



Reflections

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Reflections on Worship in Revelation 4 and 5

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

Worship is a crucial issue in the Book of Revelation. The theme occurs in various places culminating in the Apocalypse's center vision, the vision of the satanic trinity that is engaged in war against God's people (Rev 12-14). There the conflict is about worshiping God or worshipping the dragon, the beast, and its image. Worship is expressed in various ways. The Apocalypse mentions among others prostration (Rev 4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 19:4), prayers (Rev 4:5; 8:5), and the singing of hymns. Seven hymns are found in the seal vision (Rev 4:1-8:1), five of them in Revelation 4 and 5.¹ We will now concentrate on these five hymns in their context. However, there are a number of other hymns sung in Revelation.

I. The Five Hymns of Revelation 4-5

In Revelation 4 one encounters different heavenly beings: God who sits on the throne, twenty-four elders, four living beings or cherubim. The main topic of Revelation 4 is God and his throne. No other New Testament book mentions the throne more frequently than the Book of Revelation, and no other chapter employs the term as often as does chapter 4.² Revelation 4 describes God and his activities. The two hymns or songs toward the end of this chapter are addressed to the one sitting on the throne. In chapter 5 one again finds God the Father, the four cherubim, and the 24 elders. However this time, the group is enlarged. The Lamb appears, also angels, and finally all living creatures. While Revelation 4 focuses on the throne, Revelation 5 concentrates on the Lamb with the scroll.

The first hymn is presented by the four heavenly beings around the throne: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Rev 4:8). After the four beings have sung their "Holy," the twenty-four elders worship God—second hymn: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and

by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev 4:11). Interestingly enough, the third hymn is no longer addressed to God the Father but to the Lamb, Jesus. It is called a new hymn and is delivered by the elders, maybe also by the cherubim: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Rev 5:9-10). The group of those who praise the Lamb increases. Millions of angels turn toward the Lamb and sing with a loud voice—the fourth hymn: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev 5:12). The fifth song is presented by the entire creation and is directed toward God the Father and the Son—Revelation 5:13b: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever!"

A tremendous crescendo is observable as one progresses from one hymn to the next. A heavenly quartet is followed by a chamber choir consisting of twenty-four persons. Probably, both groups unite, forming a larger choir, and they present the longest praise among the five hymns. Next the choir of the heavenly host, consisting of millions of angelic singers, begins to sing the perfect praise of the Lamb. Finally, the entire creation participates. All beings in all spheres of creation glorify God and the Lamb. What else can be done than to respond with "Amen," to prostrate before the Lord, and to worship God? This is precisely what is described in Revelation 5:14.

II. Theological Insights

These hymns together with their context furnish a number of interesting theological details on worship. This is not all that can and needs to be said about worship. Revelation 4 and 5 reflects a specific situation.

Yet principles of worship derived from this passage are important, although a comprehensive theology of worship is not provided. Nevertheless, it would serve humans well to live up to the principles found here.

1. True Worship is

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EDITORIAL



As I begin my work as the new editor of *Reflections*, I stand on the shoulders of my colleagues Dr. Ekkehardt Mueller, who founded this publication in 2003 and served as editor until 2008, and Dr. Clinton Wahlen who served from 2008 to 2012. They will continue to enrich this newsletter with their scholarly contributions. It is my intention to continue the editorial line established by my predecessors, and keep serving the worldwide church by sharing information concerning theological developments among Adventists, and fostering doctrinal and theological unity of the church in an increasing pluralistic and divided world.

The main topic of this issue is worship. In recent years a discussion has arisen about proper styles and modes of worship. In some local churches and denominations the struggles have become so furious that they came to be known as “worship wars.” As contradictory as such a label may be, it has become a sad reality in some quarters. Worship certainly stands as a dividing and defining issue in the great controversy. But among God’s remnant people, worship should play a uniting and harmonizing role.

An understanding of worship from a biblical and theological perspective can enrich our worshiping experience and deepen our relationship with God. Ekkehardt Mueller contributes to our theological understanding of this topic by expounding on the nature of worship in the hymns of Revelation. And I offer a short study on worship and ethics in Psalm 15, pointing out the implications of conduct and obedience for a true worship experience.

This newsletter also includes a Bible study on sexuality and a book review of a recent publication about Ellen White’s influence on the leadership of the early Seventh-day Adventist church.

Elias Brasil de Souza, BRI

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Theocentric

The worship scenes of Revelation 4-5 are clearly focusing on God, his “majesty and sovereignty.”³ Although other beings are mentioned in these chapters, attention is not given to them.⁴ The center of worship is God. In addition, the language of Revelation 4 may have political overtones, stressing that not the Roman emperor but only God is Lord.⁵ In the Bible and in Revelation, worship is only due to God. Even angels may not be worshiped. When John mistakenly twice tries to worship an angel, this heavenly messenger exclaims: “Do not do it! Worship God!” (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9). Especially in chapter 12 -14 the great conflict centers around the issue of worship.

The issue in worship is not primarily whether created beings feel good about it and benefit from what they are doing, whether they are blessed with a memorable experience or are entertained; worship takes place for God’s sake and must be directed to God only. Otherwise it becomes some sort of idolatry.⁶

It is true that the hymns in Revelation 4-5 do not include elements such as petitions, intercession, and confession. These are important, even though they are not included in this specific act of

worship. To some extent, they may be reflected in the prayers of the saints (Rev 4:8) which are administered before the throne of God. But no matter what, true worship is theocentric. When the heavenly beings praise the Almighty as the Lord of the universe and fall down before him, laying their crowns before the throne (Rev 4:9-10) they provide an example for humans to emulate.

2. True Worship is Trinitarian

The five hymns consist of three groups. The first two are addressed to God the Father, the next two to the Lamb, and the last one to God as well as the Lamb. There are some similarities between the hymns.



Reflections

Reflections seeks to share information concerning doctrinal and theological developments among Adventists and to foster doctrinal and theological unity in the world church. Its intended audience is church administrators, church leaders, pastors and teachers.

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Especially the second hymn is similar to the third. Both start the same way: “Worthy are you . . . “ In addition, the same attributes are assigned to the Father and Son.⁷ Bauckham points out that the worship of Jesus “leads to the worship of God and the Lamb together (5:13). John does not wish to present Jesus as an alternative object of worship alongside God, but as one who shares in the glory due to God.”⁸

At first glance, the Holy Spirit seems to be missing in this worship setting. But this is not true. He appears in Revelation 4:5 in connection with God the Father, the Creator, and in Revelation 5:6 in connection with Jesus, the Savior. “And I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and the elders, a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth” (Rev 5:6).” Actually the Holy Spirit is so closely linked to Jesus that whenever Jesus is addressed the Holy Spirit is included.⁹ So in reality the hymns of Revelation 4 and 5 seem to take account of all three persons of the Godhead.

Trinitarian worship is important because it is only through the concept of the Trinity that we understand God’s self-sufficiency and love, his creation and salvation.¹⁰

3. True Worship Maintains the Tension between God’s Immanence and His Transcendence

In Revelation 4 God is pictured as the transcendent God.¹¹ He is the potentate of the universe. He is almighty and powerful and out of reach of humans unless he chooses to come close and reveal himself. One can only prostrate before him and worship him. He is not a buddy whom humans can tap on the shoulder.¹²

In Revelation 5 God is portrayed as the imminent Lord. He came very close to humanity. Actually, he became one of us, limited, dependent on others, and vulnerable. Again, he deserves all the praise. His self-condescension and sacrifice are astonishing and puzzling. But humans can lean at his breast and be very close to him. They can choose to be his children and his friends. They may call the Lord Abba. Bauckham points also to Revelation 21 stating that “his nearness to his creation in the language of 21:3-4 is as striking as his transcendence in the vision of chapter 4.”¹³

God is both transcendent and immanent, far and close, the sovereign Ruler and the dearest brother. Aloofness and closeness belong together. Divine transcendence and divine immanence should not be separated. Believers may have an intimate relationship with God while still maintaining awe, reverence, and respect.

4. True Worship Extols the Character and Nature of God

Some of the five hymns of Revelation 4-5 provide

insights into God’s character and his very being, praising God for who he is. In Revelation 4:8, God’s holiness is stressed as a foundational divine quality: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” As in Isaiah the seraphim present a threefold “Holy,” so in this case the cherubim sing a threefold “Holy.” Along with the threefold “Holy” come three different names for God.¹⁴ They stress his covenant faithfulness, his omnipotence, and the fact that in God there is no beginning and end. “The ‘holiness’ of God here points to his separation from the created order. He is the ‘Wholly Other,’ standing above this world and soon to judge it.”¹⁵

The description of Jesus in the third hymn as slain Lamb, as having purchased humans and as having made humans a kingdom and priests reminds the readers of Revelation of a similar statement in the prolog of the book (Rev 1:5-6). There, the work of Jesus is attributed to his love. The fourth hymn points also to divine qualities of Christ.¹⁶ According to Revelation 4-5 love and holiness are major characteristics of God as well as other divine qualities such as “exclusive power,”¹⁷ eternity, and perfection want to be expressed in a worship setting.

5. True Worship Praises God for His Mighty Works

When the “power” (Rev 4:11; 5:12) of God is praised, reference is made to his mighty works. Two major works of God are highlighted in the five hymns, namely creation¹⁸ and salvation. The second hymn praises God as the Creator.¹⁹ The third addresses the work of salvation. The worthiness of the Father consists in being the Creator. The worthiness of the Lamb consists in being the Savior.²⁰ The third hymn is called a new hymn. As important as creation is, salvation is a new, breathtaking, shaking event. Those who believe in Jesus are free, no longer slaves to sin and their own ego, no longer tortured by guilt, no longer in fear of death or in horror of God. They live in happiness, contentment, and peace. Their salvation has been assured. They have a new status.²¹ Why shouldn’t they sing and praise the Lord?

Nevertheless, creation and salvation belong together and are inseparable. One cannot have one without the other unless one creates logical and biblical inconsistencies. Without creation no salvation! Without salvation no new creation! “Where faith in God the Creator wanes, so inevitably does hope for the resurrection, let alone the new creation of all things. It is the God who is the Alpha who will also be the Omega.”²² True worship will concentrate on both. This becomes evident when the last message for this world is being presented beginning with Revelation 14:6-7. The eternal gospel appears in the context of the creation account.

6. True Worship is Objective, not only Subjective

That the hymns of Revelation 4 and 5 are not just recited but actually found in a musical setting is evident in Rev 5:8-9. The third hymn is called “a new song” and harps or lyres are mentioned.²³ The concept of objective versus subjective worship is closely related to our first point, the theocentricity of worship. Undoubtedly, worship includes music, especially vocal music. However, when it comes to hymns and songs they can be either objective or subjective. Objective music and worship focuses on God only. Sorrows and problems of humanity are blended out and are not reflected. A good example is Revelation 4-5.

Subjective music and worship relate the joys and challenges that humans face, reflect upon them, and ask for God’s help and intervention.²⁴ Both types are important, and it is essential not to lose sight of the objective ones. Today humankind has become the ultimate goal in itself and the ultimate authority. So Christians may also tend to concentrate more on themselves, on their problems and difficulties instead of focusing on the Lord. However, by doing this the inner peace and serenity is lost. The two chapters Revelation 4 and 5 remind the readers of the Apocalypse and that at times it may be very helpful and proper to concentrate on God and the Lamb only.

7. True Worship is Universal and All-Encompassing

Worship has a private and corporate side, even a universal and cosmic dimension. Worship is not limited to individual devotion, although personal worship is crucial. Worship is not even limited to corporate worship as, for instance, experienced in church. In some way, worship connects the worshiper to the heavenly worship and the heavenly worshipers. While in Revelation 4 and 5 worship begins close to the throne of God and extends from there to the entire heavenly realm, all creatures are finally included, obviously even those living on planet earth. One could argue that Revelation 4 and 5 may point to the final eschatological worship, but Revelation 5 seems to focus on Christ’s enthronement as heavenly priest-king. “Commentators generally understand Revelation 5 as an enthronement scene . . .”²⁵ So by worshipping the Godhead here and now worshipers may know that they are part of a larger worshipping community.

The passages may also affirm that it is impossible and improper to exclude people from worshipping God. As the gospel is accessible and available to all, so is worship. Paul’s statement may apply here, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

Worship in Revelation 4 and 5 has a past dimension as it is linked to Christ’s enthronement subsequent to his

ascension. Yet the hymns have been used and are still used in Christian worship. Some of the five hymns are, for instance, found in G. F. Handel’s *Messiah*.²⁶ So they are applied to another situation and have a present dimension; and who knows if they have also a future dimension.²⁷

8. The Completion of the Plan of Salvation is Set into a Worship Setting

The seven seals are closely related to Jesus. The One who is exalted through the hymns in Revelation 5 is the One who opens the seals and allows them to take place. When John initially saw the sealed scroll that nobody was able to open until the Lamb was found who was worthy to do so, he wept. It is hardly perceivable that John wept for curiosity sake. Obviously the opening of the scroll had something to do with the completion of the plan of salvation.²⁸ The seals describe human history after the cross. Subsequent events on earth take place, beginning with the proclamation of the gospel—represented by the rider on the white horse (first seal)—that finally leads to the heavenly signs of the Second Coming and the *parousia* itself (sixth seal), as well as the time thereafter (seventh seal).

The completion of the plan of salvation is placed into a worship setting as the hymns in Revelation 5 and the hymns in Revelation 7 indicate. Indeed, the sixth hymn of the seal vision is expressed by the redeemed who “cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (Rev 7:10), followed by the angelic choir—seventh hymn—saying: “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen” (Rev 7:12). So, salvation is expressed by the third, fourth, and sixth hymn.²⁹ Beale observes that the redeemed “. . . celebrate an eschatological feast of tabernacles in heaven to commemorate joyfully their end-time salvation which is attributed to ‘God , who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’ . . . The ‘overcomers’ acknowledge that their victory is really God’s victory . . .”³⁰

Here we have unmistakably a future dimension of worship, although the verb “to cry out” [in praise] is used in the present tense. This is a historic present.³¹ While here referring to the future, the present tense also points to continuing action. God/Jesus will be praised for final salvation, and most likely this exultation will continue in eternity.

Believers are called to appreciate salvation already here and now, as a present and yet also as a future reality. Their lives may be permeated by the constant remembrance of the fact that they are already saved and will finally be saved. It was the Lamb who has conquered and won the decisive victory (Rev 5:5). Therefore they live their lives constantly in the context of worshipping the Godhead for their salvation.³²

9. True Worship Provides a New Perspective to Life on Earth

The Book of Revelation begins by locating John on the island of Patmos under difficult circumstances. He is a “fellow partaker in the tribulation” and has to be perseverant (Rev 1:9). But in the beginning of chapter 4 John sees an open door in heaven and is invited to come up there, experiencing heavenly worship before he encounters the challenges on earth.

By reporting what he has seen, John allows his audience to perceive what is going on backstage. This is very important. Before one begins dealing with the problems on earth—in this case the opening of the seals—it is essential to take a look at God and to worship him.

Whosoever has “seen” God, his dwelling place, and his work for humanity first, has gained the right perspective to handle everyday life. Such a person knows how to interpret what is going on in this world. Such a person knows that behind the scenes there are ultimate realities working out the plan of salvation.

At the end of the seal vision, John again describes heavenly events. That means: Those who have the right perception of life begin contemplating God and worshipping him (Rev 4 and 5). Then they turn toward the realities of life on earth (Rev 6), and again they look ahead to the heavenly realm (Rev 7). Worship allows them to concentrate on the ultimate reality from which their lives in this world receive meaning. In other words, focusing on the Lord in worship will tremendously help believers to cope with their worries and anxieties, their sorrows and challenges, their pain and suffering. The heavenly dimension allows believers to look beyond the earthly and be filled with hope, joy, and peace.

10. True Worship Is Continuous and Unending

Revelation 4:8 stresses that the worship of the heavenly being is unceasing. They praise God day and night which means that their worship is continuous and unending. John “employs human terminology in expressing the concept of eternity.”³³ This seems also to be true for the other heavenly beings.³⁴ Osborne states that “the eternal God is extolled for all time for his majesty and power.”³⁵

But ceaseless worship does not mean inactivity in other respects. The wings of the four heavenly beings point to the “swiftness to carry out the will of God.”³⁶ Their eyes imply supreme intelligence, alertness, and “probably wakefulness.”³⁷ They are involved with the opening of the seals (Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7). Angels are also actively pursuing God’s concerns by mediating his word (Rev 1:1), proclaiming messages (Rev 5:2), holding back winds (Rev 7:2), sounding the seven trumpets (Rev 8:6) which bring divine judgments on those who dwell on earth, waging war against demonic forces (Rev 12:7), pouring out the seven plagues on earth (Rev 16:1),

imprisoning Satan (Rev 20:1), and revealing the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:9). Unceasing worship and unceasing service go hand in hand.

This heavenly worship and activity sets an example for God’s people on earth.³⁸ They are called to “unceasing” worship and “unceasing” service already today. Their lives are to be permeated by daily praising and exalting God. What they do honors God and serves others in some way or another (Rev 2:2-3, 19; 1 Cor 10:31). Worship of God is not just a future activity of the people of God. It is their daily practice and working itself out in practical ways of service and ministry.

So the heavenly worship of Revelation 4 and 5, emulated by the Lord’s church on earth, prepares for the final call to humanity: “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters” (Rev 14:7).

Conclusion

The Apocalypse contains an important theology of worship. Major elements are found in the hymns of Revelation 4 and 5 and their context. Much more can be said. But it would be well for believers to remember the following crucial elements:

- True worship is theocentric.
- True worship is Trinitarian.
- True worship maintains the tension between God’s immanence and his transcendence.
- True worship extols the character and nature of God.
- True worship praises the works of God.
- True worship is objective, not only subjective.
- True worship is universal and all-encompassing.
- The completion of the plan of salvation is set into a worship setting.
- True worship provides a new perspective to life on earth.
- True worship is continuous and unending.

May God’s people learn truly to worship the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ the Lamb that was slaughtered and has redeemed them, and the Holy Spirit, speaking to Christ’s universal church (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

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¹Stephen N. Horn, “Hallelujah, the Lord our God, the Almighty Reigns: The Theology of the Hymns of Revelation,” in *Essays on Revelation: Appropriating Yesterday’s Apocalypse in Today’s World*, edited by Gerald L. Stevens (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 42, explains how hymns can be recognized.

²The throne is found there fourteen times and refers to God’s throne twelve times.

³Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 236.

⁴See Horn, 43.

⁵See Osborne, 240.

⁶Osborne, 243, calls it blasphemy. He goes on to say: “Any person or thing that comes to be more than God in our lives constitutes idolatrous worship. God must be all and in all in our lives.”

⁷David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1997), 360, states: “Three hymns in Revelation begin with the adjective ἄξιός, ‘worthy’ (4:11; 5:9, 12), all within 4:1–5:14. The first ἄξιός εἶ, in the second-person singular *du-Stil*, ‘thou style’ . . . , introduces a hymn to God in 4:11, while the second ἄξιός εἶ introduces a hymn to the Lamb in 5:9. There is then a switch to the third person, the so-called *er-Stil*, ‘he style’ . . . , and the phrase ἄξιός ἐστιν in 5:12 introduces a second hymn to the Lamb. . . . This hymn in vv 9–10 is addressed to the Lamb, and so might appropriately be designated ‘the Song of the Lamb’”

⁸Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 60. See also Osborne, 265-266.

⁹See Ekkehardt Mueller, “The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation,” unpublished manuscript, 26.

¹⁰See Ekkehardt Mueller, *Die Lehre von Gott: Biblischer Befund und theologische Herausforderungen* (St. Peter am Hart: Seminar Bogenhofen, 2010), 157.

¹¹Cf. Horn, 44-45.

¹²Bauckham, 45, describes false worship, namely the worship of the beast as “false precisely because its object is not the transcendent mystery, but only the mystification of something finite.”

¹³Bauckham, 46.

¹⁴Cf. Aune, 307, who also suggests that in Revelation 4:8 “the threefold repetition of ‘holy’ is connected, perhaps by design, to three characteristics of God.” See also Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 123.

¹⁵Osborne, 237.

¹⁶Aune, 365, notes: “Each of the seven prerogatives is a metaphorical application to Christ of qualities that belong properly to God”

¹⁷Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 2001), 192.

¹⁸The sustaining work of God may be included in Revelation 4:11. See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 335.

¹⁹Bauckham, 48, maintains, “The one God is defined as the One who brought all things into existence. As Creator, he alone has ultimate power over everything. As creator, to whom all creatures owe their very being, he alone is to be worshipped. . . . The understanding of God as Creator was not only integral to Jewish and Christian monotheism; it was also essential to the development of Jewish and Christian eschatology.”

²⁰Horn, 52, stresses that “The death of Jesus, rather than his life and ministry, is the primary focus of John’s Christology. As indicated in the hymns, Jesus’ slaughter results in the redemption of people of God, and his death is the means by which believers overcome.”

²¹Cf. Osborne, 260-261.

²²Bauckham, 51.

²³The *kitharas* occur in two other important worship settings (Rev 14:2; 15:2).

²⁴This may be what Osborne calls the “horizontal” dimension:

“There have been scores of articles and books on the crisis of worship in the church today. The average service so centers on the horizontal life of the Christian that the experience of awe in the worship of God, the feeling that we are in his presence, is all too often lost” (243).

²⁵See Beale, 357.

²⁶Kistemaker, 193, relates the story when in 1743 Handel’s Messiah was performed for the first time in the presence of King George II. “. . . the king rose from his seat when he heard the Hallelujah chorus. By rising with bowed head, he indicated that not he but Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.”

²⁷This has nothing to do with so-called multiple fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecy.

²⁸Beale, 348, states: “He [John] is in despair particularly because it appears to him that the book’s seals cannot be broken and that God’s glorious plan will not be carried out.” For an extensive discussion of the scroll see Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, second edition (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2009), 171-183. He considers the scroll to be “the scroll of God’s eternal covenant.” “It is . . . symbolic of the sum and substance of God’s plan and purpose for the human race and the entire universe” and “contains judgments and salvation” (180).

²⁹In Rev 12:10 and 19:1 other hymns occur, praising salvation.

The hymn sung at the sea of glass (Rev 15:4), which is called the “song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb” (Rev 15:3), praises the great deeds of God and his righteous acts. Although language pertaining to salvation does not directly occur, it is clearly referring to salvation from all enemies. This hymn has a future dimension.

³⁰Beale, 431.

³¹Cf. Smalley, 192.

³²Salvation includes among others deliverance from sin, God’s victory attributed to us, and deliverance from enemies. See Osborne, 320.

³³Kistemaker, 192.

³⁴Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, Revised edition. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 125, notes that “continuous worship is a common feature in apocalyptic descriptions of heaven. *I Enoch* 39:12 pictures sleepless angels standing before God and extolling his greatness. . . .”

³⁵Osborne, 236.

³⁶Mounce, 125.

³⁷John Sweet, *Revelation*, New Testament Commentaries (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990).

³⁸See Smalley, 123.

Worship and Ethics: A Reflection on Psalm 15

BY ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA, BRI

Inspired by the very character and nature of Yahweh, with whom evil shall not dwell, Psalm 15 establishes the inextricable relation between worship and

conduct and thus highlights important characteristics of the true worshiper. This short study reviews the context, structure and message of the passage, and concludes by drawing some of the implications of Psalm 15 for individual worshipers and the worshipping community.

I. Context

1. Literary context

The literary placement of Psalm 15 in the book of Psalms deserves some brief attention. First, one notes its relation to Psalm 14. As noted by commentators, Psalm 14 presents a poignant description of the wicked, while Psalm 15 introduces in strong lines the profile of the righteous person. Second, Psalm 15 has been regarded as part of a larger literary unity formed by Psalms 15-24. There are links between psalms in this group so that the larger unit emerges as editorially and theologically meaningful. Such links are as follows: Psalms 15 to 24; 16 to 23; 17 to 22 and 8 to 20 and 21. So Psalms 15 with Psalm 24 envelop the entire literary unit and, interestingly enough, both psalms ask the question as to who may dwell in the presence of Yahweh (15:1; 24:3). Noting the absence of penitential psalms from Psalms 15 through 24," Geoffrey Grogan aptly concluded that "the emphasis in this section of the Psalter is on godliness."¹

2. Historical Context

Scholars have advanced several suggestions for the setting of Psalm 15. Some commentators have hypothesized that David composed this psalm when the ark of the covenant was transferred to Zion (2 Sam 6:12ff.; 1 Chr 16:1ff) in order to move the people to honor God with sincerity.² This seems a plausible hypothesis, but unfortunately there is no textual evidence to support it.

Some scholars argue that Psalm 15 functioned as an entrance liturgy for the Jerusalem temple.³ In this case, the opening question was to be asked by a pilgrim when approaching the temple to attend one of the great religious festivals. A priest would answer by listing the qualities expected from the worshiper and pronouncing a blessing. However, the interpretation of this psalm as an entrance liturgy has been challenged on the basis of form and content. Although entrance liturgies have been attested in the ancient Near East,⁴ there is no clear description of the liturgical procedures of the Israelite Temple.⁵ Other scholars have modified the entrance liturgy hypothesis and came to propose the view of Psalm 15 as a torah liturgy or priestly instructions for those approaching the temple mount.⁶ Nevertheless, as attractive as these views may be in their explanatory intention, they lack support from the Biblical texts.

So the precise occasion for the composition and setting of Psalm 15 seems to be a moot point. Some exegetes, without denying the cultic connections, tend to

regard the psalm as a "piece of wisdom teaching"⁷ used to instruct the congregation, since the focus of the psalm on righteous living may indicate its belonging to wisdom circles.⁸ It must be noted, however, that although Psalm 15 exhibits some conceptual affinities with the wisdom literature, the psalmist developed his composition against the background of a larger theological framework. And although this latter view has much to commend it, some additional refinements are necessary.

At this juncture, due consideration needs to be given to the superscription, which claims the composition as a "Psalm of David" (Mizmor leDavid). The title of the poem as a mizmor (song/psalm) of David defines it as a song, since the term mizmor, usually translated as "psalm," means literally "a song sung to an instrumental accompaniment."⁹ Recognizing the implications of mizmor, J. Mays notes that "the heading of Psalm 15 identifies it as a text for musical performance in religious gatherings, and that is the use to which it has been put as part of the Psalter."¹⁰ Considering also the canonical claim that David composed many psalms and organized the liturgy of the Temple (1 Chr 25), this psalm was probably composed as a hymn for public adoration in the Jerusalem cult. As such, Psalm 15 most likely served for "instructional purposes to teach the congregation about the character of its relation to the Lord."¹¹

3. Structure

From a structural and literary point of view, the text is a concise and well organized piece of work. A double question sets the theme of the poem, followed by a sequence of answers or injunctions expressed in general statements (vs. 2), accompanied by concrete examples (vss. 3-4). A promise concludes the psalm by asserting that those whose lifestyle accords with the demands of Yahweh will never be moved (v. 5).

Some scholars have found ten separate injunctions, which would have served as an aid to memory—since they could be counted on the fingers—and possibly allude to the Decalogue.¹² Yet upon closer scrutiny, one finds eleven injunctions which incidentally accords with the long held view of the Talmud, according to which "Six hundred and thirteen commandments were given to Moses," but "David came and reduced them to eleven" (in reference to Ps 15)¹³ P. Craigie identified a tenfold structure, alternating positive and negative conditions.¹⁴ The table on the next page follows Craigie's overall outline according to an elevenfold structure and some other adjustments.¹⁵

Some attempts have been made to identify a more formal and precise literary structure in the psalm. Among such attempts, the one by L. Barré seems more consistent since it takes into consideration both formal

and semantic criteria.¹⁶ According to his proposal, this psalm can be so organized:

A. <i>Positive Conditions</i> (v 2)	B. <i>Negative Conditions</i> (v 3)
(i) walking uprightly	(iv) no falsity
(ii) practicing justice	(v) no evil
(iii) speaking truth	(vi) no reproach
C. <i>Positive Conditions</i> (v 4a-b)	D. <i>Negative Conditions</i> (v 4c-5)
(vii) despise reprobates	(ix) no change after swearing
(viii) honor those who fear the Lord	(x) no usury
	(xi) no bribery

A. Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

B. The one who walks uprightly,
The one who practices justice,
The one who speaks the truth in his heart;

C. Who does not trip over his tongue,
Who does not commit evil against his friend,
And does bear reproach against his neighbor.

D. Despised in his eyes is the reprobate
But those who fear the LORD he honors

C' Who swears to his own hurt and does not change;
Who does not put out his money at usury,
And who does not take a bribe against the innocent

B' The one who does these things

A' shall never be moved

A formulates two rhetorical questions by means of imperfect verbs, while **A'** expresses a promise with an imperfect verb. The semantic correspondence between **A** and **A'** may not be clear at a first glance, which makes the connection to appear more formal than conceptual. Nonetheless the idea of abiding and dwelling on the tabernacle/hill of the Lord may correlate with the notion of firmness conveyed by the negative verbal phrase (*lo' yimot*) expressing the idea of “not moving, tottering.” As Barré observed, “The prepositional phrases in **A** indicate the place of security while the one in **A'** qualifies its duration.”¹⁷

B contains three participial phrases introducing in general terms the virtues and qualities of the one fit to abide on the holy hill. **B'** appears to be a resumptive statement pointing back to **B**. It should be noted that **B'** contains a participial phrase formally similar to those of

B and a plural demonstrative pronoun pointing back to antecedents mentioned earlier. Thus a formal and semantic relationship between both members of the chiasmic structure is identified.

C correspond to the **C'** inasmuch as each member contains three negative sentences. Furthermore, the sentences in both members are structurally and semantically similar. Both **C** and **C'** express in negative statements what the true worshiper would not do against her/his neighbor. So **C** defines the true worshiper as one who does not use improper speech, while in **C'** the true worshiper does not use money as a weapon against his/her fellow israelite.

According to the structure delineated above, **D** stands in the apex of the chiasmic structure. And apex element can also be further identified as a micro chiasm **ABB'A'**, as noted in the Hebrew order of the clause constituents: “Despised in his eyes is the **reprobate**; but **those who fear the LORD** he/she honors.” The central elements of the literary structure emphasize the appropriate attitude towards two categories of people: the “reprobate” and those “who fear the Lord.” The admonition to honor the pious and reject the wicked functions as an important motif in the Psalms tradition (see, e.g, Ps 1) and receives special emphasis in Psalm 15.

II. Message

Theological motifs from wisdom, prophetic, and legal traditions are brought together to bear upon the main issue being expounded by the psalmist: “Who is worthy of being a guest of Yahewh.” Such a rhetorical question brings the topic of worship into sharp focus in this short Psalm. What essentially characterizes the true worshiper is primarily not conformity with the minutia of the sacrificial system or other liturgical procedures of the Tabernacle/Temple. Without denying the importance of worship formalities—but rather presupposing them—the psalm raises some important and crucial issues that pertain to the inner life of the worshiper, viewed especially in relationship to the neighbor and the community.

In emphasizing appropriate interpersonal relationships as fundamental prerequisites for communing with Yahweh, this short psalm touches upon the heart of Israelite worship theology. As well expressed by R. Davidson, the essence of such a worship theology, “is the celebration of the wonderful deeds of God, deeds which are the expression of a divine steadfast love which Israel can neither explain nor deserve (see Ps 136). *To live in the light of this steadfast love is to accept a discipline, the discipline to demonstrate the same steadfast love in daily relationships with other people.*”¹⁸ And it is within this framework of true and genuine worship that the theology of Psalm 15 must be understood. Such a theology, without denying the value of formal adoration, brings ethics to the foreground of worship and makes appropriate relationships with the neighbor a prerequisite to communion with Yahweh.

The first three injunctions bring to the foreground important characteristics of the true worshiper, which are theologically expressed by means of three key Hebrew words: *tamim*, *tsedek* and *’emet*. Each of these terms is governed by an action verb (walk, practice, speak, respectively), which means they are not to be regarded as passive qualities, but something to be experienced in daily life.

1. “Walks uprightly”

The first statement characterizes the ideal worshiper as someone who walks *tamim* (“uprightly”). From a root meaning “to be complete,” *tamim* in most of its occurrence applies to sacrifices. An animal that is not *tamim* makes the sacrifice invalid.¹⁹ When applied to human beings the term has a relational connotation and expresses an untroubled relationship with Yahweh or with fellow humans.²⁰ Combined with words for “walk” (*halak*) and “way” (*derek*) *tamim* emphasizes the idea of a consistent and honest behavior.²¹ In the text under study the term seems to be used primarily to indicate integrity and honesty in interpersonal relationships within the human sphere. But it should be noted that ultimately integrity between humans and Yahweh cannot be disjointed from integrity among humans, since one’s integrity with Yahweh goes hand in hand with one’s integrity toward other humans beings, as Psalm 15 itself makes clear. Integrity expressed in upright behavior (*tamim*) is crucial characteristic of those who stand in a right relationship with Yahweh and therefore are acceptable to him. This wholesome integrity, expressed by *tamim*, is predicated of Noah (Gen 6:9), and describes what was expected of Abraham (Gen 17:1) and Israel in their relationship with Yahweh (Deut 18:13; Josh 24:14). Psalmic and wisdom texts make ample use of *tamim* not only to qualify the lifestyle accepted by Yahweh but also to set the divine standard before humans (Pss 18:24; 37:18; 101:2; Job

12:4; Prov 2:21; 11:20; et al.).

2. “Practices justice”

As a second characteristic, the true worshiper is described as a person who “practices justice” (*tsedeq*). The Hebrew root underlying *tsedeq* “basically connotes conformity to an ethical or moral standard.”²² Its broad semantic range includes relational overtones and deals with behavior based on some standard.²³ In theological terms, *tsedeq* (“justice”) defines how God treats his people within the framework of the covenantal relationship and reveals how God expects humans to treat one another. So in ethical terms, *tsedeq* “involves the conduct of men (sic.) with one another”²⁴ and sets the standards for inter human relationships. Legal, prophetic, and wisdom texts use *tsedeq* in a variety of contexts. *Tsedeq* refers to honesty and integrity in dealing with other people, especially the poor (Eccl 5:7; Jer 22:13; Ps 72:2). Murder and disruption of the community’s well-being equals a breakdown of *tsedeq* (Isa 1:21). Court procedures should be based on *tsedeq*, that is, equity and conformity to the law (Lev 19:15; Deut 1:16, 18; Ps 58:1, 2; Isa 32:1; Prov 31:9). In Psalm 15, *tsedeq* occurs as direct object of the verb *pa’al* (to practice, to do). As such, it refers to concrete actions of mercy and expressions of loyalty that should characterize interpersonal relationships within the community/society. However, on the basis of the various usages of *tsedeq* and related words, such actions of mercy and loyalty must be in harmony with Yahweh’s standards as revealed in his Word (Ps 119:132; Isa 51:7).²⁵

3. “Speaks the truth in his heart”

Inner attitude comes to the fore in the third statement: “And speaks the truth in his heart.” Since “heart” (*leb*) as an anthropological term can connote the activity of the will,²⁶ it implies that “to speak the truth from the heart” means to be free of falsity and double talk. It means to speak with sincerity and transparency, so that what one speaks is consistent to one’s innermost intentions (Pss 12:2; 28:3; Prov 12:17-19; Zech 3:16).

4. “Does not trip over his tongue”

In characterizing the true worshiper as someone “who does not trip over his tongue,” this injunction seems to mirror the previous one, but upon closer examination it emerges as a distinct preoccupation. The issue here is not of truthfulness, as above, but the danger of using one’s speech as a weapon against others. So the guest of Yahweh “does not trip over his tongue.” A very graphic imagery is used here by the psalmist. The verb *ragal* (trip over), appears to be a denominative of *regel* (“foot”) and means to slander or gossip.²⁷ Hence the translation: “The one who does not trip over his

tongue.”²⁸ As oxymoronic as such an imagery may be, it paints with impressionistic artistry the incongruity of gossip and slander within the community of worshippers. Such practices equal stumbling over the tongue. The danger of improper use of the tongue appears in other major literary genres of the Old Testament, being dealt with in legal (Lev 15:16), prophetic (Jer 6:28; Ezek 22:9), wisdom and psalmic texts (Prov 11:13; 18:8; 20:19; Ps 31:20).

5. “Does not commit evil against his friend”

A person who wants to be a guest of the Lord does not “commit evil against his friend.” By playing on the words *ra’ah* (evil) and *re’ehu* (friend) the psalmist embellishes the rhetoric of Psalm 15. The word *ra’ah* in itself has a broad meaning and could mean disaster or any other harm inflicted upon other people. However, this statement should be understood in connection to the next line which mentions the reproach against the neighbor.²⁹ Besides, structurally, this poetic line also stands in parallelism with the previous line forming a tricolon. So “evil” in this context denotes the misuse of speech in relationship with friends and neighbors. This evil plagues every society and God’s people are not immune to its devastating consequences. Wisdom warns one not to devise evil against the neighbor (Prov 3:29) and makes clear the dangerous connections between such evil and improper use of the tongue (Job 20:12; Prov 15:28; 16:27; cf. Ps 50:19).

6. “Does not bear reproach against his neighbor”

The true worshiper “does not bear reproach against his neighbor.” The Hebrew word behind “reproach” is *herpah*, which combined with *nasa’* means to “carry, take, bear shame/reproach.” It usually describes a situation in which an individual or the community has to bear the shame for some unduly committed action or because of some underserved disgrace inflicted upon them by others (see. e.g.: Jer 31:19; Ezek 36:15). In the present psalm the statement reads that the guest of Yahweh “does not bear reproach against a neighbor.” The statement is not a warning against slandering, a point already made in a previous injunction, but seems to require that the true worshiper should “not “bear reproach against the neighbor” in not mocking or harassing him/her.³⁰

7. “Despised in his eyes is the reprobate”

This statement and the next form the apex of the literary structure of this psalm. The true worshiper avoid associations with evil people: “Despised in his eyes is the reprobate” (15:4a). The word “reprobate” translates *nim’as*, which is a passive form of a verbal root that means “to reject.” This term is often used to define those who reject Yahweh or his law (1 Sam 5:23; Isa 30:12)

and consequently they are also “rejected” (*nim’as*) by Yahweh (Ps 53:5; 89:38). So the reprobate is a category of people defined theologically. They are the evil ones that have been rejected by the Lord because of their wicked ways. Therefore, such persons are to be rejected (*nim’as*) by the true worshiper. So the psalm echoes a recurring motif of wisdom, which advises God’s followers not to associate with evil and despicable people. The importance of such a concept is already clear in the opening of the Psalter, where the blessed person is described as one “who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful” (Ps 1:1; see also Pss 26:4, 5; 31:6; 139:21; Jer 15:17).

8. “Those who fear the LORD he honors”

As a logical counterpart to the previous injunction, comes the affirmation that the one who enters God’s presence honors those who fear the Lord. It must be kept in mind that there are two categories of people who appear throughout the psalter: the righteous (*tsadiqim*) and the ungodly (*resha’im*), as described in the first psalm. And a point constantly made is that it is not enough to stay away from the former, but it is equally important to be in relationship with and bestow honor on the latter (Ps 16:3; 101:6; 119:63). Besides, honoring those who “fear the Lord” and enjoying their company reinforce right attitudes and good habits.

9. “Swears to his own hurt and does not change”

An injunction to keep oaths now becomes part of the list: “He *who* swears to his own hurt and does not change.” The Hebrew text presents some challenges in the grammar and vocalization, but it is still preferable to follow the Masoretic Text and interpret the clause in the sense of “swearing to one’s own hurt.”³¹ To keep one’s promise and word even when it entails personal injury or financial loss becomes an important preparation for those entering the presence of Yahweh. Other passages also emphasize the importance of keeping oaths and vows (Lev 5:4; Num 30:2; Deut 23:21-23; Eccl 5:4-5).

10. “Does not put out his money at usury”

The last two statements deal with one’s attitude towards money. So the ideal worshiper does “not put his money at usury.” It has been estimated that in contemporary societies interest rates could be as high as fifty percent a year.³² So it was not uncommon for debtors to eventually become slaves. So lending money or goods at interest to a fellow Israelite was strictly forbidden by the Hebrew law. The rationale is that one should not take advantage of a person in distress to make profit. Such a financial maneuver, which was largely practiced in the ancient Near East, was to be shunned by the Israelites

(cf. Exod 22:25; Lev 25:35–38; Deut 23:19–20). Fraternal love expressed in disposition to help those in need stands as a prerequisite for those who enter the presence of Yahweh in worship.

11. “Does not take a bribe against the innocent”

Keeping the focus on financial matters, the last injunction affirms that the person seeking the presence of Yahweh “does not take a bribe against the innocent.” The Bible warns against accepting money to pervert the right of the innocent and thus favor the wicked party in a legal dispute (Exod 23:6; Deut 16:19; 27:25). Bribery perverts justice, destroys relationships, and corrodes the very foundation of the community. However, as specific as this injunction may appear in regards to money, it transcends financial matters since it reveals the ultimate loyalty and devotion of the worshiper.

Psalm 15 concludes with a summarizing statement: “the one who does these things shall never be moved.” The first part refers back to the general statements of v. 2 and by extension to the more specific qualifications required from the true worshiper. And the last phrase “shall never be moved” functions as an *inclusio* pointing back to the opening questions: “Who shall abide/dwell?” At its very end, the psalm promises that those who live a life of integrity become unshakable and unmovable like Mount Zion (Ps 125:1). What Mount Zion is at the beginning, the worshiper becomes at the end.

Summing up, theologically Psalm 15 testifies of the inseparable connection between “temple and conduct, worship and life, holy place and righteous person.”³³ In doing so, this Psalm resonates with other Biblical texts where worship transcends formality, and nearness to God goes beyond ritual³⁴ (e.g.: Ps 24; Isa 33:14–16; Hos 6:6).

Conclusion

It may be somehow surprising that a psalm devoted to worship may be so concerned with ethical issues affecting social and communal relationships and virtually uninterested in the formal procedures of temple/sanctuary ritual. In so doing, however, Psalm 15 does not deny the importance of ritual and liturgy, but brings the focus upon an area that risks to be neglected. The people of God since times past have been tempted to divorce spirituality from daily life, and worship from social and communal relationships. This psalm reminds us that God is as interested in the way we treat others as He is in our formal worship service. From a biblical perspective, worship is expressed in liturgy and conduct, doctrine and obedience. So in a true worship experience we relate to God both in cult and life. True worship means to offer ourselves as “living sacrifices” expressed in a life of obedience. And such obedience reveals its true character in the way we relate to others.

God expects not only the best formal worship service that we can offer to Him, but He also expects to be praised by the life we live outside the church building. Our daily lives have a deep cultic meaning since they define the quality of the offering we bring to God. And this is not legalistic theology. It is not a *quid pro quo*. Such theology as deeply and concisely expressed in Psalm 15 must be understood within the framework of sanctuary/temple service, where atonement was granted through the sacrificial system. The psalm invites us to acknowledge our limitations, incapacities, and failures. As we do so, we plead for God’s forgiveness and healing so that He will make us able to offer Him the kind of life and relationships he expects from us. Ultimately Psalm 15 is not a prescription for access to God’s presence, but a description of those living within the bounds of God’s covenantal grace. But as we genuinely experience God’s presence in the place of worship, we mirror God in other places. And we should not forget that in order to arrive safely at Psalm 150 we need to make a stop at Psalm 15.

¹Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 61.

²E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 3 vols (Hengstenberg, E. W. *Commentary on the Psalms*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), 1:20; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, H. C. Leupold Commentary Collection (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 142.

³E.g., John Day confidently asserts that “Psalm 15 is the only psalm which in its entirety may be said to constitute an entrance liturgy. The same structure is to be found in Ps. 24:3–6 and, by way of prophetic imitation, in Isa. 33:14–16” (John Day, *Psalms* [London: T&T Clark, 1999], 60). See also Claus Westerman, *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message* (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1980), 103; Cas J. A. Vos, “Theopoetical and Liturgical Patterns of the Psalms in *Psalms and Liturgy*,” ed. Dirk J. Human and Cas J. A. Vos, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 410* (London: T. & T. Clark International, 2004), 253.

⁴Garcia de la Fuente, O. “Liturgias de entrada, normas de asilo o exhortaciones proféticas: A propósito de los Salmos 15 y 24,” *Augustinianum* 9, (1969): 266–298.

⁵An argument advanced against such an interpretation is the total absence of ritual and physical requirements from the list of qualities mentioned in Psalm 15. The characteristics of the ideal worshiper emphasized in this psalm are personal and ethical, which makes it difficult for the priest or cultic functionary to evaluate an individual on such a basis. Only the worshiper could know whether those conditions have been met (Ronald E. Clements, “Worship And Ethics: A Re-Examination of Psalm 15” in *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of John T. Willis*, ed. Matt Patrick Graham, Rick R. Marrs, and Steven L. McKenzie, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 284* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 83. In addition, it must be noted that the worshiper addresses the questions directly to Yahweh, which, as Gerstenberger has observed, “is unusual when compared with the unspecified addressees in related texts (Ps 24:3; Isa 33:14c–d; Mic 6:6–7)” (Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*. The Forms

of the Old Testament Literature 14 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 15).

⁶Hans-Joachim Kraus, *A Continental Commentary: Psalms 1–59* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 227. See also Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, The NIV Application Commentary, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1:296.

⁷Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998), 56.

⁸Willem VanGemeren, “Psalms,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 5:148.

⁹Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), s.v. “רוֹקֵזַם.”

¹⁰James Luther Mays, *Psalms* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1994), 85.

¹¹Ibid, 85; John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 1:219.

¹²George A. F. Knight, *Psalms: Volume 1*, The Daily Study Bible series (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 70-71; Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: 1988), 56; Charles A. Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1906-07), 112.

¹³Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), Tractate Makkot 3:15-16.

¹⁴Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary 19 (Dallas: Word, 2002), 150.

¹⁵Craigie conflates #7 and 8 into one condition and regards v 4c as positive condition due to his interpretation of the underlying Hebrew text. Craigie, 150.

¹⁶Lloyd M. Barré, “Recovering the Literary Structure of Psalm 15,” *Vetus Testamentum* 34, no. 2 (1984): 207-211.

¹⁷Ibid, 208.

¹⁸Davidson, 57. Emphasis supplied.

¹⁹Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), s.v.

םַמַּת.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid, 1427.

²²R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 752, s.v. שָׁדֵעַ (šādēq) be just, righteous.”

²³David J. Reimer, “שָׁדֵעַ (šādēq)” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. W. A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 3:746.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, translated by Margaret Kohl (London: S.C.M. Press, 1974), 51.

²⁷William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 332, s.v. לָגַר.

²⁸So Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 84.

²⁹Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, 2 vols., The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1:299.

³⁰Barnes interprets this injunction in the sense of not giving credit to accusations raised by others against the neighbor (Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms, Volume 1* [London: Blackie & Son, 1870-1872], 121).

³¹The Hebrew text has been variously translated as “to do no wrong” (Dahood, 83; Craigie, 149), “to his neighbor” (LXX) and to “to [his own] hurt” or similar idea (NKJV, ESV, NASB, NIV). Since the context is an oath, the latter option seems more likely, since the fulfillment of an oath might sometimes demand some personal loss.

³²Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reyburn, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Psalms*, Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 137.

³³Mays, 85.

³⁴S. Edward Tesh and Walter D. Zorn, *Psalms*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999), 163.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

The Gift of Sexuality

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

In Eden God gave wonderful gifts to humanity. Two have survived Paradise, the Sabbath and marriage. These are supposed to be enjoyed and celebrated. Heterosexual marriage is about companionship, love, and mutual support. It is also the place to use the gift of sexual intimacy. When we talk about stewardship of our bodies, this includes this very gift.

I. Marriage in the Old Testament

1. The Institution and Meaning of Marriage

Marriage differs from non-marital sexual relations

by its public and legal recognition. It was instituted when God created the first human couple. Therefore we have to go back to the creation account when we talk about marriage.

- Gen 1:26-27 - Both men and women were created in the image of God in spite of their sexual differentiation.
- Gen 1:28 - The first divine mandate for humanity used the plural. That means that the woman had a special status, comparable to that of Adam, which was unique among ancient Near Eastern religions.
- Gen 2:18-23 - Man and woman are created for each other. They share a common identity and are of the same value and coequal. God took Eve, brought her

- to Adam (Gen 2:22), and performed the first wedding.
- Gen 2:24 - This verse contains five characteristics of marriage as designed by God:
- (1) Marriage has a clear beginning. The husband leaves his parental family and becomes somewhat independent, ready to enter into an intimate union with his wife.
 - (2) God's will is heterosexual monogamy.
 - (3) Marriage is complete companionship. It is about becoming one in thinking and feeling, in will and action, climaxing in becoming "one flesh."
 - (4) In its character marriage is indissoluble. It is a union marked by trust and faithfulness.
 - (5) Marriage is the legitimate place for sexual intimacy.

God created marriage. It is not a human but a divine invention.

2. The Wedding

In the Old Testament (OT) a wedding was connected to the following steps:

- *Courtship*
Typically parents selected spouses for their children (Gen 21:21; 24). However, there were also cases when the young people could choose or at least were asked (1 Sam 18:20-21; Gen 24:57-58).
- *Engagement, Marriage Contract, Bride Price (Dowry)*
It can be assumed that engagement was associated with the payment of the bride price (Gen 34:12; Exod 22:16; 1 Sam 18:25)
- *Wedding Ritual*
The wedding consisted of three elements, (a) the wedding procession (Judg 14:11; Ps 45:14-16), (b) the marriage banquet (Gen 29:22; Judg 14:12, 17), and (c) the wedding night (Gen 29:22-23; Deut 22:13-21)

In the OT marriage was neither a private matter between a man and a woman nor a form of concubinage, but a public event involving the families and the community. It has legal implications. Sexual intimacy by itself does not constitute a marriage, but is the consummation of the marriage after the other steps have been taken.

II. Marriage in the New Testament

With regard to marriage, the New Testament (NT) follows the OT and does not develop a new form of marriage. This is not an exception because other OT

teachings and institutions are also presupposed and continued in the NT, such as creation, the Decalogue, and the Sabbath.

- Jesus - He participated in a wedding (John 2) and referred to marriage in various places, dealing with marriage (references to the creation account; various parables, e. g. , Matt 22:1-14; 25:1-13), adultery, and divorce (Matt 5:27-32; 19:1-10). He also made provisions for remaining single (Matt 19:12).
- Paul - He dealt with marriage and related aspects in various places (e. g. , 1 Cor 7). In Eph 5:22-33 he compared marriage of a man and a woman with the relationship between Jesus and his church. This appreciation of marriage has deeply influenced Christianity.
- Matt 1:18-20 - Maria and Joseph are engaged but not yet involved in sexual intimacy.
- Matt 19:5 - Jesus refers back to Gen 2:24 and stresses the permanence of marriage.
- John 8:41 - The Jews suggested that Jesus was an illegitimate child, looking down upon him.
- 1 Cor 7:8-9 - A legitimate alternative to getting married is not to cohabit but to "burn" (with passion).

According to the NT, marriage was instituted by God at creation. The NT maintains the marriage constituting elements of the OT. Again, marriage is not just a private matter but has a public and legal character. Premarital virginity is stressed. In both Testaments marriage is protected by God in a special way (Mal 2:14-16; Matt 19:4-6). Therefore, Christians commit themselves to their spouses publicly, exclusively, and permanently, seeking God's blessing in the community of believers.

III. Sexuality Gone Wrong

- 1 Cor 6:9-11 - This passage and its context answer the following questions:

1. Why Should Christians Avoid Sexual Sins?

- Because there is a kingdom to gain. A misuse of the gift of sexuality does not square with God's rule and his kingdom (1 Cor 6:9-10).
- Immorality is damaging. It harms or destroys relationships with spouse, family, friends, and neighbors (1 Cor 7:10-14). It harms the relationship with God (1 Cor 6:15; 7:35). And it harms ourselves—emotionally, psychologically, and physically (1 Cor 6:18). God

wants us to live fulfilled lives (John 10:10).

2. What Are Sexual Sins?

- *Fornication*: Fornication is a broad concept in Scripture and typically includes all sins of a sexual nature such as premarital sex, adultery, incest, homosexuality, sodomy, and others. However, if it is listed with some or all of these other sins, it may describe premarital sexual intimacy (see Heb 13:4).
- *Adultery*: Adultery describes a sexual affair with a person other than one's spouse (John 8:3-11; 1 Cor 6:15-20).
- *Homosexual Activity*: In 1 Cor 6:9 the effeminate seems to play the female in a homoerotic relationship, while the second Greek term, *asernokoitēs*, the male who lies with a male, obviously describes the one playing the male in such a relationship. See also Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26-27.
- *Incest*: Incest describes a sexual relationship with a close relative (1 Cor 5:1-2; Lev 18:6-18).
- *Divorce*: Following Jesus who had addressed the matter of divorce (Matt 19:1-10; Mark 10:1-10), Paul is also opposed to divorce (1 Cor 7:10-16). See also

Mal 2:16.

- *Intentional Mixed Marriages*: A widow and—by implication a widower—may remarry, but it should be “only in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39). In the context of 1 Cor 5-7 this has been understood as a warning against a marriage with an unbeliever whatever philosophy of life this person would adhere to other than true biblical faith. See also Deut 7:3; Neh 13:23-25.

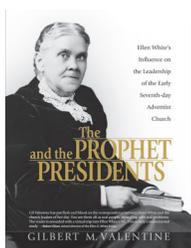
3. Why is there still hope for sinners?

The last part of our passage is full of hope: “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). If we have failed and sinned, forgiveness and a new beginning are possible through God's grace. Yet Jesus challenges us also: “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Conclusion

God has given humanity the gift of marriage including sexual intimacy. This gift of true love needs to be treasured, kept pure, and protected against abuse. It is a symbol of our relationship with the Lord.

Book Notes



Gilbert M. Valentine, *The Prophet and the Presidents: Ellen White's Influence on the Leadership of the Early Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2011. 377 pp. + 7 pp. Index. \$24.99.

The Prophet and the Presidents is a fun and compelling read of one of the most controversial periods in denominational history. The narrative picks up in 1888 and concludes in 1913 and follows the successive presidencies of world church presidents O. A. Olsen (1888-1897), G. A. Irwin (1897-1901), and A. G. Daniells (1901-1922). Valentine focuses on the “charismatic” prophetic leadership of Ellen G. White juxtaposed with these same leaders. The book is neatly organized into three main sections: chapters 1 and 2 analyze spiritual leadership as “political” skill (29-61), followed by chapters 3 through 10 that uncover the relationship between Ellen White and the presidents under scrutiny, and perhaps the most important part of the book is the last chapter (304-337) that suggests a “hermeneutical paradigm for understanding Ellen White in the 1890s.”

At the heart of Valentine's thesis is the notion that the “gift of administration” and the “gift of prophetic

guidance” were intended to balance one another. Valentine furthermore suggests that Ellen White was an astute church politician (cf. 198). Perhaps her most significant contribution was to lead a “revolution” at the 1901 General Conference Session that established a new church structure. While it is admirable that Valentine notes her political prowess, it appears that at several points he moves beyond historical documentation when he alleges that in her political maneuverings she took church leaders on rides in the country while conveniently sidestepping “certain topics of conversation” (198). How does he know? The author provides no documentation.

As a “believer's study” he concludes that a hermeneutic of Ellen White must not only include “time” and “place” but also her “personal experience.” In this sense Valentine makes assumptions that become much clearer in the final chapter. To what extent does “time” and “place” limit the authoritative message of the prophet? Was she simply in a bad mood when she wrote a message of reproof? In essence Valentine utilizes a conditional hermeneutic for interpreting Ellen White that, although he allows for her “charismatic” gift, lessens her authoritative role within the church at that time, and by extension, her continuing legacy within the church.

Perhaps this is best seen in Valentine's narrative of the power struggle between J. H. Kellogg and denominational leaders in the events surrounding the 1901

General Conference Session (perhaps the most compelling part of the book). He asks the rhetorical question if White and other church leaders possibly made a strategic mistake and thus a “failure” of leadership on the part of Daniells and by extension Ellen White? (208). Such questions move beyond the realm of hermeneutics to one with practical implications for the inspiration and authority of Ellen G. White and her prophetic role within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Was she a politician who “would abandon a particular approach when it appeared not to be effective and then adopt another?” (208). She was a pragmatist in that she was open to using various means to achieve an “end” that she knew (by revelation) was God’s will for the church. For example, when a vision and her best persuasion failed to convince church administrators to purchase the land for Avondale College, she took a different approach. She asked each member of the committee to individually pray for God to reveal to each one what they should do about the land. (See EGW to WCW, Nov. 5, 1894, quoted in Jerry Moon, *W. C. White and Ellen G. White* [AU Press, 1993], 200-202). When they did so, they all came back and said essentially, we think the land is not perfect, but it is the best available for our purposes and we should buy it even though it has some drawbacks—which was exactly what she had argued all along. She didn’t change her goal, but she took a different approach to the committee when her initial attempt failed to convince them.

An even more foundational question that Valentine addresses appears to be the underlying question of whether the human dimension of her prophetic role overshadowed the prophetic? Historically Adventists have maintained that the source of Ellen White’s writings (revelation) is from God and although the human messenger is imperfect her prophetic life and writings remain authoritative for the church (inspiration). Thus as an “agent of change” Valentine notes that she was not always effective, but the hermeneutical implication for letting “time” and “place” take front seat in the hermeneutical interpretative driver’s seat is to diminish her

prophetic authority. Clearly Ellen White was a pragmatist, but her prophetic warnings were letters written not because she was in a bad mood but because she discerned the spiritual peril of the denomination!

On a more historical level it is no surprise therefore that Valentine is biased in favor of W. W. Prescott in her interpretative framework since he did his doctoral dissertation (Andrews University, 1982) and two later biographies on Prescott. For example, Valentine takes Prescott’s word that Ellen White wanted him to become General Conference president based upon a no longer extant letter referenced in a later letter by Prescott. Was Prescott completely reliable? Later he credits the Fundamentalists with overthrowing the presidency of A. G. Daniells in 1922 (267-269) but such a cursory reading does not allow for the fact that Daniells and Prescott *both* urged leaders at the 1919 Bible Conference to become the “Fundamentalists of the Fundamentalists.” Valentine would have you believe that Prescott was the hero when he contributed to the theological polarization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As such it appears that he weights the historical evidence in favor of Prescott.

Despite disagreeing with Valentine’s interpretation, I loved reading a narrative of one of the most controversial periods in Adventist history because of the painstaking and extensive historical research. What sets this book apart and how it makes a remarkable contribution is that this is currently the most extensive and detailed analysis published to date on this period of Ellen White’s life. It exposes the reader to hundreds of unpublished letters only accessible in major archives and research centers. Nevertheless, readers need to recognize that this book was designed as a provocative study to challenge the typical interpretative framework for interpreting Ellen White, and I disagree with this central thesis. Unfortunately, the hermeneutic he proposes will tend to diminish her prophetic authority within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Michael W. Campbell,
SDA Pastor in Kansas

NEWS

3rd International Bible Conference

More than three hundred Adventist theologians and church leaders from all over the world gathered in Jerusalem for the 3rd International



Bible Conference held from June 11 to 20, 2012. The event focused on Biblical Anthropology and brought together a select team of speakers who approached the theme from different perspectives and enriched our understanding of this topic. In the near future,

it is planned to release a book containing a selection of the papers presented. The Conference was coordinated by the Biblical Research Institute with support of the General Conference and the North American Division of the SDA. The program included tours to biblical sites and geological formations, guided by scholars from Andrews University, the Siegfried Horn Museum, Southern Adventist University, Inter-American Adventist Theological Seminary, and the Geoscience Research Institute. The evaluation by the participants was very positive and demonstrated that the event accomplished its goal of fostering theological unity, stimulating fellowship among theologians and church leaders, and of promoting the academic and spiritual enrichment of the attendees.

A consensus statement was approved (see below) with the following recommendations: (1) that church administration encourage and sponsor major scholarly work on biblical anthropology, and that ample funding for this important scholarly and educational work be

made available. (2) Missiological challenges unique to special regions of the world church should be addressed by dedicated funding. (3) Church administrators should encourage Seventh-day Adventist scholars, educators and leaders to place special emphasis on the biblical teaching about the nature of human beings in curriculum and strategic planning for Adventist tertiary education. (3) Seventh-day Adventist scholars should be encouraged to give additional attention to these important topics to provide resources to frontline pastors, teachers, literature evangelists and church members. (4) Sabbath school curricula, ministerial training, and continuing education opportunities should be designed to equip pastors, Sabbath school teachers, and chaplains to educate church members about the biblical teaching on the nature of human beings. (5) Additional and concentrated study should be directed by the Office of Adventist Mission to address the implications of the biblical doctrine of humanity to the Church's mission, evangelism and witness.

Consensus Statement

Theological Prologue

An emphasis on the biblical understanding of humanity has been characteristic of the Seventh-day Adventist movement from its beginning. According to the Bible's foundational anthropological descriptions, male and female human beings are "creatures" in the "image of God" (Gen 1:26-27)—expressions which point, respectively, to what human beings have in common with other forms of life and to what distinguishes them within the natural world. As creatures, human beings are physical beings in a physical world, dependent for life on God, who alone possesses immortality (1 Tim 6:16). Even though dependent and finite, human beings have great value to God. God's pronouncement that what he had made was "very good" (Gen 1:31) thus affirms the goodness of the body, refuting dualism. It affirms the value of material reality, and therefore of physical, corporeal existence, and excludes the notion that human beings could exist in any sort of non-physical or disembodied state.

As creatures in the "image of God," fashioned by God on the sixth day of his creative work, human beings are distinguished from other forms of life on earth in a number of significant ways (Gen 1:26-29). Though variously interpreted, the expression connotes that human beings are distinguished by unique relationships to God, to other creatures, and to each other, and endowed by God with special qualities and privileges, among which is the capacity to freely embrace God's sovereign love and will for them. God also places responsibilities on human beings, including care for his world and living in harmony with God and other human beings.

Created in the image of God, Adam and Eve and their descendants were placed at the center of the great controversy between cosmic forces of good and evil. Their willful rebellion against God's love adversely affected everything about them (Isa 59:2, Eph 2:11-13). Sin in its essence points to the tragic discrepancy between what human beings are meant to be and the condition in which they actually exist. Sin placed them in conflict with God, with one another, and with creation, and subjects them to pain, suffering, physical and mental decline, and eventually to death.

Just as a wholistic view of humanity affirms all the dimensions that make us human—including physical, mental, emotional, sexual, social and spiritual dimensions—a wholistic view of sin acknowledges that every aspect of our humanity is unfulfilled and damaged. Similarly, a wholistic view of salvation envisions the restoration of our humanity—in all of its essential aspects.

The theme of human restoration appears throughout the Bible. Sinners are offered the opportunity for a restored relationship with God as they place their faith in Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, whose death reconciles them to the Father (Rom 5:6-15, 2 Cor 5:17-19). The presence of the Spirit in the life of believers continually renews and restores their fellowship with God and each other. The doctrine of the resurrection promises restoration on a personal scale—an immortal, glorified body. Jesus' preaching of the kingdom promises restoration of a perfect social order. And biblical apocalyptic literature promises restoration on a cosmic level—new heavens and a new earth (Rev 21:1-5). These various forms appeared proleptically in the ministry of Jesus, who forgave sin, healed the sick, challenged injustice, and, when necessary, defied oppressive powers, cast out demons, restored human relationships and raised the dead. As evidenced in its evangelistic, educational, community ser-

vice and medical work, it is the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to extend the multifaceted restorative ministry of Jesus to the spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, sexual, and social needs of human beings, whom God still regards as children, created in the divine image and designed for fellowship with God and each other.

The Context

Seventh-day Adventist scholars, educators, pastors, members and leaders minister in a world in which the challenges to the biblical concept of human nature are profound and pervasive. Hundreds of millions of persons accept and practice traditional religions which allow for or encourage animism, ancestor worship, communication with the spirits of the dead, or the use of occult powers. Millions more blend one or more of these false doctrines of end-time spiritualism with monotheistic faiths, including Christianity, resulting in a syncretism that robs the good news of Jesus' death and bodily resurrection of its life-giving power. Seventh-day Adventists have emphasized the Bible's teaching about the nature of man from their earliest mission endeavors: Ellen G. White referred to belief in the natural non-immortality of human beings as one of the "landmarks" of the Seventh-day Adventist message. The urgency of addressing the challenges of dualism in all its forms on faith and practice is underlined by the reality of confusion among some Seventh-day Adventists who have a background in other faith systems.

The Third International Bible Conference took place in Israel, June 11-20, 2012, at sites in Galilee and Jerusalem. The theme of the Conference was "Issues in Biblical Anthropology from an Adventist Perspective." Committed to a biblical worldview, more than 300 Adventist theologians and administrators from around the world gathered together to explore biblical, theological, historical, missiological and scientific perspectives on anthropology, to foster fellowship and unity among theologians and among theologians and administrators, and to be better equipped to serve the Lord and His church. Through the study, discussion, and fellowship this Conference provided, it was hoped that participants would experience a renewed sense of belonging and be stimulated to make further valuable contributions to the world church through their teaching and ministry.

As the meetings came to an end, we, the participants, acknowledge that we were spiritually and intellectually enriched through Bible study, the devotionals, the seasons of prayer, the lectures, the discussions, and the educational visits to important biblical and archaeological sites. We also proclaim that the Adventist understanding of human nature and its denial of anthropological dualism is deeply rooted in and nurtured by biblical anthropology.

Affirmations

Committed to the principles of *sola scriptura* and *tota scriptura*, and because we accept the Bible's teaching about the origin, nature and destiny of human life:

We affirm that human beings are creatures of God, fashioned indivisibly from the dust of the earth, into whom God breathed the breath of life (Gen 2:7).

We affirm the goodness of material reality and bodily existence, according to the divine word which declared "It is good." (Gen 1:31).

We affirm that God created human beings in the image and likeness of God. Therefore all human life is endowed with unique dignity, value, and responsibilities (Ps 8:3-8).

We affirm that sin has profoundly damaged human nature in all its dimensions, separating human beings from fellowship with God and each other (Rom 3:23; Gen 3:7-8).

We affirm that death is the inevitable consequence of sin, and is both a cessation of personal consciousness and an end to human life in all its dimensions until the resurrection. The breath returns to God who gave it, and the dust returns to the ground (Gen 3:19; Eccl 12:7).

We affirm that it is the saving activity of God through the death and bodily resurrection of Christ and through the continuous work of the Spirit to reverse the effects of sin and restore in humanity the image of God (1 Cor 3:16-18).

We affirm that at Christ's return, those in Christ, both living and the resurrected dead, will receive the gift of immortality, accept glorified bodies and enter the life everlasting (1 Cor 15:51-54).

Denials

We deny natural immortality in its various forms, including the concept of the immaterial soul, eternal punishment, and reincarnation in any life form.

We deny naturalism as an explanation for the origin of human life, or any form of life.

We deny the continuation of any consciousness after death, and thus the use of practices to commune with the dead, worship ancestors, or gain occult powers.

We deny all forms of anthropological dualism, especially the belief that “soul” and body are different orders of being.

Missiological Implications

It is a vital part of the mission of the church to proclaim Christ’s victory over death, and deliverance from the fear of death and spiritual powers through faith in Him (Heb 2:15). We recognize that the fear of death and evil spiritual powers pervades human experience, and takes form in a variety of religious beliefs and practices. We accept the responsibility of teaching the biblical truth about the nature of human beings in every culture and context so that all who hear will find lives of freedom and joy in the gospel and be prepared to meet the Saviour in peace. We confidently expect the literal Second Coming of Jesus at which God will restore the wholeness of all who put their faith in Jesus. We preach and teach the Word of God, inviting persons of every race, ethnicity and language into fellowship with God and His end-time people. Recognizing the dignity and value of every human being, we engage in education, healthcare, and humanitarian aid, combatting poverty, injustice, and involvement in the occult. We do these things as expressions of Christ’s goal to restore in human beings the image of God and full fellowship with God and each other.