's slave. Lang's warnings were fulfilled, as humanity exchanged communities for efficiency and discovered that they had become nothing more than machines. The resultant image is one of an efficient yet sterile society, which lacks any emotion, compassion or love. It seems as though the contemporary church has chosen the same course. We have chosen comfort and convenience over servanthood and sacrifice; organisation over life, and this, perhaps, is the dilemma we face – that at best the church is seen as a healthy organisation.

The problem seems to be that we treat the church as an organisation instead of an organism. Even an elementary reading of the New Testament would make it clear that the church is the body of Christ.[161] The church in its essence is a living system. Whenever we see the church through the template of an organisation, we begin creating an institution. When we relate to the church as an organism, we begin to awaken an apostolic ethos, which unleashes the movement of God.

It is this ethos[162] of the church of Acts that needs to be re-emphasised so as to highlight the missing link. Ethos in this context relates to the characteristics of the church. It is logical that the best description of this church is to be found in Luke's treatise addressed to Theophilus, namely The Acts of the Apostles. The second chapter thereof describes the Pentecost event, which is viewed by many as the beginning of the church.[163] It is in this chapter that Luke presents us with a number of characteristics that seem to be present in the church soon after the first members had received the Holy Spirit on that momentous day. Two of these characteristics are discussed below and elaborated on with relation to the modern church and the problem addressed in this thesis.

2. Two characteristics of the primitive church

Acts 2:42-47 (NIV) describes the newly established church as follows:

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled awe, and many

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[161] See discussion on page 52, point 5.1.

[162] The Concise Oxford Dictionary (new edition), 1980, defines *ethos* as: characteristic spirit and beliefs of community.

[163] See discussion on the founding of the church on page 34, point 4.2.

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wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

We often speak of the primitive church, appeal to it, and to the history thereof. In the portion of Scripture quoted above, we can identify the two characteristics previously referred to. The first and the last sentences of the quoted verses contain these two important factors, namely "devotion" and "regeneration". These were distinctive of the primitive church, of the first days of it, its state of infancy indeed, but like that, the state of its greatest innocence. About three thousand had been added to the company of believers, which by the Holy Spirit had been formed into one body. As a result of Peter's testimony concerning the rejected, crucified and risen Jesus, that he is Lord and Christ, these repented, having believed the message and were added by the Spirit to the body. In the foreground of the description of this gathered company stands the fact that *they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching*.

2.1 It was a church devoted to the apostolic doctrine

The very first evidence Luke mentions of the Spirit's presence in the church is that they *devoted themselves to the apostles teaching* (doctrine), which is the equivalent of the doctrine of Christ, of which he is the author, preacher and subject; the substance of which is peace, pardon, righteousness and salvation by him. This is the doctrine that the apostles had received from Christ (Mt 28:19) and constantly taught in their ministry, for which reason it is called *theirs*. The teaching of the apostles must, of course, have been in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. They were, as revealed later, the foundation of the great spiritual building (Eph 2:20).

Gaebelein (1961:65) notes the importance of doctrine and states:

> That teaching is placed in the first place shows its great importance. True fellowship and prayer as well as right living, is only possible in truth. Throughout the epistles, which concern the church, doctrine is always the first thing. One of the last exhortations the Holy Spirit gave through Paul, is an exhortation to be true to right teaching: "Hold fast the form and sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 1:13).

It is this doctrine that the young converts had embraced gladly and were not only believers of it, but also persevering believers. They were constant hearers of it and continually attended on the ministry of the apostles; they held fast the form of sound

words they had received from them; they stood fast in the faith of the Gospel. The fact that Luke says they *devoted themselves to the apostles teaching* implies that they adhered thereto and lived their lives accordingly. This is the inspired record of the result. That any of these first converts apostatized is nowhere recorded, nor is it to be presumed. Though they had been suddenly converted; though they were suddenly admitted to the church; though they were exposed to persecution, contempt and many trials, yet the record is that they adhered to the doctrines and duties of the Christian religion.

Stott (1990:82) makes the following significant comment concerning the phrase *they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching*:

> One might perhaps say that the Holy Spirit opened a school in Jerusalem that day; its teachers were the apostles whom Jesus had appointed; and there were 3000 pupils in that kindergarten! We note that those new converts were not enjoying a mystical experience, which led them to despise their mind or disdain theology. Anti-intellectualism and the fullness of the Spirit are mutually incompatible, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Nor did those early disciples imagine that, because they had received the Spirit, he was the only teacher they needed and they could dispense with human teachers. On the contrary, they sat at the apostles' feet, hungry to receive instruction and they persevered in it.

It is clear from the biblical record and from the comment above that the new converts waited constantly upon the teaching of the apostles. There was much for them to learn. They knew nothing as yet in detail of the doctrine of their new Master and the particulars of his life, words, character, work and the implications of belonging to the church. Nonetheless, the epistle to the Hebrews teaches that Jesus is the full and final revelation of God to humankind *in the last days* (Heb 1:1-2). It refers to Christ as *better than* the angels (v4), the law (7:19) and the Old Testament priesthood (7:23, 24). Indeed his revelation and redemption is said to be *eternal* (5:9, 9:12, 15) and once for all (9:28: 10:12-14). He alone could say, *He that has seen me has seen the Father* (Jn 14:9), and of him alone could it be said that in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form (Col 2:9).

This Jesus commissioned twelve apostles (Mt 10:1ff) to teach the full and final revelation that he had given them. Before his ascension, he promised these disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit, saying *…He* (Holy Spirit) *will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have told you (Jn 14:20).* This is why it is that the church is

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referred to as *built on the foundation of the apostles* (Eph 2:20) and why the primitive church *devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.*

Obviously, this teaching had as content that which Jesus, by the Spirit, taught the apostles and had commanded them to preach (Jn 14:16; Mt 28:19). This logically included the fact of Christ's pre-existence (Jn 1:1); his incarnation (v14); his death; the witness of Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:32; 4:33) and ascension (1 Cor 15:3; Lk 24:50). These are some of the absolutes[164] or non-negotiables included in the doctrine of the apostles teaching. They are the unchangeable, not subjected to any change brought about by time and space.[165] It is these absolutes that Paul reminds us of in his first epistle to the Corinthians: *Now I make known unto you brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures;* (1 Cor 15:1-4).

Horak (1999:121) comments as follows concerning Paul's usage of the words *delivered* and *received* within the context of the above quoted text:

> The words *delivered* and *received* refer to the method in which the gospel was received, namely through preaching. The apostles received it from the Lord himself (Gal 1:12) and in turn delivered it to the churches that then delivered it to others. The fact that Paul says that the doctrine that he received was from the Lord emphasizes his conviction that this, which he delivered, had a divine origin.

Dunn (1993:2) maintains that it is because of this that Paul's committed involvement and total devotion to that which he wrote cannot be questioned, as it is not a summary of teachings, but of facts. Paul strengthens his argument by adding two statements in the negative. Firstly he says that, *I make known to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man, neither did I receive it from man,* which refers to the divine origin thereof. Secondly he adds, *nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ,* which refers to his exceptional knowledge concerning the content of the gospel (Gal 1:12).

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[164] Absolutes and relatives are discussed on page 161, point 4.
[165] See discussion of change and time on page 101, point 4.

Any deviation from this doctrine is a deviation from the core foundation of Christian spirituality. The apostle, in this chapter (1 Cor 15), recommends the Gospel and gives a summary of it, proving the resurrection of Christ. By various arguments he establishes the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and answers objections made unto it. He also sets forth the glory there will be upon the bodies of risen saints and the change that will be made on living ones and concludes with an exhortation to perseverance in faith and holiness.

As his chief view is the doctrine of the resurrection, he introduces this by recommending the Gospel in general, or by observing that this is a principal doctrine which should be remembered and retained, because it was the Gospel which he had preached, which they had received and had hitherto persevered in (v.1). Besides this, it was essential to salvation and was also the means of it, by which they would be saved if they held fast thereto. Otherwise their faith was in vain, as it would be should they deviate from it (v.2). Moreover, the apostle had received it by divine revelation and had faithfully delivered it to them. Therefore it was important for them to hold fast thereto, the sum of which was the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, agreeably to the Scriptures (v.3). This is so contrary to the teaching and beliefs of groups such as the Jesus Seminar and the New Reformers[166] who, amongst others, interpret the virgin birth as a "culture-sensitive" event and the resurrection of Christ as an event that acquires new meaning when the individual breaks from the sin he/she normally tends to do and when he/she becomes a new creature in Christ. König (2005:301) quotes Spannenberg[167] as stating:

> The confession that Jesus is raised acquires new meaning when I break with the sinful things that I tend to do and when I become a new person (Rom 6; Col 3). I can also formulate it as follows: Jesus must be resurrected in me as one of his followers and become present in this world. As the well-known statement reads: 'He has no hands but our hands to do his work today.'[168]

König (*ibid*:301-302) continues by pointing out that this view of Spanneberg's expresses a view that is present in Paul's theology (cf. Rom 6 and Col 3) yet is completely wrested out of context by Spannenberg. König argues that according to Paul, believers are united to Christ through baptism and thereby become partakers of his death, burial and resurrection. Thus individuals can refuse to be servants of sin

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[166] See the relevant discussions on page 43, point 4.7 and page 45, point 4.8.
[167] See note 57 on page 45.
[168] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

and are able to serve God with their total being. The end of my old life and the new life are therefore gifts of grace from God. *God* gives me the new life that I can and should live. Yet according to Spannenberg, *I* must break with evil and *I* must become a new person. Hereby that, which is gospel to Paul, becomes ethic, law and moralism. What Spannenberg does not accept annihilates our faith: the reality of Jesus' resurrection. Spannenberg makes his own experience the norm for his faith. He cannot believe in whatever is not present or does not fit into his culture and "life-experience". This is a very contradictory as a person does *not* need to believe in anything that is present in one's culture or "life-experience," because you experience it as factual yourself anyway. With this method of interpretation, namely "culture-sensitive," Spannenberg will, amongst others, most likely find the doctrine of creation to be problematic. The original event of creation most certainly is not part of our culture or "life-experience."

Henry (1961:1831), commenting on 1 Corinthians 15 :1-3, says:

> Paul begins with an epitome or summary of the gospel, what he had preached among them, namely, the death and resurrection of Christ. Upon this foundation the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is built. Note, divine truths appear with greatest evidence when they are looked upon in their mutual connection. The foundation may be strengthened, that the superstructure may be secured. Now concerning the gospel observe 1. What a stress he lays upon it (1 Cor 15:1-2): *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel, which I preached to you.* 2. It was what he constantly preached. His word was not yea and nay: he always preached the same gospel, and taught the same truth. He could appeal to his hearers for this. Truth is in its own nature invariable; and the infallible teachers of divine truth could never be at variance with themselves or one another. The doctrine, which Paul had heretofore taught, he still taught. 3. It was what they had received; they had been convinced of the faith, believed it in their hearts, or at least made profession of doing so with their mouths. It was no strange doctrine. It was that very gospel in which, or by which, they had hitherto stood, and must continue to stand. If they gave up this truth, they left themselves no ground to stand upon, no footing in religion.

From this the implication is that truth in itself always remains the same[169] and that all successive generations of Christian teachers should continue in the apostles' doctrine as received from Christ. Regarding the continuation of Jesus' teaching through the apostles, Harrison (1985:158) comments as follows:

> Of equal importance is the provision Jesus made for the future, when he would no longer be personally present. In the upper room he declared to

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[169] See discussion of "truth" on page 117, point 5.2.3 and page 161, point 4.

the disciples that he had many things to teach them but they were unable to receive them due to their distraught condition. He promised to send another Counselor, the Spirit of truth, who would take over the ministry of teaching. The Lord made three important statements about the Spirit's teaching activity: (1) he would recall to their minds what Jesus had taught them (John 14:26), (2) he would teach them all things (14:26), and (3) he would declare to them the things which were to come (16:13).

Jesus had, by giving the apostles the promise of the Spirit, assured them that the ministry that he initiated would not fade after his departure, but would be continued by the Spirit. At his ascension, Christ did not leave, in his office of teacher, a vacuum. Luke clearly explains this in the opening lines of the book of Acts, wherein he refers to his Gospel as containing *all that Jesus began to do and teach* (1:1). This implies that the ascended Lord is still active in this ministry, but now by means of the Spirit acting upon the church. Matching the provision of the Spirit, as teacher, is the human obligation laid upon the church in the persons of the apostles, as set forth in the great commission *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you* (Mt 28:20).

Consequently, the continuation of Christ's doctrine, namely the doctrine to which the apostles and primitive believers devoted themselves, is of vital importance for maintaining a balance between identity and relevance within the church.

 From this it is deduced that the primitive or early church identified with Christ. People, who listened to their proclamation and explanation of the gospel message, knew that these message bearers were associated with Jesus Christ (Acts 4:13). It was this church which set the standard of all succeeding ages in doctrine and discipline. The apostolic commencement of the church and its doctrine must therefore be the model to which we continually refer for the corrections of those errors of development that will, by mixture with human ideologies, destroy the fundamental conception of Christianity. That the primitive church was also relevant is discussed in the next chapter.

2.2   It was a regenerated church

The concluding sentence of Acts 2:47, namely: *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved* (NIV), although recorded by a variety of extant Bible versions with altered word choices, emphasises the necessity of regeneration

as a precondition to being added to the church.   Listed below are a number of these interpretations:[170]

(ALT) So the Lord was daily adding the ones being saved to the Assembly [or Church].

(ASV)   And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved.

(AV) And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

(BBE) And every day the number of those who had salvation was increased by the Lord.

(CEV) And each day the Lord added to their group others who were being saved.

(GNB) And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

(GW) Every day the Lord saved people, and they were added to the group.

(ISV) And every day the Lord was adding to them people who were being saved.

(LITV) And the Lord added to the assembly, the ones being saved from day to day.

(MKJV) And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

(MSG) Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

(WEB) The Lord added to the assembly day by day those who were being saved.

(Webster) And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

(WNT) Also, day by day, the Lord added to their number those whom He was saving.

(YLT) And the Lord was adding those being saved every day to the assembly.

From the quoted versions it is deduced that the salvific status of individuals being added to the church is described as follows:

a)   Ones being saved
b)   Those that were saved
c)   Such as should be saved
d)   Those who had salvation
e)   Were being saved
f)   The Lord saved people

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[170] See list of abbreviations on page 209.

g)   *Those who were saved*

h)   *Those whom He was saving*

i)   *Those being saved*

Stott (1990:87) comments as follows concerning the phrase *"those who were being saved"*:

…the present participle *sõzomenous* either being timeless or emphasising that salvation is a progressive experience culminating in final glorification. He did not add them to the church without saving them (no nominal Christianity at the beginning), nor did he save them without adding them to the church (no solitary Christianity either). Salvation and church membership belonged together, they still do.

Although the phrase, "*such as should be saved"* (AV)*,* may imply a futuristic note, this does not seem to be the case.[171] Vincent (1985:113) describes Acts 2:47 in reference to the AV's rendering thereof as follows:

The rendering of the AV would require the verb to be in the future, whereas it is the present participle. Compare 1 Corinthians 1:18. Salvation is a thing of the *present,* as well as of the *past and future.* The verb is used in all these senses in the New Testament. Thus, *we were saved* (Rom 8:24); *shall* or *shalt* be saved, (Rom 10:9, 13); *are being saved,* (1 Cor 15:2). Godliness, righteousness, is life, is salvation. And it is hardly necessary to say that the divorce of morality and religion must be fostered and encouraged by failing to note this, and so laying the whole stress on either the past or on the future - on the first call, or on the final change. It is, therefore, important that the idea of salvation as a rescue from sin, through the knowledge of God in Christ, and therefore a *progressive condition,* a present state, should not be obscured, and we can but regret such a translation as Acts 2:47, "The Lord added to the church daily such *as should be saved," where* the Greek implies a different idea.

Newman & Nida (1972:66) comment as follows:

Those who were being saved must be understood in the light of "every day". The meaning of the verb phrase *were being saved* is temporal and not theological, that is, Luke is not concerned in this passage to present a theory of salvation as a progressive experience; rather he is saying that day after day the Lord kept adding to their group those people who became believers.

The implication is that people added to the church by the Lord, were regenerated[172] individuals. These were such whom God had chosen to salvation by Jesus Christ, whom he had redeemed by his precious blood, who were now regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of God and so should certainly be saved. This is not always

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[171] The semantic implications of these texts are not discussed here as they are beyond the scope of this thesis.
[172] See point 7.2.2 on page 61 for a definition of regeneration.

the case of persons added to the modern day church. It seems many have been added - via human tradition and efforts - that have not been regenerated and so bring about an imbalance between identity and relevance, for there is a vast difference between being added by the Lord, and being added by human tradition or human effort.[173]

From the above it is deduced that regeneration is the *one* property or necessary attribute,[174] which constitutes the essence of the church. In view hereof it can irrevocably be stated that the members of the primitive church who were added by the Lord, were spiritually renewed or born again. In modern terminology this is often referred to as Christian spirituality.[175] This Christian spirituality was a prerequisite for becoming a member of the church. The Lord adds to his body (church) only those who are saved (Acts 2:47). The church's identification with Christ therefore implies that it must be a regenerated church (or body of individuals) as was the primitive church.

Concerning the relevance of the primitive church, it must be said that as far as fulfilling Christ's great commission is concerned, they most certainly were relevant. He had told them to preach to all nationalities, to baptise and to teach them (Mt 28:19). Acts 2:41 and 4:4 respectively record that three thousand individuals and about five thousand men believed the gospel and were added to the church. In this regard the primitive church was relevant. This church never forgot the fact of sin and that humanity was lost. The very name of Jesus reminded them of this. Their success, which implies relevance, was so overwhelming that Remwick (1977:16) remarks:

> So successful were they in spreading their teaching that eighteen years after the resurrection of Christ his followers were accused of turning the world upside down (Eph 4:24-32). Through the 'good news,' which they preached the lives of men and women, were transformed. As the whole narrative shows, the chains of vice were broken and sinners were cleansed and raised to a higher spiritual plane by the power of God. The broken-hearted were comforted, the weak were made strong, the selfish learned to love their neighbour and sacrifice themselves for the cause of Christ. Superstitions were swept away and idolatry vanished. Even the slave, hitherto treated as less than human, and who could be sold or killed

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[173] The implied *human tradition and human effort* is discussed on page 170, point 2.
[174] See discussion of *Essence*, point 2.2 on page 6.
[175] The nature of Christian spirituality is briefly discussed on page 164, point 1.

at the pleasure of his owner, was now given a place in the Christian church as a child of God.

Earlier in this thesis reference was made to Moltmann[176] who had stated that the question of relevance arises only where identity is a matter of experience and belief. He also adds that when something can be identified, it is possible to ask whether it is relevant to anything else and whether it has any connection with anything else.

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that the experience of and belief in Jesus, implies identity with Christ and his church. Subsequently, the question of relevance of the primitive church arises. As far as fulfilling its Christ given mission, the primitive church most certainly was relevant and had a connection with those outside her parameters. This is obvious considering how it impacted the outside world, the numbers of converts and the resultant change brought about, as described above by Renwick. This substantiates the fact that a vertical relationship with God must precede a horizontal relationship to the world. Put another way, it can be said that in order to impact the world (relevance), the "members"[177] of the modern day church must have a living relationship with God (identity). Only if this is the experience of these members through regeneration, can the Lord add them to the church and will the church be able to maintain balance between its identity with God and its relevance.

3.   Characteristics of the twenty-first century church

The character of the modern day church needs to be examined in the light of the two characteristics of the primitive church as discussed above, namely that concerning the apostolic doctrine and the Lord adding to the church.[178] This is done below in order to reach the desired goal of this study, namely a proposed possible solution to the identity/relevance dilemma of the church.

Throughout the centuries it has been fashionable to give one age or another a defining label. This label is often quite useful as "shorthand" for referencing an entire

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[176] See page 90.

[177] I have added the inverted commas here indicative of my belief that some of the so-called members of today's church may be members of a denomination, but not necessarily regenerated members of Christ's body. These are those added not by the Lord, but rather due to human action or tradition.

[178] As was noted earlier (see page 4) the scope of this study is primarily concerned with the mainline Protestant and Pentecostal churches in the South African context, yet not exclusively. The discussion also includes references to the church within both these traditions that are situated beyond the South African borders

period of time, or for explaining why that time frame was special. The Renaissance, the Dark Ages, the Medieval Period are all ways of describing periods of earth's human history and the response man has had to God. Postmodernism[179] succeeds the modern age, which spanned the period from the Renaissance to about the early 1900's. This period was characterized by science and reason - "rationalism". These intellectual disciplines are considered devoid of emotion and warmth.

When humanity determined that their emotional well being and inner peace were not to be found in science and reason, Modernism ended and Postmodernism began. It is the pursuit of the "me" generation to obtain "inner peace and joy" for itself. "Emotional well-being" and "live and let live" are some of the catch phrases that have come to be recognized as hallmarks of this self-focused movement. Schaeffer (1982:385)) explains that they (postmodernists) have only two values – personal peace and affluence. He adds that personal peace is not to be equated with pacifism. Rather, it is the attitude: "Let me alone; don't let trouble at home or abroad come near my door. Just give me peace, personal peace." The postmodern age is thus an age wherein humans are seeking their own self-fulfilment through emotional gratification. A more descriptive and scholarly term for this emotional gratification would be *secular humanism.*

3.1   Conservatives, Liberals and change

Postmodernism has affected the protestant church to such an extent that it can be divided into two groups irrespective of denominational relations. These are what I would label the conservative group and the liberal group. There are conservatives and liberals in the Reformed churches and there are conservatives and liberals in the Pentecostal churches. The only group that may consist of liberals only, are the Charismatic churches. Within this context, the conservatives are the group that have, despite the changes brought about by postmodernism, resisted change. They are the ones that have held on to their traditional liturgical styles, but in the process are finding that the pews are no longer filled with attendees, rather, that attendance is decreasing notably from one Sunday to the next. The reason being ascribed to the fact that for most postmodernists, stories[180] that would have them hearken back to

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[179] See the discussion of postmodernism on page 107, point 5.1.3. Only the effects of postmodernism on the church are discussed here.

[180] "Stories" refer to grand narratives. See footnote 191 on page 157 for explanation.

some prior theological era are untenable and unacceptable. They vote by their absence.

The liberals can be described as those that have remained in step with postmodernism and consequently have made the necessary changes to their liturgical styles and manner of "doing church." The results can be seen in the pews being filled in these churches and the continual establishment of mega churches in various countries worldwide.

The plea of the day is that the church must change. Bookshelves are filled with titles such as *Death of the church - The church has a choice: to die as a result of its resistance to change or to die in order to live;*[181] *Dying for change;*[182] *Ja vir Jesus, nee vir die kerk;*[183] *Vernuwe of verdwyn;*[184] *Op soek na God buite die kerk*[185] and *Sprakeloos oor God.*[186] The themes of these books are that churches need to change from traditional style churches to more modern life churches; also that they be more conscience of and sensitive to humanity's quest to find personal emotional well-being and to work towards filling up that perceived need for them; to help them to feel good about themselves.

Numerous books promoting this change have been published, amongst others, "The Purpose Driven Church", a book by Rick Warren, which is concerned with the theme of the church being seeker-sensitive. In chapter fourteen Warren (1995:251) focuses on the *how* of designing a seeker-sensitive service, in order to make visitors feel comfortable. This book was succeeded by Warren's follow-up book and New York Times bestseller, namely "The Purpose Driven Life". This book focuses on a forty day "spiritual journey" in order to discover God's purpose for one's life. Warren (2002:10) claims that the readers will find the "next forty days will change your (the readers) life".

Anderson (1990:144) states that a popular and exciting response to late twentieth-century change is the emergence of the entrepreneurial church. These are churches

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[181] Author Mike Regele, 1995. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
[182] Author Leith Andersn, 1990. Minneapolis: Bethany.
[183] Author Jannie Botha, 2001. Lapa Uitgewers: Pretoria.
[184] Author Adrio König, 1998. Lux Verbi: Cape Town.
[185] Author Annes Nel, 2003. Lux Verbi: Wellington.
[186] Author Ben du Toit, 2005. Lux Verbi: Wellington.

founded by capable charismatic leaders like Warren, who see a need and venture to meet it. They poll people as to what they want and then begin services in a non-threatening way. He goes on to say concerning the church of Bill Hybels in South Barrington, Illinois:

> He (Hybels) asked people what they wanted or didn't want in a church, and out of their responses developed a program targeted to the unchurched – with practical and relevant sermons, drama, contemporary music, minimal mention of money, and many special programs for meeting specific needs.

Membership statistics of both Rick Warren's "Saddleback Church", and Bill Hybels' "Willow Creek Community Church" runs into thousands. From this it is deduced that churches who are seeker-sensitive (or liberal) seem to be more acceptable to the community than traditional (conservative) churches are, with the result that they find their pews filled with attendees from all walks of life.

3.2   Conservatives, Liberals and identity

It may be said that the conservatives seem to have retained identity with Christ, but as a result of their resistance to change have become irrelevant. In contrast to the conservatives, the liberals are the group that have not resisted change, but have chosen rather to adapt than to die. Thereby they have succeeded in being relevant in a humanistic society, but have, it seems, sacrificed identity with Christ in the process.

Brummer (1999:29) maintains that the identity of Christian tradition is often explained in terms of the Aristotelian distinction between substantial and accidental change. According to this theory, a tree can grow over the years, loose its leaves in the autumn and grow new leaves in spring etc. and still maintain its identity as a tree. Such changes are accidental since they affect only the accidental properties. If however it were to catch fire and be reduced to ashes, it would no longer be a tree. This would be a substantial change affecting its essential properties, i.e. those properties that make it what it is: a tree.

Similarly, one could distinguish between the accidental and the substantial change of the church. The accidental could vary and change without the church ceasing to be what it is, namely the church of Christ Jesus. An example here would be doctrinal tradition, which is a process whereby Christian beliefs are handed down from generation to generation. This process may be described as a cumulative process, in

that doctrine is always progressive. The primitive church of Acts did not compile the Apostolic Creed,[187] but rather, it was the result of later theological thought. Nonetheless, the primitive teachings of the apostles are preserved therein. These have to remain the same throughout the life span of the church. If they were to be altered, the church would loose its identity as the church of Christ.

On the other hand, substantial change within the church would include, for example, the rejection of Christ's virgin birth and/or his resurrection from death. The moment this is accepted and proclaimed by any *church,* it ceases to be church. The rejection of these biblical truths, as handed down by the apostles, is a characteristic of postmodernist thought. Janse van Rensburg (2000:5) explains that all postmodernists agree that there are no absolute truths and no fixed values, because of the principle of difference. For this reason groups like the "Jesus Seminar"[188] and the "New Reformers,"[189] influenced by postmodernistic thought, question the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ. This is because grand narratives are unacceptable for postmodernists.[190]

It cannot be denied that we live in a postmodern age. The ongoing philosophical debate on this subject and the realities of our everyday existence convince us of this fact. Janse van Rensburg (*ibid*: 35) maintains, concerning the fact of the presence of postmodernism in our day and age, that:

> Recognising this reality implies that we dare not go through life with our eyes shut, pretending that everything is as it was in days gone by. To reminisce about those days may be fine, but to live as though the past were the present, is to live in a fool's paradise.

That postmodern thought has impacted the church is no understatement. The danger is that postmodernity holds the threat of pluralism and relativism. Dreyer (1994:5) argues that the ecumenical mood created by postmodernity may reduce the Christian faith to just one of many possibilities. When theology may no longer proclaim with

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[187] Tyson (1999:57) says: this anonymous treatise was sometimes called "The Teaching of The Twelve Apostles." Its Greek title, *Didache,* means "teaching". The treatise was not penned by the apostles, but is "apostolic" in the sense that it represents a summary of teachings that the church received as being in harmony with what the apostles taught.
[188] See explanation of the Jesus Seminar on page 43, point 4.7.
[189] See explanation of the New Reformers on page 45, point 4.8
[190] See footnote 191.

certainty the objective reality of God, Dreyer warns, then it will have lost its quality of truth to metaphoricity.

It has been said that the only thing postmodernists cannot tolerate, is intolerance and the only absolute truth they believe, is that there is no absolute truth. People create their own "truth" and all "truths" are equally valid. The result of all these equally valid "truths" is known as pluralism, which results in the collapse of unity. This collapse of unity occurs when grand narratives[191] of fixed structures and absolute truths are rejected and exchanged for a deconstruction of narratives, and truth is perceived as relevant only to the context. Unity here refers to one system, one explanation, one understanding and one truth for all.

Brummer (1999:29) points out that the reality of pluralism and change raise a serious problem for the unity and identity of the Christian tradition. The problem is how to maintain that the various and changing conceptualisations of the faith within the Christian tradition, are all forms or expressions of the same faith, namely that of the primitive church.

Lash (1973:59) explains:

> The difficulty arises from the conviction of Christian belief that the message proclaimed in the life, death and glorification of Jesus Christ is God's definitive word to mankind. Therefore unless the word proclaimed to men of every successive age and culture is in some significant sense, the same word, God's promise is not fulfilled.

When one recalls Luke's words in Acts 2:42 and 47, namely that they *devoted themselves to the apostles teaching* and *the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved*, then we cannot but ask: "Is this still the case?" Regrettably, it seems that the answer is no. Although the majority of churches still confess the life, death and glorification of Christ, as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, there are those who most certainly are not *continuing steadfastly* therein.

The Apostle Paul reminded Timothy that *the time would come when they (*the people*) will not endure sound doctrine* (2 Tim 4:3). Considering Paul's statement together

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[191] Janse van Rensburg (*ibid* :7) describes grand narratives as the way things have traditionally been explained. They are called "grand" because they are supposed to be constant and always applicable to all people in all spheres of life at all times. Christianity, for example, like Marxism, proposes absolute truths and values for all. Postmodernism denies that life and the world surrounding us can be explained and "caught between" fixed definitions and grand narratives (stories).

with what we perceive within the ranks of the church of our day, we most certainly cannot say with total conviction that identity with Christ and with the teaching of the Apostles, is a common factor of the present day churches. Schaeffer (1982:390) maintains that the liberal theologians in contrast to the conservatives, don't believe in doctrinal content or religious truths, but are more concerned with outward religious experiences. They are, he says, really existentialists using theological, Christian terminology. As a result, not believing in truth, they can enter into fellowship with any other experience-orientated group using religious language.

It seems that the liberals may be sweeping doctrinal truths that have always been important for the conservatives, under the rug. Surely the apostolic doctrine handed down from generation to generation is crucial to what the content of the Bible teaches. Yet, with the liberals, it appears as though people can believe opposite things on important points of doctrine and both can be right. Or perhaps we may simply say, content does not matter as long as there are external signs and religious emotion.

Obviously there must be and should be experience and emotion in the Christian life, but neither experience nor emotion is the basis of our Christian faith. The basis should be the doctrinal truths of the apostles' teaching. Reaction to these truths by the whole person, including the intellect, will lead to an experiential relationship with God. The basis however is content, not experience.

3.3   Conservatives, liberals and relevance

On the one hand, the decreasing membership statistics among the conservative group may be indicative of their irrelevance within society. On the other hand, the increasing membership statistics within the liberal group may be indicative of their relevance within society. Most certainly these liberal churches and the attendees are experiencing a change in liturgical style, a style of doing church that most certainly has influenced the community and filled the pews.

Put broadly, it seems that they are relevant. They are relevant in their style of worship and relevant in making attendees feel at home in a warm and loving atmosphere. But are they relevant in their application of the gospel message and their involvement in social issues? Are people genuinely being "born again"? Do

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these churches speak out against racial discrimination, economic injustice, political corruption, nuclear weapons, domestic abuse, abortion and HIV/AIDS?[192] Do they do all in their power to feed and care for the poor? What are they doing for the survivors of natural disasters such as those suffering from the recent earthquake disaster in Pakistan?[193]

With the support of their members, these churches could perhaps form organisations, hold marches, build schools and to some extent may side with parties involved in lawsuits to stop abortion and respond to the social needs of the day But is this all that church relevance entails? Is it only meant to be an organisation that fulfils the needs and wants of the seeking populace, or is there more to being a relevant church?

There are two perspectives on the church and social involvement. On the one hand there is the view that the church's involvement in social and political spheres, means compromising the mission of the church. In attempting to transform society by changing its organisational structures, the church neglects the priority of reconciling humanity to God. By substituting a human-centred foundation for a Christ-centred foundation, it deludes itself into thinking that power politics is more powerful than the Word of God. In short, personal regeneration then gives way to Christianised humanism whose goal it is to make humanity totally human - healthy, happy, economically secure, at peace with itself and free in a just society.

On the other hand, there is the view that the exaggerated emphasis on the individual overlooks the degree to which humanity has become societal and its world political; the pro-occupation with the spiritual overlooks the suffering of humanity, who are both body and soul. Exclusively, person-to-person evangelism does not deal with the corporate and institutional sin of our modern mass society. There is a political and social naiveté behind the evangelistical approach to changing society through "born again" lives. The failure to throw the weight of the corporate church against modern day social evils leads to a passivity, which harms the witness of the church.

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[192] HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome).
[193] This refers to the October 2005 earthquake that devastated towns in Pakistan and India and killed thousands of people.

Only when we are willing to find out where each view is correct and where it is not, and to seek the reasons behind the beliefs of each, will we be in a much better position to engage in fruitful dialogue.[194] Nonetheless, Jonker (1987:165) is of the opinion that church relevance is not obtained in an effortless manner. He states that:

> Conformity to the secular age does not make the church relevant, but rather, superfluous. In addition to this, it is impossible for the church to be relevant, if it cannot successfully explain the relevance of the gospel to modern humanity. That which makes the gospel relevant is the fact that it is not of this world, nor the product of human ideology, but rather the message of God, which leads to life in its fullness, by the power of God. The church cannot do this, however, if it disposes of the offence of the gospel.[195]

Secular humanity's school of thought or its prejudice cannot determine the criterion of what the church should proclaim. It can only be the Word of God itself, which addresses humanity's deepest need through the gospel. The gospel is the answer to humanity's need irrespective of what the need may be. The greatest need of humanity is the fact of its sin and lost condition. The fact that humanity is not aware of this need does not imply that the need does not exist. The ministry of the church needs to be inventive in order to expose this great need of humanity, so that they will seek the redemption offered. The church cannot be relevant if it does not address humanity's greatest need, its need of peace with God.

It must be admitted though, that church relevance also entails the manner of how the full content of the gospel is proclaimed to humanity. Obviously, the content of the gospel influences humanity on the horizontal level - human relationships to others and to the world; the economical and political; the psychological and physical life. The church cannot ignore these issues and expect to be relevant. It must be stated here that the church has never really ignored these aspects of humanity. In actual fact, the church has become such a part of it that instead of using the gospel as a critique of the situation, it is fulfilling a substantiating roll. This has resulted in the church not being able to identify the evils that are built into secular structures and therefore it has to a certain extent become unfaithful to its mission of evaluating the world by the criterion of God's word. The tragic consequence is that the church has

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[194] This dialogue will demand a study of its own and will necessarily include explanations of various theological schools, e.g. Liberation Theology, Political Theology, Feminist Theology, etc. Due to the vastness thereof this is not included in this study.
[195] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.

allowed itself to be conformed to secular humanistic ideology and in the process has allowed humanistic ideology to infiltrate the church.

Van der Walt (2004:107) holds that secularisation can hardly bring about happiness and that the Word of God warns - not without reason - that people shall not live by bread alone (materialism, Mt 4:4). Something far greater than that which secularism can offer, something greater than self is needed to make life meaningful. He continues by saying that the general slogan of the day is "feel good about yourself". Why? It is because the precocious, yet deeply unhappy, sinful humanity no longer knows the meaning of guilt-confession, repentance and regeneration. Sin is no longer called by the name, but referred to as a "defection" or "illness". The result is symptomatic relief of the consequences instead of addressing the root of the problem.

Regrettably this has led to many people "joining" the twenty-first century church because of human tradition and effort, yet sadly, the Lord is no longer adding them. This is easily deducible from "worshipping" trends and liturgical styles the modern day churches are adopting, in order to conform to secular trends and to "attract" people to the church.[196]

4.   Absolutes and relatives

The above conclusion can be described as absolutes being exchanged for relatives. This seems to be the demise of the church. As soon the church makes this exchange, it no longer is identifiable with Christ or relevant. Biblical truths can never be exchanged for secular relatives. Janse van Rensburg (2000:11) explains that:

> The relation between absolute and relative is a delicate one. We all agree that no person, ideology or religion can have absolute knowledge, if absolute knowledge is to mean knowing absolutely everything in an absolutely true and complete fashion. That would take omniscience, an attribute that can only be ascribed to God. We may therefore, in fact, *welcome* the idea that absolute knowledge is not to be found in any construct of reality.

Lather (1992:100-101) correctly reflects that absolute knowledge was never possible anyway and therefore relativity need not be made the monster of the postmodern narrative. Janse van Rensburg (2000:11), commenting on this, goes on to say that

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[196] See discussion on page 148, point 2.2.

we may agree with this as long as by "relativity" we mean the impossibility of having absolute knowledge as explained above. He adds, when speculation becomes a part of demonstration and deconstruction, and when relativity becomes rampant, as in the epistemology of post-structuralism and the deconstruction strategies of postmodernism, then the danger of the postmodern paradigm becomes strikingly evident. For in this paradigm it is not "relativity" that is suggested, but "relativism": *no* truth, norm or system can be absolute. Rorty (1991:202) feels free to use the term "relativism" as a more appropriate term for postmodernism.

From this it is deduced that within the postmodern paradigm, the implications are clear. No truth can be made applicable in all circumstances and for all people. The basic Christian truths (Jesus Christ as the only Saviour, the Bible as the only divine book of revelation, etc) and norms (you shall not steal, lie or commit adultery) may be true for Christians if they choose so, but they may not be made universal truths for all others. They are therefore regarded as not absolute in postmodern thought.

Contrary to this, my understanding of truth is that it does not seem to be relative in all situations but rather, absolute.[197] For instance there are certain truths that are epistemologically and philosophically understood to be absolute.[198] These truths seem to be true for all people, at all times, in all places. There are certain aspects about these truths that we cannot ignore and which I support. Following are a few examples:

- Natural truth is discovered, it is not invented. It exists independent of anyone's knowledge of it. (Gravity existed prior to Newton.)
- Mathematical truth is transcultural; if something is mathematically true, it is true for all people, in all places, at all times ($2 + 2 = 4$ for everyone, everywhere, at every time).
- Natural truth is unchanging even though our beliefs about natural truth change. (When we began to believe the earth was round instead of flat, the truth about the earth didn't change, only our belief about the earth changed.)

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[197] Obviously a discussion of "truth" in itself is a subject matter to enormous for inclusion within this study. The mentioned facts are only included in an attempt to illustrate my understanding of truth.

[198] Also see the discussion of truth on page 117 point 5.2.3.

- Beliefs cannot change a natural fact, no matter how sincerely they are held. (Someone can sincerely believe the world is flat, but that only makes the person sincerely mistaken.)
- Certain truths are absolute truths. (Eg. "I, Jan van Wyk, feel warm on July 11, 2005" may appear to be a relative truth, but it is actually absolutely true for everyone, everywhere that Jan van Wyk had the sensation of warmth on that day.)

The question that obviously must be put to postmodernists who argue that 'there are no absolutes' is: "Are they absolutely sure about that?" If, according to postmodernists, there are no absolutes, then how can they make such a statement? If nothing can be known for *sure* (as truth) then how can postmodernists know for *sure* (as true) that there are no absolutes?

Nonetheless, what are the consequences of the postmodern impact on the church? Sadly, it appears that theologians and church leaders may have abandoned much of the apostles' teaching, reducing Christ to a mere "moral teacher" or "narrative character" and thereby denying the biblical truth concerning the Christ of the church. In addition to this, they have made church membership an easy to come by entity. They have to a certain extent compromised devotion to the apostles' teaching and replaced additions to the church by the Lord, with means of human effort and tradition.[199]

The result is that regeneration (a biblical absolute) has been replaced by a mere seemingly "spiritual life". In view hereof the part 5 is committed to briefly explaining Christian spirituality as understood within various schools of theology and the spiritual life required by God of humanity. A discussion of the progressive neglect of the *teaching of the apostles* by the post-apostolic and modern church is also included in part 5, expressly to illustrate how the church has lost the balance between identity and relevance.

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[199] Refer to point 2 on page 170.

1. Christian spirituality[200] (regeneration)

There are various approaches to investigating Christian spirituality, such as African, Feminist, AIC, Anglican and others, which is demonstrated by the surfeit of books on the subject. Unfortunately, due to the vastness of the subject it is not possible to discuss all these approaches within the precincts of this study, although one or two are briefly explained in this part of this thesis. It is important to mention that I approach the subject of Christian spirituality from within the paradigm of Pentecostal theology.

Firstly, it must be explained what is meant by the term Christian spirituality. This is said in view of the fact that there is an instinctive peril in theological language that stresses spirituality if one understands it against the backdrop of dualism, which seeks to separate the "spiritual" from "physical" realities. Paul's command not to live *according to the flesh* but rather to walk *according to the Spirit* was not given to urge us to fly from physicality or the challenges of life in the world. Rather they urge Christians to find their motives, aspirations and bases for action in the Holy Spirit, and not in fallen, sinful, rebellious and self-serving attitudes that do not please God. Christian spirituality does not gesture an escape from physical life, or a withdrawal from the challenges of life in the world. It rather describes the process whereby Christians seek to live holy lives, while in the flesh and while engaging the challenges of this world.

Kourie & Kretzschmar (2000:24) explain that the term "spirituality" was not part of Protestantism until recently.[201] Terms such as 'piety', 'holiness', the 'devout life' and 'godliness' were more prevalent. However, this is changing and the understanding of spirituality as one's relationship with God and the manner in which that relationship is conceived and expressed, is accepted more and more within Protestant circles. It

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[200] The term *Christian spirituality* is a particularly apt one to use in this part of the thesis as it has meaning and significance to all across the Christian tradition. Furthermore it emphasises the role of the Holy Spirit in creating spirituality and sanctification. Wherever I use this term within this study, it implies a holistic spirituality that is relational to God (vertical) and relational to others (horizontal).

[201] Although the term "spirituality" was not part of Protestantism until recently, it has long been a term used within the Roman Catholic tradition.

must be mentioned though, that it is impossible even to begin living the Christian life, or to know anything of Christian spirituality, before one is a Christian. Moreover, according to the Bible, the only way to become a Christian is not by trying to live some sort of a Christian life, nor by hoping for some sort of religious experience, but rather by accepting Christ as saviour. Within the Pentecostal paradigm, Christian spirituality is understood to be initially, a personal conversion or a personal experience of Jesus Christ. This is more than often the reactionary result of hearing the gospel message, the "good news" of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice of himself on humanity's behalf, and accepting him as one's saviour. The Holy Spirit who *will convict the world in respect of sin* (Jn 16:7-8), brings about this experience or encounter with Christ. This is followed by a life of continual and progressive spiritual growth and actions that are or should be in agreement to the word of God.

According to Kourie (2000:15) it is clear from the writings of the New Testament that the risen Christ gives his Spirit to his followers. Henceforth, the Disciples of Christ are to be 'spiritual' (*pneumatikos).* Paul's experience of Christ on the Damascus road involved the empowerment of the Spirit to give new life. The result was that Paul could say: *Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new* (2 Cor 5:17). Therefore the fruit of the Spirit is to be manifest in the lives of believers (Gal 5:22); sin must no longer rule (Rom 6:12). Christians are to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:6) and live in the Spirit (Gal 5:25). The Spirit communicates the dynamic reality of salvation in Christ and is the pledge, the foretaste of future glory. The Spirit leads and guides, directs and comforts us; helps us in our weakness (Rom 8:26); the Spirit is power (1 Cor 2:4). From this Kourie (*ibid* :15) concludes, "Thus the 'Spirit person' is the essence of spirituality".

Although for the Pentecostal, Christian spirituality often begins with an emotional momentary experience such as that of Paul,[202] this experience is only the beginning of a sustained relationship with the person of Jesus. Coleman (1972:61) explains that for the Pentecostals, faith in a personal God commences in those moments in life when the sense of communion is so real and the feeling of another personal reality so is overwhelming that the only way to describe it is to say that another independent "Thou" has confronted one.

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[202] I am aware of the fact that Paul's conversion was a unique experience and I do not imply that his experience must be duplicated in every consequent conversion.

As was mentioned earlier,[203] each of us can point to a specific day as the date of our physical birthday. We came into the world *suddenly*, at a certain moment. Although there may be various views regarding the instant or moment of regeneration (e.g. progressive or suddenly) I personally believe that as with natural birth, the spiritual birth is a crisis experience.[204] It may take a while for us to get to the point of the crisis, but when it happens, it happens suddenly. This initial Holy Spirit influenced, gripping experience is only the beginning of a new life implying a daily walk with God. Although there may be a gradual work of God's providence and Spirit, preparing the change, and a gradual recognition of it after it has taken place, there must be an instant in time, when under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the disposition of the soul, previously hostile to God, is changed to love.

Strong (1907:823) explains it as follows:

> It is not a change in the substance of either body or soul. Regeneration *(Christian spirituality)*[205] is not a physical change. There is no physical seed or germ implanted in the human nature. Regeneration does not add to, or subtract from, the number of man's intellectual, emotional or voluntary faculties. But regeneration is the giving of a new direction or tendency to powers of affection which man possessed before. Man had the faculty of love before, but his love was supremely set on self. In regeneration the direction of that faculty is changed, and his love is now set supremely upon God.

The Bible says that at that moment we pass from death to life (Jn 5:24), from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his dear Son (Col 1:13), we become individually, children of God (Jn 1:12). We are children of God from that time on. There is no way to begin the Christian life except through the door of spiritual birth, anymore than there is any other way to begin physical life except through the door of physical birth. In every regenerated persons life, there was a moment in time that they were unregenerate. It is logical that there must have been an instant or point in time that they were "transformed" from unregenerate to regenerate. That point in time was a crisis experience. One moment an individual is a sinner; the next moment a born again believer.

Although it may be argued that if regeneration as described above is biblical correct, then it may appear that some New Testament characters are excluded from salvation

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[203] See discussion on page 63, point 7.2.3b.

[204] I mention the fact of my personal belief here, but I am aware of different views in this regard adhered to by theologians of other traditions.

[205] Italics are my own words included to indicate that in this context "regeneration" and Christian spirituality are used as synonyms.

because nothing is mentioned of them being "born again". The malefactor on the cross immediately comes to mind. Nothing is said of him being born again or regenerated; yet Christ said that he would be with him in paradise. It is important to remember though that the terms "regeneration" and "born again," are not the only terms used in the Bible in connection with salvation. In the King James version of the Bible the word "regeneration" only occurs in Mt 19:28 and Tit 3:5, while born again or begotten of God (implying rebirth cf. 1 Jn 5:18) occurs only in Jn 3:3 and 1 Pet 1:3, 23.

Nonetheless, it is important that we bear in mind the fact that regeneration as such is implied by many different terms in the Bible. Words such as: saved, repentance, faith, justification, redemption, believed, etc. are all associated with regeneration. These are all terms associated with the *ordo salutis*[206] and are used by the apostles indicative of regeneration. Thus, although the term "regeneration" is not used explicitly in the Bible with regards to many Biblical characters that believed in Christ, (e.g. the malefactor and the publican Lk 23:42; Mt 18:17) it can be assumed that they were regenerated. König (1983:55) supports this view and states in reference to these terms:

> If these are only 'stations' on the road to salvation, then not one of the apostles taught the totality of salvation., as none of them use all these terms. That which is clear in the Bible is that each apostle preferred to use certain terms in place of others. With Paul we find it is justification and faith; Luke prefers salvation and John faith, but not one of them makes use of all the terms.[207]

John declares: *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* (Jn 1:12-13). Surely the malefactor *believed on his name* when he requested that Christ remember him (Lk 23:42).

From this it is inferred that Christian spirituality is not hereditary. Unfortunately it seems that relatives via human effort and tradition[208] have replaced this absolute biblical truth.[209] Kretzschmar (2000:38) maintains that:

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[206] See footnote 84 on page 67.
[207] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.
[208] See discussion on page 170, point 2.
[209] See discussion on page 161, point 4.

> Faith, at the end of the day, cannot be based on someone else's experience and insights, but only on our own personal senses of knowing. This is what makes so much of what masquerades as Christianity empty and facile – it is not based on what is actually known, but only on what we feel ought to be known or on what others have affirmed. In times of intensive and prolonged crisis, such as many in South Africa have experienced, one quickly finds that unless one's Christian faith is deeply rooted in and regularly nourished by the living Christ, faith will easily move towards nominalism or agnosticism. The experience of a "crisis of faith," then, may lead either to a deepening or to an abandonment of one's faith. It would also lead to a compartmentalisation between "faith" and "life".

Kretzschmar's statement above seems to be contradictive. It is assumed on the one hand that the cause of "what masquerades as Christianity empty and facile" is because our experience is "not based on what is known, but only on what we feel ought to be known or on what others have affirmed". I agree whole-heartedly with this. But on the other hand, Kretzschmar argues that in time of a "crisis of faith" such a faith may either be "deepened" or "abandoned". This is contradictory, for unless one has had a personal experience with Christ, there is nothing that can be "deepening" as there is no faith. Nor is there any faith that can be "abandoned." One cannot deepen or abandon something that one does not have.

Could it be, that an imbalance between church identity and relevance seems to be the order of the day, because a large number of so-called Christians are dependant on what others have experienced in Christ, while they themselves have not had a similar personal experience?[210] Bacik (1996:4) has the following to say in this regard:

> Borrowing a distinction from John Henry Newman, we could say that the "notional assent" to religion in our country outweighs the "real assent." This means that many people say they believe, but do not act on faith convictions. Church attendance does not guarantee that worshipers appropriate the faith or try to spread the kingdom in the world. There is more lip service to religious values than genuine conviction.

The heart of the church is union with Christ, which are both the means and the goal of Christian spirituality. In his introductory remarks on the subject of Christian spirituality, Tyson (1999:1) comments that Christian spirituality describes the relationship, union and conformity with God that a Christian experiences through his or her reception of the grace of God, and a corresponding willingness to turn from sin and (to use a Pauline phrase) *to walk according to the Spirit* (Rom 6:1-19). This

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[210] See discussion on page 173, note 2.2.

relationship with God is made possible because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is apparent that Christian spirituality (regeneration) is always rooted in the individual's experience of Jesus.

Rahner (1986:8) described the individual's experience of Jesus as a unique, unsurpassable, and total event. He described it as an "experience in which Jesus becomes for a particular person the event of the unique and qualitatively unsurpassable and irreversible approach to God, which is always affected by the totality of its elements as a single entity even if each of the elements is not necessarily immediately present and explicitly and clearly in conscious awareness".

Tyson (1999:2) adds that to be united with Christ is to be united with Christ's Spirit (1 Cor 6:17) and conformed to Christ's image (Rom 8:29); thus "life in the Spirit" is synonymous with "life in Christ". This union has as its goal (Grk. *telos*) a renewal and renovation of the person and the producing of a new life and renewed attitudes (2 Cor 5:17). Being in Christ creates a desire for conformity between a Christian's life, attitudes and aspirations and those of Jesus Christ (Phil 2:3-11). Hence the goal of Christian spirituality is "Christlikeness" and a restoration of the "image of God" [211] (2 Pet 1:4), wherein humans were originally created (Gen 1:26).

Since this is the goal of Christian spirituality, namely Christlikeness, the implication is that this spirituality is holistic - it brings about change in the spiritual, cognitive, volitional and affective levels of the individual. It also recognises the complexity of the human being. Although it is initially a personal experience of Christ, it is not a purely personal affair, but should be practised and expressed at all levels of life, whether ecclesiastical, social, political or economic. Christian spirituality does not only imply a vertical relationship with God, but also a horizontal relationship with others. Unfortunately, early Pentecostalism laid so much emphasis on the vertical that in so doing neglected the horizontal. Fortunately, this disregard of the horizontal has been attended to of late, a fact that is discernible within the ranks of the major Pentecostal denominations in South Africa.

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[211] The meaning of the terms "Christlikeness" and "Image of God" are debatable, but are used in this context to imply a life of faithful obedience and conformity to the will of God.

In contrast to Pentecostalism's belief that Christian spirituality is a crisis experience, most Reformed theologians tend to view it as a progressive experience. By this is meant not only that Christian growth is progressive, but also the actual spiritual experience of Christ is attained by progression. This belief stems from Covenant theology, adhered to by Reformed theologians.[212]

2.   Christian spirituality, human effort and tradition

In this chapter the author's implied meaning of the terms "human effort" and "human tradition" are explained. It was mentioned earlier that instead of people being added to the church by the Lord, they were and still are, in many cases, being added by human effort or human tradition. Part three[213] of this thesis expanded on the supposed cause of the current identity/relevance dilemma of the church. It was explained that:

1. The roots of the problem extend as far back as to the church of Acts.[214]
2. The church became an organisation with a hierarchy, rather than a community.[215]
3. The church became the state church and free from persecution.[216]
4. The protestant church has allowed institutionalism to shape the church.[217]

Considering the two characteristics of the primitive church, namely *that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching* and *the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved,* an analysis of church history, or rather, Christian spirituality during and subsequent to the primitive church, should reveal to us how "human effort" and/or "human tradition"[218] influenced the identity and relevance of the church. In the following paragraphs these are discussed, not as a repetition of church history, but in order to illustrate the seemingly progressive abandonment of the *teaching of the apostles* and how human effort replaced God as the one who adds to *the church those that were saved.*

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[212] The implications of Covenant theology are briefly discussed on page 178, point 2.3.
[213] See page 122.
[214] See page 124, point 2.
[215] See page 127, point 3.
[216] See page 136, point 7.
[217] See page 138, point 8.
[218] These two terms are used as synonyms in all relevant discussions within this study.

2.1 Christian spirituality and the primitive church

Moltmann (1974:18) states,

> Where does the identity of Christian faith lie? Its outward mark is church membership. This, however, takes us no further, but merely moves the problem on. For the Christian identity of the church is itself questionable, when the form it takes is affected by so many other interests. One can point to the creed. But to repeat the formula of the Apostle's creed is no guarantee of Christian identity, but simply of loyalty to the fathers and to tradition. One can point to particular experiences of vocation, conversion and grace in one's own life. But even they do not guarantee one's identity as a Christian; at best, they point to what one has begun to believe in such experiences. Ultimately, one's belief is not in one's own faith; within one's experiences in faith and one's decisions, one believes in someone else who is more than one's own faith. Christian identity can be understood only as an act of identification with the crucified Christ, to the extent to which one has accepted the proclamation that in him God has identified himself with the godless and those abandoned by God, to whom one belongs oneself.

From this statement it seems that Moltmann accepts the fact that identity with Christ is only possible when one has accepted the proclamation that God has revealed himself to us through his son (Heb 1:1). This acceptance must be confirmed by faith in the crucified Christ, which implies believing that he, by his self-sacrifice and death, has reconciled all individuals who accept him as their Saviour, to God. (Jn 1:12; 3:16). This is known as regeneration, or currently spoken of as Christian spirituality,[219] the permanently valid, constantly binding and indispensable element of the church.[220] This is clearly seen within the primitive church, where the answer to the question put to Peter and the other disciples, namely: *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* was *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost* (Acts 2:37-38). In making their decision, these converts were reminded by Peter that there was a price to pay – namely, separation from the sinful and unbelieving community around them (v.40).

This was part and parcel of the apostles' teaching, which the church must adhere to in order to be the church that God meant it to be. It was those who had repented whom the Lord added to the church and they were the ones that were devoted to the teaching of the apostles. From this it is deduced that in order to identify with Christ, it

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[219] See footnote 199 on page 163.
[220] See discussion of Essence on page 6, point 2.2.

is essential that Christian spirituality be experienced. This event is called regeneration. What is important here is to bear in mind that although the convicting of the sinner by the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:8) commences before one is regenerated, one does not first become a believer, after which one is added to the body of Christ. One's coming to faith, or salvation, exists in the fact that, through the Spirit one is baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13).

Möller (1998:53) agrees with the above and states:

> Salvation is not merely an individualistic event – as if you have merely been changed from one kind of person to another – but is also a corporate event. It means becoming part of others who are already in Christ. Therefore, salvation cannot exist only in the secrecy of a person's heart, but it should also have an external and visible manifestation in the fact that one is part of the community of believers. It is in this sense, and only in this limited sense, that one can say that there is no salvation outside the true church.[221]

Since the members of the primitive church (according to the biblical account) were such *renewed* and *renovated* individuals as described above,[222] the implication is that they most certainly identified with Christ by this renewal plus by adhering to his teaching (Acts 2:41-47).

There seems to be no intimation of any attempt to screen applicants for church membership, or any indication of disdain for any stratum of society. More than likely the example of Jesus in his attitude toward tax gatherers and notorious sinners must have been a factor. At one point (6:7) we read of the acceptance of a large body of priests. They were not rejected on the ground that they belonged to an order whose leaders, the chief priests, had taken an active role in the arrest and execution of Jesus. The only "qualification" for membership seems to have been repentance and faith, expressed in submission to baptism. This promised all converts the gift of the Holy Spirit whereby they could gain assurance of their salvation and the ability to understand and embrace the teaching of the apostles (2:38, 42).

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[221] I am aware of the theological debate concerning the axiom "No salvation outside the church". Obviously a discussion hereof will be to vast to be included within the limits of this study. Nevertheless suffice it to say that I am of the opinion that there may be salvation outside the organisational church but never can there be salvation outside the true (invisible) church.

[222] See the discussion of the primitive church and regeneration on page 148, point 2.2.

Besides this they were also relevant not only concerning the spreading of the gospel message, but in their horizontal relationship to the world of their day. Luke states that they enjoyed *favour with all the people.* [223]

2.2   Christian spirituality and Constantine[224]

The problem addressed in this thesis, namely that of maintaining a balance between identity and relevance stems from the fact that it seems that the post-apostolic church has either neglected or altered the apostles' teaching concerning Christian spirituality as a pre-requisite for church membership. Put differently, it may be said that the absolutes have been exchanged for the relatives.[225] Besides the emergence of a sacerdotal structure run by an unbiblical priesthood, Constantine's involvement had turned the church into an "empire-wide" state church. This resulted in the church being saturated with "members" that had never experienced any form of Christian spirituality.[226] Relatives, such as the observance of human rules for membership, consequently replaced absolutes, such as regeneration. Obviously this had major negative implications concerning identity and relevance. It was mentioned earlier that the question of relevance arises only where identity is a matter of experience and belief. Where the Christian identity of faith is abandoned, this question no longer arises.[227] The result was that those who called themselves "Christians," were not "born again" or "Christians regenerated by the Holy Spirit".

Unfortunately, this "state-church" relationship has lasted for many years. Ferguson & Wright (1988:660) explain that for the next thousand years, as either ideal or reality, the identification of church and state was to be the most pervasive feature of European society. They add that in many ways the medieval church *was* the state. Not even the Reformation, as can be inferred from history, brought an end thereto. Most Reformers seem to have accepted the basic notion of the religious character of the state, for which they found biblical support in the Old Testament for the most part. Even in our day this is still the case. Various countries still function within the basic structures of a state-church relationship. The consequences of such a relationship

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[223] Their relevance has been noted as explained by Renwick on page 151.
[224] See discussion on page 136, point 7.
[225] See discussion on page 161, point 4.
[226] See discussion on page 136, point 7.
[227] See first paragraph on page 152.

are similar to those in Constantine's day, namely the church being saturated with unregenerate members.

 Finngeir Hiorth[228] writes that the present Norwegian state church system goes back to 1536 when the Reformation in Europe led to the establishment of Lutheranism in Norway. The Norwegian Lutheran State Church, often simply called the Norwegian Church, is led by and largely financed by the state. In practice the state has for many years not really led the church and it has mostly only interfered in the management of the church in cases of unrest or irregularities. In such cases bishops or other clergy in the church have referred to existing regulations and have appealed to the state to interfere to put an end to the irregularities.

Apart from such cases, the state has mostly only served as a "rich uncle" to which the state clergy and other religious believers have appealed for financial assistance. The clergy and other representatives of the church have also many times stressed their wish to manage their own affairs within the framework of the state church system. The state continues to appoint the bishops and higher clergy. In the case of bishops the church is allowed to present its candidates, and from the list of candidates presented by the church, the state selects the new bishop.

As the Norwegian state since the 1970s, has become quite rich, the system has benefited the church and as a result the resistance against the state church system has generally been quite weak from the part of the religious believers. Even atheists and other secularists have generally been quite indifferent with regard to the state church system. The main exceptions to this state of affair have been the two Norwegian organizations of secularists, Human-Etisk Forbund (HEF, Human-Ethical Society, founded 1956) and Det Norske Hedningsamfunn (Norwegian Pagan Society, founded 1974).[229]

The situation in South Africa has changed dramatically since the 1994 national general elections wherein the African National Congress (ANC) was elected by a huge majority vote, as the new governing party. Prior to this, according to the "Library

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[228] Internet article: http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/finngeir_hiorth/norway.html
[229] These organisations opposed the state church situation. A discussion hereof is not the purpose of this thesis.

of Congress Country Studies,"[230] Christianity had become a powerful influence in South Africa, often uniting large numbers of people in a common faith. In the twentieth century, however, several Christian churches actively promoted racial divisions through the political philosophy of apartheid.

The largest of these denominations was the Reformed Church, which came to be known as the "official religion" of the National Party during the apartheid era. Its four main branches had more than 3 million members in one thousand two hundred and sixty three congregations in the 1990's. The reformers arrived in South Africa in the seventeenth century, after Calvinist reforms in Europe had entrenched the idea of predestination, and the Synod of Dort in the Netherlands had proclaimed this church as the "community of the elect" in 1619. The church gained recognition as the state religion in 1651, and the Dutch East India Company, as an extension of the state in Southern Africa, established the first reformed church at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652.

According to du Toit (2005:86) this church arrived in the Cape with Jan van Riebeeck and from the start there was a close relationship between the church and the state. The state, positioned in the Netherlands, Europe, appointed and paid the preachers, and granted them permission for the establishing of assemblies. Some of these preachers even became politicians, for example Dr D F Malan (first national prime minister).

Nonetheless, since the ANC came into power the Reformed Church's position has drastically changed. Du Toit (*ibid*: 91) explains that when President F W de Klerk announced the release of Mr Nelson Mandela from prison, the writing was on the wall concerning the loss of power. This was true not only for the Afrikaners and white South Africans, in general, but also for the Reformed Church. König (2005:340), commenting on the current position of the Reformed Church within the community, remarks that its position has changed dramatically. Previously it (the church) had played an important leading role in the community. It enjoyed participation in governmental matters at the highest level. It gave guidance in matters concerning the

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[230] http://www.photius.com/countries/south africa/society dutch reformed churc~11931.html *Data as of May 1996.*

upholding of moral standards. But, he adds, that these privileges are no longer available to the Reformed Church. Its period of dominance has come to an end.[231]

Burger's (1995:14-15) warnings while reflecting on the changes that might come about in the political arena in South Africa have literally been fulfilled. He wrote:

> The DRC (Dutch Reformed Church) will become a less influential institution than it was previously. In the previous dispensation probably more than half the politicians were members of the DRC. Obviously this granted special status and power to the church. Just about everything the DRC said and did was news. When church leaders spoke the people were eager to listen. The church had direct and indirect dictates in various quarters. The picture may change drastically in the next ten years. A large portion of the governing politicians will no longer have an ear for the meanings of the DRC. In actual fact, because of the DRC's role in the formulation and legitimising of apartheid, there more than likely will be a an antipathy toward the church (DRC).[232]

Because of the DRC's position as "state church" within the South African context, the larger majority of white South Africans together with many blacks and coloured were or are members thereof. According to Hendriks (2003:9) the DRC comprises of over 90% of the reformed churches in South Africa. Unfortunately, it seems that, as is the cases of all state-church situations that a large number of these members were or are not regenerated, but were added by human tradition or effort.

Philpott (1998:68) maintains that a church or denominational affiliation poses a substantial barrier to a person's true conversion. He points out that in the USA a large percentage of the people were baptised as infants, but Scripture clearly teaches that this does not mean they were or are converted. The situation in the DRC (and other reformed churches) is very similar. A large percentage of the members have been baptised as infants, but it is probable that the Holy Spirit has never, at any stage in their lives, regenerated some.[233] Family tradition may be the glue that holds a person to a church denomination, but unfortunately, such individuals more than often never evaluate their affiliation in order to determine how one becomes a born again Christian. Being a Christian is reduced to family tradition, right actions and a loving attitude.

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[231] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.
[232] Translation from Afrikaans to English my own.
[233] I will not debate the polemics of infant baptism here. I am merely attempting to illustrate that there seems to be a great possibility that many so-called church members are not regenerated. See also page 178, point 2.3.

In a recent article in Christianity Today, titled, "The Joys of a State Church" (Moll:2005) [234] reports the following incident, which contains an excellent example of absolutes being exchanged relatives within a state-church structure :

> Almost two years ago, a Danish minister said "There is no heavenly God, there is no eternal life, there is no resurrection." After making the statement in an interview, Thorkild Grosboell was suspended by his bishop. But because the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the state church of Denmark, the bishop could not fire the disbelieving pastor. Only the government can do that, and "the government refused, saying he should be given another chance to explain himself to Jan Lindhardt, a regional bishop who has been one of his few defenders," according to the Associated Press.[235] Lindhardt has said that although he disagrees with Grosboell's views, "there should be room for him in Denmark's state church."
>
> On Sunday, Grosboell returned to his pulpit in Taarbaek. Grosboell recently renewed his ministry vows, but said his views about God have not changed.
>
> In England, the intricacies of church/state relations have produced a strange requirement for gay clergy who are now allowed to register for civil unions. "The new law leaves [church officials] little choice but to accept the right of gay clergy to have civil partners," says the London Times.[236] Despite the legal requirement, the church still requires gay clergy to remain celibate.
>
> So the church compromised. "Homosexual priests in the Church of England will be allowed to 'marry' their boyfriends under a proposal drawn up by senior bishops, led by Rowan Williams, the archbishop of Canterbury. … They will, however, have to give an assurance to their diocesan bishop that they will abstain from sex."

Moll adds, "Those worried that evangelicals' participation in politics may produce a theocracy may take comfort from Western Europe, where church and state have mingled for centuries. The closer church and state get, the more the church looks like the state." What a tragedy!

It is plainly perceived from the above quotations and discussions, that "state-churches" are still to be found in some countries. Furthermore, it seems that at least part of the twenty-first century church has abandoned the teaching of the apostles and that it most certainly is no longer *the Lord* that is adding to the church them that *are being saved*. How can it ever be possible for the resurrected Lord to add anybody to the church if regeneration has not taken place, or if the state and/or its ministers

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[234] Internet article written by Rob Moll and posted on 21st May 2005:
www.photius.com/countries/south_africa/society/south_africa_society_dutch_reformed_churc~11931.html
[235] Internet article: http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/international/AP-Denmark-doubtful-minister.html
[236] Internet article: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-1632517,00.html

are permitted to make statements such as those made by Grosboell above. Identity with the risen Lord in such cases is impossible and where there is no identity, there can be no relevance.[237]

2.3   Christian spirituality and Protestant Theology

Ferguson & Wright (1988:538) explain that the word *Protestantism* derives from the *protestatio* of the post-reform representatives at the Diet of Speier (1529) against Roman Catholic practices. It soon came to cover all those within the Christian tradition outside of Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The origins of Protestantism then lie in the teaching and actions of the magisterial Reformers, chiefly Luther, Zwingli and Calvin and the leaders of the Radical Reformation.[238] Though there were sometimes bitter divisions between these seminal figures, a number of leading convictions can be seen to characterise the vast majority.

In 1517 Martin Luther nailed his theses on indulgences to the church door at Wittenberg in Germany and ushered in the Protestant Reformation. From here the Lutheran tradition spread north to Scandinavia and the Baltic countries. In Switzerland the Reformed movement took shape in Zurich under the leadership of Zwingli, but John Calvin supplanted his influence. Geneva became the centre for Calvinism, which spread into France, the Netherlands, Scotland and England.

Healey (2003:230) explains that these events gave rise to different Protestant traditions[239] and churches that continued as independent Christian bodies. Foremost among these traditions were the Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, Anglican and Puritan. In the following paragraphs Christian Spirituality within three of these traditions are briefly discussed.[240]

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[237] Although a country like the USA may not be subjected to a state-church situation, the mega-churches may pose a similar problem, especially where they agree or support mostly everything that the government may decide on.

[238] See discussion concerning Christian Spirituality and the Anabaptists on page 181, point 2.3.3. More is said here of the Radical Reformation.

[239] Ferguson & Wright (1988:540) divide Protestants into seven main families – the Lutheran (with about 54 million adherents), the Anglican (50 million), the Baptist (48 million), the Presbyterian or Reformed (40 million), the Methodist (30 Million), the Congregationalist (3 Million) and those standing in the heritage of the radicals of the Reformation, such as the Pentecostals.

[240] Obviously, these theologies cannot be discussed in their entirety here. Only a short explanation of each is given so that the reader can comprehend the assumed cumulative problem leading to the identity/relevance dilemma.

2.3.1 Christian Spirituality and Lutheranism

An important component of Luther's spirituality was his own personal struggles and experience. For much of his life, he was greatly tormented by a condition that he referred to as *Anfectung.* It left him distressed by his sinfulness and seemingly alienated from God. Relief from this condition came ultimately through the insights he gained from his study of Scripture and the conviction that justification or righteousness came only from faith in God. For Luther, the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel. It is a gratuitous gift of God that is revealed to us through the cross of Christ. According to Lutheran theology the chief article of Christian spirituality centres in the person and work of Christ, in his substitutionary atonement. It is this saving redemptive work of Christ, which constitutes not merely the cause but also the basis for God's loving and gracious justification, or acquittal of the sinner. A person becomes righteous not through his or her good works, but only through faith in Christ. The emphasis is on a personal relationship with God and a loving response to the God who has created and redeemed us.

The word of God became central to Luther's spirituality. It is through the Word that God communicates himself to the believer. The Word is God's personal intervention in the life of the person of faith, and the personal response in faith to the Word is vital to one's relationship with God. The sacred Scriptures are the very word of God and as such carry with them the authority and truthfulness of God himself. Against the authority of the papacy, church councils, reason and experience (even religious experience) Lutheran theology teaches that Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura)* is the source of all theology and the rule and norm for judging all teachers and teachings in the church.[241]

Furthermore, mention should also be made of the importance Luther gave to the doctrine of the priesthood of the faithful, the share in Christ's priesthood imparted to all through the reception of baptism. This provided a base for his development of lay spirituality. Bouyer (1982:76) comments as follows regarding Luther's understanding of the priesthood:

> Luther was the first, at least since patristic times, to proclaim the priesthood of the faithful so clearly and to propose so concretely a

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[241] There are other solisms included within Protestantism, namely: *sola gratia, sola fide* and *solus Christus*, but a debate on these is not the purpose of this study.

genuinely lay spirituality such as would sanctify life in the world with all its domestic or professional responsibilities.

Lutheranism is characterised by its strong Christ-centric line of thought and a dual order doctrine; the spiritual order of the gospel wherein God by the power of his word, renews people and the world order wherein God governs through intermediators (such as government).

2.3.2 Christian Spirituality and Reformed Theology

The historical roots and development of reformed spirituality are varied and somewhat complex. It would be quite inaccurate to equate reformed spirituality and Calvinism. When Calvin began his reform at Geneva, there was already a reformed tradition and spirituality in existence. The early leader of the reformed movement was Ulrich Zwingli (1484 – 1531), a contemporary of Martin Luther. Healey (2003:236) explains that Zwingli was a parish priest in Zurich, Switzerland, who was greatly influenced by the humanist movement and its strong emphasis on biblical studies. For Zwingli, the preaching of the Word was to occupy the central position, and he was quick to do away with anything that detracted from the centrality of the Word. Thus, he moved much farther away from Catholic tradition and practices than Luther did.

Healey (ibid:237) states that John Calvin (1509 – 1564) came to Geneva in 1536 and found Zwinglian Protestantism firmly established there. Gradually his theology and his practical sense of organisation came to have a great influence. His spirituality did not, however, receive the same attention, as did his theology. His spirituality, nonetheless, constitutes a rich part of his legacy to the Reformed Church. Calvin's spirituality begins with the believer's union with Christ. From this union comes all Christ's gifts and blessing. This living relationship with Christ begins with baptism and continues to grow and develop during the course of one's life.

Calvin agreed with Luther's teaching that justification was by grace alone, but he was able to integrate human activity a little more with his teaching on sanctification. Bouyer (1982:86) points out that:

> Calvin, on the other hand, while also maintaining that justification precedes, and is hence independent of, any possible works that man may do, added that a faith that did not produce both external works and the

progressive sanctification of our whole being was but an appearance of faith and therefore would not have justified us.

For Calvin justification and sanctification are both gifts that come from our union with Christ. The final emphasis of Calvin's spirituality was placed on the obedient ethical activity in the world. Union with Christ should lead a person to live a life in keeping with that relationship. One gives glory to God not only in liturgical worship but also in righteous and ethical living. An assurance of belonging to Christ is found in obedience to God's law and service of one's neighbour.

2.3.3 Christian spirituality and Anabaptists

Healey (2003:239) explains that those who were part of the so-called "Radical Reformation" found themselves on the margins of the mainline Protestant churches of the sixteenth century. Luther had very little sympathy for them and used the word *Schwärmer* in speaking about them. Williams (1963:132) used the term the "Radical Reformation" to designate the various groups of religious innovators who belonged neither to the Roman Catholic nor to the mainline Protestant churches. In spite of a great variety of characteristics that marked these groups, there were a number of commonalities attributable to them all.

They all wanted to cut through the traditions that had become part of the established churches and return to the authentic root of Christian spirituality as they envisaged it. Adult baptism was to follow regeneration and thus they were strongly opposed to infant baptism. They advocated complete separation from the world and gave witness to a very distinct and uncompromising lifestyle. The basic theme of their distinct spirituality is that of an immediate experience of God. Each person can and should approach God directly, apart from any reliance on external religious practices or means. This experience of encountering God was extremely important and should be sought wholeheartedly.

In one's relationship with God, it is the personal, experiential, individual and subjective aspect that really counts and the one that should be nourished. In fact, an experience of a new birth was the prerequisite for baptism. Adult baptism marked the entrance into the community and served as the public pledge of separation from the world and a commitment to the community on the part of the repentant believer.

2.4   Christian spirituality and Pentecostal / Charismatic Theology

The Pentecostal movement that emerged in the early twentieth century had a number of historical roots. Firstly, there was the Scriptural witness of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the first Christians on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Secondly, there were the influences that flowed from the various groups connected with the Pietist tradition as well as the Revivalism that flowered in the United States in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Perhaps the most important immediate source was the aspect of the Wesleyan tradition that was emphasized in the Holiness Churches that separated from the Methodists.

The Holiness churches strongly emphasized Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification. They distinguished two separate experiences of grace. The first was the experience of conversion or regeneration and the second was the baptism of the Holy Spirit.[242] Because of the disagreements and opposition that arose with the mainline Protestant Churches, those who accepted the Pentecostal way of life gradually began to form new churches and denominations. They were united in their teaching that *water[243]* baptism can only be administered to those individuals who had been regenerated; that all regenerated persons should seek a post-conversion baptism in/with the Holy Spirit and they believe that glossalalia is the initial physical evidence of the Spirit baptism.

Russell-Boulton (2000:63) defines spirituality as follows, stating that Pentecostal spirituality would concur with the definition:

> Christian spirituality is the consequence of the redemptive event and an ongoing process of sanctification, facilitated by grace and motivated by faith. Thus the reconciled and justified believer responds in worship, fellowship, prayer and Holy Communion, sharing with all the word the good news of faith, hope and love in Christ Jesus.

McMahan (2004:152) explains that the Charismatic movement began in the late 1960's and early 1970's. In contrast to Pentecostals who quickly formed independent groups, which eventually became international denominations, Charismatics began

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[242] According to Healey (2003:373) the first outpouring of the Spirit in the modern revival seems to have taken place at the Holiness Bible School run by Charles Parham in Topeka, Kansas, on 1st January 1901. The second and more influential Pentecostal outpouring took place at the Azusa Street Revival Mission in Los Angeles in 1906.

[243] The word "water" is added here so as to distinguish this baptism from Spirit baptism in this paragraph.

within mainline denominations and many have continued in those denominations. Others have formed independent churches, autonomous and congregational in polity and practice, avoiding the creation of denominations. Still others like the Vineyard movement have formed denominational fellowships.

Although there are various distinctions between the beliefs of Pentecostals and Charismatics, which are to broad to expand on here, they are knit together in their emphasis on the need for every individual to be regenerated (which is a sudden experience)[244] and the work of the Spirit. Like Pentecostals, the Charismatics also believe that only regenerated individuals should be baptized and thus too, reject infant baptism.

2.5   Christian spirituality and African Initiated Churches

Tshelane (2000:138) maintains that the term "African Initiated Churches" (AIC's) is an academically accepted term for church groupings founded and led by Africans with little or no missionary support. Nonetheless, it is literally impossible to discuss Christian spirituality as it relates to all the denominations within the AIC's, within the limits of this study. This is said in view of the fact that the term AIC does not refer to a single theological tradition, but rather to a group of denominations characterized by a variety of theological views, teachings, liturgical styles and historical background. Hayes (1998:159) mentions that some AIC's have a Methodist tradition, some a Congregational tradition, some an Anglican tradition, some have an Orthodox tradition and others a Pentecostal tradition.

Anything one says of their Christian spirituality will therefore be an over-generalization. In view of this I will only very briefly mention some factors of Christian spirituality within the AIC's, with the understanding that in the summary of this part of the study the AIC's are either included or excluded in the identity/relevance dilemma, depending on their specific denominational tradition.[245]

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[244] See discussion on "sudden experience" on page 63, point 7.2.3b.
[245] The AIC's are mentioned in this study for two reasons. 1. It is reported to be the largest and fastest growing church in South Africa and, 2. It is mentioned solely because of the author's geographical place of abode, namely South Africa. It must be clearly understood, however, that the author is not totally familiar with the religious and cultural traditions of these churches, thus this statement.

AIC spirituality is a way of life in quest to be obedient to God's word in a world broken by human reason that has a tendency to obscure the divine initiative. Concerning the Christian spirituality of the AIC's, Tshelane (2000:143) maintains that the point of departure is liberation. Liberation in this context means total liberation from social deprivation, materialism, disease and cold, formalised worship. The objective is to guide individuals towards sensitivity to others both within the AIC's and the mainline churches without necessarily falling into the trap of triumphalism, where humans tend to claim credit for the work of the Holy Sprit. Basic precepts of this spirituality are the Holy Spirit, the Biblical message, prophecy and the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations.

In reference to all that has been said concerning the various traditions and their understanding of Christian spirituality, it is clear that there are a variety of perspectives thereon. The common factor however seems to be, that the spiritual life is the life of the whole person directed towards God. When Christian spirituality needs to be defined though, the emphasis on the experiential cannot in practise exclude specific reference to tradition, even if there is common ground between different faith traditions regarding the meaning of spirituality. Sheldrake (1995:60) comments as follows concerning Christian spirituality:

> While spirituality, in Christian terms, is not about some other kind of life but about the whole of human life at depth, our understanding of what this might mean cannot avoid questions posed specifically by the Christian tradition of revelation about the nature of God, human nature and the relationship between the two. Spirituality is understood to include not merely the techniques of prayer but, more broadly, a conscience relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and in the context of the community of believers. Spirituality is, therefore, concerned with the conjunction of theology, prayer and practical Christianity. A central feature is that spirituality derives its identity from the Christian belief that as human beings we are capable of entering into a relationship with God who is both transcendent and, at the same time, indwelling in the heart of all created things. This relationship is lived out, not in isolation, but in a community of believers that is brought into being by commitment to Christ and sustained by the active presence of the Spirit of God in each and in the community as a whole.

From this it is deduced that Christian spirituality implies a living relationship between human beings and God – a relationship that is brought about by regeneration. Without this relationship identity and relevance becomes impossible. From what has been discussed above in this part of this study with reference to human effort and tradition, the cause of the identity/relevance dilemma can most certainly be ascribed

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to the fact that all "so-called" church members have not entered into this living relationship with God via regeneration. In view hereof the concluding part of this study focuses on working towards a viable solution for the identity/relevance dilemma.

1.   The age-old problem of the church

In retrospect of all that has been discussed and explained thus far, it seems that throughout the ages, the church and Christian tradition has been plagued by a major problem that is largely responsible for the seemingly current identity/dilemma crisis. It is imperative that this problem be addressed in order to enable the church to be more effective in that which God intended it to be, namely a body of regenerated individuals, bearing the witness of Jesus Christ from *Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth* (Acts 1:8)

This statement is not in any way suggesting that the church has not been effective in a positive way,[246] but it is suggesting that the church can be more effective positively, by addressing the cause of the problem. Whether it is humanly possible to come up with a solution thereto is a debateable matter. Nonetheless, I do believe that if certain biblical truths and teachings are adhered to, it could bring the church much closer to that which God intended it to be.

The problem referred to emerged soon after the birth of the church and has continued to be part thereof ever since. It can be described as the fact that the church has progressively experienced an increasing numerical growth in membership, but sadly this growth includes many members that do not seem to have ever been regenerated by the Spirit (the prerequisite to church membership).[247] An analysis of what has been discussed above clearly reveals the fact of this dilemma.

Concerning the post-apostolic church, it was seen that the unification of church and state resulted in the church being saturated with unregenerate persons, often in order to escape persecution or to gain other benefits or state favours.[248] This trend led to the general acceptance of state churches being the order of the day in some countries. Consequently a majority percentage of the populace were automatically accepted as members of the church, whether regenerated or not.

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[246] The term "positive way" is used here to distinguish it from the negative effectiveness of the church in the past, e.g. the effective negative support of Apartheid in South Africa during the past.

[247] See discussion concerning regeneration on page 62, point 7.2.3.

[248] See the discussion concerning Constantine and the church on page 136, point 7.

This was followed by Protestant theology that in particular, due to its adherence to covenant theology, believes that the church of the New Testament is an extension of the Old Testament Israel and that the promises made to Abraham and the Israelites, are valid and applicable to the people of the New Testament church.[249] They fail to distinguish between Israel of the Old Testament as the covenant people of God (made with Abraham) and the New Testament church as a separate, unique entity. Ferguson & Wright (1988:174) explain that covenant theologians (with the exception of some Calvinistic Baptists) have argued firstly, that the children of Christians are no less in the covenant than the children of the old covenant (Is 59:21; Lk 18:15-17; Acts 2:39; 16:31; 1 Cor 7:14; Eph 6:4; 1 Tim 3:4-5; 2 Tim 3:15; Tit 1:6).

Secondly, they have contended that the application of baptism as the sign of the new covenant, parallels the Old Testament covenants, each of which included children: Noah (1 Pet 3:20-21), Abraham (Col 2:11-12) and Moses (1 Cor 10:1-4). Since children of believers are in the new covenant, and believers are in the Abrahamic covenant which gave the sign of the covenant to the children of believers (Gal 3:29), covenant theologians believe that baptism, as one of the signs of the new covenant, ought to be administered to believers' children.[250]

König (2005:308) in an attempt to justify the baptism of children (infants) maintains that as Isaac was first circumcised (being the offspring of Abraham) and had to come to faith in God later, so children of believers are baptised as infants and must later come to faith in God themselves. Unfortunately this is not always the case. Within most Reformed churches these children usually follow a catechistic program, which when completed and after repeating the church's confessional statement or creed, permits them to be accepted as confessing members of the church. That which qualifies them for membership is therefore not regeneration, but human effort or tradition.[251]

That this system is not achieving the desired results is evidenced within the content of a recent magazine article published in one of South Africa's leading secular

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[249] See footnote 42 on page 34.
[250] The purpose of this discussion is not to embark on another endless debate on the "for" or "against" of infant baptism, but rather to illustrate the fact that churches seem to have some unregenerate members within their ranks.
[251] See point 2 on page 170.

magazines.[252] Herein it is mentioned that during the last twelve years, membership has decreased from 1,3 million to 1,18 million. Although this does not seem too drastic, it is troubling to note that according to the report, only 3,6% of these members attend the evening services, while the children that should be the future church members, are just not there. Within the last four years the number of children who should be prepared for acceptance as members via catechism, has decreased by 40%.

De Klerk (1998:75) mentions the fact that catechism no longer has much impact, as the majority of the youth that recite their confession of faith publicly, soon disappear from the church. There no longer is any unconditional loyalty to the church. These individuals say that the church no longer addresses their spiritual needs and that the church has reached the end of its ecclesiastic tradition.

The absence of regeneration within Christianity is not however only found within the ranks of reformed churches, but also within that of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. By this statement I do not imply that there are no regenerated persons in either of these groups, namely, Reformed, Pentecostal or Charismatic, but rather that it seems that a certain percentage of these individuals have never experienced regeneration.

Within the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements salvation is generally "offered" to the audience after the pastor or preacher has delivered his sermon. An invitation is made to all attendees who are not "born again" to accept the salvation offered by God through his Son, Jesus Christ. As a token or sign of their acceptance of this salvation they are generally requested to raise a hand indicative of their decision to accept Christ as their personal saviour. This is usually followed by the recitation of the "sinner's prayer" and later by water baptism. It is then generally accepted that regeneration has occurred within the lives of these persons. That a number of individuals are born again via this method may be true, yet there seems to be so many that have raised a hand in response to such an invitation, have gone through all the rituals, were baptised, but have never really experienced regeneration.

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[252] The article by Pieter van Zyl titled "NGK: Is dit ja of Amen," appeared on page 10 in "Die Huisgenoot" dated 28 July 2005.

Philpottt (1998:16,17) agrees with the above when speaking of his experiences with so-called converted church members and says,

> Often raised in the church, these people usually participated in the normal activities of a church, including baptism, membership classes, public statements of faith and discipleship classes. Yet they did not have assurance of salvation. Why? Because they were never converted in the first place…. It is commonly understood by a majority of Christians that conversion occurs as a result of coming forward in a church service and praying the sinner's prayer, or being baptised, or joining the church, or reciting a statement of faith, or behaving like a Christian. I believe such processes lack biblical authority and precedent and tend to Christianise rather than convert.

Christianisation is problematic for theologians and the church, as people have been taught to rely on prescribed church recitations and rites for salvation, while salvation and regeneration as such, is a mystery that humans will never fully comprehend. Jesus said: *The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit* (Jn 3:8). Those who are born of the Spirit (regenerated) and empowered by Him, are moved upon from a source that from a human perspective is both invisible and largely unpredictable.

Perhaps it would be in order to postulate here that regeneration is a mystery. It is not guaranteed by the recitation of a simple 'sinner's prayer' (or for that matter a complex theologically correct one). Nor is it guaranteed by inheritance or inclusion in a church denomination. No human being, including myself can determine with certainty whether a person is regenerated or not. No spiritual gift that I may posses allows such an insight, nor do I have or claim to have any special anointing or knowledge. Regeneration is the sovereign work of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.[253] Nonetheless, when so-called "born-again" persons manifest no care for prayer, no interest in Scripture, no desire for worship and praise, no love of Jesus and his cross – certainly something is amiss. On the other hand it can often be perceived whether or not the life of Christ is in a person. If there is love for God, love for the Saviour, interest in the Bible, concern for worship, praise and prayer, then it is most probable that a biblical conversion has taken place.

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[253] The purpose of this thesis is not to discuss the "how" of regeneration, but to illustrate the author's supposition that many church members have not been spiritually regenerated by God and that this is a major cause for the identity/relevance dilemma wherein the church finds itself.

According to Philpott (*ibid*:20) the mystery of regeneration can be described as a paradox – that is, two thoughts that seem at odds with each other and appear impossible for us to harmonise. He explains that conversion is worked of God, yet we are called to 'turn to God' in repentance and to have faith in Christ (Acts 20:21). This implies that God works and we work – a paradox or mystery. The problem is that the paradox or mystery, has so often been swept aside by the invention of purely human means to receive salvation. The result of ignoring the mystery is christianisation, or false conversion. In addition Philpott (*ibid*:22) maintains that instead of letting the mystery stand, we have attempted to resolve the mystery by using methods such as a sinner's prayer. He argues that we want to provide the person who asks, "What can I do to be saved?" with a concrete answer such as "Pray this prayer and you will receive salvation." "Get baptised and join the church." "Enrol in our discipleship class." How can something so extra-biblical lead to anything but confusion, christianisation or a false conversion?

2.   A modern remedy?

In its effort to convert the world it seems that Christianity has to a certain degree abandoned the preaching of the apostles doctrine of "repent and be baptised" (Acts 2:38) and replaced it with postmodern catch phrases such as, "seeker sensitive" and "purpose driven" which are used to draw the masses to church. It cannot be denied that the propagators of these methods are achieving good results as far as quantity is concerned. But the problem is that quantity does not imply quality in all situations. In view hereof the question arises: "Is the Lord adding to the church those that are being saved or are they being added by human effort?" I am of the opinion that this "modern remedy" for evangelism and church growth, namely the "seeker sensitive" method of evangelism is not found or taught anywhere in Scripture. In contrast to this method the Bible teaches that the true seeker is Jesus himself (Lk 19:10). If we are going to be "seeker sensitive" then I propose that we be sensitive to the real seeker, Jesus.

Swaggart (69:2004) has the following to say in criticism of Warren's "purpose driven church" and "purpose driven life." [254]

> Purpose driven living is a spin-off of the Bible by using and misusing
> Scripture in order to seduce the consumer (the church) into reading and

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[254] The third paragraph on page 154 introduces the reader to these books by Rick Warren.

participating in his *"40 Days of Purpose."* I want to emphasise it is Warren's 40 days of Purpose and not God's. He has marketed this idea of how this process can help Christians grow spiritually and how they can become an effective contribution to their church and their community.

Pastors are blindly accepting this process as being from the Lord because of its seducing appeal to develop a bigger and healthier church. This translates, as they are sold, to more members, more money and more influence in their local community. Although subtle, this appeals to pride and greed. The good intentions of many pastors are used by Warren to draw them into a false way to build their church, which is not of God. How can one say this is not of God when Scripture is quoted all throughout the books? He justifies his misuse of Scripture by using many different translations of the Bible. Sadly, these modern translations are not word for word translations that provide an accurate rendering of the original meaning of the words. Most of these new translations are either *paraphrases* or *thought-for-thought* interpretations that distort the true meaning of the words and verses. He will even use Scripture out of context to support his thought or idea rather than what the Lord would have us to know about him.

What the propagators of "seeker sensitive" methodology seem to misunderstand is that the parables within the context of the portion of Scripture that they are using as a major passage to justify their argument, namely Luke 15, always represents God as the seeker. The lost sheep, lost coin and lost son represents lost humanity. This principle is found throughout the Bible. God is the seeker and humanity the lost. In the account of the Fall as recorded in Genesis 1-3 we learn that Adam and Eve *hid* themselves from God. Most certainly they were not seeking God, but he was seeking them.

The image of God as seeker and humanity as those sought after, is the continuing theme throughout Scripture (Lk 19:10). Fallen humanity is lost and needs to be "found" by God. We read in Acts 2:37-38 of the peoples response following Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost: *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, repent, and be baptized.* From this passage it is clear that the Warren-Hybels[255] methodology of asking the "people what they wanted and then doing church their way" (i.e. seeker sensitive) was not the methodology of the primitive church. In contrast to asking the people what they wanted the people here were asking the apostles what God wanted or required of them.

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[255] See last paragraph on page 154.

3.   Humanity not seeking God.

One of the major problems that the church faces in its attempt to solve the identity/relevance dilemma is the fact that humanity in its totality is not seeking God, but rather, is seeking solutions and answers to current sociological and ethical dilemmas. The tragedy of our day is the fact that the humanistic spirit of the masses together with the church's identity/relevance dilemma is the reason why humanity is seeking remedies to these dilemmas outside or without the aid of the church. Apparently this is because the church does not seem to have the answers that humanity is seeking for. Humanity is wrestling with moral and ethical dilemmas such as racial discrimination, economic injustice, political corruption, abortion, homosexuality and HIV/AIDS?[256]

In the humanistic process of finding solutions to these dilemmas the outside world seems to view the church as an institution that has lost its identity and that has become irrelevant.[257] The church, which should be a community of moral discourse and discernment, should be involved and asking itself "What ought we to do?" while at the same time telling the outside world "what is right and what is wrong." Sadly, however, the church has seemingly become sidelined by its lack of being able to take a firm stand on what it believes, as is evidenced by the ongoing ecclesiastical debate on current issues such as homosexuality. The present day church is struggling with important and complex questions including those about the morality of same-sex behaviour.

Jones and Yarhouse (2000:17) in their discussion of research, reason and religion, present two versions of arguments that are typically offered to justify the revision of Christian teaching concerning homosexuality,[258] based on scientific research: that the Bible is wrong and that it is vague. The arguments are described as follows.

> *The Bible is wrong.* The first is the argument that the Bible, though it is clear in its teachings about homosexuality, is in error on homosexuality. Here is how the argument goes: the moral teachings of the Bible and the Christian tradition regarding homosexual behaviour cannot be considered to be without error and this must be tested against the fruits of human reason. If modern science proves that the views expressed in the bible are mere prejudice and ill-founded, we must adapt our views. Through

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[256] See footnote 192 on page 159.

[257] See the introductory remarks on page 17, point 1.

[258] The debate on homosexuality is not the theme of this thesis and is only mentioned here for illustrative purposes.

advances in human reason, particularly through modern scientific discovery we have come to see homosexual orientation as a natural and normal and good variant. In short, the Bible is wrong on this matter and must be superseded by human reason.

The Bible is vague. The second argument is that the Bible, though foundational to our Christian ethic is inconsistent and vague on homosexuality. The Bible cannot really be accused of being wrong because what it says is so confused that it really does not amount to a consistent teaching. The argument here is that, in direct parallel to what some see as the internal tension in the Bible's teachings about women in ministry the Bible and Christian tradition reveal substantial confusion and inconsistency on the moral evaluation of homosexual behaviour: in the face of this lack of clarity we must look to our contemporary understanding to make rational decisions about sexual morality.

Although the authors of the above clearly state their rejection of these arguments and their acceptance of Scripture as not being at error or being vague, they still do not, however, make a final statement for or against homosexuality. This seems to be the general problem of the church and the reason why the world no longer requires of the church that it set the moral standard. While the church has much to say on the subject of Christian ethics based on biblical principles, it has seemingly failed to do so in a comprehensible and distinct way. Why is this? Perhaps it could be best explained by the following illustration. My youngest child wears a WWJD bracelet (What Would Jesus Do?), and while I am delighted that she actually aspires to ask that question from time to time, I am also acutely aware that she has little chance to do as Jesus might have done unless she becomes more and more of who Jesus was and is, and unless she loses her life in his. To do this implies regeneration.

So too, in order for the church to be able to defend its faith in God and in his word, it must be a regenerated church, identifiable with Christ through renewal. Only then will the church be able to be relevant in a world that is in dire need of salvation.

Hannah (1996:168) remarks:

> The stress upon the rationality and provability of the evangelical faith has seemingly robbed us of much of the inner dynamic and mystery and wonder, of reverential awe, and of our own littleness. In the quest to make the modern church more important to society, the church is finding itself less appealing to an increasing apathetic world because it has little to offer that is distinctive. Our growing accommodation of the gospel message to immediate, felt needs, with the hope of attracting the less interested, may well cause the church to forget that its true work is about an indescribable miracle of God's grace and that its message is ultimately about something we can neither explain nor cause by self-effort and exertion.

4. Concluding remarks

In all that has been said within this study we see a contrast between the ideal and the actual Church. Nothing is to be gained from concealing the fact, which the study above makes amply clear, that a frightening gulf separates the character of the church of today from the character of the primitive church. The cause thereof appears to be the postmodern day church's seeming neglect of continuance in the apostles' doctrine and the fact that it seems as if the Lord is no longer adding to the church them that are being saved, but rather, additions are being made via human effort and tradition.

As was mentioned in part two[259] of this study, the church has to function in a continually changing world. This is problematic, as the future is always just ahead of us and we do not seem to arrive at that to which we wish to be relevant. Obviously this is the product of progression and especially the product of postmodernity that always presents us with something new in order to escape from our past traditions and customs. In view of this the modern church has attempted to maintain its identity with Christ by presenting various methods of doing church that seem to be "godlike" or "pious" but when closely scrutinised and analysed seem to be nothing more than "modern entertainment shows" with a spiritual connotation. At the same time, in an attempt to be relevant, the church has implemented seeker-sensitive methods that include contemporary music and the use of modern electronic equipment. Holsclaw[260] in explaining this postmodern church's quest for relevance makes the following significant statement:

> Unfortunately, while seeking to reform and transform the modern church, the emerging church movement many times continues to fall prey to the tyranny of the new and the drive toward relevance under girded by a missionary theology of contextualization which in a Western setting ends up creating more and more niche market Christian consumers rather than a subversive unified church.

The problem with the postmodern church is that - unlike the primitive church that did not seek to identify with their surrounding culture, but sought to express their Christian identity amidst their surrounding culture, thereby becoming relevant – they are adopting modern cultural trends and implementing them as part of their liturgy.

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[259] See page 92.
[260] Internet article posted 02-2004. www.emergingchurch.info/reflection/geoffholslaw/african.htm

This has apparently resulted in the church losing its Christian identity in order to be relevant.

In working towards a possible solution for understanding the essence of the church and maintaining the balance between identity and relevance, I suggest that the church and its theologians remember that the Christian call includes continuance in sound doctrine - the doctrine of the apostles. In other words it is important that the church does not exchange biblical based fundamental absolutes for secular relatives.[261] Obviously there will be borderline things in which we have differences among ourselves, but on the central issues there must be no compromise. Probably the most central absolute that cannot be replaced with any relative when we speak of the essence of the church is the fact that the pre-requisite is regeneration.[262]

If regeneration is absent there can be no church. As was discussed above, no human effort or tradition can replace the necessity of regeneration (Jn 3:3). Unfortunately it its attempt to be relevant within the secularist world, the church seems to have compromised the absolute gospel message and replaced it with a seeker sensitive gospel, wherein God the *true seeker* has been degraded to God the crowd pleaser, while sinful humanity who *hid themselves from God* (Gen 3:7-8)[263] are promoted to the seekers. This is all due to the postmodern church's slackness in taking a firm stand on their theological convictions and beliefs, based on sound hermeneutical criteria. The central theme of the Bible and of the apostles' doctrine is Salvation

The general current theological debate concerned with homosexuality, exemplifies the church's failure to adhere to sound doctrine by not taking a firm stand concerning its theological conviction in this regard.[264] This is deducible from various recent synod reports and media articles. In an Internet article[265] by Tobie Sterling, titled "Dutch churches merger will permit gay marriages," it is reported that:

> The Dutch Reformed Church, the Calvinist Reformist Church and the small Lutheran Church will unite to form the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, together representing around 2.2 million churchgoers – or about fourteen percent of the population. The new Protestant Church will

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[261] See discussion on page 161, point 4.
[262] See the implied meaning of essence on page 6, point 2.2 and the discussion on page 60ff, point 7.1.
[263] See discussion on page 190, point 2.
[264] Obviously there may be denominations that have taken a firm stand, but in general it seems that the church is very accommodating of homosexuality at this stage.
[265] Posted 25 August 2003, www.gmax.co.za/look/12/15-hollandmarry.html

permit gay marriages and women pastors, but will not force any local congregation to accept them – which is the current practice in the mostly liberal Netherlands. Conservative members of the Dutch Reformed Church view the merger with "great apprehension," but decided that unifying the church was more important.

This is a heart-rending example of the church not being able to take its stand on its theological convictions based on the apostles' doctrine. A similar article by Theunis Engelbrecht was published in a South African national Sunday Newspaper.[266] This article, namely, "ACDP eis standpunt van Raad van Kerke," was a report on a TV debate wherein the ACDP (African Christian Democratic Party) demanded that the SACC (South African Council of Churches) take a firm stand on the Court of Appeal's legitimising of gay marriages. Sadly, however, the SACC remained neutral, while Reverend Molefi Tsele, of the SACC requested church leaders to be cautious of the decision of the court. He went on to say that in the traditions and teachings of the church same-sex marriages were never recognised. Yet he added that the core lessons of the Christian faith do not explicitly forbid the legitimacy of same-sex relationships that are characterised by love and faith. Surely this is seemingly compromising the sound biblical doctrine that forbids same-sex relationships.

The reason for this seeming failure of the church is because of the fact that it (the church) has allowed itself to be pressurised and dictated to by the world as to what it should believe concerning the Bible and according to what hermeneutical principles and criteria it should be interpreted and understood. As can be seen from the above examples, it is a pathetic sight to see how the church, via its theologians, is like a cat on a hot tin roof not knowing where to tread in order to stand firm when caught in the crossfire of theological and moral issues. No definite, fundamental biblical standpoint is taken, based on the sound doctrine of the apostles.

Some churches have fenced themselves off in an effort to keep the modernisation process out. The danger is that they become so satisfied with themselves and their own life that they do not recognise that they have very little influence on their surrounding environment and least of all on life in the public sphere.

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[266] Die Rapport, 5 December 2004.

As was mentioned in the summary to this thesis,[267] the church carefully locked in, inside the confines of the peaceful atmosphere of its own walls, will not be able to bring the message of God's liberating grace to the world. It will always remain irrelevant. Only a church that is willing to venture out and encounter people with the gospel, has understood its mission. On the other hand there is the church that adopts the attitude of accommodation. By this is meant that they sacrifice their Christian identity in order to be relevant.

Runia (1994:309f) points out that many individual Christians and even a number of the larger church denominations fall prey to the spirit of tolerance and humanism. The result is that the distinction between church member and non-church member has disappeared. People become more afraid to be called outmoded than to be frowned upon as heretics. Many church leaders in the ministry will not hesitate to dilute the gospel to make it more acceptable to modern tastes. The reasons advanced for living a life of faith no longer make sense to many people and the stream of people leaving the church is increasing at an alarming pace.

Obviously, the "often-apologetic" stance that is adopted by the church against any criticism aimed at it, may cause the secular world to question whether the church is really convinced of the content of the gospel message that it proclaims. What the church seems to forget is that it is not the church's gospel as such, but it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom 1:1). This gospel, like all of Scripture is relational in essence. It is primarily concerned with Christ and unless people have a living relationship with him, their religion is nothing more than a just another ideology or philosophy.

The day has dawned for the church to stand up and to discard the pathetic image that it has of late adopted and projected – an image brought about by the pressure of postmodernism. At times it seems as if the church has reverted back to an inferior stance of fear, similar to that which embraced the disciples in the upper room after the burial of Christ (Jn 20:19). There is no need for the church to continually be on the defensive and to constantly wrestle for recognition and acceptance in a secular society. There is no need for the church to revert to human traditions and efforts in order to find favour with the people.

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[267] See summary on second page.

The church has a commission and promise from Christ, namely to preach the gospel to all nations, him being with the church always, even unto the end as promised (Mt 28:19-20). This gospel is a power of God unto salvation to every one that believes (Rom 1:16). Once the church reverts back to proclaiming the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42) without compromise or double standards, the Holy Spirit will once again regenerate people in an unprecedented way and the Lord will add them that are being saved to his church (1 Cor 12:13; Acts 2:47).

In conclusion of this study I must categorically accentuate the two characteristics that are essential to understanding the essence of the church and for maintaining the balance between identity and relevance. They are 'sound doctrine' and 'true spirituality'. We desperately need clear doctrinal content concerning the central issues of the church and Christianity. There is no way that the church can fulfil its God-given calling unless theologians help each other to have a clear doctrinal position without making any compromise of the apostles' doctrine. Christianity is bound to truth, and the church and its theologians must hold to this truth, without necessarily being apologetic in order to find favour with the masses. We must practice the content of the doctrine; practice the truth we say we believe.

We must exhibit to the watching world that we are serious about truth. Indeed Christianity is throughout concerned with the truth. However, in this context 'truth' does not mean purely theoretical truths of reason but practical truths of faith, which are grounded in experience, decision and action. Indeed, the truth of Christianity is not to be seen theorized, but to be done, practised. It will not do in a relativistic age to say that we believe in truth and fail to practice that truth in places where it may be observed and where it is costly. There should be some manifestation of the truth that the world can see when they look upon the church – something that they cannot explain away. Hereby we will not only be preserving identity with Christ, but also be demonstrating it.

Secondly, we need true spirituality. Certainly, we must be very careful not to fall into the cheap solution which seems so fascinating at first of just moving people to make decisions without their really knowing what they are making a decision about. The concept of being "born again" or regenerated, must be totally understood by the people. They should understand what it means to "accept Christ as their saviour."

Theologians and the church need to understand postmodernism to be an age of very obvious religious communication – a communication without absolutes. True spirituality is not about some other kind of life, but about the whole of human life at depth. It is not merely the reciting of creeds. Jesus never said, "say after me", but rather "follow me" (Mt 4:19). It is not merely understood to include the techniques of prayer or the discovery of a purpose but, more broadly, a conscious living relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

It has been the argument of this thesis that the essence of the church is an attribute that every member of the church universal must necessarily partake of in order to belong thereto. Furthermore, it was argued that the essence of the church is indissolubly linked to the new birth. Literary research of the history of the church has shown that throughout its existence, the church has been saturated with many members who seem to have never experienced this new birth, or as otherwise explained, regeneration. It is the author's conviction that regeneration is essential for any person who is a member of the church and that this entails a living vertical relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the Spirit. This relationship brings about identity with God. Additionally it is argued that in order for the church to be relevant in this postmodern world, i.e in a horizontal relationship to the world, it must first experience the vertical relationship with God. A church that is not identifiable with God cannot be relevant concerning his purposes in society. Identity and relevance are two sides of the same coin and are inseparably linked to each other.

For the church to understand its essence and to maintain a healthy balance between identity and relevance, the two characteristics mentioned above and throughout this thesis need to be clearly understood and implemented in the lives of every church member. I believe that then and only then can and will the church become more effective to the purposes of God. Then it will better understand the source of its essence and the identity/relevance dilemma may become a crisis of the past, as regenerate members become more Christlike – loving God with their whole beings and also their neighbours as themselves.

It was said earlier that regeneration was a mystery.[268] It was concerning this mystery that Jesus said to Nicodemus: *The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit* (Jn 3:8). That regeneration is a necessity in every Christian's life has been deduced from this study.[269] However, to explain the "how" of the actual process of regeneration remains a mystery. In view hereof and with due consideration for the changes brought about by postmodernism, it must be remembered that on the one hand, regeneration is a non-negotiable for the regenerated Christian theologian. Yet, on the other hand, the same theologian has a responsibility towards the academic world and the church. This responsibility may lead us to solicit an answer to the question of whether or not God is perhaps speaking to us in a "new way" concerning the new birth.

I trust that this study will serve as a stepping-stone in the progression to further study by other theologians, so that whatever has not been clearly demarcated or fully explained herein will be further expanded on in the future. May it be instrumental in assisting the church to a better understanding of the mystery of regeneration and to becoming what God intended it to be.

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[268] See the first paragraph on page 190.
[269] See the second paragraph on page 189.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ALT	Analytical Literal Translation
ASV	American Standard Version
AV	Authorised Version
BBE	Bible in Basic English 1965
CEV	Contemporary English Version
GNB	Good News Bible
GW	God's Word
ISV	International Standard Version
LITV	Literal Translation of the Holy Bible
WEB	World English Bible
Webster	Webster Bible 1833

| WNT | Weymouth New Testament 1912 |
| YLT | Young's Literal translation 1898 |