

The relevance of the messianic dimension for the Christological controversy in the Seventh-day Adventist church

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ABSTRACT

Christology has always been important to the life and well-being of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. From the Church's early beginnings in the New England states, its organization in Michigan in 1863, down past its European outreach in 1874, past the historic 1888 Minneapolis Conference, and on to the present, the Person of Jesus Christ has played a vital role in Adventism. The Adventist church has often had to grapple with its understanding of Christ. Not that this truth is beyond the grasp of the simplest Christian for salvation, and yet, because of the very nature of Christ, whom we believe to be God, there lies a depth that is beyond the wisdom of man. This tension between simplicity and complexity must always be held in balance. But, far beyond all this is the relevance of this kind of messianic Christology, particularly for Adventist Christology.

The purpose of my study is to challenge and destabilize exclusive principles in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church and to broaden the perspective of the church to be welcoming and affirming to those who are perceived to be "the other" or "different." I will do so by way of appropriation and application of the "messianic" concept, much discussed in recent philosophy (Jacques Derrida) and theology (Jürgen Moltmann), to Adventist Christology.

I will, in the final analysis, present an Adventist Christology that replicates a messianic faith. All this creates what I believe is an effective interpretation of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Proposed Title and Key Words

Title: The relevance of the messianic dimension for the Christological controversy in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Key words: Adventism, Messianic Hope, Messianism, Christology, The Other(s), Fundamental Adventist Beliefs.

1.2. Abstract

Christology has always been important to the life and well-being of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. From the Church's early beginnings in the New England states, its organization in Michigan in 1863, down past its European outreach in 1874, past the historic 1888 Minneapolis Conference, and on to the present, the Person of Jesus Christ has played a vital role in Adventism. The Adventist church has often had to grapple with its understanding of Christ. Not that this truth is beyond the grasp of the simplest Christian for salvation, and yet, because of the very nature of Christ, whom we believe to be God, there lies a depth that is beyond the wisdom of man. This tension between simplicity and complexity must always be held in balance. But, far beyond all this is the relevance of this kind of messianic Christology, particularly for Adventist Christology.

The purpose of my study will be to challenge and destabilize exclusive principles in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church and to broaden the perspective of the church to be welcoming and affirming to those who are perceived to be "the other" or "different." I will do so by way of appropriation and application of the "messianic" concept, much discussed in recent philosophy (Jacques Derrida) and theology (Jürgen Moltmann), to Adventist Christology.

I will, in the final analysis, present an Adventist Christology that replicates a messianic faith. All this creates what I believe is an effective interpretation of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

1.3. Background and Rationale

It is a matter of history that at or near the beginning of what has since come to be known as the Christian era, Christ was born. The principal information of His¹ birth, life, death, and resurrection are so well attested as to be reasonably indisputable; they are facts of record, and are accepted as essentially authentic by the world at large. There are diversities of deduction, however, based on who and what He was. There are dissensions of grave monument dividing opinions of men, and this divergence of conception and belief is most pronounced upon those matters that shape the very Christian religion and its denominations, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

As it has been stated under the abstract, Christology has always been important to the life and well-being of Christianity² and to the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA)³ Church. From the Church's early beginnings, the Person of Jesus Christ has played a vital role in Adventism.⁴ Adventism sees Christ as the center of its message. Ellen White, who is accorded prophetic status in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Church Manual, 2016:168), wrote the following words:

“Christ, His character and work, is the centre and circumference of all truth. He is the chain upon which the jewels of doctrine are linked. In Him is found the complete system of truth.” (White, 1961:16)

¹ I will in this text follow the convention of often using in-text upper case letters such as “He,” “His,” and “Him,” as reference to Christ or deity. This convention should not in any way be seen as a window into my theological, philosophical, social, or even denominational assumptions; however, this reverential capitalization is out of habit. Where there are awkward situations of capitalizing words such as “Adventism,” this would be out of grammatical necessity of capitalizing pronouns and not reverential capitalization.

² Karl Barth once said, “Christology is the touchstone of all knowledge of God in the Christian sense, the touchstone of all theology.” (Barth, 1966:66)

³ Seventh-day Adventism sees itself as a part of the Christian church standing in the tradition of the Protestant Reformation and having its roots running clear back to the New Testament. LeRoy Edwin Froom writes: “Our roots did not simply begin in 1844—nor even with the antecedent worldwide Second Awakening and Movement of the early decades of the nineteenth century particularly the 1830s and 1840s. We stem back, in spiritual ancestry, not only to Protestant Reformation times, but clear through to the Apostolic founding period of the Christian Church.” (Froom, 1971:27-28)

⁴ By “Adventism” I am referring to the theology of the “Seventh-day Adventist Church”. It will later have a broader meaning when discussing “Messianic Adventism.”

However, problems arose in the Adventist Church over this “center”. The Adventist church has often had to grapple with its understanding of Christ. Due to locating the theological debate on the nature of Christ, this doctrine has divided the Adventist church over the years.

Everywhere on the leading edge, and in the wake of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, doctrinal controversies of mixed intensity have been raging. From the oldest members, who have been in the church for years, to the youngest members, who have recently joined the church, the faith of members is being shaken to the core. Historic landmarks are being defaced or disparaged. In some cases, churches are divided. In others, doctrinal controversies have erupted and church leadership is called in to resolve the issues—or at least to prevent the flames of dissent from spreading to neighboring communities. Many theologians have left the church over doctrinal controversies. Others, such as ML Andreasen, have vehemently opposed the church and its leadership over this doctrinal issue, particularly with the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*. Since members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are united in belief, due to the sisterhood of churches, these controversies are global in nature and impact the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide, regardless of where the debate takes place.

This dissertation will use the Christological controversy in Adventism as a case study. Since the eruption of this Christological controversy, a controversy that has divided the church in several ways, three trends⁵, within Adventism, have since divided the Adventist community. One trend is a proponent of what is known as the *prelapsarian* position.⁶ The *prelapsarian* position emphasizes that Christ took Adam’s sinless human nature before (“*pre*”) the fall (“*lapsys*”). This position argues that in Christ there was no sin, either inherited or cultivated, as is common to all other human beings.

⁵ In this dissertation I will focus on two of these, which are major trends.

⁶ Publications in support of this view are in abundance: Thomas, AD. 1979. Was Jesus Really like us? Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.; Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief. 1957. Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Another is a proponent of what is known as the *postlapsarian* position⁷. This position emphasizes that Christ's nature was identical to ours and that His human nature inherited the weaknesses of humankind since the fall of Adam and Eve. In this position, Christ had the nature of Adam after ("*post*") the fall ("*lapsys*").

The third divide emphasizes that, although Christ's nature was fully human and that He could yield to temptations, Christ did not inherit our inner inclination and predisposition to sin. He could sin, and He was tempted to sin, but all His temptations came from outside of Himself, as was the case with Adam and Eve before the fall.

There are real issues at stake here, and they run deep. Part of the issues at stake is the very identity of Seventh-day Adventism. The problem I attempt to address here is not a superficial problem. It cannot be settled by a vote. What we need is a reframing of the question itself. The question at the heart of this Christological controversy is: what nature did Christ have? This Christological controversy hinges on a rigid hermeneutic within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Without dividing an already divided community, one has to bring to the forefront that the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Church Manual, 2016:162) defines itself as a church that has no creed other than the Bible. However, it is anomalous how there are mutually exclusive divisions on all sides of the spectrum concerning this Christological controversy and yet all of them claim that their views are biblically sound. The problem then is not with the biblical text, but with the hermeneutics of the biblical text. My intent in following another possible reading of the person of Christ (messianic) is in order to read the biblical text carefully, to be faithful to the text, and to recognize 'the other' in the text. I will argue that the most inclusive approach to Adventist Christology is a Christology that concerns itself with a life of discipleship in which people learn who Christ is, through living with and among the poor, sick and oppressed—among "the other." By

⁷ Publications in support of this view are in abundance as well: Heppenstall, E. 1977. *The Man Who is God*, Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association; Jones, AT. 1895. "The Third Angel's Message—No. 13." *The General Conference Bulletin*, 1. <http://docs.adventistarchives.org/docs/GCB/GCB1895-01-08ex.pdf#view=fit>. (Accessed 26 February 2018); Waggoner, EJ. 1889. *God Manifest in the Flesh*. *The Signs of the Times*, 15(3):39; Zurcher, JR. 2000. *Touched with Our Feelings*, trans. Edward E. White. Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing; Gage, K. 1985. What human nature did Jesus take? *Fallen Ministry*: 9-21.

this approach, I do not seek to deal with issues surrounding the two natures of Christ, but other issues surrounding Christ, why He came and what He set out to accomplish as the Messiah.

Beyond this is the relevance of a kind of messianic Christology, particularly for Adventist Christology and Adventist identity. By proposing this messianic dimension, I wish to resituate Adventist Christology, not in terms of the conservative traditional metaphysical categories (two-natures) or the liberal anthropological schemes (incarnation), but in terms of the messianic categories found in recent philosophical and theological thought leaders, particularly in Jacques Derrida⁸ and Jürgen Moltmann. I seek to demonstrate another interpretation of the nature of Christ. This *other* interpretation lies in an eschatological framework of messianic hope and open expectation. In other words, this *other* interpretation can be found in what is meant when we talk of the Advent (Adventism), the messianic, and, evidently Christ. Coupled with this, the messianic dimension found in Derrida and Moltmann can be shown to be central to the essence, ethos and telos of the Bible and hence has relevance to both the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its Christological controversy.

1.4. Problem Statement

The problem that this dissertation will wrestle with, in a nutshell, may be stated in the following way: Is there a hermeneutical way of addressing the exclusive complexion this controversy is causing?

There is an evident controversy and effect between three theological strands in Adventism concerning how we interpret the nature of Christ. One clear effect is how the Seventh-day Adventist Church is viewed as being exclusive to those who hold a different interpretation to what is conventional at the time. This problematic situation raises the question whether there is a way to resolve this conflict of interpretations. In dealing with this problem, the following subsidiary research questions need to be addressed:

What is the context of the arguments arising from this Adventist Christological controversy?

⁸ Jacques Derrida is one of the most difficult authors in modern philosophy, as he has written thousands of words to express his deconstructive thoughts. In order to breakdown Derrida's thoughts and build a bridge between Derrida and Adventism, I will mainly depend on the work of Adrian Platts. Platts, A. 2012. Jacques Derrida, the Sacred Other and Seventh-day Adventism: Stumbling on the Creative Play of Différance in Genesis 1. Cape Town: University of Cape Town. (Thesis-PhD)

What are the effects of this controversy on the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its identity?

What hermeneutics is applied that brought about this Christological controversy?

1.5. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of my study is to challenge and destabilize exclusive principles in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to broaden the perspective of the church to be welcoming and affirming of those who are perceived to be “the other” or “different.” The SDA church, which is defined by a fairly rigid, though not inflexible list of beliefs, tends to resist anything that is not more of the same. Due to different interpretations of Adventist Christology, this community has divided itself and tensions have built due to the different views on the nature of Christ. I will destabilize exclusive principles within Adventist Christology and broaden the perspective of the church by way of appropriation and application of a destabilizing and openly inclusive idea—messianic—much discussed in recent philosophy (Jacques Derrida) and theology (Jürgen Moltmann).

The objectives of this study are:

1. To study and present the history of Adventist Christology within the past 100 years and place the argument within a context.
2. To identify and examine the effects of this Christological controversy on the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its identity.
3. To examine current Adventist hermeneutics and Christological positions.
4. To study and appropriate the concept of the messianic, according to Derrida and Moltmann.
5. Finally, to apply and present an Adventist Christology in messianic dimensions and outline the implications of such a Christology on the identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

1.6. Central Theoretical Argument

The central theoretical argument of this dissertation is that since Christ (the Messiah) identifies with the other, the application of an open hermeneutics, such as the messianic dimension, to Adventist Christology urges adherents to be more welcoming and inclusive thus addressing the exclusive complexion in the Adventist Christological controversy.

1.7. Research Methodology and Design

The methodology of this research is a major component of its meaning. It is not exclusive. I will elaborate on this further in the dissertation, but it will be helpful to describe the methodological nature of this research.

The methodology I will employ in this dissertation is called comparative literature research, also known as literature research methodology. Lin Guijuan defines this methodology.

“Literature research methodology is to read through, analyze and sort literatures in order to identify the essential attribute of materials. It’s significant difference from other methodologies is that it does not directly deal with the object under study, but to indirectly access information from a variety of literatures, which is generally referred to as ‘non-contact method.’ Literature materials are the crystallisation of wisdom, are the ocean of knowledge, have important values for the development of human society, history, cultures and research scholars.” (Guijuan, 2009:179)

The very nature of this methodology is inclusive. It does not only look at material related directly to the object under study, but it looks at a “variety of literatures,” a “non-contact method”.

Since I will be using scripture, it is also necessary to describe the hermeneutical method through which I will interpret scripture. I will employ Derridean deconstruction as a way of reading the biblical text. This way of reading the biblical text takes *seriously* the linguistic and semantic structures of whatever text is being read. The goal is to expose both the text and its interpretive history as a construction. This kind of reading is an ethical act, primarily because it shows that both the structure of the text and its readings could have been done ‘otherwise.’ It is a form of close reading of a text, in its proclivity for finding gaps and inconsistencies, and, most importantly, in showing the different possibilities of explaining a text. It is a hermeneutic that

does not sanction a monolithic interpretation of a text to the exclusion of other readings. Deconstructive reading overturns privileged hierarchy and meaning.

However, in defining the hermeneutical method that I will employ to read and research both scriptural passages and conduct this study, it will be necessary not to fall into a logocentric⁹ notion that insists on a particular hermeneutic, and rejects any other possible meaning of a text. Logocentrism argues that things, such as this dissertation or the reading of the bible, should be logical, and that the logic of the argument must be made, while sending everything else to the periphery as mere rhetoric. So, logocentrism is taking a pre-understanding to the text and permitting it to govern the meaning of the text. The implication of this is that, when one subscribes to a particular logocentrism, one automatically eliminates other perspectives.

I am not interested in examining a particular text to suggest a better or *another* way of interpreting it, even though I will suggest *another* interpretation of Christ. I will not embark on an exegetical exercise that attempts to discover other readings of texts employed by both sides of the Adventist Christological controversy, and propose what the texts are *really* saying. Logocentric views seek to control what one can and cannot say about a text. In this sense, to fall into a logocentric path is to fail to treat the text, and frankly this dissertation, with the proper respect.

By so doing, this dissertation becomes irrelevant. It would fail to achieve the very thing it wants to achieve, which is to have an inclusive, rather than exclusive, interpretation. At the heart of the Christological controversy found in Adventism is the very notion of declaring or defining a hermeneutic or methodology of research or reading, and considering a particular hermeneutic or methodology as superior than the other. Faithfulness to the text means that it cannot be bound by our interpretations. John Caputo observes that deconstructive reading consists “in a fine-grained reading of the text, of the literality and textuality of the text, slowly, scrupulously, seriously, in releasing the still-stirring forces that ‘philosophy’ and logocentrism strive to contain” (Caputo, 1997a:83).

This then leads me to the heart of this dissertation, which is the messianic. In other words, the research methodology of this dissertation (literature research methodology) and the

⁹ I will expand on this term in the third section of this dissertation. But for the moment it can simply be described as a pre-understanding that governs the meaning of a text, a presupposition one carries to the text which becomes the standard to which all further interpretations are subjected.

reading of the scriptures (deconstructive reading) is a kind of messianic approach, one that is a non-contact method. The very notion of non-contact simply means that we are ever pressing towards the subject matter but never arriving at pinning it down as to what it should or should not be. Therefore, it is necessary for me to present a very careful and thorough reading of very specific texts in order to avoid logocentrism. There is an inevitable generalizing and summarizing, a centering of the discourse that occurs. I do not think it is wholly possible to avoid this, especially in what I wish to propose. However, I will endeavor to follow “a fine-grained reading” (Caputo, 1997a:83) of certain of Derrida’s and Moltmann’s texts, as well as biblical texts, “slowly, scrupulously, seriously” (Caputo, 1997a:83). In particular, I have followed this pattern for the proposal I am making. I will deliberately do this, so that Adventism can see the alternatives emerging. This does not mean that my interpretation of Christ is any better than other readings.

It is pertinent to note that I am writing from within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, since I am an employee of the SDA Church. SDAs have been aligned with a conservative evangelical Christianity that, despite very specific and distinctive beliefs, they do hold to general Christian notions such as the notion of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. However, one of the principal signifiers that identifies the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the vocal argument of the nature of the humanity of Christ. Part of the reasoning behind this is the very need for Adventism to identify itself with evangelicals. It is this need that gave birth to the Christological controversy in the SDA Church.

The Christological controversy within Adventism merely serves as a case study of the hermeneutical method I am attempting to outline. In this sense, since Adventism merely supplies an example, it is also somewhat arbitrary and could have been substituted for any other dogmatic controversy, biblical or otherwise. This is the methodology I will use to conduct this research.

I will outline SDA history in order to demonstrate the journey of Adventist Christology and further show how any novel approach to Adventist Christology must be within the historical context of Adventist tradition. Furthermore, the conflicts that have frequently accompanied theological reflections on Christology provide insight into what elements of this doctrine are inflexible, as well as the points of which there is theological room to maneuver. I will achieve this by way of studying historical texts within Seventh-day Adventism, particularly *Seventh-day Adventist Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Ad-*

ventist Belief. 1957. Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association. I will look at some other texts such as Knight, GR. 2000. *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs*. Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association; Froom, LE. 1946-1954. *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, 1-4. Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association; *Our Firm Foundation*. 1953. Vols. 1-2. Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association; and Dederen, R., ed. 2000. *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald

In the second half of this study, I will argue for a Christological dimension that rests on the messianic idea. This is an intrinsically inclusive idea that urges believers to be more welcoming to others. This will be done with reference to the deconstructive thoughts of Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Moltmann¹⁰. I will invoke the key elements of deconstruction.¹¹ These include notions of the messianic, community, and the other. I will also go deeper into assumptions within the identity of Adventism—the Fundamental Beliefs. I will, in the final analysis, propose an Adventist Christology that replicates a messianic faith. All this creates what I believe is an effective and inclusive interpretation of the person and work of Christ.

1.8. Concept Clarification

- *Adventism*

Adventism, in this dissertation, should be taken as a descriptor of a school of thought—one which is fundamentally oriented towards “the other.” By this I mean being *open* to the coming of “the other”. This concept is made much clearer by John Webster,

“The denominational label, Seventh-day Adventist, is thus not only a reference to a particular world-wide religious community; it also describes the kind of theology it espouses. Other similar examples would be: The Dutch Reformed Church, the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, or the Greek Orthodox Church.” (Webster, 2008:7)

¹⁰ Moltmann’s main text on this idea of a messianic Christology is Moltmann, J. 1993. *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

¹¹ I use Derrida’s term “deconstruction” without introduction at this point. However, Derrida (cited by Caputo, 1997b:16) defines what deconstruction is: “Deconstruction is not an enclosure in nothingness, but an openness towards the other.”

- *Messianic Hope*

The “Messianic Hope” is seen in the fact that God, from the Old Testament up to the Christian era, makes promises. The foundation of this hope is the promise of Christ’s coming. Christ is, here and now, as the One who is coming. This notion of the messianic hope is a characterization in both belief and practice chiefly by an *open* (all inclusive) expectation of the consummation of the coming of Christ. To expect the coming of Christ is to be *open*—open to the future, open to each other, open to the other. There can be no place for Christ in an exclusive system. Therefore, the messianic hope is having an *open* expectation.

Messianism (explained below) strives to determine the nature of Messiah—who s/he/it is, when s/he/it is coming, who will benefit and who will be condemned by this coming. Seventh-day Adventism¹², in its pre-denominational years (1844-1860), experienced a great disappointment when it determined when Messiah (Christ) was to come (22 October 1844). Whatever the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism can be, the figure or name of Jesus Christ will not be effaced, nor is it my intention to remotely suggest this. The point is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church will always be a form of messianism, and to dig deeper into the nature of Messiah, through the *prelapsarian* and *postlapsarian* nature of Christ is to make concrete this messianism, and to beacon yet a possible disappointment of great magnitude. However, I hope to demonstrate that a certain messianic dimension, this messianic hope, can form the essence of a Seventh-day Adventist messianism. This dimension will constantly strain to free the church from the exclusive principles and destructive tendencies to which an unbridled messianism is prone.

- *Messianism*

The idea of the messianic not only thrives in major religions—Christianity, Judaism and Islam—but also, as Derrida notes, in “philosophical messianisms,” the teleologies and eschatologies of Hegel, Marx, Heidegger” (cited in Caputo, 1997a:160) and more. Derrida (2002:56) identifies the messianic as “messianicity without messianism.” This is defined, in this disserta-

¹² It is recognized that in 1844 the SDA Church was not yet organized. However, the SDA Church was formed out of the movement known today as the Millerites. For a brief description on the Millerites and the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church see, Crocombe, J. 2011. “A Feast of Reason”. Roots of William Miller’s Biblical Interpretation and its influence on the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Brisbane: The University of Queensland. (Thesis-PhD)

tion, as “the opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration” (Derrida, 2002:56). The messianic is further described in opposition to messianism by Derrida when he says,

“This messianic dimension does not depend upon any messianism, it follows no determined revelation, it belongs properly to no Abrahamic religion...” (Derrida, 2002:56).

Messianism is, therefore, associated with a *determined* expectation. The moment that one can identify what is to come, who is to come, when they are to come, or how they are to come, one is engaging in messianism.

- *Christology*

Christology, in this dissertation, refers to the study relating to the person, nature, and role of Christ. I will not further elaborate into the different kinds of Christologies, as mentioned by Eric Webster.¹³

- *The Other*

I will clarify the meaning of this phrase, the other, by providing its significance, first in Derrida’s thought, and consequently in the deconstructive thought of this dissertation. Johnathan Roffe notes this significance:

“Derrida tries to pursue the eradication of alterity through the history of philosophy in all of its multifarious manifestations. The relation to the other, that is, concerns the other person but also the other meanings of a text, the other ways of seeing things, the other races, other genders, another time (such as the future, the messianic), other languages, other traditions, and so forth... Derrida’s work, considered in this way, has, since the very earliest texts, been travelling down the side-streets of Western thought, well off the monotonous motorway, drawn on by the ethical demand to open itself up to the other, to all the others.” (Roffe, 2004:44)

- *Fundamental Adventist Beliefs*

¹³ Eric Webster suggests that there are several categories of Christology, namely, Ontological Christology, Speculative Christology, the ‘History of Jesus’ Christology, Existential Christology, and Functional Christology. My interest is not in the categorization of Christologies; however, for further definition refer to Webster, Eric. 1992. *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 6-7.

The Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are twenty-eight in number. These beliefs, in the Church Manual, are preceded by a preamble, which is instructive:

“Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teachings of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truths or find better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.” (Church Manual, 2016:162)

Therefore, Fundamental Beliefs refers to the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church’s synopsis of faith and identity.

1.9. Ethical Considerations

This dissertation will be a study of relevant literature. Although literature will be used, the results could be controversial. Accordingly, the risk level is low. There will be no human subjects involved or interviews conducted. In dealing with resources I will be fair, honest, represent views accurately, and give credit where credit is due. This work has not been previously accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree. This work is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by using the appropriate reference system.

1.10. Classification of Chapters

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Proposed Title and Key Words

1.2. Abstract

1.3. Background and Rationale

1.4. Problem Statement

1.5. Aim and Objectives of the Study

1.6. Central Theoretical Argument

1.7. Research Methodology and Design

1.8. Concept Clarifications

1.9. Ethical Considerations

1.10. Provisional Classification of Chapters

1.11. Reference

1.12. Schematic Presentation

CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORY OF ADVENTIST CHRISTOLOGY WITHIN THE PAST 100 YEARS

2.1. Introduction

2.2. Brief Historical Background

2.3. Evangelical Conferences

2.4. Questions on Doctrine

2.5. The Andreasen Controversy

2.6. Recent Adventist Approaches To Christology

2.7. Summary

CHAPTER 3: ADVENTISMS: TWO THEOLOGICAL STRANDS AND THEIR HERMENEUTICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

3.1. Introduction

3.2. Adventism and Postmodernity

3.3. Hermeneutical Presuppositions

3.4. Deconstruction

3.5. Deconstruction of Adventist lapsarian ontology

3.6. Timeless Ontology

3.7. Temporal Ontology

3.8. Summary

CHAPTER 4: APPROPRIATION AND APPLICATION OF THE MESSIANIC IN ADVENTIST CHRISTOLOGY

4.1. Why The Messianic?

4.1.1. The Messianicity And Messianism

4.1.2. The Messianic Is An Open Expectation

4.2. The Other

4.2.1. The Messianic Hope

4.2.2. The Other

4.3. Community

4.4. Fundamentals

4.4.1. Adventist Fundamental Beliefs

4.4.2. Christological Fundamental Beliefs

4.5. The Messianic Advent Movement

4.5.1. Messianic Adventism

4.5.2. Messianic Remnant

4.5.3. Messianic Soteriology

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Research Question	Aim and Objectives	Research Method
What is the history of Adventist Christology and where is the Christological controversy situated in this history?	To study and present the history of Adventist Christology in the past 100 years and place the argument within a context.	In order to study and present the history of Adventist Christology and place the argument within a context, a literature analysis will be conducted to outline Christological viewpoints in Adventism.
What are the effects of this Adventist Christological Controversy?	To examine and identify the effects of this Christological controversy on the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its identity.	In order to examine and identify the effects of this Christological controversy, a look at literature on Adventist Christology will be done and Adventist Christology will be categorized according to the dominant theological strands in Adventist Christology.
What hermeneutics is being employed on either side of the argument and what Christological conclusions has it created?	To examine current Adventist hermeneutics and Christological positions.	In order to examine current Adventist hermeneutics and Christological positions, I will do so by picking key figures from each side and unpacking their presuppositions.

What is the messianic concept by Derrida and Moltmann and how does it fit in the current debate?	To study and appropriate the concept of the messianic, according to Derrida and Moltmann.	In order to study and appropriate the concept of the messianic, according to Derrida and Moltmann, it is necessary to identify, analyze and sort out relevant literature.
How does Adventist Christology in messianic dimensions look like and what are its implications on the identity of Seventh-day Adventism?	To apply and present an Adventist Christology in messianic dimensions and outline the implications of such a Christology on the identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.	In order to apply and present an Adventist Christology in messianic dimension, and outline its implications on SDA identity, I will do this by invoking deconstructive thoughts to Adventist Christology, demonstrate an inclusive and unifying approach to Adventist Christology, present an Adventist Christology in messianic dimensions and outline the implications of such a Christology on SDA identity.

1.11. Schematic Presentation

CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORY OF ADVENTIST CHRISTOLOGY IN THE PAST 100 YEARS

2.1. Introduction

Since the thrust of this research relates to Adventist Christology, a look at the history of Adventist Christology is essential. The knowledge of the historical background is important to understanding the current Christological controversy. Thus, in this chapter, I will look at a brief historical background of Seventh-day Adventism in relation to its Christological doctrine.

2.2. Brief Historical Background

The SDA Church has its roots in the nineteenth century Protestant Reformation. It is a fast growing and widespread church worldwide, with an estimated number of twenty-million baptized members, which means a doubling of membership since the 1990s (Bull and Lockhart, 2007:155). This growth is due to its missionary success in developing countries. Its growth is owed to a combination of strong missionary efforts, doctrinal clarity and supply of educational and health institutions that are especially attractive to people in poorer regions, as they help to improve everyday life and educational opportunities. Its doctrine, although clearly rooted in the tradition of Protestantism, features a variety of unique teachings, such as the observance of the Sabbath, the heavenly sanctuary, the investigative judgment, and the prophetic role of Ellen G. White (1927-1915).

During this period of religious attentiveness, William Miller, a Baptist farmer from Low Hampton, New York, calculated Christ's second coming to occur during the year 1843/44 by interpreting passages from the biblical book of Daniel. His findings provoked a massive response across the various Protestant denominations. Inspired by his public lectures and his tract evidence from Scripture and history of the coming of Christ, 'Millerism' rapidly evolved from an "obscure, regional movement into a national campaign" (Rogers, 1991:110). With the year 1844 approaching, tensions between Millerites and non-Millerites among the churches and denominations grew stronger. By the end of April 1844, the obvious failure of Miller's prophetic interpretations seemed to be the end of the movement. Then, fellow preacher Samuel Snow believed to have found a hint (interpretation) for Christ's delay in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins and the "delayed" bridegroom in Matthew 25. At a camp meeting in Exeter, New Hampshire, Snow fi-

nally set the date of the coming of Christ to be October 22, 1844. When the day arrived, nothing visible happened. The failure of Christ's coming was dubbed "The Great Disappointment."

A vast number of former Millerites now returned to their parishes, and others ceased to believe at all. Some smaller groups, however, opted for a theological explanation of the disappointment and thus provided the basis for the development of the SDA. Like every other millernarian movement, this movement met with obvious failure, and yet out of this failure eventually emerged another of the American sectarian success stories. These held that the date—22 October 1844—was a correct calculation and only the event—Christ's coming—was mistaken.

This second interpretation—a heavenly prelude to the coming of Christ—proved to be a convincing explanation for the Great Disappointment. In the meantime, the post-Millerite movement gained impulsion. The movement, named Seventh-day Adventists after their distinguishing beliefs, began a period of formal organization in 1860. By 1863, various conferences that were organized had been organized into a General Conference¹⁴. With this establishment, Seventh-day Adventism became an official organization that quickly made effort for worldwide mission.

During this period, the SDA also saw a theological paradigm shift by adopting the Christian belief in the Trinity that was initially rejected as unbiblical. In the aftermath of its inception, people from different religious backgrounds came together and began to proclaim the coming of Christ. The Christological position of most of these proponents of the message was Trinitarian (Froom, 1971:146-147), but, in some cases, the position advocated on Christ was unorthodox (Froom, 1971:148-182). The book, *Movement of Destiny* by L.E Froom in 1971, could well represent a shift in what might be termed neo-Adventist thought. Attempting to give a history of the development of certain aspects of beliefs in Adventism, Froom came out strongly in support of the full atonement at the cross and the sinlessness of Jesus Christ (Froom, 1971:493-517). This represents Froom's earnest efforts to steer Adventism into an acceptable Christian stream and to the fulfillment of its destiny.

¹⁴ The SDA form of governance is representative and at its head is a body known as the General Conference (GC). The GC holds elections every quinquennial and it is at this session that revisions of the belief statements of the church are also reviewed.

Closely related with the Christological controversy has been the so-called 'righteousness by faith' dialogue. The roots of this discussion lie deeply embedded in the Minneapolis Conference. Leading out on the one side of the issue has been Desmond Ford who maintains that 'righteousness by faith' is a New Testament Pauline expression representing the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the sinner in justification alone.¹⁵

On the other side of the spectrum has been Herbert Douglass who maintains that 'righteousness by faith' is wider than justification and includes sanctification and in fact represents the possibility of saints living righteously as Christ did by faith in God.¹⁶ Many have participated in these discussions and conferences have been held seeking greater clarity. The Palmdale Conference of 1976 was an important event in this dialogue.¹⁷ It is clear that Christology (frankly an interpretation of Christ) is also deeply involved in this whole discussion. At one stage it was felt that the agitation on these issues was so divisive that a suspension on further discussion was called.¹⁸ Further conferences were held by church committees and, in 1979, the statement "Dynamics of Salvation" appeared (Adventist Review, 1980:3-8). To many this acted as a mediating position in the field of soteriology. In this statement, the deeper involvements of the Christological conflict were not dealt with in detail.¹⁹ The discussions within Adventism have been observed by those outside the ranks as evidenced by Geoffrey Paxton's book, *The Shaking of Adventist* (Paxton, 1977). While this work concentrates on the soteriological claim of Adventism, the question of Christology is closely linked.

¹⁵ Ford, D. "The Scope and Limits of the Pauline Expression 'Righteousness by Faith'", (In *Documents from the Palmdale Conference on Righteousness by Faith*), pg. 1-13.

¹⁶ Douglass said, "That is exactly what the process, righteousness by faith, is all about - to produce...someone just like Jesus," (Douglass, 1975 :29)

¹⁷ At the Palmdale Conference a group of Adventist theologians, editors and administrators from Australia and the USA met to discuss the issues of the 'righteousness by faith' controversy. A statement was issued after the Conference. See Ford, D. 1976. "Christ our Righteousness," (In *Review and Herald*), pp.4-7.

¹⁸ Neal C. Wilson, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at the time, appealed in a letter for a halt to the debate on the subject. He announced that the church intended to study the issues in a Conference and appealed for patience and prayerful study.

¹⁹ In "Background on the statement 'The Dynamics of Salvation'" I quote: "Certain aspects of this inexhaustible theme, such as the nature of Christ, perfection, and original sin, are not dealt with in detail in this paper" (p.3).

In order to complete the picture of this brief historical development of Adventist Christology, I wish to quote the relevant Christological statements in the Fundamental Beliefs voted at the 53rd General Conference Session of Seventh-day Adventists held at Dallas, USA, April 17-26, 1980. These statements are among the twenty-eight fundamental beliefs (Church Manual, 1976:32-39).

The Trinity. There is one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Deut. 6:4; 29:29; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 14:6,7).

The Son. God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles, He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things. (John 1:1-3, 14; 5:22; Col. 1: 15-19; John 10:30; 14:9; Rom. 5:18; 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Luke 1:35; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Cor. 15:3,4; Heb. 2:9-18; 4:15; 7:25; 8:1,2; 9:28; John 14:1-3; 1 Peter 2:21; Rev. 22:20).

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

Seventh-day Adventists and other Protestants have traditionally not been comfortable with one another. Each side has harbored a degree of suspicion and hostility toward the other. At various times, Protestants have branded Adventism as cultic and heretical. Adventists, on the

other hand, were deeply drawn to the fundamentalist struggle against modernism and were eager to show them that they were of kindred spirit. Though rhetorical punches and counter-punches continued to fly between Adventists and Protestants, there was a clear sense that the wide chasm between the two sides was narrowing. This distrust was overturned by some evangelicals, notably Donald Grey Barnhouse and Walter Martin, when they approached the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference with inquiries that would bring permanent changes to the nature of the relationship between Adventists and Protestants, through the evangelical conferences.

2.3. Evangelical Conferences

In 1955-1956 the Seventh-day Adventist Church engaged in a series of dialogues with evangelicals to examine commonalities and differences in beliefs between the two sides. Initiated by Walter Martin, a young evangelical scholar and sponsored by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and *Eternity* magazine, the Seventh-day Adventist Evangelical Conferences of 1955-1956 became a historic turning point in the relations between the two sides. The conferences culminated in the production of a significant capstone document that quickly became a landmark document on Adventism.

By early 1955, Martin had nearly completed the manuscript for his book on cults to be entitled *The Rise of the Cults* (1955). In that work, Martin had categorized Seventh-day Adventism as one of the “The Big Five [cults], namely, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Science, Mormonism, Unity, and Seventh-day Adventism” (Martin, 1955:12). He had included a chapter on Adventism based on his reading and analyses of Adventist literature as well as part publications on Adventism by evangelical and ex-Adventist writers. But he felt the need to contact Adventist leaders directly, verify the conclusions that he had arrived at in that chapter and gather further material for his future book on Adventism.

After a series of telephone calls and letters, the first meeting was set. Jerry Moon (1971:478) states that Martin opened the meeting by discharging a “rapid-fire complex of questions” that contributed to a tense atmosphere in these conferences. These questions centered on the “problematic” Adventist teachings on the nature of Christ, the atonement, the relationship between salvation and Gods law, the Sabbath and, states Barnhouse, several other topics (Barnhouse, 1956:6). In the course of his extensive reading of the Adventist literature, Martin had discovered ample references that denied the deity of Christ. He could not see how Adventism could

be recognized as a Christian church if the anti-Trinitarian view had a legitimate place in it. According to Moon (1971:478), Adventist leaders opened their responses with a presentation of “a succinct statement on [the] fundamentally Protestant position on the Bible and Bible alone as the rule of Adventist faith and practice.” When they returned to the General Conference building the following day, Martin made a dramatic announcement that shocked the Adventist conferees and permanently changed the nature of the relationship between Adventists and evangelicals. Martin concluded that he had been wrong in his past assessment of Seventh-day Adventism. He stood in stark contrast to not only his own earlier writings, but also to the entire evangelical world. History would show that the product of these evangelical conferences was the publication of a divisive book titled *Questions on Doctrine*.

2.4. Questions on Doctrine

Questions on Doctrine, a product of the Seventh-day Adventist Evangelical Conferences, was finally released by the General Conference leadership in 1957. The book, which opened with an introduction and the Adventist Fundamental Beliefs statement of 1931, contained Adventist responses to forty-eight questions posed by Martin over the course of the conferences. The forty-eight chapters were divided by topics into ten different sections, with the appendices and indices forming the eleventh section. One of the major sections was the section “Questions about Christ”. This section makes an unequivocal affirmation of Christ’s membership in the Trinity, seeking to debunk once and for all the evangelical charge that Adventist Christology is anti-Trinitarian and deal with issues relating to the nature of Christ.

This in turn became beneficial for the Adventist church. The book endeavored to outline exactly why Adventists, despite certain peculiar beliefs, should nevertheless be regarded as Christians. Keld Reynolds (1986: 187) cites Martin’s book entitled *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism* where Martin (1960: 236-237) writes:

In the providence of God and His own good time, we trust that evangelical Christianity as a whole will extend the hand of fellowship to a group of sincere, earnest fellow Christians, distinguished though they are by some peculiar views, but members of the Body of Christ and possessors of the faith that saves.

Questions on Doctrine was—and remains—a historical document of extraordinary significance in several ways. First, along with Barnhouse and Martin’s articles in *Eternity*, *Questions*

on Doctrine marked a major milestone in Adventist-evangelical relations. Speaking directly to evangelicals in an intentionally non-parochial language, *Questions on Doctrine* represented the friendliest overture to date attempted by Adventism. Second, the book made a unique contribution not only to the theological dialogue between evangelicals and Adventists, but also among Adventists themselves. Third, *Questions on Doctrine* is significant for the attention it has received since its publication. Before its release, Anderson (1957: 24) wrote in *Ministry* that no other book produced by Adventists has had “more careful scrutiny.” As it would turn out, even more scrutiny from all sides would follow its publication. George R. Knight (2007:1) describes this book as the “most divisive book in Seventh-day Adventist history.”

After *Questions on Doctrine* was published in 1957, one of the first reactions issued by evangelicals came from Donald Barnhouse. He was pleased with *Questions on Doctrine*, since he opened his article issued in November 1957 in *Eternity* with a ringing endorsement of the book. He wrote: “The long-awaited *Answers to Questions on Doctrine* is the vindication of the position we have taken in recent months and will soon be recognized as such by all fair-minded Christians” (Barnhouse, 1957:22). Barnhouse acknowledged that many “will not want to believe” the book to be representative of Adventism, and he stated that he, himself, continued to “heartily disagree with the Adventists on many of the doctrines.” But he found particular satisfaction in the book’s position on two doctrines. First, he praised the book’s unequivocal commitment to the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. Second, he lauded the book’s recognition of the sinless human nature of Christ, which he found to result in the nullification of “the most serious charge ever made against the Adventists” (Barnhouse, 1957:47)—namely, that they believed in the fallen, corrupted nature of Christ.

However, Barnhouse was less than correct about his assessment of the role that *Questions on Doctrine* played within Adventism. Though he insinuated that the book would have the effect of eliminating variant views, Adventists would experience mixed results on this front, though Barnhouse himself, who died in November 1960, would not live to see. As history unfolded, *Questions on Doctrine* did have mainstreaming effects on certain areas of Adventist belief, but it proved also to be a source of fragmentation in other areas. This was particularly true regarding the human nature of Christ as described in *Questions on Doctrine*—a key point that Barnhouse saw as providing grounds for vindication on his new view of Adventism. Within the Adventist movement, that teaching would become the most controversial and divisive portion of the book.

On this issue, instead of looping off the writings of Adventists who disagreed with it, *Questions on Doctrine* spawned a plethora of publications into the twenty-first century whose lineage can be traced back to 1957. Most administrators, pastors, and academics gave glowingly positive assessment of the book and presented it as a major accomplishment.

On the other hand, some Adventist lay people, rallying around a retired theology professor, M.L. Andreasen, lodged vehement protests against *Questions on Doctrine*, decrying both the process through which the book was published, but mainly the theological content presented on the nature of Christ.

2.5. The Andreasen Controversy

The attempt to align Adventism with Christianity as a whole, in the manner that *Questions on Doctrine* has achieved, has not been uniformly accepted within the church and at the heart of the debate is Adventist Christology. One of the key figures against, not only the book *Questions on Doctrine* but also, the position (prelapsarian) held by the authors of that book regarding the nature of Christ has been M.L. Andreasen.

In 1956 Milian Lauritz Andreasen was six years into retirement from a half century of denominational work as a local conference president, professor and president at the church's colleges and seminary, and finally a field secretary of the General Conference.²⁰ What promoted him to voice his concerns with *Question on Doctrine* was the theological position the book would take upon publication with regard to the nature of Christ. Andreasen also lambasted Froom for an article he wrote that came out in the *Ministry* magazine in February. This article convinced Andreasen that something was theologically amiss at the General Conference head-

²⁰ For a more complete biographical sketch of Andreasen, see *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., "Andreasen, Milian Lauritz (1876-1962)." Some autobiographical accounts of selected portions of his life can be found in Document File 961, EGWE, and the M.L. Andreasen Collection (C115), AU. For a book-length biography, see Steinweg, *Without Fear or Favour*. Selected aspects of his theology have been explored in Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary Doctrine: Three Approaches in the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 165-235; Dwight Eric Haynes, "The Final Generation: A Descriptive Account of the Development of a Significant Aspect of M.L. Andreasen's Eschatology as Related to His Treatment of the Sanctuary Doctrine between 1924-1937" (MA thesis, Andrews University, 1989); Jerry Moon, "M.L. Andreasen, L.E. Froom, and the Controversy over *Questions on Doctrine*" (term paper, Andrews University, 1988); Quintin Betteridge, "A Critical Appraisal of the Hermeneutical Horizon of M.L. Andreasen's Postlapsarian Christology" (MA thesis, Newbold College, 2018).

quarters. He feared that the book would not only fail to represent the traditional Adventist beliefs but, more importantly, signal “a radical departure from the faith” which Adventists had held for over a century.

To ensure that his protest was registered with the highest echelon of denominational leadership, Andreassen penned a letter dated February 27 to Figuhr and attached a copy of his “Atonement” manuscript, with Froom and Anderson receiving carbon copies. In that letter, Andreassen expressed grave concerns for the forthcoming book. “I fear greatly for the contents of the book that is being published setting forth [Adventist] belief,”²¹ (Figuhr, 1957). Andreassen’s protest was indeed noted by Froom in his 27th March response to the retired theologian. After expressing “a distinct shock” at Andreassen’s disregard for “common courtesy and Christian ethics” in sending a letter of complaint for Figuhr and Anderson without addressing him directly, Froom charged that Andreassen had “totally misread and misunderstood” his article. He then ended his letter on a characteristically Froomsque rebuttal by appealing to the number of his supporters: “Men, just as experienced and well trained, and as scholarly as you, do not draw your conclusions...Scores of our scholarly men have told me of their gratitude for bringing these statements together in a systematic form...I fear that I could not discard their views in lieu of yours” (Froom, 1957).

Andreassen’s response to Froom’s caustic letter came almost immediately in an equally acerbic tone. He insisted that he had neither misread nor misunderstood Froom’s article. Decrying Froom’s assumption of “the role of speaking pontifically for the denomination,” he queried, with a burst of sarcasm: “May we expect other pronouncements from you in regard to other matters, or will we be permitted to settle some questions without your aid. May I ask who gave you authority to pronounce on doctrine?” (Andreassen, 1957). If the forthcoming book is to contain what Froom claimed to be the Adventist view on Christology, Andreasean threatened, “I shall feel compelled to protest with pen and voice to the limit of my ability” (Andreassen, 1957). And so began what would be five years of controversy between Andreassen and the church leadership over theological contents of the book *Questions on Doctrine*.

²¹ The letter from Andreassen dated 27th February is made reference in the letter of the 7th of March by Figuhr. Emphasis in the original.

Having now committed himself to a protest campaign “with pen and voice to the limit of [his] ability,” Andreasen began issuing a series of manuscripts entitled “The Atonement,” following the title of his manuscript of February 15 and numbered retroactively to that document. Between 1957 and 1958, he fired off nine papers, striking each time at the section on the atonement in *Questions on Doctrine*. He insisted that that section was “utterly unacceptable” and that it “be recalled.”

Buoyed by the fact that there were others who not only shared his view of *Questions on Doctrine*, but also were vocalizing their criticisms, Andreasen proceeded to commence a new round of open letters with the first installment of *Letters to the Churches* in February 1959. Along with the nine-part series entitled “The Atonement,” the six-part *Letters to the Churches* became Andreasen’s lasting theological legacy from this era. The six documents were released at various times throughout 1959 containing not only Andreasen’s criticisms of *Questions on Doctrine*, but also accounts of his struggle against the book and the church during this time period. *Letters to the Churches* contained Andreasen’s treatises on Christ’s human nature and narratives of his recent challenges against the General Conference in which he raised questions about doctrinal integrity and moral authority of leaders.

Andreasen’s key concern regarding the human nature of Christ was that the new book presented Christ’s incarnation as a man who was radically different from all other human beings. *Questions on Doctrine*, in its section on the human nature of Christ, taught: “Whatever [nature] Jesus took was not His intrinsically or innately. His taking the burden of our inherited weakness and failings...did not in the slightest degree taint His human nature.” It stated further that, “all that Jesus took, all that He bore, whether the burden and penalty of our iniquities, or the diseases and frailties of our human nature—all was taken and borne *vicariously*.” Therefore, when Ellen White “refers occasionally to sinful, fallen, and deteriorated human nature,” the book declared, “it is in this sense that all should understand” her statements. Elsewhere in the book Christ was described as “born in the flesh,” “exempt from the inherited passions and pollutions that corrupt the natural descendent of Adam.” Finally, in an appendix, the book provided a collection of quotations on Christ’s human nature from White’s writings. These quotations were grouped under such sub-headings as “Took Sinless Human Nature” and “Perfect Sinlessness of Christ’s Human Nature” (*Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, 1957:60-62,383,647-660). Andreasen asserted that the teachings of *Questions on Doctrine* represented a major departure from

traditional Adventist Christology. If Christ lived a sinless life by virtue of being exempt from those passions, Andreasen argued, human beings are left without hope of overcoming sin, and Satan's charge that God's law cannot be kept by his creatures becomes true. Therefore, the idea "that God exempted Christ from the passions that corrupt men" was, for Andreasen, "the acme of all heresy" brought in through the Adventist-evangelical conferences (Andreasen, 1959:8-14, 94).

The publication of the *Letters to the Churches* provoked many in the church to respond in defense of *Questions on Doctrine* and the General Conference. The General Conference administration became, once again, disturbed by Andreasen's resumption of activity in February 1959 and felt compelled to dispatch a statement to union and local conference presidents in North America. In reference to Andreasen and *Letters to the Churches*, Figuhr wrote, "his evident purpose is to stir up trouble." At the same time, efforts were continually being made, on a personal level, to dissuade Andreasen from prolonging the controversy. On one occasion, Bietz asked Figuhr if Andreasen could be encouraged to "prepare a manuscript on the Atonement [*sic*] without any reference to any controversy" in order to "keep him busy" and "keep his mind off things," such as continuing to challenge church leaders.

While the prevailing opinion among Adventist leaders seems to have been positive toward *Questions on Doctrine* and unsympathetic toward Andreasen's comments, the developing crisis revealed that there were several who shared some of Andreasen's views. By June 1960, all hope of reconciliation was extinguished and the dialogues came to an insurmountable impasse. Andreasen saw the leaders of the church united in compromise and apostasy—unwilling to listen to his voice of reason and truth. The leaders felt that all public and private overtures towards Andreasen had been exhausted and that the church was in need of a strong theological response to his charges. It fell upon A.V Olson to provide such a response—a comprehensive theological critique of Andreasen's writings. His defense of the church leaders' position was titled "An Examination of M.L Andreasen's Objection to the Book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*" (Olson, 1960).

In his rejoinder to Olson entitled "A Most Dangerous Heresy," Andreasen reiterated his grievance against *Questions on Doctrine*. Upon completion of this paper, Andreasen sent it to Figuhr, along with a letter that would lead to the removal of his ministerial credentials. In that

letter, Andreasen demanded “an open, public trial, before an impartial jury and a competent judge” in which he would proceed to “place an impeachment against [Figuhr] and others.”

When the General Conference officers met on April 5, 1961, they voted to “recommend to the General Conference Committee that the credentials of M.L. Andreasen be suspended” (Minutes of the General Conference Officers Meeting, 1961).²² The following day, Andreasen’s ministerial credentials were suspended, which meant that he could no longer practice as a minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When Andreasen continued with his defiance, the General Conference Committee voted to further censure him by removing his name from the list of retired workers in the 1962 *Yearbook*. According to the *SDA Encyclopedia*, by the 19th February, 1962, Andreasen died at the age of 85. According to the General Conference Committee minutes, on the 1st of March, 1962, the General Conference Committee voted to revoke its former action to suspend Andreasen’s credentials.²³ It also voted to put his name back on the list of the retired workers in the *Yearbook*. Thus ended Andreasen’s five-year controversy and struggle against *Questions on Doctrine* and the General Conference.

Considering the theological developments in the decades following Andreasen’s death, it became clear that it is because of—not in spite of—the last five years of Andreasen’s life that Adventists have come to be so significantly impacted by his teachings.

2.6. Recent Adventist Approaches to Christology

With the publication of Froom’s *Movement of Destiny* in 1971, the series of reaction by the original participants in the Christological divide came to a close. Evangelicals and Adventists proceeded differently in the years that followed. With each new printing of *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Martin reaffirmed his assessment of Adventism as evangelical, though he remained critical of the heterodox element within Adventism. A majority of evangelical anti-cult writers eventually followed suit and removed Adventism from the list of non-Christian cults.

The two Adventist camps (*prelapsarian* and *postlapsarian*), on the other hand, have not found a resolution to the struggle that began in the 1950s. Part of the problem has been the ambiguous stance taken by the General Conference leadership on *Questions on Doctrine* since the

²² Minutes of the General Conference Officers’ Meeting, 5 April 1961, GCA.

²³ Minutes of the General Conference Officers’ Meeting, 1 March 1962, GCA.

election of Figuhr's successor, Robert Pierson. Since the Review and Herald Publishing Association discontinued the printing of the book in 1975, the General Conference has neither repudiated the book nor defended it. Clearly, the debate over the self-understanding and mission of Adventism continues, and it remains to be seen if and how the two seemingly irreconcilable camps will achieve resolution of the issues and come to theological reconciliation within the household of Adventism.

What the early theologians of these strands did not foresee was the repercussions of this controversy, which had manifested themselves in the 1980s and 1990s, and has ruptured Adventism even further. We have had Geoffrey Paxton write *The Shaking of Adventism* in 1978 and more recently had the former editor of the *Review*, William Johnsson, publishing a book entitled *The Fragmenting of Adventism* in 1995. Not only has the issue been over theological controversy but we are also facing an identity crisis. This crisis is caused by Adventists pulling in fundamentally opposite directions.²⁴

2.7. Summary

It is obvious that the arguments brought forward by different Adventist proponents have not made Adventist Christological controversy easy. For the sake of summary, the main opposing views can be divided into two different camps. The first camp, which is the *prelapsarian* camp, holds the view that Christ had an unfallen nature. The second camp, which is the *postlapsarian* camp, holds the view that Christ had a fallen nature. However, one thing they all agree on is that Christ did have a human nature and a divine nature. Thus, these theological strands place the arguments within a well-defined context.

What brings these distinctive nuances with regard to the human nature of Christ is their hermeneutical presuppositions. This has led to Adventism being theologically fragmented over the issues surrounding the nature of Christ. Thus the Adventist Christological controversy continues till today. It is with this in mind, that I turn to the hermeneutical presuppositions of both these theological strands.

²⁴ The former GC president has made a statement on this crisis: "I sense a growing uncertainty about why we exist as a church and what our mission is," (Folkenberg: 1995:7); and Jack Provonsha who spoke of a "crisis of identity" facing "the First World Seventh-day Adventist Church" (Provonsha, 1993:7).

CHAPTER 3: ADVENTISMS: TWO THEOLOGICAL STRANDS AND THEIR HERMENEUTICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

3.1. Introduction

The understandings of Christology are not uniform within Adventism²⁵, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. There are two Christological positions that have dominated Seventh-day Adventism and continue to divide the church. This divide is better articulated by the labelling that is usually considered. In fact, these labels are due to different Christological positions held. The first is called the *prelapsarian* and the second *postlapsarian*.

The question whether Christ has the nature of Adam before the fall (*prelapsarian*) or after the fall (*postlapsarian*) presupposes that Adam's nature before the fall was different from his nature after the fall. This presupposition is fundamentally improvable, at least *from* a biblical stand point. This is what calls for deconstruction in the arguments made by the two strands. The argument aims to demonstrate that there is either difference or similarity in nature between a human being and Christ. Each side of the spectrum, not only has theological implications, but they each have presuppositions. Proponents of each strand would be more apologetic to their theological system rather than subject them to any form of reinvention. The very idea that these theological convictions could be reinvented may sound sacrilegious to these proponents. That is why I call on the aid of deconstruction. What is needed to properly engage these two strands is a

²⁵ The Biblical Research Institute (BRI) of the General Conference was established in 1975 as a body that would assist the Adventist General Conference on matters relating to doctrine and interpretation of scripture. It endeavors to foster doctrinal and theological unity in the Adventist church, globally. However, even this seemingly unified body of the Adventist Church is divided on the question of the nature of Christ. Two papers dealing with the respective positions are posted at the Biblical Research Institute Website: Kenneth Gage (Pseudonym), "What Human Nature Did Jesus Take? Fallen," Benjamin Rand (Pseudonym), "What Human Nature Did Jesus Take? Unfallen." These position papers crystallize the thoughts on the opposing sides within Adventism. Kwabena Donkor (2005:1-18), an associate Director of the BRI, tries to analyze both these position papers and makes the conclusion that any position on the nature of Christ should be judged on the basis of its soteriological implication. Donkor (2005:6) argues that in the early controversies the test of the orthodoxy of any position, *ontologically*, was decided in relation to its soteriological implications, namely its implications for *salvation*. In other words, even though the controversies appeared to center on the "being" of Jesus, ultimately, the significant issue was how His "being" related to our salvation. Donkor (2005:18) concludes that any position in Adventism should also be tested on the basis of its soteriological implications. Without saying much, Donkor seems to hold soteriology as a stable center to determine which ontological position will hold against the biblical data and in Adventism.

critical hermeneutic that can solicit an ethical position without succumbing to binary exclusion. Deconstruction can achieve this.

In a community that is already fragile, due to the division caused by this Christological controversy, the Seventh-day Adventist church may view deconstruction as synonymous to destruction. However, I employ deconstruction as a way of exposing and evaluating the presuppositions on which these two Christological systems have been built. My focus is in deconstructing a teaching that has been constructed through the years by way of dogmatic or systematic theological thinking. This is not delivered by a thunderbolt approach. My intention is not to destroy Adventism, which is already facing ever-increasing fragmentation, but to gently force it to reform and reconfigure, to open the way for new theological understandings and fresh discovery of truth. I do this by challenging the presuppositions the two positions are built on.

My aim here is very modest. I aim to present a preliminary outline of presuppositions that hold the two strands together and call for deconstruction. To achieve this, I will consider the postmodern context facing Adventism and the notions of hermeneutical presuppositions. Then, I will examine the pivotal axis around which this deconstruction revolves—ontology. This axis includes the deconstruction of the ontology on which these Christological strands were constructed (temporal and timeless ontology) and the hermeneutical alternative that such deconstruction presents to Adventism.

3.2. Adventism and Postmodernity

Theology is always done within a context. It is prudent therefore, that we consider the immediate intellectual context from within which this study takes place and deconstruction as a theological procedure should be understood. Since the last decade of the twentieth century, our times have been consistently characterized as postmodern. Stretching from the late 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, modernism reached its peak in the 1960s, while postmodernism describes the period that followed during the 1960s and 1970s. It is during this time that we had the strengthening of Adventism, the formation of Adventism's fundamental beliefs, evangelical conferences that sparked the Christological controversy in question, the publication of the controversial and divisive *Questions on Doctrine* book, the Andreasen controversy and a clear cut division in the 1980s and 1990s. I refer here to modernity and postmodernity not from an apolo-

getical point of view, but from a methodological perspective as the intellectual environment that facilitates the task of deconstruction.

Among others²⁶, French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard indirectly influenced Adventism's understanding of postmodernity at an intellectual level. Perry Anderson (1998:24) says Lyotard introduced the term postmodernity by observing the following:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards meta-narratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it.

This incredulity altered the way theology and the other arts were done.²⁷ Adventism is not exempted from this alteration of incredulity.²⁸ With the Reformation, people's confidence in privileged people and groups began to break down. Truth was no longer seen to reside primarily in the meta-narratives of the church but rather in logical statements based on careful biblical research. They came to view the Bible as the ultimate source and safeguard for truth. The search for truth involved individual researchers carefully examining the Bible and then sharing what they found. If others were convinced by their arguments, movements would form around various individual's perception of the Bible. The inherent individualism of the process, however, tended to produce fragmentation, each seeking to be faithful to the biblical interpretation of its founder or founders. The Adventist pioneers were robust individualists who searched the Scriptures with tenacity and intensity. They argued their positions with each other, and Adventism might well have fragmented had it not taken a position to have a unifying preamble to its twenty-eight Fundamental Beliefs. This preamble was drafted by Ronald Graybill in 1980 and has since remained the same. George Knight (2000:201) refers to the preamble as "the all-important preamble." Knight (2000:24) further comments:

That remarkable statement captures the essence of what James White and the other Adventist pioneers taught. Creedal inflexibility, as they saw it, was not only a positive evil but also denied the

²⁶ Among postmodernism's progenitors and practitioners, the following are included: Johanne Fichte, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-George Gadamer, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty.

²⁷ Evangelical works illustrious of the impact of postmodernity include publications such as the following: Erickson (2001); Grenz (2000); Grenz & Franke (2001); Griffin (1989); Murphy (1996).

²⁸ Adventist works illustrious of the impact include the following publications: Bruinsma (2014); Goncalves (2005); Humberto & Guy (1985); Pauline (1993).

fact that the church had a living Lord who would continue to lead them into truth...the concept of progressive change stands at the heart of Adventist theology.

This preamble statement in the Church Manual (2015:162) says the following:

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

Beginning with Generation X, an increasingly pervasive worldview distrusts the scientific approach to truth of secular modernity. In postmodernism, truth is not primarily found in science, the Bible, or the church. Instead, truth is found in relationships. In modernism, communities were built on having the right ideas, ideas that the community had tested and found to be true. When people's ideas changed, they left the community. But with post-modernism, relationships and "community" become more important than the ideas that once held communities together. For postmodernists, the concept of truth has become elusive. Rather than "Truth" (with a capital T), the postmodern person prefers to think of "many truths," a "variety of truths," or "truth for me." Post-moderns assert that no one, whether scientist, clergyman, or theologian, has a clear grasp of truth.

Although postmodernism is generally accepting and inclusive, it is quite exclusive in some areas. Paul Lakeland (1997: xii) states that postmodernity "is deeply suspicious of notions of universal reason, and it rejects all metaphysical and religious foundations, all 'grand-theory,' all theoretical systems." It rejects "meta-narrative," big-picture stories (such as the Adventist "Great Controversy theme"²⁹) that try to explain everything in the universe. Post-moderns believe that meta-narratives try to explain too much and therefore promote an exclusivity that leads to violence and fragmentation.

²⁹ The theme of the Great Controversy (a cosmic battle between Christ and Satan on earth) is a worldview within the Adventist community as expressed in Adventism's distinctive theological contribution, its educational and health principles, its sense of social responsibilities, and its missiology. This theme constitutes belief number 8 in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Adventist church. It carries the same title, i.e., "The Great Controversy" (Church Manual, 2015:64).

Postmodernism's fundamental insight is that the confident claims of modernism are nothing more than a historically conditioned constructs, of no more value than the narrow-minded "certainties." If everything is just a construct, it stands to reason that even one's own perception of identity is flawed and /or self-constructed. This identity crisis becomes a serious problem for Adventism. There is a desire for authenticity and a clear identity within Adventism.

Postmodernity affects Adventism in general and the theological community in particular for two primary reasons. First, because Adventists preach the gospel to the world, any change in the world and its culture directly relates to its proclamation. If adjustments are not made, the church may find itself preaching to a nonexistent world. Second, because most theologians construct their views on the hermeneutical presuppositions that have their footing in philosophical ontologies and, besides Scripture, other sources of cultural origination are considered in doing theology.³⁰ For instance, the postmodern reinterpretation of reason affects Adventist theology because during the twentieth century Adventist apologetics was constructed using the old Enlightenment rules of the game, which postmodernity has now changed.

However, the postmodern period is not the first time that philosophy has changed the rules of the game on Adventist theologians. The period of Enlightenment, or the Modern age, produced the first epochal change. Adventism came into existence during the modernist epoch and did not escape its influence. Thus, in different and unique ways, the Enlightenment shaped Adventist fundamentalism, hence the "28 Fundamental Beliefs."

Because, in his *Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard only described the condition of scientific knowledge without considering its epistemological and philosophical grounds, postmodernity appears, to Adventist thinkers, to be one more paradigm shift to which we have to adjust when preaching and defending the gospel.³¹ In this context, Adventist theologians have reacted to postmodernity in diverse ways. Writers attempting to surmount the epistemological challenge

³⁰ For more information see, Canale, FL. 2001. *Back to Revelation-Inspiration: Searching for the Cognitive Foundation of Christian Theology in a Postmodern World*. Lanham: University Press of America, p.p 4-7.

³¹ For more information on this notion by Adventist writers, see Humberto Rasi, Fritz Guy, eds. 1985. *Meeting the Secular Mind: Some Adventist Perspectives*, Selected Working Papers of the Committee on Secularism of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Berrien Springs, MICH.: Andrews University Press; Pauline, John. 1993. *Present Truth in the Real World: The Adventist Struggle to Keep and Share Faith in a Secular Society*. Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

presented by postmodernity accentuate diverse areas of theological sources. They all call for critical evaluation, alteration in the way the gospel is expressed, in order to be understood by post-modern individuals, (Erikson, 2001:307, 308) and the need to accelerate the shift from post-modernity to “post-postmodernity” (Erikson, 2001:325). Among several recommendations about how to accelerate this transition, Erickson suggests that we should become aware of our philosophical presuppositions and define them not from the philosophical supermarket as traditionally done, but from Scripture. Erickson (2001:327) suggests:

We should seek to discern whether the Bible gives us a metaphysics, then check against it our own conceptions, correcting them to fit, then repeating the exegesis, again matching the results to our philosophy and continuing in this process. It is like adjusting an automobile compass. One does not attempt to eliminate the entire directional error in one step. Rather, one successively heads the car in each of the four primary directions, each time removing one half of the remaining compass error.

The hermeneutical, philosophical, and theological issues involved in this simple proposal are significant. Erickson is saying that philosophy should not be taken for granted. Philosophy changes too often to be consistent. However, if we verify philosophical ideas from Scripture, we are *de facto* reinterpreting the hermeneutical foundations on which Adventist and Christian theologies were built. This is not easy for Adventists to do because this process involves the deconstruction of Adventist theology that Erickson probably did not envision when he wrote this paragraph.

The proposal for deconstructing Adventist Christology takes place within a postmodern intellectual context. Thus to understand theological deconstruction as methodology, we need to gain an appreciation of and grapple with deconstruction, and apprehend that the Adventist Christological controversy has been constructed on philosophical hermeneutical grounds.

Adventist theologians stumble upon postmodernity as an intellectual incident that revolves around a reinterpretation of reason. Postmodernity, then, is the “turn” from absolute to hermeneutical reason. David Tracy (1987:9) summarizes the notion of hermeneutical reason by

saying, “to understand at all is to interpret.”³² To interpret means that not only the object of knowledge but also the cognitive subject has input in the very construction of knowledge. If this is true, to know is to construct. Our knowledge, then, is not inertly created by objects, nor is it a projection of our imagination, but results from an interface between subject and object. Resident to hermeneutical reason is the temporal historicity of the categories it uses for constructing meaning. Briefly put, presuppositions necessary to interpret are not innate but acquired from experience. That is why postmodern hermeneutical reason lacks universality, not objectivity. The notion that postmodern philosophy calls for unchecked subjectivism is unwarranted.³³

To understand deconstruction in the postmodern turn, we need to introduce ourselves to the basic structure of interpreting interpretation. Specifically, we need to become aware of the basic presuppositions involved in the act of theological interpretation. This will help us understand the role that presuppositions play on both sides of Adventist Christological controversy.

3.3. Hermeneutical Presuppositions

During the twentieth century, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989) undertook an in-depth study on the act of interpretation. In this section, we need only to underline the basic structural fact that interpretation always flows from presuppositions (the assumption underlying any argument that is not explicitly voiced or understood by the interlocutor). The functions of presuppositions in epistemology were identified by Plato’s notion that to know is to remember. It is the existence and application of presuppositions in the formation of human knowledge that makes knowledge an interpretation, or construction. It is necessary, then, to identify the presuppositions that are

³² The entire quotation is enlightening. “Interpretation seems a minor matter, but it is not. Every time we act, deliberate, judge, understand, or even experience, we are interpreting. To understand at all is to interpret. To act well is to interpret a situation demanding some action and to interpret a correct strategy for that action. To experience in other than a purely passive sense (a sense less than human) is to interpret; and to be ‘experienced’ is to have become a good interpreter. Interpretation is thus a question as unavoidable, finally, as experience, understanding, deliberation, judgment, decision, and action. To be human is to act reflectively, to decide deliberately, to understand intelligently, to experience fully. Whether we know it or not, to be human is to be a skilled interpreter” (Tracy, 1987:9).

³³ This misunderstanding of postmodernity is properly corrected in James Smith. 2000. *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity. Smith (2000:163) notes that to “say that everything is interpretation is not to say that all is arbitrary. Or, in other words, to emphasise that understanding is relative to one’s situationality is not to espouse a *relativism* (which is largely understood as arbitrariness)”

involved when Adventist theologians construct their interpretations in these two theological strands (*prelapsarian* and *postlapsarian*).

Speaking generally, the sum total of the personal experiences we bring to the act of knowledge can be classified as presuppositions. However, as presuppositions, not all experiences have the same role. As a result, in this study, I will concentrate on a specific group of presuppositions that I have called “hermeneutical presuppositions of the two Christological strands in Adventism.” They are the general conditions involved in the interpretation of Christological data and realities. When we look at these conditions from the interpretations they helped to create, they are presuppositions.

Hermeneutical presuppositions originate from temporal-historical experiences, are stored in our minds, and then are used as parameters when interpreting fresh data. If this is so, then proponents of the two Christological strands all generate or construct knowledge from different experiences and, in Adventist Christology, from different hermeneutical presuppositions. In the end, we should not confuse hermeneutical presuppositions with the sum total of their experience. Briefly put, hermeneutical presuppositions are a tightly interrelated collection of overarching notions that, because of their all-inclusiveness, condition the entire range of Adventist thinking. There are different kinds of hermeneutical presuppositions. To borrow Kung’s (1988:134) language, we can speak of macro-, meso-, and micro-hermeneutical presuppositions. From macro-hermeneutical presuppositions, which some theologians draw from philosophy but most assume from tradition, they move to the meso-hermeneutical presuppositions used to conceive, formulate, and understand Adventist Christology, and to the micro-hermeneutical presuppositions used to interpret the text of Scripture. The interpretive force moves from macro- to micro-hermeneutics. Thus, for instance, when interpreting a text from the gospel of John, we apply our macro- and meso-hermeneutical presuppositions, consciously or unconsciously acquired from a specific theological tradition (such as Andreassen’s presupposition of the Great Controversy meta-narrative)³⁴. For this reason, in this dissertation, we will concentrate on the interpretation and role of the macro-hermeneutical principles of theology.

³⁴ See Betteridge, Quintin. 2018. A Critical Appraisal of the Hermeneutical Horizon of M.L Andreassen’s Postlapsarian Christology. Binfield, UK: Newbold College. (Thesis-MA).

Since Adventist Christology deals with Christ and human beings, theologians always assume ideas about these realities. Besides, they also presuppose an interpretation of human reason, including epistemology, hermeneutics, theological, and exegetical methodologies, and the origin of theological knowledge (revelation-inspiration). Thus in every biblical interpretation, theological construction and practical application, we find the presence and operation of a few, but very influential, macro-hermeneutical presuppositions. They are presuppositions about reality, including understanding about ‘Being’ (general ontology), human nature (anthropology), reality as a whole (metaphysics)³⁵, and principles about human knowledge (epistemology), including understanding about hermeneutics, revelation-inspiration, and theological method.

The question that stands out at this stage is, in what way does ontology influence Christological thinking? We need to look at these presuppositions and destabilize what lies at the center in order to finally expose what is at the heart of these Christological presuppositions.

3.4. Deconstruction

It is important to try and define what deconstruction is so that when it is at play in Adventism, it can be recognized. It is a term derived from the work of Jacques Derrida. Derrida (1995:15) said:

I have never claimed to identify myself with what may be designated by this name. It has always seemed strange to me; it has always left me cold. Moreover, I have never stopped having doubts about the very identity of what is referred to by such a nick-name.

Despite the fact that Derrida is reluctant to be identified with such a “nick-name,” he was often asked to define the term.

...deconstruction doesn’t consist in a set of theorems, axioms, tools, rules, techniques, methods... there is no deconstruction, deconstruction has no specific object... (Derrida, 1996: 218)

³⁵ Throughout the history of Western philosophy, ontology and metaphysics have been used interchangeably. I am using the word “metaphysics” here only to refer to the articulation or understanding of reality as a whole, that is to say, to the relationship between the parts and the whole. On this issue, see Wolfhart Pannenberg. 1998. *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 130-152; and Martin Heidegger. 1959. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press.

...deconstruction is neither an analysis nor a critique...I would say the same about method. Deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one...It must also be made clear that deconstruction is not even an act or an operation... (Derrida, 1991:273)

...deconstruction loses nothing from admitting that it is impossible. (Derrida, 1991:272)

There is no method to deconstruction because texts *literally* deconstruct themselves in their impossible attempt to use language, that is, as a way of pointing at some eternal truth or other. All that the deconstructionist needs to do, then, is write, because in the final analysis, deconstruction is writing. Furthermore, it is writing with no preconceived goal. 'To write' is an intransitive verb, a verb without an object, an end in itself. Deconstruction manifests itself in the process of writing rather than in the product. Derrida (1991:274) said that: "Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject."

If this is indeed the case, then deconstruction is, in another sense, impossible. Firstly, the process of deconstructive writing produces a second text as a sequel to that which it seeks to deconstruct, which is itself *self-deconstructing*. In other words, the more words we use to try and get to the real meaning of what something means, then that very meaning needs to be deconstructed. Secondly, there is no single authoritative and 'correct' deconstructive reading/writing of any particular text. Therefore, each text contains within itself the possibility of a vast number of sequel deconstructive texts, and each of those is likewise open to further deconstruction in an infinite regress. In fact, we do not even need to write in order to fall into the abyss of deconstruction. The very act of *reading* creates a new and different text; that is to say, reading writes in a deconstructive manner.

If deconstruction is not a method, as Derrida pointed out, then why would we take deconstruction as a method of doing this very dissertation? Why is the deconstructive method of doing this dissertation central to its meaning? McQuillan (2000:5) has observed that Derrida's assertion that deconstruction is *not* a method ('*pas de méthode*') can itself be deconstructed: The word *pas* in French means both "not" and "step," so this ambiguous phrase can be translated as either "not a method" or "a methodological step." Thus, deconstruction is a method, an impossible method. In keeping with his insistence that deconstruction cannot be tied down to a single meaning, Derrida reveals that his work consisted precisely in an attempt to formulate such a strategy or

methodological step that he, elsewhere, claims to be impossible. Deconstruction is an impossible method:

I tried to work out...what was in no way meant to be a system but rather a sort of strategic device, opening onto its own abyss, an enclosed, unenclosable, not wholly formalizable ensemble of rules for reading, interpretation and writing. (Derrida, 1983:40)

Deconstruction is not a system, then, but an “ensemble of rules for reading, interpretation and writing.” It is not entirely clear what these rules might be, but Spivak (1976: lxxvii) gives us some clues in her “Translator’s Preface” to *Of Grammatology*:

To locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed. Deconstruction in a nutshell.

The general descriptor of deconstruction is “to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is already inscribed.” The bottom line, the degree zero, of deconstruction, lies in this: Traditions, like Adventism, seek to establish the authorized meaning of the text, the original meaning placed in the text by the author. Deconstruction consists in putting this authority “out of joint” (Derrida, 1995: 25). Deconstruction is the enemy of the authorized/authoritarian text, the text that tries to explain what the real meaning of another text is.

The difficulty for Adventism is that the proponents of both sides of the spectrum in the Adventist Christological controversy have placed certain ontological presuppositions on the nature of Christ at the center or, at least, very close to the center as some form of authoritarian center. Deconstruction, therefore, serves to destabilize such centers. The deconstructive idea of the messianic is destabilizing by its very nature. With this in mind, we need to examine why an inviolable definitive center is problematic, then place the de-centering name and person of Christ (via the messianic dimension) at the center of this Christological controversy.

The notion of de-centering can be problematic to a tradition like Adventism because it is built on certain foundations/fundamental centers. The center is a crucial point of any structure. It is the point where one cannot substitute anything. The center is that which connects and holds the structure in shape and keeps all parts together. The problematic part about such centers is that they limit the movement of the elements in the structure—this movement is what Derrida calls “play.” These centers are significant because not only do they maintain the shape of the frame

but they also contain hidden presuppositions and assumptions of *logos*. These *logos* become vital to traditions like Adventism because they guard the ‘truth’ that the structure generates. The function of the center is to orient, to balance, and to organize the structure, thus making it stable. This organizing principle of the structure is to limit the play inside the form and to close off play so that the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. However, and this is Derrida’s point of view, the center is not the center, for the idea of the centered structure is just that, an idea and a metaphysical one. The function of this imaginary center is to express a desire, a longing and reassuring certitude that even Adventism fall victim to.

Ellen White (1961: 16) said that, “Christ, His character and work, is the centre and circumference of all truth...the chain upon which the jewels of doctrine are linked. In Him is found the complete system of truth.” Adventist Christological controversy is an attempt to lockdown and define Christ to a point where the nature of Christ is stabilized by a *logos* called the “centre.” However, within the postmodern intellectual context, that centering has been called into question. To call a center into question is to open, destabilize and call into question the most central building blocks of Adventist Christology.

At the center of Adventism is the fundamental beliefs. It is impossible to deny the fundamental beliefs of Adventism and remain an Adventist. The Church Manual (2015:62), under the heading “Reasons for Discipline” states that: “Denial of faith in the fundamental of the gospel and in the fundamental beliefs of the Church or teaching doctrine contrary to the same” is one of the reasons one could be disciplined or even disfellowshipped. The result of denying the fundamental beliefs is the removal of an individual from membership in the Adventist church. These fundamental beliefs determine whether one is an Adventist or not. They form the center of what being an Adventist means. However, rigid as these fundamental beliefs are, there is a preamble that is de-centering to these fundamental beliefs. By way of a deconstructive reading/writing, the preamble states that:

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference Session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truths or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word (Church Manual, 2016:162).

Platts (2012:142) gives an analysis of this preamble by pointing out something playfully deconstructive about this preamble. The preamble states that Adventists accept “the Bible as their only creed” which is offset by a notion of the fundamental beliefs. The Bible is here identified as a “creed,” although technically the Bible cannot be a creed, but a text from which a creed can be derived. It is said in this preamble that one can identify a list of beliefs that are *fundamental*, that is, according to Platts, the ground or the center upon which all the other beliefs are to be organized: one might say a *logocentric* declaration, through which the other beliefs are to be understood. However, this is paradoxical. The paradox is in the fact that the “Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session.”

If these beliefs were *fundamental*, argues Platts (2012:143), the very ground, the bedrock upon which the edifice known as Seventh-day Adventism is built, how can they be subjected to a revision? The very idea of a *revision* of fundamental beliefs is somewhat a contradiction in terms. The basic deconstructive inference is that what was fundamental is no longer fundamental, which means that what was fundamental actually was never fundamental at all. Therefore, this preamble de-centers the fundamental beliefs themselves. However, if Christ is to be the center and circumference of all truth, this then means that Christ is both the *center* and the *structure* of Adventism. Christ, Himself, is the center and de-center of Adventist doctrines. To have Christ at the center is to have a destabilizing name/person at the heart of the controversy. Christ is a destabilizing center because, by His nature, He is inclusive and open to the other and identifies Himself as ‘the other’. The Adventist attempt to stabilize the nature of Christ is a pointless idea because it is impossible to stabilize Christ. Thus to say that, “Christ is the centre and circumference of all truth,” as Ellen White said, is to say that ‘the other’ is central and peripheral to all truth. ‘The other’ must be central and in the circumference of Adventist doctrine.

This then calls for a deconstruction of Adventist lapsarian ontology. Having exposed these lapsarian ontologies, it is then possible to see Christ (the messianic) at the center of this controversy, thus opening up the conversation to the other interpretation of Christ and another possibility of looking at Adventism.

3.5. Deconstruction of Adventist *Lapsarian* Ontology

This is a pivotal point in our presentation. Unfortunately, next to the grounding macro-hermeneutical roles that ontology has in Adventist Christology, we find Adventist “forgetful-

ness”³⁶ about it. The constructors of Adventist Christology did not speak about ‘ontology’ or ‘ontological’ issues. The operative notion is that if Luther and Calvin were able to do theology by going directly to Scripture and tradition without depending on ontological insights, contemporary Adventist theologians should be able to do the same. Secondly, Adventism came into existence in modern times when a new emphasis on epistemology pushed ontology aside. The focus turned away from the study of ‘Being’ (ontology) to the study of the cognitive foundations on which theology was built (epistemology).

However, while the debate was taking place on the English-speaking side of the theological world, continental philosophy approached the same epistemological-hermeneutical divide in close association with groundbreaking progress in ontological reflection. After all, reason’s structure is unavoidably linked to our understanding of reality. Theological primary concentration on epistemological issues has almost concealed, from Adventist theologians, the paradigmatic ontological change that accompanies the postmodern turn to hermeneutical reason.

It is prudent at this stage to point out that the Councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Chalcedon (AD 451) had given considerable discussion to the Christological issues regarding the Divinity of Christ, His humanity and how the two natures are combined in one person. This Christology was built upon Greek ontological concepts like *homoousios* (same in being), *hypostasis* (person), and *kenosis* (empty oneself). Ellen White (1904)³⁷, considered one of the founders of Adventism, confirms the conclusions reached by both Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon that Christ had two natures, both fully human and fully divine, in one person. She nevertheless, ignores the ontological presuppositions of those church councils. In his book *The Nature of Christ*, Roy Adams (1994), an Adventist theologian praised for being the first to publish a book on the *prelapsarian* nature of Christ, is very clear about Christ having a sinless (*prelapsarian*) nature, yet no consideration was given to analyzing the relationship between ontology and Christology, although it was assumed. Robert J. Wieland (1987:3), an ordained Adventist pastor, in the pref-

³⁶Heidegger characterized traditional ontology not as being wrong, but euphemistically as being “forgetful.” As with all philosophers, he felt his work was completing philosophy by working in what tradition had forgotten. Because of this forgetfulness, the traditional understanding of Being stands in need of radical correction. In this way, Heidegger seems to suggest that his interpretation of Being stands beyond the relativism that its hermeneutical adoption has triggered in the postmodern sciences.

³⁷ Ellen G. White says the following, “Was the human nature of the Son of Mary changed into the divine nature of the Son of God? No; the two natures were mysteriously blended in one person—the Man Christ Jesus.”

ace of his book; *The broken link*, writes that: “His [Christ] perfect sinless nature is assumed,” yet in all his assumptions, he does not address his ontological assumptions. Roy A. Anderson (1970) writes in his book; *The God-Man: His nature and work*, that Christ had a post-fall (*postlapsarian*) nature, yet even he does not attend to his ontological assumptions. In this respect, Millard J. Erickson’s book; *The Word Was Made Flesh*, is much more intentional regarding ontological presuppositions in Christology, yet even Erickson seems to largely assume a Platonic/Aristotelian ontological framework in his book. In short, Adventism continues to build its Christology on the ontological foundation of the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon which has been provided by Greek philosophy. These Councils embraced Greek, which was the *lingua franca* of the time. In this embrace, they were influenced by Greek philosophy (imbedded in the language) and, as such, they fashioned a theological vocabulary that expressed the key concepts of Christology. Christianity (and Adventism), therefore, enters into philosophic conversation dialectically, thus ordering Greek ontology to tell the Christian story.

Ontology is concerned with the proper understanding of ‘Being.’ According to Norman R. Gully (2003:4), Parmenides (540-470 B.C) “seems to be the first philosopher to examine the nature of being.” Being has been interpreted by Parmenides as timelessness. Although the word “timelessness” does not seem to appear in Parmenides writings, “there is evidence that ultimate being is timeless”. Parmenides’ idea of ‘Being’ had a profound effect on both Plato and Aristotle, who built their systems on that concept. Moreover, Parmenides’ “signs of being were used by later theologians to define God’s attributes. His influence has been enormous. The idea of God’s timelessness is a foundation idea that has affected much of Christian theology” (Gully, 2003:6).

Canele (1983:97) says the following regarding ‘Being,’

The reflection on time in general and as a primordial presupposition in particular appeared rather late in the history of philosophy. Kant seems to have set the stage, so to speak, for this appearance. Kant’s system provided the ground not only for continuity with traditional epistemology in the scientific era but also for discontinuity from the criticism of traditional timelessness.

Thus, the landscape was the same until a shift of monumental proportions in the interpretation of ‘Being’ came and set the ontological interpretation on which postmodern hermeneutical reason stands. This came through the analysis of ‘Being’ by Martin Heidegger. In so doing, postmodernity was exposed as something that is not a partial departure from some features of modern thinking, but a radical departure from the intellectual paradigm that has defined Western

philosophy and culture. Here, I wish to point to the change in a simple and concise manner. In so doing, my purpose is to show that Adventist Christology cannot keep on building on tradition without first deconstructing its hermeneutical foundations.

Heidegger deconstructed not only modern but also classical philosophical traditions. He accomplished that by purposefully focusing on the notion of ‘Being,’ the most general of all human concepts. His epoch-making *Being and Time* begins by doubting that philosophy had properly understood the notion of ‘Being’ and suggesting that we should attempt to understand it from a temporal perspective. As far as I know, Heidegger never claimed he was turning more than two millennia of philosophical tradition upside down. However, this is, in fact, what his thought accomplished. Yet, it seems he was not totally aware of the radical nature of his ontological proposal.

Heidegger chose to deal with ‘Being’ and not with beings. Thus he did not try to understand only concrete entities (such as man, cosmos, substance), but also ‘Being.’ At least, in *Being and Time*, he explicitly set up the understanding of ‘Being’ as his ultimate goal (Heidegger, 1962:1). Since Aristotle, ‘Being’ has been recognized to be the most general notion that human mind is capable of conceiving. By selecting ‘Being’ as his object of study, Heidegger placed his quest at the spring from which everything else flows in philosophical thinking. This is because, in its all-inclusive generality, “an understanding of Being is already included in conceiving anything which one apprehends in entities” (Heidegger, 1962:1). We can better appreciate the far-reaching consequences that the interpretation of ‘Being’ has for Adventist Christology when Heidegger (1962:1) unpacks its macro-hermeneutical role:

The question of Being aims therefore at ascertaining the *a priori* conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences which examine entities as entities of such and such a type, and, in so doing, already operate with an understanding of Being, but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provided their foundations.

The interpretation of ‘Being,’ then, influences the interpretation of the entire span of human knowledge and, of course, the interpretation of Scripture. Thomas Aquinas helps us to appreciate the overarching implications that any change in the interpretation of ‘Being’ unleashes in any construction of theology by saying that “a small error at the outset can lead to great errors in the final conclusion” (Aquinas, 1949:1). Hermeneutically speaking, at the “outset” we find the concept of ‘Being,’ which as an all-inclusive macro-hermeneutical presupposition, conditions the

understanding of all other macro-hermeneutical presuppositions. In other words, our consciously or unconsciously assumed understanding of ‘Being’ shapes our interpretation of the other macro-hermeneutical principles, which include, Christ and hermeneutics. Even when theologians may not be aware of the question of ‘Being’ or its interpretation, their understanding of the other macro-hermeneutical presuppositions guiding their theologies necessarily assumes an understanding of ‘Being.’

Since Adventist Christological traditions were built under the macro-hermeneutical guidance of classical ontology, we should consider the consequences that the paradigmatic shift in ontological perspective, formulated by Heidegger, had for the task of doing Adventist Christology in the twenty-first century.

For a number of reasons that we cannot enumerate in this space, some Adventist theologians have followed the postmodern shift at the ontological level as closely as they followed its epistemological and cultural consequences. The postmodern shift from a timeless to a temporal approach to ontology, however, has had deeper repercussions. I have read several Adventist books on the subject of the nature of Christ³⁸, yet none, to my knowledge, has studied or written about the relationship between ontology and Christology from a systematic theological perspective. Presuppositions have been made, but there has been no attempt to construct a deliberate Christology from the ontological ground to the relevant facts in the Bible. Many of the approaches to this subject have used all the tools of exegesis and hermeneutics without realizing the huge ontological implications that may be embedded in the exegesis of the relevant texts.

Canale (2004:35) seems to allude to this lack of a systematic approach by declaring:

Is the human nature of Christ, sinful, sinless, or both?...Adventist theologians should engage in drawing their theological vision from Scripture, including all ontological issues involved, even

³⁸ Adams, Roy. 1994. *The Nature of Christ*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald; Alonzo T. Jones. 1988. *The Consecrated Way*. Dodge Center, MN: The Upward Way; George Knight. 2001. *I used to Be Perfect*, 2nd ed. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press; Hans K. LaRondelle. 1988. *Christ Our Salvation*. Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions; Ralph Larson. 1989. *The Word Was Made Flesh*. Cherry Valley, CA: The Cherrystone Press. Leroy Moore. 1979. *The Theology Crisis. Corpus Christi*, TX: Life Seminars, Inc.; Leroy Moore. 2005. *Questions on Doctrine Revisited!* Itchaca, MI: AB Publishing; Lauri Onjukka. 1982. *The Sanctuary and Perfection*. Temecula, CA: Lifemark Press; Dennis E. Priebe. 1985. *Face to Face with the Real Gospel*. Boise, ID: Pacific Press; E.J Waggoner. 1992. *Christ and His Righteousness*, 3rd ed. Pleasantview, TN: The Upward Way; Woodrow W. Whidden. 1997. *Ellen White on the Humanity of Christ*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald. Jean R. Zurcher. 1999. *Touched with Our Feelings*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.

the nature of Christ. Failure to do so has contributed to no small degree to the division in Adventist theology.

This issue cannot be resolved by simply applying the Adventist claimed historical-grammatical method of interpretation because a method has no way of determining whether interpretations of Christ have assumed the timeless understanding of 'Being' or the temporal understanding of 'Being.' If there is no way of determining this, then conclusions made by those proponents may not be clear and since there is no separation between the person of Christ and the work of Christ, then soteriological understandings may also be affected. Also, if there is a connection between Christology and eschatology, ecclesiology, and missiology, then this also may be affected.

This then begs the question: Are there any ontological indicators, representatively, found in *Questions on Doctrine* or in Andreasean's Christologies? We must unpack, though briefly, the two major ways in which ontology has been understood in order to see if *Questions on Doctrine* or Andreasean deliberately and systematically weaved ontological ideas in their treatment of Christology. The first I have called Timeless Ontology (the view that the past, present and future appear alike) and the second Temporal Ontology (the view that history is not viewed in one timeless movement but events are known as they take place). We must further briefly describe some of the Christological implications those ontological indicators have had.

3.6. Timeless Ontology

Ever since the publication of the book *Questions on Doctrine*, there has been an intense debate within the Adventist Church on the issue of Christ's human nature. During the weekend of 24-27 October 2007, various scholars and pastors went to Andrews University for the 50th anniversary conference on "Questions on Doctrine," in order to hear papers which presented different viewpoints. Webster's (1992:40) dissertation stated that *Questions on Doctrine* adopted "a classical ontological Christological stance." In light of the great influence the book has had within Adventism, it reveals that the multiple source theory for theology has been accepted when it comes to Christology. Webster's statement about classical ontology reveals that not even Adventism has been able to escape the clutches of notions about Being/being. The hermeneutical and methodological issues which Webster's observation raises, therefore need to be discussed. I will now proceed to look at relevant passages in *Questions on Doctrine*, in doing this, I will look for indicators within the passages themselves that point to timeless ontology.

Perhaps the biggest ontological indicator we need to begin with is the Fundamental Beliefs as they have been stated in the book. The authors of the book *Questions on Doctrine* state that the goal of the book was to set forth their “basic beliefs in terminology currently used in theological circles” (1957:6). The book was not intended to become a formal statement of faith but, rather, it was a response to specific questions that Adventist theologians were asked. They are quick to indicate to the reader that their response came from “the framework of the official statement of Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,” (1957:6). In other words, their response to the questions asked to them presupposed Adventist Fundamental Beliefs. Their response, therefore, was not the beliefs, but a mere expansion of the Fundamental Beliefs. This can easily be taken as an interpretation of the Fundamental Beliefs. The authors hope that this expansion would be “truly representative of the faith and belief” of Adventism. The officers of the General Conference, according to *Questions on Doctrine* (1957:10), at the time, “felt that the material appearing in this volume would not only be helpful to the members of their own church but that it would also furnish reliable information on Adventist beliefs and teachings to the many inquiries” that have been brought about.

Two phrases from these beliefs are important timeless ontological indicators: “Jesus Christ is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the Eternal Father,” and “retaining His divine nature He took upon Himself the nature of the human family.” These beliefs hold both the Nicene and Chalcedon position that Christ was Truly God and Truly Man. He retained His divine nature and took on human nature. Though the Fundamental Belief is very general in its composition, the presuppositions of these writers came to bare when they expanded on what this belief meant. The expansion they gave in *Questions on Doctrine* (1957:22) was that “Christ is very God, and that He has existed with the Father from all eternity.” The second part of this statement, “He has existed with the Father from all eternity,” does not appear in the Fundamental Belief, as captured in the book. In this commentary, the authors use two timeless ontological indicators, namely, the question of Christ’s being (“existed”) and His relation to time (“eternity”). The being of Christ is thus further explained as an existence that is prior to creation. He is the pre-existent Christ. This notion of the pre-existent Christ and His nature being eternal (like that of the “Eternal Father”) indicates the writer’s timeless ontology, which implies that Christ pre-existed the creation of earth and has an eternal nature. Theologians generally relate timelessness

to “eternity; as an attribute of God.”³⁹ The authors then outline a series of statements in Appendix A from *Questions on Doctrine* (1957:641-646) from one of their “most representative” writers, who has prophetic status in Adventism, Ellen G. White. In the section titled “Eternal Pre-existence of Christ,” the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* (1957:644) reference the following statement:

In speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God.

The statement referenced shows Christ’s existence as “dateless”. It is clear that this is a reference to a timeless existence (timeless ontology). This timeless ontology of Christ is further supported by the following statement, from the same representative authors of *Questions on Doctrine*:

Here Christ shows them that, although they might reckon His life to be less than fifty years, yet His divine life could not be reckoned by human computation. The existence of Christ before His incarnation is not measured by figures. (1957:44)

Not only do the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* see Christ as being eternally pre-existent, as the “eternal Son of God,” but they have presented a Christ who exists, lives and acts outside of the future-present-past sequence of time.

The second indicator that points to the timeless ontology of Christ is assumed by the writers of *Questions on Doctrine* in their interpretation of the sanctuary. Consequently, Christ relates to creation timelessly. Due to this, the writers of the book interpret the sanctuary metaphorically. The sanctuary is viewed as a prefiguration of Christ in the section of *Questions on Doctrine* titled “Salvation Prefigured in the Sanctuary Service.” Thus, biblical texts on the

³⁹ See Wayne Grudem. 1995. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 168-169; Stanley J. Grenz. 1994. *Theology for the Community of God*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 91-93; Wolfhart Pannenberg. 1994. *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley, 3 vols.. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 401-410. Millard Erickson (1998:300) connects divine timelessness to God’s infinity. The contemporary discussion on divine timelessness and temporality includes, for instance, Nelson Pike. 1970. “God and Time-lessness”, *Studies in Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion*. London: Routledge & K. Paul; Alan G. Padgett. 1992. *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time*. New York: St. Martin’s; William J. Hill. 1992. *Search for the Absent God: Tradition and Modernity in Religious Understanding*. New York: Crossroad; William Lane Craig. 2001. *Time and Eternity: Exploring God’s Relationship to Time*. Wheaton: Crossway; Gregory Ganssle, ed. 2001. *God and Time: Four Views*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity. These studies approach eternity as an attribute of God. They do not consider the analogical understanding of God’s being as basic characteristic of His ontology.

sanctuary are viewed as metaphorical.⁴⁰ Since Christ ascended to the heavens, where there is no place, biblical statements placing God in a heavenly sanctuary are read allegorically.⁴¹ The writers of *Questions on Doctrine* say the following:

In the sanctuary ritual during the days of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, and later in the time of the Temple, many sacrifices were offered. But whatever their number, and whatever their variety, every sacrifice without exception pointed forward to the one great sacrifice—to the death of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour; He was the antitype of all these sacrificial offerings.
(157:356)

The hermeneutical presupposition at play here, which is the timeless presupposition, calls for the sanctuary be understood as metaphorical for the efficacy of Christ's salvation for us. By application of the timeless presupposition, the sanctuary becomes reconstructed as the allegorical pattern of theological discourse.

The indicators included in this section have been few and cursorily addressed. However, they are helpful in exposing what the presupposition of the prelapsarian proponents are. As we recognize the hermeneutical role that the timeless ontology has on the proponents of the prelapsarian position, it becomes clear that Christological conclusions are influenced by a particular view on the relationship between Christ and time. This presupposition has hermeneutically determined their reading of the Scriptures and determine their Christological conclusions.

This ontology is totally inconsistent with Temporal ontology, that rejects a view that Christ is timeless and is not affected by our realities.

3.7. Temporal Ontology

The biggest ontological indicator of the *postlapsarian* proponents is the meta-narrative of the great controversy. Quintin Betteridge (2008:9), reflecting on a proponent of the *postlapsarian* position (ML Andreasen), implies that the great controversy meta-narrative is the history of God in Christ. The history of Christ, extending from the past to the future in this meta-narrative, is

⁴⁰ I define a metaphor in this dissertation as those utterances functioning “in two referential fields at once. This duality explains how two levels of meaning are linked together in the symbol. The first meaning relates to a known field of reference, that is to the sphere of entities to which the predicates considered in their established meaning can be attached. The second meaning, the one that is to be made apparent, relates to a referential field for which there is no direct characterisation, for which we consequently are unable to make identifying descriptions by means of appropriate predicates” (Ricoeur, 1977: 299).

⁴¹ As, for instance, “The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne”, Ps. 11:4 (NIV)

one that is based on a temporal presupposition of reality. The proponents of this position assume that Christ acts in a historical chronological sequence that constitutes His history. This view allows them to view the work of Christ *historically*. This led them to view the biblical meta-narrative as a great controversy between Christ and Satan. In this way, the sanctuary doctrine became the key that opened to view a “complete system of truth, connected and harmonious” (White, 1888:423). Betteridge (2018:13), quoting Frank Holbrook, says that the great controversy meta-narrative was developed by the pioneers of the Adventist Church “‘largely from their studies of the Hebrew sanctuary system and the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.’”

In summary, the great controversy meta-narrative states that there was a controversy between Christ and Satan that started in heaven before the creation of the world. Though the earth was not yet created, other beings were created such as the angels (Satan being one of the created beings). Out of his own self-exaltation and selfish reasons, Satan became jealous of Christ and according to Andreasen (1937:109), attempted to “depose God and usurp His place.” Satan maligned Christ’s character of love by claiming that God’s laws were unfair and unable to be kept. As a result, war broke out in heaven and Satan became God’s enemy and led a third of the angels into rebellion with him (Rev. 12:4-9, NIV).

The controversy moved to earth where Satan tempted humanity (Adam and Eve) to revolt against God’s law. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s laws, they fell (*lapses*) and humanity was lost. Christ therefore had to take on human nature and descend to earth to come and reveal God’s love and the possibility of living a sinless life in accordance with God’s law. Ellen G. White (1898), in the first chapter of *The Desire of Ages*, makes certain statements that are useful as indicators of the temporal ontology:

From the beginning, God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan, and of the fall of man through the deceptive power of the apostate. *God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence* [emphasis added], and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. (White, 1898:11)

By His humanity, Christ touched humanity; by His divinity, He lays hold upon the throne of God. As the Son of man, *He gave us an example of obedience* [emphasis added]; as the Son of God, He gives us power to obey. (White, 1898:14)

Through Christ’s redeeming works the government of God stands justified. The Omnipotent One is made known as the God of love. Satan’s charges are refuted, and his character unveiled. Rebel-

lion can never again arise. Sin can never again enter the universe. *Through eternal ages* [emphasis added] all are secure from apostasy. (White, 1898:26)

The title of the very first chapter (“God with us”) is in full support of the fact that Jesus is fully Divine and fully Human. In the statements above, one cannot fail to grasp how Ellen White weaves the great controversy meta-narrative throughout the seven pages of this chapter, while, at the same time, she deliberately connects this theme with Christological issues. Through the phrases: “God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence,” “He gave us an example of obedience” and “through eternal ages,” Ellen White connects Christology with the great controversy meta-narrative and she is interpreting being as temporal.

The great controversy meta-narrative forms the temporal ontological ground for the *prelapsarian* proponents’ Christology. The nature of sin, the possibility of temptation and the human nature of Christ are consistently based on the great controversy meta-narrative. It should also be noted that on page 24, 49, and 117 of Ellen White’s *The Desire of Ages*, the kind of humanity Christ accepted was directly linked to the great controversy meta-narrative. This means that their Christology begins with a temporal presupposition.

3.8. Summary

This chapter has shown that, in spite of all the philosophical and theological variations that exist today, being has only been interpreted in one of two ways: timelessness or temporality. The timeless view of ontology has been at the foundation of the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon and the writers of *Questions on Doctrine* which provided the framework for understanding the biblical data. During the Reformation, the sovereignty of God, which was based on timeless presuppositions, laid the ground work for why Christ came in a sinless nature. The temporal presuppositions, laid the ground for why Christ took a sinful nature, thus it is supported by M.L. Andreassen.

While this chapter does not claim to be exhaustive or to have answered all the questions surrounding the issue of Christology, there are nevertheless some important conclusions to be made. The first is that ontological presuppositions have a tremendous impact on Christological understandings, which means that the interpreters of the two theological strands are either knowingly or unknowingly assuming these presuppositions in their exegesis and hermeneutics. This further means that there is no such a thing as Christology without presuppositions. It also means

that people can believe they are being faithful to the biblical text yet, at the same time, not realize that their conclusions about the biblical data have come from a particular onto-hermeneutical presupposition instead.

Secondly, there are two diametrically opposed interpretations of ontology; therefore, proponents of different Christological strands within Seventh-day Adventism must understand the ground on which their interpretations are built upon. This issue cannot be resolved by taking an “opponent” to a favorite text, setting up a syllogism and then getting them to answer yes or no. Also, this is not an issue that can be resolved merely by the clear reasoning and logic of any interpreter because reason itself assumes an interpretation of the ontological ground yet, at the same time, reason cannot determine which one of the two ontological options is the right one since both are reasonable and logical.

Thirdly, this chapter showed how ontology related to hermeneutics and Christ’s nature. The divergent conclusions of these issues are the direct result of the ontological ground that each theologian assumed in their study. This means that, instead of getting into endless and exclusive debates about the nature of Christ that do not discern the ontological issues, each person on each side of the spectrum must demonstrate how their conclusions are built. Failure to do this will only end up escalating the controversy and further fragment the Adventist community.

Fourthly, the correct starting point for understanding Christology is not Christology, but ontology.

Having reached these conclusions, we are now faced with what Derrida calls “philosophical messianisms” (Caputo, 1997:160), because the expectation of Christ that these proponents are proposing, is determined by philosophical ontologies. Thus, this kind of “philosophical messianism” can be deconstructed when we realize that the element of determination negates the very concept of alterity that the nature of the messiah represents. The question is, is there an alternative interpretation that can assist the Adventist Church from falling into these binary opposites of the debate? Is there a unifying factor that necessitates a Christology that is inclusive and a church that is inclusive of interpreters who hold different views? Is there an interpretation that affirms the alterity represented by Christ? I will propose and demonstrate in the next chapter that the messianic (“messianicity without messianism”) is a hermeneutical reading of Christ that is inclusive and does not cause further division in the church.

CHAPTER 4: APPROPRIATION AND APPLICATION OF THE MESSIANIC DIMENSION IN ADVENTIST CHRISTOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

The divide caused by this Christological controversy is one that cannot be ignored in the Adventist Church, more so because it also holds ecclesiological, soteriological and eschatological implications. The impact is phenomenal.

With Adventism divided over conclusions based on ontological presuppositions, as argued in the previous chapter, I propose that the way forward is to appropriate the messianic dimension and make Adventism more messianic rather than less. It will become clear that the substantive condition of Christology is the messianic advent. The *very subject-matter* of Christology is the messianic advent. The ideas of the messianic advent, Christology and Adventism are naturally connected. My appropriation of the messianic dimension is for the sake of reinventing the nature of Seventh-day Adventism and is not an attempt to further damage an already fragile and divided community.⁴²

In what follows, I will attempt to explain this proposal, give biblical witness to this proposal, and finally elucidate the implications this proposal will have on both Adventist Christology and the paradigmatic shift it will have on Adventist faith and practice.

⁴²The Adventist church wants to establish its agenda by establishing certain things as central to Adventism (i.e the Fundamental Beliefs and the Great Controversy meta-narrative, even the very idea of defining the nature of Christ). Deconstruction seeks to destabilize the so-called sacred centers which attempt to both control what is acceptable and exclude what is viewed as different. I destabilize this exclusive tendency via the deconstructive idea called the “messianic”. The messianic dimension is concerned with the other and wants to both affirm and acknowledge the other (other person, other hermeneutics, other races, other gender, etc.). I apply (deconstruction cannot technically be applied; it merely just happens) this messianic idea throughout the dissertation. This deconstructive idea of the messianic is an inclusive idea and helps Adventism to be more welcoming to the stranger, the other. This critic of Adventism is above all else a search for the other in this Christological controversy. Through the deconstructive idea of the messianic, I seek to erase the boundary between binary oppositions (in my dissertation that is the prelapsarian and postlapsarian opposites)—and I do so in such a way that the hierarchy implied by the oppositions is thrown into question.

4.2. Why the Messianic?

4.2.1. “Messianicity without Messianism”

In this section I set out to tackle the idea of “messianicity without messianism.” Messianism, as Derrida understands it can be either religious or secular. The main religious reference here is Adventist messianism, namely that Christ either has a pre-fall nature (*prelapsarian*) or a post-fall (*postlapsarian*) nature. This messianism has a determinate content: namely, to know the nature of Christ (Messiah). In fact, Adventism has already determined and concluded that the one who is coming has either a pre-fall nature or a post-fall nature. But in terms of his own thinking, what Derrida offers is not this determined messianism but what he sometimes calls “messianicity without messianism” (Derrida, 2002:56). He seeks to maintain the expectation of a coming of the other (“messianicity”) without ascribing both that coming to any determinate agent and knowing the nature (pre-fall or post-fall) that agent is coming in (“without messianism”). The element of determination, an onto-theology or a logocentrism that precedes the coming of the other negates the very concept of alterity (‘the other’) that the essence of the messiah represents.

Derrida (2002:56) says:

This messianic dimension does not depend upon any messianism, it follows no determinate revelation, it belongs properly to no Abrahamic religion (even if I am obliged here, “among ourselves,” for essential reasons of language and of place, of culture, of a provisional rhetoric and a historical strategy of which I will speak later, to continue giving it names marked by the Abrahamic religions).

It is this dependence, following, and philosophical belonging to ontologies that causes Adventist Christology to be a form of messianism. The ontological presupposition already determines the direction and conditions the outcome of the prefiguration. Since Being (temporal or timeless) is inscribed on these presuppositions, it fails to escape this “philosophical messianism” Derrida is referring to.

The second issue we have to struggle with here is that though we seek a messianicity that has no determined content, Derrida finds himself obliged to give this messianicity “names marked by the Abrahamic religions.” In other words, he wished that he had a way of speaking about this messianicity without using language or religious jargon (one can even say biblical terms such as messiah, faith, etc), which are both entities within everything that exists. Derrida

supplies “two words” or “two names” for the “two sources” of religion: “messianic” and “khora.” Hence, messianicity is analogous to khora, which is the “first name prior to all naming.” Adrian Platts (2012:100) explains that:

This paradoxical definition has the intent of finding a “location” for [messianicity] that is prior to not only everything that is, but also everything we use to describe everything that is—speech, language, words, concepts, discourse. This is why [messianicity] is difficult to explain. It does not belong in the realm of explanation. It is, rather, the desertification of all reference that by its total kenosis of everything that exists or can be thought to exist, sensible and intelligible, with no inside or outside, accepts without judgment anything and everything and, even, nothing [emphasis added].

If messianicity ‘is’ analogous to khora, then these are provisional names “for pedagogical or rhetorical reasons”. If Derrida’s use of the term “messianic” is “for pedagogical or rhetorical reasons” then the point, at least in this context, is not the messianic *per se*, but that which is intended by the use of the word. Messianicity should not and ought not “to be certain of anything, either through knowledge, consciousness, conscience, foreseeability or any kind of program as such.” That is why Derrida can then say that this “abstract messianicity belongs from the very beginning to the experience of faith, of believing, of a credit that is irreducible to knowledge and of a trust that ‘founds’ all relation to the other in testimony.” Perhaps, this “beginning” is pre-originary. It is the primordial presupposition before any and all ontological principles are. Thus, it escapes all messianism but “inscribed itself in advance in the promise, in the act of faith or in the appeal to faith that inhabits every act of language and every address to the other.” What is intended by ‘messianic’ is something⁴³ that precedes the promise, the act of faith, even language itself. The implication therefore is that the messianic precedes any discussion around the nature of Christ, it also precedes Adam in his post-fall and pre-fall nature, it precedes categories of Being/beings (timeless or temporal), including the name “messianic” itself. Thus, messianicity is the primordial presupposition of Christology that is inclusive, open and accepting of ‘the other.’

Messianicity is something other than that which is located in binaries. Messianicity, stripped of everything, as it should, this faith without dogma which makes its way through the risks of absolute uncertainty, cannot be contained in any binary, such as *prelapsarian* or *postlapsarian*, timeless or temporal. Thus messianicity is not a third order of ‘Being’ (as in timelessness,

⁴³ Since ‘messianic’ is a not a *thing* within creation, the word “something” fails to capture what is intended. Thus one has to note that the ‘messianic’ belongs to no category of being, logic, or any copula situated by creation.

temporal or messianic). Messianicity is an attempt to overcome the binary structure (timelessness or temporality) of traditional metaphysics. It introduces a “messianic structure,” which is a structure of promise.

Derrida (1992:38) retains the structure of the promise of something to come, an “endless promise,” in that it can never be coopted or reduced to any particular determinate content. What will come is not any named Messiah but “the most irreducibly heterogeneous otherness” (Derrida, 2004:249) which means that whatever it/he/she is that comes, will certainly not be what, or who, we are expecting. As for the transformation that this advent will bring about, Derrida describes it as the “democracy to come,” by which he does not mean the linear prolongation into the future of contemporary systems of parliamentary democracy, but a disruptive, non-linear “event” which is unforeseeable and unexpected:

The event must also announce itself as im-possible; it must thus announce itself without calling in advance, without forewarning, announcing itself without announcing itself, without any horizon of expectation, any telos, formation, form, or teleological preformation. Whence its always monstrous, unrepresentable character, demonstrable as un-monstrable. (Derrida, 2005:144)

This figure of the “monstrous” parallels Derrida’s insistence on the justice that exceeds all calculable principle. If we could predict what/who is to come and it/his/her nature, then it would no longer be radically other to what already exists but an event within the current horizon of expectation, and it is this calculable predictability of the future that I want to avoid at all costs (especially for Adventism): “A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow” (Derrida, 1981:387). What I am seeking to do here is retain certain formal, structural features of messianism while evacuating it of its determinant content. It is this that I want to do within Adventism. My intention is not to efface Christ from Adventist Christology, nor alter the *name* of Christ, or even efface the figure of Christ from Adventist belief. In this sense, Adventism will always be some form of messianism. However, I hope to demonstrate that a certain—if limited—“messianic dimension” can essentially form the ontological condition of possibility of this kind of messianism,

an *a priori* structure relative to Adventist Christology. This would lead us then to a deconstructive messianism, the discovery of ~~Christ~~.⁴⁴ Caputo (1996:178) says that:

Deconstruction is, in particular, the reinvention of a determinable prophetic idea of the expectation of an everlasting justice to come, of one who comes “to bring good news to the oppressed” (Is. 61:1).

This deconstructive messianism, therefore, is justice. Without prefiguration (messianicity), what comes in the face of Adventism—the Messiah—is justice. However, in order to maintain some level of messianism for the sake of Adventism, ~~Christ~~ (deconstructive messianism) should be understood as the one who will come with justice (the one who comes “to bring good news to the oppressed” (Is. 61:1)). This is an open expectation.

4.2.2. *The Messianic is an Open Expectation*

In speaking of ‘the Other’ who is to come, this *coming* needs to be understood in light of an open expectation: this coming is that of ‘the Other,’ whose coming is unforeseeable and which is itself unanticipated. This unknown future, the coming of ‘the other’ that is not known⁴⁵, is an opening of the space of the future as the “to come,”⁴⁶ instead of “the end”. It is the messianic opening in that it opens the way for the coming of a messianicity without a known messiah, yet open to the advent of the unknowable Other. The future is, in this way, that of a justice to come; the future remains a promise. This notion of an open future is very provocative for a church like the Adventist Church, which has its foundation in the hope of the coming Christ.

This open future is undeterminable, in that it is not temporally conceived, and as such it challenges the ontology of being in time. It is, rather, a rupture in presence; where the open future emerges through the coming of the other, it will be as an opening in temporal and spatial

⁴⁴ The act of putting a line through a word to denote that we do not mean what the word ordinarily means (yet have no other or better word for what we do mean) is a convention called “writing under erasure” (Fr. *sous rature*), signaling our intent to point to what we cannot completely or properly comprehend or say in any other way—a convention that stems from Heidegger and those imitating his style, including but not limited to Derrida. Having made the point, I will use “Christ” for ~~Christ~~ later on again. ~~Christ~~ is what I intend in meaning when I use “Christ” in this dissertation. *Sous rature* (~~Christ~~) is a way of denouncing the ontology that is supposed to exist behind the name “Christ.” In other words, it is a convention used to speak of both presence and absence. This is somewhat similar to Derrida’s use of *sans* (without). So the phrase “messianicity without messianism,” for example, could be a way of signifying presence and absence, something that could be signified by writing the word “messianism” under erasure.

⁴⁵ There is something ~~Christ~~ speaks about that speaks directly to this thought in Matt. 24:36, “But about the day or hour no one knows...”.

⁴⁶ Rev. 1:8, “...who is, who was, and who is to come.”

understanding of being. It cannot itself be conceived in terms of what is to come, as a temporal understanding of the future, a fixed prevision of a determinable future event inscribed as a more or less imaginable point in a linear chronology. Instead, it will arrive as an unpredictable event that will rupture not only that expectation⁴⁷, but also the understanding of temporality and the predictable arrival that that expectation entails. This is a structural future that would undo structuralism as a totalizing closure; the future event not only comes unforeseen but comes as a structural inscription that, in its opening out, also leaves open the structure of temporality. This can be problematic for Adventism because it has a very calculated and defined call, and perhaps the expectation of the Other is largely a reflection of a construction by the SDA Church. These kinds of slippages are not intentional. Part of the intent of this dissertation is to suggest certain threads from deconstruction to assist the Adventist church in smashing these constructions in the hope of genuinely opening the church to the coming for which it so fervently yearns.

As early as *Of Grammatology*, Derrida (1998, 6-26) discusses the necessity of an epoch to remain open in order to avoid inscription into a metaphysical closure (a metaphysical dead end), placing deconstruction into a relation with history and the future. The future, thought as messianic, is a structural opening within that structure, and it is thus the necessity of the opening that is contained in the future. If we were to think of this open future on the basis of a specific time to come, we would make it subject to a presenting of the future as presence and, at the same time and on the same basis, as a time which will end. This is also a structural relation to deferral. In that sense, the “to come” is the opening out of presence to that which is within it; thought in this way, the future constitutes a relation to being as to time and space.

The origin of history in presence is therefore a duplicity. A doubling of itself in the other of the one, it shows origin to be divided at its source; this division is given two names, names which are “historical” though the phrase must be remarked, for they render a concept of history inappropriate. These two names, as mentioned before, are “messianic” and “khora”. Yet the act of giving these two names is itself a divisive violence, either appropriating division to the proper or making a sign of the thing itself and further disseminating its already divided presence. To go to the name of God, the tetragrammaton (YHWH) will not allow the name to be said because the way towards the unitary is out of language; the messianic substitutes the other for the one; more

⁴⁷ “...like a thief in the night.” 1 Thess.5:2.

accurately, making it the name of the one and the other at the same time by inscribing unitary presence through alterity.

The first name is the messianic, or messianicity without messianism. The advent is both the future and coming, so this messianicity is both the opening to the future and the coming of ‘the other.’ It is the coming of ‘the other,’ the unknown arrival of an unknown other, irreducible to a prefigured event and a predetermined figure, without prophetic prefiguration. This coming of ‘the other’ is the advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation. Justice, for Derrida the only transcendental signified, remains a promise to be fulfilled in the future to come. Though it should be sought in the present, justice is conterminous with an opening of metaphysics, which means it remains undetermined. It remains without horizon of expectation, in other words, without a determinable date of fulfillment. When justice arrives, it will begin a form that is unpredicted by the description of the *horizon*, another closure based upon a thinking of temporality that would return it to a closed structure. There can therefore be no anticipation of the future, and the coming of ‘the other’ can only emerge as a singular event. This opening out to ‘the other’ means that it arrives as a surprise, as also might radical violence.

4.3. The Other

4.3.1. The Messianic Hope

If we accept that Christ is the one that is coming with justice, thus the Messiah, then there is a question asked at the heart of Matthew 24:3 (NIV) that needs to be given attention. In this story the Messiah (Hebrew derivation for “Christ”), who is at the Mount of Olives, is approached privately. “When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?” In essence, the question posed to the Messiah is “When are you coming?” Israel had this Messianic hope that the messiah would one day come. In the following chapters (Matthew 24; 25) the Messiah responds by criticizing and resolving two issues: the identity of the Messiah and the coming of the Messiah. He resolves the two issues through two scenes in Matthew 25: the parable of the ten virgins and the discourse on the sheep and the goats.

His first criticism is on the identity of the messiah (“Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many” vs. 4). These many illusions of the Messiah are said to be misleading, far from the truth, and positing beliefs that are not true, with far-reaching

effects. These have an element of self-deception as well (“I am the Messiah”). Not only are these deceptive self-referential Messiahs an issue, but the very idea of someone else identifying one as the messiah is problematic. The Messiah warns and calls for disbelief to any logocentrism or rhetoric that seeks to identify one as the messiah (“At that time if anyone says to you ‘Look, there is the Messiah!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it” (vs. 23)). The content in identifying one as the Messiah is very problematic and dangerous because it leads to deception (even self-deception), problematic beliefs, controversies and lack of love.

The discourse on the sheep and the goats gives an indeterminate identity of the messiah. Although quite lengthy, it is necessary to quote the discourse in its entirety since it gives a biblical point of departure for the issues presented by this proposal:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25:31-46, NIV)

The interesting thing about this discourse is that both the sheep and the goats fail to identify the Messiah. The self-disclosure of the Messiah is the Messiah identifying with the stranger (“I was a stranger and you invited me in” v. 35). There is some kind of ignorance that is necessary, not to justify unbelief but to keep the Adventist church open to different interpretations and

be open to accept the stranger, even the stranger within its gates. Hans Küng says, in Platts (2012:29): “God is accessible only to ‘instructed ignorance’.” In a deconstructive way, Platts (2012:30) concludes that:

[Christ] cannot be grasped in any concept, cannot be fully expressed in any statement, cannot be defined in any definition: [Christ] is incomprehensible, inexpressible, indefinable....Every statement of [Christ] therefore must come through the dialectic of affirmation and negation, every experience of [Christ] must come through the ambivalence of being and non-being [emphasis added].

The second criticism the Messiah offers is a critic on the coming of the Messiah. Without quoting another lengthy passage (the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13), I will use the same pericope above to make the point. The coming of the Messiah can be ascribed to messianic time instead of philosophic time (timelessness or temporality). The “when” in the pericope can be described as a messianic “when.” “When” could just be today. The Messiah (in the present tense of the time the Messiah arrived and was having this discourse at the Mount of Olives) said: “The King will reply” (in the future when He will come) ‘Whatever you did for one of the least of these...’ (in the past tense of what the sheep “did”, which is after His arrival and before His coming, frankly a time that has not happened since the Messiah is yet to say it). This is a future tense that is seen as having already happened and a past tense that is not yet (the Messiah was present and speaking). To put this in other words, if the Messiah is not coming in temporality, there is no point in endlessly waiting for His coming. Without any further delay or deferral, the Messiah will come *after* His arrival—that is, after we would have done the *profane* work of justice, which (even according to the discourse) the Messiah will not do for us. This work is profane because we must keep the Messiah’s place empty (*sans*) before His arrival and refrain from occupying it in a dogmatic manner. Hence messianicity has no horizon of expectation. If one is to have any semblance of a response to the question “When will you come?”, ~~Christ~~ merely answers, “But about the day or hour no one knows” vs. 36.

If one accepts the interpretation of the issues involved here, then Adventism may need to re-evaluate its attempts to identify the Messiah through the Christological debate (pre-fall or post-fall nature). Instead, it is suggested that Adventism should focus on attempts to bring justice at all costs by being open to the stranger and expecting the coming of the stranger (any stranger)

without any determined content. Not only is ~~Christ~~⁴⁸ coming with justice but He identifies Himself with the stranger that receives justice from His followers.

This kind of messianic hope and interpretation of Christ will benefit Adventism. I do not wish to get into the dangers of not adhering to this kind of interpretation, since the Christological controversy in Adventism is already evident. I can summarize the effects by stating that the last time Adventism tried to calculate and determine when Christ was coming (that was on 22 October 1844) there was a Great Disappointment. An attempt to center Christ on some sacred interpretation can result in opening up the Adventist church.

4.3.2. *The Other*

This kind of interpretation of Christ, as ‘the Other,’ invokes the deconstructive idea of ‘the other’ in Derridean thinking. Adrian Platts (2012) searches for what is sacred to Derrida in his doctoral thesis and concludes that if anything is sacred to him, it is ‘the other.’ The very idea of finding the sacred in Derrida or deconstruction is in order to ascertain Derrida’s relevance and value for religious traditions such as Adventism. Platts (2012:180) concludes that, “Nothing is sacred to Derrida.” It is important to talk about both the notion of the sacred and ‘the other’ because Adventism is a community that holds certain beliefs as fundamental/sacred.

The sacred associated with a ‘thing’ is the problem. It should be noted that there is a difference between what Platts means when he concludes that, “if any ‘thing’ (anything) is sacred to Derrida it is the other,” and when one says, “the other is sacred to Derrida.” Since the ‘other’ cannot be identified, it is always debatable what it/s/he is, until it/s/he is identified, at which point it/s/he ceases to be the ‘other’ and hence is no longer sacred. The statement by Platts that “nothing is sacred to Derrida” could be a negation (as in no ‘thing’ is sacred to Derrida), or “nothing is sacred to Derrida” could be an affirmation about the state of “nothing” which is that nothing, itself, is sacred—hence the messianic, which is before all “things” (and hence is nothing) is sacred. But since the messianic does not discriminate between things, but holds them all, or makes space for every ‘thing’ (everything), that means that everything is equal (sacred) to the messianic. Evil tries to exclude things and, as such, by default, cannot find residence in the messianic in its aspect of exclusion. By way of example, a ‘non-Adventist’ is a detour within the

⁴⁸ This is where we will leave the convention of writing under erasure in favour of standard notation. However, the point remains.

messianic that is a foolish irony—because a person (say an Adventist member) who strives to exclude any other person from Adventism can only do so by blinding themselves to the landscape that is messianic. So messianicity would make space for the one who excludes, but not the notion of ‘non-Adventist’ because to designate one as a ‘non-Adventist’ is to be exclusive and no ‘thing’ is excluded by the messianic. Except that the idea of a ‘non-Adventist’ *is* inscribed on the messianic because ‘non-Adventist’ is a ‘thing’ of sorts, but it is not descriptive of (or central to) the messianic. It is something that hides itself in messianicity, pretending that it is all there is (pretending it is the center or some sacred truth), but its pretense is exposed (by the movement of deconstruction) and it turns out to not be alone.

Thus, “Nothing is sacred to Derrida” is like saying, “Messianicity ‘is’ sacred to Derrida,” because messianicity ‘is’ not a thing. It makes space for things, but itself ‘is’ not a thing. Hence messianicity ‘is’ nothing (no ‘thing’). ‘Is’ gets written in inverted commas because the word ‘is’ indicates the status of ‘being,’ that which belongs to the nature of existence (things). However, since messianicity ‘is’ not a thing, one cannot say that messianicity *is* this, or messianicity *is* that, because the word ‘is’ is used to describe things, and messianicity ‘is’ not a thing. So language cannot describe messianicity, but there is no other way to write (or speak), thus one has to say messianicity ‘is’ this or messianicity ‘is’ that, to remember that to say ‘messianicity is’ makes no sense. Hence, “nothing is sacred to Derrida” or “messianicity ‘is’ sacred to Derrida.”

Messianicity would have it that everything is sacred, but it is founded on the concept that nothing is sacred. One may ask why everything is sacred. It is because the moment one says this and not that is sacred, one has excluded something, the something excluded is ‘the other’—thus, the reason that everything is sacred, is to prevent ‘the other’ (that we do not know) from being excluded. But the moment that something is known, it shows itself for its own failure (it excludes and is convinced of its own rightness and truth) and hence is not sacred. Thus we would arrive at an *aporia*. To preserve ‘the other,’ one must say everything is sacred, but to prevent exclusion and critique evil, one must also assert that nothing is sacred. This dimension is constantly differing and deferring meaning as an oscillation between these extremes—never accepting and never rejecting or both accepting and rejecting. It is also moving between the two—never settling on one or the other or, perhaps, constantly settling on this or that. The question that remains, however, is how Adventism would look like if we were to appropriate this messianic dimension to its community?

4.4. Community

The Adventist Church understands itself as a community of believers. Acceptance and membership into this community is only through very carefully defined rules and parameters. The question of community is through and through a question of identity. As such, I am convinced that the Christological controversy on the nature of Christ is just a front of the real concern: Adventist identity.

When the representative group of Adventists who wrote *Questions on Doctrine* met with non-Adventist evangelical Christians, Donald Barnhouse and Walter Martin, it was immediately met with opposition. ML Andreasen was outspoken and vehement in his objections to both the book *Questions on Doctrine* and these evangelical meetings. Larson (1995:67) says that Andreasen “wanted Adventist leaders to ‘stand tall’ and not compromise their commitment to the church’s traditional beliefs.” The political interests and power play was demonstrated when Andreasen’s ministerial credentials were suspended. Andreasen’s fear was that the acceptance of Adventist by non-Adventist evangelicals would mean losing its distinct identity.

Thus, the application of this messianic dimension to the Adventist Church may appear to be a hopeless task, particularly because Adventism is such a closed community, accessible only by membership. It is this very idea of power interests and closed off community that is problematic to the idea of the messianic. Derrida has a dislike for the word “community.” His distrust for this word provided an indispensable precondition for coping with the anoretics of community, with its unavoidable necessity and its undeniable violence. After all, *communitas* is a military formation, referring to a common defense built against the other, the fortifications built to keep the stranger outside, to gather ourselves together (*com*) for protection against the other; to encircle ourselves with a common wall or barrier that protects the same from the incoming (advent stranger) of the other, that keeps the same safe from the other. In that sense, community, that sense of community, is everything that the messianic dimension resists. The messianic is, through and through, the affirmation of the totally other and so everything that is done in this messianic dimension takes aim at this wall of defense that community throws up against the other.

However, the irony for the Adventist community is that its very name—Adventist—calls for the coming of the stranger from without—Jesus Christ—but its boundaries demand that

Christ be expelled since He would not be recognized and would certainly not submit to membership. The purpose of this dissertation is to use the foundational doctrine of the church, Christology, as a basis to break open the community every time it tries to close in on itself. This messianic dimension does not seek to destroy the Adventist community, but rather it seeks to recognize and affirm another community, an open community, beyond a community obsessed with its identity, one that has its powerful sense of self-identity having been shaken loose. After all, Christ, who is the head of the church, came to die for the “ungodly”⁴⁹ (Rom. 5:6, NIV): the heretic, the unorthodox, the unchurched, the impious, the one with a very antagonistic attitude towards the very idea of God or church community, including anyone who, quite rightly, passes for an atheist.

This Adventist community would be a non-totalizing community, a community that recognizes that we do not need to have all things in common, that our differences communicate, but communicate unity in diversity. This would be a community that is open to the other stranger, without proselytizing the stranger before giving them access to the community. This is an Adventist community that has an open membership. If such a community is impossible, then that is only possible (or impossible) in virtue of the messianic. Such a community would be a community that is messianic, a community that has been deconstructed into something sufficiently loose and open-ended. For how else can Adventism resist the programming effect of community, offset its too tight network, upset the totalizing impulses, exclusive principles other than maintaining one’s loyalty to the messianic dimension? Such a community is essentially non-existent, not in an ontological sense of being, but with a force of a messianic dream of something that never is but is always to come, something fundamentally other than the present order of the Adventist sense of who they are, something unforeseeable and unexpected.

⁴⁹ The greek word for “ungodly” used here is the word *agebon*. This is the same group of people that 2 Peter 3:7 refers to in the context of the coming of Christ: “the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.” The theological conundrum here is whether Christ’s death on the cross had power to save these ungodly people from the day of judgment and their destruction. If Christ identifies Himself with the stranger, the sinner, the *agebon*, then how could the coming of this Stranger (Christ) be the destruction of the same strangers that He came to die for? Romans 5:20 argued that Christ’s grace is more powerful than human sin. In Christ-self, love outbalances wrath. He says, “No” to ungodliness because He says, “Yes” to the ungodly. In the truth of Christ and the messianic, there is room for the ungodly. If Christ has room for the ungodly, what more about an Adventist community? This is the community Christ wants; a community open to and for the ungodly.

4.5. Fundamentals

4.5.1. Adventist Fundamental Belief

The messianic is always accidentally a discovery; a stumble of the unexpected. The prefiguration without prefiguration of Christ comes as an unexpected surprise. Unlike the Christ of conventional discourse (prelapsarian and postlapsarian), Christ comes to us in order to gift us with the Ineffable Other. The coming of Christ is not penultimate but it is the ultimate. This is the heart of the gospel. Christ is not the product of human reasoning about nature but the surprising Other who comes. The Christ of the Bible is neither necessary (therefore “provable” in terms of our ontology prior to Christ’s self-disclosure), nor unknowable (thus merely a presupposition), nor merely communicating from afar (and so believed in mere church dogma)—despite the number of Adventists who take one or another of these scenarios to be the case. Rather, it is the finding that Christ discloses Christ-self as the coming Stranger.

At the heart of the message of the Bible is the messianic—the coming of Christ. Christ is not simply here or there at our disposal, as an existence whose nature we can therefore debate or an object of religion. Christ is not an idol (i.e., a part of reality which we idolize). Christ always comes when we least expect it and when it is most surprising. The essence, ethos and telos of the Bible is that Christ has come, comes, will come, and will always come again.⁵⁰ Therefore, Adventist Christology’s object must be the messianic advent.

Since this is not generally acknowledged as the core of the mission of Adventism, it is necessary to explain this claim. In one sense, what I am suggesting is nothing new. Scripture has always been what it is. However, to suggest, as I am, that the Bible is essentially a proclamation to the coming of the messianic advent is to attempt to show what is already there in a new way. Specifically, what I am suggesting is a shift from seeing the Bible as a collection of information from God, to seeing it as a witness to the coming of the messianic, in all its full complexity.

It is easy to argue and think that to talk of Christ as the messianic is to prefigure, determine and have an expectation of what the messianic looks like. This would be a problem for

⁵⁰ John Webster (2008:13) talks about the the “three great cosmic movements” of God: Creation and Covenant as witnessed in the Old Testament that prepared the way for the Incarnation in Jesus Christ and it will be succeeded by a future Consummation.

Derrida. However, Jürgen Moltmann (1995:17) makes the argument that the prefiguration of the messianic advent is figures that are “provisional and passing.” These prefigurations (including Christ) must not get in the way of the messianic dimension, or give it a fixed form through any conceptions to which they themselves give rise. Their purpose is to make people open to God’s own messianic future. This is perhaps why in the Old Testament messianicity, the messiah is a figure of hope which ultimately remains shadowy, and why the messianic always bars itself against fulfillment through any existent tangible forms. Thus, any form of historical, personally defined and definable messiah (i.e., postlapsarian or prelapsarian Christ) conflicts with the openness of the messianic hope, which is related to God Himself, and therefore transcendent.

Adventism has always recognized the coming of Christ as something to look forward to and to wait for. However, I propose that the coming of Christ (this messianic dimension) is the very object of Adventism, thus it should also be the very object of its theology and praxis. This will bring a paradigm shift in Adventist theology, understanding of Christ and its confession of faith.

How can we then recognize this messianic advent? We will see the messianic advent when we see justice for the poor, and healing for the sick, when we see that the oppressed are freed, and that tears are wiped away. We will see the messianic coming, that is, from the new creation of all things (Isa. 25:8; Rev. 21:5).

Since the Bible is the source from which Adventism draws its theology, what then is the biblical evidence for this messianic advent? It is important for us to consider biblical allusions to the messianic advent as it forms the essence of Adventist Christology.

4.5.2. Christological Fundamental Belief

“Are you the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Matthew 11:4 (NIV), is the central question that revolved around Christ at the beginning of his ministry, as recorded in the Bible. The response of Christ to this question is, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” (Matt. 11:5). In the Old Testament, writers look forward to the messianic advent that will be inaugurated by God’s decisive intervention in human history, in order to establish His eternal kingdom under the Messiah.

The messianic era is characterized by justice, righteousness and peace, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the restoration and renewal of God's people and of creation. In the New Testament, the idea of the messianic advent appears in a developed form as the "kingdom of God" inaugurated by the coming of Christ and to be consummated at His return.

In Luke's account of Christ's ministry, Christ explicitly calls attention to the promise of the messianic advent as the context in which to understand what He was about, and adds, "today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). In fact, it would be all-too easy to point to the obvious centrality of the first and second advents in the New Testament as proof of my contention. Christ has come and will come again. The New Testament is about nothing if not the story of Christ. It would be very difficult to wrest from its pages the promise that, "this same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" Acts 1:11, without unraveling the coherence of the whole account. It would be equally hard to deny that Hebrews 9:28 is a sort of summary of the gospel: "So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." If one adds to this the Old Testament's messianic themes, then a very significant Biblical theme emerges.

The messianic advent of ancient Israel consisted of several strands, some of which were highlighted more at one time or by one prophet than others, but all together they introduce a multifaceted messianic advent, which presented God in a definite way over the course of history. It is important to realize that God did not inspire the prophets of the Old Testament with one single concept of a coming messianic figure who would be born at Bethlehem, preach a new covenant, suffer and die from crucifixion, rise again, thus defeating Satan, establish a spiritual kingdom on earth, the Church, and a kingdom of the just in Heaven. Though all these things are foretold in the Old Testament, the manner in which God chose to reveal His plan for the rescue of the human race was not as simple as announcing beforehand exactly what would be done, how, when, and by whom. This is where the biblical allusions to the messianic prefiguration begin.

From the initial call of Abraham to leave his kinsmen and follow God into an unknown land (Genesis 12) through the last post-exilic promises, such as Malachi's promise of the forerunner of Malachi 3 (which Christ confirms to be John in Matthew 11:10-14), God brought to Israel's attention the messianic advent to establish universal and perfect justice and peace. When put together and rightly understood, the sum of these promises gives a remarkable picture of

Christ and His work, but they were initially given in a fragmentary fashion (perhaps to empty it of any determined content or expectation).

Thus in the call of Abraham mentioned above, a covenant was established between God and Abraham in which God stated that all peoples of the earth “will be blessed in” Abraham. At this point this is an unfocused promise, both as to what will happen and how. It is a promise that has a structure of messianic thought. This call does not specify that there will be one particular figure who will be responsible for this messianic advent. It is more of the awaiting of the messianic era than the prefiguration of the messianic. Later, as I shall point out below, this promise of the messianic advent becomes associated with certain of Abraham’s descendants, namely the family of King David of Israel, for it is said that there will be an ideal Davidic ruler who will prefigure and be able to establish the things mankind longs for and seem tragically unable to attain, namely, perfect peace and perfect justice.

This longing for the ideal Davidic king further becomes associated with the promises of the coming Anointed One, likewise an ideal ruler who will completely destroy all of God’s enemies. In this way, the ideal Davidic monarch is now more clearly portrayed as one particular person than as a series of kings. Also, as these various messianic themes are proclaimed by the prophets of the Old Testament, certain of the prophetic utterances begin to speak of the Messiah’s Divinity (Isaiah 9:6), the virginity of His Mother (Isaiah 7:14), His place of birth (Micah 5), the manner of His death (Psalm 22), as well as other matters concerning this prefiguration of the messianic advent.

These promises complete the Old Testament portrait of the prefiguration of the messianic advent, but it is important to remember that these messianic promises were not given like the pieces of a puzzle that, when filled in, give an entire picture of Christ and His life, death and resurrection. A better image, perhaps, is that of a continuity of promises, each bearing a particular tradition about Israel’s hope for God’s decisive intervention in human history to deliver a messianic era, and that, even after coming together in the larger context, they are so mingled that it is difficult to see them distinctly or to understand exactly how they combine to form one whole. This is the reason that Christ so frequently had to explain the Old Testament promises about Himself; when originally delivered they usually revealed the truths about the coming messianic deliverance in a veiled manner. For example, it might be stated that the Messiah would destroy Israel’s enemies (Zech. 9). Naturally one would think of a military leader, yet what the text really refers to is the defeat of the Devil, the spiritual enemy of all of Abraham’s true descendants.

This, however, just scratches the surface of what all is involved with the notion of the messianic advent. It is not just the fact that the idea of the coming (and coming again) of Christ is a central theme in the Bible. Rather, the claim I am putting forward, is that in the Bible the very idea of Christ is inseparable from the notion of the messianic advent. Christ is understood, always and everywhere, as the prefiguration of the messianic advent (Messiah).⁵¹ Having said that, a few comments need to be made based on these findings.

The first point to be made is that the Bible is quite unlike Greek philosophy. There is no philosophical (or even theological) speculation about the nature of this messianic prefiguration. There is no argument whether the prefiguration would assume the *prelapsarian* or *postlapsarian* nature of Adam. There seems not to be a necessary argument for or against it in the Biblical witness. It does not, in anyway, relate to the messianic advent. The nature of the messianic prefiguration does not seem to affect both the prefiguration and the work of the prefiguration. The Messiah is simply announced—“This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1, NIV).

Secondly, one persistent, and indeed paramount, Old Testament theme is the connection of the prefiguration of the messianic advent with Abraham and David. The reason for this connection involves the covenants that God made with each of these men, covenants by which God promised some future benefit. The covenant with Abraham, for example, first mentioned in Genesis 12:2-3, promised a blessing for His descendants and for all people:

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you.

This was the covenant, later ratified by the rite of circumcision (Genesis 17:9-27), which made Abraham the father of the Jews. This covenant pledged two important things: that God would bless all the people of the earth, and that this blessing would somehow be accomplished through Abraham. By establishing Abraham’s descendants as a chosen people, God provided for the fulfillment of both promises, for the chosen people were a kind of seedbed for the messianic

⁵¹ The testimonies found in the vast territory of the Bible, as illustrated, confronts the metaphysical “Christology from above” and the anthropological “Christology from below” and presents a Christology that points forward to the messianic advent.

advent, Christ, who was a son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1), and in Him all people of the world can indeed find blessing.

There is nothing, however, in this initial covenant statement that necessarily implied a prefiguration of the messianic advent, and, as mentioned above, the messianic advent initially did not involve a distinct recognition of a single personal Messiah, but simply a belief that God would bless His chosen people and everyone in the world through them at some future time. Gradually, though, the Bible makes it clearer that this future blessing would be accomplished through a single person, and not be merely an action or a period of time. It does this in part by focusing attention on the House of David, the family and descendants of King David of Israel.

Thirdly, despite all these specific and diverse accounts of the messianic advent in Scripture, there is something else that emerges. It is the emerging of an overall messianic structure. I have argued that the coming of the stranger should be the central reality of Adventist belief, yet it is not simply a future expectation but rather the most *fundamental* thing we can know of this prefiguration of the messianic advent—the Messiah is always coming. Adventism confesses that at the heart of its faith stands the messianic event of Jesus Christ. This event was preceded by an earlier form of this advent that prepared the way for the incarnation and it will be succeeded by a future consummation of God’s primordial purpose in the final unity of God and humanity in the New Kingdom to come. Christ’s coming (the very heart of Adventism), then, is to be properly understood as unfolding in three great cosmic movements as advocated for by John Webster (2008:13). Firstly, Christ has come in creation and covenant. Secondly, Christ came in a new and deeper form in the event of incarnation in Jesus the Messiah. Thirdly, He will come again (again in new form) in the final climax of the ages—the return of Christ—an event prefigured in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. These three movements interpret each other. We are to understand Christ as “fulfillment” of the messianic promise and as itself a “promise” of a future messianic fulfillment in the consummation.

Fourthly, the coming of Christ implies both His *presence* and His *absence*. One cannot have the one without the other. “Coming” would not make sense if one does not, at least in some

sense, talk about “absence” as well. While the Bible affirms a divine omnipresence,⁵² it does not argue for a fixed permanent accessible presence of God. Moreover, the Bible directly affirms the notion of “divine absence.” The book of Job tells a story of an intentional absence of God, while two of the Gospels recount the astonishing words of Jesus: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:35). Perhaps the narrative in Luke 24, of the disciples on the Emmaus road after the resurrection, captures best of all this sense of both the presence and absence of Christ. If Adventism wishes to be true to its own historical founding moment (Great Disappointment) and relevant to the mood of our post-modern world, it would be well advised to pay careful attention to this dialectic of presence and absence as articulated in the Bible. To be true to itself, Adventism would have to become a messianic movement.

4.6. The Messianic Advent Movement

4.6.1. Messianic Adventism

John Webster (2008) calls for a more radically Adventist Adventism. This call is possible because the “Advent” is nothing other than the very coming of the stranger. This call for Adventists to be more “Adventist” is a call for something bigger than just a denominational label. An Adventist, thus, is one who is open to the coming other, who is an other-self. Adventism is to be taken as a descriptor of a type or school of thought—one which is fundamentally oriented towards the coming of the stranger or the other.

This messianic Adventism does not alter the faith of the Adventist Church but it rather calls the church to be true to its proclamation, without determining the content of who/what/when it/s/he is coming. The proclamation of the coming of Christ would mean that the one who is coming is coming from a messianic future. This future is not like the temporal or timeless future; it is not a predictable, scheduled or even foreseeable future. However, this coming refers to the coming Other (someone or something) whose (or which) arrival (or arrival of which) is totally unexpected, a comic that is totally unpredictable. The Other comes without us being able to anticipate their arrival, hence we cannot prepare ourselves for this coming, but we can merely

⁵² E.g. Psalms 139:7-8 (NIV) “Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.”

remain apolitically ready. “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son...” (Matt. 24:36). This is a messianic Adventist Church. Webster (2008:23) calls this church “a movement that is characterized in both belief and practice chiefly by an open, hopeful expectation of the consummation of the coming of God.”

Preparation without expectation is a difficult call and to meet it requires faith, a suspension that is not paralysis but an actively maintained openness to a plentitude that continually evades presence. This suspension would not be possible with the need for postures and practices of awareness. At the most basic level, this Messianic Adventism asks the church to meet the world without preconceived notions of what we will find there. Such a meeting itself is always already impossible, partial—for Adventism. To reject this call to suspend awareness amounts to a refusal of reality, even as that reality evades the constructions Adventism put upon it.

4.6.2. Messianic Remnant

The Remnant doctrine within Adventism is probably the most difficult to sustain from direct biblical exposition. This becomes plain when cognizance is made regarding the verses the belief uses to corroborate its claims. Most of the verses come from Revelation and once one strays outside of the book of Revelation, what remains are judgment and second coming references, which have nothing to say about the Adventist doctrine of the remnant. In this sense the belief is largely a construct grounded in traditional Adventist interpretations of Revelation. However, not all of the Revelation quotes are particularly relevant. The belief suggests Revelation 21:1-14, which is a text on the new heaven and earth and does not offer direct relevance on the remnant. It is not clear either how Revelation 18:1-4 (the fall of Babylon) is particularly helpful since there is no mention of the remnant here either. This leaves Revelation 12:17 and the three angels of Revelation 14.

The problem here has to do with the general proclamation of the second Advent and the coming of judgment as a unique “remnant” proclamation, and the fact that it is a component of the proclamation of the Church in all ages. Thus, the uniqueness of the Adventist remnant proclamation, ultimately has to be tied to the three angels’ messages. This perhaps speaks to a unique time in history (that is, before the second Advent). However, this does not alter the fundamental proclamation of the Church (namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ).

A glance at the Adventist fundamental belief on the Remnant itself⁵³, shows that the first line states the following: “The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” The statement seems to state that “the universal church” is distinct from “the remnant.” However, the last statement in the belief seems to contradict this initial claim: “Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness.” Surely, “every believer” is all those that compose the universal church. This means that, “every believer” constitutes the remnant. A question may arise that what is the difference between the remnant and the universal church? Who is the remnant that is “called out”? The incoherence here, is hard to miss.

This is somewhat complicated by a claim on the Adventist baptismal vow found in the Adventist Church Manual (2015:46): “Do you accept and believe that the SDA Church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy . . . ?” This question on the vow indicates something that this particular Adventist belief does not claim, namely, that the Adventist church is equivalent to the remnant. This is an extraordinary claim because Adventism (unlike Catholicism) does not hold to the notion that church membership is salvific or that the institution of the Adventist church constitutes the faithful, nor claim that the Adventist church holds the keys of salvation. Perhaps, it is one of those unintended slippages.

This slippage, a mainstream understanding of the “remnant,” is corrected by a simply word study. The Greek term used in Revelation 12:7 is *hoi loipoi*, which literally means “the

⁵³ The Church Manual (2015:13) states Fundamental Belief 13 “The Remnant and its Mission” as follows: The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Dan. 7:9-14; Isa. 1:9; 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Mic. 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4.)

others.” Without exception, this term is used in the New Testament in a comparison between two groups, whereby “the ones” are set over against “the others” (*hoi loipoi*).⁵⁴

In the book of Revelation, the term *hoi loipoi* (“the others”) appears eight times. At least four of these occurrences have a profane meaning, merely denoting “the others” (8:13; 9:20; 19:21; 20:5). In the other four instances, the theological meaning of a small, faithful, holy remnant is possible, even though here, too, the translation “the others” seems quite sufficient to do justice to the meaning of the text (2:24; 3:2; 11:13; 12:17).

In Revelation 12, the dragon (Satan) persecutes the woman who has given birth to the male child, who was taken up to God and to his throne (12:5). Then he attempts to kill “the other” children of the woman, i.e., the younger brothers and sisters of the “firstborn,” in other words, the faithful followers of Christ (12:17). These “others” are identical with the 144,000 saints and the great multitude, respectively, in chapter 7, who will enter the New Jerusalem. In short, the ‘other’ in the Apocalypse is made up of all faithful believers who “obey God’s commandments and hold on to the faith of Jesus” (12:17; 14:12). Thus, the believers should always identify themselves with the other while waiting for the coming Other. The ‘other’ in Revelation completes the trajectory toward a universal and eschatological other implied in the Gospels, explicated in Paul, and elucidated in Revelation.

4.6.3. Messianic Soteriology

This idea of the messianic other has soteriological implications. This soteriology is best expressed by Adrian Platts (2006:55-57) in his Seventh-day Adventism and the Sanctuary Doctrine, where he presents a soteriology of hospitality. He presents the sanctuary as God’s house, which is a place where one is made welcome. This makes it possible to apply Derrida’s notion of *hospitality*. Thus, a soteriology of hospitality, viewed from a messianic perspective urges adherents to be welcoming to all strangers without the agenda of proselytizing.

⁵⁴ For example, the faithful virgins vs. the other (foolish) virgins (Mt 25:10f) ; the two disciples of Emmaus vs. the other disciples of Jesus (Mk 16:12f); the disciples of Jesus vs. the other listeners of Jesus (Lk 8:10); the pious Pharisees vs. the other (sinful) people (Lk 18:9.11); the 12 (11) disciples vs. the other disciples of Jesus (Lk 24:9f); the Gentile Christians in Rome vs. the other Gentile believers (Rom 1:13); the believing Jews vs. the other (unbelieving) Jews (Rom 11:7); the married Christians vs. the other Christians (1 Cor 7:10-12); the church in Corinth vs. the other churches (2 Cor 12:13); the believers vs. other people (unbelievers) (1 Thess. 4:13; 5:6), and the letters of Paul vs. the other Scriptures (2 Pt 3:16).

Platts argues that this is a soteriological model that rests on the notion of hospitality. It is intrinsically an inclusive metaphor; thus it is a better explanation of the sanctuary doctrine for Adventism. If Adventism understands the Sanctuary as God's dwelling place among humanity, then the destructive theologies that revolve around personal sin and imperfection may be abrogated and replaced with a deeper concern for addressing social injustice and the alienation of strangers.

Platts argues that much of Adventist soteriology is derived from Hebrews 8-9, where the writer of the book uses the word "dwelling" eight times in those two chapters. Platts argues that the writer of Hebrews makes reference to the Sanctuary as a space that is bounded and exclusive, as understood by the Israelite in Mosaic history. However, and this is Platts' master stroke, such bounded space is not there in the "new heaven and new earth" (Revelation 21:1, NIV): "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Revelation 21:22, NIV). There is God's dwelling (sanctuary) with God's people but there is no physical bounded structure (temple). The preparation that needs to be done by Christ is to make space for the stranger, to remove the walls that have hitherto kept the stranger from God's presence. Thus, when Christ enters the Sanctuary, he goes there as the one who represents the stranger—"whatever you did for one of the least of these...you did for me" (Matthew 25:40, NIV). If Christ is welcome in this bounded space, then so is the stranger. The stranger is dragged into God's presence via the Stranger (Christ). All that remains then are those who are sheep and goats (Matthew 25)—those that welcome the stranger and those that did not—those that were hospitable to the other and those that were not.

4.8. Summary

The Christian faith, and subsequently the Adventist faith, proceeded from a messianic faith. If we take the word "Adventist" literally, the Adventist faith is a messianic faith. This messianic faith binds Adventism to the biblical openness to the other. In order to present a Christology that replicates a messianic faith, I have tried in this chapter to clarify the messianic dimension in dialogue with Adventist Christology.

This chapter has tried to present a Christology that is not metaphysical (prelapsarian or postlapsarian) nor present a Christology based on anthropological basis (incarnation) but it has presented Christ in a forward movement of God through biblical history. The chapter concludes

by saying that Christ can best be interpreted from a messianic perspective. This kind of interpretation presents a Christ that is dynamic and open to the stranger as He is a stranger, becoming the messiah.

CHAPTER 5:SUMMARY

5.1. Introduction

The nature of Christ within Adventist Christology has become a cause of disagreement within the church, ever since its inception. Among other things, the realization that there is no clear position from Adventist theological structures such as the Biblical Research Institute and a wide division among Adventist members precipitated the need to study Adventist Christology in depth. A hermeneutical way of addressing the exclusive complexion this controversy is causing was sought in this research. The two Christological strands (prelapsarian and postlapsarian) have been selected to serve as a case study in this investigation. An introductory study of the history of Adventist Christology, hermeneutical presuppositions, ontological positions and the messianic dimension was studied in this research in order to reach a balanced and inclusive conclusion.

With regard to the methodology of the research, an open and inclusive approach towards each subject was maintained and was featured in all the chapters. In the persistence of seeking an inclusive interpretation of Christ, a proposal for a messianic dimension to Adventist Christology has been put forth.

5.2. The History of Adventist Christology in the past 100 years

The history of Adventist Christology was studied in the second chapter, from its inception in the Millerite movement to recent years. Theological consensus on Adventist Christology has not been realized, but two positions are held, namely; the prelapsarian and the postlapsarian positions. The prelapsarian strand holds the view that Christ had a pre-fall nature (the nature of Adam before the fall) and the postlapsarian strand holds the view that Christ had a post-fall nature (the nature of Adam after the fall).

Even though the evangelical conferences narrowed the gap between Adventism and Evangelicals, its product (*Questions on Doctrine*) left the church polarized, thus dividing the church further. These theological strands placed the arguments within a well-defined context. Both strands agree that Christ had two natures (divine and human), but robustly debated and continue to debate what kind of human nature He had.

5.3. Adventisms: Two Theological Strands and their Hermeneutical Presuppositions

Since theology is always done within a context, it was necessary to embark on an in-depth study of the intellectual post-modern context facing Adventism. Postmodernism influenced Adventism in many ways. The research did not seek to refer to modernity and postmodernity from an apologetical point of view, but from a methodological perspective as the intellectual environment that facilitated the task of deconstruction. Postmodernism, thus, influenced Adventism and altered the way theology was done, people's confidence in privileged people and groups began to break down, truth was no longer seen to reside primarily in the meta-narratives of the church but rather in logical statements based on careful biblical research. The search for truth involved individual researchers carefully examining the Bible and then sharing what they found. If others were convinced by their arguments, movements would form around various individuals' perception of the Bible. The inherent individualism of the process, however, tended to produce fragmentation, each seeking to be faithful to the biblical interpretation of its founder or founders.

In this context, Adventist theologians have reacted to postmodernity in diverse ways. Writers attempting to surmount the epistemological challenge presented by postmodernity accentuate diverse areas of theological sources. They all call for critical evaluation and alteration in the way the gospel is expressed. Adventist theologians stumbled upon postmodernity as an intellectual incident that revolves around a reinterpretation of reason.

To understand deconstruction in the postmodern turn, we needed to introduce ourselves to the basic structure of interpreting interpretation. Specifically, we needed to become aware of the basic presuppositions involved in the act of theological interpretation. The functions of presuppositions in epistemology were identified. It is the existence and application of presuppositions in the formation of human knowledge that make knowledge an interpretation, or construction. It was necessary, then, to identify the presuppositions that are involved when Adventist theologians constructed their interpretations in these two theological strands (*prelapsarian* and *postlapsarian*).

It became clear in the study that Adventism continues to build its Christology on the ontological foundation of the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon which has been provided by Greek philosophy through its language. These Councils embraced Greek, which was the *lingua franca* of the time. In this embrace they were influenced by Greek philosophy (embedded in the lan-

guage) and as such they fashioned a theological vocabulary that expressed the key concepts of Christology, using words such as *homoousios* (same in being), *hypostasis* (person), and *kenosis* (empty oneself). Christianity (and Adventism), therefore, entered into philosophic conversation dialectically, thus ordering greek ontology to tell the Christian story.

Since Adventist Christological traditions were built under the macro-hermeneutical guidance of classical ontology, I considered the consequences that the paradigmatic shift in ontological perspectives had for the task of doing Adventist Christology in the twenty-first century. Two major ways in which ontology has been understood was discussed, together with their implications on Adventist Christology, namely; the timeless ontology (the view that the past, present and future appear alike) and the temporal ontology (the view that history is not viewed in one timeless movement but events are known as they take place and Christ is open to the changing realities of history).

As we recognized the hermeneutical role that ontology has on the proponents of each Christological strand, it became clear that Christological conclusions were influenced by a particular view on the relationship between Christ and time.

5.4. Appropriation and Application of the Messianic Dimension in Adventist Christology

With Adventism divided over conclusions based on ontological presuppositions, I proposed that the way forward is to appropriate the messianic dimension and make Adventism more messianic rather than less.

As the key principle that governs Christology, the messianic idea supplies an inclusive entry point for an understanding of Adventist Christology. This means constant redefining of church boundaries as the church moves to accept the Other for the sake of the Advent. This, in turn, strengthens Adventist identity. The Adventist church is an open and universal, rather than as exclusive, separatist, parochial, or sectarian church.

This chapter concluded that, rightly understood, the concept of the messianic has clear inclusive connotations. It is the view of the fourth chapter and subsequently this project, that the Seventh-day Adventist Church would do well to broaden its understanding and presentation of Christ in light of the biblical encompassing view of the messianic, the advent, and the stranger.

With this messianic dimension to Adventist Christology, Adventism is given a foothold that enables the church to remain “radically Adventist” in its unique identity. This kind of messianic Adventist Christology and the openness to the stranger, put the church in a position of uncertainty of who the stranger is, will be, and can be.

I believe that Adventist Christology in a messianic dimension would carry the following implications:

1. To expect the messianic advent is to be open—open to the future, open to each other, open to an Other. There can be no place for a messiah in an exclusive church that cannot be open to the other person, including other meanings of a text, other ways of seeing things, other races, other genders, another time (such as messianic time), other languages, other traditions and so forth. The essential character of the Biblical narrative is that it is messianically structured, that is, it is radically open rather than closed, inclusive rather than exclusive.

2. To be messianic is a direct expression of what it means to be Adventist, since the messianic anticipates the advent of the stranger. To say Adventist is to say Christ and to say Christ is to say messianic.

3. A messianic Adventist Christology advocates for an open, expanding messianic community committed to the other for the sake of the Other as One who is to come. If Adventism is to be truly Adventist and Christ-like, it would have to be a community that affirms the stranger, accepts any other who is different and include those that are viewed to be outsiders. A messianic community must be an open community. It cannot be totally undefined, as this would mean the loss of community itself, but rather a community with the permeable semantic boundaries that the concept of community shares with movement (as in Adventist movement), stranger and destabilized center. In principle, all humanity belongs to a messianic community. In practice, all those who accept the reality of the community and wish to belong to it, may. In a nutshell, a messianic community must be an open community. Such a messianic community must be committed to the other. The messianic community is the community that is for the other as other. This is based on God’s very nature as trinity (unity in diversity) and the economy of salvation itself—God creates community with humanity while always maintaining the otherness of the creature. This dynamic is often referred to as God’s respect

for our “freedom.” The commitment to the other is for the sake of the Other—that is Christ himself.

4. The messianic mission is essential to the definition of Adventism. Where we have a messiah we must have a messianic mission. This mission was inaugurated through the baptism of Christ. A messianic mission embraces the proclamation and acts of Christ, His acts and His suffering, His life and His death. To proclaim the gospel means bringing a message of joy, heralding victory and announcing salvation. The gospel is the light which salvation throws ahead of itself. It is nothing less than the arrival of the messianic advent in the word. In the very act of its announcement, the messianic era is already put into force. The messianic mission is a gospel proclamation to the poor, the hungry, the unemployed, the sick, the discouraged, the sad, the suffering, the oppressed, subjected and humiliated. This is a proclamation that brings dignity to the poor. This messianic mission brings men and women into the discipleship of Christ.

5. The messianic dimension brings about a messianic way of life. This includes a messianic understanding of the Sabbath for Adventism, where Christ is not viewed as either timeless or temporal but His time is viewed as messianic time, as found in the Sabbath. This is a messianic time which is open to the future, rather than determined by the past. The opening of each moment to the future is found in the Sabbath. On the Sabbath day redemption is celebrated in anticipation. The Sabbath becomes a foretaste of the kingdom of God, an order of peace for everyone, a feast of justice, a feast that is only celebrated and enjoyed together with all the others.

6. Messianic Adventist Christology begins with the acknowledgment that Christ is the coming One, He spoke and acted messianically. It begins with the question: “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29). It acknowledges the mystery that Jesus Himself is. In response to this question, a messianic Adventist Christology should suspend a response, just as Christ did, and respond by pointing to His suffering. Who He truly is manifested in His death and resurrection. Adventism will perceive who He is when it follows Him to the place where He is going, and when it takes up its own cross. Adventism can better understand who Christ is by accepting the call to carry the cross and follow Him as disciples. The key signature to Christ is not

His messianic title, but His history. Messianic Adventist Christology understands Christ through his relationship with God, His social relationships, and His relationship with Himself.

5.5. Final Conclusion

A messianic dimension reminds the Adventist church that what it believes is not its knowledge but its openness to the other. An encounter with the other will open the church to new insights and the possibility that its current understandings may adapt and grow. This does not mean that the church needs to abandon its fundamental teachings, however, it does mean that the expression of those teachings can be revised. A messianic Adventist Christology means that the church is welcoming to the stranger, because it is where Christ locates Himself. Members feel secure within the church walls as the church is a welcoming place of the stranger.

My contribution to Adventist Christology, through the messianic dimension in this dissertation, has been to call for a messianic Adventism—an Adventism that sees itself as nothing more than a movement radically committed to the other, and to the Other, and thus to the good news of Christ.

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