

**THE HOPE FOR A NEW EARTH? ESCHATOLOGICAL CONSUMMATION
IN SEVENTH -DAY ADVENTIST (ECO)THEOLOGY**

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KEY WORDS

Seventh-day Adventist Church

Sabbath

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New Earth

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Abstract


This study is situated in the intersection between systematic theology and Christian ecotheology. It focuses on eschatology, and more specifically, the hope for a “new earth”, as this is understood in the context of Adventist theology with specific reference to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The research problem that is addressed is whether and to what extent Edward Heppenstall (1901-1994), Norman Richard Gulley (1933-2022), and Fernando Canale (1945-), as leading Seventh-day Adventist theologians, avoid an escapist eschatology in their interpretation of the “new earth” (Belief number 28 of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church)? On this basis, this study critically analysed relevant writings of the three selected theologians. This required a comparison of the three authors to identify and describe the similarities and differences in their views in this regard. The main criterion for assessing their views was how they addressed the critique of an escapist eschatology that is widely found in contemporary Christian ecotheology. This study will contribute to the growth of ecotheology within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition.

DECLARATION

I declare that *The Hope for a New Earth? Eschatological Consummation in Seventh-day (Eco)theology* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Full name ...Siyamthanda Mqhayisa.....

Date.....30/10/2024.....



Signed

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Mayine (Let it Rain).

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my late mother, Nomathamisanqa Constance Mzozoyana -Mqhayisa, to whom I have promised I would never give up on the calling of being a Pastor and a Theologian. I am everything I am because she loved and believed in me.

Bible Abbreviations¹

Book	Abbreviation	Book	Abbreviation
Genesis	Gen	Nahum	Nah
Exodus	Ex	Habakkuk	Hab
Leviticus	Lev	Zephaniah	Zeph
Numbers	Num	Haggai	Hag
Deuteronomy	Deut	Zechariah	Zech
Joshua	Josh	Malachi	Mal
Judges	Judg	Matthew	Matt
Ruth	Ruth	Mark	Mark
1 Samuel	1 Sam	Luke	Luke
2 Samuel	2 Sam	John	John
1 Kings	1 Kin	Acts	Acts
2 Kings	2 Kin	Romans	Rom
1 Chronicles	1 Chr	1 Corinthians	1 Cor
2 Chronicles	2 Chr	2 Corinthians	2 Cor
Ezra	Ezra	Galatians	Gal
Nehemiah	Neh	Ephesians	Eph
Esther	Esth	Philippians	Phil
Job	Job	Colossians	Col
Psalms	Ps	1 Thessalonians	1 Thess
Proverbs	Prov	2 Thessalonians	2 Thess
Ecclesiastes	Eccl	1 Timothy	1 Tim
Song of Songs	Song	2 Timothy	2 Tim
Isaiah	Is	Titus	Titus
Jeremiah	Jer	Philemon	Philem
Lamentations	Lam	Hebrews	Heb
Ezekiel	Ezek	James	James
Daniel	Dan	1 Peter	1 Pet
Hosea	Hos	2 Peter	2 Pet
Joel	Joel	1 John	1 John
Amos	Amos	2 John	2 John
Obadiah	Obad	3 John	3 John
Jonah	Jon	Jude	Jude
Micah	Mic	Revelation	Rev

¹ For this study, I used the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and the New International Version (NIV). The above table was created by Emmanuele Mwale's for his doctoral dissertation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Christian ecotheology can arguably be regarded as both a Christian critique of ecological destruction and an ecological critique of Christianity (Conradie 2020:4). There is also a constructive task to ecotheology. However, this study will focus on one specific critique of the Christian faith, namely that many of its traditions foster an escapist eschatology, the proverbial “pie in the sky when you die”. Eschatology refers to critical reflection on the content and significance of Christian hope and forms one of the core loci in the field of systematic theology. In ecological critiques of Christian eschatology, the question is raised whether Christian hope does not prompt an other-worldly orientation where the focus is on the soul more than the body and heaven more than earth. This is captured in the hope “to go to heaven” one day, leaving behind this “earthly vale of tears”. Therefore, in the face of the current ecological crises associated with climate change, air pollution, deforestation, and so on, the question becomes whether Christian hope includes hope for the earth itself (Conradie 2005:33).

This question was explored extensively through the International Christian Faith and the Earth project (2007-2014), with one of the core themes that focused on how justice can be done to God’s work of creation and salvation. The key clearly lies in eschatological consummation. However, it is also clear that there are widely diverging positions on such consummation in different confessional traditions and theological schools. This study will build on the work done in this project by focusing on one such tradition, namely Seventh-day Adventist theology – where the suspicion of an escapist eschatology is often directed. More specifically, I will explore the understanding of the symbol of the “the new earth” in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as expressed in belief number 28 of the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In order to demarcate the study, I will focus on the views of three leading scholars in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition, namely Edward Heppenstall (1901-1994), Norman Gulley (1933-2023), and Fernando Canale (1945-). The question that will be addressed in this study is, whether and to what extent these three leading Seventh-day Adventist theologians, avoid an escapist eschatology in their interpretation of the symbol of “the new earth”. These scholars do not necessarily address the notion of an escapist eschatology directly and cannot be asked to conform to views imposed by other Christian traditions. However, the question remains how

their views relate to the critique of such an escapist eschatology.

This question will be explored based on a detailed description, critical analysis, and comparison of the primary literature produced by the above mentioned scholars. Where available, secondary literature on these scholars will be considered. Although Seventh-day Adventist theology cannot be reduced to the views of these three respected scholars, this study will contribute to the growth of ecotheology within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition by raising such critical questions from within.

1.2 Context and Relevance of the Study

The emergence of Christian ecotheology is partly due to concerns over global ecological crises. Conradie (2020:4) maintains that Christian ecotheology can arguably be a Christian critique of ecological destruction and an ecological critique of Christianity. Such an environmental critique of Christianity was famously expressed in an essay by Lynn White Jr (1967), who argued that “Christianity is profoundly anthropocentric and that the notion of exercising dominion over nature in medieval Christianity encouraged control over nature, so Christianity remains deeply implicated in ecological destruction” (White 1967:4). Christian ecotheology could indeed be regarded as a response to Lynn White’s essay. In the text, *Christianity and Ecological Theology: A Research Guide* (2006), Ernst Conradie underscores the significance of Christian ecotheology in the following manner.

Ecological theology is an attempt to retrieve the ecological wisdom in Christianity as a response to environmental threats and injustices. At the same time, it is an attempt to reinvestigate, rediscover and renew the Christian tradition in the light of the challenges posed by the environmental crisis. Just as feminist theology engages in a twofold critique, that is, a Christian critique of sexist or patriarchal culture and a feminist critique of Christianity, so ecological theologies offer a Christian critique of the cultural habits underlying ecological destruction and an ecological critique of Christianity. In other words, ecological theology is not only concerned with how Christianity can respond to environmental concerns; it also offers Christianity an opportunity for renewal and reformation (Conradie 2006:3).

Given the contextual nature of Christian ecotheology, it might suffice to note that “Ecotheology is a theology developed to motivate individuals to engage in ecological sustainability. Ecotheology includes systematic theology, environmental ethics, practical theology, and environmental politics. The concept is normative and interdisciplinary” (Tomren 2021:32). This study is therefore situated at the intersection of Christian ecotheology and systematic theology.

1.2.2 Christian Ecotheology and Systematic Theology

Christian ecotheology touches on all the traditional sub-disciplines of Christian theology, including re-reading the biblical texts, revisiting the history of Christianity, examining the content and significance of the Christian faith and a Christian ethos, reflecting on Christian praxis, on the church and its many ministries, on God's mission in church and society, and on the relations between Christianity and other religious traditions. Systematic theology, therefore, forms one crucial dimension of ecotheology, albeit alongside several others. Ecotheology cannot be reduced to creation theology, anthropology (the relationship between human beings and the rest of nature), the ecological impact of human sin, or environmental ethics only. It touches on every aspect of the Christian faith, including God's work of creation (Moltmann 1985), ongoing creation, providence, salvation, the formation of the church (see Ayre & Conradie 2016), its ministries and missions, and the consummation of God's work (see Conradie 2005; Bergmann 2018). It also touches on the person of God, God's transcendence and immanence, the person and work of Jesus Christ (see, e.g., Edwards 1995) and the Holy Spirit (see Moltmann 1992; Bergmann, 2005; Wallace, 1996), and on the doctrine of the Trinity (see Edwards 2006). This study will focus on eschatology, where God's work of creation and salvation come together in the hope of the consummation of God's work.

1.2.3 Seventh-day Adventist Contributions to Ecotheology

There is by now a well-established corpus of literature with contributions from Orthodox and Oriental Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Methodist World Conference, the Baptist Convention, various other Anabaptist churches, as well as some Pentecostal, Charismatic and other independent churches. Christian ecotheology flourishes, especially within the context of the World Council of Churches, and it has made many long-standing contributions. On this basis, the question that begs a definitive answer from this study is what distinct contribution to contemporary Christian ecotheology may be found within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition? Given, that "what is needed is to articulate an ethics of life that is not built on the predominant belief in super-humans who dominate the earth and creation and claim they are given dominion over creation" (LenKaBula 2008:376). The ongoing ecological crises continue to impact "God's creation" in a very deleterious way. On this basis, I contend it is time for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to re-assess its ecological commitments and become more involved in earthkeeping and development projects through its resources and global networks.

Despite the official statements on ecological concerns by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the early 1990s, contributions to ecotheology from Adventist theologians remain limited. For instance, there are no postgraduate theses, monographs, or edited volumes on ecotheology from within the African SDA tradition. According to Ezra Chitando (2020), this is because of “the non-immediacy of many ecological problems; second, the slow and gradual ecological destruction; and third, the realities of complex systems, since environmental problems are highly complex and not easy to simplify (Chitando 2020:3). Nevertheless, it must be conceded that Seventh-day Adventist theologians from various contexts have attempted to draw some attention to the need for the Adventist Church to address and intervene in the ongoing ecological crises, through its global resources and networks. However, labelling such contributions as Seventh-day Adventist ecotheology is still challenging. Nevertheless, this study, therefore, seeks to contribute to the growth of Seventh-day Adventist ecotheology by exploring essential doctrine, namely the hope of the new earth.

1.3 Four Symbols in Christian Eschatology

Christian eschatology refers to a critical reflection on the content and significance of Christian hope and forms one of the core loci in systematic theology. Given the long history of reflection on Christian hope, it is impossible to offer a quick overview of discourse on Christian eschatology. Traditionally, four clusters of symbols of Christian hope have been explored, namely the hope for the coming of God’s reign “on earth as it is in heaven”; the hope for the coming (or “return”) of Christ “to judge the living and the dead”; thus for a verdict that will bring justice to the victims of history; the hope for the resurrection of the body; and the hope for eternal life, for the life of the age to come, symbolized by categories such as “heaven”, the “new Jerusalem” and a “new earth”. This study will focus on the fourth of these clusters, especially the notion of a new earth and the danger that such a hope could be understood in an escapist way.

1.4 Conflicting Approaches to Eschatology

For this study, it is vital to consider various eschatological approaches that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries, especially in a Western context, where such views spread globally. Eschatology in the context of ecotheology can only be understood against this background. It may suffice to list such approaches here, more or less in chronological order:²

² I give a more detailed explanation of these conflicting approaches to eschatology in chapter 3.

- Consistent eschatology
- Dialectical eschatology
- Realized eschatology
- Existential eschatology
- Evolutionary eschatology
- Theology of hope
- Liberation eschatology
- Eschatology in black theology

1.4.2 Eschatology in the Context of Christian Ecotheology

Despite the conflicting variety of constructive contributions to eschatology in ecotheology, there is an overwhelming consensus that Christian hope should not be understood in an escapist way. This builds upon the Marxist critique that the hope to go to heaven one day functions like the opium of/for the people, namely, to offer a reward in heaven that keeps the working class sedated from the misery, oppression, and alienation that they experience in their daily lives. Accordingly, the symbol of heaven functions like the proverbial “pie in the sky when you die by and by”. Such escapism diverts attention away from this life, this earth, and the challenges faced in the here and now. One may arguably identify the following four distinct approaches to eschatology in the context of Christian ecotheology:

- Theology of hope
- Evolutionary/process theology
- Feminist theology and
- The critique of longitudinal eschatology and the emphasis on latitudinal eschatology

1.5 Demarcation and Statement of the Research Problem

This study will contribute to discourse on eschatology in Christian ecotheology from the perspective of Adventist theology and, more specifically, eschatology in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

1.5.2 The History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a broadly Protestant denomination distinguished from

other traditions by its sabbath observance and emphasis on Jesus Christ's imminent second coming.³ It is governed by its General Conference, which comprises representatives from various Unions (e.g., the Southern African Union) and several Conferences within those Unions (Abdi & Pardamean 2018:277).⁴

In the book *Anticipating the Advent: A Brief History of the Seventh-day Adventists* (1993), George Knight offers a historical account of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He notes that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was formally established in 1863 by forming a General Conference, following an agreement on the name in 1860 and a series of local conferences. On this point, Richard Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf in the book entitled *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (2000), note that the roots of the SDA Church can be traced back to the “Great Awakening Revival”, which was based on the preaching of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.⁵ William Miller (1782-1849) was a Baptist lay preacher who had turned away from Deism to a more traditional Christianity with a particular interest in eschatology. Accordingly, William Miller was an essential precursor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Gordon 2000:24). To illustrate this point, Schwarz and Greenleaf (2000:23) cite William Miller's analysis of Daniel 8, which advanced a prediction amongst himself and his followers, that Jesus Christ would return on 21 March 1843. Nevertheless, when Jesus Christ did not return in 1843, one of his followers, Samuel Snow, reinterpreted William Miller's calculations and concluded that Jesus Christ would return in October 1844. When Jesus Christ did not return in 1844 either, a “Great Disappointment” transpired amongst the adherents of the Millerite movement. Phumlani Majola (2014:47) notes as a result of this Great Disappointment, the Millerite movement broke into the following six groups:

- Some members of the movement ended up rejecting Christianity and religion.
- Some returned to their traditions and labeled the Millerite movement as “Satanic”.
- Some concluded that Christ did return in 1844, but only in a spiritual sense.

³ The idea embedded in the name Seventh-day Adventist presents a tension of this earthly worldly and otherworldly orientation. I discuss this briefly in Chapter 8.

⁴ The General Conference meets every five years with the purpose of voting on global leadership, setting direction for the next five years, and voting changes to the constitution, fundamental beliefs, and the church manual.

⁵ Other Adventist historians hold are of the view that the “Great Awakening Revival” was not based on the preaching of the 2nd Coming of Christ. In their view the confusion comes from historians identifying a “First Great Awakening” in the 18th century (linked to names like Jonathan Edwards) and a later “Second Great Awakening” in the early 19th century (also linked to reform movements like temperance, abolition, and woman's rights). However, it is true that the Second Great Awakening was a precursor to the rise of Millerite Adventism.

- Some argued that Miller's and Snow's calculations were incorrect but still maintained that Jesus Christ is to come "soon" without stipulating a date for that.
- Some acknowledged that they were wrong in their calculations but continued to set new dates.
- Some believed that Snow's calculations were correct, but that the nature of the expected event was misunderstood: For according to them, Jesus Christ was not coming back to earth on the said date but was instead moving from the holy to the holiest of the heavenly sanctuary.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church emerged from the post-Millerite movement, which maintained that the mathematical calculations leading to 22 October 1884 were correct. Still, the expected event was incorrect (Knight 2000:23). In their view, on the said date, Jesus Christ was moving to the holy of the most holy of the heavenly sanctuary. It is important to note that the move of Christ from the holy to the holiest of the heavenly sanctuary is based on the interpretation of Daniel 8:14, which speaks of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. This cleansing within the Seventh-day Adventist Church is often called the investigative judgement (Bliss 1853:2; Gordon 2000:11; White 1868:27-28; Bates 1868:300).

According to the official Seventh-day Adventist website, as of 2021, the SDA Church consisted of 21 912,161 members in 230 countries and on every continent (<https://www.adventist.org/>). Within South Africa, the historical roots of the Seventh-day Adventist Church date as far back as the late 1870s. In this regard, Sokupa (2015) notes that the first SDA congregation in South Africa was formed in Kimberly in 1887 under the leadership of two American missionaries, C.L. Boyd and D.A. Robinson (2015:170). The General Conference commissioned these missionaries based on the interests of prospective church members, namely Pieter Wessels and George van Druten. From its humble beginnings in Kimberly, the Seventh-day Adventist Church spread to other parts of the country and continent (Du Preez 2010:17).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's doctrinal and structural development is associated with two of its founders, Joseph Bates and James White. The latter's wife, Ellen Gould White, is regarded as the prophetess of the SDA Church and through her writings, played a formative role in creating an ideal Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle.

1.5.3 Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology

Seventh-day Adventist eschatology is influenced by circumstances of its origin, namely the Great Awakening Revival and the Great Disappointment. In his definition of Seventh-day

Adventist eschatology, Angel Rodriguez notes that Seventh-day Adventist eschatology is an exploration and exposition of biblical apocalyptic eschatology, which is based on a historicist interpretation of biblical prophecy and is characterized by a premillennial understanding, namely that the expected Second Coming of Jesus Christ will take place before the start of a thousand years of peace (Rodriguez 2021:x). Undeniably, eschatology plays a significant role in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Note that eschatology in the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is addressed under the section “The Doctrines of Restoration”. In their chronological order, they are listed as follows:

- Christ Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary (24)
- The Second Coming of Christ (25)
- Death and Resurrection (26)
- The Millennium and the End of Sin (27)
- The New Earth (28)

1.5.4 Seventh-day Adventist Discourse on “The New Earth”

Given that this study focuses on the image of the new earth, it is crucial to briefly outline the current discourse as maintained in SDA eschatology. There is a vast corpus of literature from Adventist theologians and laity on the doctrine of the new earth. Notable contributions in this regard include Ellen White’s *The Great Controversy* (1911); Roy Isreal McGarrell’s *The Historical Development of Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology* (1990); Gerald Damsteegt’s *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (1977); and Daugeuk Nam’s *The New Earth and the Eternal Kingdom* (2000).

The recent volume by Elias Brasil de Souza, Dennis Kaizer, Rachel Wells, and Laszlo Gallusz (2021), *Eschatology from an Adventist Perspective*, outlines various eschatological approaches from an Adventist theological lens. Some contributors agree that the hope for the new earth stands as a promise that the earth will become our “eternal home”. It is important to note that within the discourse on the new earth within the Adventist tradition lies diverging views of the earth on the two core notions embedded in the symbol of the image of the new earth. For instance, one school of thought argues that there is continuity between this earth and the new earth. Thus probing “an active human role in rejecting the greed and dominance of the world’s order and its ecological impact” (Kiel 2017:26). However, it must be conceded that this school of thought is of the perception that the continuity between this earth and its eschatological destiny (new earth) will be given by God and not primarily by human actions.

The second school of thought argues that this earth, as we have it, has no future. This means

all actions and interventions in combatting injustices are futile. This earth is deemed as a throw-away world that is destined to be annihilated (ironically, this school of thought is firmly maintained by Adventists in Africa where injustice and inequality thrive). Such an interpretation of the new earth has often been deemed as escapist eschatology, which is critiqued heavily by many thinkers and theologians (Adventist and non-Adventist theologians alike). One of the critical problems of such an interpretation of the new earth is that it views all social problems as signs of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In his article “*On Human Finitude and Eternal Life*” (2005), Ernst Conradie argues:

Such an eschatology begs the question whether there is any solace for the victims of the past. What about those who are not only poor, oppressed and victimized but who know that they will probably die as such. What about those who have been brutalized, raped, tortured and murdered? Once death intervenes the injustices of the past can never be undone. Moreover, if one has lost certain opportunities for good, if one’s best years have been ruined through pain or injustice, this can never be given back. If one has lost one’s house, home and roots through the group areas legislation under apartheid in South Africa, such homelessness cannot be reversed by obtaining a new house through restitution processes decades later (Conradie 2005:1).

Such a critique is also maintained by James Cone, in his seminal text *Black Theology and Black Power* (1989), he notes:

Eschatology means joining the world and making it what it ought to be. It means that Christians look to the future not as a reward or possible punishment for evildoers but as a means of making them dissatisfied with the present. His only purpose for looking to a distant past or unrealized future is that both disclose the ungodliness of the present. Eschatology does not mean merely the salvation of the soul, the individual rescue of evil from the world, and comfort for the troubled conscience, but also the realization of the eschatological hope of justice and peace for all creation (Cone 1989:83).

In the face of the ongoing ecological crises, the question is how can the Seventh-day Adventist tradition avoid an eschatology that emphasises redemption from the earth and not redemption of the earth?

1.5.5 Positionality as the Researcher of this Study

I must introduce myself as a researcher, as this will clarify some of my comments in this study. I am a third-generation Seventh-day Adventist by choice and conviction. I completed my undergraduate degree (Bachelor of Arts in Theology) at Helderberg College of Higher Education, a Seventh-day Adventist institution.⁶ Furthermore, I have served as a church elder

6 Helderberg College of Higher Education is located in Somerset West, Cape Town, South Africa. This is the only Seventh-day Adventist higher education institution that offers theology in South Africa. As a result, in order to be trained as a

and bi-vocational Pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Like all other Seventh-day Adventists, I accept that some fundamental beliefs are the teaching of the Bible (cf. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 2015:162). On this basis, I need to note that for this study, I will explore the doctrine of eschatology in general, and particularly the image of the new earth without any restrictions/reservations. Suffice to note that whatever conclusion I arrive at would be my responsibility as the researcher and would have no implications or bearing on the Seventh-day Adventist Church, except that the findings may probe more discourse on ecotheology and eschatology.

In my view, there is a dire need for Seventh-day Adventist eschatology to be studied in a transparent and scholarly way, given the current ecological crises, which have a deleterious impact on the poor and the earth. This study therefore seeks to contribute to Seventh-day Adventist ecotheology from a South African perspective.

1.5.6 Motivation for the Three Selected Authors

This study will focus on the contributions on the image of the “new earth” by leading Seventh-day Adventist theologians, namely Edward Heppenstall, Norman Gulley, and Fernando Canale. Suffice to note that all these three theologians are from the Global North and are all white males. I note this because, amongst Seventh-day Adventist theologians from the Global South, there is a minimal contribution to Adventist eschatology and theology in general. To this effect, Tankiso Letseli inquired:

There is, seemingly, a faint African Adventist voice in theological issues. Why? Are African Adventists afraid? Afraid of what? Of erring in their theologizing? It would still be better to theologize and err, even to the point of being labeled a heretic - than to be silent when a platform has been created to air one’s views. We should also recognize the voices of Africans in the Diaspora, including African Americans, whose contribution cannot be underestimated (Letseli 2017:131).

Such lack of contribution to theology and Christian ecotheology, particularly by African Adventist theologians, robs the Seventh-day Adventist community and the world at large of an African perspective on the current discourse on Christian ecotheology. One may mention that Africans “are rich with well-thought-through and pragmatic proverbs to unravel riddles and difficult issues. There is a need to document theology and knowledge rather than to keep it at an oral level. We must tell a story in our understanding and couch it in our languages and context. An African Adventist perspective remains a rare commodity in the free market of

pastor in South Africa in the Seventh-day Adventist context, one has to study and complete an undergraduate degree in Helderberg College of Higher Education.

discussions and debates” (Letseli 2017: 150). This could be why there is a lack of urgency in addressing environmental issues within the context of Adventism in Africa despite “Africa being severely affected by the environmental crises” (Chitando 2020:3).

The motivation behind these three selected authors is that they represent three views on the image of the new earth that exist within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Firstly, Edward Heppenstall (1901-1994) represents the group that suggests that the current ecological crisis is a sign of the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. In his view, there is no continuity between this earth and the new earth, and he leans intensely on the belief that this earth is just a throw-away world destined to be destroyed. Thus, his interpretation of the new earth offers no hope for the earth. Such an interpretation exhibits escapist notions of eschatology, of which Seventh-day Adventist theology is often suspected and accused of by non-Seventh-day Adventist theologians. As a result, Edward Heppenstall (1901-1994) in this study, represents Adventists who maintain that in the face of the current social and ecological challenges associated with poverty, climate change, air pollution, inequality, and so forth, humanity should do nothing besides wait for the Second Advent of Jesus Christ as it is the only hope that justice will be offered to victims of injustice.

Secondly, the selection of Norman Gulley (1933-2022) is influenced by the fact that he represents the group of Seventh-day Adventists who attempts to hold the two core notions embedded in the image of the new earth, which is a prophetic transformation of this earth (annihilation) and its renewal. This view is not uniquely Seventh-day Adventist or new in the intersections between Systematic theology and Christian Ecotheology. For instance, Bible scholars and theologians, such as Micah Kiel, in the book *Apocalyptic Ecology: The Book of Revelation, the Earth and the Future* (2017), explore such a perspective and argue:

A both/and approach will prove extremely helpful in finding an apocalyptic ecology. For instance, the continuity that John envisions empowers the inhabitants of the earth. Those whose names are written in the book will be spared from destruction and find life in the new creation. Such continuity is essential for any ethics to be wrung from the apocalypse. If there is nothing we can do now to change our fate in the future, then there is no right moral action. On the other hand, we must recognize that the new earth cannot come into existence without the dismantling of this earth. To speak of the new earth only in terms of renewal and continuity makes it easy to dismiss how radically new it is. The new earth created by God is ecologically unrecognizable to us. The new earth is continuous but also a break from our world today (Kiel 2017:26).

Norman Gulley's (1933-2022) interpretations of the image of the new earth explore the view that the idea of the annihilation and renewal of this earth ought to be held together. In his view,

such an approach helps empower humanity to act as earth-keepers and humbles humanity into realizing that it is God who will create a qualitatively new earth. As Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart argue, “The continuity between this earth and its eschatological destiny will be given by God in and through the discontinuity of God's creative act”(Bauckham & Hart 1999:28). Gulley’s view as one of the leading Systematic Theologians of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has impacted my theological thinking since my undergraduate years. As such, I have always wanted to examine his work in light of ongoing theological debates.

Lastly, Fernando Canale's (1945-) approach to eschatology is unique. For instance, in his view, the current approach to eschatology and the interpretation of the new earth held by Seventh-day Adventists should not be thrown away. Instead, it should be “deconstructed” to intensify the need for Adventists to be “eschatological remnants”. Hence, he understands the new earth in light of the notion of renewal and continuity of this earth, as maintained by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The views of these three selected scholars on their approach to eschatology and interpretation of the image of the new earth represent the diverging views held by different members from different contexts of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It might suffice to mention that these three Adventist theologians generally approach eschatology and interpret the image of the new earth as premised on the official Seventh-day Adventist Church approach to eschatology, which reads as follows:

God has always investigated before taking action, demonstrating His willingness to forgive and giving each one of us a chance to be part of His plan. We saw this to be true with the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel, the exodus from Egypt and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Before Jesus’ Second Coming, He is investigating the entire earth, everyone who has ever lived, every choice every human being has made. God wants it to be clear to us, and to the watching universe, that not one person will experience a fate they did not choose.

Christ’s return is near, meaning the final judgment of humanity, the destruction of the wicked, the end of death and sin, and the redemption of those who accept the gift of God’s salvation. And that’s not the end of the story. We will enjoy a millennium in heaven and the restoration of our earth to the paradise it once was, for us to enjoy for eternity while communing face to face with God (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015:178).

Having offered a brief motivation for selecting the three authors of this study, I am now in a better position to offer their biographies.

1.6 Edward Heppenstall

Edward Heppenstall (1901-1994) was born in England. He graduated with a BA at Emmanuel Missionary College (Michigan, USA), majoring in English literature, science, and theology. He completed a master's degree at the University of Michigan, where he specialized in Semantics and History. While working as a Lecturer at La Sierra College, he earned a PhD in Religious Education from the University of Southern California (1951). From 1940 to 1955, he served as a Professor of Theology at La Sierra University; from 1955 to 1960, he was Professor of Theology at Potomac University (a forerunner of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University). From 1960 to 1966 he was the Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology at the Seminary at Andrews University. From 1966 to 1976, he joined Loma Linda University, where he served as a Professor in Theology. He had also served as a pastor and youth director within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, specifically in the Michigan Conference.

Edward Heppenstall has contributed to the Seventh-day Adventist Church through periodicals: *The Ministry*, *The Signs of the Times* and *The Times*. His views on the new earth are relevant to this study and are depicted in the above mentioned periodicals. However, Heppenstall's most prominent work on eschatology is *Our High Priest: Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (1972). In this book, he discusses the themes of investigative judgement, the heavenly sanctuary, and the new earth – which is particularly of interest to this study.

Heppenstall's relevance for Adventism is indicated by a compilation of essays in his honour, *The Stature of Christ: Essays in Honor of Edward Heppenstall* (Carner & Stanhiser, 1970). Such secondary material on Heppenstall does not include anything on the new earth.

1.7 Norman Gulley

Norman Richard Gulley (1933-2022) was born in England. He obtained a BA degree from the Southern Missionary College in 1955, a Master of Arts degree from the Potomac University in 1956, and a second master's in divinity from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in 1958. He obtained a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland in 1970. Gulley has had various teaching positions in Japan, the Philippines, and United States. He taught Systematic theology at Southern Adventist University from 1978 until his retirement. He also served as executive secretary of the Adventist Theological Society (1989-1991) and as vice president (1993).

Norman Gulley's four volume magnum opus on Systematic Theology includes: *God as Trinity*

(2011), *Creation, Christ, Salvation* (2012), *Prolegomena* (2003), and *The Church and The Last Things* (2017). *The Church and Last Things* is of special interest for this study. It includes sections on the second advent of Christ and the millennium and deals explicitly with the theme of the new earth. The following books are also relevant for this study: *Christ Is Coming: A Christ-Centered Approach to The Last Day Events* (1998), *Satan Trojan Horse: God's End Time Victory* (2004). In addition, an article entitled "The Battle of Biblical Eschatology in the End-Time" (1990) is also significant for this study.

Gulley has been listed as a noteworthy theologian by Marquis Who's Who. There is a Festschrift in his honour, *The Cosmic Battle for Planet Earth: Essays in Honor of Norman R. Gulley* (Moskala & Du Preez, 2003).

1.8 Fernando Canale

Fernando Canale (1945-) was born in Argentina. He obtained a Bachelor of Theology (1966) and a Bachelor in Philosophy of Education and Psychology (1970) at River Plate College. He earned a master's degree in philosophy (1978) from the Catholic University of Santa Fé in Argentina. He earned a PhD in Religion (1983) at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. He was Professor of Theology at the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University from 1985 to 2013.

Canale is the author of the following books: *Basic Elements of Christian Theology* (2001), *Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (2017), *Vision and Mission: How a theological vision drives the Mission of the Emerging Remnant* (2017), and of more significance for this study are several articles, including "End Time and Salvation" (2013), "A Closer Look at The Adventist Mind" (2012), "On the Future of Adventism" (2007), "On Being Remnant" (2013), and "From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology" (2006).

In 2013, Canale received the Siegfried Horn Award for excellence in research. As one of the leading Adventist Theologians, a Festschrift was published, *Scripture and Philosophy: Essays Honoring the Work and Vision of Fernando Luis Canale* (Arrais, Bergland & Younker 2016).

1.9 Statement and Explanation of the Research Problem

Based on the discussion above, the research problem that will be investigated in this study can now be formulated in the following way: To what extent do Edward Heppenstall, Norman Gulley, and Fernando Canale, as leading Seventh-day Adventist theologians, avoid an escapist eschatology in their interpretation of "The New Earth" (belief number 28 of the 28

Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church)?

This study will require a careful description and critical analysis of the views of the three selected theologians on belief number 28 of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This will require a comparison of the three authors to identify and describe the similarities and differences in their views in this regard. The main criterion for assessing their views is how they address the critique of an escapist eschatology that is widely found in contemporary Christian ecotheology. Although they may not address this explicitly, it would be possible to reconstruct the implications of their respective positions in this regard. The phrase “to what extent” is significant here. The question is whether these authors recognize this critique of an escapist eschatology, whether they concur with it, and if so, how they understand this critique, whether they manage to overcome this danger in their constructive positions and whether they do so consistently?

1.10 Research Procedure

To investigate the research problem as stated above the following logical steps were considered, leading to three background chapters:

The first step will be to introduce the study and to clarify the research methodology. This will be documented in Chapter 1. The second step will be to situate the Seventh-day Adventist Church within the context of contemporary Christian ecotheology. This will require a description of its ecological ethos, praxis, and spirituality and, more specifically a discussion of its contributions to ecotheology in the full spectrum of academic disciplines that this entails. This will be documented in Chapter 2.

The third step will require a literature survey of contributions that have been made in the context of contemporary Christian ecotheology on eschatology in general and the symbol of the new earth (the new creation) in particular. This will be documented in Chapter 3. The fourth step will offer a historical overview of eschatology in general, and the symbol of the new earth in particular, as this has been developed in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This will be documented in Chapter 4.

Against this background, the study will then explore the positions of the three selected theologians on the interpretation of “the new earth” (belief number 28 of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church). It will situate their contributions, by carefully describing and analysing their views, and then assess whether and to what extent they manage to avoid escapist eschatology. The same pattern will be used for Edward Heppenstall, Norman

Gulley, and Fernando Canale. This will be documented in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

A further brief step will require a comparison of the similarities and differences in emphasis in the views of Edward Heppenstall, Norman Gulley, and Fernando Canale on the new earth. This step will be based on material collected for chapters 5, 6, and 7. Moreover, a final step will be of a more constructive nature, namely to discuss the significance of this study for a) discourse within the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the new earth; and b) the contribution that Adventism can make to wider discourse on eschatology in Christian ecotheology (given its critique of escapism). This will be documented in Chapter 8.

Chapter 2

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and its Contribution to Ecotheology

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced this study as situated within the intersections of Christian ecotheology and Systematic theology, focusing on Seventh-day Adventist eschatology and more specifically, the hope for the new earth. Accordingly, this chapter will discuss the contributions that have been/can be made in the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Christian ecotheology, given the current ecological crises. In order to assess Seventh-day Adventist ecotheology a careful analysis of the doctrines, ethos, and spirituality of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is required. Hence, this chapter begins with a brief outline of the significance of the 28 fundamental beliefs held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (see section 2.2). Secondly, I will discuss the distinct contributions made by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in addressing the ongoing ecological crises (see section 2.3). Thirdly, I will discuss how two Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs, namely (i) Christian behaviour and the (ii) Sabbath, carry an ecological ethos and praxis (see section 2.4). Lastly, I will offer some concluding remarks.

2.2 Brief History of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs

The Seventh-day Adventist Church “accept[s] the Bible as their only creed and hold[s] certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures”. The history of these fundamental beliefs dates back to 1872 when the “Declaration of the Fundamental Principles”, taught and practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church was published by its General Conference⁷. However, these doctrines/fundamental beliefs were systematically developed from 1849-1889 and were already formulated before the formal inception of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Upon the inception of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, only 5 such Principles were in existence. It was in 1931 when these “Principles” were renamed to the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Campbell 2016:99). Following major revisions at the 1980 General Conference, two beliefs on lifestyle, namely on “Baptism” and “Christian behaviour” were added, while a further statement on “Growing in Christ” was

⁷ The General Conference (GC) is the highest form of governance system in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The GC has elections that takes place every five years to elect leaders who will lead the church. It is in this General Conference session that amendments are often made to the church manual and fundamental beliefs.

added at the 2015 General Conference (Campbell 2016:98-111).⁸ Currently, these Fundamental Beliefs are divided into twenty-eight paragraphs. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, the significance of these fundamental beliefs is explicated in the following manner:

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teachings of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truths or find better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word (The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015:162).

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these fundamental beliefs are a “synopsis of faith and identity” (Nkuna 2021:12). Furthermore, Donkor (2006), notes that these 28 fundamental beliefs function in three ways in the SDA Church, namely: (i) they describe the content of what Seventh-day Adventists believe in, (ii) they reflect a consensus within the SDA Church on truth, (iii) and they ground the mission of the church (Donkor 2006:17). Accordingly, the Seventh-day Adventist Church maintain a protestant “conviction” of sola scriptura (the Bible alone), so that the 28 fundamental beliefs reflect how the Seventh-day Adventist Church interprets scripture. Currently, in the church manual of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these fundamental beliefs are categorized in the following order: (1) God, (2) Man, (3) salvation, (4) the church, (5) daily Christian life, and (6) restoration.⁹

Having offered this brief historical overview of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I am now in a better place to present the contributions made by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to ecotheology.

2.3 Seventh-day Adventist Contributions to Christian Ecotheology

The current ecological crisis, associated with devastating floods from deforested hills, loss of species, land degradation, depletion of energy resources, climate change, and so forth calls for a theological reflection and intervention from all Christian traditions, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the foreword of the edited volume by Kapya J Koama entitled: *Christian Care in Christian Mission* (2015), Thabo Makgoba notes that: “The ramifications of our ecological crises present the most urgent moral issue of our day, and time is of the essence in addressing it. We cannot claim to love God while watching the earth being destroyed”

⁸ The 1980 statement voted at the Dallas GC session, was a major rewrite led by Seminary Professors including Fritz Guy and Larry Geraty. It was the first statement of Fundamental Beliefs formally adopted by a vote of the GC in session

⁹ See Seventh-day Adventist website for a detailed explanation on categorisation of these fundamental beliefs.

(Makgoba 2015: xii). Considering that the current ecological crises have had a profoundly harmful impact on the world, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a moral obligation and responsibility to intervene in the current environmental crises. Ezra Chitando (2020), reflecting on the ecological crises from an “African perspective”, furthers this point and argues that: “To ask God to intervene, without calling upon human beings to take corrective action, is to renege on responsibility” (2020:10). However, Celia-Deane Drummond, cautions us that we must “strike a balance between exaggerating these ecological threats as total devastation (apocalypse) and a pretense that more technology will solve all ecological problems (Drummond 1996:1). Thus, I contend that Christian ecotheology has to be contextual taking its cue from how we have treated the environment in the past, present and how we will treat it in the future. In this regard, Ernst Conradie (2006) argues as follows that Christian ecotheology is indeed a contextual theology:

Ecological theology may be regarded as the next wave of contextual theology. It joins liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, womanist theology, and various Indigenous theologies in the quest for a theology that can respond to the challenges of our time. While all theologies reflect the contexts within which they are situated, contextual theologies are, for better or for worse, attempts to articulate and address their social contexts self-consciously and explicitly (Conradie 2006:1).

Elsewhere in his essay entitled “*The Four Tasks OF Christian Ecotheology: Revisiting the Current Debate*” (2020), he notes that:

Christian ecotheology offers a dual critique, namely both an ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological destruction. Without a critique of Christianity, it becomes an apologetic exercise that overlooks the need for a radical ecological reformation of Christianity and merely reiterates human responsibility towards the environment through notions of stewardship or priesthood. Without a Christian critique of ecological destruction, ecotheology loses its ability to offer any distinct contribution to wider debates. Ecotheology then becomes nothing more than one branch of “religion and ecology” and cannot avoid the traps of self-secularization (Conradie 2020:3).

Such an ecological critique of Christianity was famously expressed in an essay by Lynn White Jr (1967) , who argued that Christianity is deeply anthropocentric, and that the notion of exercising dominion over nature in medieval Christianity encouraged control over nature so that Christianity remains deeply implicated in ecological destruction (White 1967:1207). Nevertheless, Christian ecotheology could be regarded as a response to Lynn White’s essay. Accordingly, most Christian traditions have contributed to Christian ecotheology through various means. The significant question that begs an answer in this chapter is: What distinct

contribution to contemporary Christian ecotheology may be found within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition? During the early 90s, the Seventh-day Adventist Church issued official statements in the face of various environmental problems. It might suffice to outline these statements briefly in chronological order.

- Caring for Creation—A statement on the environment (1992): This statement emphatically emphasized the notion of the world/earth as God’s creation that should be loved and cared for.
- Environmental Statement (1995): This statement noted that the ecological crises that have befallen the earth were/are a consequence of human greed and the refusal to live a simple life.
- A statement on environmental stewardship (1996): The statement advanced similar ideals as the second statement.

Despite the minimal contribution to Christian ecotheology, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, like all denominations, has a significant role to play in the current ecotheology discourse. On this point, in the year 2008, the former General Conference President Jan Paulsen encouraged more discourse on ecotheology. Although such a call was made by the then President of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, no institution, department, or leader has been appointed to address this issue as yet.

It is worth noting that there have been some recent scholarly interventions by Seventh-day Adventist theologians in this regard. For instance, Norman Gulley, one of the leading Seventh-day Adventist theologians, in his book *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation* (2012) writes briefly about ecotheology and the ecological crises. He suggests that in the face of the current ecological turmoil, a “biblical ecology” is needed (Gulley 2012:105). He refers to the following biblical texts: Col. 1:15-20; John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:6; Eph. 1:9-10; Heb. 1:2-3; and Rom. 8. At the heart of his proposed “biblical ecology” is the care that God has for all His creatures in the world which Christians should mirror. On this basis, Gulley (2012:105-106) maintains that ecotheology should be grounded in Jesus Christ as the Creator and Redeemer of the cosmos. He argues that redemption is pivotal and does not benefit humans only but all of creation. However, he adds that: “Restoration of humans and all creation includes more than this world” (Gulley 2012:106) – which indicates the significance of eschatology within the SDA tradition.

In his dissertation titled “Toward an Eco-Stewardship Ministry: Communicating Environmental Values in The Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Korea” (2011), Young Seok Cha develops a theoretical and practical framework for implementing a ministry of ecological

stewardship for Seventh-day Adventist churches in Korea and ultimately to cultivate an environmental consciousness among Seventh-day Adventist Church members. In this regard, he suggests that ecotheology within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Korea should be grounded on eco-stewardship ministry, which incorporates "education" as an approach to creating an awareness of the importance of eco-stewardship based on the environmentally related messages of the Adventist Church.¹⁰ Interestingly, contributions by Seventh-day Adventist theologians from Africa remain limited because there are no postgraduate theses, monographs, or edited volumes on ecotheology from within the SDA tradition.

Sivge Tonstad, in his unpublished conference paper entitled: Covid-19: Is a Crisis of Ecology- Is It Also a Crisis of (Biblical) Hermeneutics? (2021) notes that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is earth-oriented in its ethos. However, such ethos, spirituality, and theology have not yet been fully expanded in an ecological sense. In this regard he notes:

Seventh-day Adventists are interested in the earth, but has the interest brought benefits to ecology? Our focus has been on whether the earth was created, when, and how long it took to make it. These are worthwhile interests, but do they benefit the earth? The age of the earth in the Adventist community mattered more than the ache of the earth, and the priority persists even as the groaning of non-human creation gets louder and more insistent. It persists, I say, even though the Bible does not specify precisely when the earth was created. What it does, by contrast, is to prescribe our duty to care for the earth (Tonstad 2021:9-10).

Given this ecological responsibility, it is crucial to note and emphasise that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not endorse any unique position on Christian ecotheology. Still, the theological/doctrinal views of the Adventist Church may offer some distinct perspectives in this regard. To demonstrate that some doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church may contribute to ecotheological discourse, I will consider two fundamental beliefs: The Seventh-day Adventist health message and the sabbath. I will not do a theological or biblical exposition of these two fundamental beliefs. Instead, I will reflect on how, considering the current ecological demise, these two fundamental beliefs can be a wagon that the Seventh-day Adventist Church can utilise to show solidarity with our ecological counterparts.

2.4.1 The Significance of the Seventh-day Adventist Health Message

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is distinguished not only by its eschatological emphasis on

¹⁰ In Helderberg College of Higher Education, ecotheology was offered not as an academic module per se but part of a practical aspect of certain modules. For instance, we would be required to do some agricultural work within the campus and that would encompass what we understood then as ecotheology.

the Second Advent of Jesus Christ and sabbath observance but also for its commitment to promoting a healthy lifestyle. This is unequivocally articulated in a statement by the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference, which posits that “the health reform and teaching of health and temperance are inseparable of the church’s mission and message” (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015:168). Currently, the Seventh-day Adventist health message is subsumed under the church’s fundamental belief 22: Christian behaviour, which underscores the significance of a healthy lifestyle in Christian living. The following is an excerpt:

We are called to be godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. For the Spirit to recreate the character of our Lord in us, we involve ourselves only in those things that will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015:168).

According to this excerpt, Christian behaviour entails a lifestyle characterised by a vegetarian diet, daily exercise, and abstinence from alcohol and tobacco. On this point, Rachel Wells, in her essay entitled “Why care for the earth If it is going to burn? in *Eschatology and Ecology* (2021), suggests that “Seventh-day Adventists have a head start in conservation by strongly encouraging a vegetarian diet. A plant-based diet is one of the very best things humans can do for animals. One vegan saves the lives of at least ninety-five animals per year” (Wells 2021:23). In examining the Seventh-day Adventist's emphasis on dietary habits, Sivge Tonstad (2021) notes:

Food choices have a role in Adventist theology and practice, ranging from the observance of Old Testament dietary laws to preference for plant-based food, the former an ethical obligation for Adventists all over the world, the latter optional, and the choice of a minority. The hermeneutic grounding these choices is either obedience to a still-binding prescription or personal health advantages. The reason, conspicuously, is not ecological. Should it be? Or rather, shouldn't it be? Food production and food choices are possibly the most important determinants of global warming (Tonstad 2021:6).

Accordingly, a vegetarian diet is indeed a first crucial step in caring for creation. Seventh-day

Adventists, through decades, have understood this through the many writings of Ellen White on this subject. For instance, in the book *The Ministry of Health and Healing* (1948), she argues, "Think of the cruelty to animals that meat eating involves, and its effects on those that inflict and those who behold it. How it destroys the tenderness with which we should regard these creatures of God (White 1948:47). This is further expressed in the *Seventh-day Adventist's Believe volume* (1988), in which it states that "by abstaining from unclean foods, God's people demonstrate their gratefulness, for their redemption, from the corrupt unclean world (Seventh-day Adventist's Believe 1988:283). On this point, Joshua Mendez (2016) notes:

By grounding the health message in the ethical, affirming a vegetarian diet as a crucial element of Christian behavior is a powerful first step in a relational model of Creation that abandons the species, anthropocentric confines. The health message lures us into a space that transforms the pre-existing hierarchies between human creatures and animals by suggesting a relational component that extends individual moral actions beyond human subjectivity (Mendez 2016:4).

Despite the Seventh-day Adventist emphasis on diet and healthy living, the ecotheological expression that might be found in this doctrine/ethos has not yet been sufficiently discussed/explored. On this point, Sivge Tonstad (2021) suggests that "the traditional Seventh-day Adventist health message should be explored not only to address dietary habits but also to emphasise ecological intervention that may come from the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Tonstad 2021:3). Thus, I contend, a closer look at the Seventh-day Adventist health message may promote theological and ethical commitment to caring for God's creation.

Suffice to note that the Seventh-day Adventist health message is not only concerned with dietary habits but also addresses an "irreducible spiritual dimension" (Mendez 2016:2). This is expressed in the call to abandon living in cities and opt to live in the outskirts of cities. At the heart of this call is the realization that: "one of the causes of the ongoing ecological crises is overpopulation caused by urbanization" (Abdi and Pardamean 2018:283). To further this point, Abdi and Pardamean (2018) observe that "cities are often health hazards. This is associated with visible diseases, foul air, impure food, impure water, overcrowding, unhealthy living conditions" (Abdi and Pardamean 2018:284). Hence, Ellen White argues that: "It was never the intention of God that people should be crowded in cities, huddled together in terraces and tenants (White 1946:3). According to Wells, living on the outskirts of the city grounds humanity into a realization that "other living creatures are co-inhabitants of the world with humans" (Wells 2022:24). Ellen White (1948) extends a similar view and notes how nature assists humans:

Through the agencies of nature, God is working, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to keep us alive, to build up and restore us. When any part of the body sustains injury, a healing process is at once begun; nature's agencies set at work to restore soundness. However, the power working through these agencies is the power of God" (White 1948:21).

Given this understanding, human beings and other creatures are intertwined and consequently, interdependent. This is the theological framework that is needed in the Seventh-day Adventist health message. Ezra Chitando explicates this relationality using the concept of ubuntu; in this regard, he notes, "the saying, "I am because you are. Therefore, I am", which has been deployed to highlight African indigenous approaches to the environment. An overview of reflections on ubuntu and the environment highlights a common thread: African ideas of being extended beyond humans to the environment. (Chitando 2020:7). Magobe Ramose, in his essay entitled "Ecology through Ubuntu" (2009), offers a similar discussion on how the divide between nature and humans can be broken in the African context through the notion of ubuntu:

The principle of wholeness applies also to the relation between human beings and physical or objective nature. To care for one another, therefore, implies caring for physical nature as well. Without such care, interdependence between human beings and physical nature would be undermined. Moreover, human beings are indeed an intrinsic part of physical nature, possibly a privileged part. Accordingly, caring for one another also fulfills the natural duty to care for physical nature (Ramosé 2009:2).

The ecological crises present a unique opportunity for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to redefine and re-emphasize the Seventh-day Adventist health message through this relationality lens, which may indeed "lure us into a space that enables Adventists to move beyond pre-existing hierarchies between human creatures and animals by suggesting a relational component that extends individual moral actions beyond human subjectivity" (Mendez 2016:7).

2.4.2 The Significance of Sabbath-Keeping within the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an Ecological Ethos

In a article entitled "Adventism and the World: Toward an Adventist Theology of Solidarity", Silakhe Singata (2018) notes that the ten commandments within the Seventh-day Adventist Church are understood dually, i.e. (a) the love for God and (b) the love for other fellow human beings. In his view, the sabbath commandment is understood amongst Seventh-day Adventists as a bridge that connects the love humans ought to have towards God and the love that man ought to have for fellow human beings and creation in its entirety (Singata 2018:2). Accordingly, the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual introduces the Sabbath in the

following manner:

After the six days of Creation, the gracious Creator rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It symbolizes our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God's kingdom. The Sabbath is God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts (The Seventh Day Adventist Church Manual 2015:179).

The sabbath in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is presently understood through a soteriological and eschatological lens. Thus, the significance of the sabbath remains restricted to benefit humanity. On this basis, I agree with Mendez (2016), who underscored the sabbath as a day of "communion" between God and every creature in His household. For instance, he argues that "For humans to enter into the sabbath rest, the relationship they have with the rest of creation must be taken into account" (Mendez 2016:8). Similarly, Sivge Tonstad notes that:

We have taught the world which day to keep, when it begins and ends, and what not to do on the Sabbath, but we have said very little about its communal and ecological character. The communal prescription for the Sabbath includes benefit to animals (Exod. 20:8-11; 23:12; Deut. 5:12-15), and the prescription for the Sabbath Year promises relief to animals and the earth Exod. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:2-3 (Tonstad 2021:5).

As proposed by Tonstad (2021), this communal imperative can potentially reverse the damages meted out by capitalism to the body and the rest of creation. Just like the health message doctrine, the sabbath implies relationality with nature. By interpreting the sabbath through this concept of relationality as proposed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, the sabbath can be redefined as a wagon that the Seventh-day Adventist Church can use to relate with creation in a life-affirming manner. Leonardo Boff better explains this relationality in his text *Ecology and Liberation* (1995), by arguing that: "From an ecological viewpoint, everything co-exists. Everything that co-exists pre-exists. And everything that co-exists and pre-exists subsists using an infinite web of all-inclusive relations. Nothing exists outside relationships (Boff 1995:7). Given this understanding of ecology, from an Adventist perspective, the question becomes, how can the doctrine of the sabbath advance such an ecological ethos and spirituality? For instance, in the context of South Africa in particular, in most black Seventh-day Adventist Churches, the whole Sabbath day is spent in church buildings, where minimal interaction with nature is practised. However, Ellen White (1911) long advised that on the

sabbath, humans ought to interact with nature. It is significant, in this regard, she argues: “To keep the sabbath holy, we do not need to enclose ourselves in walls, shut away from beautiful scenes of nature and from the free, invigorating air of heaven” (White 1911:66). The sabbath allows all creation in God's household to reconcile. As Joshua Mendez (2016) profoundly argues, that:

The Sabbath attempts to resolve the human/nature dualism by extending rest to animals and the land. In keeping with the spirit of Leviticus, I advocate for a rest that disrupts the linear cycles of production and engenders the transformation and renewal of the whole of Creation through the weekly experience of the Sabbath (Mendez 2016:8).

Through the sabbath rest creation (human and non-human) has an opportunity to experience the interconnectedness of all things and, most significantly, the presence of God. This was also profoundly captured by Rabbi Abraham Heschel (1951):

To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we should not use the instruments that have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence of external obligations, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men and the forces of nature -- is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for Man's progress than the Sabbath? (Heschel 1951:12).

Suppose the Seventh-day Adventist Church can explore the sabbath from this premise, it might arrive at a point wherein the members can claim that the sabbath as “a day which we are called to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation to the creation of the world” (Heschel 1951:23). Accordingly, the weekly sabbath arrives to disrupt and transform human time, and the violence it imposes to the poor and the environment. Thus, the sabbath awards nature an opportunity to transcend the material to experience interdependence with all living things, the land they occupy, and, most importantly, to be in God's presence.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to provide the significance of the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, its contributions to Christian ecotheology, and an ecotheological examination of the doctrine of the health message and the sabbath. The current ecological crisis presents a *kairos* for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As stated above, by discarding anthropocentric interpretations of the health message and the sabbath, the Seventh-day Adventist Church may develop a theological language emphasizing the relationality and interdependence of all creation in “God's Household”.

Accordingly, this chapter brought to light the following questions: What is the role of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in responding to the current ecological crises? How can the doctrines of the SDA Church be expanded to address the environmental challenges that severely impact the poor and marginalized communities? In my view, the Seventh-day Adventist Church can address the ecological crises by advocating for initiatives, such as food justice, land conservation, animal rights, and so forth. I agree with Mendez (2016:12) that the Seventh-day Adventist Church can no longer afford to remain restricted by the anthropocentric confines of our theological language when its underlying truths offer a profound alternative—a relational, holistic vision for creation.

Chapter 3

The Symbol of the “New Earth” in the Context of Contemporary Ecotheology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will offer a survey of the contributions that have been made in the context of Christian ecotheology on eschatology in general and on the symbol of the new earth in particular. While scholars from different contexts have opined various definitions of eschatology, for this chapter, I will employ the definition by Ernst Conradie (2023) that Christian eschatology refers to a critical reflection on the content and significance of Christian hope. Accordingly, Christian hope should not be reduced to the things of the end (*eschata*), nor should it be reduced to the figure of Jesus Christ as the ultimate end (*eschatos*). Instead, Christian hope “is about a vision of the presence of God (Immanuel) in our midst, indeed in us and therefore holding us onto a future with this God (Conradie 2023:2). One might also mention that eschatology is situated within the tension of the “already” and the “not yet” of the realization of God’s salvation (Conradie 2005:30). Nevertheless, I will approach this chapter by firstly presenting an overview of four core symbols in Christian eschatology (see 3.2). Secondly, I will list the conflicting approaches to eschatology that emerged during the 19th and 20th centuries (see 3.3). Thirdly, I will provide an overview of discourse on eschatology in the context of Christian ecotheology (see 3.4). Fourthly, I will discuss the significance of the symbol of the new earth in the context of Christian ecotheology (see 3.5). I will then conclude with closing remarks (see 3.6).

3.2 Four Symbols in Christian Eschatology

As noted in Chapter 1, there are traditionally, four partially overlapping clusters of symbols of Christian hope that have been articulated and explored, namely the hope for the coming of God’s reign, “on earth as it is in heaven”; the hope for the coming (or “return”) of Christ “to judge the living and the dead”; thus for a verdict that will bring justice to the victims of history; the hope for the resurrection of the body; and the hope for eternal life, for the life of the age to come, symbolized by categories, such as “heaven”, the “new Jerusalem” and a “new earth.” According to Migliorie (2014:431), these symbols are “immensely evocative and give birth to creative service of Christ and his kingdom in the here and now. Commenting on these

eschatological symbols, Ernst Conradie notes:

Such eschatological symbols have often been interpreted in an escapist way. The modernist critique of religion (epitomised by Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud) has targeted the now proverbial hope for “a pie in the sky when you die” with vehemence. The sharp edge of such critique was and still is not merely aimed at religious escapism but at the very faith in God. If God’s existence (other than in the form of human constructions) and God’s transcendence are denied, then the past cannot be redeemed, and justice for the victims of the past would be impossible. Then, there would remain no other obligation than to work for a better world that will hopefully be established somewhere in the future through ongoing societal transformation processes. Any (escapist) hope for restitution in a dispensation beyond this life can only divert us from our responsibility to this life, this history, and this earth (Conradie 2005:31).

The temptation when dealing with eschatology or reading biblical texts dealing with eschatology is to postulate the possibility of divine retribution because of the burning human demand for justice or vengeance. Such discards that eschatology/Christian hope is about God’s loyalty to God’s beloved creation. Nevertheless, to make sense of these four symbols of Christian hope, I will use the discussion by Migliorie (2014). I will not entirely discuss each symbol but show how any discussion of the new earth must be understood in juxtaposition with other symbols.

The first cluster of Christian symbols of hope addresses the *Parousia* of Jesus Christ (*inde venturus est* in the Apostle Creed). Migliorie (2014:433) defines *Parousia* as the “arrival or coming which refers in the New Testament to the coming of the crucified and risen Jesus in glory”. The symbol of the *Parousia* of Christ is grounded on the following elements: (i) Hope in the *Parousia* of Christ is hope in someone and not in ideas; (ii) The one whose *Parousia* is awaited is the very one whose humble and hidden comings have awakened and continue to sustain our hope in his final coming in glory; (iii) The hope for the *Parousia* of Christ suggests that reality in the here and now is not what it ought to be, and the hope of the *Parousia* of Christ suggests that reality will be what it was intended to be in the first place. This means that the hope of the *Parousia* of Christ “symbolizes a critique of prevailing affairs in church and society and to express struggles against various forms of oppression and towards economic, racial justice, peace, the equality of women and men and a sustainable society” (Conradie 2023:10).

The second cluster of Christian symbols of hope centers around the resurrection. This was expressed in the Nicene Creed (325C.E): “As we look for the resurrection of the dead.” The hope for the resurrection of the dead goes beyond anthropocentrism: the hope for the dead encompasses a vision for the “whole cosmos” (Migliorie 2014:435). According to Migliorie

(2014:433), the hope of the resurrection is “breathtakingly inclusive” in that the resurrection power of God embraces those who have already died as well as those who are still living and those who have not yet been born. Moreover, Migliorie (2014:435) suggests that the hope for the resurrection of the dead stands as an act of resistance against “all the forces of diseases, negativity, and evil”. Therefore, the cosmic scope of the resurrection of the dead can also be extended to the symbol of “the new earth”.

The third cluster of Christian symbols of hope centers on the last judgement.¹¹ Migliorie (2014:437) cautions against viewing the judgement as an act of self-righteousness and resentment. Instead, he argues that “the God who is revealed in the cross of Christ does not exercise revenge-inspired judgement. In this regard, Migliorie (2014:437) outlines three ways in which the hope for the last judgement can be interpreted: (i) First of all, to understand that it is God who shall judge us; (ii) This means that the same Christ who was crucified and raised from the dead will be our judge; and (iii) The hope of the last judgement is “nothing other than the self-giving, and love of God decisively made known in Jesus Christ”.

The last symbol of Christian hope centers on the hope for eternal life. According to Migliorie (2014:438), this symbol does not suggest that we will become God or lose our humanity and become angels. Instead, the hope for eternal life centers around the idea that our humanity will be fulfilled in communion with God and others.

3.3 Conflicting Approaches to Eschatology

Christian eschatology is traditionally defined as reflecting on the “last things”. This means “the things Christians expect to happen at the end of time” (Nürnberger 1994:139). In his essay “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions” (1966), Karl Rahner shares the same sentiments but grounds his understanding of eschatological hope on Christ as the ultimate end/eschatos. He comments, “Eschatology is a forward look which is necessary to man for his spiritual decision in freedom, and it is made from the standing point of his situation in saving history as the Christ event determines this.” (Rahner 1966:323). However, at the heart of Christian eschatology is the “conviction that reality shall be transformed, at least as far as it does not correspond with what it ought to be” (Nürnberger 1994:139).

It is important to make mention of two general views of Christian eschatology that theologians, laity, and Christian thinkers maintain. The first view suggests that eschatology is an unexpected

¹¹ However, in Conradie’s early works (2000) and recently (2023) he maintains that the symbol of the last judgement is related to the coming of God’s reign.

catastrophic disturbance with trajectories in human history and the inbreaking of the kingdom of God. This view was sustained in the earlier Christian tradition. The second view of eschatology is carried by teleological ideations instead of catastrophic ones. However, the latter view emphasizes a worldly utopia that may be established through social action. Such a view cannot fathom the Christian hope for the consummation of God's reign by God. There is a huge difference between premodern and modern eschatology. This is made explicit by the visible conflicting approaches to eschatology during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hence, Conradie (2005:144) suggests that historically, Christian eschatology has been "characterized by distortions, retrievals, and innovations".

Accordingly, it is also essential to consider the conflicting approaches to eschatology that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries, especially in a Western context from which such views spread globally. In Christian ecotheology and Seventh-day Adventist theology, eschatology can only be understood against this background. It may suffice here to briefly outline how Conradie (2023:17-18) explains such approaches:

- "Consistent" eschatology: Consistent eschatology was associated with Albert Schweitzer (1865-1965). The premise of this form of eschatology was that the kingdom of God would only be realized through God and not Jesus Christ.
- Dialectical theology: This form of eschatology was associated with Karl Barth (1886-1968). Central to this form of eschatology was God's relations with the world. Hence, eschatology was understood as the "entrance of eternity in time" (Karl Barth 1933:500).
- "Realized" eschatology: This form of eschatology has been associated with C.H. Dodd (1884-1973). Realized eschatology can be understood as a rejoinder to the formulations of consistent eschatology.
- Existentialist eschatology: Existentialist theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) and Paul Tillich (1886-1965) originally shared Barth's views but later equated eschatology far more narrowly with the "eternal now", namely the experience of faith in God's affirming presence as "man's ultimate concern", the ultimate moment of decision, allowing "the courage to be". In the secular theologies of "the death of God" after World War II, such existentialist meaning became sublimated in secular hopes for human autonomy and self-realization or in the dynamics of building a better society.
- Evolutionary and process eschatology: This form of eschatology is associated with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955); Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000); John Cobb (1925-); John Haught (1942-); and Catherine Keller (1953-).
- Futurist eschatology: This form of eschatology ought to be viewed as a critique of the transcendental/dialectical eschatology proposed by Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. It speaks to the future consummation of all things by retrieving the notion of promise in the Bible. Key thinkers in this regard include Jürgen Moltmann (1926-2024), Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014), and Johan Baptist Metz (1928-2019).
- Liberation eschatology: In liberation theology, eschatology is viewed as the vision of God's

coming Kingdom in the face of oppression and poverty. The vision inspires emancipatory praxis to embody the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven (see Gutiérrez 1973:160-168).

- Feminist eschatology: Leading Western feminist theologians, such as Sallie McFague (1993:197-21) and Rosemary Radford Reuther (1983:111-124), maintain that eschatology should focus on the present context, with an emphasis not only on humanity but also on creation in its entirety. This form of eschatology concerns ecological sustainability and the relationship between humanity and nature. Reuther (1983:253) submits, "Our responsibility is to use our temporal life span to create a just and good community for our children and future generations".
- Eschatology in Black Theology of Liberation: Within the corpus of Black Theology of Liberation, it isn't easy to pinpoint the essence of eschatology. However, Klippiess Kritzinger's article entitled "Black Eschatology and Christian Mission" (1987) and a chapter of his doctoral thesis, entitled "Black Theology – Challenge to Mission: (1988) offers a detailed survey of a black theology of liberation within the context of South Africa. This survey suggests that eschatology within black theology is confined to the significance of hope in the here and now. This builds on the argument by James Cone (1986) that "The most corrupting influence among the black church was their adoption of the white lie that Christianity is primarily concerned with an otherworldly reality. White missionaries persuaded black religious people that life on earth was insignificant because obedient servants of God could expect a reward in heaven after death (Cone 1986:80). The burden of eschatology, in black theology of liberation, is the inquiry that if black bodies do not matter in the here and now, how can their lives matter in the then and after (resurrection)? In essence, eschatology within black theology of liberation focuses on this question: Is there life before death for black bodies?

By identifying these diverse approaches of Christian eschatology, Conradie (2023:20) notes that the notion of redemption from the earth is widely critiqued as eschatological escapism that can only undermine human efforts to address ecological challenges. The assumption is that such hope for the earth can inspire an ecological praxis, ethos, and spirituality.

3.4 Eschatology in the Context of Christian Ecotheology

Discourse on eschatology in Christian ecotheology must be understood against the background of such 20th century theological developments. Not surprisingly, one finds that the full range of such approaches to eschatology is also employed within the context of ecotheology to express a vision of hope that includes hope for the earth itself amidst multiple forms of ecological destruction associated with climate change, ocean acidification, the rapid loss of biodiversity, deforestation and so forth. One may arguably identify the following four distinct approaches to eschatology in the context of Christian ecotheology:

A first approach extends a futurist eschatology to a theology of hope for the earth itself. Some built upon the pioneering theology of hope proposed by Jürgen Moltmann (1967). Moltmann himself addressed ecological concerns on this basis in many of his books, including *The Future*

of Creation (1979); *Creating a Just Future: The Politics of Peace and the Ethics of Creation in a Threatened World* (1989); and *A Passion for God's Reign* (1998); *The Ethics of Hope* (2010); and *The Spirit of Hope: Theology for a World in Peril* (2019). In *The Coming of God* (1996), Jürgen Moltmann broadens Christian eschatology towards a cosmic eschatology. He argues that eschatology would otherwise become “a Gnostic doctrine of redemption and is bound to teach not the redemption of the earth but a redemption from the earth” (1996:259). Scholars such as Müller-Fahrenholz (*The Kingdom and the Power*, 2002) and Conradie in *Hope for the Earth* (2005, 2015) build upon Moltmann's work. Other scholars build upon Wolfhart Pannenberg's proleptic eschatology to indicate the powerful impact of images of the future. Ted Peters, for example, sees God as “the World's Future” (Peters 2000; 1980). Some early forms of liberation theology likewise build upon an emphasis on God's coming reign as an attractive vision for a just and sustainable future (Gutiérrez 1973:160-167).

A second approach extends Teilhard de Chardin's (1881-1955) evolutionary and/or process theology to address ecological concerns. An early contribution by John B. Cobb: *Is it too late? A Theology of Ecology* (1972) may be mentioned. The most significant contribution in this regard comes from John Haught. In *The Promise of Nature* (1993), he maintains that nature is “seeded” and “saturated” with promise (Haught 1993:120). According to Haught (1993), the actualization of such promises is mirrored in the resurrected Jesus Christ. Haught (1993) suggests that the “Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the revelation of what nature anticipates, a fulfillment in which life will show itself to be more fundamental and more intelligible more than death, resurrection, therefore, is not an unintelligible interruption but the final vanquishing of deadness and disunity” (Haught 1993:123).

A third approach is advanced by feminist theologians, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether (1936-2022) and Sallie McFague (1933-2019). Both link the current ecological crises to the preoccupation with going to heaven. In *Sexism and God-talk* (1983), Ruether suggests that the focus of eschatology should be on the fullness of life and not the yearning for a life beyond the cycle of life: “Instead of endless flight into an unrealized future, a model of hope based on conversion acknowledging the basic ingredient of a just and livable society. These ingredients have roots in nature and involve accepting finitude, human scale and balanced relationships between persons and non-human beings” (Ruether 1983:254). In *The Body of God* (1993), Sallie McFague follows a similar route and maintains that a sustainable society is a sign of the realization of the new creation (McFague 1993:197). Despite the title of her book *From Apocalypse to Genesis* (1991) Anne Primavesi (1934-2019) does not develop an ecofeminist

eschatology but speaks of a vision for a good society.

The fourth approach to eschatology in the context of ecotheology is the critique of longitudinal eschatology and the emphasis on latitudinal eschatology offered by Vitor Westhelle in *Eschatology and Space* (2012). Vitor Westhelle (2012) moves away from the ideation of eschatology as the end times to the last things. He comments:

Eschatology is a discourse on liminality, and marginality, on that which is in ontological, ethical, and also epistemological sense different. Ontologically, because it addresses the question of an other reality, ethically, because it pertains to a different moral code, as different as the Sermon on the Mount is from all our ethical systems and moral prescriptions; epistemologically, because eschatology is also about the liminality of our accepted epistemic régimes, that is, that there is other often suppressed “knowledge” beyond the commonly accepted noetic realm of academia (Westhelle 2012:78).

It is also important to mention the critique of apocalyptic fears associated with ecological challenges. Notable contributions include Catherine Keller’s *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (2004); *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (2005); and *Facing The Apocalypse: Climate, Democracy and Other Last Chances* (2021); Stefan Skrimshire’s *Politics of Fear and Practices of Hope* (2008); and *Future Ethics: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination* (2010) and Barbara Rossing’s *The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse* (1999); and *The Rapture Exposed: The Message Of Hope In The Book Of Revelation* (2004).

3.4.2 Critique of Escapist Eschatology

Despite the conflicting variety of constructive contributions to eschatology in Christian ecotheology, there is an overwhelming consensus that Christian hope should not be understood in an escapist way. This builds upon the Marxist critique that the hope to go to heaven one day functions like the opium of/for the people, namely, to offer a reward in heaven that keeps the working class sedated from the miseries, oppression, and alienation that they experience in their daily lives. Accordingly, the symbol of heaven functions like the proverbial “pie in the sky when you die by and by”. Such escapism diverts attention away from this life, this earth, and the challenges faced in the here and now.

Such an emphasis on the future makes it easy to imagine the end of the world instead of the end of injustices. Accordingly, escapist eschatology breeds docility amongst victims of injustices as it encourages them to wait for the second Advent of Jesus Christ for justice to be served to them. It is on these grounds that Steve Biko (1978) argued “Finally, I would like to

remind the black ministry and indeed all black people that God is not in the habit of coming down from heaven to solve man-made problems on earth” (Biko 1978:65).

At the heart of such an understanding of Christian hope is the tendency to understand the Christian message of salvation as the redemption of human beings *from* the earth and having nothing to say about the *redemption of the earth*. An illustration offered by Conradie (2014:78) portrays this point very well; he speaks of a rescue team that seeks to save passengers (earth) by a rope (Jesus) hanging from a helicopter (God’s spirit). In this illustration, there is no hope for the burning ship itself. The human obsession with personal salvation has led humanity to only think about their redemption and attach no value to the possibility of the earth’s redemption. Such earth-denying eschatological perceptions have led to an understanding amongst various Christian communities that the current ecological crisis is a confirmation of biblical apocalyptic prophecies. On this point, Bauckham and Hart (1999) note:

The otherworldliness of the Christian tradition, alongside anthropocentrism, deprives and denies Christianity of the will and power to resist the modern project of technological subjugation of nature. If God’s creation is ultimately a throwaway world destined to perish when its purpose as a vale of human soul-making is fulfilled, it may not seem to matter too much what we do to it (Bauckham and Hart 1999:128).

According to Conradie (2005:75), escapist eschatology is characterized by “cheap hope”. This form of hope cannot advocate for an environmental praxis and thus will remain a futile and escapist form of hope. Referring to Ludwig Feuerbach, Conradie (2023) explains cheap hope as follows: “The hope to go to heaven is a projection that people make based on what they do not have.” Cheap hope is, therefore, “dangerous because it pacifies poor laborers to accept oppression in this life through the promise of eternal life” (Conradie 2023:15). However, Conradie (2015) proposes a counter hope to escapist eschatology which he terms “persistent hope”. Persistent hope “offers an inspiration to challenge oppressive systems” and energizes an environmental praxis. Indeed, without persistent hope, “an environmental praxis will lose its impetus and fight a losing battle (Conradie 2005:74). Clearly, at the heart of Christian hope, lies the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of the realization of God’s salvation.

3.5 The Image of the New Earth in the Context of Christian Ecotheology

In this section, I will briefly discuss the image of the new earth in the context of Christian ecotheology. The image of the new earth cannot be understood outside of its two core notions, namely that a prophetic transformation of this earth is needed, given the destructive practices that negatively impact creation and the poor. The second notion addresses the idea that a new

earth is needed; thus, continuity with what is material, bodily, and earthly is essential. Thus, any assessment of the new earth must answer the following questions: Is our home on earth in God's presence or with God in heaven? Does the new earth replace the old earth or merely renew it? Is the new earth a renewed earth or a "new" earth? To some degree, one might say that a thorough assessment of the image of the new earth offers a critique of eschatological escapism. Nevertheless, to guide the reflections of this section, it is crucial to consider the following questions, which are not only confined to the image of the new earth but also concern ecological eschatology in general: Where can a clear vision of hope for the earth be found amidst such a sense of environmental despair? How can a vision of hope for a new earth be made intelligible within the parameters of contemporary cosmology that indicate the radical finitude of species of life in general and of the earth itself?" (Conradie 2005). It is also important to mention that reflections on the image of the new earth from an ecotheological perspective cannot debunk the biblical category of the new heaven and the new earth, which is found in both the Old Testament (Isa. 66:2) and in the New Testament (Rev 21:2).

In his book *The Coming of God* (1996), Jürgen Moltmann suggests that "Christian eschatology must be broadened out into cosmic eschatology, for otherwise it becomes a gnostic doctrine of redemption, and is bound to teach, no longer the redemption of the world, but a redemption from the world; no longer the redemption of the body but the deliverance of the soul from the body (Moltmann 1996:260). In discussions around the symbol of the new earth, the contestation lies on the idea of redemption. For instance, what and who is redeemed, and for what reason(s)? In his landmark text, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (2014), Richard Middleton offers a biblical discussion on the earth's redemption within the historical lines of Christian eschatology. In the book's appendix, he gives a historical account of how the idea of being "saved from the earth" came to be within Christian eschatology. Suffice to add that the implications of the understanding of being redeemed from the earth of advanced ideas that humanity (specific reference to Christians) that their home is in heaven and that they are just in exile here on earth for a specific period and purpose. In this regard, Middleton argues, "Salvation includes not just a moral transformation and the renewal of community but also the renewal of all things, which includes the earth itself" (Middleton 2014:140). This understanding encourages humanity to see nature as God's beloved creation, as John 3:16 aptly states, "For God so loved the World". Currently, the earth's inhabitants face various problems, including ecological challenges, economic instability, human inequality, and so forth; the hope then for the new earth, in one way, can be interpreted as a protest statement

to the current order. On this point, Klaus Nürnberger (1992) suggests that “the symbol of the new earth is a protest statement, an act of defiance, directed against the inevitabilities of reality on behalf of human dignity, freedom, and authenticity made in the name of a God who is irrevocably committed to the comprehensive wellbeing of his creatures and who is the master of reality” (Nürnberger 1992:139). This means that despite ecological degradation this earth has a future. From an ecological perspective, one can argue that if the earth has a future, then our actions in the present will carry consequences over into the new earth. Such a view encourages humanity to take care of the earth. Micah Kiel puts it this way: “God makes all things new, not all new things” (Kiel 2017:20).

Scholars interpret the image of the new earth as lingering between two ends. First, some maintain that there is a need for prophetic - radical transformation of this earth, given its life-denying order. Such a position becomes a critique of the order of the day and hopes that justice will be served to the victims of injustice one day. Micah Kiel (2017) explores this view this way.

The earth has become Rome’s domain, which is why it unfortunately bears the brunt of so much of God’s punishment. God does not seek to destroy the earth, but because the earth has become Rome’s, it becomes a casualty in the apocalyptic war. Anything less than destruction would not meet the challenge of the extent to which Rome has infected and harmed the earth (Kiel 2017:2025).

Conradie (2000:181) notes that the emphasis of discontinuity between the earth and the eschaton is born from the acknowledgment that suffering and death in the world are not merely the result of sin. In his earlier works, Jürgen Moltmann offered a discussion about discontinuity. He suggests that the eschaton should be understood in light of the possibility of something new instead of the continuation of this earth. In this regard, he proposes terms such as “*creatio ex nihilo*” (creation out of nothing) which are vehemently rejected by scholars, such as Van Ruler (1967) and Berkoff (1985). Conradie (2000:189) suggests that any emphasis on the discontinuity of this earth should account for the possibility of a *novum*.

The second notion in interpreting the image of the new earth is the subject of continuity between this earth and the new earth. The emphasis on the continuity between creation and the eschaton centers on God’s commitment to creation. This means there is no time in history or future creation when God will abandon it. In this regard, Pannenberg (1991:164) suggests that “creation and the eschaton belong together.” Conradie (2000:175) notes that Van Ruler (1969) rejects the term *nova creatio* as proposed in some of the works of Jürgen Moltmann to address the relationship between creation and the eschaton because the term does not capture the

possibility that this earth will be saved. Van Ruler (1969), therefore, advocates the term *recreatio*. The term *recreatio* is not primarily concerned with the continuity of this earth. On this basis, Conradie (2000:180) exemplifies this in the Christological continuity between crucified Jesus and resurrected Christ. To a certain degree, one may argue that the emphasis on continuity opens a possibility for the earth's salvation instead of salvation from the earth.

African scholars such as Chammah Kaunda (2019) maintain that the hope for the renewal of creation affirms that “God is not above creation but through the Holy Spirit is within creation as an expression of unconditional love” (Kaunda 2019:472). Catherina Halkes (1991) extends this view further, maintaining that: “In principle, we already live in the new creation based on the incarnation and the descent of the spirit on all flesh. She, the Rauch, is a love-filled and communicative power. Our mother, the Holy Spirit, invites us to a life in relationships with people, nations, animals, flowers, and things (Halkes 1991:160).

In my view, the idea of the earth's renewal should be read and held together with the hope for the annihilation of this earth. This is because the symbol of the new earth indeed carries an ecological impetus. On this point, Peter Phan argues that “eschatology has to be reconceptualized in light of ecology in which humans no longer occupy the central place” (Phan 1996:3-4). He builds this position of ecological eschatology on the works of Paul Santmire (1984), who spoke of an “ecological motif”. However, the symbol of the new earth may be difficult to understand. This is because the hope for the “new earth is still dominated by the eschatological significance of heaven” (Conradie 2000:335). Such an emphasis pushes one to ask if God wanted us in heaven why did he create us on this earth in the first place?

It is interesting to note that working to preserve the earth in some conservative Christian communities is interpreted as working against God’s plan of saving us from this earth. Hence, Jonathan Kavusa (2022) maintains that such a “beliefs reinforces the Christian hope of rescuing the elect from a hostile earth towards a new earth and heaven” (Kavusa 2022:6).

A difficulty in comprehending the notion of the new earth arises in how feasible it will be for the earth to contain billions of those who are the beneficiaries of salvation . In his landmark, *The Promise of Nature* (1993), John Haught argues against scientific materialism's cosmic pessimism and nihilism. This cosmic pessimism is accurately formulated in the second law of thermodynamics: in a closed system, all energy will eventually degenerate into entropy. Rather, Haught (1993:120) suggests that “the material world is seeded with promise”. Consistent with this in his text, *God’s Spirit: Transforming a World in a Crisis* (1995), Müller-

Fahrenholz speaks of “ecodomy”, which signifies the building of a house and economic endurance, which is rooted in the spirit that gives the community eschatological power in the face of ecological destruction. At the heart of this notion of “ecodomy” is the understanding that “God weaves all creation into one single fabric of life” (Fahrenholz 1995:194). For this reason, Rossing & Buitendag (2020:3) suggest the image of the new earth as we have it in Revelation stands as a promise of God’s future dwelling with people in a radiant, thriving cityscape located in a renewed earth. Therefore, the hope for the new earth within the ecotheology framework is life-affirming and not life-denying. Moreover, the symbol of the new earth, when read through ecotheological lenses, may aid us to “envision how to undertake an exodus away from oppressive economic and ecological systems to a more just and sustainable economy in the household of all creation” (Rossing & Buiteng 2020:6).

Such views are built on the two core notions embedded in the image of the new earth, namely the tension between this earth's continuity and the new earth and its discontinuity in light of the new earth.

3.6 Conclusion

To conclude, there is a need for the continuity of this earth and its discontinuity to be held together precisely when assessing the image of the new earth from an ecotheological perspective. For instance, the idea of continuity of this earth probes an active role in disrupting the dominance and greed that comes with anthropocentric theologies and ideas. While the notion of the discontinuity of the earth reminds us that the new earth will not be through human endeavors but through the faithfulness of God. Bauckham and Hart (1999) put it this way, “The continuity between this world and its eschatological destiny will be given by God in and through the discontinuity of God’s creative new creative act” (Bauckham & Hart 1999:56). In *Eschatology and Space* (2012), Vitor Westhelle suggests that the “kingdom of God is topologically nearby, choratic, even if the faithful have not fully and resolutely stepped into it” (2012:77). The hope then for the new earth within the lens of Christian ecotheology articulates a vision for this earth which is grounded on the “presence of God in our midst, indeed in us and therefore holding onto a future with this God” (Conradie 2023:2). In this chapter I have reflected on the significance of the new earth within the conceptual framework of Christian ecotheology. What is clear within this chapter is a feasible approach to the hope of the new earth is not grounded on cheap hope, which harbors an attempt to escape this earth. Rather, at the heart of hope for the new earth within the framework of ecotheology, is persistent hope, which advances ecological praxis.

Chapter 4

The Symbol of the New Earth in the Seventh-day Adventist Theology

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I offered a discussion on the contributions made in the context of Christian ecotheology on eschatology in general and on the image of the new earth in particular. I noted that Christian hope is situated within the tension between the “now and here” and “the there and then”. Accordingly, eschatology within the Seventh-day Adventist Church plays a crucial role in the church's orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Thus, eschatology within Adventism is not just one theme alongside others in the denomination. Instead, in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, eschatology is the core of what the tradition of this church is all about. In the preface of the edited volume entitled *Eschatology from an Adventist Perspective* (2021), Angel Rodrigues discusses the nature of Adventist eschatology and maintains that Seventh-day Adventist eschatology offers a vision of the future centered on Jesus Christ. In this regard, Rodrigues (2021) defines Seventh-day Adventist eschatology as being an:

Exploration and exposition of biblical apocalyptic eschatology. Which announces a future characterized by a drastic discontinuity between the present order of things and a future one which Jesus Christ will establish. It proclaims the consummation of the eschatological newness initiated by Christ and therefore its emphasis being not on what will be terminated but on the establishment of God's kingdom on earth and the healing of the cosmos (Rodrigues 2021:x).

My main objective in this chapter is to inquire how Seventh-day Adventist eschatology addresses concerns over an escapist eschatology widely found in contemporary Christian ecotheology. To do this, I will first underscore the historical development of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology (see 4.2). Secondly, I will offer an overview of the key eschatological clusters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, expressed mainly in the Seventh-day Adventist 28 fundamental beliefs under the section “The doctrines of restoration” (see 4.3). Thirdly, I will discuss the significance of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology. Thereafter, I will offer an overview of the discussion centered around the image of the new earth within the context of Seventh-day Adventist theology (see 4.4). Lastly, I will offer some remarks on the eschatological posture of the Seventh-day Adventist church and its interpretation of the new earth.

4.2.1 Historical Development in Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology

Seventh-day Adventist eschatology has been shaped by several historical factors and evolving theological interpretations of some biblical texts, and the counsels from the prophecy/visions of the prophetess and co-founder of the denomination, Mrs. Ellen White. Significantly, the Great Disappointment of 1844 served as an impetus to Seventh-day Adventist eschatology implicitly and explicitly. In this section, I will provide the historical development of eschatology within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and an overview of the three historical factors that shaped the eschatological ethos of the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the denomination's formative years. Secondly, I will outline the statements that the Seventh-day Adventist Church issued about their doctrinal views on eschatology from 1872-1930 and the revisions recently made in 2015.

4.2.2 Three Social Factors that Influenced the Development of Seventh-day Eschatology

Historically, the understanding of eschatology within the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been influenced by three factors that occurred from 1880 to 1889, namely the Sunday legislation and some of its corollaries in 1880; the polarization of the righteousness by faith message in 1884-1888 and the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church towards organized labour. In this regard, Roy McGarrell (1990:132), in his doctoral dissertation entitled: "The Historical Development of Seventh-day Adventists Eschatology 1884-1895", observes that the "late nineteenth century Seventh-day Adventists understood the conflict between capital and labour as a crisis that presaged the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. While Sunday legislation did not necessarily add new elements to Adventist eschatology, it sharpened the eschatological beliefs maintained by the denomination". The following three historical factors influenced the development of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology:

- Sunday Legislation on Adventist eschatology: The response of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to the Sunday legislation of 1880 "heightened their conviction that the second coming of Jesus Christ was even at the door". Thus, early Seventh-day Adventist leaders interpreted Revelation 13 with a view that the Sunday legislation was a sign of the coming of Jesus Christ. This placed Revelation 13 central to Adventist Eschatology. According to Pettibone (1979:23), "Sunday observance was the counterfeit of the Sabbath" and symbolized the mark of the beast. Early Adventist writers were convinced that the rejection of the Sunday legislation and the acceptance of the Sabbath inseminated the eschatological grounding of the denomination. Early Adventists viewed the Sabbath as a message that must be proclaimed before the Advent of Jesus Christ. In her landmark book *The Great Controversy* (1911), it may suffice to mention that Ellen White dealt greatly with eschatological themes and how Seventh-day Adventists explicated eschatological themes

in light of the Sunday legislation.¹² These themes were: the Sabbath as the great test of loyalty; the persecutions of the defenders of truth who refused to observe the Sunday Sabbath; and the wrath of God, which will be poured out against the disobedient.

- Righteousness by faith on Seventh day-Adventist eschatology: McGarrell (1989:143) observes that a significant development in Seventh-day Adventist eschatology from 1884-1888 was the link that was struck between the third angel message of Revelation 14 and the righteousness by faith message. At the heart of the righteousness by faith message was the idea of preparing people to meet Jesus Christ.
- Organized labour influence on Adventist eschatology: The significance of organized labour to Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology was that the Seventh-day Adventists saw it pointless to participate in labour unions. Seventh-day Adventists viewed the tactics of labour unions, which were characterized by strikes, violence, and disorder, as unethical and contrary to their eschatological beliefs. Rather, Adventists opted to “look beyond the labor unions' solutions of that time but to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ as the solution to all social complexities.

According to McGarrell (1989), these three social factors that occurred from 1884 to 1889 were significant in sharpening the eschatological doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, this does not suggest that the church's initial views on eschatology prior to 1884 to 1889 were discarded; rather, their eschatological view were expanded and refocused through the events of 1884 to 1889.

4.2.3 Statements on Eschatology

In this section, I will present the historical statements about eschatology that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has made.

a) Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology in the 1872 Statement

In 1872, Seventh-day Adventists issued a statement regarding the question of the millennium and the resurrection. In this regard, Ogouma (2018:53) argues that “Seventh-day Adventists believed in prophecy as part of God's revelation and that the history of the world was being fulfilled through prophecy.” Secondly, Adventists maintained that the millennium would occur after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and lastly, Adventists believed that 1844 was not a disappointment. Instead, it was the beginning of the heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.

b) Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology in the 1889 Statement

Due to the social ills of the 1880s, the eschatological views of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were strengthened, and one article was added. Thus, eight articles in the statement of

¹² Its important to note earlier editions of the book *The Great Controversy*. The book was originally published in 1858, then it was revised in 1884 and 1888. The final expanded edition was in 1911 as cited above.

Beliefs” focused on eschatology. Furthermore, the 1889 Adventist statement of beliefs reserved an article on the destruction of the wicked, which will happen at the end of the millennium.

c) Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology in the 1931 Statement

In 1931, a strong emphasis on the sanctuary doctrine was placed with attempts to clarify some misunderstandings on the initial position/interpretation of the Heavenly Sanctuary and the ministry of Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary.

d) Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology in the 1980 Statement

This statement added a new doctrinal article to the Great Controversy, the Second Coming of Christ, the millennium, and the end of sin. It is important to note that Seventh-day Adventists understood the Second Coming of Christ as a precursor to the first resurrection. They also understood the millennium as that which will transpire after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It was the text by Ellen G. White (1911), *The Great Controversy*, that gave a complete theological picture of Adventist eschatology.

e) Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology in the 2015 Statement

In 2015, the Seventh-day Adventist eschatology was “reaffirmed with the emphasis on the word near” (Wilson 2016:3). This was done to suggest that the coming of Jesus Christ is still nearby. This revision did not really change the outlook of Seventh-day Adventists on eschatology rather as the President of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Ted Wilson (2015) argued that through these revisions “we are simply trying to enhance and make the doctrinal views more understandable” (Wilson 2016:3).

4.3 Restoration Doctrines

Eschatology within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is expressed in the 28 fundamental beliefs, also known as the Restoration doctrines. It might suffice to note that eschatological doctrines in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are listed as Restoration doctrines in the 28 fundamental beliefs. The doctrine of restoration entails statements that are descriptors of what the Seventh-day Adventists believe about the end times of the earth, and what is in store for humanity as eternity unfolds. In this regard, I will briefly discuss three eschatological statements and their significance to Seventh-day Adventist eschatology.

4.3.2 “Christ’s Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary”

This cluster builds on the works of Hiram Edson (1806-1882) and Owen RL Crosier (1820-1912), who re-interpreted the great disappointment as the beginning of the ministry of Jesus

Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. In this regard, Edson maintained that instead of Jesus Christ leaving the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary to come on earth in 1844 as the Millerites had concluded, Jesus Christ in 1844 entered the second apartment of the sanctuary because he had ministration responsibilities to perform. This ministry responsibility of Jesus Christ as a High Priest became an interpretation of the typology of the priestly ministry in the sanctuary as found in the Old Testament.

The doctrine became fully fledged through the intervention of other pioneers such as Joseph Bates, James, and Ellen White. For instance, Joseph Bates is considered the first to connect Christ's entry into the Most Holy Place with the emphasis on the Sabbath after he read Revelation 11:9, which highlights the ark of the heavenly temple with the Ten Commandments (Bates 1868: 98). Secondly, Joseph Bates, in *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps* (Bates 1847:102), linked the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the concept of prejudgment. In this regard, he made biblical links between Daniel 7 and Revelation 14:6 about the ministry of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.

Later on, James White coined the ministry of Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary as the "Investigative Judgement". This was because, initially, the doctrine was concerned with Jesus Christ's work of "blotting out sins." Thus, the investigative judgement coined by James White incorporated the notion of blotting out sins and the aspect of judgement. In this regard, James White (1853) argued, "The investigative judgment of the church of God will take place before the first resurrection, so will the judgment of the wicked take place during the 1000 years as detailed in Revelation, and they will be raised at the end of that period (White 1853:33).

Ellen White was also integral in the development of the Investigative Judgement doctrine. This is visible throughout her landmark text, *The Great Controversy* (1911). For Ellen White, for instance, the Sanctuary/Investigative Judgement doctrine is central to Seventh-day Adventist theology; in this regard, she argues that "the subject of the sanctuary was the key. It opened to view a complete system of connected and harmonious truth" (White 1911:412). Early Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen White did receive visions of the investigative judgement idea confirmations that she should endorse the doctrine. In this regard, it is recorded that her first vision of this doctrine was in 1845 but later published in the *Day Star* in 1846. In the vision, it is said she saw the place in heaven, which exhibits the ark mirrored by in the Heavenly Sanctuary. Her second vision occurred in 1846, wherein it was indicated to her that the Father had moved into the most holy place to end the heavenly ministry of Christ in the holy place. In 1847, she was shown a vision of the triadic relationship between the sanctuary, the Ten

Commandments, and the Sabbath.

Currently, the Investigative Judgement within the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is expressed as follows: “The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligence who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him are deemed worthy to have a part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest of who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in him are therefore ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom” (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015:177). Thus McGarrell (1989:63) argued that “central to understanding Seventh-Adventist eschatology is the exploration of the statement of Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.”

4.3.3 The Second Coming of Christ

The second cluster of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology is entitled “The Second Coming of Christ.” In the SDA 28 fundamental beliefs, this doctrine is expressed in the following manner:

The Second Coming of Christ is the church's blessed hope, the gospel's grand climax. The Savior's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected and, together with the righteous living, will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy and the world's present condition indicated that Christ's coming is nearby. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015:177).

The hope of the literal second coming of Jesus Christ is the defining cluster of what Seventh-day Adventist eschatology is all about. Ellen G. White has written extensively on this doctrine. Some of the topics about the Second Coming of Christ she has covered include (a) The literal nature of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ; (b) Early Adventism and the Second Coming of Christ belief; (c) The problem of setting a date for the coming of Jesus Christ; (d) The time of trouble that precedes the coming of Jesus Christ and (e) Looking forward to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In his book *Decoding Jesus: A Comparison Between John Calvin and Ellen White's View* (2014), Patrick Jones summarised how Ellen White understood the Second Coming of Jesus Christ:

Ellen White opposed setting a date for Jesus Christ's second Advent because it created false excitement. Instead, White worked with the unique principle of the divine historicity expressed in the historical biblical timeline from which she, in the mirroring of Christ's words, interpreted the words as presenting a clue and a hint regarding signs that will transpire before the coming of Christ (Jones 2014:77)

The doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ plays a huge role in the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The scriptural references for this doctrine are the following biblical passages: Matt.24; Mark 13; Luke 21; John 14-1-3; Acts 1:9; 1 Cor 15:51-54; 1 Thess 4:13; 2 Thess 1:7; 2 Tim 3:1-5; Titus 2:13; Heb 9:28; Rev 1:7; 12:14; 19:11-21.

4.3.4 Death and Resurrection

The third cluster of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology is entitled *Death and Resurrection* and is expressed in the following way in the Seventh-day Adventist Church's 28 fundamental beliefs:

The wage of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later. (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015:178).

The current President of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ted Wilson, defines death as “a deep sleep in which a person waits for the resurrection.” He bases this view on biblical texts such as Eccl 9:5 and Psalms 115:17. For this particular theological reason, resurrection is thus understood as awakening from that sleep. In the book *Heaven* (2003), Ellen White explains the concept of resurrection in the following manner:

Amid the reeling of the earth, the flashing of lightning, and the roaring of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then raising His hands to heaven He cries, “Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise! Throughout the length and breadth of the earth, the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. (2003:42).

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church this belief is based on the following scriptures: Jon 19; Ps 146; Eccl 9; Dan 12:3; Isa 25:8; John 5:28; Rom 6:23; 1 Cor 15:51-54; Col.3:4; 1 Thes 4, 1 Tim 6; Rev 20:1-20.

4.3.5 The Millennium and End of Sin

The fourth cluster in Seventh-day Adventist eschatology is entitled The Millennium and End of Sin. In this regard, this doctrine in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is expressed in the following manner:

The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections. During this time, the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels. At its close, Christ will descend from heaven to earth with His saints and the Holy City. The unrighteous dead will then

be resurrected, and Satan and his angels will surround the city, but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth. The Universe will thus be freed of sin and sinners forever. (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015:177).

This cluster is based on the following scriptural references: Jer. 4:23-26; Ezek. 28:18, 19; Mal. 4:1; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Rev. 20; 21:1-5.

4.3.6 The New Earth

The last cluster speaks to the image of the “New Earth” in the 28 fundamental beliefs:

On the new earth where righteousness dwells, God will provide an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy, and learning in His presence. God will dwell with His people, and suffering and death will have passed away. The great controversy will be ended, and sin will be no more. All things, animate and inanimate, will declare that God is love and he shall reign forever. (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015:179).

The basis of this doctrine is the following scriptures: Isa. 35,65:17-25; Matt. 5.5, 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 11:15; 21:1-7;22:1-5. In the next section, I will offer a fuller discussion on the image of the new earth which is central to Seventh-day Adventist Theology.

4.4 Eschatology in the Context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

In the recently edited volume entitled *Eschatology from an Adventist Perspective* (2021), Angel Manuel Rodrigues discusses the profundity of the Seventh-day Adventist eschatology. In this regard, he highlights that Adventist eschatology can only be explicated through exploring biblical apocalyptic eschatology. According to Tankiso Letseli (2001), the Seventh-day Adventist biblical apocalypse is based on reading the books of Daniel and Revelation. He argues that “these books have been critical in birthing and shaping the identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (Letseli 2001:44). Other Seventh-day Adventist theologians, such as Johnson (2000), Paulien (2003) and Strand (1992) agree with Letseli’s contention that the books of Daniel and Revelation are essential to the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of biblical apocalypse. However, they add other parts of scripture such as Isaiah 24-27; Ezekiel 38;39; Joel 2; 3 Zachariah 9-14; Mathew 24; Mark 13; Luke 17; 1 Thessalonians 4 and 2 Thessalonians as having common symbolism and focus to Adventist apocalyptic eschatology. According to Phumlani Majola (2010), Seventh-day Adventists exhibit seven integral features in approaching biblical apocalyptic literature: (i) Apocalyptic texts are revelatory literature. This means that apocalyptic literature has to unmask the present and future realities. (ii) Adventist theologians argue that biblical apocalyptic cannot be hidden by time and space. Johnson (2000:786) has recently amplified this idea in the following manner: “Biblical

apocalyptic is not a secret literature generated in time and place unknown to us.” (iii) Angelic figures also characterise the Biblical Apocalypse. (iv) Biblical Apocalypse emerged in times of crises. (v) Biblical Apocalyptic is characterized by contradictions between that which is good and evil, future and present, and heaven and earth. (vi) Biblical Apocalyptic contains symbolism and imagery. Lastly, the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical apocalyptic explicates how “God brings about closure to the present world order and ushers in His reign” (Davidson 2006:184). Also, how apocalyptic literature is interpreted within the Seventh-day Adventist Church is significant. Firstly, within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the primary understanding is that God has made known the future in the scripture (Paulien 2003:23). Secondly, all apocalyptic prophecies hinge on the knowledge God has of the present and the future. Thirdly, Seventh-day Adventists interpret apocalyptic literature using a historicist approach. According to Bennett (1986:346), this method views apocalyptic prophecies as containing a cosmic range that begins in the writer's day and takes the reader to the end of the establishment of God's kingdom. Johnson (2000:797) buttresses the importance of historicism as being in contrast to other modes of biblical exposition. Despite it being marred by diverse, sensational, speculative, and contradictory approaches, historicism is paramount in interpreting apocalyptic literature, particularly in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Its significance is that it bases its claims on biblical texts where a build-up of predicted events is visible.¹³ Fourthly, the day-for-a-year principle is based on Hebrew thought. Seventh-day Adventist scholars, such as LaRondelle (2000) and Shea (1992) maintain that from this approach, a “day” in a symbolic context represents a full year in reality. Recently, Jon Paulien (2003) defended this view at the 2008 Bible Symposium of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Society. He argued that scripture or exegetical scripture reading does not support this method. Instead, this method finds its significance in the Hebrew mind, underscoring the word ‘day for a year’.¹⁴

Lastly, the significance of apocalyptic interpretation within the Seventh-day Adventist Church is based on what is often referred to as “recapitulation” or in some Adventist contexts, “progressive parallelism”. McGarrell (1989:78) notes that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, just like other denominations, accepted the general eschatological clusters, which include the final judgement, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection, the millennium, and the restoration of the new earth and new heaven. However, they added some unique yet biblical

¹³ Two examples of this approach which are visible within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is Daniel 2;7 and Revelation 12-14

¹⁴ He speaks in this regard about a year day thinking and a year day equivalency.

aspects to these generally accepted eschatological categories. In his essay “The Challenge of an Ecological Eschatology” (2022), Hanz Gutierrez suggests that Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology has two distinctive features: premillennialism and a cosmic scope. His observation is built on the pioneering book by Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* (1911). Gutierrez defines these two features in the following way:

- Premillennialism—This is a critique of humanity’s optimism in claiming to solve the problems of history. Therefore, the Second Advent of Jesus Christ is the hope that all human tragedies will end.
- Cosmic scope—This reminds humanity that evil is embedded in society and within the cosmos. Therefore, any attempts to solve the problems of society are partly insufficient if one does not attend to resolving cosmic evil.

In this regard, Hanz Gutierrez (2022:3) offers an alarming rejoinder to Seventh-day Adventist eschatology; he notes:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has constructed an eschatology that is excessively tied to old and now irrelevant themes while remaining insensitive to the issues that matter today. Moreover, the notion of cosmic eschatology makes the situation worse because, through its ethics, it reinforces the anthropogenic element and not the cosmos as it should (Gutierrez 2022:3).

Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have an ecological eschatology but rather possesses a human-centered eschatology. Hence, Gutierrez (2022:4) maintains that “Adventist eschatology points to the history not to the cosmos, individual ethics but not environmental ethics, obedience not contemplation, heaven, not the earth, the new creation not this creation, truth not life, holiness not vitality and Christ the Advocate not the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of life.” Such observations have led other Seventh-day Adventist scholars to note elements of escapism within Adventist eschatology. For instance, Paul Magagula, in his essay entitled “Retrieving and Articulating Liberative Aspects of the Doctrine of the Sabbath in the Context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa”, Magagula (2020:1), observes that within the context of South African Adventism eschatology has been used as an escape wagon from the mission to liberate people of South Africa. In other words, the hope for Jesus Christ to return has, in turn, created a longing amongst Seventh-day Adventist members to escape this world. The escapist eschatology posture within the Seventh-day Adventist Church historically speaks to what Silakhe Singata (2018:3) calls “apocalyptic anticipation”, which mirrors how the Seventh-day Adventist Church has placed their focus on the Second Advent of Jesus Christ as a means of fixing all the ills on this earth. On this point, Lawson (1996:284) observes:

Although Seventh-day publications now address political issues, initially, they were totally pessimistic about any action that could change the landscape of society. Initially, Seventh-day Adventist Apocalyptic expectation was of such immediacy and intensity that it overrode any impulse toward social activism. They employed a radical republic critique of slavery on behalf of their judgement of America, but in the 1850s and 1860s they believed that political liberty would be a distraction from the urgent task of preparation for the Lord's return (Lawson 1996:284)

Given such an illustrious shift of Adventist eschatology, in the face of poverty, ecological crises, and economic instability, the question becomes how Seventh-day Adventist eschatology can be geared towards a praxis that makes this earth a better place for all.

4.5 The Significance of the New Earth in Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology

There is a vast corpus of literature on the image of the new earth from Seventh-day Adventist theologians. Notable contributions in this regard include Ellen White's *The Great Controversy* (1889), Roy Isreal McGarrell's "The Historical Development of Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology" (1990), Gerald Damsteegt's *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (1977) and Daugeuk Nam's *The New Earth and the Eternal Kingdom* (2000). Suffice to note that within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the general understanding is that "the new earth will be the eternal home for the redeemed and perfect environment for everlasting life, love, joy and learning in the presence of God" (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2015:181). However, it is also important to mention that not all theologians in the Adventist Church consent to this position. For instance, some emphasize the "new" in the new earth, thus focusing more on discontinuity and the need for a radically new order. In contrast, others focus more on the earth in the new earth and therefore emphasize essential continuity with this life, this earth. The last view maintains that there is a need to hold these two core notions embedded in the image of the new earth. In their view, there is indeed a need for a prophetic transformation of this earth, and there is also a need for a continuity of what is material, bodily, and earthly. To make sense of these diverging views in this study, I have elected to focus on three Seventh-day Adventist theologians who represent each of the abovementioned positions.

The theological debate around the image of the new earth hinges on whether the church is responsible for taking care of this earth in the "*here and now*" amid the hope of the new earth in the "*then and there*". As mentioned, most Seventh-day Adventist theologians are of the idea that this earth has to be annihilated to combat the effects posed by sin; as such, this earth possesses no future. In his essay entitled "Ecology & Ecotheology in Revelation" (2009), Sivge

Tonstad, expounds on five ways in which the image of the new earth, as expressed in Revelation 21, can be interpreted in an ecologically friendly way. I will outline three of the five proposals. Firstly, Tonstad is of the view that when John says he “saw a new heaven and a new earth” he was not suggesting an “ecological nihilism” or the “abandonment of the earth”. Rather he was expressing “the relationship between the Creator and the earth at the most basic level, which does not suppose an abandonment of the earth by the Creator”. Secondly, Tonstad suggests that throughout the book of Revelation, God takes the posture of protecting the earth. Therefore, the hope for the new earth implicitly and explicitly speaks “for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great”, and, as more than an afterthought, “for destroying those who destroy the earth” (Rev11:18).

The third proposal is that the new earth, as expressed in Revelation 21, speaks to the renewal of the earth. As such, Sivge Tonstad suggests that the idea of “new” in Revelation speaks to the restoration of the earth and not its replacement. Interpreted in this way, the image of the “new earth” offers what Carl Braaten (2017) calls *eschapaxis*, which he explains this way “In proleptic ethics, it may be said that the end justifies the means because the end is proleptically present and operative beforehand, rehearsing the qualities of the eschatological kingdom characterized by peace, love, joy, unity -in the course of history’s forward movement ”(Braaten 1974:21).

4.6 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, one has to consider the significance of the two core notions embedded in the image of the new earth, namely that a discontinuity of this earth is needed amid the destructive practices that continue to impact the earth negatively and that the need of the continuity of that which is material, bodily and earthly. In my view, Seventh-day Adventist theology ought to embrace both perspectives. This is because the hope for the discontinuity of this earth stands as a critique of the current world order. While the notion of the continuity of this earth stands as a reminder of humanity’s prophetic role in taking care of the earth. As Ted Peters (1980) argues, “This is the prophetic task of the Christian church. The kingdom of God is coming, and someone needs to say so” (Peters 1980:114). However, such a task within the Seventh-day Adventist Church is reduced to docility wherein every environmental, and social problem is interpreted as the sign of the coming of the Second Advent of Christ. For this specific reason, the notion of prophetic transformation of this earth needs to be held with the idea of the continuity of that which is material, bodily, and earthly. Expressing that God will

accomplish the continuity between this earth and its eschatological destiny in and through the discontinuity of God's new creative act.

Chapter 5

Edward Heppenstall's Interpretation of the Symbol of the New Earth

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the significance of the image of the new earth in Seventh-day Adventist theology. In this chapter, I will examine Edward Heppenstall's interpretation of the image of the new earth as the leading Seventh-day Adventist theologian of the 20th century. I will begin by providing a brief biography of Edward Heppenstall (see 5.2). Next, I will present an overview of his role in Seventh-day Adventist theology, focusing on his general contributions to theology and Adventist eschatology (see 5.3). Thirdly, I will present a detailed analysis of his interpretation of the image of the new earth (see 5.4). Lastly, I will offer a brief response to Edward Heppenstall on his interpretation of the image of the new earth.

5.2 Biography

Edward Heppenstall was born into a family from the Congregational Church in Yorkshire, England, on May 8, 1901. Before his conversion to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he was publicly known as an agnostic whose relationship with Christianity was solely intellectual. His colleague's efforts introduced him to a “living relationship with Jesus Christ.” In 1923, Heppenstall was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the book *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (1992), Eric Claude Webster notes that the baptism of Heppenstall significantly impacted the theological praxis of Adventism in the 20th century. He writes, “His baptismal was an act that was to have a far-reaching influence on Adventism in the second half of the century” (Webster 1992:289).

According to Margrit Heppenstall (1996:2-3), he lost his job after he decided to become a Seventh-day Adventist.¹⁵ This predicament led to the beginning of his academic journey (Heppenstall 1996:3). Heppenstall's academic journey began at Stanborough Seventh-day Adventist College, where he spent five years of his life as a student. After graduating, he was appointed a rhetoric teacher at Stanborough Seventh-day Adventist College (Webster 1992:292). Heppenstall's theological thinking became increasingly sharpened due to his teaching of rhetoric (Webster 1992:292).

Due to his interest in furthering his education, Heppenstall left Stanborough Seventh-day Adventist College in 1931 to continue his academic pursuits at Emmanuel Missionary College

¹⁵ Edward Heppenstall first worked in a machine shop (Margit Heppenstall 1996:2-3). One reason why he lost his job was the conviction that Saturday is the Sabbath and not a day for him to be engaged in any form of labour.

in Michigan, United States of America.¹⁶ Heppenstall met William Warren Prescott at Emmanuel Missionary College, who would significantly influence his theology.¹⁷ In 1934, Heppenstall completed a master's degree in medieval history and semantics at the University of Michigan. Upon completing his master's degree, he worked as a lecturer and pastor in the Michigan Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Heppenstall was invited to join La Sierra College in California, where he was appointed as lecturer in 1940 and lectured there from 1940 to 1955. While working as a lecturer, he also served as the resident pastor of La Sierra College church. Webster (1992:297) notes, "This allowed him to express his theology within the practical context of church life." Murdoch (1970:22) notes that "he became one of the foremost Bible teachers the denomination has produced in the 20th century." While working at La Sierra University, Edward Heppenstall spent time pursuing a PhD at the University of Southern California. He obtained a Doctorate in Philosophy in Religious Education in 1950 with a thesis entitled "A Functional Approach to the Study of Religious Education in Seventh-day Adventist Colleges" (1950). He was appointed as a lecturer in systematic theology and Christian philosophy at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary in 1955 which was at the time Potomac University in Washington DC (Webster 1992:300). He worked there (and later at the SDA Theological Seminary when it moved to Michigan and together with Emmanuel Missionary College was reconstituted as Andrews University) for 11 years and was chair of the Christian Philosophy department. Eric Webster observes, "By this time, his influence had become international because he was now teaching Seventh-day Adventist pastors from across the globe" (Webster 1992:300).

Amongst those he taught and led, Heppenstall is often described as one who is loyal to the truth. For instance, Murdoch (1970) describes Edward Heppenstall as having a dynamic personality. In this regard, he notes that he was a man of courage and conviction, always championing the cause of right, whether famous or unpopular. He is broad-minded, holds high standards, and is loyal to what he considers suitable. He is the stuff of which martyrs are made. He stands for the right at any cost, whether unfavourable to his present or future development (Murdoch 1970:3). His influence reached Seventh-day Adventist seminaries in Australia, the Philippines, the United States of America, and England (Murdoch 1970:14). Heppenstall published numerous articles in Seventh-day Adventist journals and contributed to the book

¹⁶ Emmanuel Missionary College was renamed as Andrews University in 1960.

¹⁷ William Warren Prescott (1855-1944) had a great influence on the educational system of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In theological circles in the Seventh-day Adventist Church he is celebrated for his groundbreaking work *The Doctrine of Christ* (1920) and *the Savior of the World* (1929).

Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrines (1955) and the SDA Bible Commentary Series (Vol 1-7) (1953-57). Toward the end of his academic career, he was called to join the Faculty of Theology at Loma Linda University, where he lectured until his retirement in 1970.

The life story of Edward Heppenstall has a wealth of themes, namely his being a lecturer, theologian, pastor, and family man. These contexts influenced and shaped Heppenstall's theological thinking, beliefs, and spirituality, which are visible in every aspect of his writings.

5.3 Edward Heppenstall's Place in Seventh-day Adventist Theology

In discussing the significance of Edward Heppenstall in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Armando Juárez (1991) notes the following:

Edward Heppenstall is one of the important theologians in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He has published a lot on the grounding doctrines of the church, such as law, sin, salvation, Christology, and Eschatology. Edward Heppenstall greatly shaped Seventh-day Adventist theology through his articles, books, and teaching. He taught during an era when scholars from 1960-1990s attended the Seventh-day Adventist seminary, where he taught, and many of the pastors he taught were the first to be conferred with Doctoral Qualifications in Theology. (Juárez 1991:3).

The place and contribution of Edward Heppenstall in Seventh-day Adventist theology “should be envisioned in light of the internal and external theological conflicts that the Seventh-day Adventist Church experienced in his time” (Juárez 1991:15). It might suffice here to briefly sketch these periods and how Heppenstall contributed theologically to settling the theological contradictions between 1928 and 1985. Below, I divide these years into five distinct periods:

- The period before the dialogue (1930-1955): This was a period wherein a Seventh-day Adventist theological position was formulated about the Deity of Jesus Christ, the Trinity, and the personality of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, this position came to be accepted as part of the Seventh-day fundamental beliefs. However, Leroy Froom in the book entitled *The Movement of Destiny* (1971), notes that in this period, there were further corrections that were made to these doctrines, in response to the accusation that the Seventh-day Adventist Church should be dubbed as a cult in contrast to other Protestant denominations (Froom 1971:22). The theological significance of Edward Heppenstall in this period is expressed in his text *Syllabus for Bible Doctrines* (1955). In this text, Heppenstall expresses his support for the corrections made to these doctrines. Arguably, it was during this period that Heppenstall was in his theological prime.

- The period of dialogue with Evangelicals (1955-1960): After the doctrinal revisions and adjustments around the Deity of Jesus Christ, the Trinity, and the personality of the Holy Spirit, Juarez (1991:17) notes that “invitations to Adventist theologians for theological debates by Protestant theologians increased during this period”. According to Froom (1971:29), these dialogues were initiated by Walter Martin (1928-1989). Martin formulated a rejoinder by asking questions about the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This led to the publication of *Seventh-day Adventist Answers to Questions on Doctrine* (1957), which aimed to answer the questions raised by Walter Martin. Despite not having contributed explicitly to the dialogue, Heppenstall was one of the reviewers of the answers in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (1957). Furthermore, Heppenstall wrote a rejoinder to Walter Martin's text entitled *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism* (1960). In his rejoinder, Heppenstall specifically responded to Martin's views on an Adventist position regarding law, grace, salvation, and the notion of the Seventh-day Adventist Church being a remnant church.
- The period of the Brinsmead controversy (1960-1970): This period was characterized by the beginning of the awakening movement led by Robert Brinsmead (1933-). This movement held some novel views of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines, such as the investigative judgement. Edward Heppenstall has been dubbed as one of the major opponents of the theological views of this movement. In considering the positions held by this movement, he wrote extensively on the following doctrines: perfection, righteousness by faith, original sin, the sinless nature of Jesus Christ, and the investigative judgement.
- The controversy around the doctrine of sanctification and justification (1970-1980): Heppenstall's retirement from Adventist seminaries was the most productive period to Seventh-day Adventist theology. In this period, Heppenstall addressed the tension between the doctrine of sanctification and issues related to the theme of righteousness by faith.
- The era of the internal debates around the heavenly sanctuary and investigative judgement (1980-1985): Arguably, the doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary and investigative judgement is one of the most important and unique doctrines within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the book, *The Sanctuary Doctrine: Three Approaches in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (1981), Roy Adams notes that the doctrine of investigative judgement invited objections and criticism from evangelicals and some Adventist theologians (Adams 1981:27). The most prominent critique within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination came from Desmond Ford (1929-2019), who openly rejected the

“traditional formulation that Jesus Christ entered into the most Holy place of the heavenly sanctuary in 1844” (Juárez 1991:20). This crisis and controversy within the Seventh-day Adventist Church inspired Edward Heppenstall to publish several articles as a response to this crisis.

One can describe Edward Heppenstall's place in Seventh-day Adventist theology from two perspectives: first, as a pioneer; and second, as a facilitator of Adventist theology. As a pioneer of Seventh-day Adventist theology, Heppenstall is celebrated for contributing to Adventist theology after 1950. As a facilitator of Adventist theology, Heppenstall is appraised for his attempts to ground Adventist doctrines on the Bible. Moreover, his contribution to the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of concepts, namely law, sin, salvation, Christology, and eschatology has equally led him to be appraised as a champion of “new theology” (Juárez 1991:19).

It may suffice to mention that Heppenstall recognizes Ellen White's writings as an authoritative source of truth which provides the church guidance, instruction and correction. Heppenstall is a key figure within Seventh-day Adventist theological circles. Juárez observes, “He had a central role in shaping the Seventh-day Adventist theological lens in the 20th century not only through his writings but also through decades of teaching in Seventh-day Adventist institutions” (Juárez 1991:28).

Having presented Edward Heppenstall's biography and place within the Seventh-day Adventist theology, I will now offer a critical discussion of his views on eschatology. I will assess his significance in light of his theological contributions in general and how he approaches eschatology within the clusters of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology.

5.4 Edward Heppenstall's Theological Contribution

This chapter investigates whether and to what extent Edward Heppenstall, as a leading Adventist Theologian of the 20th century, avoids escapist eschatology in his interpretation of the image of the new earth. Heppenstall has published more than any other Seventh-day Adventist theologian in the 20th century about the doctrine of redemption and the heavenly sanctuary. It may suffice to mention some of his theological writings, specifically articles and books:

- “A Functional Approach to the study of Religious Education in Seventh-day Adventist Colleges” PhD dissertation, University of Southern California (1951)
- *Our High Priest: Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (1972)

- “Access to God through Special or Natural Revelation” (1974)
- *Salvation Unlimited: Perspectives in Righteousness by Faith* (1974)
- *In Touch with God* (1975)
- Chapter in *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility* (1975)
- *The Man Who Is God: A Study of the Person and Nature of Jesus. Son of God and Son of Man* (1977)
- Chapter in *Our Firm Foundation. Vol 2.* (1952)
- Contributed to *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (1957)
- "The Hour of God's Judgment Is Come" (1962)
- “The Sanctuary and the Atonement” (1981)
- “The Foundation of the Adventist Faith” (1965)
- “Can You Stand Persecution?” *These Times* (1968)
- “Things Which Cannot Be Shaken,” *These Times* (1972)
- “How God Works to Save Us,” *These Times* (1973)

In this chapter, I will evaluate Heppenstall's eschatological understanding by examining the following contributions: *Syllabus of Biblical Doctrines* (1955), “Daniel 8:14 in Perspective” (1956), *Our High Priest: Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (1972), and "Doctrinal Discussions: The Hour of God Judgment" Parts 1 and 2 (1962). It may suffice to provide the context of these publications briefly.

Syllabus for Biblical Doctrines (1955)

The publication of this text follows a series of theological inquiries into the doctrinal positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church after its formal inception in 1864. Accordingly, key doctrinal contestation centered around the deity of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the entire eschatological position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

This publication came when Edward Heppenstall's theological system reached its maturity. In this text, Heppenstall builds his theological arguments on the works of Seventh-day Adventist pioneers such as Ellen White. Thus, he approaches eschatology in this text from a traditional Seventh-day Adventist perspective. To contribute to the already established formulations such as Jesus Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, death

and resurrection, the millennium and the end of sin, and the hope for the new earth. Edward Heppenstall grounds these key Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal loci in the Bible in this text.

Daniel 8:14 in Perspective (1956)

The article was published the year after Edward Heppenstall published *The Syllabus for Biblical Doctrines* (1955). The article can be understood as a biblical explication of the key foundational text of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology.

Doctrinal Discussions: The Hour of God's Judgment Has Come (1962)

This compilation of essays by Seventh-day Adventist thinkers served as a rejoinder to the theological contestation raised by Evangelical theologians, specifically to the text entitled *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism* (1960) by Walter Martin.

In this regard, Edward Heppenstall responded to Walter Martin's claims in an essay titled "The hour of God's Judgement has come." His main focus in these essays was to offer a critique and response to Martin by emphasizing the first eschatological cluster of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, namely the heavenly sanctuary.

Our High Priest: Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary (1972)

The publication of this book comes after a decade of theological debates imposed on the Adventist theological system by an Australian group called the Awakeners. At the same time, it emerged at the beginning of a period in the 1970s wherein the doctrine of justification and sanctification as understood in the Seventh-day Adventist Church was contested.

In this text, Edward Heppenstall attempts to integrate the entire Adventist eschatology by implicitly and explicitly addressing the issues of justification and sanctification and the looming tension around the doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary. Note that this book was published after his retirement as a lecturer.

5.5 Edward Heppenstall's Approach to Eschatology

In the 20th century, the theological system of Edward Heppenstall was considered an important explication of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines in general and eschatological clusters in particular. He discusses Seventh-day Adventist eschatology in several publications; for this chapter, an emphasis will be placed on his views in the following publications: *Syllabus for Biblical Doctrines* (1955), "Daniel 8:14 in Perspective" (1956), "Doctrinal Discussions: The hour of Gods Judgment has come" (1962) and *Our High Priest: Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (1972).

5.5.2 Syllabus for Biblical Doctrines (1955)

To understand Heppenstall's eschatological approach in the *Syllabus for Biblical Doctrines* (1955), a few basic eschatological concepts that are advanced in the Seventh-day Adventist theology that one needs to be familiar with as they shape the context of the overall eschatologically, he proposes in this text. First, it is the Adventist hermeneutical approach to interpreting biblical prophecy. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Seventh-day Adventist Church maintains a historicist interpretation of the apocalyptic prophecies found in the book of Daniel and Revelation. Secondly, Edward Heppenstall (1955:27) perceives the doctrine of the ministry of Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary as key to understanding Seventh-day Adventist eschatology. These two concepts constitute the groundwork for Heppenstall's understanding of eschatology.

In this text, Edward Heppenstall explicates Adventist eschatology in three themes, namely: (a) God's way in the sanctuary; (b) signs of the times; and (c) the Second Advent of Christ.

God's Way in the Sanctuary

Heppenstall opens the text by first explaining the significance of the "heavenly sanctuary" in the plan of redemption. In this regard, Heppenstall offers three ways in which we can understand the functionality of the "sanctuary", namely: "The sanctuary is the key to God's plan of redemption" (Heppenstall 1955:8). In other words, the completion of the work of redemption hinges not primarily on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Instead, in Heppenstall's view, a key step in the completion of the plan of redemption is in juxtaposition with the completion of the mediatorial work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.

Secondly, Heppenstall proposes that the sanctuary should be understood as "the way of salvation and the way of a covenant relationship with God" (Heppenstall 1955:22). Lastly, he suggests that "the sanctuary ought to be understood as the way of judgment" (Heppenstall 1955:31). In this regard, he strongly argues the case of investigative judgement, as the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church argued.

In Edward Heppenstall's view, without understanding this eschatological cluster in the theological system of Seventh-day Adventist theology, it becomes difficult to explicate the rest of the eschatological clusters, such as the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, millennium, resurrection, and the image of the new earth. For instance, the sanctuary doctrine according to Heppenstall encompasses the following themes: Jesus Christ in the earthly sanctuary; Jesus Christ in the ceremonial law and Jewish ritual; the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ; the daily ministration of Jesus Christ; and lastly, the yearly ministration in the sanctuary – the day of

atonement (Heppenstall 1955:23). All these themes are vital in the eschatological thinking of Edward Heppenstall as they become a window to his attempts to explain the eschatological clusters of Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Signs of the Times

Heppenstall tries to draw a congruency between the sanctuary and what he terms “the times of the end” (Heppenstall 1955:38). The end of the times for Edward Heppenstall is characterized by (i) a period when the gospel shall go to all the world in a great burst of missionary zeal, and (ii) it will be days of counterfeit religious revivals, a time of great trouble both economically and cosmically. Accordingly, Heppenstall maintains that when such events occur, this could be the sign of Jesus Christ leaving the holy of the holiest place in heaven to come to earth to fetch His church. It is worth noting that Heppenstall views the signs of the times with what he terms the “seal of God, anti-Christ and the mark of the beast”. All these, for Heppenstall, are precursors to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.

The Second Advent of Christ

Edward Heppenstall addresses several themes about the Second Advent of Christ in this chapter. First, he offers an explication of the “millennium”. In this regard, he begins by noting the two polar opposite themes regarding the millennium: pre-millennium and post-millennium. Accordingly, Heppenstall argues that the millennial reign of Jesus Christ will be characterized by the following events: the Second Advent of Christ, the First Resurrection, and the Second Resurrection. He argues, “The millennium is the period between the two resurrections. The resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the wicked” (Heppenstall 1955:41).

In Heppenstall’s view, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ entails the “victorious consummation of the great controversy” (Heppenstall 1955:41). This entails the permanent eradication of sin and final retribution. Thus, in commenting on the hope of the Second Advent of Christ, Heppenstall suggests: “The people of God through six thousand years of the great controversy have lived and worked in confident assurance and eager anticipation of the speedy return of the Lord they loved” (Heppenstall 1955:41).

Furthermore, according to Heppenstall, the Second Advent of Jesus Christ leads to the actualization of the “reward of the righteous” (Heppenstall 1955:43). This reward of the righteous, according to Heppenstall, speaks to the following factors: The eternal dwelling place of God, and the saints inhabiting heaven temporarily (Heppenstall 1955:41).

5.5.3 Daniel 8:14 in Perspective (1956)

This brief essay comes a year after the publication of the *Syllabus for Biblical Doctrines* (1955). In this essay, Edward Heppenstall seeks to amplify the importance of the “Heavenly Sanctuary” doctrine within Adventist eschatology. In doing so he attempts to settle various theological contradictions about how the Adventist conclusion has been dubbed incorrect by Protestant theologians. In this regard, he offers a brief analysis of Daniel 8:14, which he dubs the center of Seventh-day Adventist theology in general and eschatology in particular. He comments:

Daniel 8:14 has long been one of the key texts in the scriptural foundation of the Adventist faith, and rightly so. The prophetic period of the 2300 days, with its termination in the fall of 1844 and the commencement of the antitypical Day of Atonement, constitutes one of the main pillars of Adventist theology (Heppenstall 1956:6).

However, the Adventist interpretation of this text has not been without contestation. Amongst the contestations of this verse is the understanding of the word “cleansed”. In this regard, Heppenstall defends the Adventist position by suggesting that the verse refers to cleansing the heavenly sanctuary as typified in the day of atonement. Secondly, Heppenstall perceives the verse as explicating when the investigative judgement shall commence. Lastly, Heppenstall maintains that the word ‘cleansing’ refers to the broader scope of the work of the sanctuary doctrine, which entails the solution to all the attacks on the sanctuary by the little horn (Heppenstall 1956:1).

Heppenstall (1956:1) maintains that in order to understand the eschatological grounding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, one should understand the sanctuary doctrine to its fullest. Thus, in this essay, Heppenstall seeks to explicate the relationship of the sanctuary and the realization of the kingdom of God. He does this by surveying Bible verses from Daniel 2-12. In this regard, he describes the relation of the sanctuary to the kingdom of God in the following manner:

From Daniel 2 to Daniel 12 there is shown the conflict between the kingdoms of men and the kingdom of God. How is the sanctuary related to the kingdom of God? It teaches the truth about the setting up of God's kingdom (Dan. 7:9-14). The setting up of the kingdom comes at the time of judgment when a distinction will be made between the true and the false subjects of God's kingdom. The kingdom will be realized through preaching the everlasting gospel, the three angels' messages of Revelation 14, with their proclamation that the "hour of his judgment has come." Then, the little horn's dominion will be taken away (Dan. 7:26; 8:14), and the true saints will possess the kingdom (Heppenstall 1956:2).

One important eschatological concept that Heppenstall holds firm in this text it is the notion of the completion of the ministration of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Heppenstall argues

that the completion of the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary “sets before the world the great issues in the controversy between sin and darkness” (Heppenstall 1956:3). Secondly, for Heppenstall, when Christ completes his ministry in the heavenly sanctuary that will reflect the “victory of the church and the return of the Jesus Christ” (Heppenstall 1956:3). The main contention of Edward Heppenstall in this brief essay is to try and settle the contradictions about the Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:14 that were in place while also validating and intensifying the Adventist position regarding the sanctuary and the kingdom of God.

5.5.4 Doctrinal Discussions: The Hour of God's Judgment Has Come (1961)

In the introduction to *The Hour of God's Judgment*, Heppenstall (1961:160) refers to the heavenly sanctuary and the ministration of Christ therein as holding a spotlight in the end-time events. Accordingly, in this essay, he briefly analyses Daniel 8 and highlights two relative underpinnings to the heavenly sanctuary and the ministry of Jesus Christ. Firstly, Heppenstall refers to the 2300-year prophecy and how the 1844 moment, per the Millerite Movement interpretation, has been impaired in its effectiveness on earth. Secondly, Heppenstall is of the view that the “heavenly sanctuary is of great importance for the redemption of all things” (Heppenstall 1961:183). However, central to these two sanctuaries is the teaching of the “mediatorial ministration of the High Priest” (Heppenstall 1961:183). Accordingly, Heppenstall maintains that it is the high priest that holds the key to the consummation of all things, for in the mediatorial work of the high priest is the work of atonement, judgment, and redemption” (Heppenstall 1961:183).

Another critical aspect for Heppenstall is the doctrine of investigative judgement. In the essay, he responds to the questions held by protestant theologians such as Walter Martin of whether a judgement is currently taking place in heaven post-1884. In his response to Martin, he first attempts to define investigative judgement. In this regard, Heppenstall maintains that the term investigative judgement refers to “the biblical teaching on the keeping of the records of all mens lives, thoughts and deeds” (Heppenstall 1961:186). These records, according to Heppenstall, are kept detailing every minute of human life.

Significantly, Heppenstall argues that the investigative judgement is the final work of salvation that will bring about the consummation of all things (Heppenstall 1961:186).¹⁸ But more importantly, it is about God's vindication and justification on the grounds of the accusation

¹⁸ In SDA thinking the “investigative judgement” is just a part of the final work of salvation. It is followed by the Second Coming, Millennial judgment (Rev 20:4) and finally the Last or Final executive judgement (Rev 20:11f).

leveled by “Satan against God”, as read in Daniel and Revelation.

In this essay, Heppenstall believes that investigative judgement initiates God’s ultimate redemption of the consummation of all things.

5.5.5 Our High Priest: Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary (1972)

Edward Heppenstall (1972) strongly believes that the hope for actualizing the new heaven and earth hinges on Jesus Christ's ministration as the High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. In his view, Jesus Christ:

Mediates an eternal redemption to those who believe in Him. He saves to the uttermost. He gives repentance. He ministers forgiveness and takes away sin. He offers what man desperately needs. He alone meets the spiritual wants of men. Because He is the Son of God who became man, He is fitted in all ways to be man's Savior and Advocate before our heavenly Father. He knows the Father as no other being does. He is fully acquainted with the character of God (Heppenstall 1972:55).

As such, Edward Heppenstall returns to this eschatological cluster because he believes it is a significant part of the Seventh-day Adventist theological system. In this text, his interpretation of the eschaton is influenced by an emphasis on Jesus as the High Priest in the Heavenly sanctuary. However, he goes beyond explaining the ministry of Christ as a high priest in the heavenly sanctuary in this text. He offers a detailed discussion on the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. According to Heppenstall, Christian hope will be realized when "Christ leaves the heavenly sanctuary and returns to the earth" (Heppenstall 1972:66). In his view, the fight for human rights and addressing societal issues are futile, because justice and order will only be attained when Christ leaves the heavenly sanctuary. As such part of the Christian mission is futile because Jesus Christ can only achieve it. He further argues that only at Christ's Second Coming will the eternal destinies of all people be determined. Based on the pre-Advent judgement, believers will be united with Christ when He comes, and unbelievers will be forever separated from God. Thus Heppenstall (1972:72) maintains that the investigative judgement is necessary to understand the hope of the consummation of all things.

Heppenstall builds his eschatology from the doctrine of redemption and the completion of Christ's ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary. As a 20th-century Seventh-day Adventist theologian, he emphasizes the Adventist hermeneutical approach in unveiling apocalyptic books such as Daniel and Revelation.

5.6 Edward Heppenstall’s Interpretation of the New Earth

Thus far, in this chapter, I have analyzed Edward Heppenstall's understanding of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology in four of his major works. He greatly emphasizes the doctrine of

“Christ’s Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary” as a precursor to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, millennium, resurrection, and ultimately the new earth.

Traditionally, the Seventh-day Adventist Church understands the image of the new earth as an “eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love and learning in God’s presence”. However, in ecological critiques of Christian eschatology, the question is raised about whether Christian hope does not prompt an other-worldly orientation where the focus is on the soul more than the body and heaven more than earth.

The primary criterion for evaluation here is the extent to which Edward Heppenstall’s interpretation of the new earth promotes an escapist eschatology. In addition, the following questions will guide this evaluation: (1) Does his approach to eschatology encompass the hope for this earth? (2) Does his interpretation of the new earth emphasise the continuity with the present earth or the novelty of the new earth? (3) Does his interpretation of the new earth highlight the transformation of the existing earth, or does it suggest that the new earth will entirely replace the current one? Inquiries into his works above and secondary sources published on Heppenstall will be discussed.

In his essay entitled “Should Christians Obey the Law of God?” (1969), Heppenstall maintains that it is through obedience to the will of God that humanity is made ready for the new earth. He affirms that humanity is called to prepare for the new world in the *here and now* by living in obedience to the will of God. In this regard, He wrote:

The gospel’s ultimate purpose is to restore God’s image in man. If a man does not desire to seek this, he is unfit for the new earth. The fight is not found in man’s obedience rather that fight was won by Christ. But obedience through the Holy Spirit proves they have the right to inherit the new earth (Heppenstall 1969:11).

What remains unclear is whether the “obedience to the law of God,” as argued by Heppenstall, translates into human actions against ecological injustices that severely impact the earth’s future. Significantly, for Heppenstall, the gospel’s essence is to restore God’s image in Man. The idea of the “image of God” in ecotheology is often problematized because many of our ecological problems now emerge from such perceptions. Man is placed above non-human creatures, meaning that humans alone are the repositories of the presence of God; as a result, other creatures are at the mercy of humanity to exist.

The theological language Heppenstall uses regarding the relationship among all creation in God’s Household fails to encourage connection and relating among all creatures. Instead, it has led Heppenstall to disregard the significance and potential of this earth. Hence, he calls upon Seventh-day Adventist Christians to focus solely on the new earth. He comments:

We have come to the hour when we are lodged, as it were, between two worlds: the world we know and live in, and the new earth yet to be born. The first is visible. Potentially it is dead. It has no future. There is no solution to the world's fatal sickness within the present historical process. The world we belong to is invisible (Heppenstall 1972:33).

Elsewhere, Heppenstall (1975) furthers this point by arguing that “Jesus Christ will ultimately build a new earth upon the ruins of this old earth” (Heppenstall 1975:45). Heppenstall’s position implicitly and explicitly advances notions of docility amongst Seventh-day Adventist Christians. For it shows disregard for the earth and opens room for ecological degradation to proceed. For this reason, he believes that the new earth reflects the “vindication of God”. In this regard, he argues:

The purpose of Christ’s heavenly ministry is to punish those who oppose God and His people. God's vindication is complete when sin and sinners are eradicated at the end of the millennium. With this act, the plan of redemption is accomplished, God is vindicated before the universe, His government is secured eternally, and the believers relish the benefits of God's redemption: life eternal in a new earth (Heppenstall 1975:51).

Heppenstall provides a clear insight into his belief that the destruction of the earth is necessary for the realization of the new earth. He bases his interpretation of the new earth on completing Jesus Christ's mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary. This work involves three stages of judgement, which, in his opinion, will ultimately lead to the new earth. The first stage is what he calls the "pre-advent/investigative judgment." The second stage is known among Seventh-day Adventists as the “millennial judgement”. The final stage is referred to as the executive judgement. After this last stage, Heppenstall believes that God will create a new earth once sin and Satan have been eradicated. Heppenstall's interpretation emphasizes the replacement of this earth and implies its destruction. Consequently, he believes attempting to solve social problems is futile, as he sees them as "signs of the end of time". In this regard, he comments:

Human progress can never make this world a better place. The assertion that man on earth can realize a perfect society must be rejected. Nothing will remain of the present civilization as we know it. This has been the divine plan all along. Christ will one day make His work perfect. Those who trust Him will live in a sinless world of perfect beings. Beyond these shadows, the perfect order will come with the final revelation of Christ (Heppenstall 1972:36).

Heppenstall's methodology for interpreting the new earth must be stronger because it solely focuses on a heavenly orientation. This is evident in his attempts to discourage human actions in caring for the earth, as he believes such actions delay the "Second Advent of Jesus Christ," which is seen as the ultimate solution to the problem of sin. Another important aspect of Heppenstall's interpretation is his reliance on a historicist understanding of apocalyptic books,

particularly Daniel and Revelation. As a result, his interpretation of the new earth does not demonstrate any interest in developing a theology of hope for this earth. The danger with Heppenstall's stance, or at least his fixation on the idea of the "signs of the end of the world", is that it promotes passivity among Christians when human actions are necessary. Furthermore, his formulations fail to recognize the significance of the present, which is dependent on future hope.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an in-depth discussion of Edward Heppenstall's interpretation of the doctrine/symbol of the new earth. In addition to reviewing his life and work, attention was also given to how he approaches eschatology. Several observations on how he understands the new earth were made. I will now offer concluding remarks and further evaluations on Heppenstall's interpretation of the new earth.

Heppenstall undeniably emphasizes the completion of the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary as the precursor to the actualization of the Second Advent of Jesus Christ and, ultimately, the new earth. He holds firm to the idea that this earth will ultimately be destroyed and that all human efforts to save it are futile. Heppenstall was fully aware of the social problems of his time but understood these problems in a limiting way theologically. Limiting in the sense that he offers "cheap hope" to all social problems. Hence, throughout his eschatology, he creates a congruency between the social ills and what he frequently terms as "signs of the end of the world". He ascribes to the Maoist maxim that "Everything under heaven is in utter chaos; the situation is excellent." In this case, the chaos under heaven is excellent because, for Heppenstall, it is a precursor to the Advent of Christ. For instance, when Heppenstall observes the interventions of scientists and religious institutions in resolving some pressing problems faced by the world, he maintains a very undermining posture towards such intervention. In this regard, he argues:

Most of our time's religious and scientific world expresses the development of truth, religion, culture, and civilization in limitless duration. Solutions to the world's problems are believed to be within the present historical process. But the fulfillment of God's Word and prophecies requires the end of the end of history as man has known it for the past six thousand years. The climax of history is here, when God promises a new heaven and a new earth, and God will soon be realized (Heppenstall 1971:26).

In my view, the weakness of Heppenstall's eschatological thinking is that it lacks what Carl Braaten (1972) calls "eschatopraxis." Heppenstall holds firm to the idea that this earth will be destroyed and consequently replaced with the new earth. This line of thinking amongst

Seventh-day Adventist Church members has advanced what Ernst Conradie (2015:74) describes as “cheap hope”. This is because, in Heppenstall’s eschatology, there is no environmental stewardship ethic. After all, he views this earth considering what he envisions to be its ultimate destiny: annihilation. He argues:

At the end of the millennium, Satan, his angels, and all the wicked are judged before the universe. God is vindicated when saints and sinners recognize His justice in His dealings with the problem of sin. Sin and sinners are annihilated. In this way, the ongoing controversy against Satan and the sin problem in the universe is concluded. The saints reign forever with Christ on the new earth, enjoying the eternal result of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (Heppenstall 1971:69).

Heppenstall’s interpretation of the image of the new earth emphasizes the newness of the earth as opposed to its continuity, its complete annihilation, and not its renewal. The weakness in rejecting the continuity/renewal of this earth, as Heppenstall does, is that it justifies eschatological escapism and renders this earth useless. Thus, his interpretation of the new earth buttresses “*redemption from this earth*” and not “*redemption of the earth*”. To an extent, Heppenstall interpretation verifies the critique of Christian hope by Ludwig Feuerbach that, in fact, “Nature, the world, has no value, no interest in Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and salvation of his soul” (Feuerbach 1957:287).

Chapter 6

Norman Gulley's Interpretation of the New Earth

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter assessed Edward Heppenstall's interpretation of the new earth. I noted that Heppenstall understands the doctrine of the new earth as emphasizing discontinuity from this earth. Thus, in his view, this earth has no future and all attempts to save it are futile. The purpose of this chapter is to offer a critical assessment of how Norman Gulley (1933-2022) interprets the image of the new earth. Among 21st-century Seventh-day Adventist theologians, Gulley is a significant voice in explicating Seventh-day Adventist eschatology.

I will begin this chapter with a brief biographical sketch of Norman Gulley (see 6.2). Secondly, I will outline his place within Seventh-day Adventist theology (see 6.3). Thirdly, I will discuss his distinct approach to eschatology (see 6.4). Fourthly and most significantly, I will offer a critical and detailed assessment of Gulley's interpretation of the image of the new earth (see 6.5). Accordingly, the conclusion of the chapter will assess how Gulley handles the continuity and discontinuity of the new earth with this earth, thus answering the question of whether and to what extent Norman Gulley, as a leading Seventh-day Adventist theologian, avoids an escapist eschatology in his interpretation of the new earth (see 6.6).

6.2 Biographical Sketch

Norman Richard Gulley was born on September 22, 1933 in Stalbans, Herts, England. Gulley holds a PhD in Systematic Theology from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. He has taught in Japan, the Philippines, and the United States of America. Gulley has served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a pastor, lecturer, academic, administrator, and researcher. As an academic, Gulley has published 14 books, contributed chapters to edited volumes, presented theological papers at various theological conferences, and authored articles in journals and Adventist magazines. Previously, he served as the President of the Adventist Theological Society.

6.3 Norman Gulley's Place in Seventh-day Adventist Theology

Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Gulley is celebrated as one of the leading systematic theologians of the late 20th century and 21st century. This is because Gulley has contributed significantly to the discourse on Seventh-day Adventist dogmatics. Throughout his career, he promoted the notion of "biblical theology" in interpreting the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He has often looked at the trends within theology from a biblical

perspective.

6.4 Norman Gulley's Approach to Eschatology

Traditionally, systematic theology concludes with the doctrine of the last things. In the Seventh-day Adventist context, the doctrine of the last things focuses on the culmination of Jesus Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, death and resurrection, the millennium, the end of sin, and the new earth.¹⁹ Gulley explicated these eschatological clusters throughout his theological career from a “biblical and Christological” perspective. As a result, much of his writings on eschatology seek to justify the doctrinal position of Adventist eschatology while offering a critique on non-Adventist eschatologies that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Surprisingly, as an Adventist theologian who writes predominately in the late 20th and 21st centuries, Gulley's eschatology embodies a sense of hope rather than fear amidst what he calls the “time of trouble” (Gulley 1998). However, Gulley, just like Heppenstall and other early Adventist theologians, is suspicious of the ability of human beings to bring about a just world as often advocated in prophetic theologies such as liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, and recently ecotheology. In what follows, I will discuss Gulley's approach to eschatology. This will be done through a survey of the following publications:

- “The Battle for Biblical Eschatology in the End Time” (1990).
- “The Good News About Last Days Events” (1998).
- “Will Christ Return in the Year 2000?” (1999).
- “How to Survive the Coming Sunday Law Crises” (1991).
- “The impact of Eschatology on Protology” (1996).
- “Church and State in the End Time” (1998).
- “The Battle Against the Sabbath and Its End-Time Importance” (1994).
- *Systematic Theology: The Church and the Last Things* (2016).

6.4.2 Gulley's Understanding of Eschatology in The Battle for Biblical Eschatology in the End Time (1990)

In “The Battle for Biblical Eschatology in the End-Time” (1990), Gulley cascades his eschatology around three concepts, namely the theory of human evolution, the critique of the

¹⁹ See the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, for a fuller rubric on SDA eschatology.

historical-critical method, and lastly, the jettison of the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. Before I discuss how Gulley understands eschatology in this article, I will briefly clarify how he treats these three concepts in light of his eschatological approach in this article.

a) The Theory of Human Evolution

In Gulley's reflection on human evolution, he observes that evolutionary theologies, as proposed by Teilhard de Chardin and his followers, “exalt man as a developer, interpreter and bringer of utopia rather than Jesus Christ as creator, Word and coming Lord” (Gulley 1990:23). Moreover, he deems this theory as ‘satanic’ as it queries “Is Christ Lord over man or is man lord over Christ?” (Gulley 1990:23). On this basis, Gulley understands the concepts of human evolution as “Satan’s end time attack against the church” (Gulley 1990:22).

b) The Critique of the Historical-Critical Method

Gulley observes that most theologians tend towards being “subjective judges over God's word” (Gulley 1990:23). In this regard, Gulley offers a critique on the historical-critical method as a form of biblical interpretation, in his view, this approach “places human judgement above the word of God (Gulley 1990:27). Accordingly, Gulley is of the view that “Satan’s purpose in causing people to place their judgement above the word of God has been to keep them from getting ready for the Second Advent of Christ but to prepare them for his counterfeit advent” (Gulley 1990:27). To this end, Gulley offers a sharp critique of 19th and 20th-century eschatologies. In his view, most theologians utilised the historical-critical method to arrive at their conclusions about the doctrine of the last things. This includes the realised eschatology of Charles Harold Dodd (1884-1973), the timeless eschatology of Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), and the proleptic eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann (1926-2024). To this end, Gulley maintains that these eschatologies are not feasible in explaining the current times we are living in amid the hope of the Second Advent of Christ because, in his view, these eschatologies are “one-sided” (Gulley 1990:29).

c) The Jettison of the Second Advent of Christ

For Gulley, the jettison of the Second Advent of Christ extends to teleological eschatology, wherein human liberation is achieved through human capabilities. In Gulley's view, Jesus Christ should be the focus of eschatology to change the world, not human abilities.

The basis of these three concepts is the attempt to place human thought above God's word. Hence, in countering these concepts, Gulley proposes what he calls “biblical eschatology,” which is solidly based on the revelation of God’s word (Gulley 1990:29). Unsurprisingly,

biblical eschatology as proposed by Gulley differs from the biblical eschatology maintained by Catholic scholars such as Hans Küng (1928-2021) and Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009). In his view, biblical eschatology is the prognosis of end-time events. For instance, he argues that “biblical eschatology is the only safe approach to take in understanding the things of the end” (Gulley 1990:29). Ironically, Gulley insists that biblical eschatology, unlike the eschatologies that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries, is not “one-sided” wherein the focus is on the past (realized eschatology), the present (existential eschatology) and the future (proleptic eschatology), but biblical eschatology is “three dimensional” (Gulley 1990:30). To prove this, he notes that, “Christ's promise to return have been appropriately fulfilled in the past, present and those that apply to the future only await fulfilment at their proper time” (Gulley 1990:29). In Gulley's view, eschatology should not be understood as “Eschatological Christology” wherein the focus is on events/signs leading to the Second Advent of Christ (Gulley 1990:29). Instead, Gulley advocates for “Christological Eschatology”, wherein “the true study of the final events begins primarily with Christ and not with events (Gulley 1990:29).²⁰ To this end, Gulley employs the metaphor of Jesus Christ as the “new Adam”, in whom the antagonism between personal and social problems is conquered. He believes “Christ stands at the center of the Bible and biblical eschatology” (Gulley 1990:31).

6.4.3 Gulley’s Understanding of Eschatology in How to Survive the Coming Sunday Law Crises (1991)

In the introduction of this essay, Gulley begins by stating that the “end appears to be at hand” (Gulley 1991:152). This view is born from his analysis of the global political climate of the late 1980s. Thus, in this essay, Gulley problematizes the dominant ideologies of the time, such as communism and Catholicism. In his view, these ideologies are “competing for world dominion” (Gulley 1991:152). On this basis, Gulley expresses suspicion about these two ideologies from a traditional Adventist position that the relations between the United States of America and the Roman Catholic Church will lead to the global Sunday law. To this end, he argues:

Seventh-day Adventists have long foreseen that the United States of America would lead out in establishing a new world order- a world order in which the United States of America, would on behalf of the Vatican assume the burden of persuading the rest of the world to enforce coercive Sunday observance (Gulley 1991:152).

²⁰ Gulley builds on Karl Barth. I say this because Gulley's PhD is titled the “Eschatology of Karl Barth (1970).

Accordingly, the eschatological significance of the Sunday law is that it will “foreshadow the eschaton” (Gulley 1991:152). This view has endured within the Adventist Church because the matriarch of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ellen White, provided a “prophetic stamp” to it. For instance, in the book *The Great Controversy* (1911), she comments:

The dignitaries of church and state will unite to bribe, persuade, or compel all classes to honour the Sunday. The lack of divine authority will be supplied by oppressive enactments. Political corruption is destroying the love of justice and regard for truth; and even in free America, rulers, and legislators, to secure public favour, will yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance (White 1911:95).

Gulley understands the “global Sunday law” from the traditional interpretation of Revelation 13 maintained by the Adventist Church. Those who succumb to the Sunday law will inevitably accept the “mark of the beast.” This view has led to a suspicion regarding ecumenism. In this article, Gulley explicates the Sabbath as having an eschatological significance. In his view, the Sabbath stands as a distinguisher between those who have accepted the mark of the beast and those who have received the seal of God associated with Sabbath observance. Secondly, Gulley proposes that the Sabbath should be viewed as an eschatological window pointing to the eternal Sabbath rest, which the people of God will enter at the consummation (Gulley 1991:164).

6.4.4 Gulley's Understanding of Eschatology in the Impact of Eschatology on Protology (2000)

For Gulley, protology and eschatology should always be read through the lens of the “cosmic controversy” (Gulley 2000:57).²¹ This is because he understands that the justice of God should address both protology and eschatology. Hence, he suggests that “If a system is wrong in its protology, it will also be wrong in its eschatology” (Gulley 2000:57). On this basis, Gulley thinks that “The cosmic issue must be kept at the centre stage in questions of protology and eschatology, for it is in this issue that they both meet. We need a protology informed by eschatology because the divine decree must be seen in the light of the final judgment” (Gulley 2000:57).

Accordingly, in this essay, Gulley discusses the Jesuit reaction to the theology of predestination as maintained by many protestant churches, in tandem with the theology of Arminius and Arminianism. Unsurprisingly, Gulley rejects these views because, in his view, they harbour an eschatological predestination. In this regard, Gulley critiques the theology of predestination

²¹ In the Seventh day Adventist Church, the concept of cosmic controversy is explicated in the eighth statement of the 28 fundamental beliefs under the heading “The Great Controversy”.

using the criterion of Christological eschatology and the notion of the final judgement. For instance, he argues that “human destiny was not determined in eternity; instead, it was determined by Jesus Christ in his cross of calvary” (Gulley 2000:98). In this sense, Gulley understands the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as an eschatological event that revealed to the universe that God had one destiny for humanity, which was to save them (Gulley 2000:99).

Regarding the notion of the final judgement as a critique of the theology of predestination. Gulley argues:

Why is there a need for a final judgment if God has predetermined human destiny? If He knows from eternity who are the elect and who are the reprobate, and if He has known this through predetermining the outcome, and if this is a part of His incomprehensible plan that humans should not pry into, then why does He even bother with a Final Judgment?” (Gulley 2000:100).

In his view, eschatology moves towards the final judgement and the new creation. Gulley's core argument in this essay is that predestination theology cannot capture the essence of protology and eschatology in light of the cosmic controversy.

6.4.5 Gulley's Understanding of Eschatology in “Will Christ Return in the Year 2000?” (2000)

For Gulley, the weakness of Adventist eschatology lies in setting dates on when the Second Advent of Christ will occur. For instance, Gulley observes how some Adventists before the year 2000 were adamant that Jesus Christ would return in 2000. To this end, Gulley submits that as a prophetic movement, the Adventist Church should be on guard about ecumenical movements as they are part of the more extensive agenda to unite the world with the Catholic church and Satan (Gulley 2000: 212). Furthermore, he notes, “We should know Christ is coming not because of the year 2000, but because prophecy is fulfilled, and the ecumenical movement is one of the many prophecies being fulfilled rapidly (Gulley 2000:212).

In this essay, Gulley calls for Adventist eschatology to move away from speculation and endorse the prophetic nature of biblical eschatology.

6.4.6 *Systematic Theology: The Church and the Last Things* (2016)

Throughout his career, Gulley has maintained that the biblical approach to eschatology, which the Seventh-day Adventist Church maintains, is more feasible than circular eschatologies that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries. This volume is a valuable compendium on how Gulley approaches eschatology. In what follows, I will outline how Gulley makes sense of some vital eschatological formulations maintained in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

a) Methodology to Apocalyptic Prophecy: Historicist Interpretation

Gulley begins this volume by clarifying some misconceptions around the hermeneutical approach of the historicist interpretation used by the Adventist Church in interpreting apocalyptic literature. Accordingly, he explains the year-day principle, which indicates that a day equals a year in specific apocalyptic prophecies. Furthermore, Gulley emphasizes distinguishing between symbolism and literalism when reading apocalyptic literature. For instance, he argues that classical prophecies employ literalism. In contrast, apocalyptic prophecies use symbols (Gulley 2016:7). Unsurprisingly, Gulley reads the feasibility of the historicist interpretation by invalidating other methods of interpreting apocalyptic literature. For instance, he argues that this hermeneutical approach, unlike the preterist approach, which focuses on the past, and the futurist approach, which magnifies the future, the historicist method takes into consideration both the past and the future in light of ongoing history in apocalyptic literature (Gulley 2016:9). Just like other Adventist theologians and thinkers, Gulley is of the view that this is the most feasible method in interpreting Apocalyptic literature.

b) Eschatology and Sola Scriptura

In this chapter, Gulley uses the arguments he made in his essay “The Battle for Biblical Eschatology” (1991). However, in this chapter, Gulley stresses the importance of the principle of *sola scriptura* in understanding the doctrine of the last things. In his view, it is easy for human ideas to creep into the doctrine of eschatology simply because the future is unknown. In this regard, he argues:

We must limit our presentation to what is revealed in scripture and do so in the context of scripture. Furthermore, the biblical worldview of the cosmic controversy must be the context in which final events are interpreted (Gulley 2016: 16).

In this sense, Gulley suggests that scripture should not be understood as a “secular history book” that has nothing to say about the “outwork of the cosmic controversy in secular and religious history and the revelation of God's plan to meet and defeat the controversy” (Gulley 2016:17). Essentially, for Gulley, eschatology should be grounded in scripture.

c) Eschatology: Global Test, Left Behind and Armageddon

In this chapter, Gulley discusses the eschatological significance of the Battle of Armageddon. In this discussion, he first presents the importance of the “Final global test” (Gulley 2016:618). In his view, “the final global test will occur when the papacy has global dominion (Gulley 2016:618). At the heart of this global test is the question of worship. In this regard, he argues.

the final test will be over worship. The worship of the beast includes worship of the dragon, so it has to do with aligning with the wrong side of the cosmic controversy between Christ and Satan (Gulley 2016:628). The context of this worship conflict, according to Gulley, is found in “Revelation 12, and it includes A battle in heaven, A battle in the time of Christ on earth, A battle for 1260 years after Calvary, and lastly, a battle in the end time.” (Gulley 2016:630). Building from Revelation 13, Gulley asserts that during the battle of Armageddon, “nearly the whole world will worship Satan and his systems due to enforcement, which will include an international death decree and economic sanctions to keep everyone in line” (Gulley 2016:630). In this regard, Gulley believes this battle should not be viewed as a political or secular battle; instead, he suggests, “The biblical accounts of Armageddon indicate that Christ will be with his people in their hour of greatest need. It is not a secular war but a pre-advent battle of the cosmic controversy” (Gulley 2016:631).

d) Eschatology: Second Advent of Christ

Norman Gulley begins the chapter by examining the validity of the concept of the signs of the time. Gulley observes that the focal point of Christ's teachings about the signs of the time was two-fold. Firstly, it was to address the emergence of false Messiahs. Secondly, Christ's concern about the signs of the time was centered on the “abomination that causes desolation spoken through the prophet Daniel- let the reader understand” (Matt. 24:15 NASB). According to Gulley, this is speaking directly to “the papal system that seeks to replace the sabbath and Christ’s priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary” (Gulley 2016:644). In what follows, I will survey how Gulley understands the pre-advent judgement that precedes the Second Advent of Christ.

e) Pre-Advent Judgment: Eschatological Perspective.

The question that Norman Gulley seeks to respond to in this chapter is the necessity of the pre-advent judgement. According to Gulley, the need for the pre-advent judgement hinges on the roots of the “cosmic controversy”. In this regard, Gulley asserts, “There are two groups of people involved in the pre-advent judgement: The enemies of God and God's people. It must be demonstrated to all created beings that these two groups deserve their destiny because they elected it” (Gulley 2016:646). Gulley makes two distinctions. First, the little horn is judged, and the saints review the judgement. Gulley builds the notion of the little horn from the book of Daniel 7, where a court scene in heaven is presented.²² In this regard, Gulley notes three

²² The following are biblical references “The court was seated, and the books were open” (Dan. 7: 1 NASB). The session

phases within the court scene in heaven. First, it is the little horn waging war against the saints. The second phase is the judgement at the end, where a verdict is pronounced in favour of the saints. The last phase addresses the time the saint takes possession of the kingdom at the Second Advent of Christ (Gulley 2016:646-647). Gulley notes, “the time sequence places the investigative judgment before the second Advent of Christ” (Gulley 2016:647). Gulley notes that Daniel 8:11 outlines why the little horn should be judged. In this regard, Gulley suggests that the little horn is judged because of the “abomination that causes desolation, which is the counterfeit of the priestly office of Jesus Christ ministry on earth, thus deflecting attention away from Christ's authentic priestly ministry in heaven” (Gulley 2016:647).

Regarding the saints and the judgement, Gulley maintains that the ongoing pre-judgement focuses on Christ, not human beings. He argues that:

Some Christians fear the present judgment because they look to themselves and not to Christ. In one sense, to look to self instead of Christ is no better than to look at the priestly ministry instead of Christ's priestly ministry in heaven (Gulley 2016:648).

The chapter closes with a sharp critique of the theology of rapture, which is set to take place before the Second Advent of Christ. On this basis he argues, “that the theology of rapture is not biblical because God will not take humans out of the world before the great tribulation but will keep them from losing their faith in amid the tribulation” (Gulley 2016:650).

e) Eschatology: Millennium

The Millennium debate is centered around two conflicting views. The first view maintains the idea that the millennium is on earth. The second view is that the millennium will be in heaven. In this regard, Gulley leans on the idea that the millennium will occur after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in heaven. On this basis, Gulley notes that there is also “pre-millennium and post-millennium judgment, which will be an opportunity for other created beings to witness the judgment of God (Gulley 2016:670). At the heart of Gulley’s understanding of the millennium, is the view that the millennium judgement is an appropriate way to vindicate God from the charges of Satan in the cosmic controversy and thus bring resolution to the controversy to welcome in the new earth (Gulley 2016:670)

Having discussed Norman Gulley's eschatological approach and how he explicates Seventh-day Adventist eschatological doctrines, I am now better positioned to discuss his interpretation

ends with a verdict, "As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Highest, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom" Dan. 7:21-22(NASB)

of the new earth.

6.5 Norman Gulley's Interpretation of the New Earth

In his *Systematic Theology Volume 4: The Church and Last Things* (2016), Gulley treats the doctrine of the new earth from two perspectives, namely, the new earth as a place where pain and suffering do not exist. Secondly, Gulley understands the doctrine of the new earth as speaking to the notion of re-creation. In what follows, I will assess these two proposed perspectives held by Gulley in his interpretation of the new earth. I will mainly use his *Systematic Theology Volume 4* (2016), as the main source of understanding his approach to the new earth. I will, however, make use of his other works interchangeably.

The New Earth as a Place where Pain and Suffering do not Exist

According to Gulley, this earth, as we have it, is a place of “cosmic controversy” (Gulley 2016:698). In his *Systematic Theology Volume Three: Creation, Christ, and Salvation* (2012), Gulley argues that the “cosmic controversy began in heaven before the creation and the fall of humans (Gulley 2012:136). At the heart of this cosmic controversy is the fight between good and evil and attempts by Satan to replace Christ's rule (Gulley 2012:136). Gulley, just like Heppenstall, maintains that this controversy will end with the vindication of God. This will be actualised through the following judgement sessions: (i) pre-advent, (ii) millennial, and (iii) postmillennial judgements. It is interesting to note that Gulley links the coming judgement as “God's vindication upon all those who destroy the earth because God expects humans to do their part in preserving what God has created (Gulley 2012:104). On this basis, Gulley outlines the role of God and humanity amid the ecological crises. In his view, the hope for the new earth speaks directly to the roots and consequences of sin. The effects of sin can be linked to the “exploitation of the earth, the cruelty of animals by humans, the cruelty of ferocious animals toward humans and cruelty of animals to animals (Gulley 2012:107). This, for Gulley, is the pain and suffering that not only harms human beings but the entire creation. In this regard, Gulley comments:

It should be noted that human redemption and the earth's reprieve come at the same time. Through the fall, cosmic controversy gained entrance into this world and invaded human nature and environmental nature. Restoration of both is the work of the creator (Gulley 2012:107).

Perhaps this is the first step toward a re-reading of the image of the new earth from an ecotheological perspective within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, wherein redemption is not only for human beings but for all creation. Alternatively, as Conradie emphasized, “redemption cannot imply redemption from the earth but should always imply the redemption

of the earth itself” (Conradie 2000:223). This is because pain and suffering associated with death, unemployment, poverty, ecological turmoil, and so forth “entered the perfect world through sin” (Gulley 2012:108). Hence, Gulley argues that: “The new earth means that after the old earth is reduced to its ruins because of sin, God will create a new earth” (Gulley 2016:110). This new earth for Gulley emanates from the notion of *ex vetere* because the new earth, in his view, will come from the ruins of this earth. Gulley’s treatment of the new earth as a place where pain does not exist addresses the eradication of sin and the predicament of finitude interchangeably. In this sense, he tries to balance the annihilation and the restoration of the earth. I will return to how he does this in the concluding section.

However, it is interesting that Gulley differs from Heppenstall's understanding of “pain and suffering” amid the hope for a new earth. For instance, Heppenstall, as discussed in Chapter 5, understands all the pain and suffering on earth as a visible sign of the Second Advent of Christ and thus calls for no human interventions to preserve the earth as that would delay the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Gulley takes a different turn and calls for ecological responsibility amongst human beings. He argues, “The fact of a coming judgment on those who destroy the earth indicates that the original stewardship has never been repealed. God expects humans to do their part in preserving nature, despite His providence doing much to preserve the earth” (Gulley 2012:102). Moreover, this ecological responsibility that Gulley emphasizes is not only limited to this earth but will also extend to the new earth. Hence, he suggests that: “in the new earth the saved will carry out their stewardship of God's creation without any interference from any cosmic controversy or human rebellion (Gulley 2012:103).

The New Earth as Recreation

According to Gulley, the end product of the recreation of the new earth will essentially be similar to the first creation found in Genesis 1. In his view, the process of re-creation will be made possible through the burning of sin and sinners to purify the earth so that it looks as it initially looked in the first creation (Gulley 2016:700). In this sense, Gulley is of the view that for the kingdom of God to be established on earth, there is a need for this earth to be cleansed from sin associated with injustice, violence, ecological degradation and so forth. On this basis, Gulley proposes the notion of re-creation to formulate a connection between creation and the hope for the new creation. Thus, he argues that the “recreation of the cleansed world will allow God to demonstrate how the original creation took place in six literal days followed by the seventh-day Sabbath” (Gulley 2016:700).

Interestingly, Gulley maintains that the new earth is not a different earth; instead, it is this old earth recreated and freed from the contamination of sin. In this regard, he argues: “Christ will demonstrate to the redeemed a second creation of the earth, the new earth that they will inhabit. While remaining in New Jerusalem, they have a front-row seat to observe what happens” (Gulley 2016:702). On this basis, Gulley emphasises that this earth, life, and body will be recreated. Accordingly, Gulley believes that the new creation of humans cannot be limited to repristinating. He argues that “the glorified body will be the glorification of the physical body, however removing its limitations and gifting it with capacities it never had before” (Gulley 2016:708). Regarding the question of those who have died and the resurrection of the dead, Gulley suggests that the resurrected body of Christ gives insight into how the resurrected bodies will be at the Second Advent of Christ. Just as there is no scriptural evidence of Christ being physically different after His resurrection, likewise, after Christ’s return, humans will be able to recognise each other (Gulley 2016:708).

In what follows, I will discuss the central question of the chapter: whether and to what extent Norman Gulley avoids an escapist eschatology in his interpretation of the new earth. In doing so, I will illustrate how Gulley's interpretation of the new earth advocates for both the annihilation and restoration of the earth, as well as its continuity and discontinuity.

6.6 Conclusion

Gulley emphasises a biblical-based eschatology as opposed to what he perceives as popular trends in eschatology, which presents theologians as “judges” over what he terms as “biblical truth”. His proposal of biblical eschatology covers several doctrines in the Adventist Church, such as the resurrection of the dead, the second Advent of Jesus Christ, judgement, and the new earth. To this end, Gulley offers a sharp critique of the emphasis on the notion of the “signs of the end of time” maintained by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Gulley understands the preoccupation with the signs of times as a form of escapism, which is built on a “cheap hope” that does not call for praxis in resolving the problems of this earth. For this reason, Gulley suggests that the notion of the signs of the times is grounded on “speculation and not on biblical truth” (Gulley 2016:638). On this basis, Gulley leans on biblical eschatology, which in his view, is confrontational to systems and ideologies that oppose the coming kingdom of God.

In Gulley’s interpretation of the new earth, there seems to be a balance between the continuity and discontinuity of the earth. The annihilation and restoration of the earth. This is due to the hermeneutical approach he employs in interpreting apocalyptic literature. For instance, he acknowledges that the Books of Daniel and Revelation are “symbolic and apocalyptic and

therefore barely straightforward” (Gulley 2016:640). In this sense, Gulley implicitly suggests that apocalyptic literature should not be interpreted literally. Thus, he can advocate for continuity and discontinuity in his reading. The continuity that Gulley follows seeks to empower an ethic of caring for creation. In this regard, Gulley speaks of “ecological responsibility” (Gulley 2012:107). Gulley clearly understands the current ecological problems and attempts to offer interventions from an ecological perspective. For instance, he understands redemption as that which has the potential to restore “eco-relationships”. In his view, “the new earth will testify to God’s restoration of human and all created things. There is a need for a cosmic understanding of redemption. The restoration of humans and all creation includes more than this world (Gulley 2012:100). It might suffice to add that Gulley’s treatment of the question of pain and suffering amid the hope for the new earth offers hope for humanity and all creation. This hope for Gulley is premised on “God who is the premier ecologist, whose providential care is a continuing gift to human beings” (Gulley 2012:104). Emphatically, Gulley understands that in as much as human actions are vital amid ecological problems, the continuity between the creation and the eschaton rests only in God, whom he calls the “premier ecologist”.

On the other hand, with his emphasis on discontinuity, Gulley stresses the idea that the future will bring “something qualitatively new”. This new thing speaks to “God’s new creative act (Bauckham and Hart 1999:129). Gulley builds this on the view that “this earth needs to be emancipated from the effects of sins” (Gulley 2016:712). However, the hope for the new earth beyond this earth may easily function as an opiate of the masses, as famously realised by Karl Marx, and easily attracts a suspicion of escapism amid ecological degradation associated with climate change, air pollution, and so forth. Accordingly, the discontinuity held by Gulley first stands as a declaration that the destiny of the world is not in the hands of the “Roman Catholic Church or the ideology of communism” but rather in the hands of God. In my view, Gulley’s interpretation of the new earth is an important intervention within Adventist theology as it calls for both continuity and discontinuity. To this end, Gulley is convinced that the hope for the new earth outlines God’s responsibility in the future and calls humanity to be pioneers of that future by being ecologically responsible in the here and now.

Chapter 7

Fernando Canales's Interpretation of the New Earth

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed Norman Richard Gulley's interpretation of the image of the new earth. Gulley's interpretation reads the future of this earth as having both elements of continuity and discontinuity. This approach might be helpful in the reconstruction of Adventist eschatology because Adventist eschatology as we have it is "tied to old and now irrelevant themes while remaining insensitive to issues that matter today" (Guitierezz 2022:2). Accordingly, in this chapter, I will explore how Fernando Canale interprets the image of the new earth. I aim to demonstrate that Canale's approach to eschatology envisions a continuity between this earth and the new earth. This is based on how he holds eschatology and soteriology together. I will follow the pattern in chapters 5 and 6 in this assessment. I will begin with a brief biographical sketch of Fernando Canale, enabling me to outline Canale's distinct place within Seventh-day Adventist theology (see 7.2). Secondly, I will discuss his approach to eschatology in general (see 7.3). Thirdly, I will offer a critical and detailed discussion of Canale's interpretation of the image of the new earth (see 7.4). Lastly, this chapter will conclude with some critical remarks on Canales's approach to eschatology and his interpretation of the image of the new earth (see 7.5).

7.2 Fernando Canale: A Biographical Sketch

Fernando Canale was born in Cordoba, Spain, on September 15, 1945. Canale holds a PhD from Andrews University in the United States of America. Canale has served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an academic and also briefly as a pastor. Canale has published numerous articles and several books. On this basis, Canale's place within the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that of an academic/theologian who attempts to construct an Adventist systematic theology.

7.3 Fernando Canale's Approach to Eschatology

The theological contributions of Fernando Canale within the Adventist Church are significant and pivotal in understanding the philosophical and theological worldview of Seventh-day Adventists. In several of his essays, Canale has not just offered an explication but has provided a profound insight into the thinking of Adventist doctrines in general and eschatology in particular. To better understand Canales's eschatology, an emphasis will be placed on his views in the following essays: "From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part III Sanctuary and "Hermeneutics" (2006) and "End-times and Salvation" (2013).

7.3.2 From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part III Sanctuary and Hermeneutics (2006)

In this essay, Canale captures eschatology from the Seventh-day Adventist Church's grounding eschatological doctrine, the sanctuary doctrine.²³ The importance of the sanctuary doctrine for Canale is that it covers all theological truth. In this regard, Canale notes:

Adventism cannot change the history of creation without pulling from under its feet the foundation upon which it stands. Without the doctrine of the sanctuary and the historical interpretation of prophecy, it becomes a futile exercise that does not help us understand the nature of God's work of salvation. The sanctuary doctrine explicates the biblical history of salvation as a redemptive process that moves from creation to new creation (Canale 2006:53).

It is important to note that the work of Ellen White, a foundational figure in Adventist theology, has significantly influenced Canale's understanding of the sanctuary doctrine. White captured the sanctuary doctrine as follows:

The subject of the sanctuary was the key that unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great advent movement and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people (White 1911:423).

This definition is significant in understanding the core of Canale's theology (as an Adventist theologian) and how he views eschatology. For instance, Canale notes that the importance of the sanctuary lies in its ability to "embrace the complete system of Adventist beliefs and the broad outline for eschatological consummation" (Canale 2006:62). Thus, the sanctuary doctrine becomes a "completed system of truth, connected and harmonious". However, Canale insists that there is not just a need, but an urgent and crucial need for a systematic deconstruction of the sanctuary doctrine as understood by Adventists (Canale 2006:42). Such a deconstruction is embedded in the idea that the Seventh-day Adventist doctrines were constructed from "non-biblical hermeneutical visions" (Canale 2006:52). On this basis, Canale offers a re-reading of the sanctuary doctrine assessing the plausibility of the hermeneutical assumption held by the Adventist Church and the eschatological emphasis the sanctuary doctrine embodies.

Regarding hermeneutics, Canale believes that the role of philosophy in understanding Christian doctrines in general and the Sanctuary doctrine in particular should not be discarded. For instance, he argues that "Philosophy provides the hermeneutical guide and principles from

²³ See Chapter 4, for a fuller discussion on how the sanctuary doctrine brought the Adventist Church into existence.

which Christian theologians should interpret scripture and articulate Christian doctrines systematically” (Canale 2006:37). On this basis, Canale maintains that all Christian doctrines, including eschatology, are birthed from hermeneutical principles of a theological *apriori* which includes the following areas in philosophy: (I) ontology, (II) metaphysics and (III) knowledge (Canale 2006:42).²⁴ This serves as the rationale behind his discussion of eschatology in this essay. On this basis, Canale asserts that the sanctuary is not just a mere Adventist eschatological system but a reality (ontology). Thus, in this essay, Canale attempts to answer two questions that guide his proposal of the sanctuary's doctrine being a reality: How should this reality be understood? Moreover, how earth-oriented is this reality?

It is interesting to note that Canale moves away from the notion of the reality of the sanctuary being a building in heaven, as early Adventists claimed. Instead, he proposes that the reality of the sanctuary should be viewed as a Being, who is God (Canale 2006:52). To explain this reality proposal better, Canale insists on an understanding of the conception of time and temporality. In his view, these concepts underscore reality in two motifs: (i) *This side* where we live in which is categorised by time and space, and (ii) *The other side*- which extends to the side of God. In this regard, Canale offers a critique of Adventist theology on how, since its inception, it has been fixated on matters of the other side and consequently paid no attention to issues threatening *this side*. Canale’s problem with how Adventists understand the sanctuary doctrine is that it only addresses the investigative judgement before the Second Advent of Christ (Canale 2006:58). This, for Canale, is a limiting way of understanding and thinking about the sanctuary doctrine. In his view, “the biblical doctrine of the sanctuary includes more than the investigative judgement and opens to view a broader biblical metanarrative that includes and articulates the incarnation and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (Canale 2006 :58). His call for deconstructing the sanctuary doctrine is a bold intervention in bringing Adventist theology down to earth. It offers a critique of the anthropogenic eschatology maintained in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This eschatology is an eschatology embedded in “fear, obedience, reliability, and human perfection” (Gutierrez 2022:6). It is in this light that Canale proposes that the sanctuary doctrine should be viewed “as the key to accessing the biblical metanarrative of the great controversy (Canale 2006:59). To this end he explains how the great controversy should be understood in light of the hope for cosmic

²⁴ Canale defines theological *apriori* as the integral assumptions theologians make when engaged in the task of doing theology. This includes cognitive, hermeneutical, teleological, and methodological principles of Christian theology (Canale 2006:42).

redemption:

The great controversy is more than the cosmic battle in heaven before the creation of this planet described by Ellen White. The great controversy is also more than the conflict between God and the powers of evil. The great controversy should be viewed as a metanarrative which views the inner logic and historical progression of divine activities involved in the plan and accomplishment of the cosmic redemption (Canale 2006:59).

To further argue this point, Canale proposes a “Sanctuary-Covenant structure”; this structure becomes helpful in understanding the ‘salvation of the earth’ through the historical sequence of God's redemptive acts. For instance, Canale notes:

As God achieved goals in the salvific process of redemption through Christ, the sanctuary moved to heaven to reach still unachieved goals in the plan of salvation at the cosmic level of the great controversy. Through the covenant, God creates a people out of the world to restore in them the perfect design of creation the world lost through sin” (Canale 2006:60-61).

For Canale, there is a need to stretch the sanctuary doctrine beyond the investigation before the Second Advent of Christ and allow it to address issues of cosmic redemption. In summation, Canale's eschatological approach in this essay can thus be understood in light of the sanctuary-covenant structure. In one sense, this structure unveils the divine redemptive activities through past and future histories and recovers the great metanarrative when thinking about Adventist eschatology.

7.3.3 End-times and Salvation (2013)

In this essay, Canale makes an important connection between eschatology and soteriology. To emphasise this, he opens the essay by noting that “there is a strong connection in scripture between eschatology and soteriology” (Canale 2013:1). However, this quest to connect eschatology with soteriology is not a simple task. To underscore this connection between eschatology and soteriology, Canale seeks to answer the following questions as a map to prove that indeed, “eschatology assumes soteriology”:

Should soteriology be understood from the side of eschatology instead? Can we properly understand Christ's work of salvation in isolation from prophetic interpretation? Could the study of the biblical prophecies of end times provide a broad context for Christians to understand Christ's work of salvation? More specifically, can our prophetic interpretation influence or condition our understanding of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ? Does salvation assume an end of the world? (Canale 2013:1)

To be clear, Canale takes this approach from the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who developed a distinct Adventist eschatology that utilised a historicist interpretation to

understand the biblical link between eschatology and soteriology (Canale 2013:1).²⁵ To prove this, Canale notes that:

Adventism came into existence as a result of the study of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation (1844–1850). A few years later, attention turned to salvation (1888). Historicism, then, permeated not only their eschatology but also their soteriology. Adventist thought moved from biblical historicist interpretation of the end times to salvation (Canale 2013:2).

The historicist approach, as held by early Adventists, seeks to explicate the referent notion of purification as presented in Daniel 8:14. Accordingly, Canale observes that early Adventists discovered that the purification in Dan 8:14 addresses Christ's work of atonement in the heavenly sanctuary after the resurrection. Such a position led them (early Adventist thinkers) to see a connection between apocalyptic prophecies and the sanctuary doctrine. On this basis, Canale suggests that “Eschatology not only includes apocalyptic prophecies, but also God’s historical actions in His sanctuary” (Canale 2013:2).

With time, such views on eschatology within the Adventist tradition were forgotten. In this light, Canale, as an Adventist theologian, seeks to evoke this link between eschatology and soteriology. On this basis, Canale looks at how this link is feasible from both the side of eschatology and soteriology; in this regard, he notes:

On the side of eschatology, the broad-reaching prophecies in the Book of Daniel include God’s central acts of salvation: the Cross, the investigative judgment, and the Second Coming. On the side of salvation, God operates salvation historically within the flow of created human time. Salvation embraces God’s redemptive acts from predestination to new creation (Canale 2013:2).

On this basis, Canale insists that any attempts to separate eschatology from soteriology will lead to distorting the meaning of both these doctrines (Canale 2013:4). This is because, in his view, “Eschatology predicts the continuation of Christ’s works of salvation in human and cosmic history. While salvation speaks to the “execution and development of God’s atonement before and after Christ’s incarnation and death on the cross” (Canale 2013:4). Moreover, this emphasises “Christ’s high priestly, mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary” (Canale 2013:4). Thus, in Canale’s reading of the eschatology doctrine from scripture he notes:

In Scripture, eschatology is not the consummation of the work of Christ from Christmas to Easter, but the anticipation of Christ’s multifaceted historical works of salvation from creation to new creation. Because eschatology provides a broader context for understanding Christ’s work of

²⁵ For a full discussion on the historicist interpretation see Chapter 5.

salvation, we should study the doctrine of salvation from the perspective of prophetic interpretation and not the other way around (Canale 2013:5).

It is interesting to note that, for Canale, eschatology involves an “ontological commitment” (Canale 2013:5). The question then becomes, in the face of the current ecological crises and other social ills, who or what will be saved, given the ontological commitment of eschatology Canale holds? Accordingly, Canale’s understanding of the ontological commitment of eschatology rests on his conviction that eschatology predicts the continuation of Christ’s works of salvation in human and cosmic history (Canale 2013:4). In this regard, Canale’s eschatological approach has two challenges, for contemporary Christians in general and Adventists in particular. First, salvation should be studied through the historicist interpretation of biblical apocalyptic prophecy as a hermeneutical key to unlocking the link between eschatology and salvation. Secondly, salvation should be understood in light of eschatology. Canale believes this approach strongly impacts the Adventist Church's praxis and ethos. On this basis, Canale notes, “The success of the global eschatological mission of the remnant church depends on how faithfully and consistently Adventists would be in using the historicist interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy as the hermeneutical key to interpret the eternal gospel and preach it to the world” (Canale 2013:5).

7.4 Fernando Canales’ Interpretation of the New Earth

This section focuses on a crucial eschatological symbol, the “new earth”. As discussed in previous chapters, this symbol could counter eschatological escapism by emphasizing the earth (as land, soil, or planet). On the other hand, this raises questions about the continuity between this earth and the new earth. If there is no such continuity, then this would encourage a replacement theology where this “earthly vale of tears” is subject to destruction (which may be hastened) and to be replaced by a “new heaven and a new earth” in which God will dwell, especially (if not only) with those (humans) who are saved. The main question becomes how, then, does Fernando Canale interpret this eschatological symbol? Throughout his theological career, Canale tried to prove that salvation and eschatology cannot be read/understood apart. As such, one can easily discern that his understanding of the new earth is premised on its continuity. For instance, he notes:

The harmonious flow of salvation history from creation (biblical redemptive history) to new creation (historicist interpretation of biblical apocalyptic prophecies), provides the proper

ontological/historical context for Christians to understand the atonement and the gospel (Canale 2013:5).

The continuity of this earth, as held by Canale, does not discard the reality that this earth is constrained by sin. Hence, in his view, the hope for the new earth addresses the end of the great controversy and “the restoration of the perfect design of creation which was lost through sin” (Canale 2006:38). In this sense, Canale maintains that the new earth is not a different earth rather it is this old earth radically renewed from the forces of sin. On this basis, Canale suggests that the new earth will be a historical reality. For instance, he argues, “The new earth will be real in space and time. We take this clue from the understanding that earth, which Revelation 21:1-5 speaks about, is a restoration to the perfect design God had when he created this earth (Canale 2006:55). Canale’s interpretation of the image of the new earth emphasizes the eradication of sin. This becomes a crucial point in Canale’s interpretation of the new earth as it implies that without the eradication of sin, the promise of salvation for the earth remains futile. Hence, he suggests,

Being-in-hope is the blessed and joyous experience of living our lives in this dark world as an advance of the time when, by the grace and work of God, “the great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love” (Canale 2006:173).

Because Canale seeks to connect eschatology and soteriology, the continuity of the earth he envisions is in the hands of God. For instance, he notes, “Until the final restoration of creation, God’s history with human beings is redemptive. Promise and fulfilment are always redemptive. Prophecy is not merely anticipating historical facts disconnected from God’s works of salvation (Canale 2013:3). This means that, for Canale, there is a continuity between this earth as we have it and the earth to come. However, there is also something “new” about the new earth. Accordingly, this “new” in the creation, according to Canale, is brought about by the creative acts of the transcendent God. To explicate this, Canale suggests the following:

The incarnated Christ His character and work is the center and circumference of all truth. He is the chain upon which the jewels of doctrine are linked. In Him is found the complete system of truth. Within the golden chain of Christ historical acts from predestination to the consummation of salvation in the restoration of the new earth, the cross is the great central truth around which cluster (1) all biblical truths, (2) Christ work of atonement in the soul of the believer and (3) the history of the church in heaven and earth. The resurrected Christ himself, “the Son of God, is the center of the great plan of redemption. He is the center of all doctrines.” (Canale 2006:155).

Canale (2006) further explores this point by noting, "Christ was appointed to be the centre of the system of reality God was about to create. God's love prompted him to relate directly with his creatures through the mediatory presence of Christ in their future, life, and history (Canale 2006:160). Accordingly, such a view implicitly suggests God's creation as we have it, which will not be a throwaway thing but will be gathered and made new in the new creation. However, for Canale, such an understanding does not relieve Adventists in particular for caring for the earth. Rather, it should empower them to take their rightful position of being an "eschatological remnant" (Canale 2006:131). He suggests, "The biblical history of God's love is the message of Adventism. In living this message daily, Adventists become part of God's history of salvation as the eschatological biblical remnant" (Canale 2006:131). Canale does not explicitly state what actions Adventists should take in caring for the earth while hoping for the new earth. However, he calls for "participation" in the history of God's actions. I believe this becomes a paramount intervention in Canale's interpretation of the new earth. As it outlines, humanity's participation in the history of God's actions in the world.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the eschatological approach of Fernando Luis Canale, his interpretation of the new earth, preceded by his life and contribution to Adventist theology. Below is a critical reflection and evaluation of his approach to eschatology. The guiding question is whether and to what extent Fernando Canale avoids an escapist eschatology in his interpretation of the new earth. Regardless of his limited contribution to eschatology, Canale's approach to eschatology and his interpretation of the new earth add value and create an opportunity for further discussion and evaluation of Adventist eschatology. Drawing from various theologians and philosophers (Adventist and non-Adventist), Canale delivers a thought-provoking reading of eschatology, which is premised on holding eschatology and soteriology together.

Recently, South African Adventist thinkers such as Phumlani Majola (2014) and Silakhe Singata (2018) have noted with great concern that Adventist eschatology is otherworldly oriented. This is because it points to history, not the cosmos; individual ethics, not environmental ethics; heaven, not earth; and new creation, not this creation. Thus, prompting escapism. Relative to this concern by Adventist thinkers from the Global South, Canale has called for a 'deconstruction' of Adventist eschatology. However, as proposed by Canale, this deconstruction does not seek to do away with how Adventist eschatology currently reads in the 28 fundamental beliefs; rather, it aims to develop a praxis that speaks to the missional vision of the Adventist Church on this earth. For instance, the emphasis on Adventist eschatological

symbols such as the investigative judgement, the Second Coming of Christ, and the hope for the new earth tends to inhibit an earthkeeping ethos, praxis, and spirituality. By contrast, an emphasis on the signs of time maintains a clear focus on what happens on this earth and may well be associated with ecological destruction. Symbols such as the investigative judgement and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ are ambiguous as they refer to an assessment of this earthly life. It is in this light that Canale argues:

The success of the global eschatological mission of the remnant church depends on how faithfully and consistently Adventists would be in using the historicist interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy as the hermeneutical key to interpret the eternal gospel and preach it to the world (Canale 2013:4).

This historicist interpretation of apocalyptic literature enables Canale to hold eschatology and soteriology together. This congruency between eschatology and soteriology, as held by Canale, may amplify the definition of eschatology as held by John Suggit (1994), which suggests that “eschatology should not be seen as the doctrine of the last things after everything but rather as the revealing importance of the present viewed in light of the end” (Suggit 1994:121). Accordingly, at the heart of this congruency between eschatology and salvation, the cosmic scope of God’s salvation addresses the love God has for this earth. On this basis, Canale speaks of God’s acts of salvation as an “ontological commitment to eschatology” (Canale 2013:4). This ontological commitment to eschatology, in one sense, empowers humanity/church to embody a sense of responsibility by acting analogically to what God is doing in the world. On this basis, Canale speaks of the Adventist Church as being an “eschatological remnant”. In his view, being an eschatological remnant entails “the message of the church coinciding with the history of God’s love and salvation” (Canale 2013:117). Canale’s eschatology does not explicitly carry notions of eschatological escapism, which focuses strictly on going to heaven and leaving this earth. Nevertheless, Canale’s eschatology is not without any pitfalls. For instance, Canale believes that this earth and the new earth will exhibit a clear and recognizable continuity; however, in this assertion, Canale does not explore how that should be imagined given the transience of all things. Merely as an ongoing (recycling) process (where individual lives dissipate) or through God’s cosmic memory (only?), or will there be at least some material continuity?

Having offered an in-depth discussion on how the three selected Adventist theologians approach eschatology and interpret the image of the new earth. I am now in a better position to discuss the significance of this study for discourse on the new earth within the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the contribution that Adventism can make to broader discourse on

eschatology in Christian ecotheology (given its critique of escapism), and for ecumenical discourse on eschatology.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

In reaction to the research problem presented in Chapter 1, this chapter sets out to describe and evaluate the similarities and differences in the interpretation of the new earth as held by the three selected Seventh-day Adventist theologians, namely Edward Heppenstall, Norman Richard Gulley, and Fernando Luis Canale. On this basis, a definitive response to the research problem will be provided, namely, “To what extent Edward Heppenstall, Norman Gulley, and Fernando Canale, as leading Seventh-day Adventist theologians, avoid an escapist eschatology in their interpretation of “a new earth” (see section 8.2). Against this backdrop, this chapter will then offer a constructive discussion on how Seventh-day Adventist eschatology may avoid escapist eschatology (see section 8.3). Furthermore, I will discuss the contribution Seventh-day Adventist theology can make to Christian ecotheology beyond eschatology (see section 8.4). Lastly, I will discuss and present my position on the symbol of the new earth and Seventh-day Adventist ecotheology in general (see 8.5).

8.2 Similarities and Differences in the Views of the Three Selected Seventh-day Adventist Theologians

The symbol of the new earth may be interpreted in light of the two core intuitions embedded in it. Firstly, a prophetic transformation of this earth is needed, given the deleterious effects of “sin”. This prophetic transformation addresses the discontinuity of this earth. Secondly, there is a need to address the continuity of that which is material, bodily, and earthly. Thus, at the heart of the interpretation of the new earth is the question: Where is our true home; is it here on earth in the presence of God or with God in heaven? Moreover, will the new earth replace the old earth or only renew it? Recently, the point of contestation in addressing these questions amongst Adventist theologians has been centred around two opposites: "A renewed earth or a new earth?"

Accordingly, Edward Heppenstall’s eschatological approach and interpretation of the new earth is influenced by early Seventh-day Adventist thinkers who maintained that this earth as we have it will be destroyed and that all human efforts to save it are futile. As such, Heppenstall’s theology exerts that ecological injustices meted on the earth and social injustices faced by the marginalised should be interpreted as signs of the second advent of Jesus Christ. Edward Heppenstall’s eschatology is premised on the doctrine of Jesus Christ's ministry in the

heavenly sanctuary. In his view, the doctrine of the sanctuary encompasses all theological truth. Thus, it undergirds God's plan of redemption. Furthermore, the doctrine of the sanctuary held by Heppenstall is built on the Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutical understanding of apocalyptic literature, which is a historicist interpretation. According to Heppenstall, a thorough knowledge of the books of Daniel and Revelation is needed to understand Adventist eschatology. In his view, these books offer an explication of the beginning and end of the investigative judgement. In this regard, Heppenstall believes that the investigative judgement is about the vindication of God. Moreover, it will bring justice to those deprived (In this case, justice is limited to human beings) and the consummation of all things. It is worth noting that justice and consummation of all things, according to Heppenstall, hinge on the end of the ministration of Jesus Christ as the high priest in the heavenly sanctuary. This becomes a vital point in the eschatology of Heppenstall as he believes that the actualisation of Christian hope is embedded in the completion of Jesus Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. At the core of the completion of the ministerial work of Jesus is the hope that evil will be dealt with. Such a perspective becomes integral to understanding the Second Advent of Christ. For instance, Heppenstall believes that the victory of Jesus Christ over evil will lead to the eternal dwelling place of God with the saints.

In tandem with the eschatological cluster of the second coming of Jesus Christ is the notion of the signs of the Second Advent of Christ. In this regard, Heppenstall maintains that social, economic, and ecological problems that thrive in the world are signs of Jesus Christ leaving the holy of holies in the heavenly sanctuary and descending to earth. This view has intensified apocalyptic fears amongst Adventists and consequently made Adventists docile in the face of injustices, as they perceive them to be the signs of the Second Advent of Christ. On this basis, the eschatological approach of Heppenstall echoes notions of eschatological escapism. As such, to address the problem of eschatological escapism as found in Heppenstall eschatology, it might be helpful to return to Karl Marx's famous critique of religion in his contribution to the critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of the Right* (1820).

Religious suffering is, at the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people (Marx 1844:33).

Here, Marx's critique of religion is on how it often seeks to flee/escape from material reality. Thus, the harsh realities of this earth are viewed as fertile ground to build eschatological hope that has no praxis to combat social, ecological, and economic problems faced by the

marginalised. This is the problem with the general eschatological approach of Edward Heppenstall; it is seemingly disgusted with/by the world as we have it, but it has no praxis or ethos in resolving the plight of the earth and the poor. Heppenstall's eschatology may be summed up in this way: "Everything under heaven is in utter chaos, the situation is excellent." In this regard, for Heppenstall, the chaos is excellent because it is a sign of the second Advent of Christ.

Regarding Heppenstall's interpretation of the symbol of the new earth, he leans greatly on the idea embedded in the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of the new earth, which is "the new earth is an eternal home for the redeemed and a perfect environment for everlasting life, love and learning in God's presence". Accordingly, Heppenstall's interpretation of the new earth suggests that this earth is not our home. Thus, the question becomes, why did God create us on this earth in the first place if it will just be a throw-away thing? In my view, this is the weakness of Heppenstall's eschatological thinking. It lacks what Carl Braaten (1972) calls "eschatopraxis". Heppenstall holds firm to the idea that this earth will be destroyed and consequently replaced with the new earth. This line of thinking amongst Seventh-day Adventist Church members has advanced what Ernst Conradie (2015:74) describes as "cheap hope". Clearly, in Heppenstall's eschatology, there is no earth keeping ethic. This is because the ultimate destiny of this earth, in his view, is its annihilation. The interpretation of the new earth, as held by Heppenstall, views the ecological destruction and social injustices meted on God's creation as the ultimate end of the earth and not a call for action. For instance, he maintains:

At the end of the millennium, Satan, his angels, and all the wicked are judged before the universe. God is vindicated when saints and sinners recognize His justice in His dealings with the problem of sin. Sin and sinners are annihilated. In this way the agelong controversy against Satan and the problem of sin in the universe is concluded. The saints reign forever with Christ on the new earth enjoying the eternal result of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (Heppenstall 1966:33)

In Heppenstall's interpretation of the image of the new earth, the newness of the earth is emphasised as opposed to its continuity, its complete annihilation, and not its renewal. The weakness in rejecting the continuity/renewal of this earth, as Heppenstall does, is that it justifies eschatological escapism and renders this earth worthless and useless. Thus, his interpretation of the new earth buttresses "redemption from this earth" and not "redemption of the earth". To an extent, Heppenstall's interpretation verifies the critique of Christian hope by Ludwig Feuerbach that, in fact, "nature, the world, has no value, no interest in Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and salvation of his soul" (Feuerbach 1957:287). The eschatological approach and the interpretation of the new earth, as Heppenstall holds, sees no future for this

earth. Rather, it justifies the destruction of the earth as it deems it to be the sign of the second coming of Christ. In his view, only the Second Advent of Christ will bring justice against all forms of evil that this earth is currently facing. Thus, for Heppenstall, it is easier to imagine the Second Advent of Christ than to imagine the end of ecological injustices, unemployment, poverty, and so forth. On this basis, Heppenstall's interpretation of the symbol of the new earth intensifies apocalyptic fears and promotes eschatological escapism.

In comparison, Norman Richard Gulley's eschatological approach to eschatology is also premised on the culmination of Jesus Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the millennium, and the image of the new earth. In explicating these eschatological clusters, Gulley advocates for a "biblical eschatology", which stands as a critique of non-Adventist eschatologies that were popular in the 19th and 18th centuries. Like Heppenstall's interpretation of apocalyptic literature, he uses the historicist interpretation/method. The justification of the historicist interpretative method is that it considers the past, present, and future as presented in Apocalyptic literature. However, differing from Heppenstall, who was fixated on the signs of the Second Advent of Christ, Gulley advocates for a biblical Christological eschatology where the focus is not on events; instead, it is on Christ. Such a perspective becomes helpful in avoiding escapist eschatology as it makes those anticipating the Advent of Christ to act analogically to what God is doing in the world. For instance, if God loves the world as stipulated in John 3:16, those anticipating the Advent of Christ should also love the earth. Similarly to Heppenstall, Gulley's eschatological approach is influenced by the ministry of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. As such, in his earlier works, he agrees with Heppenstall about the end of the great controversy; for instance, Gulley and Heppenstall both maintain a suspicion about the call that is often made in prophetic theological circles such as black theology of liberation, feminist theology and other forms of liberation theology to fight for a just society. They believe a just world will only be actualised in the Second Advent of Christ.

Regarding his interpretation of the new earth, Gulley takes a different route from Heppenstall's. For instance, Heppenstall shows a predilection toward the prophetic transformation of this earth, which addresses its discontinuity. While Gulley believes there is a need to hold the two core intuitions embedded in the notion of a new earth together. In his view, there is a need for a prophetic transformation of this earth, given the deleterious effects of sin, and there is also a need for the continuity of this earth with what is material, bodily, and earthly. Unlike Heppenstall, who believes that the new earth will solely come out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), Gulley

thinks that there is a need for this earth to be destroyed as we know it and there is also need for the restoration of this earth. Thus, for Gulley, the new earth will come from the ruins of the (old) earth (*ex vetere*). Such an emphasis on *ex vetere* exhibits an ecological intuition.

In Gulley's discussion of the new earth, he speaks of two intersecting concepts: The new earth as a place where pain and suffering do not exist and the new earth as addressing the notion of recreation. Gulley's understanding of the new earth as a place where pain and suffering do not exist addresses the need for the eradication of sin, which has dire effects on God's good creation. This is why he agrees with Heppenstall that this earth as we have it must be destroyed. Interestingly, their understanding of pain and suffering amid the hope for the new earth differs. For instance, Heppenstall understands the pain and suffering faced by the "wretched of the earth" as visible signs of the second Advent of Jesus Christ. Thus, human intervention to end pain and suffering is just a gimmick to delay the second Advent of Christ. Hence, Heppenstall denounces earth-keeping and fighting for justice. Gulley understands the notion of pain and suffering as a call for human beings to act ecologically and responsibly. This becomes an important proposal in Gulley's understanding of eschatology in this age of the Anthropocene as it calls for humanity to preserve this earth actively. The second aspect of Gulley's interpretation of the new earth speaks to the notion of recreation. In his view, the recreation of this earth means that the new earth will not be different from this earth as we have it; rather it will be freed from the contamination of sin.

On this basis, Gulley's interpretation of the new earth addresses the need for annihilating the earth as we have it and the need for its restoration. On this point, the continuity that Gulley advocates empower an ethic of earth-keeping among human beings. His position on the discontinuity of the earth suggests that the future will not bring something qualitatively new and that the earth's future is in God's hands.

Similarly to Heppenstall and Gulley, Fernando Canale's eschatological approach is influenced by the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of the last things, which addresses the culmination of Jesus Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, death and resurrection, the millennium, the end of sin and lastly the new earth. Canale maintains that the doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary is the key that unlocks all theological truth. This view has long stood in the Adventist Church and has been intensified by the writings of Ellen White. For instance, in her book *The Great Controversy* (1911), she captures the significance of the doctrine as follows.

The subject of the sanctuary was the key that unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great advent movement and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people (White 1911:423).

However, Canale believes that the emphasis of this doctrine should not be on the investigative judgement as was maintained by Heppenstall and Gulley. Instead, Canale is of the view that the doctrine of the sanctuary should have a strong emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On this point, he speaks of a “Sanctuary-Covenant Structure”. This structure becomes useful in understanding God's redemptive acts through the works of Jesus Christ. Interestingly, just like Heppenstall and Gulley, Canale builds his eschatological approach from the historicist interpretation of apocalyptic literature. As such, Canale draws a congruency between eschatology and salvation. Accordingly, Canale maintains that Adventist theologians have moved from the premise of linking eschatology and salvation. Unlike Heppenstall and, to a certain degree, Gulley, Canale believes that the Second Advent of Jesus Christ bears an ontological responsibility to those anticipating it. This is to say the reality of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ does not discard the duty of Christians to take care of the earth and respond to other social injustices.

Regarding the hope for the new earth, Canale agrees with Heppenstall and Gulley that this earth, as we have it, is contaminated by sin; as such, it must end as we know it. However, for Canale, this end addresses the need to restore this earth, which sin severely destroyed. In this sense, Canale, unlike Heppenstall who advocates strongly for the discontinuity of this earth given the destructiveness of sin, shows a strong predilection for the continuity of the earth.

8.2.2 Response to the Research Problem

Having discussed the similarities and differences in the eschatological approach and interpretation of the new earth of the selected Seventh-day Adventist theologians, I am now in a better position to offer a definitive response to the research problem: To what extent do Edward Heppenstall, Norman Gulley, and Fernando Canale, as leading Seventh-day Adventist theologians, avoid an escapist eschatology in their interpretation of “The New Earth?”

Edward Heppenstall

Edward Heppenstall's eschatological approach and interpretation do not avoid escapist eschatology in any form. As stated above, this earth does not need to be saved from its ultimate destiny: its destruction.

Norman Richard Gulley

The interpretation of the new earth held by Norman Richard Gulley avoids escapist eschatology despite his fundamentalist hermeneutics. I say he avoids an escapist eschatology because Gulley, unlike Heppenstall, advocates for ecological responsibility amongst Christians and Seventh-day Adventists in this age of the Anthropocene.

Fernando Canale

Like Gulley, Canale avoids escapist eschatology. He speaks of the Seventh-day Adventist as the “eschatological remnant” responsible for sharing God's love with the world. In this manner, I argue that Canale avoids an escapist eschatology in his interpretation of the new earth.

8.3 Can Seventh-day Adventist Discourse on the New Earth Avoid an Escapist Eschatology?

In defining Seventh-day Adventist eschatology, Angel Manuel Rodriguez suggests that Adventist eschatology “expresses our disgust with the present condition of the world that, under the influence of evil powers, afflicts humanity and opposes the value of the kingdom of God” (Rodriguez 2021:x). Since the emergence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this “disgust for the present condition of the world” has not encouraged a praxis of caring for the earth. Rather it has prompted a neglect of the environment in the present. In her essay “Why care for the earth if it is all going to burn? Eschatology and Ecology” (2022), Rachel Wells notes that,

The Seventh-day Adventist understanding of eschatology is that the earth will burn at the end of time. Unfortunately, the resulting assumption that God will renew the earth, no matter what humans do, often leads to neglect of the environment in the present. This inaccurate understanding of eschatology overlooks the clear descriptions of God's care for the earth and human ecological responsibility in the original creation, the present earth after sin, and the new earth (Wells 2022:18).

Wells (2022) and Gulley (2012) agree that the Bible portrays clear injunctions for earth keeping. In this regard, Wells notes that “one of the reasons for discarding ecological responsibility amongst Adventists is the view that this earth will all burn up regardless of humans' actions to save it (Wells 2022:19). Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist is often suspected of advancing eschatological escapism. This is because the Seventh-day Adventists look to the Second Coming of Jesus as the only sustainable solution to fixing this world's wrongs, as scholars such as Heppenstall argue. In furthering this point, Silakhe Singata, in an essay entitled “Adventism and the World: Toward an Adventist Theology of Solidarity” (2018), observes that the “apocalyptic vision of Adventism has tended to predispose it to political inactivity,

even to the point of deferring deeds of justice to the Second Coming of Jesus (Singata 2018:2). This is what Hans Guitierezz defines as “Adventist premillennialism,” which is a critique of humanity’s optimism, in claiming to resolve the problems of history by reminding us that only Jesus Christ will end human tragedies (Guitierezz 2022:2). Accordingly, this eschatological orientation does not correct, as it could, the impact of mankind on nature. On this point, Jacques Doukhan (2022) observes that “eschatology without connecting the present dimension with its concern for life, ethics is dangerous” (Doukhan 2022:14). This is because it “leads to an anthropocentric eschatology of sanctity, obedience, fear, moral reliability and human perfection (Guitierezz 2022:2). On this basis it is easy to discern that to an extent Adventist eschatology “not a joyful, inclusive ecological eschatology” (Guitierezz 2022:2).

The key question this section seeks to answer is how Seventh-day Adventist eschatology can avoid escapist eschatology. An important aspect of eschatology that should always be emphasised in this age of the Anthropocene is that “eschatology does not negate our responsibility to care for the earth. Rather, it presupposes and urges it” (Wells 2022:32). In essence, this means eschatology assumes a definitive motivation for earth keeping. To emphasise this point, Wells suggests:

Adventists have a special duty to be involved in the conservation efforts because of the links between original creation and re-creation in the new earth. In light of these connections, Seventh-day Adventists believe that conservation is not only necessary, but also a God-given responsibility before sin, after sin, and will continue to be on the earth made new. Seventh-day Adventists should be at the forefront of caring for those less fortunate than we are, including animals and all life on earth, not as a chore but as an offering of thankfulness for redemption by God, looking forward to the redemption of the whole world (Wells 2022:32).

The point to be taken here is that redemption is not only for human beings but for the entire earth. Such an understanding may bring the emphasis of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology down to earth. In his doctoral dissertation entitled “The Relationship between Eschatological Hope and Christian Mission in the Theology of Jurgen Moltmann and its Implication for Seventh-day Adventist Theology” (2014), Phumlani Majola offers a re-reading of the Investigative Judgement as held in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He reads the investigation judgement doctrine in conversation with Jurgen Moltmann’s eschatology. According to Majola, the problem with the Seventh-day Adventist explication of the investigative judgement doctrine is that it “is emphatically heaven-bound with earthly significance for human beings and not for society at large” (Majola 2014:172). Thus, in his view, there is a need for Adventist eschatology “to be brought back to the earth (with political

significance) in equal balance with the hope for heaven” (Majola 2014:172). In essence, the call for a deconstruction/re-interpretation of the eschatological clusters proposed by Fernando Canale (2014) is important in avoiding an escapist eschatology within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition. For instance, Majola notes a need to “re-define” what prophecy means, as often articulated in the Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of the apocalyptic literature and the signs of the times. In this regard, Majola notes that the Millerite tradition understood prophecy as “foretelling” the future. In our current context, prophecy is about “forth-telling” the truth in the interest of justice, which must accompany the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven (Majola 2014:182). Arthur Sibanda, writing from the context of a young African Seventh-day Adventist, lamented that:

Africa’s perpetual struggle needs something more than what skeptics have branded as a “pie in the sky by and by”. We need a firm basis for our faith, not a sanctified escapism. The second Advent of Christ and the hope for the new earth should not be used as a placebo that ignores present realities and breeds narcissistic preoccupations. We cannot neglect active participation in any process that might improve our livelihood now because we await what is still yet to come. That is a precariously gloomy way of existence, and it is existentially chaotic (Sibanda 2020:1).

What is to be taken from Sibanda’s argument is that there is a need to redefine Seventh-day Adventist eschatology to have a more emphatic concern on that which is bodily, materially, and earthly. In this regard, Rodriguez has coined a term he called “eschatological ethics”. In his view, the Adventist way of life ought to be “determined by the presence and coming of God’s kingdom. Accordingly, eschatological ethics motivate action to alleviate suffering while waiting for its eradication when realising the Second Advent of Christ. In essence, Adventists’ hope for the Second Coming of Christ and the new earth should not make Adventists indifferent to the deleterious condition of this earth. Given the above discussion on Adventist eschatology and escapist eschatology, there is an emerging consensus amongst Seventh-day Adventist theologians from the Global North and the Global South that Adventist eschatology carries explicit tones of escapism. There is also a consensus amongst Adventist theologians from the Global South and North that Adventist eschatology can be redefined and brought back to earth, in order to offer sustainable solutions to the social and ecological injustices faced by the earth and the poor. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1937), though not an Adventist, gives a perspective on how this could be attained:

The church of Christ witnesses to the end of all things. It lives from the end, it thinks from the end, it proclaims its message from the end. “Do not remember the former things of old. I am about to do a new thing” (Isa.43.18-19). The new is the real end of the old, the new, however, is Christ. Christ

is the end of the old. Not the continuation, goal, or completion in line with the old, but the end and, therefore, the new. The church speaks within the old world and the new world. And because it is surer of the new world than anything else, it sees the old world in light of the new world (Bonhoeffer 2015:21).

Until the Seventh-day Adventist Church takes this call of living and thinking from the end, it will continue to lack an eschatological praxis, ethos, and spirituality in the face of ecological crises, economic instability and inequality.

8.4 The Contribution Seventh-day Adventists Can Make To Ecotheology

In an orientational sense, this study attempted to interrogate how the Adventist interpretation of the new earth and theology, in general, can contribute to Christian ecotheology. Accordingly, this section is a direct compliment to Chapter 2, which discussed and outlined Seventh-day Adventist statements on caring for the environment, spirituality, ethos, and two fundamental beliefs which, when read through an ecotheological hermeneutic could promote an earth-keeping ethic amongst Seventh-day Adventists. In this section, I will move a step further and discuss how often otherworldly eschatological themes embedded in Seventh-day Adventist theology relate to this worldly praxis (e.g., on sabbath keeping). This may settle the apparent theological tension embedded in the “Seventh-day Adventist way of -life” .

John Webster in his essay entitled “Towards a More Radically ‘Adventist’ Adventism (2008), comments on the need for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to re-envision itself in light of the contemporary challenges that continue to throttle the world. In this regard, he suggests that “an Adventist movement born in the apocalyptic fervor of the 1840s has some serious reflecting to do if it is to avoid ossification and renew itself as a dynamic movement with something to offer in the 21st century” (Webster 2008:1). Clearly, there is a need for a distinct Adventist voice in the contemporary ecotheological conversations/debates given how earth-oriented some of its key doctrines are. On this basis, Wells (2020) notes that Seventh-day Adventists have a special duty of being involved in earth-keeping praxis given that the “Seventh-day Adventists believe that humans are to help others who are oppressed (all creatures), even though we may lack result. Since any advantages in this world are only temporary, conversation in the light of the sabbath and creation teaches us to trust in our heavenly riches and practice conservation with an eye toward eschatology” (Wells 2020:24). When reading together the sabbath and the eschatological themes embedded in the Adventist tradition, it may lead to a distinct ecological intervention from the SDA church. Regarding the sabbath, Sivge Tonstad (2022) notes the Seventh-day Adventist's inability to articulate the sabbath as earth-keeping

praxis. He comments.

We have taught the world which day to keep, when it begins and when it ends, and what not to do on the Sabbath, but we have said very little about the communal and ecological character of the Sabbath. The communal prescription for the sabbath includes benefits for the animals and the earth itself (Tonstad 2022:4).

In essence, Adventists need to reclaim and redefine the sabbath as a day of worship and earthkeeping, given the environmental ills meted on earth by the ongoing ecological crises, and in order to contribute to Christian ecotheology. In explaining this point, Andy Blosser (2021), suggests that,

Climate change functions as a disease. Its symptoms are poverty, inequality, mass migration, reduction of biodiversity and others. Scientists who wish to cure the disease have one primary agenda- to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. From a scientific perspective, this all that is necessary. If emissions can be reduced, the symptoms will disappear and the disease will be cured. However, this approach may not adequately address the illness itself, which is an unhealthy relationship between human beings and the earth. Sabbath could be the time of healing this illness (Bloser 2021:9)

There is an unhealthy relationship that exists between Adventists and the earth, which is well articulated in the emphasis of the Second Advent of Christ (as noted in the sections above). The otherworldly orientation dismisses this worldly praxis. Jurgen Moltmann, in *God in Creation* (1993), has called for the eschatologization of the doctrine of creation, which might help respond to the tension embedded in the name of Seventh-day Adventist; he suggests that “the sabbath is the prefiguration of the world to come” (Moltmann 1993:167). However, John W. Webster (1998) offers an intervention in this regard through his essay entitled “A Christian Ethics or Responsibility.” He notes that for every problem, there are two questions that every Adventist should ask themselves, namely, “What is God doing? Moreover, what is happening here? According to Webster, these two questions probe the most decisive question: “What should I, as the believer of Jesus Christ and community member, do now? Adventist ethics should seek to respond to the problems analogically in the direction of God’s action in the world (Webster 1998:1). At the core of Webster’s proposal of “analogical responsibility” is the call for Adventists, in particular, to understand that they are not only “responsible to God but also responsible for God’s creation.” This is because “we are never lone individuals” but persons belonging in God’s household. In his essay “Dreaming Beyond the Flesh: Toward a Relational Adventist Ecotheology for a Global Age” (2020), Joshua Mendez notes that “the flourishing of humans is intrinsically tied to that of its ecological neighbours” (Mendez 2020:3). This

means that the earth should not be exploited and subdued by human beings. Accordingly, in my view, the exploitation of the earth can only be halted through the embodiment of the sabbath as an ethic of earthkeeping.

Another important contribution the Adventist Church can make to Christian ecotheology beyond eschatology is emphasizing the health message (full discussion in chapter 2). For instance, food choices play a significant role in Seventh-day Adventist theology. Wells captures such significance in the following way.

Seventh-day Adventists have a head start in vegetation diet. A plant-based diet is one of the best things humans can do for animals. One vegan saves the lives of at least ninety-five animals per year.

In addition, such a diet is one of the best things a human can do for the environment (Wells 2022:20).

Such a diet/food preference becomes a first step in a “relational model of creation” that brings Adventist theology down to earth and “abandons the anthropocentric confines” (Mendez 2020:4). Based on the above discussion, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a huge contribution to make in Christian Ecotheology. On this basis, Joshua Mendez suggests:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church can continue to address the ecological crises by advancing projects that tackle food justice, environmental racism, land conversation, and animal rights. We can no longer afford to remain restricted by the anthropocentric confines of our theological language when our underlying doctrines offer a profound alternative a relational, holistic vision for creation (Mendez 2020:5).

Indeed, Adventists need to unthink their anthropocentric confines in their theological language, given that “ecological theology is an attempt to retrieve ecological wisdom embedded in the Christian tradition as a response to ecological threats and injustices” (Conradie 2010:295). On this point, Teddy Sakupapa argues, “the church as God’s alternative community must respond to the ethical challenge of the devastation of the earth from its standpoint as *koinonia*, whose relationship with, and actions towards other people and the rest of creation is the common good (Sakupapa 2016:79). Given the deleterious effects of the ecological crises, Seventh-day Adventist African theologians “should attempt to address the current environmental crises by retrieving African wisdom which is contextually sensitive and relevant to the ongoing dilemma” (Chitando 2020:3).

8.5 Conclusion

In response to the research problem statement, this study explored the views of the three selected Seventh-day Adventist theologians on their interpretation of the new earth. I am now in a better place to offer my position on the symbol of the new earth and where the Seventh-

day Adventist Church should go regarding eschatology in general and Christian ecotheology in particular. In his essay “The Four Tasks of Christian Ecotheology: Revisiting the Current Debate (2020), Ernst Conradie notes

Ecotheology offers a dual critique, namely both an ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological destruction. Without a critique of Christianity, it becomes an apologetic exercise that overlooks the need for radical ecological reformation of Christianity and merely reiterates human responsibility towards the environment through notions of stewardship or priesthood. Without a Christian critique of ecological destruction, ecotheology loses its ability to offer any distinct contribution to wider debates, Ecotheology then becomes nothing more than one branch of “religion and ecology” and cannot avoid the traps of self-secularization (Conradie 2020:2-3).

In my view, Seventh-day Adventist ecotheology has been limited to notions of stewardship due to its inability to hold these critiques together. While various Adventist and non-Adventist scholars have offered definitions around Christian eschatology, this study has grounded itself in the definition opined by Ernst Conradie, who maintained that “Christian eschatology refers to a critical reflection on the content and significance of Christian hope. Accordingly, Christian hope should not be reduced to the things of the end, nor should it be reduced to the figure of Jesus Christ as the ultimate end. Rather, Christian hope is about the vision of the presence of God in our midst, indeed in us, and therefore holding us onto a future with God” (Conradie 2023:2). In light of this assessment, the question becomes how should Adventist eschatology be perceived in light of the current ecological crises, economic instability and breakdown of moral values and social cohesion?

To begin with, there is a seemingly limited contribution that African Adventist scholars have made over the years around major theological themes such as the symbol of the new earth and eschatology in general, which is in question for this particular study. To this end, Tankiso Letseli also observes this crisis

Africans need to be at the cutting edge of issues and debates and lead rather than follow issues. There is a need to be involved in creating knowledge and a new understanding of issues. African Adventist scholars deprive and continue to deprive the world of the Adventist Church of an African flavor on issues. Africans are rich with well-thought-through and pragmatic proverbs to unravel riddles and difficult issues. There is a need to tell a story in our understanding and couch it in our language and context. An African perspective remains a rare commodity in the free market of discussions and debates (Letseli 2017:144).

African Adventist scholars continue to outsource the responsibility of engaging with the apocalyptic literature of the books of Daniel and Revelation, which is the premise of Adventist

eschatology, to scholars from the Global North. In my view, there is a need for an African perspective on apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is important because it “teaches us that eschatology is a protest against reality as a whole” (Nürnberg 1994:146). In this regard, African idioms and proverbs could open a new terrain of eschatological thinking amongst Seventh-day Adventists. To disrupt this hegemony of African Adventists being only consumers of theology from the Global North, the call for decolonization by Frantz Fanon should perhaps be taken seriously. For instance, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Frantz Fanon, offers a quasi-eschatological gesture from a secular perspective, wherein he argues that:

Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history’s floodlights upon them (Fanon 1963:120).

African-Adventist scholars have to take on the responsibility of participating in the theological arena. Only then would the emphasis of Adventist eschatology shift from longitudinal (temporal) to latitudinal (spatial) eschatology. In this regard Viktor Westhelle, notes:

Eschatology is a discourse on liminality, and marginality, on that which is ontological, ethical, and also epistemological sense different. Ontologically, because it addresses the question of an Other reality, ethically, because it pertains to a different moral code, as different as the Sermon on the Mount is from all our ethical systems and moral prescriptions; epistemologically, because eschatology is also about the liminality of our accepted epistemic régimes, that is, that there are other often suppressed “knowledges” beyond the commonly accepted noetic realm of academia (Westhelle 2012:77).

Such a perspective could open some crucial questions regarding some Adventist eschatological themes. For instance, on the doctrine of the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, an inquiry on temporality and justice can be explored. By specifically asking, If those who destroy God’s creation and oppress the marginalised truly believed in the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, why do they still participate in oppressive norms which lead to the cry of the poor and the earth? If a capitalist believed in the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, why would he/she still cling to his/her amassed wealth? In my view, African Seventh-day Adventist theologians have not asked the right questions within the framework of Adventist eschatology.

Regarding the hope for a new earth amid the current ecological crises associated with air pollution, global warming, climate change, and so forth. I agree with Klaus Nürnberg (1994) that the hope for a new earth should be understood as a “protest statement, an act of defiance, directed against the inevitabilities of reality on behalf of human dignity, freedom, and authenticity made in the name of a God who is irrevocably committed to the comprehensive

well-being his creatures and who is the Master of reality (Nürnberg 1994:149). In my view, this is where the discourse around the symbol of the new earth within the Seventh-day Adventist Church should be pushed towards. Such a view undermines eschatological escapism, which the Adventist Church is often critiqued for. To an extent, the hope for the new earth has prompted many Adventists' desires to flee from this earth.

On this point, there is a need for a prophetic transformation of this earth given the 'nervous conditions' associated with climate change, economic instability, racism, and so on. There is also a definite need for a continuity of that which is material, bodily, and earthly. I think if these two core intuitions embedded in the notion of the new earth could be held together the clue to the question of where is our true home (on earth in God's presence or with God in heaven), may perhaps be found.

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