

THE HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH

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The holiness of the church was affirmed by the Niceno Constantinopolitan Creed of AD 381 which in Greek reads: "Πιστεύω εἰς ἕνα Θεόν, Πατέρα ... Καὶ εἰς ἕνα Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν ... Καὶ εἰς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον ... Εἰς μίαν, Ἁγίαν, Καθολικὴν καὶ Ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν," and in Latin: "Credo in unum Deum, Patrem ... Et in unum Dominum Iesum Christum, ... Et in Spiritum Sanctum ... Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam."¹ In English: "I believe in one God, the Father ... and in one Lord, Jesus Christ ... and in the Holy Spirit ... and (in) one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." Karl Barth, following the Latin text, which lacks another preposition before "unam," pointed out that it is not possible to believe in the church in the same way as one believes in the Godhead. There must be a distinction between believing in God and believing (in) the church. The holiness of the church is not the same as the holiness of the Holy Spirit. One is original, the other one is derived.²

These four adjectives *one*, *holy*, *catholic*, and *apostolic* have been used throughout church history to point to the key marks (*notae*) of the church. Although the Roman Catholic Church appropriates these characteristics for herself,³ Protestants feel they describe more than the Roman Catholic

¹ "Nicene Creed," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene_Creed; see also Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, vol. 3 of *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2001), 316.

² Karl Barth, *Die Lehre von der Versöhnung*, vol IV/1 of *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1953), 766-767.

³ John A. O'Brien, *Der Glaube der Millionen: Die Beweise der Katholischen Religion* (Aschaffenburg: Paul Pattloch Verlag, 1950), 32-39. See also Medard Kehl, "The One Church and the Many Churches," *TD* 49 (2002): 34. The August 6, 2000 Roman Catholic declaration *Dominus Iesus* stresses the uniqueness of the Catholic Church and "maintains that particular churches (above all the Reformation churches) are 'not churches in the proper sense' (*sensu proprio Ecclesiae non sunt*)."³ On another note but related to the holiness of the church, George H. Tavard, "Holy Church or Holy Writ: A Dilemma of the Fourteenth Century," *CH* 23 (1954): 195-206, discusses the

Church.⁴ S. J. Grenz mentions that “the major church traditions view these marks differently.”⁵ It is also discussed, if the term holy points to something holy or to the fellowship of the saints.⁶ This paper will take a look at the second characteristic only, the holiness of the church.

Although there are a number of so-called holiness churches in the tradition of Methodism, Pentecostalism, and the Charismatic Movement that at least partially stress “‘three works of grace’—conversion, entire sanctification and a ‘baptism in the Spirit’ with speaking in tongues,”⁷ this study will not venture into this area. Instead, it will take a look at how Scripture uses the terms *church* and *holy*, ask how the phrase *the holy*

“remarkable, if unfortunate, break with the hitherto conventional doctrine on Scripture and Church ... reading the written word of God goes no longer hand in hand with listening to the living voice of the Church, and the voice of the Church, rather than growing from the contents of Scripture, is superseded to them” (195-196).

- 4 Cf. James C. Goodloe IV, “The Church: One and Holy,” *ThTo* 66 (2009): 205-210; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 3:405-414. Protestants felt also that these marks may not be enough, because they could be outward signs only. Reinder Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ: A Biblical Understanding of the Church* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2009), 70, points out that Protestants have added “the pure preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments in a biblical way, and in particular for John Calvin, a faithful application of church discipline.” He mentions that Charismatics have added the gifts of the Spirit, and “Adventists lay stress on the keeping of the divine commandments and faithfulness to the ‘testimony of Jesus’ (Rev 12:17).” He concludes: “One might, with some justification, argue that all these aspects are included in the apostolicity of the church, as they are included in the apostolic heritage found in the New Testament writings” (70).
- 5 Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 468. He points, e.g., to apostolic succession.
- 6 Fritz Buri, Jan Milič Lochman, and Heinrich Ott, *Dogmatik im Dialog: Die Kirche und die letzten Dinge* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1973), 37.
- 7 Donald W. Dayton, “The Holiness and Pentecostal Churches: Emerging from Cultural Isolation,” *The Christian Century* (1979): 786. See Dale T. Irvin, “Holiness unto the Lord’: Toward a Holiness Christian Dialogue with Judaism,” *JES* 34 (1997): 13-37, in which the author argues that the “‘second blessing’ of sanctification, which proponents identify with the baptism of the Holy Spirit” empowers people to keep “the Law in considerably high regard” while not arguing “that its covenantal form has been superseded by the church.” (13). See also Melvin E. Dieter, “The Development of Nineteenth Century Holiness Theology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20.1 (1985): 61-77; John W. V. Smith, “Holiness and Unity,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 10 (1975): 24-37; and Gilbert W. Stafford, “The Faith and Order Movement: Holiness Church Participation,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32.1 (1997): 145-156.

church should be understood, and study implications of the concept of the holiness of the church.

1. Biblical Vocabulary

1.1. Holiness

A number of words express holiness, for instance, the Hebrew *qadosh* and *qodesh*. In Greek, most frequently the adjective *hagios* (holy, set apart) appears in the NT, followed by the verb *hagiazō* (to sanctify, purify, treat as holy), and the noun *hagiasmos* (holiness, sanctification, consecration). There is another noun of the same word family, *hagiōsynē* (holiness, uprightness) which, however, is found quite seldom. The terms *hosios* (holy) and *hosiotēs* (holiness) belong to another word family. Finally, there is the related term *hagnos* (pure).⁸

Term in the NT	Frequency in the NT
<i>hagios</i>	233 times
<i>hagiazō</i>	28 times
<i>hagiasmos</i>	10 times
<i>hagiōsynē</i>	3 times
<i>hagnos</i>	8 times
<i>hosios</i>	8 times
<i>hosiotēs</i>	2 times

Table 1. Occurrences of the Greek *hagios*

Holiness describes the awe-inspiring nature of God and is applied to persons and things that belong to God and stand in a relationship with him. The terms deals with the process of setting apart from what is evil or negative and with dedication devotion, and consecration to what is good.⁹

⁸ For a listing of the respective vocabulary see also G. F. Hawthorne, "Holy, Holiness," in *DLNT*, ed. Ralph P. Martins and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 485.

⁹ See O. Procksch, "hágios," in *TDNT*, G. Kittel, G. Friedrich, and G. W. Bromiley, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 1:17; Ted Cabal, "Holy," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. C. Brand, et al. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 772; Siegfried H. Horn, ed., "Holy," *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington

Holiness refers to persons that are holy, to holy places, and to holy things. It is not linked with the term *church* but it doubtlessly points — among other things— to a holy church. Here are some of the usages:

(1) Holy Persons

- God is the Holy Father (John 17:11). He is holy and true (Rev 6:16), and his name is hallowed (Matt 6:9).
- Jesus is the Holy One (Mark 1:24). He is also the holy servant (Acts 4:27) and the unique high priest “holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens” (Heb 7:26). He “became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).
- The Holy Spirit carries the adjective *hagios* in his very name. He does the work of sanctification (1 Pet 1:2).
- Because God is holy, those associated with him are holy too. There are heavenly beings that are holy such as the holy angels (Mark 8:38).
- John the Baptist was a holy man (Mark 6:20).
- There are the holy prophets (Luke 1:70), the holy apostles (Eph 3:5), the holy brethren (Heb 3:1), holy men (2 Pet 1:18), and holy women (1 Pet 3:5).
- A bishop must be holy (Titus 1:8).
- Christians are the holy ones, in other words the saints (Rom 1:7).
- They are also a holy temple of God (1 Cor 3:17), a holy nation (1 Pet 2:9), a holy priesthood (1 Pet 2:5), and the holy city of Rev 11:2.

These last statements indicate that the people of God are a holy people. Therefore, the church is a holy church. She is holy because she is connected to God. This concept is clearly found in the OT. Having arrived at Mt. Sinai God declares that Israel as the covenant-keeping people is con-

DC: Review & Herald, 1979), 504. It is said that “Fundamentally, holiness is a cutting off or separation from what is unclean and a consecration to what is pure.” W.A. Elwell and P. W. Comfort, eds., “Holiness,” in *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), 608. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles in the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, vol. 4 of *Conflict of the Ages Series* (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 51, writes: “Holiness is not rapture: it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father; it is trusting God in trial, in darkness as well as in the light; it is walking by faith and not by sight; it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love.”

sidered by him “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation/people” (Exod 19:6), God’s “treasured possession” (Exod 19:5). Because of its relationship to God Israel is holy. In Lev 11:44-45 and 19:2, again in the context of encountering divine law, God exhorts his people “to be holy as he, the Lord, is holy.” What is said to and about the covenant people of God in the OT is appropriated by Christ’s church in the NT. For instance, the above mentioned statements found in Exodus and Leviticus are used in 1 Peter to describe the new covenant people of God (see 1 Pet 2:9 and 1:16).¹⁰ Holiness and the people of God are associated throughout Scripture. To some extent holiness seems to be a relational concept and yet is not limited to this aspect.

(2) Holy Places

- Jerusalem is the holy city (Matt 4:5).
- The mountain of transfiguration was a holy mountain (2 Pet 1:18).
- The temple (*hieron*) was a holy place (Acts 21:28).
- The earthly sanctuary had a Holy Place (Heb 9:2) and a Most Holy Place (Heb 9:3).
- Moses stood on holy ground when he experiences the phenomenon of the burning bush (Acts 7:33).¹¹
- The presence of God transforms ordinary places into holy places.

(3) Holy Things

- Whatever is holy should not be given to dogs (Matt 7:6).
- There is the holy covenant (Luke 1:72).
- God made promises in the Holy Scriptures (Rom 1:2)
- The law/commandment is holy and good (Rom 7:12).
- Christians greeted each other with a holy kiss (Rom 16:16).
- Men should lift up holy hands in prayer (1Tim 2:8).

(4) Our Sanctification and the Call to Holiness

- The Father sanctifies Jesus’s disciples (John 17:17). Jesus gave himself to sanctify his church and present her without wrinkle, blameless, and holy (Eph 5:25-27).

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:5 reflects the same idea by calling the new covenant believers, the church, a “holy priesthood,” thereby combining the two phrases of Exodus 19:6, “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation.”

¹¹ The place was holy due to the presence of the angel of the LORD/the LORD (Exod 3:5).

- Believers have been sanctified by the blood of Jesus (Heb 10:10).
- Still God's will is our sanctification (1 Thess 4:3) "without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14).

While sanctification is described as God's past, present, and future work on and in us, believers are not to be passive in this work. The divine indicative leads to a divine imperative. Thus, the believer is supposed to "share in his holiness" (Heb 12:10).

1.2. The Church

In secular Greek the term *ekklēsia* designated a gathering of people, for instance, the assembly of citizens as a political entity. In the Septuagint the word is most often employed as a translation of the Hebrew word *qahal*, "gathering," "congregation," or "assembly." In the NT it normally describes the group of those, who believe in Jesus Christ and accept him and his teachings.¹² They "are joined to the organization originated by Him"¹³ and are his disciples and followers, called to minister to each other and the world and to proclaim what he has commanded them (Matt 28:20).¹⁴ S. Horn notes that *ekklēsia* as it refers to the Christian church is used for "(1) a church meeting (1Cor 11:18), (2) the total number of Christians living in one place (1Cor 4:17), (3) the church universal (Matt 16:18)."¹⁵ It is the community of the Holy Spirit and the people of God.

Let us take a closer look at how the *ekklēsia*, the church, is described in the NT.

- (1) Frequently, *ekklēsia* refers to a local church such as the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22), the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1) or the church in Cenchrea (Rom 16:1). It could be a house church (Rom 16:5).

¹² Cf. Erwin Fahlbusch, "Church. Subject, Tasks, and Problems of Ecclesiology," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. E. Fahlbusch et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1:477-478; and Jürgen Roloff, "Church. Historical Aspects," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, edited by E. Fahlbusch et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1:481.

¹³ Siegfried H. Horn, ed., "Church," in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington DC: Review & Herald, 1979), 224.

¹⁴ Cf. G. Gloege, "Gemeinde. Begrifflich," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Kurt Galling (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958), 2:1325-1329.

¹⁵ Horn, "Church," 224.

- (2) The plural is used to describe churches in a certain area, for instance, in Judea (1 Thess 2:14) or Galatia (1 Cor 16:1) or churches of a certain composition, for instance, the churches of the Gentiles (Rom 16:4).
- (3) However, churches of a certain area can also be portrayed as *the* church of this area, for instance, the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria (Acts 9:31) pointing already into the direction of a universal church.
- (4) Finally, the universal church is envisioned when Jesus talks about his church (Matt 16:18). The elders are to shepherd the church of God (Acts 20:28). Jesus is the head of the church that is his body (Eph 5:23).¹⁶ Undoubtedly, it is the universal church that the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed had in mind.
- (5) Although in the NT the adjective *holy* is not joined to the noun *church*, nevertheless the concept of the holiness of the church is found.¹⁷
 - The church is frequently called the church of God (1 Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 12:28; 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:13; 1 Thess 2:14; 2 Thess 1:4). As the church of God she is not a human institution and is not owned by human benefactors. The church belongs to God,¹⁸ and as such she shares to some degree God's holiness.
 - The same is true when the church is called the body of Christ (Eph 4:12). The body metaphor may describe the entire church, including the head (1 Cor 12, especially verse 21). However, in Ephesians 4:15 and Colossians 1:18 the head is Christ, and the rest of the body represents the church. In this context the church is considered to be the body of Christ. The theme of holiness appears in Colossians 1:22 and the church as his (Christ's) body in Colossians 1:24.
 - The church in Corinth is addressed as "the church of God which is at Corinth ... those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling" (1 Cor 1:2). The word family *holy* appears twice in this text. Obviously, the "church" is the

¹⁶ See Ekkehardt Mueller, "God's Church and His Churches," unpublished paper, 2003.

¹⁷ A. S. Wood, "Holiness," in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 3:189.

¹⁸ Cf. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 27.

same entity as “those who have been sanctified.”¹⁹ That would mean that the holiness of the church is confirmed. “The change from the singular to the plural is noteworthy. The singular stresses the solidarity of the readers as one united corporate entity; the plural calls attention to the individual responsibility of each member to live out his or her consecrated status in Christ.”²⁰

- Phrases such as “the churches of the saints” (1 Cor 14:33),²¹ “the church of God ... with all the saints” (2 Cor 1:1) and the “saints” (Eph 1:1; Col 1:2) that are later identified as a church (Eph 1:22; Col 1:18) support the concept of the holiness of the church.
- According to Ephesians 5:25-27, Jesus sanctifies the church and presents her as holy. The church appears as bride or wife of Jesus. The passage seems to describe her present condition. She is holy.²²

¹⁹ See A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 76, who writes: “The plural form of the dative participle ἡγιασμένοις, to those sanctified, provides an exegetical gloss on the earlier singular form, to the church.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

²¹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 27-28, suggests: “Designating them as ‘saints’ has at least four implications. First, they are ‘saints’ by God’s call ... the Corinthians already are ‘saints’ in the same way that Paul already is an apostle.... Second, belonging to the holy people of God qualifies them as saints set apart to serve God’s purposes, not their own. All Christians are equally holy so that none is to be regarded ‘saintlier’ ... than others. Third, they are called to a particular lifestyle and are bound by moral strictures and standards of behavior because God is holy.... Fourth, the term ‘saints’ has corporate significance.... They are not set apart from the world as lone saints but set apart with others as a community of saints with obligations to one another as well as to God. One of the hallmarks of holiness is wholeness, and Paul wants this church to be whole and without divisions to represent God’s holiness to the world.”

²² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 377, states: “There are no grounds for deducing from the wording of this verse that Christ’s presentation of his pure bride to himself awaits the parousia, though many commentators have assumed this.... This ignores the fact that later in v 32 the ‘one flesh’ marriage union is applied to the present relationship between Christ and the Church and that throughout the passage the past and present relationship between Christ and his Church is the model for husbands and wives to follow in their marriages. Here, in line with this writer’s more realized eschatology, glory and holiness are seen as present attributes of the Church, and Christ’s activity of endowing the Church with these qualities is a present and continuing one.... After all, in 1:4 holiness and blamelessness, along with love, are present aspects of Christian existence.”

1.3. Summary

A study of the biblical material suggests that the concept of the holiness of the church is a biblical concept. While this concept applies to the universal church of God, it certainly is also applicable to local churches.²³ However, the emphasis is clearly on Christ's universal church. Hawthorne discusses the saints of the NT and states:

The most common term describing Christians is *hoi hagioi*, consistently translated 'saints'.... *Hagioi* (holy / saints) refers to persons who are holy because of God's gracious choice of them ... who have been oriented away from the world and turned toward God, and not primarily persons who are morally and ethically perfect. Yet moral and ethical meanings do inhere in this word.... Therefore they are persons who have been turned toward God and toward doing his will.²⁴

These persons form Christ's church. Fortunately, Hawthorne talks about the indicative and imperative and a conscious decision in doing the will of God. Otherwise his statement could be misunderstood in the sense that Christians would remain completely passive when it comes to sanctification. In any case, Christians have been sanctified—perfect tense—and yet they are also being sanctified or made holy—present tense (Heb 10:10,14). "Thus, paradoxically, holiness is both an established fact for Christians and at the same time a process. Christians are holy and are becoming holy."²⁵

2. The Dilemma of a Holy Church and a Community of Sinners

This raises some serious questions: Which one is the holy church of Christ? Can Christian denominations be counted as such? Can one single denomination claim to be this church? Is it reasonable to go so far as to conclude that outside of such a denomination salvation cannot be found?

How should one deal with the issue that the Christian church claims to be holy but oftentimes looks unholy, sinful, ugly, and maybe even evil? Even James calls the saints sinners and double-minded people (Jam 4:8). Secular persons and people of other world religions are appalled when

²³ Cf. Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ*, 61; who argues that the marks of the Christian church should also found in local churches.

²⁴ Hawthorne, "Holy, Holiness," 488.

²⁵ Ibid.

they are confronted with the scandals of Christianity: misuse of power, manipulation, political maneuvering, sexual abuse, greed, money laundry, etc. They define institutional Christianity “in terms of hypocrisy rather than in terms of holiness.”²⁶ And it is not only others that suffer from Christianity; it is also Christians themselves that suffer from the church. Is it possible for parts of the church of God to apostatize or is the holy church of God a holy church forever? These are some of the questions this study will seek to address.

2.1. The Church of Christ

The question which Christian community is the holy church of Christ is not a question raised in the NT. The NT authors did not witness a splintering of Christianity in numerous denominations, although most of them had to battle heresy and some secessionists. They laid down boundaries of what was unacceptable in teaching and life style.²⁷ Yet even churches with life style and doctrinal issues such as the church in Corinth were still considered true Christian communities, however, in need to correct their course. On the other hand, it seems that a split took place with the church of Thyatira in Rev 2. A remnant emerged from an apostate church.

So, what is the true church today? T. C. Oden points to a Lutheran distinction between “*die Kirche im eigentlichen and uneigentlichen Sinne* (the church properly speaking, and the church in a wider or improper, diffuse sense; Neve *Luth. Sym.*, p. 187). The church in its narrow definition is composed of those who truly believe, whose faith is active in love.” In a broader sense, it “includes all those baptized.”²⁸ But this is the church in its *uneigentlichen Sinn*.

Barth considers the Christian church as the assembly of those people who are willing to live under the divine judgment executed in Christ’s death and revealed in his resurrection from the dead.²⁹

²⁶ Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ*, 63.

²⁷ See, e.g., John in his epistles toward the end of the first century.

²⁸ Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 322.

²⁹ Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik: Ausgewählt und eingeleitet von Helmut Gollwitzer*, 2nd ed. (München: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969), 221: “Die christliche Gemeinde, die sein Leib ist, weil und indem er ihr Haupt ist, ist aber die Versammlung derjenigen Menschen, ‘die durch ihn allen anderen zuvor jetzt schon zu einem Leben unter dem in seinem Tod vollzogenen und in seiner Auferstehung von den Toten offenbarten göttlichen Urteil willig and bereit gemacht sind.’”

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) position is presented by Raoul Dederen: "According to the NT, the church is a society not of thinkers or workers, but of believers. 'Believers,' or 'those who believed,' is constantly used as a synonym for the members of the church." He also points to the importance of baptism, "a rite of faith and of confession." and the fact that "faith was no mere act of intellectual assent, but the symbol of an intimate union between the believer and Christ."³⁰

Bruinsma raises the question whether or not a third way may be possible:

There may well be a third way of approaching this matter. Denominations are structures in which the visible church exists. Some are closer to the ideal of the Apostles' Creed than others. Might one say that denominations can claim to be truly part of the church universal only as long as they are serious about maintaining these marks of the Christian church?³¹

Then he goes on to raise questions based on the assumption of a third alternative:

Where does one draw the line between what might be considered as bona fide Christian churches and what is definitely outside the realm? Can such churches as, for instance, the Unitarian Church (that denies the doctrine of the Trinity) and the Mormon Church (that has other holy writings in addition to the Bible), in which fundamental aspects of apostolic doctrine are denied, be considered as part of the invisible church? And are churches in which basic beliefs are in flux, or parachurch entities in which there is no administration of baptism or celebration of the Lord's Supper, be considered church in the full sense of the word?³²

The SDA Church has not defined its understanding of the universal church in these institutional terms. SDAs do not claim to be Christ's universal church, neither do they claim that other denominations are. SDA Fundamental Beliefs state:

The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration

³⁰ Raoul Dederen, "The Church," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2000), 561.

³¹ Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ*, 60-61.

³² *Ibid.*, 61. On page 154, he does not go to the third alternative but states: "God's church does not coincide with one particular denomination or religious tradition,"

of the Lord's Supper, for service to all mankind, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel.³³

The remnant form an extra point in the Fundamental Beliefs: "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."³⁴

The statement on relationships with other Christian churches and religious organizations of the *General Conference Working Policy* contains the following paragraph: "We recognize those agencies that lift up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for evangelization of the world, and we hold in high esteem Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ."³⁵

The universal church is broader than any denomination. It is visible and invisible insofar that it consists of those who believe in Jesus and follow him.³⁶ This study cannot discuss here the issue of visibility versus invisibility, but it may suffice to say that if membership in Christ's church depends on a personal decision of individuals, the universal church cannot simply be equated with an organized church of our days in which both saints and unconverted persons hold membership and in which not all true believers may be gathered yet.³⁷ Although the church as the assembly of followers of Christ has visible aspects, there is this invisible dimension.

The problem is heightened when apostasy among Christians is taken into consideration. Whereas, in the first century the universal church may have been quite visible, it is much more difficult and complex to recognize

³³ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed. (Silver Spring: Review and Herald, 2005), 13.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *General Conference Working Policy* (Silver Spring: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2002), policy No. 075.

³⁶ Dederen, "The Church," 546; states correctly: "The church, according to the NT, is not an invisible entity, nor a mental image.... At the same time the church can be described as having an invisible dimension."

³⁷ Some would claim that there is no invisibility of the church. The church is found where the Eucharist is celebrated in a certain way and with a certain theological understanding. However, such a view is forced to maintain a sacramental view of the Communion that comes quite close to the position of *ex opere operato*. It does not seem to do justice to the NT emphasis on the decision of individuals to accept Jesus and follow him nor the problem of apostasy within the church and even apostasy of churches and/or it has—at least to some extent—to separate the organizational structure of the church, which becomes the real church, from the members of the church.

it, for instance, during the Medieval Ages, that is, throughout large parts of church history.

2.2. Holy and Sinful

The dilemma and tension between the claim to holiness and the missing of the mark is reflected in the writings of numerous Christian theologians. M. E. Dever affirms:

The church is *holy* and is to be holy because God is holy.... The holiness of the church describes both God's declaration concerning his people and the Spirit's progressive work. After all, the church is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and it is composed of saints set apart for God's special use.... So the church's holiness is fundamentally Christ's holiness; at the same time, Christ's holiness will be reflected in the church's holiness.³⁸

Then he adds: "In this present age the church will never attain ethical holiness perfectly.... The church is holy, then, in the sense that it is daily advancing and is not yet perfect."³⁹ T. C. Oden acknowledges: "As body of Christ, the church is necessarily holy, yet its holiness is enmeshed in continuing human imperfection and finitude until the end of history."⁴⁰ However, he continues to say:

The deeper irony is that the signs of sin that attach to the church are indirect evidences of its holiness. It could not be a holy church if it had clean hands, as if separated from its mission and task of saving sinners.... The church appearing to have no sin within its precincts is likely to be a church that has forsaken its mission.⁴¹

This statement may need further unpacking and clarification in order not to be misunderstood. In any case, his analogy between the sinless Christ and his mission and the sinful church and her mission does not sit well. But he is right in his assessment that the church is not only holy but also bears the signs of sin.

Commenting on the Second Vatican Council, A. Dulles points out that for Catholics "The church is most perfectly holy in Mary and the saints, who are intimately and abidingly united with God in heaven (LG 48). But

³⁸ Mark E. Dever, "The Doctrine of the Church," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 776.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 316.

⁴¹ Ibid., 318-319.

already here on earth 'the Church is adorned with true though imperfect holiness' (LG 48)."⁴² The Council does not mention sinfulness in regard to the church, although some Catholic theologians would allow for this. The members may be sinful, but the "church is entirely holy"⁴³

Several solutions have been suggested for the tension between a holy church and an imperfect church:

- (1) "Donatists as well as Gnostics, Novationists, Montanists, Cathari, and other sects solved the problem by claiming that they alone were holy while all others were not really members of the church. But 1 John 1:8 reminds one that the church which has no sin to confess simply does not exist."⁴⁴
- (2) "Others [among them the Roman Catholic Church] have claimed that the members are sinful but the church is holy. But the church does not exist in that abstract; it is sinful people who constitute the church."⁴⁵ The Roman Catholic position has been dealt with more extensively by Berkouwer. First he describes the Catholic view: "The holy Church no longer stood under judgment because of Christ's will in constituting the Church as an irrevocable given of salvation, and she would not be confronted in the future by judgment either."⁴⁶ Among others he quotes Y. Congar who stated that "There is no more sin in the Church than in Christ, of Whom she is the body; and she is His mystical personality."⁴⁷ Then he makes it clear that "sin in the Church is not separate from individual members."⁴⁸ Oftentimes, if not predominantly, Scripture has a corporate perspective and does not limit itself to an individual view. Therefore, the sin of individuals affects the church.⁴⁹
- (3) "Gnostics claimed that the body was sinful while the soul was holy. But biblical anthropology declares that it is the whole undivid-

⁴² Avery Dulles, "The Church as 'One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic,'" *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 23 (1999): 21.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ R. L. Omanson, "Church, The," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 232.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See G. C. Berkouwer, *The Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 340.

⁴⁷ Quoted *ibid.*, 341.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 345.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Achan in Joshua 7 and the immoral church member in 1 Corinthians 5.

ed human being who is sinful."⁵⁰ Scripture has a holistic perspective and does not separate the soul from the body.

- (4) S. Wood speaks about the eschatological dimension of the holiness of the church. The church will be holy one day in the future. But he warns that this concept should not be divorced from ethical behavior here and now.⁵¹
- (5) Furthermore, it is suggested that the church is holy objectively but not empirically.⁵² While this may have an element of truth, the church's holiness should shine as a light to the world. The objective dimension is not enough.
- (6) Holiness points to being set apart. It is a relational concept. The church is involved in a relationship with its Lord that differs from all other relationships.
- (7) Holiness is understood in an external, cultic sense. However, sanctification should include ethics and conduct.
- (8) It has already been pointed out that holiness may point to fellowship of holy things, for instance the Lord's Supper, and not to fellowship of the saints. However, this seems to be excluded by texts such as 1 Corinthians 1:2.

While Berkouwer mentioned the previous last four points used in church history to solve the tension between a holy and sinful church, he stressed especially that sanctification—clearly expressed in the NT—has to be taken seriously in Christianity today without falling into the trap of moralism or legalism. Holiness cannot just be interpreted as forensic justification but must play itself out in concrete conduct, in an attractive new life. He is strongly opposed to the notion of a mere objective holiness, because accepting such a solution could lead to the problem that holiness is no longer connected to Christian life in this aeon and to the attitude that personal sanctification does not matter.⁵³ Why would people join the church, if there were not some difference between believers and unbeliev-

⁵⁰ Omanson, "Church, The," 232.

⁵¹ Wood, "Holiness," 190.

⁵² R. L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 842, proposes: "The church is definitively holy in an absolute sense in that it is 'in Christ.' It is progressively holy in a relative sense in that its sanctification is progressive, originating from the inner man and finding expression in the outer life. As Calvin remarks: 'The church is holy ... in the sense that it is daily advancing and is not yet perfect; it makes progress from day to day but has not yet reached its goal of holiness.'"

⁵³ Berkouwer, *The Church*, 316-325.

ers, if there were not some new quality of life, an admirable and fascinating conduct, an impressive bond of love between believers?⁵⁴

Omanson's solution to the problem is what Berkouwer had also mentioned: To be holy means to be separated from the profane and serve God.⁵⁵ It does not point to sinless perfection. Bruinsma holds: "Holiness, therefore, is primarily a matter not of moral distinction but rather of assignment to a particular purpose. And therefore the holiness of the church has first of all to do with the mission of the church."⁵⁶ However, he does not deny a moral dimension.⁵⁷ "An overemphasis on holiness, understood as absolute moral perfection, will almost certainly lead to fanaticism and sectarianism. An imbalance in the other direction will easily lead to worldliness and superficiality."⁵⁸

Berkouwer and Ryken take Luther's *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time righteous and sinner) and apply it to the church. Yet they differ somewhat. Dever stresses that the holiness of the church can only be discerned by faith. He bases his exposition on 1Cor 6:9-11, being washed, sanctified, and justified,⁵⁹ and comes to the conclusion: "God was calling them to become what they were in Christ, and this required the pursuit of holiness."⁶⁰

Being aware that the *simul justus et peccator* can be misunderstood as being purely external and not involving a change in humans, Berkouwer clarifies it saying:

Luther did not see sin as an 'undisputed reality governing the field,' but as 'sin that is assaulted and fought against.' The *simul* is not an equilibrium, an inevitable 'existential' of the Christian; rather, it is a 'formula of battle' along a way, in movement: a transition in which the

⁵⁴ Berkouwer, *The Church*, 322, states: "There is something undeniably impressive in the new life of sanctification, something radiating that automatically draws attention to itself (cf. Acts 5:13f.; I Pet. 3:2)."

⁵⁵ Omanson, "Church, The," 232.

⁵⁶ Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ*, 64.

⁵⁷ Similar Dederen, "The Church," 562-563.

⁵⁸ Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ*, 65.

⁵⁹ Philip G. Ryken, "A Holy Church: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11," in *The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*, ed. Richard D. Philipps, Philip G. Ryken, and Mark E. Dever, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishers, 2004), 45-66.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

glance is directed in humility to Christ and His saving, superior grace.⁶¹

“Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are inseparably connected.... Therefore, the *credo* is possible only in the context of struggle, prayer and nostalgia.” The *simul* in the church is a surprise and at the same time a challenge to accept “the commission which that surprise entails.”⁶²

Barth takes a different approach. He suggests that comprehending the holiness of the church is an act of revelation, a discovery which cannot be received independent of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is not accessible to everyone. Barth underlines also the importance of the *credo*, faith.⁶³ “It is true: in her holiness she [the church] is and remains invisible to the world and without faith also to herself.”⁶⁴ The church cannot be holy without the living Lord and is always bound to and dependent on him. Without him her preaching deteriorates into a form of enlightening people, baptism and Lord’s Supper become religious rites only, her theology turns into a form of psychology, and her mission into a form of propaganda. Without him no institution, no good will, no technique can prevent her from slipping into the profane. Her holiness is a reflection of his holiness and a free gift of the Holy Spirit revealed to the believer.⁶⁵

While some of the suggested solutions must be excluded on NT grounds, others contain elements of truth, such as the concept of holiness as separation from what is opposed to God, the idea of holiness as a mystery, but also the aspect that holiness must itself play out in the life of the church, despite all imperfection. Therefore, none of the suggested solutions should permit believers to be content with the status quo. Instead God must be allowed to continuously sanctify believers and through them the church so that holiness does not remain a theoretical concept but becomes tangible.

2.3. Limitations of the Holy Church

The problem of the divine ideal and the earthly condition of the church is heightened when the problem of apostasy among Christians is taken into

⁶¹ Berkouwer, *The Church*, 347.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 356, 357.

⁶³ Barth, *Die Lehre von der Versöhnung*, 766-767.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 782.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 775.

consideration. One of the initial questions was: Is it possible for parts of the church of God to apostatize or is the holy church of God a holy church forever?

Barth is adamant: The church did not take on holiness on her own. So she cannot put it off. It is her destiny.⁶⁶ The church can fail and get lost. She can deny her Lord and apostatize. She can become disfigured and deformed, even sick. She has to stand the critique of her Lord and the oftentimes justified criticism of the world, but as the body of Christ she cannot die. She remains the *ecclesia semper reformanda*. Yet she is indestructible.⁶⁷

While according to the NT Christ's church will remain and will not be overpowered by the gates of Hades (Matt 16:18) but at one time will continue in the form of the gathering of the eschatological end time remnant, that does not mean that parts of this church may not turn into false churches. While Pannenberg laments the "scandal of divided Christendom" he admits that, "Some divisions are certainly necessary, i.e., in cases of apostasy from faith in Jesus Christ. Primitive Christianity had to separate itself from Judaizing and Gnostic errors, and the early church from Arianism."⁶⁸ So the crux is to decide what is heresy that would allow for a split in Christianity. Pannenberg asks if it is "the stubborn (*pertinax*) rejection of a truth that is part of the faith."⁶⁹ But he does not have a real answer, and so he opts for tolerance in cases of deviations "when there is a readiness to uphold and preserve the church's fellowship than when there is no such readiness and the deviation becomes a public scandal in the church."⁷⁰

J. C. Goodloe discusses Calvin's concern for the unity of the church and also his answer to the question when it is permissible or mandatory to leave a church. Indeed, Calvin and others withdrew from the dominant church and also provided reasons for their decision to leave what they no longer regarded as a church.

the true church is tied to the Word of God. When that Word and the Christian faith founded upon it are abandoned, there is no Christian church. Calvin has already pointed out that there are nonessential doctrines, on which disagreement should be allowed. Surely, however, the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 770. "Sie hat es sich nicht genommen, heilig zu sein: so kann sie diese ihre Bestimmung auch nicht abstreifen."

⁶⁷ Ibid., 770-771.

⁶⁸ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 411.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 412.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 415.

repudiation of the plain content of the Scriptures, the Word of God upon which all true doctrine rests, would involve nothing less than the rejection of the foundation of Christian faith, and therefore the rejection of Jesus Christ himself.... [S]uch a rejection of the Scriptures would form the basis for legitimate and necessary separation. Such a separation ... would not be schismatic. It would be, instead, an acknowledgment that a body which used to be part of the church of Jesus Christ was, by its own actions, no longer so.⁷¹

He goes on to say: "Again, simple immorality is not an excuse for leaving the church. If, however, that immorality were to be compounded by the church's declaring it not to be immorality, something different would have occurred. A line would have crossed."⁷²

SDAs take seriously the ecclesiological teachings and implications of the Apocalypse. The historical part of the book ends with Revelation 12-14. These three chapters contain a succinct description of the fate of the true church of Christ through human history with a specific focus on the very last period prior to Jesus' second coming. Revelation confirms that the true church exists as the people of the Lamb and that an apostate part of Christianity forms part of end time Babylon. Babylon is described as a religious power. Part of its OT allusions depict Babylon as a spiritual harlot comparable to Israel (Oholah) and Judah (Oholibah; Ezek 23) and a priest's daughter involved in fornication (Lev 21:9).⁷³ Undoubtedly, apostasy is possible. However, God's true and holy people will not disappear. It will survive till the end. But it looks as if in the last days of history the true church throughout the ages continues to exist in form of the end time remnant, also called the saints/the holy ones in Revelation 13:7,10 and 14:12. It is very clear that Revelation 13 and 14 focus on this largely visible end time remnant only, the descendant of the metaphorical woman, without any further reference to the woman itself. The end time remnant is the one that is confronted by evil powers and has to face economic boycott and possibly death before it experiences liberation and final victory.

However, Revelation does not deny that there are other faithful believers that belong to the church of God. They are described as still being

⁷¹ Goodloe IV, "The Church: One and Holy," 209.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 210.

⁷³ For more information on Babylon see Ekkehardt Mueller, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Studien zum Buch der Offenbarung*, Adventistica: Forschungen zur Geschichte und Theologie der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten, Schriftenreihe des Historischen Archivs der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Europa, ed. Daniel Heinz 11 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), 381-416.

in symbolic Babylon but are called to leave it (Rev 18:2-4). This message of separation points to the holiness theme, because to be holy means to be separated from what is not.⁷⁴ The remnant are called saints; the people coming out of Babylon are indirectly saints. Revelation 18:2-4 which immediately precedes the judgment of Babylon is to some extent parallel to the second and third angels' messages that the remnant proclaim.⁷⁵ Whereas the message of the second angel addresses the fall of Babylon (Rev 14:8) as does the message of Revelation 18:2, the message of the third angel describes the judgment on Babylon as does the rest of Revelation 18. This chapter is chronologically parallel to the judgment of Babylon in Revelation 14. Since there is only one group that is threatened with death and economic boycott, namely the remnant who do not worship the beast and its image and do not accept the mark of the beast, it must be assumed that the initial end time remnant and the people of God that will be leaving end time Babylon will form one group only that will suffer severe opposition and persecution.⁷⁶ From this perspective the woman as church of God will at the very end of time continue its existence in the form of the remnant only.⁷⁷ Rodríguez states:

the function of ... the end-time remnant, is to pull the universal church of Christ out of its invisibility before the final polarization of the human race at the close of the cosmic conflict.... It is God's intention to merge the universal church with the end-time eschatological faithful remnant. That remnant is already here as a historical phenomenon, but

⁷⁴ See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 638. See also Rev 21:7-8 and 2 Cor 6:14-18.

⁷⁵ On the identity of the angels see Ekkehardt Mueller, "Mission in Revelation," unpublished paper, 2009.

⁷⁶ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 897, notes: "Charles regards the exhortation [of Rev 18:4] as out of place because all the faithful have already been put to death. But his view is based on a literalistic chronology of the Apocalypse, which is insensitive to a cyclic view of the book's structure."

⁷⁷ It seems that throughout human history the faithful remnant as a group of a larger whole became the *church* from which after a period of apostasy and spiritual decline a new remnant arose. The eight humans in Noah's ark were a remnant from which later Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Israel derived. When Jesus started his church, it began as a remnant movement incorporating Jews and Gentiles. The final remnant occurs in Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 13-14.

its fullness is coming into being ... at the moment when the rest of God's people will come out of Babylon.⁷⁸

These remnant-saints have specific characteristics that are listed in Revelation 12-14 in the following order:

- (1) Keeping the commandments of God (Rev 12:17; 14:12) including the Sabbath (Rev 14:7)
- (2) Having the testimony of Jesus, Scripture and genuine prophecy (Rev 12:17)
- (3) Exhibiting patience/perseverance (Rev 13:10; 14:12)
- (4) Having faith in/of Jesus, the incarnate Lord who died for humanity on the cross and rose from the dead, and his teachings (Rev 13:10; 14:12)
- (5) Refraining from false worship (Rev 14:4)⁷⁹
- (6) Following the Lamb, Jesus, wherever he goes, that is, in every aspect, as teacher and example (Rev 14:4)
- (7) Being ethically faithful/truthful and blameless (Rev 14:5)
- (8) Proclaiming the eternal gospel, the three angels' messages on a worldwide scale and gathering the faithful children of God (Rev 14:6-12)⁸⁰

These characteristics of the remnant should also be reflected by a holy church. It is hardly conceivable that God would use different sets of criteria to characterize his people. And these eight characteristics come close to the four that stress the oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the church, if unpacked. On the other hand, they serve as a means to determine what is heresy and what is not.

So, SDAs do not limit the concept of God's true church to their own denomination or church members nor do they automatically extend it to other Christian churches. God's true church consists of those individuals who truly believe in him. God knows them. SDAs, on the other hand, claim that they are God's special visible end time remnant of Revelation

⁷⁸ Angel Manuel Rodríguez, "Ecclesiology and Reorganization: The Oneness of the Church," unpublished paper (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 11, 13.

⁷⁹ A selection of principles for worship in Revelation see Ekkehardt Mueller, "Reflections on Worship in Revelation 4 and 5," *Reflections: The BRI Newsletter*, July 2012, 1-6. <https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/BRI%20newsltr%207-12%20%28%2339%29.pdf>

⁸⁰ For further discussion see Ekkehardt Mueller, "The End Time Remnant in Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11.1-2 (2000): 200; and Mueller, *Der Erste und der Letzte*, 373-376.

12:17 found also throughout Revelation 12-14 and being in opposition to the "Babylon" of Revelation 14-18.

3. Implications of the Holiness of the Church

The concept of the holiness of the church has implications for modern churches, local congregations, and individual Christians.

3.1. Holiness and Relationships

Unquestionably, holiness has to do with relationships. First, it describes the relationship to God. Second, it also has to do with relating to others.

3.1.1. Holiness and the Relationship to God

Holiness defines the relationship between God and humans in terms of what God has done and is doing for his elect and how they associate with him. It declares their status and points to God's continuous work on believers. They have been called with "a holy calling" (2 Tim 1:9) and are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Together they are "growing into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:21). This understanding leads Ariel C. Leder to note: "the relationship among the church, Christ, and the Holy Spirit is so intimate that the church itself is now, scandalously for the Jews and foolishly to the Greeks, the temple of God (1Cor. 3:17)."⁸¹ Further Scripture asserts that "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10) and have become "a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Pet 2:9). This holiness centers in Jesus' death and resurrection and leads to the parousia. "For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Heb 10:14). "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:23). Yet this divine gift is not given to people without their consent. People have to accept it. The indicative "you are holy" is linked to the imperative "be holy"

⁸¹ Arie C. Leder, "Holy God, Holy People, Holy Worship," *Calvin Theological Journal* 43 (2008): 216.

(1 Pet 1:16). While God separates and liberates people from the realm of sin, they have to will this separation, remain separate, and rejoice that they have been “called ... out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

Barth has expressed this relationship when he wrote, Jesus is the Holy One not for himself but for the world and especially for his church, not being distanced but being in and with her. Therefore, the church is constantly confronted with Christ’s presence as the Holy One and placed in the sphere of his activity, is constantly alarmed by him, constantly asked if and how far she wants to correspond with the fact that she is his body and his earthly-historical form of existence.⁸²

3.1.2. *Holiness and the Relationship to Humans*

Holiness will also influence human relations. Holy conduct and godliness (2 Pet 3:11) will lead to courtesy, respect and love of as well as care for others. Jesus has especially emphasized that his followers will be discernable by mutual love (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17). This can go so far as to lay down ones life for brothers and sisters (1 John 3:16). But love extends to also to the neighbor whoever that may be (Luke 10:27-28; Lev 19:18), even the enemy (Matt 5:44).

Bruinsma points to “full transparency and honesty” as well as to “a truly Christlike spirit of humility”⁸³ when SDAs communicate with other Christians. He adds: “God’s church has no room for triumphalism.”⁸⁴

Rodríguez takes the discussion to another level when he states:

One could even suggest that at the present time, the remnant is the visible church without being the totality of the expression of the church. This also means that the existence of this remnant is a reaffirmation of Christianity (the remnant people of God are part of something larger

⁸² Barth, *Die Lehre von der Versöhnung*, 782. The German version reads: “Nicht für sich, sondern für die Welt und zunächst für sie, seine Gemeinde ist Jesus Christus der Heilige, und er ist es nicht in irgendeiner Höhe und Ferne..., sondern ... in und an ihr selbst... Sie selbst ist also ... dauernd mit seiner Gegenwart als dem Heiligen konfrontiert und seiner Aktivität ausgesetzt, dauernd von ihm alarmiert, dauernd danach gefragt, ob und inwiefern sie ... dem entsprechen möchte, dass sie ja sein Leib seine irdisch-geschichtliche Existenzform ist.”

⁸³ Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ*, 155.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

than themselves) and also a judgment against it in the sense that it finds in Christianity spiritual unfaithfulness. In other words, with respect to the Christian world, the remnant exists in the tension between a reaffirmation of it and calling it to repentance and reformation.⁸⁵

3.2. Holiness and Divine Teachings

While holiness is a reminder to take good care of our relationships, either with God or with fellow humans, it also affects how believers respond to biblical teachings. Holiness affects doctrine and lifestyle. Holy people that relate to a holy God are very much interested in what this God reveals about himself, about the plan of salvation, and divine realities. His teachings affect very much how people live their lives and how they relate to him. They want to know what the will of God is (Rom 7:12) and want to understand and experience truth (John 17:17). Divine teachings are beneficial and not a burden. They change lives for better. For instance, the doctrine of the non-immortality of the soul prevents believers from getting caught up in ancestor worship, spiritualism, and the belief in reincarnations, which at the same time tends to emphasize salvation by works and affects our understanding of God's character. A holy people cannot afford to neglect plain doctrines taught by the sovereign God in his word, Scripture.

3.3. Holiness and Ethics

It has been stressed repeatedly throughout this paper that holiness has ethical implications. It does not only describe the believer's status as a child of God but affects everyday life.⁸⁶ People are attracted to the God of the Bible when they see the positive lives of his followers. Thus ethics has to do with the divine law. The law has been called holy and good (Rom 7:12). Christianity is not a lofty philosophy that does not affect daily life. On the contrary it shapes very much how the believer lives and behaves. It has become fashionable to exclude lifestyle issues from theological and practical deliberations and leave it to the individual how he or she decides

⁸⁵ Angel M. Rodríguez, "Concluding Essay: God's End-Time Remnant and the Christian Church," in *Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009), 221.

⁸⁶ Cf. Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ*, 64.

on these issues. While it is true that Christians do not force upon others what to believe and how to make decisions, they know that the Bible contains clear and binding guidelines and accept them.

The “fine linen [of the bride of the Lamb] is the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev 19 :8). Believers are practicing hospitality “in a manner worthy of the saints” (Rom 16:2). “Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:9-11). “But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints” (Eph 5:3). Holy people refrain from getting involved with the deeds of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21). Instead their lives reflect the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23) and exemplify holy behavior “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior” (1 Pet 1:15). “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way [at Christ’s second coming], what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness” (2 Pet 3:11). Scripture clearly talks about the normative value of the moral divine law and the need of obedience on the part of the followers of Christ (Rev 14:12).

Barth does not avoid the question of obedience,⁸⁷ and Dederen stresses the importance of ethical holiness. “The church is holy, set apart from the world, to refract the holiness of God and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit in a fallen world.... Christian holiness consists not merely in a status determined by one’s relation to Christ, but also in a consecration to God that finds expression in character and conduct.”⁸⁸ “Christians cannot be content with the knowledge that God wants them as citizens of His ‘holy nation,’ and will manifest in their daily lives the fruits of an ever closer relationship with their Lord.”⁸⁹

3.4. Holiness and Church Discipline

If the holiness of the church relates to biblical doctrines and an ethical life, church discipline (Matt 18:15-17) deals with the propagation of false doc-

⁸⁷ Barth, *Die Lehre von der Versöhnung*, 781 and 783.

⁸⁸ Dederen, “The Church,” 562-563.

⁸⁹ Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ*, 64

trines and a biblical unacceptable lifestyle.⁹⁰ While in 1 John and Revelation 2 false doctrines needed to be confronted and in some cases a separation of the church from the secessionists was necessary, in 1 Corinthians the saints needed to address the issue of incest within the church (1 Cor 5). Paul stated: “I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.... Remove the wicked man from among yourselves” (1 Cor 5:11, 13).

“When there are serious deviations from biblical doctrine and when serious offenses against God’s moral law are committed, the church cannot turn a blind eye but must deal with the issue.... After all, one of the ‘marks’ of the church is holiness.”⁹¹ However, church discipline has nothing to do with retribution at a sinner or simply administering a case, instead of caring for a person. Berkouwer devotes an entire chapter to holiness and discipline. While he makes clear that “there can be no recognition of sin—nor any excuse of it”,⁹² he also warns against the dangers in discipline.

Correctly understood, church discipline is one of the last means to tell an erring brother or sister that his or her way is disastrous and the church would like them to be restored.⁹³

3.5. Holiness and Worship

The Book of Revelation clearly links holiness and worship. As the heavenly beings sing their triple “holy” (*agion*) to God (Rev 4:8) and all the heavenly beings join in divine worship, so the saints get involved in the worship of God the Father as Creator and the worship of Christ as Savior (Rev 5:13-14). Their prayers reach the throne of God (Rev 5:8; 8:3-5). This worship theme is also a central to Revelation 12-14. The message proclaimed by the remnant-saints calls for the worship of the only true God. But also in other parts of the NT is holiness and worship connected. In the Lord’s Prayer the church hallows God’s name (Matt 6:9). Men are to lift up holy hands in prayers of intercession and thanksgiving (1 Tim 2:1-8). Even, the Holy Spirit himself will intercede for the saints (Rom 8:27).

⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, 100.

⁹¹ Bruinsma, *The Body of Christ*, 101.

⁹² Berkouwer, *The Church*, 358.

⁹³ See *ibid.*, 104.

In an article, Leder has pointed out the importance of the holy worship of a holy God by a holy people, a dimension that has to be recovered in many congregations.⁹⁴ Discussing the New Jerusalem with “the clean inside, the unclean outside,” he notes: “Because God is holy, and the space where he dwells is holy, the worship taking place within that space must also be holy. No unclean things may participate.... Thus, the presence of a holy and dangerous God in the midst of an unclean people belongs to any study of holiness and worship.”⁹⁵ “The first accent is therefore on God’s act of holy-making, not on the people’s holy acts.”⁹⁶ “Because even our best works are stained by unrelenting uncleanness, God’s sole act of justification and sanctification are central to the cult,”⁹⁷ resulting in our gratitude. Yet “holy worship cannot be accomplished without the constant presence of the awesome language of holiness. Its vocabulary will describe our separation from the world, our defilement, and our cleansing.... Word and sacraments focus our attention on Christ our wholeness and the Spirit our Sanctifier.”⁹⁸

L. Gilkey has also commented on worship in the context of holiness: A church may be filled with creative ideas and overflowing with good works, but unless there is a sense of the presence of the holy there, of the presence of God ... it is doubtful whether what is there is religion. Worship is not centrally an experience of *ours*; it is meaningless to speak of a ‘worshipful experience’ as if the holy were compounded of a clever arrangement of various kinds of lighting, sober music, proper tones of voice, and the softness or hardness of the pews, all so manipulated as to create a certain experience in us. Such ‘client-centered’ worship does not extend beyond the ceiling of the sanctuary, for here, by finite media we seek to take the place of the holy, to create it synthetically.... But neither our manipulation nor the enjoyment are categories appropriate to worship.... Worship is a response to the presence of God, our reaction to the appearance of the holy ... to the tremendous, majestic, awesome power and goodness of God—that is the core of worship. Thus we bow, thus we adore, thus we surrender ourselves—thus we experience God.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Leder, “Holy God, Holy People, Holy Worship,” 222.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 226,

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 229, 230.

⁹⁹ Langdon Gilkey, *How Can the Church Minister to the World without Losing Itself* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 107-108.

3.6. Holiness and Service/Mission

Finally, holiness is related to service and mission.¹⁰⁰ This is an important observation because holiness can easily be understood as quietism, something static. Or it can be taken as a personal experience only. Individuals are declared holy, and they are personally involved in a process of sanctification. But does this relate to others and how does it relate to them?

First Peter provides an answer: “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). These texts talk about a holy priesthood and a holy nation and they come in a certain context. Holiness is a calling to service.¹⁰¹

“It is the whole church in relationship to the world which is to exercise the tasks of priesthood.”¹⁰² Functions of this holy priesthood and holy nation are proclamation of the great deeds of God and offering of spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5). These sacrifices may include

that the body of priests recognizes its special responsibility for the world, particularly the responsibility of sharing the Gospel as a faithful witness (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 6:9; 20:4) and interceding for humanity with God. Berkouwer discusses the poles of proclamation or presence and proclamation or dialogue, suggesting that they do not exclude each other.¹⁰³

that this priesthood follows Christ’s example (1 Pet 2:21) by doing right and exhibiting excellent behavior (1 Pet 2:12, 15; 3:16); the result may be that others praise God (1 Pet 2:12).

that the members of this priesthood love Jesus (1 Pet 1:8) and others (1 Pet 1:22) and therefore are willing to serve each other (1 Pet 4:8-10); they help the needy, do good, and share their possessions (Heb 13:15-16; Phil 4:18).

¹⁰⁰ Wood, “Holiness,” 190, notes: “the positive aspect of being set aside for God to be utilized in his service prevails over any negative exclusivism.... The church as the body of CHRIST belongs to God and becomes the vehicle of his activity in the world.... In order to prove an effective instrument of the gospel, the church must be holy.”

¹⁰¹ See Dever, “The Doctrine of the Church,” 776-777; Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 317.

¹⁰² Omanson, “Church, The,” 233.

¹⁰³ See Berkouwer, *The Church*, 410-420.

that instead of returning evil for evil they bless, which would include forgiving others (1 Pet 3:9, 11), and seek peace (1 Pet 3:11).

4. Conclusion

The church of God is indeed a holy church.¹⁰⁴ The NT assumes this holiness of the church. But the community of believers also has a human side and does not always represent the holy God well. Therefore, “the holiness of the church, like its unity, is both a gift and a task,”¹⁰⁵ a present and a challenge. And this applies to the church as a whole as well as to local congregation and individuals.

This holiness of the church with its various aspects vis-à-vis the holiness of God may need to be rediscovered. The oftentimes superficial talk about the love of God may have partially eclipsed the concept of holiness. Oden suggests that only a few theologians of the 20th century have seriously discussed the holiness of the church. Most have neglected it.¹⁰⁶ “Faith in the holiness of the church does not imply that the church can rest easy in its proximate unholiness.”¹⁰⁷ “Those who having been made holy positionally in Christ are now called practically to walk in the way of holiness.”¹⁰⁸ Yet only if believers listen to and focus on the biblical testimony about the holiness of God himself can they be confident that the holiness of the believers and the church be re-experienced in practice.

¹⁰⁴ Wood, “Holiness,” 190, suggests that holiness defines the essence of the church and is not only “a secondary feature.”

¹⁰⁵ Dulles, “The Church as ‘One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic,’” 20.

¹⁰⁶ Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 320.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 317.