Sabbath Rest(oration):
Reframing the Purpose and Witness
of an Eschatological Sabbath-keeping Community

by

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Date:
April 21, 2023

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University.
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This thesis touches on several massive themes within Christian theology, including questions of ecclesiology, eschatology, soteriology, and missiology. Yet it is grounded in a very real and practical question. What definition of the church should guide me, as the senior pastor of an incredibly diverse Sabbath-keeping local church in the Seventh-day Adventism denomination, as we develop the strategic vision for this next season of ministry, and decide how we want to fund those goals. What should the “markers” of the church be?

In order to help narrow my focus, I will explore this question in four parts. In Chapter 1, I provide a brief history of Seventh-day Adventism, with a specific focus on the development of the doctrine of the Sabbath and the doctrine of the church, such as it is. In Chapter 2, I turn more directly to various models of the church. Using Avery Dulles as a conversation partner in his work Models of the Church, I examine Adventism in the light of some of the most prominent models and note which of these Adventism seems to lean towards. I then recommend a new eschatological understanding of the church that I believe could be uniquely well-suited for Adventism.

In Chapter 3 I turn to the question of the Sabbath. Given that Sabbath-keeping is considered a marker of faithfulness for most Seventh-day Adventists, I propose that the biblical Sabbath has always been about more than humanity’s faithfulness, and that the Sabbath should be seen instead primarily as a pointer to the purpose and faithfulness of God. Drawing from Sigve Tonstad’s book The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day, I suggest a reframed understanding of the Sabbath that includes seeing the Sabbath as an indicator of God’s future purpose promised
from the very beginning of creation. I suggest that the Sabbath can best be seen as a promise, grounded in the past, pointing to the future, that shapes and directs the present.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I consider how the idea of the “church as foretaste” and “Sabbath as promise” could shape the lived reality of a local community, and recommend some practices that we as a local church could explore that would help us better embody the coming kingdom of God.

Questions about the nature, purpose, and mission of the church have been asked and answered and asked again for generations. Most recently, the coronavirus pandemic has caused the longest disruption to the regular rhythms and practices of the church in recent memory. Clergy and laity alike are wondering, as we imagine what a post-pandemic life will look like, just what impact this new reality will have on the church, which practices will stay the same, and which will shift. A season of new beginnings is an excellent time to reconsider old assumptions, and to recalibrate where needed.

It is my hope that this thesis will be helpful in three ways. First, I hope for it to be helpful on the local church level, especially for Sabbath-keeping churches interested in a reframed perspective on the Sabbath that moves it beyond a question of obedience, to a question of meaning, liberation, and purpose. Secondly, I hope to contribute to the much needed and growing conversation within Seventh-day Adventism regarding Adventist ecclesiology.¹ Over the past two decades, Adventist scholars have become increasingly convinced of the need to further develop our ecclesiology, but it is still a relatively recent field of study within the denomination. This thesis will offer a reframed understanding of Sabbath-keeping that is linked to an eschatologically-shaped ecclesiology. Finally, I hope this thesis will have something to

¹ For the sake of convenience, I will be using the term “Adventist” interchangeably with “Seventh-day Adventist” throughout this paper.
offer to the broader Christian community. The biblical concept of the Sabbath has experienced something of a renaissance in the wider Christian conversations over the past half-century. The Sabbath has been linked to creation and as a potential response to the environmental crisis; to economics, debt relief and jubilee; and to emancipation, messianic ethics, and spiritual formation. Yet while many of these Christian authors draw on themes inherent in the biblical Sabbath, very few of them have lived in communities already profoundly shaped by its counter-cultural power. We as Adventists are deeply indebted to the gift of the Sabbath; it is my hope that our lived reality can provide inspiration to others.
Dedication

To all those who dream of what the church could be, and to my parents, who nurtured the dream in me.
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INTRODUCTION

I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. As such, I belong to a community that has been deeply shaped by its eschatology, but has not spent sufficient time on developing a coherent ecclesiology. This lack is evident in several significant areas, including how to maintain unity in diversity, how to relate with other Christians and the wider world, and how best to understand the missio Dei.

A few years ago, I became senior pastor of an incredibly diverse congregation. We have a substantial number of members whose mother tongue is Spanish, Creole, Tagalog, French, or Swahili/Kinyarwanda. We have some who, in their own words, “have lived a pretty comfortable life,” and others who spent most of their lives in refugee camps. The congregation is diverse in significant ways – ethnically, economically, educationally. It has been drawn together by a common functional identity of the church as a remnant people with a particular message to share to the world; but this focus on what the church should say does not provide an adequate framework for how the church should be.

What does it mean to be the church? What are its markers? What should guide us as we make very practical decisions about navigating very different cultural expectations and experiences, or addressing unequal power dynamics, or where to focus our time and resources? These questions are not merely academic for us – the church recently received an unexpected substantial donation that we need to prayerfully decide how best to use. Discussions around money could become a battleground for power and pet projects, or it could be an opportunity to better articulate who we are, what we value, and what the church is called to be.
These questions around the nature of the church and its mission are being urgently discussed in my larger denomination as well, as it faces a current crisis of leadership. I am a female pastor, and in 2017 I was ordained in a ceremony that was both profoundly meaningful and deeply controversial. While our denomination has been wrestling with the question of women’s ordination for the past forty years, it has grown increasingly divisive in recent years as current world leadership pushes for an ecclesiological vision based on ideological purity, and changing global demographics shifts the center of power towards cultures that do not prioritize gender equality. Tensions between liberalism and fundamentalism and between law-centered and grace-centered theological perspectives are threatening to split the church.

Yet in the midst of the very real differences that are present in both my local church community and broader denomination, Seventh-day Adventists also share a deeply held sense of communal identity. This identity has been shaped by two dominant themes: our focus on eschatology, and our keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. In this thesis, I suggest a potential eschatologically-shaped ecclesiological framework for the Adventist community to consider that may help us navigate questions of purpose, mission, and unity-in-diversity. In particular, I hope to show how a reframed understanding of Sabbath-keeping can help church communities become a better witness to the coming God and God’s kingdom.
CHAPTER ONE

Seventh-day Adventism and the Church

“Will the real ______ please stand up?” The question comes from a YouTube series. In the series, a handful of random strangers are put in a room together and asked to figure out who is the odd one out. They are told they are all football fans, for example, or they all are allergic to peanuts, but there is one “spy” among them. They ask each other questions to identify who is real, and who is pretending. At the end, there is the moment of revelation. Would the real __________ please stand up? The game assumes there are some among us who are not “true believers,” and what is important is to identify and expose them.

Within the Adventist church, there is a growing fear that the differences of perspective have become so intense that the denomination is heading for a split. Although the tension has recently been seen most visibly over the issue of women’s ordination, there are fault lines over the relationship of law vs grace, how to read the Bible, how to engage with science and culture, and even over how best to understand the mission of the church. Indeed, some theologians and church scholars suggest that there are as many as four distinct types of Adventism, each with its own perspective on themes as crucial as grace, law, justice, salvation, and each with their own Bible verses and Ellen White quotes. And there are those within the various camps that accuse

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1 For an introductory overview of some of these issues, see William G. Johnsson, Where Are We Headed? Adventism after San Antonio (Oak and Acorn Publishing, 2017). Johnsson was a respected scholar and long-time editor of the official church magazine, the Adventist Review.

2 For an example, see John Webster’s “The Four Types of Adventism,” paper presented at the West Coast Religion Teachers’ Conference, (Virtual Host: Burman University, April 2, 2021). Webster names the four types as historical (focused on obedience), evangelical (focused on grace), progressive (focused on justice), and mission (focused on baptism/institution) Adventism. A similar set of distinctions was highlighted in 1993 in Adventist Today, where North American Adventism was divided into “Mainstream Adventism,” “Evangelical Adventism,” “Progressive Adventism,” and “Historic Adventism” (see “A Gathering of Adventisms,” special section in Adventist Today, Jan.–Feb. 1993, 4–16).
the other of being “false Adventists,” and call for the “real” Seventh-day Adventists to please
stand up.

Even before the most recent conflicts, there had been growing recognition among
Seventh-day Adventist scholars that our current ecclesiology is underdeveloped. As far back as
1982, the Biblical Research Institute Committee of the General Conference pinpointed the need
for more focused attention on Adventist ecclesiology and voted to begin a series of studies on the
subject.3 Studies generated by the Biblical Research Institute usually consist of a collection of
essays and articles compiled together on a particular subject from a variety of Adventist scholars
and theologians around the world, and it can often take time for the list of scholars and titles to
be collected. In the ensuing years after the 1982 vote, other priorities took precedence, and the
series was put on the back burner. It was not until 2009 that the first in a series of three volumes
of essays in ecclesiology was published, entitled Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An
Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective.4 In the preface, former BRI director and editor Ángel
Manuel Rodríguez highlighted three reasons why he felt the series was so timely, which he
articulated as 1) the need for the church to remain relevant, 2) the need to preserve unity, and 3)
the need to interact properly with others. He also suggested that there are certain “non-negotiable
aspects of biblical theology” that should remain as anchors for any Adventist ecclesiology, which

3 The Biblical Research Institute is a group of Adventist scholars and staff entrusted with the task
of identifying and organizing new areas of biblical research that are needed in the Adventist church,
among other responsibilities. Given that they operate in close cooperation with the General Conference,
the official governing organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, their articles and publications
often work within the paradigm set by the General Conference. It is thus important to note that they do
not include the full array of perspectives amongst Adventist scholars, even as their publications provide a
valuable insight into an important portion of the conversation.

4 The series include Ángel Manuel Rodriguez, ed., Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An
Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009); Ángel M.
Rodriguez, ed., Message, Mission and Unity of the Church (Biblical Research Institute, 2013); and Ángel
Manuel Rodriguez, ed., Worship, Ministry, and the Authority of the Church (Biblical Research Institute,
2016).
for Rodríguez include an “eschatological outlook” and a “remnant outlook,” alongside the more traditional areas of soteriology, missiology, and what Rodríguez describes as a “gospel outlook.”

Although the series provides a valuable sample of conversations around ecclesiology within the Adventist church, the articles are only loosely connected around various themes (“Remnant,” “Unity,” “Church Authority,” etc.), and do not provide a complete and coherent articulation of what Adventist ecclesiology should look like. This is, in part, intentional. The task given to the group was to conduct additional research in the field of ecclesiology and to generate further conversation, not to attempt to propose a comprehensive Adventist ecclesiology. The series was also compiled during a period of heightened tension within the denomination, especially leading up to the 2015 General Conference vote regarding women’s ordination.

The final volume of the series, *Worship, Ministry, and the Authority of the Church*, was published in the year after the highly contentious vote, and perhaps unsurprisingly, includes

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6 The vote at issue read: “After your prayerful study on ordination from the Bible, the writings of Ellen G. White, and the reports of the study commissions, and; after your careful consideration of what is best for the church and the fulfillment of its mission, is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No.” Fifty-eight percent of delegates selected to represent the world-wide church voted no. For a contemporary report on the vote, see “Delegates Vote ‘No’ on the Issue of Women’s Ordination,” *Adventist News Network*, (July 8, 2015), https://adventistnews/news/delegates-vote-no-on-issue-of-womens-ordination [accessed February 26, 2023].

This vote came after a diverse group of Adventist scholars, ministers, leaders, and representatives from each division around the world was tasked with studying the issue from around 2011-2014, and providing recommendations to the church as a whole. This “Theology of Ordination Study Committee” could not come to a consensus, and so presented three distinct positions, with corresponding recommendations. For more, see *General Conference Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report*, June 2014, published as an internal document by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for use by and as a reference for its affiliated entities and constituents, https://www.adventistarchives.org/final-tosc-report.pdf, [accessed March 19, 2023].
several articles supportive of the authority of the General Conference in session to be the “final authority” on issues like who should be ordained. Yet the issue is by no means resolved. Several conferences and unions throughout the world have gone ahead with ordaining women, notwithstanding the 2015 vote. They claim, in part, that final authority for ordination has always been held at the union level, not the general conference. More importantly, they also claim that unity in the denomination is not to come at the cost of gospel convictions, and is to be found through cooperation in Christ, not coercion. Although women’s ordination is probably the most visible divisive issue the world-wide Adventist church is currently navigating, it is by no means the only one. We are in a pivotal time in Adventist history. Will there be enough common DNA to hold us together across very real differences? Or will we succumb to the flaw of Protestantism, and fragment into our various corners?

This thesis will not attempt to provide a fully developed ecclesiology, nor suggest a definitive solution to the challenges of unity and diversity. Instead, I hope to add to the much-needed conversation around Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology by suggesting a reframed understanding of how two essential features of our denomination – our eschatological emphasis and our Sabbath practice – should shape our nascent ecclesiology. Although this suggested perspective will be deeply grounded in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, it

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7 As we shall see in the next section, the Adventist church has long had a somewhat unique mix of presbyterian and congregational DNA in its church polity.

8 As an example of the interest in a cooperative unity, in 2017 several church leaders and scholars voluntarily gathered (without the official approval of the General Conference) to discuss the idea of “Unity” without uniformity. For a compilation of the papers presented at the conference, see Bonnie Dwyer, ed., “Unity 2017,” Spectrum 45, no. 2-3 (2017), https://spectrummagazine.org/system/files/journal/spectrum_45.2-3_2017.pdf [accessed February 26, 2023].
is my hope that readers within the broader Christian community may find value in these two elements as well.

In order to explore this reframed understanding of Adventist ecclesiology, then, it is helpful to spend some time briefly tracing the origins of the Seventh-day Adventist church, with a particular focus on the development of Adventist eschatology, understanding of the Sabbath, and approach to ecclesiology. It is to this history we now turn.

**Seventh-day Adventist Origins**

On October 22, 1844, thousands of people joyfully gathered to wait for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. They were filled with hope and anticipation. At long last, they were about to see Jesus physically return in clouds of glory. He did not come. Although the Seventh-day Adventist church formally organized much later (in 1863), it traces its origins most directly to this moment, known as “the Great Disappointment.”

The early 1800s was a period of great religious fervor and revival in the United States. Referred to as the Second Great Awakening, it sparked significant changes in the American Protestant religious landscape, as a sense of postmillennial optimism led to proposed reforms on a great number of societal ills, such as temperance, women’s rights, anti-slavery, and education.9 Many Christians believed that heaven was arriving on earth, and that they were entering into a period of wide-spread peace and prosperity.

In the midst of this optimistic revival, a Baptist farmer-turned reluctant preacher by the name of William Miller (1782-1849) became convinced that instead of a new season of Christian

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triumph, the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were about to be fulfilled in his lifetime. The world was not about to enter a long season of heaven on earth – it was about to end. Miller’s predictions were relatively obscure until Joshua Himes (1805-1895), an energetic pastor and experienced publisher, heard them and became Miller’s unofficial promoter. Although Miller firmly believed in the soon coming of Jesus, he was less comfortable with the sensationalist date setting that many of his followers were pushing. But after several earlier tentative predictions came and went, Miller succumbed to pressure from the ‘seventh month movement’ faction within Millerite circles, and set October 22, 1844 as the date for the “cleansing of the sanctuary” mentioned in Daniel 8:14, which was interpreted as a metaphor for Christ’s Second Coming.\(^{10}\) With the date set, the movement spread rapidly, as people sold their homes and livelihoods and poured themselves into spreading the end-of-time message. But October 22 came and went, and Jesus did not return.

In a small but helpful book on the history of the Seventh-day Adventist movement, church historian George Knight traces the response to this stunning disappointment.\(^{11}\) The largest category by far were those who said that Miller was completely mistaken. They either reverted back to the faith they had had before, or lost their faith entirely. The second group, however, believed that Miller was right in some capacity, but differed in what way. One group, led by Joshua Himes, continued to believe that Miller had prophesied the right event, he just got the date wrong. As time went by and successive additional dates came and went, this group


dwindled and disappeared.

Most of those who remained believed Miller had got the date right, but the event wrong. Some claimed Jesus had returned on October 22, but in a spiritualized form; still others believed something else happened on October 22, but to understand it they needed to go back and search the Scriptures even more faithfully. It was this latter group, originally the smallest, from which the Seventh-day Adventist movement emerged.\(^\text{12}\)

Two months after the Great Disappointment, in December 1844, a young 17-year-old Methodist turned-Millerite by the name of Ellen Harmon (1827-1915) had the first of what the church would consider to be over 2000 visions and prophetic dreams.\(^\text{13}\) In it, the distraught teenager, searching for answers to the questions of why Jesus had not come, was told by a heavenly being to “look again and look a little higher.”\(^\text{14}\) She was encouraged to fix her eyes on Jesus, and be willing to follow where he led, no matter the consequences. Two years later, in 1846, she would marry fellow Millerite James S. White (1821-1881), and a little later the same year the young couple would meet Joseph Bates (1792-1872), a retired sea captain, abolitionist, reformer, and fellow Millerite who had become convinced that Saturday was the biblical Sabbath, and who would later join the Whites in founding the Seventh-day Adventist church. Although the group started small, the movement started growing.


\(^{13}\) Ellen G. White [nee Harmon] became a significant female voice in the predominately male sphere of religious Christian leaders in the 19\(^{th}\) century. In 2014, the Smithsonian listed her as one of the 100 most significant Americans of all time. T.A. Frail, "Meet the 100 Most Significant Americans of All Time," Smithsonian.com, November 17, 2014 https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonianmag/meet-100-most-significant-americans-all-time-180953341/ [accessed July 20, 2020].

In the years between the Great Disappointment of 1844 and the establishment of an official denomination in 1863, several key doctrines developed as the movement grappled with what they had gotten wrong, and what their identity should be moving forward. Although the former Millerites recognized they were mistaken about the date of Jesus’ second coming, they did not give up their eschatological focus. After reviewing the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, these early Seventh-day Adventist pioneers continued to believe that while the end of time was not yet, it was near.\(^\text{15}\) Jesus was coming soon. Thus, one defining feature of this new movement was that it was *advent*-ist, that is, focused on and shaped by the *advent* of Jesus Christ. The advent of Christ was so important to this community that it became part of the eventual name of the movement, as Seventh-day *Adventists*.\(^\text{16}\)

As the disappointed Millerites poured over Scripture in those early years after 1844, a few other defining features emerged.\(^\text{17}\) Perhaps most important for our question of ecclesiology, early Adventists came to believe that they were living in the time of the three angels’ message of Revelation 14.\(^\text{18}\) Adventist pioneers saw the movement as part of a prophetic warning that Babylon has fallen, and that God was calling a remnant to “keep God’s commandments and

\(^{15}\) To be specific, they came to believe that the cleansing of the sanctuary *had* begun in 1844 – it was just that this cleansing was of the *heavenly* sanctuary, which was to be a precursor to the cleansing of the earth. Christ had entered into a new phase of ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, one that would usher in the final events.

\(^{16}\) As a sidenote, while early pioneers focused primarily on the second coming or “advent” of Christ, there are contemporary SDA scholars that argue this defining feature of the Adventist movement sheds light on the entire scope of the gospel, not just what happens at the end. In other words, we know Jesus is coming because Jesus has come, and we know about God because God has come to us first.

\(^{17}\) These included the belief that that the gift of prophecy continued as a “lesser light pointing to the greater light,” that human immortality was conditional, and thus the judgment involved heaven or final annihilation, but not an everlasting “Hell.”

\(^{18}\) The first angel proclaimed the gospel and announced that hour of God’s judgment had come; the second announced that “Babylon” (understood to be apostate Christianity) had fallen, and the third warned against receiving the mark of the beast.
remain faithful to Jesus” (Rev 14:12 [NIV]). This self-understanding of the movement as “remnant” became central to Adventist ecclesiology. Part of the role of the church thus included warning the larger community of the dangers of “Babylon,” which was interpreted in part to be the deceptive merging of religious power with political power, and the coercive steps this merged group would take to enforce a particular version of Christianity.

As part of this developing picture, the pioneers read the call to “keep God’s commandments” as referencing God’s moral law, and thus placed significant emphasis on the ten commandments, especially number four (keeping the Sabbath). They came to believe that the seventh-day Sabbath held continued significance for Christians, hence their eventual name of “Seventh-day” Adventists. They also came to believe that this message against Babylon, and the corresponding call to remember the Sabbath, would instigate significant backlash.

Although the continued relevance of the seventh-day Sabbath was not a completely new idea within Christianity, with small pockets of Sabbath-keepers present throughout the centuries, early Adventist pioneers linked the Sabbath and eschatology in an unusual way. It is to that argument we now turn.

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Adventist commitment to the ten commandments also led the denomination to hold strong pacifist views at its inception. While the leaders were strongly anti-slavery (many had been part of the abolitionist movement), they also took the command “thou shalt not kill” literally, and applied to become conscientious objectors. Some avoided military service entirely, while others were happy to take “non-combatant” positions, and work as medics or cooks. For an overview of these early decisions, see Douglas Morgan, ed., *The Peacemaking Remnant: Essays and Historical Documents* (Silver Spring, MD: Adventist Peace Fellowship, 2005). For the story of one of the most famous Adventist conscientious objectors see Booton Herndon, *The Unlikeliest Hero: The Story of Desmond T. Doss, Conscientious Objector, Who Won His Nation's Highest Military Honor* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 2010). Today the Seventh-day Adventist church continues to reaffirm its official “non-combatant” position, although in 1972 added that “this statement is not a rigid position binding church members, but gives guidance leaving the individual member free to assess the situation for himself,” *Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee: General Actions*, October 14-29, 1972, Mexico City, found at https://adventistreview.org/news/adventist-military-service-conference-discusses-official-non-combatancy-position/ [accessed February 26, 2023].
Adventism, Eschatology, and the Seventh-day Sabbath

In August 1846, Joseph Bates published the “The Seventh Day Sabbath, A Perpetual Sign,” the first of a series of tracts and small books written on the issue of the seventh-day Sabbath. Bates grew up keeping Sunday as the Sabbath day, but in 1845 read a tract arguing for the seventh-day Sabbath from a Free Will Baptist minister by the name of Thomas M. Preble. His curiosity piqued, Bates turned to Scripture looking for clear biblical directives for changing Sabbath from the seventh day to the first. Instead, he became convinced that far from being obsolete, the seventh-day Sabbath was a deeply important sign in the relationship between God and humanity that not only continued to be relevant, but also had an important part to play in end-time events.

Bates framed his argument as refutations to the commonly-held rationale the wider Christian community gave for keeping the Sabbath on Sunday. He began by arguing that contrary to those who hold that the Sabbath command started on Mount Sinai, Scripture clearly records the Sabbath being instituted at creation. It was the seventh day that God rested on, blessed, and made holy. Bates then turned to the New Testament for support, arguing that Jesus’ statement in Mark 2:27 that the “Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” suggests that the Sabbath was made for Adam (and thus all humanity), and not for Abraham or Moses (and thus Judaism alone).

After making the argument for when the Sabbath was instituted, Bates asked whether

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there is Scriptural support for the idea that the Sabbath has been abolished. He discussed various New Testament texts that speak about abolishing the law and Jewish rites and ceremonies, but made a distinction between moral and ceremonial law. Bates noted that Jesus emphasizes the importance of the Decalogue, summarizing them in his description of the greatest commandment and arguing that he came not to “abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17 [NIV]). Bates claimed that it was self-evident to most Christians that the rest of the moral laws listed in the ten commandments were still applicable (love God, do not murder, do not commit adultery, etc.). Since the Sabbath is listed as one of the moral laws, Bates argued, it is thus inexplicable why the fourth commandment should be excluded from the other nine.

Bates then addressed those who agree that the Sabbath is still an important moral law, but that it was changed in Scripture from Saturday to Sunday. Although he acknowledges that there are a few occasions where Scripture notes the apostles meeting on the first day of the week to break bread together, the list of apostles meeting in both synagogues and house-churches on the seventh day far outweighs them. Bates notes that nowhere in the New Testament is the first day called the Sabbath, and argues that the actions of Constantine the Great (c. 280-337 A.D.) in A.D. 321, who decreed that Sunday be kept as a day of rest when the empire converted to Christianity, played a far more important role in this change.

Finally, Bates turns from history to the present, and proposes an argument that is critical to understanding the role the Sabbath currently plays in Adventist eschatology. He suggests that since the Sabbath continues on as part of the “commands of God,” we should hear it in the subtext of Revelation 12 and 14’s description of the faithful as those who “keep the

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22 Up until this point, Bates arguments have had significant parallels with the arguments from Seventh-day Baptists.
commandment of God and the faith of Jesus. The three angels message of Revelation 14 includes a call for the faithful to “come out of Babylon.” Bates argued that “Babylon” should best be understood as the apostate Christian church, apostate in part because of their proclivity to prioritize the laws of humanity over and above the commands of God. This tendency, for Bates, is seen most vividly by their relationship with the fourth commandment. Bates thus gives the Sabbath a prophetic meaning that goes beyond the arguments of those like Thomas Preble and other Sabbatarians of the time, and that continues to shape Adventist understandings to this day. The Sabbath is a symbol of faithfulness, and as such has a particular eschatological role to play.

Although Joseph Bates helped bring the seventh-day Sabbath to the attention of several early Adventist pioneers like James and Ellen White, other significant figures in the Advent movement were also discovering its importance on their own. J.N. Andrews (1829-1883) was one such figure. In 1845, he too came across Seventh-day Baptist teachings on the Sabbath, and he and a group of young Millerites also came to believe in the seventh-day Sabbath. J.N. Andrews would later go on to be one of the most significant defenders of the doctrine of the Sabbath in this fledgling denomination, writing the 500-page “History of the Sabbath and the First Day of the Week” in 1873. His work is an extensive overview of the history of the Sabbath, starting with creation, and tracing its presence through the Old and New Testament, the early church, the middle-ages, the Reformation, and its presence in various Baptist congregations in America.

Like Bates, Andrews argued that the Sabbath plays a central role in God’s history with the world, grounded in God’s very first interaction with humanity in the garden of Eden, pivotal

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23 “Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.” (Rev 12:17 [RSV]); “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandment of God and the faith of Jesus.” (Rev 14:12 [RSV]).
in shaping God’s relationship with God’s people, and symbolic in the final battle with the apostate church. He begins his magnus opus with an overview of the direction of the book, writing:

What a history, therefore, has the Sabbath of the Lord! It was instituted in Paradise, honored by several miracles each week for the space of forty years, proclaimed by the great Lawgiver from Sinai, observed by the Creator, the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, and the Son of God! It constitutes the very heart of the law of God, and so long as that law endures, so long shall the authority of this sacred institution stand fast.

Such being the record of the seventh day, it may well be asked, How came it to pass that, this day has been abased to the dust, and another day elevated to its sacred honors? The Scriptures nowhere attribute this work to the Son of God. They do, however, predict the great apostasy in the Christian church, and that the little horn, or man of sin, the lawless one, should think to change times and laws.24

Here in the book’s introduction, we can see some essential moves that Andrews later unpacks in the rest of the book. First, although he emphasizes the institution of the Sabbath in creation, he like Bates also ties it firmly to the moral law of God. This move will cause the denomination to lean dangerously close to legalism in the ensuing years.25 Andrews also highlights the link that Bates makes between the Sabbath and eschatology, noting that Bates “called attention to the proclamation of the third angel relative to God’s commandments… He has been instrumental in leading many to the observance of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and few


25 In fact, this focus on moral law and what made Seventh-day Adventism distinctive from other Christians was so prevalent in the early years that it led various leaders (including Ellen White) to push hard for the fledging denomination to re-focus on Christ. This led to a highly significant general conference session in 1888. It was a contentious gathering, but the end result was that many denominational leaders re-committed themselves to the centrality and full sufficiency of Christ. For reflections on the impact of the 1888 session, see “1888-1988: Advance or Retreat?” Ministry International Journal For Pastors (February 1988), https://cdn.ministrymagazine.org/issues/1988/issues/MIN1988-02.pdf?_ga=2.26010685.1468634765.1677696186-2076261152.1677120032 [accessed Feb 28, 2023].
who have received the Sabbath from his teaching have apostatized from it.”  
Thus Bates and Andrews considered the Sabbath to play a unique eschatological role in both the purpose and mission of the movement they were part of.

This brief sketch of Bates and Andrews’s writings provides a glimpse into how the doctrine of the Sabbath was inextricably linked to both ecclesiology and eschatology in the Adventist church. Early Adventists, shaken by the Great Disappointment, searched Scripture to try and ascertain where they had gone wrong. As part of that process, and in conversation with others, they came across the seventh-day Sabbath, and grew to believe that the Christian church had made a mistake by replacing it. They increasingly saw their role as a remnant community, called to share the three angel’s message of Revelation 14. And central to that message was a renewed call to be faithful to God’s moral commands, including the Sabbath.

A Remnant Movement and the Challenge of Church Organization

Many Adventists in those early years after 1844 were deeply opposed to formal church structure. Having been kicked out of their denominations for their Adventist beliefs, they were suspicious of church organization and creeds. Two Seventh-day Adventist pioneers, James White and Joseph Bates, were from the “Christian Connexion,” a contemporaneous collection of churches that were strongly anti-organization above the local level.  

26 Andrews, 503-504.

Seventh-day Adventist leaders had a “shut door” theology, believing that Christ had closed the door of salvation in 1844, and that their task as remnant was merely to wait until He returned, and share the result of their studies with other confused Millerites. Thus in those early years the group remained small, and focused primarily on reading Scripture and clarifying their beliefs, with a mission focused on other Adventists.28

As time went by, however, these early positions changed.29 Ellen White and the other pioneers grew to believe that their position on the “shut door” was wrong, and that the three angels’ message compelled them to reconsider: “having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6 [NKJV]). The movement was growing, and as such needed structure to solve such practical problems as raising funds for traveling evangelists and publishing tracts. Although James White and Joseph Bates had come out of congregationalist church structures, Ellen White had a Methodist background, and was not opposed to church structure per se. By 1859, both she and James were ready for the movement to become a denomination and were strongly supportive of some type of church organizational system. Convincing the rest of the community was no easy task, however, and debate raged in The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, the most widespread and

28 Knight, 51.

influential journal that the fledging community had at that time. Yet despite opposition, in October 1, 1860, during a gathering to discuss organizing, the name “Seventh-day Adventist” was formally adopted; and in 1863, the community voted to create a “general conference” to oversee the running of the newly formed denomination, though they still adamantly refused to adopt any formal creed.

Thus the Seventh-day Adventist church was organized, primarily due to pragmatic reasons. The tension between the value of organizational structure versus its dangers was by no means resolved, however. By the early 1900s, the Seventh-day Adventist church had begun to embrace a sense of mission to the world, and had grown from 3500 members in 1863 to more than 78,000 in 1901. The growth had strained its organizational structure, and so the period between 1901 to 1903 involved significant reorganization. Ellen White in particular was concerned by what she saw as the amassing of “kingly power” in the hands of just a few men at the top of a structure that was looking increasingly hierarchical. She would later write that “in the work of God no kingly authority is to be exercised by any human being, or by two or three. The representatives of the Conference, as it has been carried with authority for the last 20 years, shall be no longer justified in saying, ‘The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we.’”

Elsewhere she continues the theme, writing:

No man has been made a master, to rule the mind and conscience of a fellow-being.

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30 As George Knight notes “White’s suggestion brought forth a broadside from R.F. Cottrell – a corresponding editor of the Review and the leader of those opposed to church organization. Cottrell wrote that he believed “it would be wrong to ‘make us a name,’ since that lies at the foundation of Babylon. I do not think that God would approve of it” (Review, March 33, 1860),” as quoted in Knight, 63.

31 Knight, 64.

Let us be very careful how we deal with God’s blood-bought heritage. To no man has been appointed the work of being a ruler over his fellow men. Every man is to bear his own burden. He may speak words of encouragement, faith, and hope to his fellow-workers; he may help them to bear their special burdens...33

In fact, White was so opposed to what she was seeing that she pushed strongly for reorganization to be the main topic for discussion at the 1901 General Conference Session. The reorganization that followed diversified where power and authority lay in the Seventh-day Adventist church. It added organizational levels, that of “unions” (made up of conferences, which were themselves made up of local churches), and “divisions” (made up of unions). Power that was once held at the General Conference level was distributed among these various entities, and a direct link was made between authority and representation, with accountability flowing from the bottom up. Churches, Conferences, and Unions all had local constituencies that they were accountable to, while Divisions reported to the General Conference, which was in turn accountable to the worldwide church at session.34

As we have seen, this reorganization would have significant implications for how the church would deal with issues related to church unity over the next century, including the current

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34 Given the current disagreements over where ultimate authority lies in the church, there have been a number of authors who have revisited this period in Adventist history. For more, see Alberto R. Timm, “Seventh-Day Adventist Ecclesiology, 1844–2012: A Brief Historical Overview,” in Message Mission and Unity of the Church, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodriguez, vol. 2, Studies in Adventist Ecclesiology (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2013), 220–221; see also Stan Patterson “Kingly authority: Is it finding a place in the Adventist Church?” (Andrews University Faculty Publications, 2012, Paper 15), https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1014&context=christian-ministry-pubs [accessed February 26, 2023].
arguments over women’s ordination and where church authority lies. Various early church leaders would tackle questions around church structure and authority over the years, but as a whole the conversation around ecclesiology remained largely functional and pragmatic. Early Adventists believed they had a unique message to share with the world. They saw themselves as the remnant church, entrusted with the task of sharing the three angels’ message. A core feature of this message was the importance of the Seventh-day Sabbath and its eschatological role. Questions of ecclesiology mainly centered around issues of organization and authority.

This focus has met with a certain amount of success. The church that officially started with 3500 members in North America in 1863 has grown to over twenty-one million members in 212 countries over the past 150 years. It developed one of the most widespread Protestant networks of religious hospitals, K-12 schools, universities, development/relief agencies throughout the world, and recently hit a new denominational record of opening a new church every 3.5 hrs. In the last decade alone, the church has grown by four million members. Yet as

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35 I want to at least note that another critical point of organizational tension in the past century centered on race relations. In the United States tensions escalated to the point of creating Black “regional conferences” in 1944, ostensibly in order to better further “the work” within Black communities, but also at least in part because White leadership had lost the trust of Black members. For a more comprehensive overview of the rise of regional conferences, see Calvin Rock Protest & Progress: Black Seventh-day Adventist Leadership and the Push for Parity, (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2018).


was noted in the beginning of this thesis, behind this explosive growth exists a significant amount of tension and division. Although the denomination accepted over forty million new church members during the past fifty-five years, at least sixteen million of those have left the church.39 While there is still growth overall, the majority of those numbers are coming from the global South, as the message as presented seems to resonate with decreasing frequency in the global North.

How should Adventists respond to these current challenges? Should we double down on the language and framing we inherited? Or should we, like the pioneers of the Adventist movement, take this as an opportunity to reassess what shape the church has taken so far, and what would best serve us moving forward? In the section that follows, I turn to questions of ecclesiology. As can be seen in the brief overview of Adventist history just discussed, early Adventists did not think their movement would be around for long. Questions of ecclesiology often took a back seat to the seemingly more urgent questions of eschatology and how best to proclaim a particular message. Yet perhaps this distinction between message and messenger has been unhelpful. Perhaps a new way of understanding what the church is called to be can breathe new life into a community fraying at the seams.

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CHAPTER TWO

Church as a Foretaste: Ecclesiology and Eschatology

“You are still planning on having in-person church?” My church member’s voice sounded incredulous over the phone. “Why? To tell you the truth, I’m getting more sermons now than I’ve ever had before. I’ll listen to you, and then to (church X), then to (speaker Y), all from the comfort of my living room. Its great! I’m telling you, this is the future of the church.”

It was eighteen months into the COVID 19 pandemic, and I was reaching out to church members we hadn’t seen in person in a while. While some of our members were eager to come back to church in person, others were not so sure. Some were nervous about getting infected. But for others, in-person church had lost whatever appeal it once had. Why get up, get dressed, drive thirty minutes, find parking, and find a pew when you could hear whatever was being said from the comfort of your own home?

Why indeed? The answer to this question depends on another, more fundamental one. What is the church? And flowing from that question: what is its purpose? What features need to be in place for church to be “church”? What can be removed, without affecting its ‘essence’?

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought this question to the forefront of most Christian communities, as clergy across the globe articulated some form of “the church is not a building, the church is…” in light of buildings shutting down and services moving online. But the question of the church is a question that thoughtful Christians have wrestled with for over two millennia, resulting in a variety of different analogies, metaphors, and descriptions.1

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1 Although many Christians name the four markers of the church that were first expressed in the Nicene Creed (one, holy, catholic, apostolic) as the essential markers of the “true” church, as we have seen these have not played a major role in Adventist ecclesiology.
As I mentioned previously, this question has been in the forefront of my mind over the past few years, as I stepped into senior leadership of a diverse Sabbath-keeping local church in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. What vision of the church should guide us? Who are we called to be? What are we called to focus on? In some ways, our church members have very little in common. We come from different countries, speak different languages, have different political preferences, different educational opportunities, different socio-economic status. Is all this difference something to be tolerated or celebrated? How can we grow together – and by that, I mean grow closer to each other, to Christ, and as a community? Is our diversity merely something to be endured as a byproduct of our mission, or is it somehow inexorably intertwined with who we are called to be? And is our mission mainly to proclaim a particular message, or to promote a certain perspective, or to embody a unique lifestyle?

As we have seen, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination has had a predominately functional approach to ecclesiology, although there has been a renewed interest in this field of study recently. The main metaphor that the denomination has used to describe itself is that of “remnant,” but this concept alone is insufficient to answer the pressing questions raised by tensions in the wider Adventist church, and the pragmatic questions of church attendance and involvement raised by the pandemic. In what follows, I briefly outline six widespread models of the church, note how elements within Adventism relates to or differs from each model in turn, and highlight some challenges. I then propose a more recent emerging understanding of the essence of the church that is not only biblically and theologically compelling, but also I believe deeply resonant with Adventist convictions: namely, the idea of “church as foretaste.”
Dulles’ Models of the Church

In 1974, Catholic theologian Avery Dulles wrote a book entitled *Models of the Church* that examined the dominate Protestant and Catholic understandings of the church, and placed them into five broad categories: church as institution, as mystical communion, as sacrament, as herald, and as servant. He then added a sixth category, the church as community of disciples, in his last edition. ² Although Dulles acknowledges up front that these models are not exhaustive, they have helped frame the conversation in ecclesiology over the past fifty years. As such, I will briefly summarize them here, after which I will pay particular attention to potential points of similarity and difference to our nascent Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology.

**Church as Institution**

The first model Dulles describes is that of church as *institution*, which is the position most often associated with the Catholic Church. In this model, the Church is hierarchical, organized, and visible. The visible Church is the instrument of salvation, the Ark outside of which all are lost. One early church father, Cyprian, summarized the idea succinctly, stating, “He cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother.” Vatican I picks up on this theme, stating, “It is an article of faith that outside the Church no one can be saved…Who is not in this ark will perish in the flood.”³ The visible, institutional Church is ordained by God, and to step outside of this Church is to be lost.

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³ As quoted in Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 32. The Latin formulation is: *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus.*
Dulles highlights a number of different strengths to this model, noting that the first strength is that of the endorsement of the Catholic Church, the second continuity with the past in a world uncertain about its future, and the third a strong sense of corporate identity and institutional loyalty. There is a certain clarity and straightforwardness to the idea that the visible Church (along with official church membership) demarcates the boundary between those “saved” and those “lost.” To use a different metaphor, the visible Church is the train headed for heaven – anyone wanting to get there needs to get on board.⁴

Dulles notes that the weaknesses to this model, however, are substantial. These include the fact that there does not seem to be much scriptural support for it – the early church was far more of a movement than an institution. Second, it can lead to an anemic Christian life of passivity, since salvation and basic church membership are so closely tied. As long as you are an official member of the institution, very little else is expected or required of you. Third, it can create a theology that is defensive and reactionary versus creative and exploratory, and not allow for the power of the Holy Spirit outside of official church structures – why mess with the vehicle that is getting you to heaven? Finally, it is a model that is viewed with growing suspicion in these increasingly anti-institutional times. There is far less willingness to turn a blind eye to abuse or injustice, even in order to protect the supposedly sacred institutions that perpetuate them.⁵

⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁵ Ibid., 36.
Church as Mystical Communion

Dulles’s second model, church as *mystical communion*, is in some ways the antithesis of the first. In this model, theologians turn away from what sociologists term formal and/or structured “society,” and towards the more informal and interpersonal “community.” For Dulles, this community is not just the friendly fellowship of individuals, although it includes that, but also the vertical and mystical communion of humanity with Christ. This model draws heavily upon two images from Scripture, that of the Church as the People of God and as the Body of Christ. While the two images overlap in many ways, they each have their own distinct strengths and weaknesses. The People of God is a powerful, predominantly Old Testament metaphor. It emphasizes the covenantal relationship between God and God’s people, but it fails to distinguish between various types of divine-human relationship. In some ways, are not all people God’s people? If God created all of humanity, who exactly falls outside the “people of God”? For Dulles, the “Body of Christ” imagery better reflects the new covenantal relationship of the Christ and the Church, knit together through the power of the Holy Spirit. It emphasizes organic, Spirit-filled relationships over official, institutional structures.

Although there are valuable elements within this model, Dulles notes several drawbacks. First, Dulles argues that this model fails to clearly explain how the “Body of Christ” connects with the church of Christ. Is it invisible or visible? If the former, how is it connected with the visible church? If the latter, what should we call the “invisible communion of grace” of the early church fathers? Also, if the church is mainly seen as the work of the Holy Spirit, what is the motivation for Christian mission or evangelism? In practice, Dulles argues, churches that use this

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6 Ibid., 39.
model as their predominant one could tend to become “fragmented autonomous congregations” on the one hand, or “monastic communities that prioritize mystical interiority” on the other.⁷

Yet despite its drawbacks, this model adds rich dimensions to the concept of the Church that the institutional model lacks. As Dulles notes, it draws from the extensive descriptions of Church as *koinonia* found in the Book of Acts and the writings of Paul. It recognizes a significant role for the Holy Spirit, and its power to create spontaneous, warm, authentic community outside the confines of organizational structures. As Dulles poetically puts it, in this model “the Church is not a mere means. It is not just a vehicle to bring men to heaven. The Church in a certain sense exists for its own sake. Wherever men are in the Church they have partly fulfilled the aim of their existence; they are, at least inchoatively, in union with God.”⁸

*Church as Sacrament*

Between these two models of the Church as institutional instrument of salvation versus Church as mystical communion lies Dulles’ third model, that of the Church as *sacrament*. For Dulles, this model provides a helpful middle way, amplifying the strengths and minimizing the weaknesses of the previous two. Given the significant role of the sacraments in Catholic theology, it is perhaps not surprising that Dulles views this model so positively. A sacramental view of the Church sees the church as both a sign and instrument of God’s grace. It has both an outer and inner dimension. Thus the institutional or “visible” reality of the church is vital, as part of the sacrament is the explicit unity in Christ towards which it points; it is not, however, the full picture, as it is possible to imagine a visible church void of the invisible aspects of God’s grace.

⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁸ Ibid., 50.
Thus this understanding of the church creates space for the Church to be both visible and invisible. It recognizes that God’s grace in Christ is available to all humanity. The Church, then, is the place “where it appears most clearly that the love that reconciles men to God and to one another is a participation in what God communicates most fully in Christ.”9 Dulles goes on to further unpack the role of the visible church, stating that “since sacramentality by its very nature calls for active participation, only those who belong to the Church, and actively help to constitute it as a sign, share fully in its reality as sacrament.”10

Although Dulles sees significant advantages to this model, he also acknowledges some potential weaknesses. He recognizes that there is little explicitly sacramental language in the New Testament witness of the Church, and that it lacks an emphasis on service to the world. He also concedes that the technical language of sacrament may make it less useful as a model that captures the imagination of laity, and that it is a model that has had very little traction in Protestant communities.

Church as Herald

The fourth model, that of the Church as herald, on the other hand, is far more commonly found among Protestant communities. Here the Church and its mission are closely tied, and has to do with the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Bible as a witness to Him. Dulles points to Protestant theologian Karl Barth as the most influential proponent of this position. In this perspective, there is a distance between the Bible and the Church, making it possible, as Dulles notes, “for the Bible to testify against the Church… the word of God is not a

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9 Ibid., 63, emphasis mine. This recognition that the sign participates in but is not equal to the reality to which it points helps this model avoid the problem of “deification” of the Church associated with the mystical communion model.

10 Ibid., 65.
substance immanent in the Church, but rather an event that takes place as often as God addresses his people and is believed… the Church is the great crater left by the impact of God’s revealing word.”11 It is a witness to and a herald of the reconciling grace of God and the coming Kingdom of Heaven. According to Dulles, the goal of the church in this model is predominately to herald the message, for “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:20). The Church should not point to itself, but to the Word.

Dulles notes that there are significant benefits to this model. First, it is an image with solid biblical grounding; secondly, it provides a clearer link between the Church’s identity and mission to herald the gospel of Jesus Christ; third, it prompts repentance and reform; and fourth, it leads to a rich and deep theology of the Word. But for Dulles, the limits of this model seem especially apparent from a Catholic perspective. In his reading, this model does not adequately prioritize the fact that Christian revelation is fundamentally incarnational. For example, Dulles argues that “it is not enough to speak of the word of God, for Christianity stands or falls with the affirmation that the Word has been made flesh. In the theology of proclamation, on the lips of some Protestants, it appears as though the Word has become not flesh but only word!”12 This critique is surprising, however, given that Dulles names Karl Barth as one of its foremost proponents, the same Barth who places such significance on the Incarnation of Christ.

The final critique that Dulles raises is that this model can focus so much on witness to what God is doing that it neglects what humanity can do. What role should the Church have in serving the world, working for the common good, and improving life in the here and now?

11 Ibid., 70. Dulles also lists Hans Küng, Bultmann, Ernst Fuchs, and Gerhard Ebeling as proponents of this view.

12 Ibid., 77.
Church as Servant

The fifth model of the Church, and final of Dulles’ original categories, is that of the Church as servant. Just like Christ came to the world “not to be served, but to serve” (Matthew 20:28), the Church’s mission is to be the ‘community for others.’\(^{13}\) The Church is not the mediator between God and the world – rather, the world has its own valid encounters with God outside the strict boundaries of the Church. In the words of one proponent of this model, “The house of God is not the Church but the world. The Church is the servant, and the first characteristic of a servant is that he lives in someone else’s house, not his own.”\(^{14}\) Priorities of this model include acts of service, reconciliation, justice, compassion, and peacebuilding in the wider world.

For Dulles, the strengths of this model include providing the Church with a new sense of relevance, energy, and mission potentially more compelling to the current times we are in. It can include a prophetic critique of social institutions that may be missing in some of the other models. On the other hand, however, the model has a weaker biblical foundation than some of the others. It is also not clear to Dulles that Scripture anticipates that the Church’s role is to help usher in the Kingdom of God, instead of that being God’s work alone. Finally, sometimes those in this model may seem to pit “preaching” and “doing” against each other, instead of seeing them as deeply intertwined.

\(^{13}\) Dulles notes the impact of this image in work like Richard Cardinal Cushing, The Servant Church (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1966).

Church as Community of Disciples

Although Dulles only had five models in the 1974 original version of this work, his 2002 addition included one final category, that of the Church as community of disciples. Dulles noted that while the five models we have just summarized seemed to have become a useful tool for many interested in ecclesiology, he had hoped to find one that could help harmonize the strengths of the others, and minimize their weaknesses. Although Dulles originally chose the sacramental model as best suited for the task, he later found the model of community of disciples as a potentially more fruitful possibility. The benefits of this model include 1) its clear origin in the historical Jesus, who explicitly called disciples to follow him; 2) the fact that the disciples (and thus by extension the Church) represent Christ to the wider world; 3) the reality of Jesus present in the disciples (“I am the vine, you are the branches” John 15:4-7 [NIV]); 4) and the fact that Jesus is in the process of transforming his disciples (and by extension the Church). To use this language acknowledges the deficiencies of the Church (to be a disciple means you are on a journey, not that you have arrived), and thus the need for continued repentance and reformation. But it also serves to highlight the One who they are disciples of.

Dulles notes three possible objections to this model. The first objection is that this “community of disciples” model over-emphasizes the countercultural nature of the church, and minimizes what we have in common with the rest of humanity. Images such as “healer” or “reconciler” or “servant” create less of an abrupt divide. In a similar way, a second objection could be that the “community of disciples” model seems to ask too much from the average Christian. Dulles wonders if every Christian is called to follow Jesus like the first disciples did? What would happen to marriages, jobs, possessions, civic responsibilities if we did? Finally, this model may inadvertently drift into an individualistic ecclesiology. You can be a disciple on your
own – the “community” part of the name could be seen to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. Yet despite these challenges, Dulles finds this model the most compelling, writing that this description of Church “illuminates the institutional and sacramental aspects of the Church and grounds the functions of evangelization and service that are central to the herald and servant models… Without being adequate to the full reality of the Church, it has… potentialities as a basis for a comprehensive ecclesiology.”

Dulles’ Models and Seventh-day Adventism

I have briefly outlined six different potential models of the church according to Dulles, each of which have been prominent at various times and in various ecclesial bodies. As we consider expanding the Seventh-day Adventist concept of the church, I turn next to the following question: have any of these models helped shape how the Adventist church functions, even if the model itself has been subterranean? While traces of each may be found, I suggest that the idea of church as herald, servant, and community of disciples have made the most obvious mark. More recently, some Adventist theologians are suggesting that we formally adopt the idea of church of mystical community (or koinonia) into our self-understanding, while others suggest that we reconsider the value of sacramental language.

Before we turn to engagement with these models within Adventism, we should acknowledge there are some traces of church as institution that can be found. As previously noted, the Seventh-day Adventist church has traditionally viewed highly institutionalized church

15 Dulles, 197.

16 We will examine an Adventist perspective on koinonia later in this chapter; for an argument for reworked sacramental language within Adventism, see John Webster, “Six Pointers Towards an Adventist Ecclesiology,” (adapted from paper presented at the West Coast Religion Teachers Conference, Walla Walla University, 2012).
structures with suspicion. Yet it is not uncommon to hear language within the pews that is reminiscent of this institutional idea of the Church. Someone who switches to a different denomination (a relatively rare practice among Adventists compared to other Christians), has left “the Truth.” Someone who joins the Adventist community from another denomination has entered into “the Truth.” Although our official documents explicitly recognize a difference between the invisible church and our Adventist denomination, that distinction does not seem to have always translated to the pews. The language of the Church as an ark or train has found its way into the Adventist community despite our anti-institutional beginnings.

Adventism and the Herald Model

“Pastor, I thought it was a mistake then, and I think it is a mistake now.” The church member was deeply concerned. They had heard that our conference had made the decision to close the physical location of our last major Adventist Book Center in the area. People just were not going to bookstores anymore, preferring to buy everything online. But for this member, this move was a move away from the church’s mission. “What is our conference leadership thinking, closing down our bookstores? We have a message to share – we should be getting our writings into more hands, not less. How will people know our message if no-one tells them?”

17 In the Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Beliefs (a self-described statement that is not a creed and thus open to revision), the beliefs directly connected to the church have a universal invisible element, even as there is a particular role for the remnant. For example, statement #12 on The Church states that “the church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour,” and the beginning of statement #13 on The Remnant and Its Mission continues the thought, noting that “the universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ.” However, the latter part of statement #13 goes on to say that “in the last days…a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” For more, see Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, 2020 edition, https://www.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ADV-28Beliefs2020.pdf, accessed February 28, 2023.
Life-long Adventists will be very familiar with the language of the church as “herald,” someone tasked with a particular message. In 1849, over a decade before the movement became an official organization, early Adventist pioneers started publishing what they called *Present Truth*, a “little paper” that Ellen White envisioned would become “like streams of light that went clear round the world.” The following year, in 1850, her husband James White started publishing the journal *The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald.* Nicknamed “the Review and Herald,” this paper was in some ways considered “church” for many early Adventists, isolated as they were among communities that scoffed at their beliefs. Although the magazine’s name has now been shorted to *The Adventist Review,* that idea of Adventists as “herald” remains an important part of the denomination’s language and sense of identity.

Given Adventist history, it is understandable that when it comes to questions of ecclesiology, Adventism has tended to emphasize the call to proclamation. The core question has been “what church structure would best serve our function?” with our function being seen primarily as those with a particular end-time message to share. A good example of this can be found in a chapter on Adventist ecclesiology written by Raoul Dederen, professor and editor of the comprehensive *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology.* Dederen writes:

Let us finally consider the element that lies at the heart of all the functions of the church and gives shape to everything it does: its message, the content of what the church proclaims. The essential nature of the apostolic preaching is clearly expressed in two main words used throughout the NT: kērussein, “to proclaim as a herald,” and euangelizein “to tell good tidings”… Paul makes the most frequent use of the term “gospel.” Although he often refers to it without qualifiers to define its

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19 The Seventh-day Adventist Church Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research has compiled an online database for all publications since 1950. For more, see https://documents.adventistarchives.org/default.aspx [accessed February 23, 2023].
meaning (cf. Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 4:15; Gal. 2:5, 14; Phil. 1:5; etc.), he has in view a specific body of facts.\textsuperscript{20}

As we have seen, for Adventists’ this “specific body of facts” has historically included the three angel’s message proclaimed in Revelation 14. Part of the reason the Adventist denomination invested so heavily in its publishing ministry from the very beginning of the movement was that it believed that there was an important message for today that broader Christianity was ignoring, and it was its task to share, proclaim, “herald” that message first to fellow Christians, and then the world at large.

Given this focus, it is helpful to consider whether the weaknesses Dulles noted in this model show up in Adventism as well. The challenge with seeing the function of the church as primarily a “herald” of a specific set of facts, as Dulles notes, is that we can artificially separate belief from practice, ortho-doxy from ortho-praxis. How does the “herald” model incorporate the fact that Christian revelation is fundamentally incarnational? Is the church called to be anything, as opposed to just proclaiming something?

This question is particularly relevant in our post-pandemic age. As was noted earlier, if the church is primarily a herald of a particular message, is it really necessary to meet together in person? Why not listen to the message from the comfort of your home? If the church is mainly a herald, should we not be investing more heavily in our publishing and online presence than our physical one? These questions are being actively wrestled with in churches of all denominations today, and the Adventist community is no exception.

Yet for Adventists, the concern that we might inadvertently minimize ortho-praxis because of our focus on orthodoxy is mitigated by the content of our message itself. Given that

the denomination has historically viewed its call as proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in the context of the three angels’ message of Revelation 14, and given that part of that context is interpreted to involve direct and specific behavior (for example the call to “come out of Babylon,” and the commitment to celebrate the seventh-day Sabbath), the Adventist community is often known for its countercultural actions. Many Adventists promote a healthy lifestyle, abstain from drugs and alcohol, and place an emphasis on acts of service and compassion. Orthodoxy and ortho-praxis can go hand in hand.

The church as herald model has had an important history within Adventism, one that I think can be built upon instead of discarded. Adventists are “heralds,” but we need to expand the message from beyond the warnings of the three angels. We need to realize that our task is not just proclaiming something to come, but actively participating in the beginning of what it is proclaiming.

Adventism and the Servant Church

“So you’ve outsourced the gospel, have you?” I was sitting in my office in an impromptu meeting with a potential volunteer. He was asking about our partnership with Friendships for Hope (FFH), a non-profit that uses our community service building throughout the week to provide hundreds of pounds of food to over 500 families, and run an English as a Second Language program for refugees. The relationship between FFH and the church is very close; most of the volunteers are church members, and it is run by the former senior pastor of the church and his wife. But it is run separately, which is what I was explaining to the volunteer when he responded.

“Outsourced the gospel?” I repeated, a little stunned. “The gospel is summed up in Matthew 25,” he replied. “We need to be feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the
prisoner. That is what matters. If FFH is doing it, you’ve outsourced the gospel.” I could not help but feel somewhat taken aback by the blunt pronouncement. But it is indicative of an important perspective, one that seems to be growing among certain circles. For some, the church needs to take a step back from the “proclamation” model, and should focus on ministering to the “least of these.” In these circles we may hear the oft-repeated phrase, “Preach the gospel at all times; when necessary, use words.” The thought is that the heart of the gospel is how we care for, treat, and serve those around us. It is communicated far more by how we act than by what we say.

There is definitely a significant tradition of service for its own sake within the Adventist denomination. The Adventist Relief and Development Agency (ADRA), established in 1956, is the denomination’s global humanitarian arm, operating in 118 different countries. Interestingly, in a denomination that has been so emphatically connected to proclaiming a particular message, ADRA’s purpose is explicitly non-proselytizing – it exists to “serve humanity so all may live as God intended.” In fact, in a section on FAQs, ADRA responds directly to the question of proselytizing, stating:

ADRA does not proselytize. God’s love in ADRA’s programs is expressed when it reaches out to those in need regardless of race, gender, and political, or religious affiliation. We work in harmony with a broad array of cultures, traditions, and peoples of non-Christian faith, respecting the human dignity of all. The positive impact of ADRA’s contribution globally validates our heritage and belief in benevolent giving, as well as introduces the Adventist name to communities.

In a similar vein, the Adventist denomination has a vibrant and extensive hospital network. While originally seen as operating hand-in-hand with verbally sharing the Adventist message,
there is considerable discussion currently among medical professionals and theologians about how closely the medical work should be tied to the church.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to Adventism’s various more institutional forms of care (ADRA and the extensive network of hospitals), the idea of every member meeting the wholistic needs of others is included in the latter half of Statement of Fundamental Beliefs #11, entitled “Growing in Christ.” It states:

We are also called to follow Christ’s example by compassionately ministering to the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of humanity. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience.\textsuperscript{24}

Yet despite the recognized importance of serving others, and even though many within Adventism feel ADRA and the hospitals are doing good work, few would say that this priority encompasses the totality of what the church is called to be or do. What, if anything, makes the church different from a solely humanitarian non-profit? Is there a role it is called to play beyond providing for mainly physical or emotional human needs?

Adventism and the Community of Disciples

“At its heart, it is really all about making disciples, isn’t it?” Our conference administrator paused, looking around the room full of pastors. It was one of our biannual regional pastors’ meetings, and the first meeting in-person in San Diego since the start of the

\textsuperscript{23} Interestingly, one of the very earliest schisms in the Adventist church was in part over control of the American Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association, with Dr. John Harvey Kellogg on one side of the struggle, and denominational leadership on the other. For more, see George Knight, \textit{A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists}, 113-118.

pandemic. We had been talking about the impact of the pandemic, and the ways in which our
regular rhythms of church life had changed. He continued, “There have been a lot of changes in
the past few years – but what we long to do, what we’ve been called to, is to make disciples of
Jesus. And we can only make disciples by being disciples.”

The gathering included the regular features of meetings like this: updates on conference
policies we needed to be aware of, reports from different ministry departments, important
upcoming events. But it also included a significant emphasis on discipleship. While more
“proclamation” based evangelism strategies were mentioned, the emphasis on discipleship was
noticedably pronounced.

Perhaps one of the most significant investments Adventism has made that connects with
the concept of discipleship is the high prominence it has placed on Adventist education. There
are Adventist schools in close to 150 countries, with educational options from pre-school through
university. As of the most recent data, there are over 9,000 schools, 111,000 teachers, and
2,000,000 students. Although many Adventist schools have faced challenges in recent years
(primarily due to high costs and falling enrollment), the denomination continues to place a high
priority on seeing education as part of the mission of the church.

This emphasis took some time. Early Adventists, convinced that Jesus was coming within
the next 5-10 years, wondered if they should spend much time focusing on anything other than
proclamation. Yet by the beginning of the 20th century, that hesitation had disappeared, and

25 Seventh-day Adventist Church Education Department, “About Us,”

26 For a recent connection between discipleship and education within Adventism, see Alan Parker
"Discipleship as Means to Reinvent Higher Education," The Journal of Biblical Foundations of Faith and
Learning: Vol. 2 : Issue 1, Article 19 (2017), https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/jbfl/vol2/iss1/19
[accessed February 28, 2023].
Adventists saw education as a deeply important component of the church’s mission. This was shaped in large part by the writings of Ellen White, whose book *Education* starts with these words:

> Our ideas of education take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the pursual of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.27

Later in the same book she even more explicitly connects the work of education with that of redemption, saying:

> In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one, for in education, as in redemption, “other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ”… To aid the student in comprehending these principles, and in entering into that relation with Christ which will make them a controlling power in the life, should be the teacher’s first effort and his constant aim. The teacher who accepts this aim is in truth a co-worker with Christ, a laborer together with God.28

Thus, although the language of church as “community of disciples” might be slightly less prominent in Adventist circles than church as “herald,” for example, Adventists have long been interested in how to develop, train, and grow Christ-followers. To name the church as a “community of disciples” could fit many existing Adventist priorities.29

However, the challenges Dulles mentioned in this model are very evident in Adventism. As Dulles noted, this model can highlight the separation between the church and the world and

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28 Ibid., 30.2

29 It is important to note here that while I have linked the idea of “discipleship” to education, there are forms of discipleship, like those promoted within the “spiritual formation” framework, that some Adventists are deeply suspicious about.
over-emphasize the counter-cultural nature of the church.\textsuperscript{30} This model also ironically provides little protection against the western drift into individualism. Although “community” is in the title, discipleship does not \textit{necessarily} have to be communal. The relationship between disciples and teacher could be considered primarily as a vertical one. The teacher teaches, the disciple learns. The “community” could thus exist predominately to help support each other along the journey, but is not an essential feature.

\textit{Adventism and the Communio/Koinonia Model}

Of all the models mentioned so far, the one that is most closely related to the direction I will be proposing is the idea of church as \textit{koinonia} (or Dulles’ “mystical community”). There has been a wealth of research and discussion of the church as “koinonia” over the past several decades since Dulles’ work. Of particular interest for our discussion is a recent work by Adventist scholar Tihomir Lazić, published as a dissertation in 2016 and then later as a book in 2019, entitled \textit{Towards an Adventist Version of Communio Ecclesiology: Remnant in Koinonia}.\textsuperscript{31} Lazić hopes to help the Seventh-day Adventist community adopt \textit{communio/koinonia}

\textsuperscript{30} Adventists are historically deeply counter-cultural. In fact, although Adventism is now usually recognized as a Christian denomination instead of a sect or cult, its counter-cultural tendencies brought it to the attention of the FBI in the early 1920s and led to a series of conversations between leading Adventist and Evangelical scholars in the 1950s regarding Adventism’s place in the broader evangelical community. These conversations would end with Walter R. Martin, noted evangelical scholar on cults, concluding that Adventism was an authentic (if somewhat misguided) part of the evangelical community. For more on this conversation, see Walter Martin, \textit{The Truth about Seventh-Day Adventism} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1965), and \textit{Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine; an Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-Day Adventist Belief} (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Association, 1957). For more recent research on the relationship between Adventists and the FBI, see Kevin Burton, “Adventist Peace Radio, Episode 36: Adventism & The FBI in WWI,” (June 13, 2019), \texttt{http://adventistpeace.org/blogcontent/2019/6/13/adventist-peace-radio-episode-36-adventism-amp-the-fbi-in-wwi} [accessed February 28, 2023].

ecclesiology as a core component of the ecclesiological framework that Adventists are constructing. He compellingly shows how Adventists’ concept of church as remnant, while powerful, is insufficient on its own. He names four inadequacies: the lack of systematic reasoning, the neglect of ontological definition, the reductionist concept of truth, and the pneumatological deficit. Lazić suggests that by developing their own version of *communio* ecclesiology alongside their concept of the church as remnant, the Seventh-day Adventist church can address some of these deficiencies, and start to see the church as not only a vehicle for a particular message, but as an essential part of what the message is proclaiming. He writes, “Thus, the message, occasionally seen as an aim per se in Adventist circles, becomes a tool for achieving the real goal. The people involved and joined together in the process of proclamation are no longer only simply instrumental in achieving the aim, but — as a community of believers — constitute a part of the end goal.” 32

Lazić notes that there has been significant conversation around the idea of *koinonia* over the past half century, and divides the recent literature on the topic into two broad categories. The first is the *imitatio Trinitatis* approach, most notably articulated by theologians like John D. Zizoulas, Joseph Ratziner, and Mirsolav Volf. According to Lazić, the central argument of this approach is that the church should be an imitation of the type of *communio* found within the Trinity, a mirror by which we can catch glimpses of that relationship. The challenge with this approach for Lazić is that he considers it essentially hypothetical. He writes, “The main difficulty with such an approach seems to be that, in order to be feasible at all, it has to presume the existence of specific, reliable and detailed knowledge of the inner being and workings of God —

32 Ibid., 163.
knowledge that we as human beings simply do not possess.” As beautiful as this concept is in theory, how can one truly know the inner workings of the Trinity, especially enough to proscribe how one should engage with each other and with God?

Lazić instead recommends Adventists consider the second, lesser-known but (he suggests) more promising approach to *communio* ecclesiology, namely *participatio trinitatis*. This view takes a “bottom-up” instead of a “top-down” approach to understanding the divine life, grounding it in the believers’ experience of Spirit-filled community, and then moving “upwards in explaining the ways in which this Spirit-gathered community is then incorporated into the spiritual body of Christ and, through this life-giving, mysterious union with the Son, reunited with the Father.” Lazić points to Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes’ distinction between participatory and observational language. While much of theological language tends towards the “observational,” attempting to describe the total cosmic drama from a “spectator” or “observer” perspective, participatory language recognizes itself to be part of the drama, and thus does not claim to know the full picture. Instead, it acknowledges and embraces a sense of mystery about the Divine. Lazić describes this mystery as follows:

Therefore, the essential proposal and the inner logic of this Spirit-sensitive approach may be summed up in the following way: It is through the man Jesus, and his earthly life, culminating in the Resurrection and Ascension, that believers are confronted with the mystery of God, which they learn of by participating in him through the work of the Spirit.

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33 Ibid., 172.
34 Ibid., 168.
35 Ibid., 182.
36 Ibid., 181.
For Lazić, this acknowledgment of the mystery of God should temper but not preclude our attempts to construct a systematic theology and ecclesiology. He writes:

The fact that all Christian language about church is essentially experiential should not, however, discourage efforts towards a more elaborate and systematic theology. It is precisely because the theory of participation in God is shaped in the context of a community that is taking part in God’s life that the development of a more rounded ecclesiology is necessary. It provides the community of believers with a coherent conceptual framework for their shared experience. It is intended not only to describe what the church is at the moment but also to point to what the church is intended to be.37

Lazić compellingly argues that Adventists should consider their calling as a church as consisting “not only in passing on the message – distinctive doctrinal statements that, according to Adventist believers, form the ‘present truth’ – but also in being (embodying) the message that they are called to proclaim.”38

I believe this emphasis on what the church is called to be instead of only what the church is called to proclaim must be a core component of the ecclesiological framework Adventists are constructing. Lazić’s work is a very helpful start in this direction. While including this emphasis, I hope to broaden the Adventist understanding of the church as an eschatological movement and thus am proposing the idea of “church as foretaste,” which suggests that the church has been part of God’s end goal from the beginning. This idea could be vulnerable to the same critique Lazić has towards the imitatio Trinitatis approach: namely, that the future of the church is fundamentally a mystery, and as such is a nebulous anchor from which to create an ecclesiology. While I will try to show how a reframed understanding of the Sabbath could help answer this

37 Ibid., 184.
38 Ibid., 180.
critique in part, I do agree with Lazić that further thinking about the role of the Spirit in the Adventist church would be deeply beneficial.

Broadening the Perspective

Before we move to the proposed “church as foretaste” concept that I hope will be helpful to nascent Adventist ecclesiology, I want to acknowledge some obvious weaknesses to the approach I have chosen so far. While I believe engaging with a single summative work like Dulles’ is helpful in providing necessary focus for a topic as broad as this one, there are obvious drawbacks to tracing models of the church from a singular American Catholic voice from the 1950s. The past seventy years have seen dramatic shifts in Christianity, with crosscurrents of both exponential growth and rapid decline. Christianity has had steadily declining numbers in America since the 1950s, with a noticeably rapid decline over the past twenty years in particular. While in the 1950s ninety percent of Americans identified themselves as Christian, only sixty-three percent identify as such in 2021. This is a ten percent drop from just ten years ago. At the same time, Christianity has expanded rapidly in the global south. In 2011, the Pew Research Center released their official calculations on the size and distribution of Christians worldwide. The number of Christians in the Global North was 856,360,000, while the Global South had risen to 2,184,060,000. Compare this with Pew’s estimates of the Christian population from 1910 from the same report, where they estimated there were 502,900,000 Christians in the Global North,

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and 108,910,000 in the Global South. Of note in a discussion about ecclesiology, the rapid growth is being fueled not primarily among the traditional denominations (mainline Protestant or Roman Catholic), but instead among the far younger Pentecostal community.

This trend is echoed within Adventism as well. Although the denomination originated as a small group of pioneers in the northeast of the United States, as of the end of 2021 there are just 2,151,305 Adventists in the “Global North,” and the remaining 19,760,856 are in the “Global South.” In fact, close to 10,000,000 are from Africa alone. This has had a significant impact on global decision-making, and the tensions that come with a shifting center of power have been on increasingly clear display, as evidenced by the 2015 vote on women’s ordination. This rapid shift means that older models of the church may no longer adequately reflect the current experience within the pews.

The past seventy years has also seen the rising acknowledgment of a number of previously muted voices within academic circles, including but not limited to feminist, womanist, Asian, African, Latinx, Black, and indigenous voices. While many fields in theology have greatly benefitted from listening to these previously overlooked perspectives, I have found there to be less of a diversity of voices in the field of ecclesiology. To that end, I have greatly appreciated the work of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, whose book *An Introduction to Ecclesiology:*
Ecumenical, Historical, and Global Perspectives surveyed the contemporary landscape within ecclesiology, and intentionally worked to identify and amplify feminist, womanist, Asian, African, Latinx, Black, and indigenous perspectives in addition to the classical Catholic/Protestant/Eastern Orthodox descriptions. As Kärkkäinen notes, “Rather than a wealthy Euro-American male, a ‘‘typical’ contemporary Christian... [is] a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian favela” or a young, often poor, person anywhere in the megacities of the Global South.” Writing about what the church is called to be without acknowledging the lived experiences of most within the church would be an exercise in futility.

Kärkkäinen’s survey of Latin American ecclesiology highlights the birth of a new type of church community. He writes, “Out of the liberation theologies’ struggle for freedom, justice, and economic sharing arose a new type of ecclesiological experimentation that has contributed to the renewal of the church in Latin America, namely, the base communities or Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs).” These BECs are most predominately a grassroots gathering of the poor, those who have been marginalized and oppressed by the Roman Catholic church hierarchy and, as Kärkkäinen puts it, do ecclesiology ‘from below.’” He notes, “the main purpose of the BECs, therefore, is to live out that kind of open and inclusive community life that does not erect any kind of social, political, religious, or other boundaries but affirms the value of all people, especially the rejected and oppressed.” Latin American theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez

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46 Ibid., 109.
challenge the larger church to consider God’s “preferential option for the poor;” BECs put that challenge into practice.47

While Latin America continues to be predominately Roman Catholic (although there has been a rapid rise of Pentecostalism recently),48 it is far more difficult to name a single dominant African ecclesiology. In fact, Kärkkäinen quotes African scholar Stan Chu Ilo, who notes that “one cannot define an African ecclesiology”; instead, where one should start is “to describe the nature of churches in Africa and show how they are distinct from other forms of the church outside Africa.”49 While the missionary efforts of western Christianity in the 19th and 20th century have left an undeniable imprint, it is important to remember that Christianity in Africa can be traced back to Jesus’ childhood in Egypt, and that there are indigenous forms of Christianity that have been present in Africa for 2000 years.

Part of the complicating challenge for any survey of African Christian theology is the myriad of cultures and languages on the one hand, and the prevalence of oral traditions on the other. But Kärkkäinen suggests that one feature that seems to be held in common is the idea of koinonia previously referenced. Kärkkäinen quotes Ghanian theologian Cephas N. Omenyo, who states the following:

The concept of koinonia is fundamental in understanding the ecclesiology of the AICs, mainly because the sense of community is the sine qua non in understanding Africa


societies. Communal living is the way to promote and maintain the general well-being of the individual and of society in general.50

Kärkkäinen notes that this concept of koinonia has similarities to the African concept of ubuntu, the idea that “I am because we are,” which was perhaps most famously developed in the work and thinking of South African archbishop Desmond Tutu. Tutu placed ubuntu thinking at the center of his work around forgiveness and reconciliation, and his resultant theological convictions profoundly shaped how South Africa navigated a path towards reconciliation in difficult and uncertain post-apartheid times.51

Kärkkäinen next turns to a survey of Christian communities on Asian soil. As was the case with the previous two continents already discussed, to speak of “Asia” as anything other than vast and immeasurably diverse would be foolish. Kärkkäinen notes the words of Chinese American theologian and feminist Kwok Pui-lan, who writes:

More than half of the world’s population live in Asia, a multicultural and multireligious continent that has undergone tremendous transformation during the past several decades. From Japan to Indonesia, and from the Philippines to Central Asia, people live in different socio-political realities and divergent cultural worlds. Divided into at least seven linguistic zones, Asia is also the birthplace of the major historical religions of humankind.52


51 I was a child in South Africa during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which Archbishop Tutu chaired; for a powerful reflection on the TRC, see Desmond Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness (New York: Image, 1999). This book had a huge impact on me, as I had grown up in the transition between apartheid and the “new South Africa,” but it was the first time I had heard an account of what had happened told with both such grace and unflinching honesty.

The question of ecclesiology in Asia should thus more realistically be a question of “Which Asia? Which Christianities?” Although Christianity is less widespread in Asia than in the other continents we have discussed, there are significant communities in the Philippines, South Korea, and South India.

Kärkkäinen notes that despite the vast diversity of the Asian continent, there do seem to be some tentative commonalities. Similarly to Africa and Latin America, indigenous religion in Asia does not conform to the Western distinctions between the sacred and the secular; as such “religion is an irreducible part of all of life.” Perhaps connected to this, Singapore theologian Simon Chan notes that:

In Asia, the primary locus of religious life is the home. In Confucianism, the family “has always been the centre of Confucian life and ethics”… In Hinduism too, much of its ritual expressions occur daily at home. Unlike the church, worship in the Hindu temple is not congregational… Thus, in Asia, religion blends seamlessly with family and social life. This focus on home instead of church perhaps explains the rise of movements such as “Church-less Christianity,” or the “Non-Church Movement,” which cultivates a Christianity that allows for people to remain in their families or communities of origin without insisting on a distinct break and the formation of a new community.

A final perspective which Kärkkäinen surveys that I want to briefly mention is that of the feminist/womanist/mujerista voice. Kärkkäinen notes that there “are precious few ecclesiological

53 Kärkkäinen, 127.
54 Ibid., 125.
56 Kärkkäinen, 128-129.
studies and full-scale presentations” told from women’s perspectives,\textsuperscript{57} a reality that I experienced while searching for conversation partners for an eschatologically-shaped ecclesiology. Kärkkäinen does highlight the work of scholars such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Natalie K. Watson, Stephanie Y. Mitchem, Letty M. Russell, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Delores Williams, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Yolanda Tarango, María Pilar Aquino, Mercy Amba Oduoye, and Elizabeth Johnson. Although only a few of them focus directly on ecclesiology, their perspectives have helped shift the wider theological conversation to pay closer attention to the \textit{embodiment} of ideas like salvation, liberation, and eschatology.

As evidenced by Dulles’ six models, and by the ever-expanding iterations of Christianity throughout the globe, an honest answer to this question “what is the church” would recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all answer. Kärkkäinen’s survey suggests that forms of Christianity that emphasize the Holy Spirit (such as Pentecostalism) are spreading rapidly in the Global South, and have allowed for more syncretic and indigenous forms of Christianity to emerge. Although this thesis is focused more on an eschatologically-oriented ecclesiology, Lazić’s suggestion that Adventism pay careful attention to developing a robust pneumatology seems to be timely, and could be a fruitful avenue for further study of Adventist ecclesiology in a global context.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 133.
Adventism and the Church as Foretaste

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”
Revelation 7:9-10 (NIV)

As mentioned previously, the ecclesiological model I am proposing for consideration within the Adventist community is that of “church as foretaste,” or an eschatologically-shaped ecclesiology. I propose this idea in part for pragmatic reasons: given that Adventists are already focused on eschatology, I believe that there could be more traction re-envisioning what that eschatological focus should include rather than trying to introduce an entirely unfamiliar concept. However, I am also convinced that the idea is deeply theologically and biblically rooted.

The idea of “church as foretaste” is in line with proposals such as Stanley Hauerwas’ and Will Willimon’s *Resident Aliens*, or Jürgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* and *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. For these theologians, the church is not primarily an institution, herald, or servant. Instead, the church is fundamentally eschatological, an inbreaking of the world to come. As Hauerwas and Willimon put it:

Jesus’ eschatological teaching was an attempt to rid us of the notion that the world exists indefinitely, that we have a stake in the preservation of the world-as-is. Israel had always described the world as a story, which, like any story, has a beginning and an end. Although the “end” here is not necessarily “end” in the sense of finality, it is the means through which we see where the world is moving. The question, in regard to the end, is not so much when? but, what? To what end?

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They go on to describe the impact of this future-focused orientation:

The ethic of Jesus thus appears to be either utterly impractical or utterly burdensome unless it is set within its proper context—an eschatological, messianic community, which knows something the world does not and structures its life accordingly.59

This move to have the life, structure, and vocation of the church grounded in an eschatological vision is more fully developed in the three-volume systematic theology of “baptist” theologian James McClendon.60 It is most directly addressed in his second volume, entitled Doctrine, although this orientation can be seen in his work on Ethics (Vol 1) and Witness (Vol 3) as well. McClendon starts his discussion on doctrine with the Rule of God, which he links directly to eschatology. He argues:

The biblical vision of God’s rule is… an ‘end-picture,’ where end means both aim and limit of life. The end is where we end up; it is also the present intention or purpose that steers our course. Thus God’s rule is unfailingly future-regarding… if we are Christian, we aim toward the day when the vision comes true “on earth as in heaven” (Matt 6:10).61

McClendon argues that the whole of Christian doctrine should be grounded in this “rule of God” end-picture, including questions of ecclesiology. He describes the church as a community that will be the “sign and foretaste” of this realm.62 This view proclaims that the world “as is” is not the end of the story, but that we have been called to participate in a new reality, a new communal creation that is breaking into the present even now.

59 Ibid., 90.

60 McClendon liked to refer to himself as a baptist with a lowercase “b”.


62 Ibid., 68.
For our local church community, this has inspired us to consider John’s vision of “every tribe, nation, tongue, and people” as a call to not only tolerate but embrace the changing demographics of our church family. If God is at work reconciling every tribe and nation and tongue and people, then so too should we. If God’s vision for the end includes a continuation of our unique identities, while unifying us in worship of the Lamb, then we should not be working to eradicate difference, but rather to learn how to worship together with and through our differences. If “the end” were a song, it would be sung in harmony, not as a single voice.

This eschatological perspective of the church is already being considered by a number of Adventist theologians. In a presentation given to the West Coast Religion Teacher’s Conference (an unofficial annual gathering of Seventh-day Adventist professors from the five western North American colleges and universities), Adventist theologian John Webster presented a paper suggesting an “Adventist” theology of the church, with “Advent” signifying the (eschatologically-driven) Coming of God. He writes:

The Church is a prolepsis of the ‘Kingdom of God’ that has its origin, derives its basis and structure, and is directed towards its goal—in, from and through the three-fold event of the Advent of God. This Advent, or Coming of God, brings to light the essential but particular will of God from all time, which is ‘God with us’: that is to say an electing, gracing and re-ordering of the world itself to be God’s home; the adoption of humanity as God’s unique ‘family’; and the sharing of God’s own eternal life with us—all in and through the person of Jesus Christ. The church universal is the historical consequence of this particular will of God.63

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63 John Webster, “Six Pointers Towards an Adventist Ecclesiology,” unpublished, 2022, 9. This document was adapted from a lecture given to the West Coast Religion Teachers Conference, Walla Walla University, 2012. In his footnote on this section, Webster goes on to explain “It is true that this very same three-fold Advent at the same time discloses a dual presupposition to this particular will of God: i.e. that a) God, as ‘Wholly Other’, Creator of heaven and earth, also reigns eternally ‘far above and beyond us’; and that b) God, as ‘Spirit’ intimately involved in the very fabric of the cosmos, life and community, also moves universally ‘within all reality,’ the very source of life and freedom wherever it is to be found. However, the three-fold Advent discloses a particular ‘kingdom’ or ‘reign’ of God that is still to come, though it is not without its witness, sign and prolepsis in history. The church is one such proleptic sign, a trans-historical witness to the coming reign of God (God’s future which is pulling us towards itself)”, 9.
This understanding of the church as a future-oriented, proleptic witness to God’s goal for humanity (which, as noted above, is “participation in God’s own eternal life shared with us in Christ”), is not currently all that common within the ranks of Adventist laity. Yet it is arguably one of the oldest, consistently-held models within Christianity. Although much of Western Christianity traces its lineage through the early church, through Roman Catholicism, to the Protestant Reformation, this is by no means the only form of observant Christianity. The Eastern Orthodox community, from which the church in Rome split in 1054 AD, has long held a perspective of Christianity that focused more fully on the church as eschatological community.

As Kärkkäinen notes:

Rather than centering on guilt concepts and sin—as in the West—Orthodox tradition focuses on a gradual growth in sanctification culminating in deification, becoming like God (the ancient doctrine of theosis). Indeed, according to Eastern theology, Latin (Christian West) traditions have been dominated by legal, juridical, and forensic categories. Eastern theology, on the other hand, understands the need for salvation in terms of deliverance from mortality and corruption for life everlasting. The ultimate goal of salvation and Christian life for the human being, created in the image of God, is union with God.64

We can see justification for a position like this in passages such as Romans 8:15-25 [NRSV], which uses the evocative image of adoption to describe God’s goal as fully fulfilled only in the eschaton:

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ — if, in fact, we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.

64 Kärkkäinen, 22. He also notes more recent scholars who pick up this theme, writing: “Therefore, the church is referred to the future of God, the eschatological consummation. In the words of Miroslav Volf, the New Testament “authors portray the church, which emerged after Christ’s resurrection and the sending of the Spirit, as the anticipation of the eschatological gathering of the entire people of God.” Every gathering of the church refers to the final homecoming (Rev 21:1-4)...The church is a preceding sign pointing to the coming righteous rule of God in the eschaton,” 12-13.
The Christian story runs not just from the past to the future, but from the future into the past.65

Although the Adventist community does not yet have a robust articulation of “church as foretaste,” there is enough within Adventist DNA and its understanding of Scripture that may make this concept both possible and beneficial. Adventists are a future-oriented community. It is in the name “Advent,” which within the community is often seen as a shorthand for the Second Coming/eschaton (although some Adventist scholars suggest we should see “Advent” as connected to the entirety of the gospel). The move I am suggesting would involve not a retreat from considering “the end,” but a shift from focusing on the “when,” to being shaped by the “what.” As Willimon and Hauerwaus put it, eschatology should help us consider, “to what end?”

Given the historical emphasis on eschatology as future-oriented within Adventism, I believe the proposal to consider “church as foretaste” builds upon authentic Adventist DNA. Yet I think it is valuable to note critiques to this position. For example, theologian Loida Martell-Otero, in a section in Latina Evangelicas entitled “Neither “Left Behind” Nor Deciphering Secret Codes: An Evangélica Understanding of Eschatology,” suggests that the “last things” of eschatology are not a “when,” but a “who.”66 She argues that eschatology is too focused on chronology, and should instead be focused on justice, and on transforming the lived realities of the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed. Martell-Otero notes that future-focused eschatologies

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65 It is important to note, however, that just because communities have a “church as foretaste” model does not automatically mean they prioritize equality. For example, the Eastern Orthodox community is only now grappling with issues of women’s inclusion in the priesthood. For an interesting (relatively recent) glimpse at the internal conversation on the topic, see Petros Vassiliadis, Niki Papageorgiou, and Helenē V. Kasselourē-Chatzēvasileiadē, eds, Deaconesses, the Ordination of Women and Orthodox theology, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 2017), https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/duke/reader.action?docID=5487796 [accessed February 28, 2023].

may be too myopic, writing “I find in such discussions little that connects the concepts of creation and salvation with eschatological fulfillment. How are these linked, if at all?” Yet while that critique may be valid against certain future-oriented eschatologies, the version of eschatology I am proposing explicitly links creation and salvation with eschatology, namely in the practice of the Sabbath.

Before we turn to describe these connections more closely, however, for the “church as foretaste” model to be workable within Adventism we will have to consider how it relates to one final ecclesiological description: that of “church as remnant.” As we noted in the section on Seventh-day Adventist history, the Adventist church initially started out as an ecumenical movement drawing from many different Christian communities (Methodist, Baptist, Christian Connection, etc). It saw itself as having a specific and unique message for the broader Christian community, as seen in Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief #13:

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.

This “remnant” self-understanding can coexist relatively easily within Dulles’ “herald” model (just expand the content of the message we are ‘heralding’), but would it work with the idea of church as foretaste that I am suggesting? At first glance, it seems fundamentally different. A “remnant,” seems by some definitions to be grounded in the past. According to this view, a

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67 Ibid., 112.

remnant is a small piece of something that is *left over* from a larger original amount. Christianity has lost its way, the thinking goes, and so it becomes important to separate from the apostate group. As noted in the three angel’s message, “Babylon has fallen!” (Rev 14:8), and the remnant are those who obey the call to “Come out of her my people” (Rev 18: 4). Thus the “markers” of the true church in this understanding are those who “keep the commands of God and the faith of Jesus” in the context of fallen Babylon (Rev 14:12).

Yet I think it is possible to see a role for the concept of “remnant” within the “church as foretaste” model as well, if we take seriously the biblical concept of remnant. In a chapter entitled “A Remnant People: The Ecclesia as Sign of Reconciliation,” theologian Murray Rae, following Karl Barth, argues that the biblical understanding of remnant is not as a group chosen by God *over and against* the whole, but instead a group chosen by God *for the sake of* the whole. To make this argument, Rae takes note of Paul’s discussion in the book of Romans regarding God’s relationship with Israel. He starts off by noting that although Paul openly acknowledges Israel’s current rejection of Christ, this rejection doesn’t mean that God has now chosen Gentiles *over and against* Israel, but that God’s gracious inclusion of Gentiles is *for the sake of* the whole. Rae writes:

> Although, as we have noted, the disobedience of Israel is openly acknowledged, to the question 'Has God cast off his people?' (Rom. 11:1), Paul responds with an emphatic, 'Certainly not' (μὴ γένοιτο). In Romans chapter 3, Paul had given justification for such an answer on theological grounds; 'Will their faithlessness

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69 The “remnant” perspective has also lent itself to a deep sense of suspicion towards any type of ecumenical work. If Christianity in general has apostatized, then should the Adventist community primarily look for ways we can work together with other Christians, or primarily point out the dangers of their current trajectory? This question is a live one within the Adventist community, and many pastors see opposing answers within the very same church. (This is also similar language that early Baptists such as John Smyth and other radical Protestants used in their protest of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church).
nullify the faithfulness of God?’, he asks, and again the response was the adamant, 'certainly not' or 'by no means' (μὴ γένοιτο).70

Rae notes that throughout Scripture, the concept of the remnant functions “as a sign that God will renew his people,” 71 for “the remnant, if we may continue Paul’s theme – is not a basis for their reconciliation over against that of everybody else. It is rather a sign that God has not cast off the world. God maintains his purposes of reconciliation for the whole world.”72 Thus for Rae “[t]he Church is not a gathering of those who have been taken out of the world. It is a gathering within the world that God loves and has reconciled to himself of a community entrusted to be a sign of that reconciliation - a remnant, if you like, that God has established in order to show forth his faithfulness.”73 This reconciliation Rae speaks of has both a past and a future. It is accomplished in Christ, but still awaits its final fulfillment in the age to come. This understanding of remnant can fit well within a model of the church as foretaste. If, as Rae has argued, the remnant model is not primarily about faithful humans left over after others have fallen away, but is instead about broken humans who nonetheless consciously acknowledge and respond to the faithfulness of God, the focus can move from what we need to do in order to be part of “the remnant,” to what actions of God “the remnant” is intentionally witnessing to.

At the heart of this “church as foretaste” model, then, is the sense that God has had a goal for humanity from the beginning of creation, for God to be “God with us, and us with God;” or, as Paul puts it, the adoption of humanity, to be fellow heirs in and through and with Christ. This


71 Ibid., 99.

72 Ibid., 101.

73 Ibid., 108.
future vision is not yet completely fulfilled; yet this future reality is also breaking in, in the here
and now. The church as foretaste witnesses to this goal; it participates in it even as it awaits its
final fulfillment.

Why does it matter what model of the church guides us? In this past section, we have
examined several different models, primarily through the lens of Dulles’ synopsis in the middle
of last century. We have considered various pros and cons of each, along with where Adventism
may lie in the mix. We have seen that the Adventist vision of ecclesiology, undefined as it is,
seems to incorporate many different models. There are times when it seems like Adventism
prioritizes its institutions; other times when we focus almost exclusively on our heralding role.
There are recent signs of promoting elements of the *koinonia* model.

On the one hand, this diversity can be a good sign. After all, Scripture doesn’t seek to
limit the church to any one description, and instead uses several different metaphors to paint the
picture of its identity and role. But while diversity may be a good sign, Adventism’s haphazard
approach to ecclesiology has also had its shortcomings. We may pragmatically adopt models
without fully considering their drawbacks. Where models clash, we may lack a guiding paradigm
for which values to prioritize over others. And, most pertinent to this thesis, our haphazard
approach means we may overlook new frameworks that could provide some innovative solutions
to the tensions our denomination currently finds itself in.

I have suggested that the “church as foretaste” concept can provide some valuable
resources for Adventism. It can provide needed inoculation against the danger of Christian
triumphalism as it awaits the “not yet,” and also against the danger of an exclusivist
understanding of the “remnant.” It can keep us turned towards the future, anticipatory and open
to the moving of the Spirit, instead of reactionary and closed. It can inspire us to live the present
in light of the future. But there are challenges to this concept. Like was noted in the critique of *imitatio Trinitatis* position, there are some things that remain mysterious to us. How can we know the future in enough detail to be an accurate witness to it? How can we practice its rhythms and relationships? How can we imitate what we do not yet know?

These questions bring us to our next section. In Chapter 3, I reflect on a key feature of Adventist identity – that of the seventh-day Sabbath. I propose that, in the light of what we have just discussed, the Sabbath may be much more than the litmus test Adventists have tended to treat it as. Instead, it may be a God-given gift of future time breaking into the present, and as such may have something to say about the type of church we are called to be.
CHAPTER THREE

Sabbath Rest(oration)

To this day, the smell of homemade macaroni and cheese, warm and freshly baked, will immediately transport me back to the Friday nights of my childhood. The lights are dim. Candles are set out on the dining room table. The family has gathered around the table, all six of us, no books or other distractions allowed. It is Friday sunset, and Sabbath has arrived. We are a busy family, with four of us kids spread out over eleven years. We rarely have the whole family seated around a table for mealtime during the week – usually at least one of us has something going on. Yet on Friday night, we gather. The house has been cleaned; whatever work not finished before the sunset put aside. We sing, pray, welcome the Sabbath, and somehow time seems to slow down. We go around the table, checking in on how our week went; the four year old, the eight year old, the fourteen year old, the fifteen year old. The topics vary widely week to week. Sometimes we talk about history, sometimes science, sometimes politics, sometimes literature. But the thread that runs most consistently through our conversations each Friday night are reflections on God. What is God’s purpose for the world? How do we see evidence of it? Where do we fit in?

Perhaps one of the most significant practices that shapes the weekly lived experience of a Seventh-day Adventist is that of “keeping” the Sabbath. Seventh-day Adventists keep the Sabbath over the same timeframe as do the Jews, from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. It is a curiosity to many in other faith communities, both Christian and Jewish. My Christian friends wonder why we are so apparently fixated on Old Testament practices; my Jewish friends wonder why we as Christians celebrate a practice so deeply tied to Judaism.
If you were to ask most Seventh-day Adventists about what constitutes the “marks” of the faithful church, most would include some version of “keeping the Sabbath” in their answer. For those readers from other Christian communities for whom the Sabbath does not play as vital a role, this answer may seem misguided. Yet while it is true that my primary audience is for those who are already convinced of the continued significance of the Sabbath, it is my hope that this section might provide some insights and points for further consideration for those from the wider Christian community as well. As we will see, there are several non-Adventist Christian authors who are starting to recognize that much of the rich depth of the biblical Sabbath has not carried over into traditions associated with Sunday-keeping. While other authors may seek to disassociate the “content” of the biblical Sabbath and transfer it to Sunday (or encourage their readers to find a “Sabbath”-type time that works for their lives and schedules), my goal instead is to consider how keeping the biblical Sabbath might help those interested in the “church as foretaste” model of ecclesiology.

In this section, then, I consider the following. First, I briefly summarize some of the contemporary conversation about the Sabbath both within and outside of Adventism. Second, following the work of Sigve Tonstad, I suggest that Sabbath-keeping is less of a marker of human faithfulness, and more of a marker of God’s faithfulness. I show how the Sabbath is linked to the major movements of human history – creation, covenant, incarnation, and consummation. Finally, I explore the ramifications of what Sabbath-keeping could look like from this reframed perspective.

**Contemporary Conversations**

As we noted in the section of Adventist history, while many Adventist pioneers were indebted to groups like the Seventh-day Baptists for their initial understanding of the Sabbath,
the linking of Sabbath to eschatology was relatively unique for the time. Historically, Adventists understood the three angels’ message of Revelation 14 to remind Christianity of the eternal quality of God’s covenants, including the importance of God’s commands (from Revelation 14:12 “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commands of God and the faith of Jesus” [NKJV]). For many Adventists, the arguments for continuing to keep the seventh-day Sabbath are as follows: 1) since Sabbath was instituted in creation, pre-fall, it is part of God’s original plan for creation; 2) since Sabbath is part of the ten commandments, it is part of the “moral” law as opposed to the “ceremonial” law, and thus continues to have relevance to this day; and 3) given that the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath could be seen as an indication of those who “keep the commands of God and the faith of Jesus,” the seventh-day Sabbath has profound eschatological significance as a litmus test.

A challenge with this view is that the Sabbath becomes a marker of the “true” church via a test of human obedience/faithfulness. Have we shown our commitment to “the commands of God and the faith of Jesus” by keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, or have we been deceived into replacing the command of God with human tradition? This focus on the importance of obedience has meant that in certain circles, members spend a lot of time and energy debating what is true “Sabbath” behavior. Just what, exactly, constitutes appropriate obedience when it

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1 In the US, cultural wars continue to be fought over trying to keep the Ten Commandments on display in public places. For example, see PBS News Hour, “Ruling on Ten Commandments,” transcript, (June 27, 2005), https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/ruling-on-ten-commandments#:~:text=In%20two%205%2D4%20votes,t%20pushing%20a%20religious%20agenda [accessed February 28, 2023].

2 For an example the position that the law of God (and the Sabbath command) is a type of litmus test, see Johannes Kovar, “The Remnant and God’s Commandments: Revelation 12:17,” in Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, vol. 1, Studies in Adventist Ecclesiology (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009), 125.
comes to Sabbath-keeping? It also gives human faithfulness a prominent role in the cosmic drama.

Some have responded to this legalistic interpretation of the seventh-day Sabbath by labeling it as just another indication of its current irrelevance. The seventh-day Sabbath, in this view, is the cornerstone of an old covenantal system that has been replaced. Because Israel rejected God, God rejected Israel. This view tends to pit Judaism as a religion of laws, and Christianity as a religion of grace. Yet recent Christian scholars have recognized the significant flaws in such a simplistic dichotomy. In fact, it has been intriguing as a Seventh-day Adventist to note how the biblical concept of the Sabbath has experienced something of a renaissance in the wider Christian conversations among authors and scholars over the past half-century. The Sabbath has been linked to creation and as a potential response to the environmental crisis (Jürgen Moltmann’s *God in Creation*), economics, debt relief and jubilee (Ross and Gloria Kinsler *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life*; Ched Myers *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics*; Richard Lowery *Sabbath and Jubilee*), and emancipation, messianic ethics, and spiritual formation (Walter Brueggemann’s *Sabbath as Resistance*; Rob Muthiah *The Sabbath Experiment*; Marva J. Dawn *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*; Norman Wirzba *Living the

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3 I remember as a child a church discussion about going to the beach on Sabbath. We weren’t planning on doing anything that radical – instead, the debate was about walking in the waves. Just how high could the water go before it was considered swimming? To your ankles? To your knees? Could you wade?

4 For example, the influential so-called “new perspectives on Paul,” influenced by works like E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1977); and NT Wright and others.

Within Adventism, several theologians have worked to expand our understanding of the Sabbath as well. In a classic 1985 special edition of Spectrum Magazine entitled Festival of the Sabbath, editor Roy Branson compiled reflections from numerous Adventist scholars into a helpful collection of those that had begun promoting a broader understanding of the Sabbath. The authors suggest that instead of seeing the Sabbath as primarily a marker of loyalty and obedience to the laws of God, we see it as a core biblical theme that reflects God’s grace, care, and redemption of us. They remind us that unlike space, time eludes our attempts to master it, and that the Sabbath is “not merely a distinctive religious practice; it is also a profound theological statement” that operates as a “symbol of God’s ultimacy... as well as His relatedness

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7 As can be seen by the following quotes, many of these authors were influenced by the thinking of Karl Barth and Rabbi Abraham Heschel on the Sabbath.

to human beings.” It is a “sign of God’s grace… The first Sabbath kept by the first pair came on the first day after their creation. Thus, they were invited to rest not because of anything they had done but because God had finished His work. They came to the Sabbath empty-handed of any human works; all they could do was to view what God had done for them.” The Sabbath is also a marker as God’s purpose, as it not only “inaugurates the history of mankind, but also epitomizes its ultimate consummation. The decisive divine acts of creation, redemption and the final restoration are all effectively symbolized and commemorated by this first divinely established institution, the Sabbath.” This purpose includes communion, as the Sabbath was “never a haven of solitude, but always an invitation to fellowship.” This invitation persisted after the fall and through God’s liberation of Israel, yet “God’s freeing Israel from tyranny did not free them for fellowship. Before the Sinai experience, Israel was still only a collection of wandering, former slaves… But the presence of God transformed freedom into fellowship. By restoring the Sabbath, Yahweh brought out of chaos a new creation: the people of God.”

The Sabbath played a key role in the creation and liberation of Israel. Connected to the end of the week as the seventh-day Sabbath is, “if the weekdays constitute a journey toward sabbath rest and peace, it enhances our certainty that all of life represents a journey toward rest and peace.” It reminds us not only of our beginning, but also of eternity; and the Sabbath’s

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13 Ibid., 71.


15 Gerald Winslow, “Moment of Eternity,” Festival of the Sabbath (entire article).
extension in its sister institution, the sabbatical/jubilee year, was envisioned to be a time of justice, liberation, and restored equality between humanity, and between humanity and creation.16

The authors of this compilation recognize that it can be difficult to find the line between appreciating the Sabbath and becoming legalistic, but suggest that Jesus’ example as “Lord of the Sabbath” points to a way of Sabbath-keeping that is contextual, prioritizes people, and implies freedom. They note:

At this point we are confronted with a great irony. On one hand, we are always tempted to think that without rules we will forget the Sabbath. But on the other hand, the Sabbath itself reminds us that the way of rules will not do… This does not mean laxity and lack of concern for the Sabbath. It does mean that the community that follows Jesus’ way will be a certain kind of community… It will be a community that reflects together on how the Sabbath can best be kept in a way that both contributes to its meaning and benefits the people to whom God has given it as His gift.17

As these Adventist theologians suggest, the Sabbath is symbol, sign, and sacrament of much more than human obedience. It is the culmination of God’s creative work, an invitation into fellowship with God and with each other, an ongoing reminder of God’s ultimacy, sovereignty and faithfulness, and, crucial to the point we will be developing in the following pages, a foretaste of the world that is to come. Seventh-day Adventists follow the logic of passages such as Hebrews 4:9, which notes, “Therefore, a sabbath rest still awaits the people of God.”

Many of these Adventist theologians just quoted were themselves inspired to take a new look at their understanding of the Sabbath by encountering Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s

In his book, Heschel recounts a Jewish legend that relates to the idea of Sabbath as eschatological pointer. The story goes as follows:

A legend relates that “at the time when God was giving the Torah to Israel, He said to them: My children! If you accept the Torah and observe my mitzvot, I will give you for all eternity a thing most precious that I have in my possession.
—And what, asked Israel, is that precious thing which Thou wilt give us if we obey Thy Torah?
—The world to come.
—Show us in this world an example of the world to come.
—The Sabbath is an example of the world to come. ¹⁸

Heschel goes on to suggest that the experience of Sabbath in the here and now is a vital part of not only anticipating but proleptically participating in the world to come. “Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath while still in this world,” he writes, “unless one is initiated in the appreciation of eternal life, one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come. Sad is the lot of him who arrives inexperienced and when led to heaven has no power to perceive the beauty of the Sabbath.” ¹⁹

As has been shown, there is a resurgence of interest in a broader understanding of the Sabbath both within and outside of Adventism. In what follows, I link the idea of the “church as foretaste” with this broader understanding of the role, purpose, and significance of the Sabbath. I do so by engaging with a recent Adventist theologian who suggests that the Sabbath has a role all the way from creation to consummation and is not mainly an indication of our faithfulness to God, but God’s faithfulness to us. I then suggest that we should envision the Sabbath as promise, grounded in creation, still awaiting its final fulfillment in the future, but with profound implications for the present.


¹⁹ Ibid., 70.
Tonstad and The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day

One of the most comprehensive articulations of this alternative perspective within Adventism can be found in a book entitled *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*, written by biblical scholar Sigve Tonstad. In his introductory chapter, Tonstad argues that there is a profound reality, meaning, and purpose to the seventh day that has been lost. He writes, “God is the primary subject of the seventh day…When we speak of the lost meaning of the seventh day, therefore, we are speaking of meaning that has been lost concerning God.”

He goes on to highlight this connection between the Sabbath and the character of God throughout the book, noting towards the end that:

What the seventh day says about God looms larger than what it reveals about human reality. In this respect the meaning of the Sabbath is not easily reduced to an identity marker of a certain group of people as though the Sabbath is their copyrighted trademark. Nationhood and Jewishness are not the central issue. To the extent that the Sabbath signifies a sacred vocation, the critical element in this vocation is to be a witness to God’s person and ways (Exod. 19:4–5; Rev. 5:9–10). The people are set apart in order to know God and to make God known. In this sense the meaning of the Sabbath rests primarily on God’s faithfulness and on the intent of including others in the same experience.

For Tonstad, the seventh day is fundamentally a revelatory sign about who God is, and what God’s purposes for creation are. These characteristics of God include God’s faithfulness, God’s graciousness, and God’s love. Tonstad begins his analysis of the Sabbath with the creation story, briefly retelling the Genesis account and then writing:

The seventh day signifies what is most essential to know about God. Therefore, right from its debut the seventh day is not a peripheral afterthought. God ceases from working in order to enjoy the company of the person God has created, suggesting that the seventh day speaks as much about the value of human beings to God as of God’s valuation of human life. What lies in the foreground of the seventh

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21 Ibid., 131.
day’s first mention in the Bible is God’s gift, not human obligation. It is as if we hear God speaking, “I am ceasing on the seventh day not only that you may acknowledge and love me, but in order to make it known that I recognize and love you.”

Thus in creation, the seventh day plays a special role in highlighting not only the character of the Creator, but also God’s purpose in creating humanity; to be God with us and us with God in love.

Tonstad continues this theme of God’s character and God’s purposes as symbolized by the Sabbath by turning to an analysis of the covenant between God and God’s people. God rescues the Israelites from Egypt and invites them into a covenantal relationship at Mt Sinai. One key element of their relationship was to “remember” the seventh day Sabbath, a gift that Tonstad argues was given from the very beginning but had been forgotten by humanity. In this reminder, God emphasizes not only the relationship between Sabbath and creation as found in the Sabbath command of Exodus 20:11, but also the deeply intertwined relationship between the Sabbath and freedom that is highlighted in the Sabbath command of Deuteronomy 5:15. The Israelites are to “remember the Sabbath” because God set them free from slavery. Tonstad notes the significance of this reappearance of the Sabbath in the covenant, writing:

As the narrative unfolds, it is possible to draw out at least four points with respect to the seventh day. First, that Exodus affirms the priority of the Sabbath, staging its renaissance in a manner fully as striking as the first mention of the seventh day in Genesis.

Second, the seventh day in Exodus meets a genuine need … The Sabbath rest serves as an inviolable boundary marker against the forces of oppression—exploitation by the master of his slave, by the employer of his workers, or even the oppression intrinsic to ideologies that treat human life as mere raw material for pretentious political and material projects. God is on the side of human need in this respect, and the worker’s need of the seventh day is to be seen as an inalienable God-given right. Third, the Sabbath returns in the larger context of freedom and as

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22 Ibid., 50. Tonstad also notes that Karl Barth writes perceptively that the characteristic of God that is revealed “in the rest of the seventh day is His love,” 44.
the most distinctive marker of the experience of freedom… Fourth, the resurgence of the seventh day expresses the central Old Testament idea of God’s presence.\textsuperscript{23}

In the covenant, God links the Sabbath to both creation and freedom/redemption; it is a celebration both of God’s original plan and presence in Creation, and God’s liberation of the oppressed in the Exodus. But God does not just provide the Israelites with a command; God emphasizes the freedom that comes with the Sabbath by providing them with a double portion of manna on Friday, and none on Sabbath. Tonstad links this Sabbath miracle with freedom directly, noting that the Israelites, used to the punishing pattern of slavery that allowed only for a constant daily grind, could not at first get used to the idea of Sabbath rest interrupting that rhythm. He writes:

\begin{quote}
What is the point of this Sabbath magic? A forgotten reality was breaking into their toilsome routine. Along the Nile there was neither Sabbath nor shade. Now the ruthless oppression and the entrenched maze of mindless routine were interrupted by a new pattern that allowed them to straighten their aching backs, lift their heads, and make room for their minds to seek a higher destiny… They had to be reoriented and reconditioned in preparation for living as free men and women.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

This link between the practice of the Sabbath and living in freedom is something that I would argue was present as part of the purpose of God from the very beginning, but was made all the more potent by the realities of slavery that the Israelites had lived through. The Sabbath was linked both to a \textit{freedom from} slavery, but also a \textit{freedom for} community and relationship with God. As Tonstad notes:

\begin{quote}
Amazingly, Exodus makes it clear that God, not a place, was the destination of the liberated people. On the one hand, God was the precondition for the freedom they were invited to enjoy, and, on the other hand, God was also the end of its
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 106-107.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 102.
fulfillment… God set before them a life of freedom and dignity on the assumption that freedom is achievable only in fellowship with the Creator.25

This gift of the Sabbath fundamentally shaped the Israelite community, but it did not end there. In a later section of the book, Tonstad turns to the birth of the Messiah, where he sees a continued role for the Sabbath in the life and ministry of Jesus and beyond. Tonstad notes the prominent role of Sabbath healings in all of the gospels, but turns to trace its role in the book of John in particular. Following scholars like Rudolf Bultmann, Tonstad suggests that according to the gospel of John Jesus’ central task includes revealing the true character of God, over and against the pervasive misperceptions of who God is and what God wants. Jesus came to reveal God; and part of that revelation includes God’s gift of the Sabbath. Tonstad argues that the rising tension between Jesus and the religious leaders traced in the gospel of John intensified precisely because of how Jesus acts on the Sabbath. Some scholars see this tension as a prime example of the new irrelevance of the Sabbath; Jesus’ actions and words about the Sabbath showed that its time had passed. But Tonstad suggests that the argument Jesus has with the religious leaders over the Sabbath is not about whether or not the Sabbath should be kept, but how the Sabbath should be kept. Jesus desires to rectify a warped view of the Sabbath and enact its original purpose, as this would help rectify a warped view of God. Tonstad writes, “whereas Jesus’ critics make the Sabbath the inspiration and alibi for their indifference to human need, for Jesus the Sabbath and awareness of human need are indissolubly linked. The Sabbath is the pledge of God’s healing, restoring presence.” He continues:

Once the relation of Jesus to God is established, it is possible to appreciate more fully what the healing ministry of Jesus says about God. Jesus’ insistence on healing on the Sabbath is best understood when we see the Sabbath not as the prized possession of the Jews but as God’s signature statement. In effect, Jesus is delivering on the original commitment invested in the seventh day at Creation…

25 Ibid., 104 & 106.
Being present, and responding to present reality, constitutes the essence of Jesus’s idea of the Sabbath.\textsuperscript{26} Jesus cannot wait till the next day because He is magnifying the original message of the Sabbath in the context of human suffering. Ministering to the person in need, reaching out to heal and to restore, lies at the heart of the divine character and mission.\textsuperscript{27}

Jesus revealed the true character of God, and Jesus’ insistence on healing and restoration on the Sabbath indicated the true role of the Sabbath. It was never meant to be primarily a marker of human obedience or faithfulness. From the beginning, the Sabbath has been tied to God’s consistent desire to be our God and for us to be God’s people. God “hallowed” the Sabbath by being present with creation and invited creation to rest in God’s presence and trust our futures to God’s grace. Throughout the Old Testament and into the life of Jesus, the Sabbath is linked to God’s grace, healing, alleviation of suffering, and restoration.

What about after Jesus’ death and resurrection, however? If Sabbath is about God’s presence, isn’t Jesus the fulfillment of that promise? For Adventists, while Jesus’ resurrection is the “firstfruits” of the resurrected life, the full promise is yet to be fulfilled. This clarification that what was started in Jesus is not yet fulfilled is a crucial point. A key feature of Adventism, a denomination longing for the Second Coming, is that while the Incarnation is part of what the Creation story has been pointing to from the beginning, it is not the same as the final Consummation. For Tonstad, this ongoing longing for the final fulfillment of God’s promises is connected to the continued significance of the Sabbath. The tension between now/not yet, and its connection with the Sabbath, can be seen in writings like the book of Hebrews and Revelation.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 216.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 218.

\textsuperscript{28} Although Tonstad also unpacks the Sabbath in Paul’s writings, we will be focusing on these two books.
In Hebrews, Tonstad notes the author’s pervasive emphasis on God’s faithfulness and the focus on providing hope and comfort to a people experiencing the stark difference between the promised kingdom to come and the reality of oppression and persecution in the world as is. Jesus had come, and the kingdom of heaven was nigh; but there remained a difference between the “now” and “not yet,” between what was breaking into the present and what was still to come in all its fullness and glory. It is in this context that the author of Hebrews puts forth a treatise on the faithfulness of God, and as part of its overarching frame, evokes the image of the Sabbath.

Tonstad writes:

This “sermon” promptly brings up the Sabbath (Heb. 4:1–11), using it as an integral part of its overall message... While affirmation of God’s faithfulness is not unique to Hebrews, the sabbatarian emphasis is distinctive and conceptually demanding. We might say that the sermon draws a triangle: one corner marked “future,” the second corner “past,” and the third corner “present.” The “future” refers to a promise unfulfilled and not yet in the possession of those who have staked their lives on it (11:10, 13–16, 39–40). The past looks to a work completed—indeed, a work “finished at the foundation of the world” (4:1–4). And what of the “present”? In Hebrews the “present” concentrates on a sabbatarian message, described as “a sabbath rest” that “still remains for the people of God” (4:9).  

This “Sabbath rest” that is rooted in the past (the “creation” account noted in verses 1-4), is also pointing to the future (the “still remains” of verse 9). Here we have a Sabbath motif at work even after the resurrection, suggesting a ‘Sabbath rest’ that still remains. There is a now/not yet suggested in this passage. Something profound has shifted because of the Incarnation, yes. But we are not yet at the end of the story. There is more to come. We will still face challenges, persecution, difficulties. The final restoration of the world is still ahead of us. The promise of the Sabbath, rooted in the past, still points to a future. And this now/not yet reality shapes how we live “today” (verse 8).

29 Ibid., 299.
One cannot get an accurate picture of the final restoration of the world according Scripture without turning to the book of Revelation. As we have shown in Chapter 1, it is here where Adventists have traditionally most firmly tied their understanding of the role of Sabbath and eschatology, linking the Sabbath with the remnant who “keep the commands of God and the faith of Jesus” from Revelation 14:12. Tonstad, however, follows a different track. For him, the relationship between the Sabbath and Revelation is linked more fundamentally to the connection between Creation and Re-Creation. He writes:

Genesis and Revelation are not mere bookends. Creation in Genesis and the new creation in Revelation belong together, enhancing and clarifying each other. The middle and the ending of the story are incomprehensible apart from the beginning, and the beginning pointedly prefigures the ending. “And behold, it was very good,” says Genesis (1:31, NASB), and we can say no less of the ending that is found in Revelation. It is of an ending that is “very good” that the Sabbath is the climax, and to such an ending it looks forward.

The hope to be found in the new creation of Revelation is grounded in the Creator introduced in Genesis. Tonstad continues:

In Revelation God will be who God is in Genesis; God will be the Omega because God is the Alpha; God will be the last because God is the first; God will be the end because God is the beginning. Revelation’s hope rests on the strength of the identity between first and last. “Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more,” says John (21:4). “The first things” will pass away (21:4), but the God who is the first and the last will not (1:5, 17; 2:8; 22:13).

Tonstad does not ignore the link between Sabbath and “the commands of God” completely, however. He notes that the characters in conflict in Revelation echo those in conflict in the garden of Eden; the serpent of Genesis has become the ancient serpent of Revelation. Traditional Adventist understanding suggests that the most insidious lie of the serpent has been to call into
question the character of God; Tonstad suggests something similar, but brings an important new
twist to the argument.

What too many proponents and detractors of the Sabbath command seem to have in
common, Tonstad notes, is the idea that the command to keep the Sabbath is fundamentally
arbitrary. Early church theologians argued that while the other commands in the Decalogue had
an obvious connection to natural law, the Sabbath did not; and some Adventist theologians have
embraced this idea of the arbitrariness of the Sabbath. For example, Adventist scholar M.L
Andreasen wrote that the reason to keep the Sabbath is simple: “God has spoken. The Sabbath
commandment rests definitely and solely on a “Thus saith the Lord,” and has no ground in
nature, as such. It is for this reason that God makes the Sabbath His sign and test.”

In contrast, Tonstad suggests that the inclination to see God as arbitrary is part of the
attack on God’s character we see from the very beginning. He points to the story of the tree of
the knowledge of good and evil, and notes how often interpreters view the restrictions God
places on this tree as purely arbitrary as well. What is at stake, in this view, is whether or not
humanity will obey God’s command out of pure obedience, in part precisely because the
commandment seems to have so little merit on its own. For Tonstad, however, the picture of God
that is shown from Creation to Redemption suggests that God is not primarily interested in
humanity obeying arbitrary commands, but in an intimate relationship of both freedom and
embrace. Tonstad suggests that instead of seeing the Sabbath as arbitrary, we should see it as
contingent, writing:

In defective human terms the contingency of the Sabbath belongs in the
same category as parents who celebrate the birthday of a beloved child or to the
fond marking of a wedding anniversary. These celebrations are not arbitrary
because they are anchored in real historical events, but they are contingent in the

Publishing Association, 1942), 29, as quoted in Tonstad, 456.
sense that there is no law to obligate that they be observed. The initiative is entirely in the mind of the parent or the spouse. More importantly, they do not have an arbitrary intent as if the celebration of the birthday is meant to drive home the truth of parental sovereignty, or, in the case of the wedding anniversary, as if the celebration primarily seeks to reinforce the legal contract of marriage… a better analogy for the depth of the divine memory that is expressed and institutionalized from Creation in the Sabbath rest [is], “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you” (Isa. 49:15).  

In this view, those who keep the “commands of God” referenced in Revelation are not exemplary because of their obedience to an arbitrary rule of God. Instead, they are those who are remembering something important about who God is and what God wants for the world.

So far, we have followed Tonstad as he has traced the significance of the Sabbath from creation to redemption, and linked the Sabbath with God’s character and faithfulness instead of primarily with human obedience. For a portion of his book, however, Tonstad turns from following the journey of the Sabbath in Scripture to following its trajectory as the fledgling Christian church is formed, solidified, and turns imperial. At this point I turn from my account of Tonstad, to explore the relationship between the biblical account of Sabbath just outlined and my suggested understanding of the “church as foretaste.”

**The Sabbath as Promise**

One way to summarize the picture of the Sabbath we have seen traced by Tonstad is to describe the Sabbath as a promise, grounded in the past, centered on a Person, pointing to the future. I have suggested that the power of the “church as foretaste” image is that it encourages us to consider the end goal of God’s work in the world, and live in the light of that world to come now. If the church is a foretaste, then the Sabbath is the lived rhythm of the promised future breaking into the present time. There is power in the language of Sabbath as promise. A promise

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34 Ibid., 459.
by its very nature looks to its future fulfilment from the very moment it is uttered. It has an origin (the moment the promise was made), a future (the moment the promise will be fulfilled), and a present power (the present reality that is transformed because of the promise). But the strength of the promise is only as good as the character of the One who makes the promise.

Jürgen Moltmann, in his work *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, unpacks this argument as he turns his considered attention to the profound significance and eschatological promise of the Sabbath. He writes:

> The goal and completion of every Jewish and every Christian doctrine of creation must be the doctrine of the sabbath; for on the sabbath and through the sabbath God 'completed' his creation, and on the sabbath and through it, men and women perceive as God's creation the reality in which they live and which they themselves are. The sabbath opens creation for its true future. On the sabbath the redemption of the world is celebrated in anticipation. The sabbath is itself the presence of eternity in time, and a foretaste of the world to come.35

For Moltmann, the creation Sabbath is not just an event in the past, but points towards creation’s purpose and anticipated future. He explicitly links the Sabbath with the concept of “foretaste,” a connection that works well with our proposed concept of church. Moltmann continues, writing “what is special about the sabbath commandment is, on the one hand, the remembrance of God's eternal sabbath of creation, from which the command to sanctify the sabbath springs; and, on the other, the promise of the eternal sabbath of the messianic era.”36

This future-oriented view sees an eschatological role for the Sabbath that is profoundly different from narrow, personal-morality perspective of Sabbath as an end time “litmus test” that is so predominately found within Adventism. In this view, keeping the Sabbath is not about

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36 Ibid., 305.
earning God’s favor, but is about participating in the promised world to come. We do not keep the Sabbath in order to earn salvation, but in order to embody it. It may be helpful here to revisit Adventist theologian Tihomir Lazić’s work on an Adventist version of Communio ecclesiology referenced in Chapter 2 of this paper. As Lazić notes, “the relational reality of koinonia could be seen as the fulfilment of the true purpose of the seventh-day Sabbath — the union between God and humanity and among human beings. While the remnant framework enables an emphasis on preaching and restoring the Sabbath as the right day of worship, koinonia expresses the very essence of the day and draws attention to the restoration of its content.”

The idea of the Sabbath as a promise pointing towards a future fulfilment is thus not completely new, and has precedence both within the wider Christian community and within Adventism itself. In this next section, I name what I consider to be crucial markers of an eschatological, Sabbath-shaped church, and then suggest some ways of embodying each marker. I suggest that authentic Sabbath-keeping has something to say to some of the most pressing challenges of today, including the environmental crisis, the whole-person health crisis, the crisis of deepening polarization and demonization of the “other,” and Christian nationalism, among others. If the Sabbath is a promise, then the markers of authentic Sabbath-keeping should be linked to the promise’s origins, present role, and future fulfilment. I thus propose that the markers involve 1) celebrating creation, 2) practicing liberation/healing, and 3) embodying salvation.

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37 Lazić, 161.
The markers of a Sabbath-shaped eschatological community

To start, let us turn our attention to how our Sabbath-keeping practices can better mark the beginning of the promise: that of celebrating creation. Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally done a good job with linking the Sabbath to creation as a whole. Growing up in South Africa, I vividly remember our Sabbath afternoon hikes, or trips to rivers and oceans. There would be picnics under the shade of large trees, or a stroll to the nearest waterfall. Young adults would change out of their church clothes, put on their hiking boots, and head up the nearest mountain. There was some discussion on how exactly to enjoy nature, however. As mentioned before, going to the beach was fine, but swimming could be deemed too distracting. Spending time at a lake was good, but waterskiing on the Sabbath would be problematic. Hiking was acceptable, but running a race was not.

While many of these discussions seemed frivolous or legalistic to me while I was growing up, I now think they point (perhaps even unintentionally) to an underlying truth that is valuable to us today; namely, that there are different ways to engage with creation. One way is to see it as inert, a resource to be used for our enjoyment and benefit, or to be conquered by our strength/energy/tools. A fundamentally different way is to see it as God’s handiwork, and spend time intentionally remembering that God took delight in God’s creation. We are not essentially distinct from but are intrinsically bound up with creation, and we have been called to be stewards, not masters, of the created world. This reframed focus may end up encouraging similar types of engagement on Sabbath as the ones I grew up with, but it would come from a very different starting point. We may decide to refrain from waterskiing on Sabbath, for example, not because it is intrinsically sinful, nor because it is problematic to have fun on the Sabbath, but because our goal on Sabbath is to do whatever helps us best honor, remember, and celebrate
God’s care for and delight in the created world for its own sake. I mention waterskiing because of potential noise pollution and use of gas. It is not the enjoyment that is the problem (which has sometimes been the barometer), but rather – how does waterskiing help the created world, or help us relate to it as co-creatures versus its “master”? I would encourage us against hard and fast rules, but believe it is valuable to raise the question: What helps us see ourselves as intrinsically bound up in the natural world, care for it as stewards, and honor God as creator?38

To name this reframed relationship with creation specifically as a marker of authentic Sabbath keeping could help us have something to offer in a world increasingly aware of the existential threat that our current attitude towards and relationship with creation is causing. A recent Deloitte survey of just under 23,000 millennials and Gen Z’s from across the globe noted that the environment was the top concern of both groups in 2020 (although “mental health” and “unemployment” rose slightly higher for millennials as the effects of the pandemic wore on).39 Climate scientists have long predicted catastrophic consequences if we do not reduce our carbon footprint, and drastically shift our consumption of natural resources.

Yet traditional Seventh-day Adventism doesn’t align automatically with the modern environmental movement, in part because of the fundamentally different pictures of the future that guide them. On the one hand, the environmental movement gets a large part of its energy from a desire to see an inhabitable planet for future generations. Adventism, on the other hand, exists in consistent anticipation of a worsening world, ending with the (soon) return of Jesus

38 One of the benefits of the idea of “steward” is the recognition of the temporary nature of the arrangement. In this version of Christianity, humans are not masters of the world – they are merely stewards, part of the created order.

Christ. In response to this challenge, I believe that a reframed understanding of the Sabbath can create a path for Adventists to prioritize caring for the environment, even if our motivations for doing so may differ. I suggest the following elements as a starting place: our focus on Sabbath-keeping should help us 1) acknowledge that God named creation *good*; 2) acknowledge our place as *stewards*, not masters; 3) remember God’s Sabbath gift is for all of creation (animals, land), not just humanity. This emphasis would mean treating the created world as something that God values, takes an interest in, and cares about. It would mean we take seriously passages that speak to God’s impatience with our mistreatment of the natural world, and consider ways in which our Sabbath-keeping is a blessing for the rest of the created world as well.40

While Adventists traditionally have made very direct links between Sabbath and creation, we have tended to overlook the biblical link between the Sabbath and liberation. As we noted in the previous section, the Sabbath is fundamentally grounded in both the creation story of Genesis and the liberation story of Exodus. God is in the business of breaking our chains, and Deuteronomy ties that characteristic trait directly with the Sabbath: “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. *Therefore* the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15, emphasis mine).

This direct command to remember the Sabbath because of God’s work of liberation raises some intriguing questions. While the link between Sabbath and creation has been obvious to Adventists – the Sabbath is, after all, the final and culminating act of creation – the link between Sabbath and liberation has been less developed within the denomination, Tonstad’s work

40 See for example Jeremiah 2:7; Ezekiel 34:18; Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:23-24; Jeremiah 12:4. The Adventist denomination does have an annual “Celebration Sabbath” it promotes worldwide (since 2009). But its focus seems to be in the debate around origins, and in navigating the debate between faith vs science (for details, see [https://creationsabbath.net/](https://creationsabbath.net/)).
notewhilstanding. Why does God command the Israelites to keep the Sabbath because of God’s deliverance? Is it possibly because the Sabbath not only commemorates liberation, but helps perpetuate it?

Old Testament scholar and author Walter Brueggemann has written a powerful little book entitled *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* that suggests this very argument. He writes:

In our own contemporary context of the rat race of anxiety, the celebration of Sabbath is an act of both resistance and alternative. It is resistance because it is a visible insistence that our lives are not defined by the production and consumption of commodity goods. Such an act of resistance requires enormous intentionality and communal reinforcement…. Thus I have come to think that the fourth commandment on sabbath is the most difficult and most urgent of the commandments in our society, because it summons us to intent and conduct that defies the most elemental requirements of a commodity-propelled society that specializes in control and entertainment, bread and circuses… along with anxiety and violence.\(^4^1\)

Brueggemann argues that there are profound similarities between ancient Egypt’s expectation for its slaves, and the pressures and principles of the modern empire we find ourselves in today. As he puts it, “in the narrative imagination of Israel, the gods of Egypt are stand-ins for all the gods of the several empires. What they all have in common is that they are confiscatory gods who demand endless produce and who authorize endless systems of production that are, in principle, insatiable.”\(^4^2\) Despite the vast distance in time, Brueggemann argues that this priority on endless productivity is evident in the empires of today as well, and that God is as interested in liberating us from these systems today, and the unending anxiety, violence, and coercion that it produces as God was in liberating the Israelites then. And in both cases, remembering the Sabbath plays an

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\(^4^2\) Ibid., 2.
actual, tangible, real role. Brueggemann continues, “the departure from that same system in our time is not geographical. It is rather emotional, liturgical, and economic. It is not an idea but a practical act… Sabbath is a practical divestment so that neighborly engagement, rather than production and consumption, defines our lives.”

The Sabbath is connected to liberation because the Sabbath has the power to reshape lives, and to resist incredibly formidable forces: economic forces that push us to buy and consume, for example, or psychological forces of anxiety or an overextended sense of self-sufficiency. The Sabbath is connected to God delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt, but also has ongoing power to resist the slavery of today. Brueggemann goes on to unpack how the Sabbath enables us to resist anxiety, coercion, exclusivism, and the dangers of incessant multi-tasking, liberating us from the destructive powers of each.

For those who grew up seeing the Sabbath as a symbol of stifling legalism, this connection between the Sabbath and freedom might seem surprising or counterintuitive. Seventh-day Adventists have on occasion been accused of legalism from the wider Christian community, and there are grounds for the accusation. Certainly there is a significant contingent of older Adventists who grew up with strict “do’s” and “don’ts” around the Sabbath, and the understanding that by keeping the Sabbath well they were somehow making themselves more righteous or acceptable to God.

But I would argue that this legalistic rationale for Sabbath-keeping stems from a misunderstanding of its purpose. If, as we have argued, the Sabbath is in fact linked to liberation, perhaps the “do’s” and “don’ts” are less about rigid obedience, and more about resistance to the

43 Ibid., 18.

44 In my experience, I would add that the Sabbath also has the power to help communities resist individualism.
dangerous undercurrents of modern society that threaten to pull us under. If this is true, here are some markers for what practicing liberation as a form of Sabbath-keeping could look like. First, we could do far better at explicitly linking our Sabbath rest with resistance to what threatens to enslave us and those around us. We could start by reframing the rhythms many Adventists have already adopted. When Adventists opt out of buying and selling on Sabbath, for example, what would it mean to not do so merely out of personal piety, but instead intentionally considering our economic system? To opt out of a system so pervasive, even for a single day, is to prove that the pattern of buying and selling is not the only way to exist. It could help us re-examine in what ways might we need to be liberated from commodification. Could it be that we have allowed ourselves to start commodifying not only stuff, but life itself? In what ways could the Sabbath help us resist these patterns?

We could also expand our Sabbath-keeping rhythms to include some new ways to keep the Sabbath, practices that are intentionally tied to both liberation and the embodiment of salvation. As many scholars and theologians have pointed out, God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt is seen by most Christians as a prototype of God’s deliverance of all of humanity from the slavery of sin (and here I mean both personal and systemic sin). God is not only concerned with the liberation of a few, but with the liberation of all. In what ways can our Sabbath-keeping be involved in the embodiment of salvation for a whole community? One possibility is to consider the Old Testament vision of Jubilee, found in Leviticus 25. Some churches have started debt relief programs based off of this vision in Jubilee where debts are forgiven and power balance
restored. This vision includes a radical disruption to the power inequalities that had developed and started to calcify and has clear links to this liberation thread in the Sabbath.\textsuperscript{45}

Finally, this link between Sabbath and resistance, liberation, and the embodiment of salvation could provide a new frame for explaining the role of the Sabbath versus Sunday in Adventist eschatology. As we have shown, Adventists have sometimes explained the distinction between Sabbath-keeping and Sunday-keeping in overly literal and simplistic language. In this view, the Sabbath is linked to faithful obedience to God’s law, and Sunday to misguided adherence to a man-made change. But the practical result of this focus sometimes ends up with traditional Adventists arguing that there are specific days we should \textit{not} worship God or attend church, which seems like a strange position to take. Instead, I would argue that to highlight the link between the Sabbath and both resistance on the one hand, and the embodiment of salvation on the other is important. It helps bring to the surface a distinct element within Adventism that can provide an important counterbalance to the troubling rise of Christian nationalism and triumphalism. As we have seen, one of the arguments to replace the Sabbath with Sunday is to say that in Jesus the kingdom has come, the consummation is here, and all that the Sabbath pointed towards in the Old Testament has been fulfilled. But Adventists are deeply conscious that while Jesus has come, we are still awaiting his final return. We are living between the Now/Not Yet. This world is still not as it should be. The future kingdom has broken into the

present, but it has not yet fully arrived. In one way, we have been liberated, but in another, we still exist in structures and systems that need to be resisted, and are waiting for God’s final act.46

46 I acknowledge the possibly frustrating ambiguity of this statement. How do we know precisely what actions towards liberation we should take on our own, and which we need to wait for God to enact? My point here is not that we should retreat from engagement in our own liberation; rather I am trying to point out that questions about the effectiveness of this strategy or that approach must not ignore the fact that God’s final act is still to come.
CHAPTER FOUR

A Sabbath-Keeping “Church as Foretaste” in Practice

What, then, would an eschatological church look like? One that takes seriously the “church as foretaste” model, and seeks to live in light of the Advent? I have argued that the Sabbath is a powerful potential resource, and that Adventists are well-positioned to model how faithful Sabbath-keeping can help communities proclaim a prophetic “no” to broken and oppressive systems, and a proleptic “yes” to the kingdom to come.

In this final section, we will turn to some concrete possible examples of what this could look like in a local church. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the questions wrestled with in these pages are not purely academic to me. I am the senior pastor of a local church community leading through a time of significant transition and change. Our church has been re-envisioning its mission and vision for this new season, and some of the questions asked over the past few years, especially during COVID, highlight the pressing need for a more compelling articulation of our ecclesiology and eschatology. In what follows, I seek to ground the theological discussions we have had so far within a local context, sharing where my church has been, where it is currently, and what we could become if we leaned into this reframed vision of a Sabbath-keeping eschatological community.

A Taste of Paradise

*celebrating creation, practicing healing/liberation, and embodying salvation.*

The Paradise Valley Seventh-day Adventist church is located in the urban neighborhood of National City in the hills of southeast San Diego. It has had a presence in the community for almost 120 years. In 1904, Ellen White (one of the aforementioned pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism) had a vision that the area needed a sanitarium, a place for the wholistic healing of
mind, body, and soul. Although she lived far from southern California, her vision brought her to a large tract of land that had suffered under a severe drought for several years. The owner reduced the price several times, eventually dropping the price from $20,000 to $4,000, growing increasingly desperate to sell a property that needed water to survive, in a climate where there was seemingly so little water to be found. Ellen White raised the funds needed, and bought the property on faith. She invited a well digger to come to the newly purchased property. The team started digging. There was no water at forty feet, sixty feet, eighty feet.

According to records, Ellen White asked the well-digger, Salem Hamilton, what was to be done. “I have a question to ask you,” he answered. “If you will answer that, I will give you my answer. Did the Lord tell you to buy this property?” “Yes! Yes!” Ellen White replied emphatically. “Three times I was shown we should secure this particular property.” “All right, Hamilton replied. “I have my answer. The Lord would not give us an elephant without providing water for it to drink.” A short time later, Hamilton struck water, and the well filled up so quickly they did not even have time to remove their tools.¹

I can see that same well from my office. In the ensuing century, the Paradise Valley Hospital (and connected church) became a staple in the community, providing quality healthcare to what is now one of the lowest-income areas in south San Diego. In 2006, however, the hospital was sold to Prime Healthcare, in a move that shifted the hospital from non-profit to for-profit. It was a deeply shocking move to the local Adventist community, and church members still speak of the pain of that event to me today. The hospital was sold because it was required to do a $61 million renovation in order to upgrade it to the latest earthquake guidelines, and they just did not have the funds.

¹ Wayne R. Judd and Jonathan M. Butler, Thirsty Elephant: The Story of Paradise Valley Hospital (Paradise Valley Hospital, published in cooperation with La Sierra University Press, 1994), 11.
I became senior pastor of this church in 2019, roughly thirteen years after the shift. In the years that followed the sale, the church wrestled with its sense of identity and direction. The medical professionals that used to make up the bulk of the membership started moving away. For so many years the church had seen one of its primary ways to impact the local community as serving through the hospital. With that gone, who were they?

In 2008, an answer emerged that would guide the church for the next decade. One Friday the church secretary answered the phone, a phone call that would blossom into a vocational call for the broader church community. On the other end of the line was E.B., an Adventist pastor who was from the Democratic Republic of Congo, had pastored in Rwanda, and had been living in Germany as a refugee once the genocide broke out. He had just arrived in San Diego with his family, but they had no place to go. Could the church help?

The church could. The family was picked up and spent their first few weeks in San Diego sleeping in the community service room. The church helped them find more permanent lodging and got them settled. In the process, the church slowly became aware of the challenges facing the refugee population in San Diego. Through the relationship with E.B., the church started forming connections with other refugees, and over time a robust ministry for refugees was formed, with E.B. playing an integral role. It started with providing families with food, but soon grew to include ESL classes, job training & placement, transportation, and help with navigating the complex process of applying for food stamps, learning about public transport, and even (in some cases) teaching new arrivals how to use household appliances and get used to electricity.2

2 The former senior pastor of PV published a small devotional book that includes the stories of E.B. and others: see Will James, The Joys of Partnering with God: The Story of a Church That Did, (National City, CA: Teach Services, 2016).
This new focus has played a significant role in shaping the Paradise Valley Seventh-day Adventist Church of today (hereafter referred to as PV). What had once been a church of predominately well-to-do medical professionals has become an incredibly diverse community, with ministries run in English, Spanish, Tagalog, Laotian, French, Creole, Swahili, and Kinyarwanda. The refugee and community services ministry grew so large that it became difficult for the pastoral team to run both it and the church, and so they started a non-profit called Friendships for Hope (FFH) that is currently led by the former senior pastor and his wife. FFH operates on church property and has significant overlap with the church, but it is officially independent.

It has been a beautiful, meaningful journey for the PV church, but not without its tensions and challenges. I remember conversations with church members shortly after I arrived. They appreciated that we were doing ministry for the refugee community, they assured me, but they were concerned about other areas of ministry that they felt had been neglected. There were very few young adults engaged in church life. Potlucks had become a frustration, where there was a small group of people who brought food, and a much larger group (mainly “the refugees,” I was told) who would come empty-handed and let their children pile their plates high and not leave food enough for others. From the other side, I heard stories from refugees with professional degrees who shared how affronted they felt when an American church member tried to tell them how to hold a knife and fork. “I have a graduate degree!” they said to me, obviously exasperated by the memory.

The PV church has had a long history of service in the community. First through its medical arm, and then through its ministry to refugees, the church has done important work operating out of a charity-based “church as servant” model, seeking to identify the pressing
needs of the broader community and meet them. But there are drawbacks to operating out of this model predominately. Although there are a couple families that have formed strong connections with members in the refugee community, many of our language-based ministry groups do not really know each other. There is a language barrier and a wide array of cultural differences. I have been told by various long-time leaders that the immigrant community that is attending our church are here because they want to “assimilate” into American culture – otherwise they could have gone to a predominately ethnic church.\(^3\) The charity model that has marked several of the relationships between various groups also often perpetuates a sense of division between those who have, and those who have not. How can these distinctions be overcome, especially when subterranean power dynamics are often still at play?

There has also been a shift in the theological perspective within PV church membership. Given that Adventism from the global South is on average much more conservative and fundamentalist, as the number of church members from those parts of the world grows, so too does the percentage of those who hold fundamentalist and conservative theological views. Although most of our adult Sabbath School classes all use the same quarterly,\(^4\) the discussions I overhear (in the English and Spanish I understand) seem to come from very different theological perspectives. The church has changed dramatically over the past twenty years. What had been its

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\(^3\) As a child of immigrants myself, and as someone who spent much of my childhood growing up elsewhere, I find the term “assimilate” problematic. Not all immigrants want to erase their heritage or culture by “assimilating;” instead, I am exploring the language of a marriage of equals, where something new is consciously co-created together from the traditions that both parties bring with them.

\(^4\) A Sabbath School class is most often a discussion-based small group similar to a Sunday school class, where Adventist beliefs and Biblical passages are taught and discussed for an hour on Saturday mornings. The “quarterly” is the world-wide study guide printed by the Adventist denomination, which means that Adventists in San Diego and in Papua New Guinea are studying the same lesson any given week.
governing identity has had to change and shift in the light of the changing demographics within and around its walls.

Over the past three years since I arrived at the PV Church, we have been exploring this question of identity and mission for our church moving forward. The COVID pandemic raised the question of what truly constitutes “the church.” Does physical presence matter? Or is the spoken message most important? In early 2020, we received a significant bequeast, to use as the church saw fit. What should guide us in how best to use these funds?

We have made some moves towards answering this question. Last year, our church board finalized the key verse that we will use to guide us as a church: “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). This deceptively simple verse (and corresponding motto love first) encapsulates so much of what we believe to be at the heart of the gospel – that God moves first, that God loves first, and that all we do and are flows from this reality. Because God loves first, we are loved. Because God loves first, we love first. It is what should guide our initial instincts, the first question we should ask ourselves before moving on to planning and programming and logistics and decisions. What would it mean to love first in this scenario?\(^5\)

It has proven to be a powerful verse for our church community. I hear it coming up in conversation as parents talk about their “wayward” young adult children; I hear it in a greeters meeting as people discuss how best to make first-time visitors feel welcome; I hear it among our high school students as they share when they have felt judged, and what they long for from church. But powerful as it is, it doesn’t answer all the questions raised in the beginning of this thesis. Our church is called to be a community that loves first, yes. But what about our specific

\(^5\) Our full statement includes some additional elements, and reads as follows: “In light of the Advent, we seek to be different, grow together, create together, serve together, share together, live different, and above all, love first.”
sense of calling as a denomination? And what role does the Sabbath have to play? Is it just that we choose to worship on a different day than the rest of the Christian community? Or is there something in this practice that can embody what *love first* could look like in a uniquely powerful way?

The PV church is currently experiencing a season of momentum, energy, and possibility. We have come out of the pandemic with a new, passionate, and innovative pastoral team. We have reconfigured our board, decreasing it from a board of over forty-five (in which only a quarter would show up to meetings), to an intentionally diverse and committed team of twenty. We have renovated our children, youth, and young adult spaces, taking down the 1950s pictures of “white Jesus” scattered throughout the classrooms and the unyielding “please keep your kids quiet” sign in the parent’s room, and replacing them with the invitation to “*love first,*” with pictures that better reflect who Jesus was and who our church is, with maps of the world, with pictures of our kids dressed in their cultural dress, with a timeline of the stories of Scripture. We have reworked our focus in each of the kids’ rooms, with the invitation to “love” (our key word for ages birth-4), “wonder” (k-2nd grade), “create” (3-5th grade), “discover” (6-8th grade). We have removed torn couches and broken tables in the youth room, painted walls, created corners for conversation and play and reading and reflection. We have named one of our rooms as our “heritage” room, where we have placed a number of the important mementoes that remind us where we have come from (a podium used by Ellen White when she came to visit the hospital; pictures of what the church and sanitarium looked like when they first opened; pictures of the (predominately white) nursing and medical students through the past century), while creating space for us to visually represent who we are now and where we hope to go. We have added pictures of the church in action; a mother from the Congo smiling at her child in the lap of a
church member in the pew behind her; a translator speaking softly into a mic, bridging the communication gap between pulpit and pew; young adults from Haiti, the Philippines, Rwanda, and Central America leading praise together.

We have made a start towards what I would consider an “eschatologically-shaped Sabbath-keeping church,” where we are doing our best to live into the future kingdom in the here and now. The church God is creating is beautiful. It is filled with people from all backgrounds and walks of life. It is a new community being knit together, one that is marked not by ethnic or economic barriers, but by the grace of God and the presence of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit.

We have made a start, but I believe that there is much more to come. Through the work of this thesis, and seasons of prayer and conversation, we are envisioning the next steps we can take. I think the PV church is poised to move into a new phase of mission and identity, one that may perhaps provide a model for how other churches could embody a Sabbath-shaped eschatological community in new and fresh ways. In what follows, I detail three specific practices we are currently engaged in, and how they might be expanded and/or reframed to better model what a Sabbath-shaped eschatological community could look like.

The Garden

The church started a garden about a decade ago, in tandem with its expanding ministry to refugees. A sizeable contingent of recently arrived refugees were experiencing significant culture shock. They had grown up in predominately agrarian societies, and were now trying to navigate a completely new culture with vastly different expectations. Starting a garden allowed new arrivals to spend at least part of their day in a familiar rhythm, growing food that they could later use for their families. Over the past decade, however, the use and organization of the garden has
become more haphazard. Although the garden is still currently being used by around four families, it has become overgrown and is producing far less than it potentially could. It also seems like it has become known predominately as a “refugee” project, and is not connected with the church or community at large.

Over the past year, I have been exploring various possibilities of what it could look like to integrate our garden more explicitly into our mission and vision as a church. Would it be possible to partner with local environmentally-conscious organizations and movements? Could our garden better help our church see ourselves as part of the created world, instead of mainly masters over it? Could our traditional Adventist values around healthy food and agricultural self-sufficiency be a blessing in the “food desert” that is our zipcode? How could we make these shifts while centering the refugee families that are currently using the space?

There have been some promising signs. In the past few months, we have identified a gardener who has agreed to help coordinate the project, revived our health ministry team who can provide support, talked with a nearby school about having students connected to the project, and received funding with a portion earmarked specifically for our gardening project. One challenge that we are still navigating, however, is how to expand the scope of the garden without marginalizing the families that are currently using the space. What we are planning on doing is to approach the project in phases. In phase one, we will select a portion of the south side of the garden for the community portion of the garden, and leave the rest for individual families to continue to till. This specific area is currently being used by just one individual, and she seems to be predominately using just one part of the area, and letting the majority of the rest grow wild. We have met with her, the new coordinator, a translator, and the health ministry director to talk about the new vision for the south side, which will include keeping the area for her to continue to
grow the crop she is currently growing, but also expanded the use of the space so others can be included as well. The idea is to be able to experiment with this particular area, and see what might work best in terms of building a community of gardeners that meet, plan, and grow together, instead of just growing alongside one another. This will not be easy, as there are distinct barriers to a joint project, not the least of which are various language differences. This is part of the reason the plan is to have both communal and individual plots, as we may have to develop how this will work through trial and error.

We have also been exploring what it looks like to partner with the broader community with this project. San Diego County has a growing food and environmental justice movement, complete with a specific vision for 2030 centered around 1) cultivating (food) justice (“Increase health, wealth, leadership, and power for BIPOC communities across our food system”); 2) fighting climate change (“Mitigate climate change impacts and adapt to the changing climate in our food system”); and 3) building resilience (“Increase integrated nutrition and food security and create an adaptive local food economy”). While it has been slow going trying to get connected with the various food justice or local garden organizations during COVID, we have identified a few potential partners. One such partner has suggested we consider becoming a composting site, in addition to having our community garden. California has identified organic waste ending up in landfills as a significant environmental concern, and has passed a recent law (Senate Bill 1383) aimed at mitigating its effects. Creating a composting center on-site could

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help minimize the amount of organic waste we throw away (which is sometimes quite high given that we are a food distribution location); 2) provide organic fertilizer for our gardeners; 3) help us build connections with partners in the community; and 4) provide an opportunity for education, not only about how to compost, but also why.

It is this last point that links most directly to the idea of reframing why we garden. While there are many reasons to be involved in activities like gardening or composting, I suggest this is one way to be involved in authentic Sabbath keeping. The link between gardening/composting and celebrating creation, practicing resistance, or embodying salvation would have to be made explicit, however. You do not have to be Christian to compost, obviously. You do not have to garden to be Christian, obviously. But what I am trying to suggest is that authentic Sabbath keeping should celebrate creation, resist/liberate us from problematic systems, and embody a different way forward. Getting involved in gardening/composting is one simple but tangible way to do so.8

One way to make this connection explicit is to create a placard with a QR code that we can place at the entry to the garden and to the composting area that would have a small description, then link to a webpage for more details. While it is still a developing project, the following is a possible example of what we could include.

8 One example of an organization that makes a similar connection between gardens and Christianity is A Rocha, a “community of Christians working in biodiversity conservation to protect and restore vulnerable habitats, species, and communities,” A Rocha USA, “Bringing Hope to All Creation,” https://arocha.us/whatwedo, [accessed February 23, 2023]. They have created a brochure that provides both the rationale for why churches should plant gardens, and step by step instructions on how. For more, see Ginny Vroblesky, “Why Every Church Should Plant a Garden… and How,” Good Seed Sunday: Delivered by A Rocha, https://arocha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/why-every-church-should-plant-a-garden.pdf, [accessed February 23, 2023].
Welcome to Paradise Valley Church Garden!

Welcome:
Welcome to our garden here in Paradise Valley! While we are still a work in progress, we wanted to share a little bit of our dream with you. We believe we are called to be good stewards of the earth, and are concerned by the devastating disregard humans have had towards creation. We aren’t gardening experts, but we are people who care about creation, who value healthy food, fresh air, being outdoors, getting our hands dirty, and connecting with each other and with the world around us. We believe gardening may help us remember some important lessons about ourselves, our Creator, and our relationship with the rest of creation.

Who we are:
The Paradise Valley Seventh-day Adventist Church is a diverse group of people from all sorts of backgrounds. We come from different countries. Some grew up in the church. Some have just started searching for God. We are young. We are old. We are broken. We are blessed. We are an incredibly diverse community of people who have this one thing in common: we have been changed because of Jesus. We strive to #lovefirst, grounded by this verse: “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).9

The Garden:
We have been blessed by people from all over the world joining our community, and several came with lifelong experiences of growing food. Creating a garden allowed for our newly arrived friends to continue the rhythm of planting and harvest that was familiar to them, even as

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9 This language comes from a “who we are” section on our church website, https://pvchurch.org/im-new-1
they were working through the various peculiarities of a new culture and land. During the pandemic, our garden went through a transition period, with some of our refugee families moving away. Our hope looking forward is that this garden will be a place where even more of us can gather, connect, and grow together.

We have two areas to our garden. On the north side of the valley, specific families have their own areas of land where they are growing food for their immediate family and friends. Areas are assigned based on need and availability, as for several families this provides a much-needed supplement to their food budget. On the south side of the valley, you will find a community garden, where the planting, weeding, and harvesting is done by the community at large instead of single families. The southern community garden will also be used for education on various growing techniques, as well as a place to encourage more people to get involved in learning about and supporting at-home and communal gardens.

There are many reasons to garden. Over the recent pandemic, we have learnt just how fragile our current infrastructure is, and how important it can be to decrease our reliance on complex systems to help feed us. Gardening builds resiliency, both as individuals, as we reap the mental health benefits of being outside and physically active, and also as a community, as we reap the communal benefits of remembering we are part of the created world, and doing what we can to honor our Creator by treating the world and by extension one another well.

**Composting:**

Welcome to our composting corner! Here we are working to create nutritious fertilizer by repurposing organic waste (food scraps, yard cuttings, etc.) that can then be used to create compost for our garden. We are excited to include composting in our plans for our garden, as it
has several benefits, including reducing the amount of waste that ends up in landfills and adding much needed nutrients to our soil. Composting can also both reduce the need for water, as it helps the soil retain water, and helps prevent said water from getting polluted by lessening excess storm runoff. Composting serves as a very visible reminder of how interconnected the created world is. If you would like information about how our garden project links to our faith, check out the QR code below!

(QR CODE): How a garden links to faith:

There are many reasons to start gardening, and we want to invite you to start being part of a garden for whichever reason is most meaningful to you. However, as people of faith, we have some additional reasons as to why we think it is so valuable.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, the center of our faith is Jesus. We seek to live lives transformed by who Jesus is, and that includes paying attention to the whole Great Big God story, a story that points to and proceeds from Jesus.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we are deeply shaped by the Advent, which means the coming of God. We believe that God comes to us first, and that God has done this in the beginning (creation), in the past (Jesus’ birth), and will be coming again in the future (the Second Coming). We believe the church should be a pointer towards the coming kingdom of God, guiding how we live with each other and the world around us in the here and now.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we live our lives in a certain rhythm, shaped by the biblical concept of the seventh-day Sabbath. The Sabbath is a powerful practice that involves observing a different pace of life from sunset Friday evening to sunset Saturday evening.
Keeping the Sabbath often involves saying “No” to the many things that grab at our attention, in order to say “Yes” to what matters most.

The Sabbath is a practice; but more than that, the Sabbath is a promise about who God is, who we are, and what we were created for. The Sabbath points us back to creation (Genesis 2:3); the Sabbath promotes our liberation (Deuteronomy 5:15); and the Sabbath prepares us for our future, when God will be with us and we will be with God (Isaiah 66:23, Hebrews 4:9).\(^\text{10}\)

Living Sabbath-shaped lives thus includes activities that re-connects us with creation, that practices liberation, and helps us embody salvation.

Which, finally, brings us back to our garden. While there are many ways to celebrate creation, practice liberation, and embody salvation, we see gardening as one potentially powerful option. Creating gardens helps us remember the One who created all things. In a culture particularly divorced from the profound impact our actions have on the natural world, gardens build a sense of connection to and appreciation of the rest of creation.

Creating gardens can also help us build resistance and practice liberation. There are significant problems with our current system where the people who most often grow our food are often least likely to have access to it. Building diverse communities that navigate the growing and harvesting of food together helps us imagine an alternative to a system that is deeply problematic. Creating gardens can also help provide resiliency against a growing social-emotional health crisis. Our church garden has already proven to provide an important sense of

\(^{10}\) “And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says the LORD.” (Isaiah 66:23, [NKJV]); “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;” (Hebrews 4:9, [NIV]).
stability and continuity for members of our community over the past few years, and there are multiple studies that link gardening with improved social-emotional-mental health.\textsuperscript{11}

Finally, establishing a garden can be part of embodying salvation. At first glance, this might seem like a stretch, particularly if salvation is seen predominately in terms of reconciliation and atonement for sin. But what if salvation is seen instead as a process by which not only are broken relationships restored, but we are invited to live once again into the purpose we were originally created for? If that is the case, then the question becomes “how best can we live the values of the coming Kingdom now.” Given that creating a garden can improve the mental, physical, societal, and emotional health of a community, it may be a great place to start.

\textbf{The Center}

On the Paradise Valley SDA Church property is the Christian Bookstore and Nutrition Center. Originally started as part of the Seventh-day Adventist network of Adventist Book Centers, the Center transferred to the private ownership of PV church members in 1991. These members firmly believed in the importance of supporting and promoting the publishing ministry of the Adventist denomination, and getting Adventist writings into the hands of the community. This vision (which I would suggest is closely aligned with our previously mentioned model of church as “herald”) continues today under new owners, who took over the bookstore last year when the previous owners retired.

The Center does not only sell books, however. It has also been selling vegetarian and vegan food and various health supplements as part of its portfolio, and it is this portion that makes up the vast majority of the Center’s sales, and has kept it viable (though not profitable) over the past thirty years. The PV Church has had a supportive relationship with the Center over that period: although the Center business is privately owned, the location is owned by the PV Church/Southeastern California Conference. The current business owners are church members, and the church has kept the rent negligible in order to support their ministry.

Within the first few months of my arrival at the PV church, the former owners had let me know of their desire to retire in the then near future. Although COVID delayed the plans until early 2022, the news of their intention prompted me to consider how the space could best be used if a transition was coming soon. Would we want to continue to run a bookstore? If so, would we want to take ownership of the space as a church, and run it directly? Who did we have who had the necessary expertise? What types of resources would we want to offer? On the nutrition side of the Center, given that the majority of the sales was related to food, would we want to expand that? Perhaps we could open a small deli to provide a much-needed healthy meal option in National City, and link it with our garden.

In late 2021, the matter came to a head when the previous owners shared that they had found a buyer for the store, and they were needing to make the transition within a matter of months. We as a church needed to decide how we wanted to approach the Center. Did we want to own it? Did we want to rent to new owners? Did we want to take back the use of the property for ourselves and do something different with it? Eventually, the church board decided that since we didn’t have a well-developed alternative planned, we would rent it to the new owners on a short-term basis, to be renewed as needed. That would give us the opportunity to continue to
envision what our dreams for the space could be, as well as help us see whether the new owners would be a good fit with that direction. To that end, I have been considering if and how the Center could better reflect our new understanding of a Sabbath-shaped eschatological community. Currently, the Center is linked to the Sabbath and eschatology by virtue of the content of the writings that they sell, and the healthy vegetarian/vegan food that they provide. I would love to see those links reworked and expanded.

One idea we have been working on that could be linked to the markers of 
creating and embracing salvation is the aforementioned idea of adding a small deli or healthy food bar to the Center. We could call it “Tastes of Paradise” (a play on both the name of our church and our theological orientation), and offer vegetarian/vegan soups, smoothies, sandwiches, salads. We could also celebrate the cultural diversity that is part of our community by offering a “special item” on a rotating basis. This item could be from a Rwandan recipe one month, a Bolivian recipe another month, an Afghani one another month, etc. Our PV health ministries has had healthy cooking classes offered to the community before COVID. These could be restarted and connected to the Center.

We have had some promising conversations with the current owners of the Center about these ideas. They have had some experience in restaurant work, and have a passion for vegan/vegetarian food and healthy living. They have already started showcasing locally made items (soaps, honey, lotions), and have shared they would be more than happy to highlight recipes provided by local community members. Perhaps there could even be some type of profit-sharing – although I know there are health regulations that would make it difficult for the Center to sell food that is made in someone’s private home, perhaps there could be a portion of the
proceeds of any “special item” that gets sold that goes directly to the family that provides the recipe.

While I am excited about the momentum that seems to be coalescing around this idea, there is another resource that the Center could provide that I want to mention. I envision the Center providing direct training and resources to practice liberation/healing. This element may in some ways be more challenging than the deli already mentioned. The deli will require organization, funds, and some expertise in how to run a business, but already fits well within existing Adventist theological frames. The practicing liberation portion of the Center, however, may run up against political and theological differences. Traditional/conservative Adventists are wary of phrases like “social justice,” and the current owners seem to share that aversion.\(^{12}\)

Part of the work of this thesis has been to argue that practicing liberation/healing is an essential part of what it means to honor and remember the Sabbath. It is my hope that we can start to bridge some of the differences between conservative and progressive approaches to justice by centering this feature of the Sabbath. Similarly to how both conservative and progressive Adventist lawyers have been on the forefront of arguing for religious liberty and the separation of church and state over the past century (including advocating on behalf of other

minority religious groups), I believe it may be possible to find a way to advocate for biblical justice and liberation in a way that resonates with both segments within Adventism.\footnote{For a fascinating history of Adventism’s involved in the cause of religious liberty in the US, see Douglas Morgan, *Adventism and the American Republic: The Public Involvement of a Major Apocalyptic Movement* (The University of Tennessee Press, 2001). Adventists have worked with several other religious groups on this issue, including Christian denominations (like the Baptists), Jews, and Muslims.}

This, then, is the dream. While there are many important ministries that could fall under the umbrella of *practicing liberation/healing*, I would like to suggest two that I would love to implement at PV as a start. The first is to provide training in peacemaking and conflict resolution. There have historically been many ways people “practice liberation,” much of them violent. While this paper is not the place to enter into the complex discussion of ends vs means, I am convicted that the eschatologically-shaped community that Jesus called us into must be fundamentally nonviolent. By this I do not mean passive in the face of injustice, but instead creatively resistant in a way that practices the liberation we are working towards.\footnote{There are several excellent theological resources that pick up this idea of creative non-violent resistance: one series that I have found deeply thought-provoking is Walter Winks’ *Powers* trilogy, specifically *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Fortress Pr., 1999). For Adventist reflections on peace, see Douglas Morgan, ed., *The Peacemaking Remnant: Essays and Historical Documents* (Silver Spring, MD: Adventist Peace Fellowship, 2005); see also Chuck Scriven, *The Promise of Peace* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Association, 2009).}

We have already made some headway towards this vision. Ironically, while I have long been interested in the field of peacemaking and conflict resolution, I was unaware that San Diego has a plethora of resourcing in this area until I moved here. San Diego is the headquarters for the National Conflict Resolution Center, a leader in mediation instruction and conflict resolution that was founded 40 years ago this year.\footnote{National Conflict Resolution Center, https://ncrconline.com/mediation-conflict-resolution/about-ncrc/ [accessed February 23, 2023].} The University of San Diego houses the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies and Institute for Peace and Justice, and have degrees and programs in...
peace and justice, social innovation, humanitarian action, conflict management, et. al. There is a robust restorative justice program, working both within the juvenile court system, and within the public school system.

We have already made use of some of these resources. In 2021 we hired a restorative justice practitioner to help us navigate a conflict at our denominational school that spilled over into the church, as several of the families involved were members of our church community. They walked us through a process that encouraged us to see justice through the lens of repairing harm and rebuilding trust, as opposed to predominately retaliation. Although the process was an unfamiliar one for my church members, it conveyed both the seriousness with which we were taking the incident, and also the belief that there could be a process that did not just sweep uncomfortable conflict under the rug, but actively worked towards repairing harm, rebuilding trust, and restoring relationships (at a pace agreed upon by both parties). This partnership with restorative justice practitioners continued as we brought trainers over to our denominational school, and had the teachers go through sessions. We hired a new principal in 2022 who is familiar with this process and has implemented it in her former districts, and we are currently looking at shifting the conflict management process at the school to one that is based on these restorative justice practices. On the church side, we are looking at identifying key leaders who may be interested from our different ministry and language groups, and training a small group on

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peacemaking practices. One option for this training is through Peacemaker Ministry, a nondenominational Christian non-profit founded by Ken Sande, whose mission is to “equip and assist Christians and their churches to respond to conflict biblically.”\(^{18}\) Along with books, videos, and small group study guides, Peacemaker Ministry has also developed a free app that makes their basic approach to conflict much more easily accessible.

This type of approach to discussions of conflict would just be a start. Peacemaker Ministry helps individuals develop tools primarily for individual, family, or church conflicts, but it does not spend much time considering how we should approach conflict caused by larger oppressive systemic structures, or deal with the discomfort of conversations around polarizing issues like racial or political issues. Thus in addition to the Peacemaker Ministry resources, I want to identify a small group of key leaders to go through a resource like *The L.E.A.D. Anti-Racism Challenge: A 40-day Journey* together. This devotional book came out of a pledge by a group of Christians leaders and clergy in Chattanooga in 2020. In recognition of the urgent need for a racial reckoning within the Christian community as well as outside of it, the group vowed to L.E.A.D: to listen, embrace, advocate, and dream. I had the privilege of contributing a short chapter to the book, and believe it would be an accessible introduction to a sensitive topic in a congregation as diverse as ours.\(^{19}\)

Peacemaking is not easy, and several of our church members have arrived as refugees from countries and communities ravaged by war. Whatever tools and trainings we decide on, we need to also be sensitive to the reality of the deep trauma that exists within our community. The

\(^{18}\) Peacemaker Ministries, [https://www.peacemakerministries.org/about-peacemaker-ministries](https://www.peacemakerministries.org/about-peacemaker-ministries) [accessed February 23, 2023].

\(^{19}\) Nicole Parker et al., *The L.E.A.D. Anti-Racism Challenge: A 40-Day Journey*, (Independently Published, 2020). There is also a website connected with the book and pledge that shares additional resources; [https://leadpledge.org/](https://leadpledge.org/) [accessed February 23, 2023].
tools that we use for lower-level conflict between family or church members, for example, or for an introductory conversation about race, will most likely not be the same tools used when there has been a significant power imbalance, specifically where abuse and trauma have occurred.

About a year or so into the pandemic, I spoke at the funeral of a young adult child of refugees who had taken his own life. The pain and grief in the diaspora that gathered was tinged with despair. One family member made a comment that stuck with me. They shared how much they had done to keep this child safe through the wars and conflict and fighting back home, and how they thought things would change once they arrived in America. But there was a different type of war going on here, a war with despair, and they had not been able to protect their child from it.20

There is a significant amount of trauma in the communities that we serve, and the model that we have been taught (to do a couple of pastoral counseling sessions, but then connect individuals or families with mental health professionals as quickly as possible) has not proven to be a viable option. For one, we have struggled to find mental health professionals who speak the various languages of our community. If we do, they do not have availability. Or if they are available, it has been hard to convince members who come from honor/shame cultures to go to counseling. Yet the need is there. One option we are considering is connecting with the Trauma Resource Institute to provide Community Resiliency Training, a resource “designed to help individuals understand the biology of traumatic stress reactions and learn specific skills to return the body, mind, and spirit back to balance after experiencing traumatic events.”21 This is a model that teaches biologically-based wellness skills, and has been used effectively in over seventy-five

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20 For a helpful discussion on the relationship between healing and justice, see Sharon G. Thornton, Broken Yet Beloved: Pastoral Theology from the Heart of the Cross, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2022).

countries.\textsuperscript{22} It has also been used by other Adventist institutions, including ADRA in the Philippines and Loma Linda University (a major Adventist medical center about two hours from Paradise Valley in southern California), which could make it easier to get buy-in from our more conservative members.

For over thirty years, the Christian Bookstore and Nutrition Center has provided certain resources to the community. There has been a specific priority on sharing the Adventist end time message: three angels with trumpets decorate the walls, and books by Ellen White and other Adventist pioneers are prominently featured. But there has also been an element of wholistic care connected to the Center. It has been not just a bookstore, but a nutrition center. It has been a place not only to access specific content, but also to provide people with the tools needed to practice an alternative way of life. It is my hope that the Center can expand this element of wholistic care, and become a resource for celebrating creation, embodying salvation, and practicing liberation, healing, and peacemaking.

\textbf{The 24 Hour Sabbath}

The final part of this dream involves reframing how (and why) we keep the 24 hour Sabbath. We have described the Sabbath as a profound reminder that God loves us first, before any action we take, quite separate from what we earn or deserve. It was a promise given to humanity on our very first full day of life; it was a promise given to humanity as we were liberated from slavery in Egypt; it is a promise given to humanity in Jesus’ life and healings; it is a taste of God’s ultimate purpose, and the assurance of God’s present presence. I call this section

the “24 hour Sabbath” to highlight the importance of time. Yet another title could be “Sanctuary,” since as Rabbi Abraham Heschel has noted, the Sabbath is a “sanctuary in time.”

Although there are some cultural distinctions in how Adventists celebrate Sabbath, there are some common patterns, many of which are present at the PV church. For more traditional Adventists, Friday is a day of preparation. Any shopping necessary is accomplished early. The house is cleaned, and chores are completed. As sunset nears (and with it, the beginning of Sabbath), families start to gather for vespers, a time of worship and Sabbath welcome. People either gather in family units, or meet up with other members of the church, depending on personal preferences and schedules. Saturday morning at 9:30am, members gather into different small groups (usually age or language specific) to study the Bible together, after which they gather at 11am as a whole community to worship. Potluck lunches are common, after which groups might go on a Sabbath nature walk, or have sometime in further Bible study together, or do a service project together in the community. Sabbath sunset is a time to close Sabbath together in song and reflection, after which there would often be a fun social activity.

For many Adventists, the 24 hour Sabbath is a blessing. I have heard church members share how much they look forward to putting away the stress of their work, and shifting into an entirely different rhythm. But as I have mentioned, there are challenges with the way we have understood the Sabbath. For every Adventist who has enjoyed the Sabbath, there are those who have felt stifled by a sense of legalism and judgment. We have also sometimes been quite inwardly focused on the Sabbath. There is a story told that illustrates the point from Loma Linda University Hospital, one of our major Adventist medical centers. During a gathering of

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23 “Sanctuary” is term with powerful theological resonance within Seventh-day Adventism; one possible avenue for further thinking is on how this reframed understanding of the Sabbath could interact with our Adventist doctrine of the sanctuary.
professionals, a speaker shared that he had been struck by a common comment he had heard among the community about the hospital. “Avoid going there on Saturday if you can at all help it,” was the refrain. “They have a skeletal staff, and everyone takes that day off.” “What if instead,” the speaker asked, “the hospital was known as the best place to be on a Sabbath if you were hurting? Where healing happened in powerful ways on the Sabbath: healing for mind, body, and soul?”

I recognize that shifting my entire local church’s understanding of the Sabbath, and our members’ rationale for keeping it, is a massive undertaking. There is a simplicity in the current understanding that resonates with particular power in many of our communities: keep the Sabbath because God has commanded it, and by doing so you will show your loyalty and love. But we have started making some subtle shifts, and in what follows I will share both what we are currently doing and where I hope we can move towards. I hope that our 24 hour Sabbath keeping can move from keeping Sabbath in order to earn salvation, to keeping Sabbath in order to embody it. This embodiment will be proleptic and incomplete – we still await the final eschaton, after all – but it will be shaped by the values and rhythms of the coming kingdom.

What it means to embody salvation is a massive topic, but in what follows I will focus on three elements. First, what must mark a Sabbath that embodies salvation is a deep recognition of God’s abundant grace, and our fundamental dependence on God. We have shown how the theme of God’s gifts and grace have been deeply intertwined with the Sabbath from the very beginning; the gift of resting in God’s presence in the creation account; of God liberating Israel from Egypt and sustaining them in the stories of the Exodus and manna in the desert; of Jesus going out of his way to heal on the Sabbath in the New Testament; and of the Sabbath “rest that remains” in Hebrews. The Messianic age is not here yet, but God’s gifts and grace are real and present and
powerful. One way we have been working to emphasize God’s grace at PV is through our key verse mentioned earlier – “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19, NIV). Through sermons, via visuals, in decision-making moments and in casual conversation, we have repeated the refrain over and over again. We see every Sabbath as an opportunity to saturate ourselves in this verse, and have seen it start to shift the language of our community. Sabbath is a day to celebrate the a priori, extravagant, undeserved love and grace of God.

Second, embodying salvation includes both a freedom from and a freedom for. There is a part of this process that I think many Adventists are already pretty good at. Part of acknowledging our dependence on God is weaning ourselves off our dependence on other things – our jobs, our productivity, our technology, our hobbies. I remember a story from 2022 of a group of basketball students from Oakwood Adventist Academy that decided to forfeit a regional semi-final game in Alabama because it was to be played at 4:30pm on Saturday, before sunset. It was the furthest Oakwood had ever gotten in the tournament, and Oakwood asked the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) if they could switch with two other teams, scheduled to play at 7:30pm (after sunset) for a chance to progress to the final. The other teams were more than happy to make the switch; the Association denied it. The team forfeited the game, stating that, “this is bigger than basketball.”

After the situation got picked up by news agencies and a lawsuit was filed, the AHSAA finally voted to change its policy to allow for

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religious accommodations moving forward. The team lost their chance to play that game, but arguably won a bigger battle. Although I cannot speak directly to the motives of the team in making that decision, what I am suggesting in this new perspective is not that there is something wrong with playing basketball on Sabbath in and of itself – instead, I am suggesting that keeping the 24 hour Sabbath can uncover the various elements in our lives that can subtly become our idols, and can provide us with an opportunity to disentangle ourselves from their power.

But the Sabbath shouldn’t just be about saying “no” to the things that can otherwise occupy us; it should be about saying “yes” to kingdom living and God’s abundant grace. This leads us to a final element of embodying salvation that I believe the PV church is uniquely situated to exemplify, that of modeling unified diversity.\(^\text{25}\) We have previously suggested that the church is called to be a *foretaste* of the coming kingdom, and that this kingdom will be fundamentally multicultural, with every nation and tribe and people and language worshipping the Lamb (Revelation 7). While it is true that in many communities the worship hour at church is still the “most segregated hour in America,”\(^\text{26}\) this is not true at PV. We are an incredibly diverse congregation, and this is a source of both deep joy and complex realities. The English language

\(^{25}\) By “unified diversity” I mean seeking unity in Christ, while still creating space for (and even celebrating!?) radical differences of thought, expression, and perspective. I sometimes have asked my church, “what if we had nothing in common but Jesus, and that were enough?” It is not easy, and we need to create smaller communities that do share things in common for there to be a sense of familiarity, comfort, and safety. But I find the provocative nature of the question helpful as we wrestle with how much difference we can handle while still feeling deeply connected.

\(^{26}\) This quote is often attributed to an interview with Martin Luther King Jr during an appearance on Meet the Press, April 17, 1960, but was actually coined by Liston Pope, the dean of Yale Divinity School. Liston Pope, *The Kingdom Beyond Caste* (New York: Friendship Press, 1957), 105; and unfortunately still rings true half a century later. Lifeway Research conducted research in 2015 that suggested that “8 in 10 congregations [are] made up of one predominant racial group” and “most worshipers like it that way”; Bob Smietana, “Sunday Morning in America Still Segregated – and that is OK with Worshipers,” *Lifeway Research*, January 15, 2015, [https://research.lifeway.com/2015/01/15/sunday-morning-in-america-still-segregated-and-thats-ok-with-worshipers/](https://research.lifeway.com/2015/01/15/sunday-morning-in-america-still-segregated-and-thats-ok-with-worshipers/) [accessed February 23, 2023].
takes priority at the church – the services are in English (translated via headsets into other languages), and when we do have something in a different language (a song, a reading, a poem), we get significant pushback if we do not translate it into English on the screen. Even during the one special service we have a year that is meant to highlight our various cultures (our “Festival of Nations”), we have received critique for not having enough English special music items amidst all the other languages, despite the fact the services are in English the rest of the year. As discussed earlier in this thesis, there are also complex dynamics between those who give charity and those who receive that charity in our community, especially among the “refugee” community – even though both are attending the church together, it has sometimes been hard for the receiver to feel on equal footing. Building unity across difference is not a simple task, especially when those differences include power dynamics.

These three elements; 1) God’s a priori love and grace, 2) freedom from and freedom for, and 3) unified diversity, shape what my vision of embodying salvation looks like at PV. Currently, our PV church community keeps the 24 hour Sabbath in the following way. Several of our groups start the Sabbath hours by meeting for Friday night vespers. During COVID, our Tagalog, Spanish, and Creole groups gathered in their various language groups to welcome the Sabbath via zoom. Now that in person gatherings are more common again, we have re-started some in person vespers. Our youth meet twice a month in person, and we recently started a whole-church vespers once a month. Although the group (around 80-100) is much smaller than those who join us on Sabbath mornings, these vespers have been deeply meaningful for those who have been able to attend. We have intentionally structured it differently to our Sabbath morning worship service. Whereas the 11am church service on Saturday is focused primarily on preaching the Word, the Friday night worship is focused on the Word made real in the lives of
members. It is a time of testimony, witness, and praise, and has served to connect members who may not otherwise know each other. Our vespers coordinator is purposely asking people to share who come from different backgrounds, and whose stories are less known. The results have allowed us to catch glimpses into each other’s lives and faith, a necessary move towards starting to understand each other. But we are still navigating various barriers. We are still limited to only getting stories from those who speak English well enough to feel comfortable to share. We still have theological differences that keep some of our storytellers from being completely authentic (especially stories from our LGBTQ+ community). To address these challenges, we are working on how to offer translation for the speakers, so they can share in their own language, and have worked to create safer spaces for our LGBTQ+ community to be authentic by starting with small groups of 10-12 people that are more open to being stretched.

For those who join us for these Friday night vespers, the 24 hour Sabbath starts off with a time of communal praise and worship from a diversity of voices and perspectives, a glimpse of Revelation 7. On Saturday morning, we continue trying to balance diversity and unity by having a combination of homogenous and heterogenous gatherings. Our Sabbath School classes are usually divided by language, age, or topic preference (Spanish, Creole, Tagalog, Kinyarwanda, and sometimes Lao; our kids’ groups are mainly in English, with some bilingual teachers; our English adult classes are divided by topic). These more homogenous classes allow for groups to keep a unique identity, and tailor their programming and practices to better reflect their needs and cultural priorities. But we do not want to just have parallel experiences worshipping next to each other – we want to figure out a way to co-create worship and Sabbath experiences together. To be clear, this does not mean that every Sabbath needs to be spent in a crowd with others – there is a time and a place for solitary Sabbaths, where people are able to spend time with God.
alone. But if what we have been arguing is true, and part of the purpose of the church is to be a forecast of the community God is creating, then Sabbath is not only (or even primarily) a time for whatever recharges us on our own. It is a time to practice the rhythms of grace and a priori love with God and with others.27

This task of co-creation across cultural, political, socio-economic and theological differences is deeply challenging. While there are many ways to approach the task, we have started by reconsidering how we craft our corporate worship time together. Currently our most intentionally crafted service that celebrates our “unified diversity” is our annual Festival of Nations, a special Sabbath in November where we try to highlight various languages and distinctive cultural elements as much as possible. For example, one of our readings during a recent Festival of Nations went as follows:

> Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 Porque todos fuimos bautizados por un solo Espíritu para formar un solo cuerpo, ya sean judíos o gentiles, esclavos o libres, y a todos se nos dio a beber de un mismo Espíritu.14 மக்களின் பிறந்திருந்து ஆல்லாஹ், ஆல்லாஹ் பாபகத்தை அழித்து.15 Ngayon, kung sasabihin ng paa, "Dahil hindi ako kamay, hindi ako kabilang sa katawan," hindi ito sa dahilang iyon ay titigil sa pagiging bahagi ng katawan.16 Men, si zorey la ta di: "Paske mwen pa yon je, mwen pa fè pati kò a", se pou rezon sa a li pa ta sispann fè pati kò a.17 Lo kan lejwey ta feyin la kélass an? Lo kan lejwey ta féyin la kélass an?18 Lakini kwa kweli Mungu ameweke viungo katika mwili, kila kimojawapo, kama aliyotaka kiwe.19 जैसे उद्वेग, दिल और प्यार किसी भी चीज़ के लिए मिल्ने के लिए.20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The readers were from all over the world: Mexico, India, the Philippines, Haiti, Egypt, Congo, Laos, South Africa. The church was filled with flags that had been proudly carried down the

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27 This is one of the weaknesses I have seen from authors and thinkers that have taken up the theme of the Sabbath without linking it to a living, breathing community. They encourage us to take individual “sabbaths” (a couple hours here, or whichever day best fits your schedule this week), but these may end up being little more than breaks in our schedules, or release valves for the pressures in our lives, and not practices strong enough to knit an alternative community together.
center of the aisle at the beginning of the service; the pews were filled with the bright colors of
traditional dress from Rwanda to Peru to Burma to Iraq. They read the above-quoted passage, 1
Corinthians 12:12-20, in English, Spanish, Tamil, Tagalog, Creole, Arabic, Swahili, Lao, and
English respectively. We invited participants to read this passage about the Body of Christ
together; but instead of hearing it all in one language, the congregation heard it in seven. It was
just a fraction of the languages spoken among those in the pews; one estimate has it there are
sixty different nationalities represented throughout our church community, although the exact
number is fluid.

Yet despite this cultural celebration, there are still power dynamics at play. When I
arrived at PV, I was informed that the tradition was for the church to end the opening parade of
flags with the American flag coming in at the end, at which point the congregation would stand
and sing the American national anthem. This was surprising to me, given Adventism’s historic
position on the importance of the separation of church and state. We can celebrate our history by
carrying our flags, but singing the American national anthem during a worship service
intentionally crafted to highlight our unified diversity seemed both incongruous and dangerous to
me. We are not unified by all becoming American; we are unified in Christ. So we switched the
song, and sang “We Have this Hope” instead. Written by Adventist composer Wayne Hooper for
the 1962 General Conference Session, it has become somewhat of an unofficial anthem for
Adventists, and speaks to Adventists’ eschatological anticipation:

We have this hope that burns within our heart,
Hope in the coming of the Lord.
We have this faith that Christ alone imparts,
Faith in the promise of His Word.
We believe the time is here,
When the nations far and near
Shall awake, and shout and sing
Hallelujah! Christ is King!
We have this hope that burns within our heart,
Hope in the coming of the Lord.

We are united in Jesus Christ our Lord.
We are united in His love.
Love for the waiting people of the world,
People who need our Savior’s love.
Soon the heav’ns will open wide,
Christ will come to claim His bride,
All the universe will sing
Hallelujah! Christ is King!
We have this hope this faith, and God’s great love,
We are united in Christ.

While there were perhaps a couple questions about where the anthem had gone, the pushback for making this shift was negligible. That it was not a bigger deal to make this change I believe gives this proposal hope and speaks to the power of the eschatological DNA that is such a part of Adventism. If we are able to authentically ground the changes we are hoping to make to our ecclesiology and understanding of the Sabbath in the “to what end” version of eschatology we have been speaking about, then I think it is possible for this proposal to move off the paper and into the pews.

In some ways, our 11am service is our most obvious attempt to be united in Christ as a diverse corporate body, with the Festival of Nations service serving as a highly intentional example. However, it is not the only way, and indeed I think it would be a mistake to link keeping the 24 hour Sabbath primarily with attending a church service. This can get some Adventists into the strange territory of avoiding attending church on Sunday, because of a fear that it can give people the wrong impression. But surely God is not upset if we worship God other days of the week aside from Saturday? Would visiting a church on a Wednesday be wrong? Or a Monday service? I have emphasized the church service so far because it is currently the closest we have come to intentionally practicing unified diversity. But it is not the church service
per se that sets the 24 hour Sabbath apart. The Sabbath was set apart by God as a promise grounded in God’s original intention for humanity, a promise that remains to be fully fulfilled. We keep the 24 hour Sabbath by allowing these 24 hours to stop us in our tracks, disentangling us from whatever other priorities and schedules govern us, allowing an outside rhythm of cessation and trust and restoration to structure our lives, and creating space for us to proleptically live into the “not yet” in the here and now.

What exact form this takes may differ from community to community. I do not want to revive the debates on authentic Sabbath-keeping that attempts to narrowly define what is and is not faithful “Sabbath” behavior, or spend an inordinate amount of time discussing the boundaries. Instead, what I have suggested is to consider the elements that are at the center of the biblical Sabbath - celebrating creation, practicing liberation, embodying salvation – and envision ways that make sense in one’s own local community for how these elements shape the way we keep the Sabbath, which in turn shapes the way in which we live the rest of our lives.

Cross-cultural work is difficult. I have been repeatedly reminded of the realities of power dynamics, of unspoken (and spoken!) prejudices, and of how far we still have to go. In many ways our various communities are living parallels lives, and we have not yet done the difficult work of verbally confronting the damaging yet insidious realities of racism, colonialism, and sexism.¹² We have made a start – my presence as a female senior pastor, for example, defies the idea that women cannot hold leadership roles. Yet presence alone is not enough. At some point, we will have to name some of the unspoken dynamics at play, and confront them head on. The L.E.A.D. project is one example; I anticipate we will need many others.

¹² This is incredibly challenging work, as some of our immigrant communities are more fiercely tied to the traditional European forms of worship than even our Caucasian members. For a reflection on the deeply entrenched impact of colonialism in indigenous and immigrant communities, see Emmanuel Lartey, Postcolonializing God: An African Practical Theology, (London: SCM Press, 2013).
CONCLUSION

As I write this conclusion, there is a new documentary on the Sabbath coming to American Public Television, scheduled to be released in June 2023. The promotional blurb reads as follows:

Journey Films is proud to announce its soon-to-be-released 2-hour documentary film Sabbath. Told as a collection of short stories, Sabbath explores the history of one of the world’s most important spiritual practices and its timeless relevance for a stressed-out, modern world. From the Biblical accounts of Creation, to the 10 Commandments, to the Puritans landing in the New World, to the contemporary practice of a “tech-sabbath” – Sabbath ties together our collective history, our health practices, our response to God’s invitation and the search for a more sustainable way of life.²⁹

In the trailer, Duke theologian Norman Wirzba highlights the profound significance of the Sabbath, stating that “Sabbath isn’t simply a pious teaching, an add-on. What’s at issue is the very meaning of life.”³⁰

In this thesis, I have proposed an understanding of the Sabbath and description of the church that could guide my local multi-cultural Seventh-day Adventist community into our next season of ministry. I have argued that Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology is underdeveloped, and that our concept of “church as remnant” needs to be broadened to both better meet the needs of today, and better reflect vital biblical and theological themes. I have suggested that the concept of “church as foretaste” could build upon the existing Adventist eschatological focus yet broaden it so as to include the idea that the true church is not mainly the community that remains faithful at the end, but the community that points towards humanity’s true end, and that proleptically participates in God’s ultimate purpose. Core to this proposal is the idea that the

³⁰ Ibid.
seventh day Sabbath plays a vital role in shaping the rhythm and priorities of this “church as foreshadowing.” Contrary to the traditional Adventist view that sees faithful Sabbath keeping as a litmus test of human obedience, I have suggested that the seventh day Sabbath should better be seen as God’s promise, grounded in the past, pointing to the future, that shapes and directs the present. The Sabbath helps reveal the character of God, a character that is not fundamentally arbitrary and interested in simple obedience, but one that is invested in human flourishing and intimate connection.

There is significant renewed interest in the Sabbath from non-Adventist scholars, as seen in the making of the aforementioned documentary. I think much of the recent conversation has been deeply powerful, including linking the Sabbath with ecological renewal, economic justice, debt relief, spiritual formation, messianic ethics, and liberation. As I have tried to show, I believe Adventist scholars should take a fresh look at how these Sabbath themes should inform our own practice of Sabbath-keeping. I am excited, for example, by some of the partners the Sabbath documentary is highlighting. There is the “Green Sabbath Project,” an environmental initiative suggesting that instead of despairing that there is “nothing you can do about the environment,” perhaps “doing nothing is one of the best things you can do.” They encourage everyone to take a single rest day, writing:

Take a weekly day of rest. Make it a real sabbath. For you. For earth. Don’t drive. Don’t shop. Don’t build. Take a walk. Eat with friends. Play or read with your kids. Sing. Meditate. Celebrate contentment.31

Another partner is the “Unplug Collaborative,” an organization concerned about our technological addiction that seeks to build momentum to unplug from technology on a regular basis.

31 Green Sabbath Project, https://www.greensabbathproject.net/ [accessed March 1, 2023].
basis. They promote an annual “global day of unplugging,” as well as what they call “unplugged villages” and “unplug for a cause.”

Interestingly, their global day of unplugging is from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday the first weekend in March. This is not a coincidence – in a zoom interview, Executive Director Kim Cavallo notes that the Jewish practice of Shabbat played a significant role in the origins of the Unplug Collaborative, and shape the rhythms that they hope to promote moving forward.

In a similar way, “OneTable” is a non-profit geared towards helping young adults forge deep connection by hosting Friday night Shabbat dinners. Almost like a free Airbnb for meals, OneTable describes their vision as follows:

Inspired by ancient Jewish wisdom, OneTable is a national non-profit that empowers folks (21-39ish) to find, share, and enjoy Shabbat dinners, making the most of their Friday nights. Our social dining platform makes it easy for you to become the producer of your own experiences, and for Shabbat dinner to become a platform for community building…. Led by our core values of joy, welcoming, and elevation, we envision a whole generation of young people slowing down, getting together, unplugging from the week, creating intention in their lives, and building meaningful communities.

This community building practice is intimately connected with the Jewish Shabbat, and OneTable does not shy away from its religious rhythm.

Many of the conversations around the Sabbath I have seen in Christian communities, on the other hand, attempt to divorce what they see as the “essence” of the Sabbath from its ancient mooring in the seventh day. While I welcome the important contributions these authors are

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34 OneTable, “About Us: Welcome to OneTable. Welcome to Better Fridays,” https://onetable.org/ [accessed March 2, 2023].
making to help us remember the power of the Sabbath, I remain convinced that the Sabbath is not primarily a disembodied idea that can be superimposed into our lives according to our schedules. Thus on the one hand, I hope that this thesis can help Adventist scholars and pastors expand their notion of faithful Sabbath-keeping to include practices that celebrate creation, practice liberation, and embody salvation. On the other hand, I would invite non-Adventists who are intrigued by the deep theological richness of the Sabbath to reconsider the Sabbath’s relationship with the seventh day. What impact could it make on Jewish-Christian relations, for example, if Christians reconsidered the idea that one of the key gifts of God to God’s people, the Sabbath, has been replaced? How much more powerful could Sabbath practices be in building communities of resistance and flourishing, if the various practices of unplugging and resting and resisting and connecting weren’t just suggested to individuals to fit in when they had time, but instead were connected to an ancient practice of keeping time differently? What if the seventh day Sabbath is both a gift of time and a timely gift, especially needed today?

Finally, the impetus of this thesis for me has been fundamentally grounded in my local church, as I consider how best to lead a dynamic multi-cultural community. I have wondered what deeply biblical vision of the church could resonate with my community, while allowing for a broader understanding of what the church is called to be and not just say. How can we best encourage our community to do the hard work of co-creating a new culture at church, and not just ask newcomers to assimilate into what is already here? How can our Sabbath practices help shape us into a community of celebration, liberation, and embodied salvation? As I have shared, our church has made some initial steps in this direction. We are working on re-envisioning our garden, on creating a hub for wholistic healing and peace-making, and on finding ways to
worship as a corporate body that more closely mirrors Revelation 7, where every “nation, tribe, people and language” worship the Lamb as a great multitude.

We have a long way yet to go. Becoming “church as foretaste” is hard. We may be called the Paradise Valley Seventh-day Adventist Church, but we are definitely not yet in paradise. Yet even as we live in the reality of a broken “now,” I have seen glimpses of the “not yet” permeate our community. What we have might only be a taste, but it is my prayer that as we enter this next season we embody what it means to be a foretaste that allows the world to “taste and see that the Lord is good.”

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35 Psalm 34:8 (NIV)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


_____.”The Four Types of Adventism,” paper presented at the West Coast Religion Teachers’ Conference. Virtual Host: Burman University, April 2, 2021.


### Additional Resources: Useful Websites

Adventist Development and Relief Agency, www.adra.org

Adventist Peace Fellowship, http://www.adventistpeace.org/

A Rocha, https://arocha.us/whatwedo

Conscience and Justice Council (Adventists, justice, and religious liberty), 
https://cjcouncil.org/resources

Digital Commons @ Andrews University, a service of the James White Library 
https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/

Duke Divinity School, Center for Reconciliation. https://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives/cfr


OneTable, www.onetable.org

Peacemaker Ministries, https://www.peacemakerministries.org/

Point Loma Nazarene University Center for Justice and Reconciliation (San Diego). 
https://www.pointloma.edu/counters-institutes/center-justice-reconciliation

Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute, https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/

The Center for Restorative Justice, University of San Diego. https://www.sandiego.edu/soles/restorative-justice/

The Chalmers Center (a biblical approach to poverty). https://chalmers.org/

The Jubilee Baptist Church, North Carolina. https://www.jubileebaptist.church/

The Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, Seventh-day Adventist Church. https://documents.adventistarchives.org/default.aspx

The Repentance Project. https://repentanceproject.org/

University of Notre Dame, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/

University of San Diego, Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies. https://www.sandiego.edu/peace/institutes/ipj/

Unplug Collaborative, https://www.unplugcollaborative.org/