Our first issue for 2013 starts us off with a core issue for Christianity—the resurrection. It plays a central part in the Christian narrative of the New Testament, but many critical scholars have questions as to whether or not it can be found in the Old Testament. Jon Paulien brings us up to date on current discussions on this vital topic. Continuing with our look into the Old Testament we have Elias Brasil de Suza who examines the sanctuary through the OT view of cosmos, covenant, and creation. Clinton Wahlen then moves us into the New Testament with his study on justification—rather than reviewing the more oft-studied Pauline texts on this topic, Clinton provides a fresh look at justification as it is found in the gospels. The next article continues our study of the New Testament with the second entry on the topic of thrones in Revelation by Laszlo Gallusz. Moving into the realm of theology, the Everlasting Covenant is the focus of Peter van Bemmelen’s contribution to this issue. Next is an update on the debate of the sola scriptura principle by Aleksandar Santrac. We conclude this issue with Fernando Canale’s examination of what being the Remnant means.

We also want to encourage you to check out our website which has a variety of resources available. Under our publications tab you can find JATS archives and you can also find our publication, Perspective Digest. The activities tab lists information about the various symposiums which ATS holds each year in the spring and the fall. The media tab has archived video and audio selections in several media formats. Please feel free to utilize these all as you study various topics.
In addition to the articles in this issue, we wish to inform our readers of a new ATS publication. Occasionally a good study or dissertation is brought to our attention that we think will be of interest to our readers. That is the case with *The Role and Status of the Catholic Church in the Church-State Relationship within the Roman Empire from A.D. 306-814* by Jean Zukowski which has just been published. If you are interested in acquiring a copy of this book, please visit our webpage at www.atsjats.org. Blessings as you read!
The Resurrection and the Old Testament:
A Fresh Look in Light of Recent Research

Jon Paulien
Dean, School of Religion
Loma Linda University

“In so far as the ancient, non-Jewish world had a Bible, its Old Testament was Homer. And in so far as Homer has anything to say about resurrection, he is quite blunt: it doesn’t happen.”¹ This statement sets the table for the fundamental challenge faced by early Christians on this topic. Christianity was born into a world where its central claim was “known” to be false.² Outside Judaism, nobody believed in resurrection, at least not in the way that the Bible defines it.³

This is not to say that the ancient world had no concept of life after death. If Homer functioned like the Old Testament for the Hellenistic world, its New Testament was Plato.⁴ Plato had no need for resurrection because he understood the human person to be divided into two distinct

² Recall the mocking response of many of the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill when Paul brings up the resurrection of Jesus in Acts 17:31-32.
⁴ Wright, Resurrection, 47-48. Homer is generally reckoned to have lived around the Eighth Century BC and Plato in the late Fifth to early Fourth Century BC. See note 87 on page 48 of Wright, Resurrection.
parts; a mortal, material body and an immortal, immaterial soul that lives on after death. So for Plato, death affects only the body, not the soul.

Before going any further it would be wise to define exactly what I mean by resurrection. Resurrection is not a general term for life after death in all its forms, it refers specifically to the belief that the present state of those who have died will be replaced by a future state in which they are alive bodily once more. This is not a redefinition of death, but the reversal or defeat of death, restoring bodily life to those in which it has ceased. While the resurrected body may be different in many ways, it is as material as the first body, usually arising at the very place of death, wearing clothes, and arising with recognizable, physical characteristics of the former life. Resurrection in the fullest sense requires the belief that human beings are whole persons, with unified body, soul and spirit. That means that, in the Seventh-day Adventist view, resurrection is absolutely necessary in order to experience life beyond the grave.

According to the ancients, a lot of things happened after death, but bodily resurrection was not one of them, it was not a part of the pagan’s hope for the future. Death was like a one-way street, you can travel down that street leading to death, but once at your destination you can’t come

---

6 Resurrection, re-incarnation, immortality of the soul, etc.
7 This is well expressed in the second edition of the Encyclopedia Judaica: “Ultimately the dead will be revived in their bodies and live again on earth.” Moshe Greenberg, “Resurrection in the Bible,” in Encyclopedia Judaica, edited by Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, volume 17 (Detroit: Thomson- Gale, 2007), 240.
8 Wright, Resurrection, 201.
11 Wright, Resurrection, 38, 85. Although other scholars might qualify the statement a bit, Wright goes on to say (page 76), “Nobody in the pagan world of Jesus’ day and thereafter claimed that somebody had been truly dead and had then come to be truly, and bodily, alive once more.” On pages 32-84 of his monumental work Wright summarizes the evidence for his categorical claim.
PAULIEN: RESURRECTION AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

back.\(^{12}\) The ancient Greeks did allow that resurrection could possibly occur as an isolated miracle, but such are either fictional or are more like resuscitations than genuine resurrections.\(^{13}\) The idea of a true resurrection, particularly a general resurrection at the end of the world, was alien to the Greeks.\(^{14}\) This means that something happened to Jesus that had happened to no one else in the ancient world.\(^{15}\) What is particularly striking is a sudden proliferation of apparent deaths and reversals of deaths in the ancient pagan world beginning with the mid to late First Century AD and for centuries afterward.\(^{16}\) It is quite likely that these were influenced by the New Testament stories of the resurrection of Jesus.\(^{17}\)

---

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 81-82.


A couple of examples of such “isolated miracles” in ancient Greek literature can be found in the play *Alcestis* by Euripides and the novel *Callirhoe*, by Chariton. *Alcestis* is the only tale containing a true resurrection in the entire ancient world. The heroine of the story, Alcestis, does in fact return from the dead to bodily life, but even this is not a true parallel to New Testament resurrection; like Lazarus she will presumably die again. Even so, intelligent pagans in Jesus’ day dismissed the story as a mythic fiction (see Wright, *Resurrection*, 67, but see Stanley E. Porter, “Resurrection, the Greeks and the New Testament,” in *Resurrection*, edited by Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes and David Tombs [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 52-81). The story of *Callirhoe* tells of an empty tomb, with a mourner going at dawn and finding the grave stones moved away, the rumor spreading quickly, and others coming to the tomb and finding it empty. This is a most interesting parallel to the New Testament, so much so that it is more likely to have been influenced by the New Testament than the other way around. By in this fictitious story no actual resurrection occurs and nobody in the story supposes that it actually can (see Wright, *Resurrection*, 68-72).

\(^{14}\) Oepke, *TDNT*, 1: 369.

\(^{15}\) Wright, *Resurrection*, 81-82.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 75.

\(^{17}\) See note 13.
Resurrection in the Old Testament

The General Picture

To those accustomed to reading the Old Testament through the lens of the New, it may come as a surprise that much of the Old Testament reads like Homer. In the words of Job himself, “life is but a breath. . . he who goes down to the grave does not return. He will never come to his house again” (Job 7:7-10, NIV). “At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again. . . . so man lies down and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, men will not awake or be roused from their sleep” (Job 14:7, 12, NIV). Words like these sound like a one-way street.


PAULIEN: RESURRECTION AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is not that the writers of the Old Testament were deeply disturbed about this. Old Testament Israelites were attached to life, they did not invest much energy in dreaming of a life hereafter. As with Job, they were interested in the outcome of God’s judgment in the here and now. They did not believe that human beings have innate immortality. Rather, they believed that life comes from God (Gen 2:7), returns to Him (Eccl 12:7), and the dead lose consciousness and never again have a part in what happens under the sun (Eccl 9:5-6). Sheol or the grave was a place where the whole person goes at death. It is not a place of consciousness or purpose.

So for most of the Old Testament the idea of resurrection was, at best, dormant. The two or three relatively clear texts (Dan 12:2-3; Isa 26:19; Job 19:25-27) are accompanied by numerous hints that would eventually...

Books, 1969), 44; Lucas, 302; Segal, NIDB, 4: 770. Pope (102) calls this the “standard Old Testament view.” While not addressing Job 14:12 at all, the SDA Bible Commentary admits that the details of a corporeal resurrection were not clearly unveiled until the time of Christ. SDABC, 3:537.


Wright, Resurrection, 96-97.

Martin-Achard, ABD, 5: 680.

Generally death was not feared. The Old Testament saints were content to go down to the grave as long as three conditions were met: 1) they had had a long and blessed life (Gen 15:15; Exod 20:12; Job 42:10-17), 2) they had left behind many descendants (Gen 15:17-18; 46:3), or at least a son (Deut 25:5-10), and 3) the proper burial rites were carefully observed (Gen 49:29-32; 2 Sam 3:30-39; Jer 16:1-7). Likewise, divine punishment was expressed through a shortened life, a lack of descendants and a corpse abandoned to the wild beasts. See Martin-Achard, ABD, 5: 680; von Rad, 1: 389-390.


blossom into the full-blown confidence in the resurrection expressed by most of First Century Judaism. What is the evidence for resurrection in the Old Testament and how did people come to believe in it?

Explicit OT Texts

The clearest expression of bodily resurrection in the Old Testament is found in an apocalyptic context in Daniel 12:2-3. “Many of those who

29 Wright, Resurrection, 85. While post-Old Testament Judaism exhibited dozens of ways to express life after death, bodily resurrection was clearly the standard teaching by the time of Jesus. In fact, the Mishnah (Sanh. 10:1) explicitly states (in reaction against the Sadducees) “And these are they that have no share in the world to come: he that says that there is no resurrection of the dead prescribed in the Law...” Herbert Danby, editor, The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 397. See also Martin-Achard, ABD 5: 680; Oepke, TDNT, 1:370; Wright, Resurrection, 129. For extensive surveys of the intertestamental literature on this subject see George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Resurrection (Early Judaism and Christianity),” in The Anchor Bible Dictionary, volume 5, edited by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 685-688 and Wright, Resurrection, 129-200.

30 And generally also considered the latest (see Wright, Resurrection, 109).

Paulien: Resurrection and the Old Testament

sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake” (ESV).32 The text goes on to make reference to two resurrections, one “to everlasting life” and the other “to shame and everlasting contempt.” Then in verse 3, referring to the first of the two resurrections, the “wise” shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who bring many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.33 This prediction of the resurrection is the last in a long line of promises to the people of God in Daniel,34 promises of a divine kingdom (Dan 2:35, 44-45), stories of vindication in the face of death (Daniel 3 and 6), the vindication of the son of man (Dan 7:13-14), and a Messiah to come (Dan 9:24-27). So deliverance of bodies from death is connected to the vindication of the whole people of God.35

It is not immediately clear if the word “many” foresees only a partial resurrection or whether the word is used as an idiom for “all.”36 But what

32 “Sleeping in the dust of the earth” undoubtedly refers to the death of the whole person in Hebrew thinking (on sleep as a metaphor of death see 2 Kings 4:31; Job 3:11-13; 14:10-13; Psa 13:3; Jer 51:35-40, 57; on dust as a destination of the dead see Gen 3:19; Job 10:9; 34:15; Psa 104:29; Eccl 3:13). Thus the metaphor of sleeping and waking refers to the concrete, bodily event of resurrection. See Montgomery, 471; Stefanovic, 436 and the discussion in note 107 of Wright, Resurrection, 109.

33 The imagery of stars seems to have a royal connotation (kings are spoken of as stars or celestial beings– Num 24:17; 1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam 14:17, 20; Isa 9:6). See also Wright, Resurrection, 112 and notes. This is perhaps related to the corporate kingship imagery of Exodus 19 and Revelation 1 and 5. “Stars” are also frequently identified with the angelic host in the Old Testament. John J. Collins, “Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death,” Catholic Biblical Quarterly 36 (1974): 31-34.

34 The resurrection verses (Dan 12:2-3) are connected in the Hebrew to verse 1, where the deliverance of God’s people is at the center of focus. Verse 2 makes clear that in this text deliverance is not limited to deliverance within this life, but includes also deliverance out of death into the afterlife. C. F. Keil, Daniel, 477.

35 Brunt, 360. The natural meaning of the language is that this text is not referring to a universal resurrection, only some of the dead will arise (see Nickelsburg, ABD, 5:686; Martin-Achard, ABD, 5:683). On the other hand, the word “many” is used in both Old and New Testament texts as a reference to the whole (Isa 53:12; Mark 14:24; Rom 5:15). See Stefanovic, 436. Some Adventists, however, have seen in Daniel 12 a reference to a special resurrection of some to be living witnesses to the Second Coming of Jesus. See Hasel, 277-279; F. D. Nichol, editor, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, ten volumes (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1955), 4:878; William H. Shea, “Daniel 7-12,” The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier, edited by George R. Knight (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), 215-216; and Ellen G. White, (The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian
will prove particularly significant for this paper is the fact that Daniel 12:2-3 alludes to earlier passages in the Old Testament (such as Isa 26:19; 53:10-12; 65:20-22; and 66:24), putting an inner-biblical, bodily resurrection spin on passages that could be read in other ways.

The second clearest expression of bodily resurrection in the Old Testament can be found in Isaiah 26:19. Isaiah 24-27 exhibits a more apocalyptic style than is generally found in the pre-exilic prophets,
envisioning the renewal of the whole cosmos. The section is a mixture of doom and lament, on the one hand, and expressions of trust and praise on the other. The hope expressed in 26:19 is anticipated first in Isaiah 25:7-8 (NIV) where the Lord Almighty “will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations;“ the will swallow up death forever. The context of 26:19 is set in verses 13-15, where the enemies of God’s people are now dead in the complete and endless sense. But in contrast to these (Isa 26:19, NIV), “Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy.” A resurrection of the body is clearly in view here, but there is no reference to a resurrection of the wicked. Also significant for our purpose is that Isa 26:19 evokes the language of earlier, more ambiguous Old Testament texts like Hosea 6:1-3.

The third Old Testament text widely considered an explicit description of bodily resurrection is also the most controversial of the three; Job 19:25-27. While there are difficulties in this passage, Brunt believes that the

---

41 Martin-Achard, ABD, 5:682; Wright, Resurrection, 117.
42 The Hebrew word translated “shroud” and “sheet” in this text has connotations of burial clothes (Job 40:13), so the language of the whole passage suggests a reversal of death, the great enemy of all humanity.
43 See Delitzsch, Isaiah, 439-440; Gray, Isaiah I-XXXIX, 1: 429-430; Ollenburger, 38-40; SDABC, 4:201.
44 Brunt, 359; Collins, Hermeneia, 395; Wright, Resurrection, 117.
45 Brunt, 359; Hasel, 273.
46 Brunt, 360; Martin-Achard, ABD, 5:682. There is a detailed discussion in Hasel (272-276) regarding who the speaker in Isaiah 26:19 is, and also who is being addressed, but that goes beyond the scope of this paper.
48 Driver and Grey (Job, 171) call the manuscript evidence for Job 19:25-27 “corrupt and obscure” and “more ambiguous than could have been desired.” Pope (135) says that the ancient versions all differ and no reliance can be placed on any of them. He does not see in them a witness to bodily resurrection. Anderson, Job (193), says that several lines are “so unintelligible that the range of translations offered is quite bewildering.” For a sample of a dozen or so translations in German, English and French see H. H. Rowley, “The Book of Job and its Meaning,” Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 41 (1958), note 5, running from 203-205. On the other hand, early Christian students of the Hebrew text like Jerome were confident that the text expressed the hope and reality of bodily resurrection. See Glatzer,
conviction of life after death is clear. Job expresses confidence that God will be his go’el in the last days (19:25). What this means is expressed in verse 26, the challenging Hebrew of which is translated by the ESV: “And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.” In the context, Job can find no justice and all his friends and family have deserted him. But in verse 25 the mood changes and Job expresses.

Introduction, 27. And Anderson, Job (193), goes on to point out that we must not let the ambiguities in the text hide the fact that some things in the text are clear. See also Lucas, 302-303.

Brunt, 359. Though conservative in his leanings, Wright (Resurrection, 97-98; see also Delitzsch, Job, 356-372) emphatically differs with regard to Job 19. He argues that the passage is a clearer reference to resurrection in some English translations than in the Hebrew. Job has earlier expressed the conviction that life is a breath, that the dead will not come up out of Sheol (Job 7:7-10), that they do not rise again as long as the cosmos exists (Job 14:1-14). Why should Job suddenly be singing a different tune? I would point out, however, that there is a progression in Job from hopeless doubt to trust in God, and the very expressions of hopelessness in chapters 7 and 14 set the table for the hope that is expressed in chapter 19. In Job 19:25 (masked by most English translations) the word for earth (’rp’î) is actually “dust of the earth,” the very word used in key texts like Gen 2:7; 3:19; Isa 26:19 and Dan 12:2. So the context of verse 26 is God standing on the “dust of the earth” to vindicate His servant. Not only so, but in chapter 20 (as admitted by Wright, Resurrection, 98) Zophar reaffirms the traditional view of death and resurrection by way of rebuke to Job (see 20:2-9): “My troubled thoughts prompt me to answer because I am greatly disturbed. . . . Surely you know how it has been from of old, ever since man was placed on the earth, . . . he will perish forever, like his own dung; those who have seen him will say, ‘Where is he?’ Like a dream he flies away, no more to be found, banished like a vision of the night. The eye that saw him will not see him again; his place will look on him no more.” So I would place the weight of evidence in favor of a reference to bodily resurrection in Job 19:25-27. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary confidently asserts that verse 25 is “an unmistakable glimpse of the resurrection.” See Jacques Doukhan, “Radioscopy of a Resurrection: The Meaning of nigg’pu zo’t in Job 19:26,” Andrews University Seminary Studies 34:2 (Autumn 1996):187-193; SDABC, 3:549.

According to Anderson, Job (193), the reference here to skin, flesh and eyes makes it clear that Job expects to have this experience in the body, not as some disembodied “shade.” The problem in verse 26 is the Hebrew preposition min (םי), which is united to the Hebrew word for flesh (basar–בָּשָׂר). Min is this context can express removal, separation or location. So possible translations include “in my flesh,” “apart from my flesh,” “away from my flesh,” or “from my flesh,” the choice makes a huge impact on the meaning of the verse as a whole. If one translates “in my flesh” or “from my flesh” the text supports bodily resurrection. If one translates “apart from my flesh” or “away from my flesh,” it could imply apart from the corruptible, mortal flesh in a new body like the one in 1 Corinthians 15. Either way, bodily resurrection is not denied in Job 19. See SDABC, 3:549-550.
confidence that his go’el will one day vindicate him. Such a vindication requires a judgment and a bodily resurrection, so in spite of translational challenges, it seems likely that bodily resurrection is in view in Job 19, although the word explicit is probably a stretch when applied to this passage.

Harbingers of the Resurrection in the Old Testament

In addition to the more explicit texts on bodily resurrection in the Old Testament, there are a number of texts that offer intriguing hints of what would become the standard understanding within early Judaism and Christianity. The two most intriguing of these are found in Isaiah 53 and Ezekiel 37. I will begin with Ezekiel 37.

In Ezekiel 37 God’s ability to restore life is applied to the nation as a whole, in keeping with the community-oriented worldview of the Old Testament. The prophet sees a valley full of dry bones. He prophesies to the bones and they come together, life is breathed into them and they live

---

51 Driver and Grey (172-174) are convinced that the text of verses 23 and 26 requires that Job will have some conscious sense of God’s vindication after his death, although the fullness of bodily resurrection is not directly expressed, it is certainly implied. Charles Bruston (“Pour l’exegese de Job,” Zeitschrift fuer die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 26 (1906): 143-146) takes the opposite position based on the same evidence, so not all will be convinced that Job 19 is a clear statement of bodily resurrection. Renan (119) takes a middle position: Job normally holds the standard Old Testament view of death, but in Job 19 catches a flash or intuition of something more beyond. Rowley seems to take a similar position. See H. H. Rowley, “The Intellectual versus the Spiritual Solution,” in Nahum Glatzer, The Dimensions of Job: A Study and Selected Readings (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 126-127.

52 See the strong confirmation of this viewpoint in Anderson, Job, 194. But see also the extensive rejection of such a viewpoint in John M’Clintock and James Strong, Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, volume eight (n. p.: Harper and Brothers, 1879), 1053.

53 Wright, Resurrection, 85-128 offers a thorough summary of most of these.

54 Brunt, 358. Wright (Resurrection, 119) considers Ezekiel 37 the most famous of all Old Testament resurrection passages and also the most obviously metaphorical. See also Lucas, 302.

55 Corpses and bones are highly unclean objects to the observant Jew. This is the state to which Israel has been reduced in the eyes of God. See Wright, Resurrection, 119.
again (Eze 37:1-10). In verse 11 the vision is interpreted as a metaphor of Israel’s restoration after the Exile. But the repeated use of the word “grave” (בֹּקֶשׁ) in verses 12 and 13 suggests to some that the text goes beyond return from Exile to the resurrection of individuals within the nation who have died. At least, this text shows that the idea of resurrection was not unfamiliar to Israel, even if it was rarely expressed in explicit terms.

Isaiah 53 is one of several “Servant Songs” in the latter part of Isaiah. It is not always clear whether these songs are a metaphor of the suffering of Israel as a community in the future or a reference to one who suffers in their behalf. As we have seen with Ezekiel 37, the language of death and bodily resurrection can be used as a metaphor for the exile and return of the

---


58 Brunt, 358; Leclerc, 100; Lucas, 304; Ollenburger, 37. This passage clearly asserts that Yahweh has sufficient power to accomplish anything that He promises to His people. See Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, 2:116.


whole nation. While there is no explicit mention of resurrection itself, verses 7-9 indicate that the servant dies and is buried and verses 10-12 indicate that he afterward emerges in triumph. So the early Christian application of Isaiah 53 to the death and resurrection of Jesus was exegetically defensible. But more than this, numerous allusions to Isaiah 53 in Daniel 12:2-3 provide evidence that long before the time of Jesus, some Jews at least saw in Isaiah 53 a forecast of resurrection. In Isaiah 53 belief that Israel’s God will restore the nation after the exile becomes belief that He will restore the nation’s representative after death. So Isaiah 53 seems to provide a transition between national and bodily restoration.  

61 Delitzsch, Isaiah, 2:303-304.  
62 Ibid., 2: 322-342; Lucas, 303 SDABC, 4 291-292.  
63 Wright, Resurrection, 116. Verses 7-12 contain numerous words that refer to death. Verse 7 speaks of “slaughter” (חֶלֶל), a word used for the death of people in Isa 34:2. In verse 8 the servant is “cut off (כִּיסְרוּ) from the land of the living.” Then in verse 9 the text contains the language of “grave” (ךְָב) and “death” (תֶּהָ). Even in verse 10 it refers to the life of the servant as a “guilt offering” (כַּעַר), and verse 12 repeats the reference to death (כַּעַר). So if the servant of Isaiah 53 is an individual, there is no question that he dies, is buried and is then exalted in triumph. See also Martin Luther, “Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66,” in Luther’s Works, edited by Hilton C. Oswald, volume 17 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 227-232; McKenzie, Second Isaiah, 135-136.  
64 Wright, Resurrection, 115-116. The “wise” of Daniel 12:3 seem to be a plural version of the servant who “deals wisely” in Isaiah 52:13. They “turn many to righteousness,” the servant of Isaiah 53:11 “will justify many.” The shining of the wise in Daniel 12:3 may also reflect the light featured in Isaiah 53:11 in the Hebrew manuscripts at Qumran and also the LXX (קְצֶר). Wright also notes a strong thematic parallel between the suffering and redemption of the wise in Daniel (Dan 12:2-3, cf. 11:33-35; 12:1) and that of the servant in Isaiah 53.  
65 Ibid., 123. See also 128: “The national element in this hope is never abandoned. The promise remains. But out of that promise there has grown something new.”  
66 Delitzsch (Isaiah, 2: 302), however, does suggest that the individual reading of Isaiah 53 is grounded in multiple earlier references in Isaiah.
Hosea, one of the two earliest writing prophets, has a couple of intriguing hints of resurrection. Hosea 13:14 (ESV), speaking of Ephraim (northern Israel) asks, “Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?” The thrust of the Hebrew is actually a denial that God will raise the northern kingdom of Israel from death, but the LXX and the New Testament (1 Cor 15:54-55) take the passage in a positive sense. John Day has persuasively demonstrated that Isaiah 26:19, a fairly plain resurrection text, clearly alludes to Hosea 13:14.

The second hint is in Hosea 6:1-3. The idea of bringing to life (יִזָּקַר) on the third day is echoed in later passages, such as 1 Corinthians 15:4. It may also have been in the mind of Daniel when he wrote his resurrection passage in Daniel 12. That the bringing to life is preceded by a “striking down” (וּבָצַא) is resurrection language. While in its original context Hosea 6:1-3 is probably mocking an inadequate prayer based on Canaanite

---


68 Harper, 404; SDABC, 4:931; Wright, Resurrection, 118.


70 “Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured (וָצַא) us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.” (NIV)

71 “He rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

72 Wright, Resurrection, 119.

73 Clearly affirmed by Anderson and Freedman, 419-422; Wright, Resurrection, 118. This is also supported by the connection between the language of this passage and Deut 32:39. See Anderson and Freedman, 419; Keil, Minor Prophets, 94.
PAULIEN: RESURRECTION AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

religious expectations, both Hosea 6 and 13 demonstrate that the idea of resurrection was clearly present in Israel as early as the eighth century.

There are other intimations of resurrection in the Old Testament. There are several accounts of bodily resurrection in the stories related to Elijah and Elisha. Perhaps these incidents inspired the language found in Hosea, written to the same area less than a hundred years later. There are also the unusual stories of Enoch and Elijah, who took a different route to immortality than by death. There are frequent expressions of hope that

74 The prayer of 6:1-3 is from the people of Ephraim to God and sounds impressive when read in isolation. But note the harsh condemnations directed by God to “Ephraim” immediately before and after the prayer in Hosea 5:14-15 and 6:4-11. Whatever its source, the prayer is clearly an inadequate response to the prophet’s message and is probably more metaphorical in intent than physical. See Harper, 281-284; Lucas, 302. But see also Keil (Minor Prophets, 94) who argues that these words are a call addressed by the prophet to the people in the name of the Lord. But while Keil takes the passage in a positive way, he does not see it in terms of bodily resurrection but rather in terms of the spiritual and moral restoration of Israel as a people (96).

75 Martin-Achard, ABD, 5:681.

76 While generally skeptical about the clarity of resurrection in the Old Testament, Lucas (302) does suggest that in several texts the Psalmists’ relationship with God is so deep that it will somehow not be ended by death (Psalm 16:9-11; 73:23-26; 49:15). These texts seem worthy of further exploration even though most OT scholars do not mention them in this context.


there might be a deliverance from Sheol.\textsuperscript{79} And the Torah itself was later understood to offer a number of harbingers of the resurrection.\textsuperscript{80} So from our perspective, at least, the Old Testament picture was not as bleak as it may seem at first glance.

and Elijah texts as expressing translation into Yahweh’s other realms beyond this life. While Cogan and Tadmore do not consider the story historical, they do concede that the intention is to describe an ascension into heaven. See Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, \textit{II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary}, The Anchor Bible, edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, volume 11 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 32-33. Skinner notes that while the Enoch narrative clearly expresses a bypassing of the normal process of death, it was not presumed to relate to the destiny of ordinary mortals, it was an extraordinary circumstance. See John Skinner, “A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis,” \textit{The International Critical Commentary}, edited by S. R. Driver, A. Plummer and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1910), 131-132.

There is less clarity within the Old Testament regarding the fate of Moses (Deut 34:5-6), who is later thought to have been translated after death (Jude 7) and also appeared with Elijah and Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13; Mark 9:1-13; Luke 9:27-36).

There is less clarity within the Old Testament regarding the fate of Moses (Deut 34:5-6), who is later thought to have been translated after death (Jude 7) and also appeared with Elijah and Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13; Mark 9:1-13; Luke 9:27-36).

The best known of these, of course, is the statement of Jesus that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the God of the living, not the dead (Matt 22:31-32). But there are many other texts in the Pentateuch that were seen as intimating resurrection in the \textit{Mishnah} and the \textit{Talmud} (Num 15:31; 18:28; Deut 11:9; 31:16; 32:39; 33:6). Most of these references are found in \textit{Sanhedrin}, 90-92 and are exegeted briefly in Wright, \textit{Resurrection}, 197-198.


\textsuperscript{80} The best known of these, of course, is the statement of Jesus that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the God of the living, not the dead (Matt 22:31-32). But there are many other texts in the Pentateuch that were seen as intimating resurrection in the \textit{Mishnah} and the \textit{Talmud} (Num 15:31; 18:28; Deut 11:9; 31:16; 32:39; 33:6). Most of these references are found in \textit{Sanhedrin}, 90-92 and are exegeted briefly in Wright, \textit{Resurrection}, 197-198.
The Path to Resurrection

This survey of the Old Testament data raises the historical question of where resurrection came from within Israel. We have seen that explicit references to resurrection are rare and most of the implicit ones can be understood as metaphors of the community’s return from exile and disgrace. When and why did God begin to turn Israel’s eyes from the hope of national resurrection to an individual hope in the resurrection of the body?

The consensus among scholars who take a naturalistic, development approach to the Old Testament is to see this shift as fairly late. They understand Job 19 to be written not by Moses, but during or after the Exile. They consider Job, in any case, to be ambiguous at best regarding bodily resurrection. They also date Daniel and the Isaiah Apocalypse (Isaiah 24-27) as second and third century BC insertions into the canon of the Old Testament. So in the critical consensus, belief in bodily resurrection was a late development in Israel, clearly witnessed only centuries after the Exile.

Given these critical assumptions, it is often assumed that the belief in bodily resurrection arose among Israelites around or after their exposure to Zoroastrianism in the Persian court. But the popularity of this view has

---

81 By naturalistic I mean an approach to Scripture which ignores or denies supernatural intervention in history or in the development of the biblical canon. In such an approach, shifts in biblical thinking over time are not due to divine revelation, but to natural cause and effect triggered by cultural and philosophical developments in the Israelite environment.


84 Oepke, TDNT, 1: 369. While Zoroaster himself may have lived much earlier, Zoroastrianism was introduced to general consciousness during the Persian period when it became the official religion of the Persian Empire. From there it is assumed that it crept into the relatively late Jewish documents such as Daniel and Isaiah. See Mary Boyce, “Zoroaster, Zoroastrianism,” in The Anchor Bible Dictionary, six volumes, edited by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:1168-1174.
waned considerably among scholars. First of all, as we have seen, the language of resurrection is echoed not only in Ezekiel 37, but all the way back to Hosea, in the eighth century BC. And Ezekiel’s story of the dead rising from their graves cannot be related to Zoroastrianism, since the Persians exposed their dead rather than burying them. And the emerging Israelite belief in resurrection is anything but dualistic, a core characteristic of Zoroastrianism.

More recently it has become fashionable to see the emerging Israelite belief in resurrection as grounded in the dying and rising Baal of Canaanite mythology. While this approach is more plausible in terms of its historical progression, it is also unlikely to be the primary explanation of Israel’s emerging belief in the resurrection. For one thing, there is no reason to believe the Canaanites ever applied the resurrection of their god to themselves. And it is also questionable in light of the larger picture of the Exile. If Israel’s exile was a consequence of its compromise with pagan gods and their nature religions, why would the prophets who promised a return borrow their central imagery from those same religions?

If one accepts the biblical chronology of Daniel and Isaiah at face value, a different trajectory begins to emerge. With Hosea the seeds of resurrection, buried long before in the Pentateuch, begin to emerge as metaphors of Israel’s rebirth as a people. With the Isaiah Apocalypse

---

86 Collins (*Hermeneia*, 396) sees no Persian motifs in Daniel 12 either.
89 Note the remarkable statement by Anderson and Freedman (420): “Hosea reflects the adaptation of individual physical death and resurrection to the experience of the nation, and thus is figurative. The underlying picture, while deriving from the realm of sickness and severe injury, and associated with it, must also embrace the notion of real death and real revivification. Most scholars find a doctrine of death and resurrection of people at this stage in Israel’s thought too advanced. Recent research on the belief of early Israelites in personal survival after physical death has weakened this approach.”

As mentioned earlier, these texts may have taken their cue from the three resuscitations recorded in the Elijah and Elisha stories of the historical books. 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:31-37 and 13:20-21. See Martin-Achard, 5:681; Oepke, *TDNT*, 1:369; Wright,
PAULIEN: RESURRECTION AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

(Isaiah 24-27), bodily resurrection, hinted at also in Isaiah 53, takes explicit form. During the Exile itself, Daniel and Ezekiel apply resurrection language not only the return of the nation but also to the return from the grave of at least some of those who have died in the past. In such a trajectory, it is more likely that Zoroaster picked up the idea of resurrection from Daniel than the other way around.

If bodily resurrection is a plausible development within the evidence of the Old Testament itself, what were the factors that led to that development? I believe there are several, which I will summarize here. First, is the belief in creation. If God is the ultimate source of physical life, it is perhaps inevitable that people would come to believe that the same God is powerful enough to both end life and restore it (Deut 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6). He created and thus He can re-create. And indeed, some of the resurrection texts we have explored contain strong echoes of the Genesis creation narratives. In those narratives, Yahweh created the first human from the dust, breathing into Adam His own breath (Gen 2:7). This language is then echoed in relation to death in Genesis 3:19; when God takes His breath away, humanity returns to the dust once more. Furthermore, in Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden, we see a first intimation of Israel’s future exile. So the fate of the nation and the body are linked together in the original narrative of creation.

A second root of resurrection belief lay in the promises of God’s love (בְּרוּם) and faithfulness (דָּוִד) to Israel. If God’s love and faithfulness are only for this life, they are truly steadfast in only a limited sense. Victory

Resurrection, 74, note 234.
90 Martin-Achard, ABD, 5:684.
91 Wright, Resurrection, 127.
92 Brunt, 358; Martin-Achard, ABD, 5:684; Nickelsburg, ABD, 5:685; Wright, Resurrection, 139.
93 “Believe in the resurrection concerns the capacity of God. Immortality, on the other hand, is our weak claim to autonomous significance.” Walter Brueggemann, “Ultimate Victory: Jesus and Resurrection,” Christian Century 124, no. 3 (February 6, 2007), 33. In other words, resurrection puts the focus on God while immortality puts the focus on us. See also Martin-Achard, ABD, 5:684 and 2 Macc 7:22-23, 28-29.
94 Wright, Resurrection, 122-123.
95 See also Ps 7:5; 22:15, 29; 30:9; 104:29; 119:25; 146:4; Eccl 12:7.
96 Ibid., 123.
97 Ibid., 127.
over death provided Israel’s God the ultimate way to demonstrate hisfulness and love toward His own people.\textsuperscript{98} A personal experience with the steadfast love of Israel’s God led to the conviction that His faithfulness would be known, not only in the present, but also beyond the grave.\textsuperscript{99} There Israel’s relationship with God would continue.\textsuperscript{100}

Resurrection belief within Israel is also rooted in the justice of God combined with His sovereign power.\textsuperscript{101} As the almighty Judge, God rewards the faithful and punishes those who rebel against His covenant commandments.\textsuperscript{102} A God of justice would not forever leave Israel to suffer oppression from the pagans.\textsuperscript{103} But that kind of justice was less and less seen as Israel’s history went on. It became clear that if there is no resurrection and no judgment, there is no justice in this world, therefore, a future bodily resurrection is required for justice to occur. It is precisely the resurrection that allows God to fully demonstrate his faithfulness toward His people.\textsuperscript{104} God’s justice is seen first in the national resurrection of the people, and ultimately in the bodily resurrection of the individuals that made up that people.\textsuperscript{105}

The fourth root of resurrection belief lay in Israel’s belief in the wholeness of human beings, the idea that body and soul are a single, indivisible unit.\textsuperscript{106} This wholistic perspective is revealed in Genesis 2:7, where the living soul represents the whole being, including the body. According to Brunt, the Old Testament view of death grows out of this

\textsuperscript{98} Martin-Achard, \textit{ABD}, 5: 684. It is in the resurrection that Israel received the ultimate answer to the questions of the Psalmists about the future quality of God’s love and faithfulness (Psalms 6, 16, 22, etc.).
\textsuperscript{99} Collins (Hermeneia, 394) particularly note Psa 73:23-26 and 16:9-10 in this regard.
\textsuperscript{100} Wright, \textit{Resurrection}, 103.
\textsuperscript{101} Martin-Achard, \textit{ABD}, 5:684; Wright, \textit{Resurrection}, 139. See 2 Macc 7:9.
\textsuperscript{102} Nickelsburg, \textit{ABD}, 5:685.
\textsuperscript{103} Wright, \textit{Resurrection}, 202.
\textsuperscript{104} Martin-Achard, \textit{ABD}, 5:684.
\textsuperscript{105} Brunt, 358.
PAULIEN: RESURRECTION AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

wholistic understanding. If it is the whole person that dies, then any hope for an afterlife must include a restoration of the physical body.

The final root of resurrection belief lay, of course, in the promise of national restoration at the other side of the exile. In passages such as Isaiah 53 and Ezekiel 37, as we have seen, the two restorations are so completely mingled that it is hard to tell them apart. As hope for Israel’s national restoration began to fade with the Persian and Greek occupations after the Exile, bodily resurrection became more and more the focus of the remnant of ancient Israel.

Given the theological perspective just outlined, why is the Old Testament so implicit about the resurrection? Brunt argues that the Old Testament writers could not point back to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the foundation of their hope for the future. Their thought world was oriented to the community rather than the individual. So it is to the social

107 Brunt, 358.
108 Recently Francois Bovon protested against the current tendency of biblical scholars toward what he called “inflation of the body” and a fixed commitment to the “unity of the human person as the core of biblical anthropology.” He feels that this doctrine of wholeness encourages the absence of the divine in an outrageously secular society. His protest, however, ignores the monumental work of N. T. Wright (The Resurrection of the Son of God) as well as the vast body of evidence from the Old Testament and the ancient Near East. See Francois Bovon, “The Soul’s Comeback: Immortality and Resurrection in Early Christianity,” Harvard Theological Review 103:4 (October 2010): 401. Collins, Hermeneia, 395; Wright, Resurrection, 93.
109 An interesting feature of this trajectory is that the more Greek the ancient Bible is, the more personal resurrection one finds in it. See Wright, Resurrection, 147-150. In the LXX the Old Testament passages that speak unambiguously of resurrection come through loud and clear, there is no attempt to soften them in any way. When it comes to Job 19, Hosea 6 and Hosea 13, the LXX translator had no doubt at all about bodily resurrection and made sure that the Greek translation of these texts affirmed it without question. For example, in Hosea 13:14, the translator takes the rhetorical question “shall I redeem them from death?” with the expected answer being “no,” and turns it into a straightforward statement, “I will redeem them from death.” In Job 14:14, the translator turns “if a man die shall he live again?” into “if a man dies, he shall live.” It is interesting that the LXX is a Greek translation of a Hebrew text in ancient Egypt, a philosophical home of bodiless afterlife. One might expect that every Old Testament reference to resurrection would be altered into something more Platonic and immaterial. But that is not what happened. Instead Hellenistic Jews saw bodily resurrection in places less than clear in the Hebrew Old Testament itself.
110 Brunt, 357. Brunt also makes the point (360) that while resurrection is less explicit in the Old Testament than in the New, it is theologically consistent with what the New Testament teaches.
unit and its survival that the emphasis of God’s revelation to them is placed.\textsuperscript{112} But individual and national restoration are not an either/or in the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{113} Many seeds of both the Messiah and the future understanding of resurrection are planted in the Old Testament, to bear fruit once the messianic promises of God were fulfilled.

\textbf{Jon Paulien} is Professor of Religion and Dean of the School of Religion at Loma Linda University. He is the author of more than twenty-five books and more than two hundred articles (\textit{Adventist Review, Ministry, Journal of Biblical Literature, Biblical Research, Andrews University Seminary Studies}, among others), scholarly papers (Society of Biblical Literature, Chicago Society for Biblical Research, and others), and other publications. He is a specialist in the study of the Johannine literature in the New Testament (Gospel of John and Book of Revelation) and the intersection of faith with contemporary culture. j.paulien@llu.edu

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Wright, \textit{Resurrection}, 99-103, 127. Wright notes that in Genesis 3 the future hope is couched in terms of child-bearing and that the future of the land is a central theme throughout the OT. This community focus is crucial also to the remnant theme in the Old Testament, which is grounded on the survival of the people in the face of destructive threats that could destroy the whole nation’s future. See Tarsee Li, “The Remnant in the Old Testament,” 23-25 and Angel Manuel Rodriguez, “Concluding Essay: God’s End-Time Remnant and the Christian Church,” 201-202, in \textit{Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective}, edited by Angel Manuel Rodriguez, Biblical Research Institute Studies in Adventist Ecclesiology, volume one (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009).
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Wright, \textit{Resurrection}, 116. Resurrection becomes a primary metaphor for the return in Psalm 16, 49, 73; Isaiah 24-27, 52-53, 66; and Ezekiel 37. See Nickelsburg, \textit{ABD}, 5:685.
\end{itemize}
Sanctuary: Cosmos, Covenant, and Creation

Elias Brasil de Souza
Biblical Research Institute
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Christians have traditionally understood the earthly sanctuary with its priests, sacrifices, and sacred times as a pictorial representation of the plan of salvation with its attending implications for the relationship between God and humans. Seventh-day Adventists have added to the soteriological understanding of the sanctuary and its services a specific and crucial theological contribution by setting the worship system of Israel within an eschatological framework with attention to a vertical typology. That is, the earthly tabernacle came to be seen as a type of the heavenly temple where Jesus Christ performs his heavenly ministry in order to bring the plan of salvation to its consummation. On the basis of a close examination of the Scriptures and rigorous exegetical and theological studies, it was found that the biblical way of perceiving the Israelite worship system was preordained by God to reveal in figurative ways the plan of salvation with a focus on the final resolution of the great controversy between good and evil.

In recent years a distinct way of perceiving the sanctuary has gained considerable ground among scholars as several studies have proposed what we may call a “cosmological framework” for understanding the

---

1 This article uses the term “sanctuary” in most cases in the sense of “sanctuary/tabernacle/temple” in order to express the main locus of the Israelite worship system. Where appropriate, tabernacle and temple are also used.

Israelite sanctuary. This implies that the earthly sanctuary is not primarily a type of a heavenly counterpart but a reflection of the cosmos or creation. When the heavenly sanctuary appears in the picture at all, it means the heavens, the cosmos or creation as a whole. Among critical scholars, Jon D. Levenson, drawing heavily on extra-biblical parallels, has related the sanctuary with cosmogonic myths of the Ancient Near East and asserted that the rituals “that took place there . . . were thought to allow human participation in the divine ordering of the world.”

Within the evangelical circle, a major proponent of a similar view is G. K. Beale, according to whom the temple is to be understood as a mirror of the cosmos. He argues that the Israelite “temple was composed of three main parts, each of which symbolized a major part of the cosmos: 1) The outer court represented the habitable world where humanity dwelt; 2) the holy place was emblematic of the visible heavens and its light source; 3) the holy of holies symbolized the invisible direction of the cosmos where God and his heavenly hosts dwelt.” In a recent work, John Walton has argued that the cosmic role of the temple as perceived in the ancient Near East also applies to the temple in Israel.

Given the current scholarly contention that the sanctuary mirrors the cosmos/creation and considering the impact that such a view might have upon the Adventist understanding of the sanctuary, this study will...
examine this topic and address some important issues. First, we have to ascertain whether the cosmological view of the sanctuary temple has exegetical support from the biblical text. Second, we need to investigate what framework, if any, the Bible provides for understanding the earthly sanctuary. Third, we shall consider the implications of creation language and imagery for the theology of the sanctuary. And finally, we shall conclude these considerations with a brief reflection on a vertical typology of the sanctuary.

Sanctuary and Cosmos

Although the biblical text reveals some links between creation/cosmos and the sanctuary, it needs to be pointed out that, as J. Palmer well observed, “this connection is very clearly seen in the literature of the Second Temple period.”

In the Old Testament itself this connection is admittedly “less explicit.”

He also observes that the connection of tabernacle with creation “is plausible on the grounds of ancient Near Eastern parallels and from the muted, though still present, witness of the Old Testament, especially when read in the light of early Jewish interpretation.” So as Palmer recognizes, although the tabernacle is portrayed in the Scriptures with creation language and cosmic overtones, the cosmological framework for understanding the sanctuary is at best secondary to the basic concerns and purposes of the biblical writers.

So, it seems clear that for such an approach to be construed one has to turn to “ancient Near Eastern parallels” and “early Jewish interpretation.” An examination of ancient Near Eastern texts and especially extra-biblical literature of the Second Temple period reveals the ample profusion of cosmological views connected with the sanctuary. Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, and Egyptian texts also seem to hold such a cosmic view of the temple concept. The temple building process of King Gudea of Lagash seems to evoke a cosmic perception of the temple.

---

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid, 15.
idea. Also the Baal cycle of Ugarit, portrays Baal’s involvement in the construction of a cosmic temple and refers to El’s cosmic abode at the source of two rivers. Such ideas were also very much at home in Egypt, where such cosmological ideas related to the temple appear to have developed more clearly. As William A. Ward aptly summarized: “The cult temple as a building symbolized the divine creation of the universe. It represented the eternal existence of an ordered universe as opposed to the chaotic forces which, according to myth, once attempted to destroy that order. This struggle between order and chaos—that is, good and evil—was part of all ancient thought, including that of Egypt.”

However, it is in the literature of Second Temple period that the cosmological interpretations of the temple become more explicit. In an instructive work, P. Hayward compiled a vast array of late Jewish texts dealing with the temple. A cursory examination of this literature suffices to reveal that the cosmic interpretation of the temple and its appurtenances became pervasive towards the end of the Second Temple period. In Ben Sira there appears the notion that the Temple Service “has a part to play in the stability of Creation, the priest himself representing the assurance that God will never again destroy the world by a flood.” Similar ideas are endorsed by Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum, Jubilees, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus. However, it is in Philo and Josephus that the different parts of the temple are depicted as representations of the world or universe.

The following excerpt from Philo portrays the universe as a temple, the material counterpart of which is the temple of Jerusalem:

---


15 Hayward, 52; see Ben Sirach 45.
We ought to look upon the universal world as the highest and truest temple of God, having for its most holy place that most sacred part of the essence of all existing things, namely, the heaven; and for ornaments, the stars; and for priests, the subordinate ministers of his power, namely, the angels, incorporeal souls, not beings compounded of irrational and rational natures, such as our bodies are, but such as have the irrational parts wholly cut out, being absolutely and wholly intellectual, pure reasonings, resembling the unit.

But the other temple is made with hands; for it was desirable not to cut short the impulses of men who were eager to bring in contributions for the objects of piety, and desirous either to show their gratitude by sacrifices for such good fortune as had befallen them, or else to implore pardon and forgiveness for whatever errors they might have committed. He moreover foresaw that there could not be any great number of temples built either in many different places, or in the same place, thinking it fitting that as God is one, his temple also should be one.16

Besides, for Philo the world and the soul also function as temples in mutual relationship:

For there are, as it seems, two temples belonging to God; one being this world, in which the high priest is the divine word, his own firstborn son. The other is the rational soul, the priest of which is the real true man, the copy of whom, perceptible to the senses, is he who performs his paternal vows and sacrifices, to whom it is enjoined to put on the aforesaid tunic, the representation of the universal heaven, in order that the world may join with the man in offering sacrifice, and that the man may likewise co-operate with the universe.17

Similar ideas are developed by Josephus for whom the temple is a counterpart of the world:

For if anyone do but consider the fabric of the tabernacle, and take a view of the garments of the high priest, and of those vessels which we make use of in our sacred ministration, he will find that our legislator was a divine man, and that we are unjustly reproached by others: for if

anyone do without prejudice, and with judgment, look upon these things, he will find they were every one made in way of imitation and representation of the universe. When Moses distinguished the tabernacle into three parts, and allowed two of them to the priests, as a place accessible and common, he denoted the land and the sea, these being of general access to all; but he set apart the third division for God, because heaven is inaccessible to men. And when he ordered twelve loaves to be set on the table, he denoted the year, as distinguished into so many months. By branching out the candlestick into seventy parts, he secretly intimated the Decani, or seventy divisions of the planets; and as to the seven lamps upon the candlesticks, they referred to the course of the planets, of which that is the number. 18

At this juncture one may inquire about the sources and/or motivations that prompted Philo, Josephus, and the other aforementioned Jewish writings to devise these cosmological interpretations of the temple. Although such a question lies beyond the scope of this study, it may be suggested—as Hayward explicitly noted in regard to Wisdom and Philo—that the “possibility that Greek thought may have influenced” these writers “can hardly be excluded.” 19 In addition, it may be hypothesized that temple ideas at home in Egypt might also have exerted influence upon extra-canonical Jewish writings, not to mention the influence of the larger ancient Near Eastern environment mediated by the growing hellenistic pressure. Thus, unsurprisingly, John Walton resorts to Josephus, Philo, and rabbinic literature to endorse the perception of the cosmos as temple. 20

So, from the above considerations it may be suggested that cosmological perceptions of the sanctuary or temple are not primarily based on the biblical text but, rather, are dependent on extra-canonical writers who most probably borrowed such ideas from their cultural and literary environment.

19 Hayward, 112.
20 Walton, Genesis I as Ancient Cosmology, 188.

30
Sanctuary and Covenant

In the biblical narrative, the tabernacle is clearly linked to covenant and its attending implications (Exod 29:44-46) since the sanctuary came to be constructed only after the people had been granted freedom from slavery and experienced God’s revelation at Sinai. Connections between covenant and the tabernacle appear at conceptual and literary levels of the tabernacle account. As A. Rodriguez noted “It is significant that only after the description of the Exodus from Egypt and the covenant at Sinai does the command come from Yahweh to ‘let them make me a sanctuary’ (Exod 25:8). God had manifested himself in the Exodus, he had appeared on Mt. Sinai (Exod 19), and now his instruction is that a sanctuary be built so that he might dwell among his people.”21 In addition, the covenantal experience of Sinai should become permanent in the tabernacle. So the glory of Yahweh that appears on Mount Sinai found its permanent dwelling in the tabernacle as described in Exodus 40:34. As noted by Brevard Childs, the “role of the tabernacle as portrayed in [Exodus] ch. 40 was to extend the Sinai experience by means of a permanent, cultic institution.”22 The structural parallels between Sinai and tabernacle with three concentric zones of increasing holiness also makes clear that the biblical text intends the sanctuary to be understood within a covenantal or redemptive framework.

In the literary block containing instructions for the construction of the tabernacle one finds a structural arrangement that provides additional indications of how the biblical author intended the sanctuary to be perceived. As Childs aptly demonstrates, Exodus 32-34—which functions as a literary hinge between the tabernacle building instructions (Exod 25-31) and its execution and inauguration (Exod 35-40)—is the theological framework for the interpretation of the tabernacle account:

The canonical function of Ex. 32-34 is to place the institutions of Israel’s worship within the theological framework of sin and forgiveness. Moses had not even descended from the mountain with the blueprint for worship (32.1ff.) before Israel turned to false worship. The covenant relationship stood under the shadow of human disobedience

22 Childs, 175.
from the outset. The golden calf incident in ch. 32 is portrayed, not as an accidental misdeed, but as a representative reaction, constitutive to human resistance to divine imperatives. The worship inaugurated at Sinai did not reflect an ideal period of obedience on Israel’s part, but the response of a people who were portrayed from the outset as the forgiven and the restored community. If ever there were a danger of misunderstanding Sinai as a pact between partners, the positioning of Ex. 32-34 made clear that the foundation of covenant was, above all, divine mercy and forgiveness.  

Such a covenantal framework is also reflected in the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8:14-61). Solomon petitions that forgiveness be granted to sinners as they pray towards the temple. So it becomes clear that the temple, like the tabernacle, functions within a covenantal framework of forgiveness, which would result in the restoration of the broken relationship between the Lord and his people. In other words, in the temple God works to forgive sins and restore relationships.

It should be noted that the correlation between sanctuary and redemption is reinforced by other strands of biblical literature. Psalm 51, for example, focuses on sin and forgiveness using language evocative of the sanctuary and its rituals. David’s contrition and repentance from his sin is framed by a cluster of terms at home in the sanctuary semantic field with its covenantal and redemption framework. After appealing to God’s lovingkindness and mercy (ḥesed and rāḥāmîm), the contrite king acknowledges his rebellion (peša’) and implores God to purify (tihar) him from his sin (ḥaṭṭāt). He acknowledges the limitation of sacrifices to deal with the horrendous consequences of sin:  

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise.” (v. 16). But in saying this, David, was not denying the important role of the sanctuary service, but simply warning against a mechanical or manipulatory use of the ritual system. As the last verse makes clear, God is “pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering” (v. 19). It becomes evident that

23 Childs, 175-176.
24 In connection with David’s sin (2 Sam 11), we should note that there were no provisions in the sacrificial system to deal with adultery and homicide. In these cases, the law demanded the execution of the offender (See, e.g., Lev 20:10; 24:21).
“sacrifices of righteousness” (zibhēy šeqeq) are acceptable to God, that is, sacrifices that are offered according to God’s instructions and accompanied with confession and contrition. So for the purpose of this study, it must be emphasized that this psalm conceives of the sanctuary service within the framework of redemption and forgiveness.

Another passage worth mentioning is Isaiah 56:1-7, where temple, covenant, and Sabbath are presented as interlocked concepts. Although the temple is portrayed from a universal perspective, its soteriological function is made evident: “Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa 56:7).

A similar perception obtains for the New Testament. In Hebrews, the earthly sanctuary is conceived in connection with the covenant (Heb 9:1) and as a place where, albeit in a limited and restricted way, redemption from sin was enacted and whose ultimate consummation lies in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8:1-2). In the same vein, the book of Revelation portrays the imagery of the sanctuary in close connection with the redemption of sin and restoration. So it seems that from a Biblical theology perspective a crucial function of the sanctuary is to serve as the place where God dwells among his people and establishes with them a relationship—a relationship that is preserved because of God’s disposition to forgive sins and restore his people to full communion with himself.

Sanctuary and Creation

The Biblical texts display indubitable allusions and imagery linking sanctuary with creation. Whether such details should be taken as an endorsement for a cosmological view or should be interpreted otherwise is discussed in this section. It seems clear that the construction of the tabernacle is narrated with language redolent of creation, as scholars

---

The instructions for building and selecting materials for the tabernacle as reported in Exodus 25-31 are divided into seven sections (25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12). Each of the first six sections begins with the expression “and the Lord spoke to Moses saying” and the seventh section concludes with a reference to the seventh-day Sabbath (31:12-17). Following the golden calf episode, the last major section of Exodus (35-40) begins with another reference to the Sabbath (35:1-7), which may be understood as an allusion to creation, and concludes with a sevenfold structure linking sanctuary with creation (40:17-34). Within this last pericope, six subsections end with the expression “as the Lord had commanded Moses” (40:21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32). And, interestingly enough, the seventh subsection (40:33) uses language reminiscent of the closing of the general creation account of Genesis on the seventh day. “So Moses finished (wayēḵal) the work (ḥammēlāḵāh),” which echoes Genesis 2:2: “And on the seventh day God finished (wayēḵal) His work (mēlāḵēto) which He had done (ʾāšāh)” (Gen 2:2). We should note, however, that an even stronger connection appears in 1 Kings 7:40 in the temple narrative: “So Huram finished (wayēḵal) doing (leʾāsōt) all the work (ḥammēlāḵāh) that he was to do (ʾāšāh) for King Solomon for the house of the Lord.”

In addition, a further link between sanctuary and creation may be inferred from sanctuary imagery reflected in the Garden of Eden narrative. According to Jubilees 8:19, Eden can be conceived in sanctuary terms: “And he [Noah] knew that the Garden of Eden is the holy of holies.” Modern scholars have come to a similar opinion by identifying conceptual and verbal correlations between the sanctuary and the Garden of Eden. Attention has been given to the location of the


garden (facing East), the precious stones (bdellium and onyx) and gold, the presence of God in the garden, the cherubim guarding its entrance, the inference that sacrifices were offered at its door, etc., as support for the perception of Eden as a sanctuary.28

At this juncture one has to draw the implications of these literary and verbal connections between sanctuary and creation. Are such intertextual relationships an indication that the sanctuary should be interpreted as a type of the cosmos/world/creation? Or is there another explanation capable of doing justice to the biblical data? As noted above, since the Bible portrays the sanctuary and its services as the means by which the Lord would deal with the sins of his people and restore the covenantal relationship, the answer to the first question is a negative one. However, the clear links between sanctuary and creation must be accounted for. So in the rest of this section I will suggest an alternative explanation which appears consistent with the biblical data.

We should note at first that some of the links between the Creation account and the construction of the Tabernacle might be explained on the basis that both works share some obvious commonalities. Both are material constructions, both are based on the authority of God, and both are artistic works in their own right. So it should not be surprising that words and expressions used to narrate the creation of the world are also employed to describe the construction of the tabernacle. By way of illustration, a narrative about the construction of a house and the construction of a boat may share some similarities, without necessarily implying that the house is a type of the boat or vice versa. Similarities in this case could be easily explained on the basis of shared elements

---

required for both constructions. So some similarities between sanctuary and creation accounts do not necessarily require a cosmological view of the sanctuary in the sense of the latter being a microcosm or type of the universe/world.  

Second, some intertextual links, as those mentioned above, may have been intentionally used by the biblical writer to connect the sanctuary with creation on a theological basis. It will be argued below that creation is the theological foundation for the entire tabernacle system. The God who dwells inside the sanctuary is the creator God. This seems to be the main connection and all other assumed links should be interpreted in light of this major concept. Furthermore, the earthly sanctuary came to be established as an expression of God’s covenant with his people. In the covenant God starts to reverse the evil effects of sin and align creation with his loving purposes.

That creation is the underlying principle and motivation behind the sanctuary and its attending rituals and laws seems to be borne out by the following considerations. A major principle operating in the sanctuary system is the principle of life. The God who dwells in the sanctuary is the God of life and has noting to do with death. Contrary to the Canaanites and Egyptians who worshiped ancestors and deified dead kings, the religion revealed in the tabernacle, as a matter of principle, excluded death from the realm of true worship. This may explain the prohibition of certain pagan mourning customs (Deut 14:1-2) and the laws regarding corpse contamination (Num 5:1-4), which included specific instructions for priests (Lev 21:1, 11) and Nazirites (Num 6:6). Neglect to comply with the ritual prescribed to eliminate such impurity would exclude the willful offender from the congregation (Num 19:13).  


30 A person who wantonly neglected the application of the ashes of the red cow to eliminate corpse contamination (Num 19) would be “cut off” (karet) from the congregation. According to Donald Wold such punishment meant exclusion from the afterlife (“The Karet Penalty in P: Rationality and Cases,” The Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 1 (1979): 1-25). For a detailed explanation of the ritual involving the ashes of the red cow, see Roy Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 658-662.
It seems that Hyan Maccoby is on the right track in observing that “everything that is a feature of the cycle of birth and death must be banished from the Temple of the God who does not die and was not born. Not that there is anything sinful about birth and death,” but as Maccoby further asserts, “the one place in the world which has been allotted for the resting of the Divine Presence must be protected from mortality.” This is an insightful perception that may help in our understanding of Creation imagery in the sanctuary. As the place where forgiveness from sin was granted, the sanctuary functioned as the dwelling of the God who hates death, which is the ultimate consequence of sin. In the sanctuary God undertakes a work of restoring Creation by dealing with sin. Therefore, Creation and cosmic motifs related to sanctuary may not intend to represent the earth as an antitypical sanctuary, but to express the fact that creation stands as the foundation upon which the entire service of the sanctuary is based.

In the New Testament both Paul and John develop their portrayal of salvation in connection with Creation. Paul’s development of Adam-typology clearly demonstrates that the work of redemption is somehow consistent with God’s work of creation, as Christ the second Adam came to revert the failure of the first Adam (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21-22). For Paul, the logic of salvation seems to operate on the presupposition of Creation. In Revelation, interconnections between salvation and creation occur within the framework of sanctuary imagery. As the concluding chapters of Revelation clearly show, the ultimate outcome of salvation is the full restoration of creation when “the tabernacle of God is with men” (Rev 21:3).

Again, the occurrence of verbal, conceptual, and iconic connections between the earthly sanctuary and creation does not appear to portray the latter as the antitype of the former. Rather on the basis of the broad context of the Scriptures, creation as it appears in relation with the sanctuary functions as the operational system according to which the entire ritual system and the theology derived from it can make sense. And this happens when creation is integrated with salvation/redemption.

---

Sanctuary and Vertical Typology

In the instructions given to Moses on how to build the sanctuary, God made clear that everything should be made according to the “model” (tabnît). The meaning and implications of the term “model” (tabnît) have received detailed treatment in other studies. For the purpose of this article, it shall suffice to note that among the various connotations of the Hebrew term tabnît, that of pointing to the original temple in heaven seems to carry considerable weight for several reasons. First, it is used with this connotation in the crucial texts of Exodus 25:40: “And see to it that you make them according to the pattern (tabnît) which was shown you on the mountain” (cf. vs. 9). Second, the Bible clearly attests the existence of a heavenly sanctuary working in dynamic interaction with the earthly counterpart (e.g., 1 Kgs 8:30-35, 41-50; 2 Chr 30:27; Isa 6:1-7). Third, such a vertical correspondence between earthly tabernacle and heavenly sanctuary is attested in the epistle to the Hebrews (8:1-5; 9:23-26). Lastly, one should keep in mind that the ancient Near Eastern mind would naturally associate the earthly tabernacle with its heavenly archetype, as several scholars have noted.

---

32 Davidson, Typology in Scripture, 367-388.
33 Ibid.
35 The nature of the heavenly sanctuary in the Epistle to the Hebrews is a debated issue among scholars. For the purpose of this study, we should note that even some non-Adventist scholars concede that Hebrews may conceive of a typological correspondence between the earthly sanctuary and its heavenly counterpart. The following excerpt from the commentary on Hebrews 9:23 by William Lane is instructive: “The additional statement that the heavenly prototypes of the earthly tabernacle and its cultus required cleansing ‘by better sacrifices than these’ clearly implies that the heavenly sanctuary had also become defiled by the sin of the people. Although this implication has been dismissed as ‘nonsense’ . . . , it is consistent with the conceptual framework presupposed by the writer in 9:1-28. His thinking has been informed by the Levitical conception of the necessity for expiatory purification” (Hebrews 9-13, Word Biblical Commentary 47B [Dallas: Word, 1998], 247).
For this reason one should not overlook the correspondence between the earthly sanctuary and its heavenly counterpart. Correlations and analogies between the sanctuary with the world, creation, cosmos, etc. should not obliterate Scripture’s foundational perception that the heavenly sanctuary is the ultimate locus of God’s activity in favor of the human race and the place where Christ performs his priestly ministry. From a prophetic/eschatological perspective, the antitypical/archetypical temple to which the earthly tabernacle pointed is not the earth/world nor the cosmos as a whole—or heavens, for that matter—but the heavenly sanctuary of God located in heaven.

As the parallelism between Daniel 7 and 8 makes clear, the purification of the Sanctuary announced in Dan 8:14 corresponds to the heavenly Judgment portrayed in Dan 7:9-14. So the sanctuary to be purified in Daniel 8:14 must be located in heaven. Again, according to this parallelism, it should be noted that since it has been recognized that Daniel 7:9-14 portrays day of atonement imagery, most certainly the event described as the purification of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14 must indicate that Day of Atonement activities are performed in the heavenly temple. Studies of the cultic terminology of Daniel 8:9-14 have revealed that the language of this chapter not only refer to general sanctuary concepts but conjures up day-of-atonement imagery.

A few examples should suffice to make this point. In an interesting study Fletcher-Louis has suggested that the scene of the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days with the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13) evokes the day of atonement when the High Priest entered the most holy place surrounded by a cloud of incense (Lev 16). In Daniel 8:14 the term employed in reference to the sanctuary is qodeš, the exact word used to designate the most holy place in the rituals of the Day of Atonement.

---


Atonement (Lev 16:2, 3, 16, 17, 20, 23, 27, 33).\(^{40}\) Thus as the canonical placement of Daniel 7 and 8 are taken as mutually illuminating texts, a broad picture of the heavenly realities emerges. In this case, it seems clear that the sanctuary in these chapters is not an amorphous or ethereal cosmic temple—or world temple for that matter—but a sanctuary in heaven with structural and functional links with the sanctuary/temple described elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

**Conclusions and Implications**

On the basis of the above considerations, the following conclusions and implications may be offered. It has been noted that a most important function of the sanctuary in the Bible is to serve as the locus of atonement whereby reconciliation between a holy God and a sinful people is achieved. And it has been argued that this important aspect of the Bible perception of the temple risks being obliterated by cosmological interpretations, which, as noted above, are more reflective of ideas imported from the other ancient Near Eastern cultures than the worldview of the Biblical writers themselves. Furthermore, it was noted that the sanctuary as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible exists in structural and functional relationship to its heavenly antitype, where God deals with the sin problem and implements the plan of salvation. This is a crucial and singular aspect of the Biblical perception of the sanctuary and should not be reduced to the common denominator of the ancient Near Eastern religions.

In the narrative of the tabernacle—and the temple—construction echoes of and verbal parallels to creation motifs are evident. Similar perceptions seem to obtain for the Garden of Eden and its connection with the Sanctuary. However, such links do not necessarily require the world or the garden to be the antitypical sanctuary. Rather, as suggested above, the pervasive occurrences of creation concepts and terminology associated to sanctuary function to stress the idea that creation operates as the foundational and overarching concept from which the theology of redemption articulated in the sanctuary finds its ultimate justification. In redeeming his people from the pernicious effects and consequences of sin, God intends to put creation back on its course. And besides, the God

\(^{40}\) Rodriguez, “Significance of the Cultic Language in Daniel 8:9-14,” 531.
who forgives and restores through the sanctuary ministry is the God who created the heavens and the earth.

In summary, certainly the sanctuary as portrayed in the Scriptures has cosmic implications and the work performed therein affects the entire cosmos in the context of the controversy between good and evil. However, it should be stressed once more, such cosmic overtones should not be allowed to obliterate the redemptive framework of the sanctuary/temple and the typological relationship that obtains between the earthly sanctuary/temple and its heavenly counterpart.

Elias Brasil de Souza, an Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute, is a native of Brazil and holds a Ph.D. in Old Testament from Andrews University. He has worked as a church pastor in Brazil (1990-1994), Professor of Biblical Studies and Dean of the Theological Seminary at Northeast Brazil College (1995-1999, 2005-2011) in Cachoeira (Bahia), Brazil.

SouzaE@gc.adventist.org
There are a number of ways that the subject of justification in the Gospels could be approached. On the one hand, the discussion could be very brief since the word justification (δικαίωσις) never occurs in the Gospels and only twice in the rest of the New Testament (Rom 4:25; 5:18), a fact belying its great importance to Christian theology. On the other hand, the concept of justification, based not only on the verb δικαιόω and other cognates but also on similar terms, is found comparatively frequently in the Gospels and is no less important. Another approach would be to look at various stories of people illustrative of the concept in some way, such as the paralytic (“Your sins are forgiven,” Mark 2:5), Zacchaeus (“Today salvation has come to this house,” Luke 19:9), and the woman caught in adultery (“Neither do I condemn you. . . ,” John 8:11). Parables illustrative


2 The classic New Testament treatment by Leon Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956) exploring important interrelated terms (redemption, covenant, the blood, propitiation, reconciliation, and justification) could serve as a useful starting point.

3 Unless specified otherwise, all translations of the Bible are from the NRSV.
of the concept could also be examined. The inherent danger in a study of this kind is to read the Gospels through the eyes of Paul or, conversely, to find no commonality whatsoever between them. Despite the obvious attraction of a more wide-ranging study of the concept of justification, the approach taken here will be more limited, concentrating on the use in each Gospel of δικαιόω and related terms.

Justification in Matthew

Matthew focuses not on the process of justification but on the result. Jesus is the righteous king and those who belong to his kingdom should have kingdom righteousness, which is most fully described in the Sermon on the Mount. It is a righteousness not like that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). This is interesting because later Jesus describes the Pharisees as being righteous (9:13). However, as Matthew makes clear, this is a righteousness that can even co-exist with lawlessness (ἀνομία) because it is only external (23:25-28; cf. 6:1). Kingdom righteousness, by contrast, internalizes the law, as the antitheses describe, by banishing anger, lust, virtually all divorce, and oaths, and by insisting on giving more than is required and loving one’s enemies—in short exemplifying the ethical perfection of heaven (5:21-48).

Thus reference is made in 6:33 to seeking God’s righteousness, which is also described as doing the will of the Father.

---

4 E.g., the triad of parables in Luke 15 of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.
6 I am grateful for the helpful suggestions made following the presentation of this paper at the Adventist Theological Society/Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting in Atlanta, GA, November 18, 2010.
8 Gerhard Maier, Matthaus-Evangelium (2 vols.; Bibel-Kommentar; Stuttgart: Hänsler, 1979-1980), 1:189, locates this righteousness in the OT standard of righteousness that is based on God himself, not on human performance (Lev 19:2; Deut 18:13).
Kingdom righteousness impacts religious devotion because outward piety is meaningless. Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting should be done secretly because one’s real reward is not on earth but in heaven and based on trust in the heavenly Father (6:1-32).

No human standard of righteousness can ever be the basis for entering the kingdom. Matthew’s Jesus “points to a requirement that is impossible for us to achieve. Impossible though it may be for us to achieve it, it is nevertheless demanded.” Within Matthew’s Gospel, it becomes clear that this kingdom righteousness cannot be achieved; it can only be received. The work of Jesus, like that of John the Baptist, results in a division within Israel into believers and unbelievers, with believers largely coming from the disenfranchised, including the proverbial “sinners” (tax collectors and prostitutes) who are successfully entering the kingdom of God ahead of the chief priests and elders who did not believe Jesus or John (21:31-32). This believing is connected with repentance in the immediate context and demonstrated by godly living, i.e., “the way of righteousness.”

On the other hand, references in Matthew to entering the kingdom are frequently to a future event (5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23-24). And several parables unique to Matthew place the separation between the believing and the unbelieving, the righteous and the unrighteous, at the final judgment.

---

9 Yri, 99.
10 On righteousness in Matthew described as a gift, see, e.g., Gottlob Schrenk, “δίκη, δίκαιος, κτλ,” TDNT, 2:178-225 here 198-99; Yri, 105.
12 So also Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew (trans. David E. Green; Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1975), 412. The present tense is used in v. 31b (προάγουσιν), unusual in Matthew for entry into the kingdom (cf. future and aorist tenses in). However, judging from use of the present tense here and in 23:13, as well as references to the kingdom being already present (e.g., 4:17; 12:28; 13:38), its force should not be weakened to mean “being well along the path that leads into the kingdom rather than of having already entered the kingdom” as urged by John Nolland, The Gospel of Matthew (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 863.
13 Although μεταμέλομαι is used rather than μετανοέω both in the parable and in its application (21:29, 32), it is this application that should dictate the meaning rather than the parable. Cf. France, 803 that it approximates the meaning “repent” here.
14 As Benno Przybylski, Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought (SNTSM 41; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 95-96, points out, John’s message and way of life cannot be separated.
JUSTIFICATION IN THE GOSPELS

(13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50; 25:1-13, 31-46). There is even reference to justification in connection with this judgment: “I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (12:36-37). While this fits the typical Jewish understanding of future justification, its connection in Matthew with a present justification corresponds more closely to Paul’s schema and to NT eschatology more generally.\(^\text{15}\) At the same time, it should not go unnoticed that the immediate context connects the acceptance of the kingdom proclamation of Jesus with repentance (12:41; cf. 11:20-21), paralleling the call to repentance given by John the Baptist.\(^\text{16}\) In other words, justification in Matthew closely parallels both the present and future aspects of entering the kingdom of God which comes through full acceptance of the proclamation of Jesus.

**Justification in Mark**

Besides the mention of Herod’s perception of John the Baptist as a righteous man (Mark 6:20), the only other occurrence of δίκαιος relevant for this study appears to be an ironic reference to the scribes and Pharisees as righteous.\(^\text{17}\) To the question of why he eats with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus replies, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (2:17). The passage is significant in characterizing Jesus’ ministry as one directed at bringing outcasts back into fellowship within Israel, illustrating the theme of newness announced in 1:15 and further described in 2:18-22.\(^\text{18}\)

In the structure of the chapter, forgiveness (2:1-12) precedes fellowship (2:13-17). The aphorism of Jesus reinforces this idea, drawing on a familiar proverb. Adopting the premise of his accusers for the sake of the rebuttal,

\(^{15}\) We enjoy the benefits of justification in the present (Rom 4:25; 5:1-5) while we await its consummation (5:18); cf. Schrenk, *TDNT* 2:208, 224.

\(^{16}\) See Clinton Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels* (WUNT 2/185; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 128-29.

\(^{17}\) Against the less likely possibility of granting to the critics a degree of righteousness that God could approve, see William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 105.

the “sinners,” those who are sick, are the ones who need the physician’s “healing,” that is, forgiveness. This call or invitation of Jesus for sinners to enter the kingdom “suggests that the basis of table-fellowship was messianic forgiveness, and the meal itself was an anticipation of the messianic banquet.” Therefore, the implicit link between forgiveness and healing in the first story is here made more explicit. The story of the paralytic interprets the call of sinners to fellowship and vice-versa. In other words, Jesus’ healings comprehended not just physical restoration but also “a return to wholeness within Israel and a sign of the redemption that his kingdom proclamation offered.”

As so often in Mark, irony is utilized to make an important point: those who are truly righteous respond to the call of Jesus and thereby receive forgiveness, fellowship, and full restoration within the community of faith.

Justification in Luke

In Luke, Jesus calls sinners “to repentance” (εἰς μετάνοιαν, 5:32), a seemingly innocuous clarification until it is noticed that, in the announcement of the “new wine” ministry of Jesus that follows, only Luke includes the protest of some traditionalists that “the old is better” (5:39, author’s translation). Of the Synoptics, Luke alone identifies the “leaven of the Pharisees” as hypocrisy (12:1). He also mentions that the lawyer was “wanting to justify himself” with the question “Who is my neighbor?” (10:29), and so follows the parable of the Good Samaritan in which the priest and Levite pass by the half-dead man to preserve their ceremonial purity.

---

19 Lane, 106 (italics his).
21 Cf. the use of intercalation to produce dramatized irony by which readers are confronted with issues arising from the stories in Tom Shepherd, Markan Sandwich Stories: Narration, Definition, Function (Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 18; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993).
Likewise, in the parable of the lost sheep, there is “more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (15:7) and the parable of the lost son is also about the self-righteous older brother whose response to his father’s love is left open (15:31-32).\(^\text{24}\)

Jewish piety appears prominently from the outset perhaps to appeal especially to other such “older brothers” in Israel that they might see in Jesus the fulfillment of their hopes. Zacharias prophesies that when finally delivered (ῥυσθέντας) from their enemies Israel would be able to serve God without fear ἐν ὀσιότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ (1:74-75).\(^\text{25}\) The angel Gabriel, announcing the fulfillment of Mal 4:5-6, indicates that part of John’s purpose in paving the way for Jesus would be to call “the disobedient to walk in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him” (1:17). “Righteous and devout” (δίκαιος καὶ εὐλαβής) Simeon utters a similar prophecy when taking baby Jesus in his arms to bless him (2:25), that the child would bring God’s salvation (2:30).\(^\text{26}\)

One of the most poignant appeals for pharisaical Jews to comprehend the reason for Jesus’ attitude toward those with a sinful reputation is Luke’s account of the anointing of Jesus at the home of Simon the Pharisee. Responding to Simon’s unspoken doubts, Jesus defends the woman’s actions (in contrast to the host’s lack of hospitality toward him) as arising from her gratitude at being forgiven. Her much love demonstrates that she

\(^{23}\) Further, see Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits*, 141-42 and the literature there cited.

\(^{24}\) On this aspect of the parable, see esp. Kenneth Ewing Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 190-206: “The listening Pharisee is pressed to see himself in the older son and to respond by accepting reconciliation” (206).

\(^{25}\) Such was the goal of the exodus from Egypt (Exod 7:16; Josh 24:14); cf. its single qualified use in the NT of Christians in Eph 4:24 (ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ὀσιότητι τῆς ἀληθείας).

\(^{26}\) Among the four Gospels, σωτηρία appears mostly in Luke (1:69, 71, 77; 19:9), but also in Mark 16:8 and John 4:22.
has been forgiven much. Significantly, Jesus’ assurance both to Simon and to the woman that her sins stand forgiven (ἀφέωνται) is in the perfect tense (vv. 47-48), indicating a “state of forgiveness, which Jesus recognizes and declares. . . . Jesus does not deny that her sins have been ‘many,’ but that she is no longer under the burden of them.” This is evident from his concluding words to her: “your faith has saved you; go in peace” (v. 50). It is fitting that this story in Luke is introduced by the description of Jesus as “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” and the affirmation that “wisdom is justified by all her children” (7:34-35), suggesting a group different from Simon and the complaining children of v. 32. The meaning of ἐδικαίωθη in v. 35, as with ἐδικαίωσαν of v. 29, is “Show or pronounce to be righteous, declare or admit to be just.”

Another passage, aimed even more directly at self-righteousness, is the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14). According to Luke, Jesus “told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised everyone else” (v. 9, author’s translation). The Pharisee in the parable distinguishes himself by his arrogant behavior: “he took up a prominent position” (σταθεὶς πρὸς ἑαυτόν) in order to pray; he thanks God that he is not like the rest of mankind; he then proceeds to spell out how bad everyone else is: “thieves, rogues, adulterers”; he is not “even like this tax collector”; next he enumerates his supererogation: fasting twice a week, tithing everything he gets (even the smallest herbs, 11:42). In dramatic contrast to this proud Pharisee is the self-abasing attitude of the tax collector: he stood at a distance; he did not venture even to lift his eyes to heaven but kept beating his breast (“or more

28 Fitzmyer, 1:692.
29 Together with the verb, use of πάς matches v. 29; cf. Matt 11:19 “by her works” (cf. v. 2).
32 Jeremias, 141.
accurately the heart, as the seat of sin”); his prayer is short, simple, and straightforward: “Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (like the Pharisee also in a class by himself and yet not like him!). The prayer is a plea for propitiation and forgiveness (ιλάσκομαι, again only in Heb 2:17).

The authoritative pronouncement by Jesus that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, left justified, “accounted as righteous, accepted,” is startling, because God has said “I will not justify the wicked” (Exod 23:7 NET; cf. 1QHa XXV.13). Yet such a surprise ending is typical of Jesus’ parables and there is no reason to doubt its authenticity. The combination of δικαιόω with ιλάσκομαι is so close to the use of the same verb with ιλαστήριον in Rom 3:24-25 as to make comparison of the two contexts irresistible. That the terminology of being justified may be explicable to some extent by Pauline influence might be a reasonable supposition except that similar language is found already quite often at Qumran, albeit with somewhat different nuances. To ask what sin the Pharisee had committed or what reparations the tax collector had made to prove his repentance misses the point as the focus here is on the inward attitude of the two worshipers which is evident from their words and even their body language (as well as the concluding proverb of v. 14b). The tax collector even quotes the opening words of Psalm 51, which repeatedly considers the inner condition of the penitent (vv. 6, 10, 17). Thus, the meaning of the perfect passive participle reflects a changed state inwardly as well as outwardly—a change attributable solely to God’s grace and which remains

33 Ibid.
34 Fitzmyer, 2:1188 notes the same meaning of ιλάσκομαι in 2 Kgs 5:18 LXX, translating πρός! “will pardon.” It means to turn away wrath and extend forgiveness (see Morris, 125-60), just as the cognate noun ιλαστήριον denotes “means of propitiation” (ibid., 167-74, cf. 140-41).
35 Jeremias, 141-42.
36 Plummer, 419 (itals his).
37 See, e.g., 1QS III.3; XI.2, 5, 10, 12, 14; 1QSa IV.22; 1QHa V.34; IX.8; XV.31; XVII.14; XXV.15; 1Q35 1 2; 4Q257 III.4; 4Q264 1 1; 4Q525 10 5; 11Q5 XXIV.7.
39 Jeremias, 144.
**His justifying righteousness.** Justification in this sense can never be meritorious but is always purely God’s gift.

**Justification in John**

Seldom does the Gospel of John mention righteousness or the like, but when it does it is almost always connected with judgment. The most important and yet obscure and controverted passage is John 16:8-11. The dominant interpretation of this passage is in an exclusively negative sense, as a forensic judicial prosecution of the world; but such an interpretation overlooks the larger concerns of the Fourth Gospel, most notably its purpose to bring people to faith in Jesus (20:31) through the work of his disciples, which is modeled after the work of Jesus (17:18, 20). This is also the work of the Paraclete since he is the continued presence of Jesus in the world (14:16-18; 16:12-15).

Jesus is the true Light that enlightens everyone who comes into the world (1:9). Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him (3:17). Light brings everyone to the point of decision, some loving darkness because their deeds are evil

---

40 Cf. the typically Catholic formulation of “interior justification” by Ceslas Spicq, “which,” he says, “is much more than a verdict of acquittal: God grants that this ‘sinner’ becomes just, he makes him just” (TLNT, 1:340).

41 This rare usage should not be considered an indication of the theme’s unimportance as suggested by Andrew H. Trotter, Jr., “Justification in the Gospel of John,” in *Right with God*, 126-45 here 127: “The very paucity of references to the dikaios- word-group makes it all the more important to examine them thoroughly, and the passages in which they occur, if we are to understand John’s view of justification.”

42 John 5:30; 7:24; 16:8; also 16:10; 17:25—dikaiosunē appears in 16:8, 10 and dikaios elsewhere.

43 E.g., D. A. Carson, “The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7-11,” *JBL* 98 (1979): 547-66, followed in the main by Trotter; John Aloisi, “The Paraclete’s Ministry of Conviction: Another Look at John 16:8-11,” *JETS* 47 (2004): 55-69. Underlying this interpretation is the tendency to read the Gospel on two levels: the experience of the so-called Johannine community is superimposed upon and read through the historical events represented at the narrative level (see J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1968). Numerous and serious objections to this mirror-reading approach have been raised, not least of which is its distortion of the obvious message of the book which places persecution of the disciples in the future (e.g. John 16:2-3).

44 The nearest antecedent, ἄνθρωποι, is also the most natural syntactically.
Wahlen: Justification in the Gospels

while others come to the light (3:19-21). The latter include Samaritans who recognize in Jesus “the Savior of the world” (4:42), Jews recognizing him as “the Prophet” (6:14), the man born blind (9:17, 33, 38), apparently some Greeks (12:20-21), and even “the world.” Accordingly, Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind” (9:39). Since the Paraclete is to do a work similar to what Jesus had done, we should expect that the description of 16:8-11 would have differing outcomes in accordance with differing responses. A closer look at the passage supports this supposition.

The dominant meaning of the verb ἐλέγχω is “convict, convince,” “to show someone his sin and to summon him to repentance.” This meaning has its Jewish antecedents in God’s disciplining and educating human beings through convicting, chastising, testing, and judgment. If this is the meaning here, then the Paraclete would convict the world: (1) of sin, because of their failure to believe (v. 9) and their need to believe in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29); (2) of righteousness, because, through the “Spirit of truth” (14:17; 15:26; 16:13), Jesus sets people free from sin (8:31-36) and has ascended to the Father victorious to be their Advocate (20:17; 1 John 2:1); (3) of judgment, because the ruler of this world is condemned and cast out through the

46 BDAG 315.
48 Ibid., 473-74. See LXX Gen 31:42; 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 12:18; Ps 6:2; 37:2; Prov 3:11 (quoted in Heb 12:5); Wis 12:2; Sir 18:3; Isa 2:4; 11:3-4, etc. Qumran usage of ḥeḇeḇ with God as subject often means “rebuke” not simply to prove the person wrong but to persuade him to change his mind. See A. R. C. Leaney, “The Johannine Paraclete and the Qumran Scrolls,” in John and Qumran (ed. James H. Charlesworth; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), 38-61.
49 Not exactly “in the forensic sense of justification or acquittal,” as urged by William H. P. Hatch, “The Meaning of John XVI, 8-11,” HTR 14 (1921): 103-5 here 104. The word δικαιοσύνη, used only here in John, always appears in the Johannine epistles with ποιέω in an ethical sense (1 John 2:29; 3:7, 10; cf. Rev 19:11; 22:11), an idea present also in John’s Gospel once its connection with light as the corresponding opposite of sin/darkness is recognized (3:19-21; cf. 5:14; 8:11).
judgment at the cross, by which Jesus will draw all people to himself (12:31-32).  

The foregoing interpretation makes more sense of the “high priestly prayer” of John 17, where Jesus intercedes for the “Holy Father” to “keep” and “sanctify” the disciples (vv. 11, 15, 17) as well as those who will believe in him through their word (v. 20). In this context, Jesus also speaks of the Father as “righteous” and that He has made His name known to them in order that (ἵνα) “the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (vv. 25-26). This echoes the work of Jesus in John 5:30, whose judgment is righteous because it is based not on his own will but that of the Father (cf. 7:24).

That the convicting work of the Spirit is not exclusively negative but can be positive, depending on people’s response, is seen also in connection with Jesus’ words to Nicodemus about being born of the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God (3:3, 5). From the subsequent narrative, it seems clear that Nicodemus ultimately accepted this teaching, believed in Jesus, and experienced this birth “from above” (ἄνωθεν; cf. 7:50-51; 19:39) while others of the Jewish rulers believed but hid the fact because they “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (12:43 RSV).

Conclusion

The concept of justification, broadly considered in connection with δικαιόω and its cognates, is present to a greater or lesser degree in all four canonical Gospels. In Matthew, justification is correlated with the righteousness of the kingdom which alone is sufficient to enter it. This righteousness proclaimed by Jesus involves an internalization of the law. Since it is God’s righteousness it can never be achieved by human attempts at scrupulosity. It can only be received through an intimate acquaintance with the Father—in advance of and as an assurance of vindication in the final judgment. Justification in Mark includes the forgiveness available to sinners as they respond to the messianic invitation to kingdom fellowship and full restoration within Israel. Luke comes the closest to Paul’s concept of justification, highlighting the danger of self-righteousness and the need

50 For a similar interpretation of John 16:8-11, see Jon Paulien, John: Jesus Gives Life to a New Generation (The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier; Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 240-41.
Wahlen: Justification in the Gospels

for repentance in order to receive forgiveness, acquittal, and inner peace. It also involves an inward change that is manifested outwardly in humility, gratitude, and love to God for this gracious gift. John’s Gospel views justification, as well as its negative aspect of condemnation, in terms of the cross—which, with the conviction brought about by the Spirit-Advocate working through the disciples, brings people to a point of decision. Being sanctified through the word and Spirit of truth involves such a complete change that it is pictured as a new birth, which is the means of entering the kingdom of God and experiencing unity with the Father and the Son.

In all four Gospels, justification is closely connected with the proclamation of the kingdom of God, and it is perhaps for this reason that we find both present and future aspects of justification in view. In Matthew the two aspects are fairly evenly balanced. The present aspect predominates in Mark and Luke, while a “perfective” element seems to pervade the Gospel of John whereby the decisive victory at the cross is made a reality through the Spirit, who brings conviction, faith, and transformation.

Clinton Wahlen is an Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland. Following seven years in pastoral ministry, he served a total of eleven years as professor of New Testament and Greek, first at Zaoksky Theological Seminary in Russia, and later at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines. Specializing in New Testament Studies at the University of Cambridge (U.K.), where he earned his Ph.D., he has published numerous articles in church publications and in various scholarly books and journals, a book (Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels, Mohr Siebeck, 2004), and an Adult Bible Study Guide on James (forthcoming, 2014).
In the last two decades considerable scholarly interest has been shown in the Christology of the book of Revelation. The studies devoted significant attention to the specific titles applied to Jesus in the book, although it was recognized at the same time that a purely titular approach provides only limited information in illuminating the topic. With good reason, then, Revelation’s Christology was contextualized within the framework of other questions. Still, fundamental to any Christological investigation is the title ἀρι drivov as the leading Christological expression of the book. The term occurs twenty-nine times in Revelation, twenty-eight of which are applied to Christ. Significantly, the Lamb is portrayed in three

---


2 The literature on the Christology of Revelation is immense. For the survey of scholarship, see e.g. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (WUNT, 2/70; Tübingen: Mohr, 1995), 22-41; Matthias Reinhard Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship Between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation* (WUNT, 2/203; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 6-18.

3 For example, Donald Guthrie (“The Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation,” *VE* 12 [1981], 64-71[64]) states: “Since it is so dominant the title Lamb must provide an important clue for determining the purpose and meaning of the whole book.”
contexts within the visionary part of the book (4:1-22:5) as related to
throne. The nature of this relation has been vigorously debated, since
different expressions are employed for its designation: ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου
in 5:6, ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ θρόνου in 7:17 and ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου/διὰ θρόνος in 22:1,
3. This study will examine exegetically these three throne references, while
the only additional relevant reference (3:21) will be discussed in the third
article in this series on the thrones in Revelation, since it designates also
human occupants of the throne.

1. Drama in the Heavenly Throne Room (5:1-14)

Rev. 5 is the most important Christological chapter in the book of
Revelation. In this vision the Lamb steps into the scene of Revelation’s
drama as a major actor holding in his hands the solution for the cosmic
problem. The emphasis on the centrality of the heavenly throne from the
first scene of the throne-room vision (ch. 4) continues in ch. 5 indicated by
the five θρόνος references of the chapter. The term appears once at the
beginning (5:1), twice at the end (5:11, 13) and twice in the heart of the
vision (5:6, 7).

1.1. Contextual and Structural Considerations

Rev. 5 is closely connected to ch. 4 as an uninterrupted continuation of
the same throne room vision. 4 However, there is a significant shift of
attention between the two scenes. Whereas the focus of ch. 4 is the heavenly
throne, ch. 5 introduces two new motifs with detailed attention: the sealed
scroll (βιβλίον; 5:1) and the Lamb (ἀρνιόν; 5:5-6). Since these motifs have
major roles in the unfolding chapters, the primary function of ch. 5 is to
introduce them and set them on the stage of Revelation’s drama. It has been
suggested by Müller that the shift of attention causes the centrality of the
throne to be lost in ch. 5. 5 However, this suggestion is vulnerable on several
grounds. First, both the sealed book and the Lamb are portrayed as related

4 For the verbal, thematic and structural parallels between Rev. 4 and 5, see Laszlo
Gallusz, The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation (Ph.D. Dissertation; Károli Gáspár
5 Ekkehardt Müller, Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4-11 (AUSDDS, 21;
Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5 [AUSDDS, 22; Berrien
Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1996], 213) is more cautious claiming that the
centrality of the throne is lost only at the beginning of Rev. 5, while it is emphasized again
in the second half of the chapter (5:11, 13).
to the throne (5:1, 6). Second, the central scene of the chapter is the taking of the scroll by the Lamb, which necessitates approaching the divine throne and its occupant (5:7). Third, the repeated reference to τρόις in five out of fourteen verses spread throughout the entire chapter points to the significance of the motif (5:1, 6, 7, 11, 13). Fourth, the status that the Lamb receives in ch. 5 becomes intelligible only in relation to the divine throne. On the basis of the evidence set out here it can be concluded that the Lamb with the sealed book appears as the narrative focus of ch. 5; however, the centrality of the throne remains unchallenged by the events occurring around it and the reactions following them.

The literary structure of ch. 5 is framed and punctuated by the καὶ ἐξόν formula and the less frequent longer version καὶ ἔξων καὶ ἔξων. Aune notes that this formula functions in two ways in Revelation: it either introduces a major break in the narration or marks a change in the focus of the vision. On the basis of this structuring device the chapter can be divided into three units: the first focuses on the drama of the sealed scroll (5:1-5), the second presents the solution to the cosmic problem in the person and accomplishment of the Lamb (5:6-10) and the third describes the universal reaction to the solution (5:11-14). References to the heavenly throne occur at the beginning of the second (5:6) and the third sections (5:11), while the well-known circumlocution formula a “the One sitting on the throne” appears in all three sections (5:1, 7, 13).

1.2. Background

There is a close continuity between the basic background of Rev. 4 and 5 that is rooted in cultic and political imagery. The attention in the following discussion will be only on new aspects emerging from ch. 5.

1.2.1. Cultic Symbolism

The most significant new cultic aspect of the vision is the Lamb imagery. While this imagery is of “multivalent character,” it recalls primarily the paschal lamb of the Old Testament. The sacrificial role is

---

6 David E. Aune, Revelation (3 vols.; WBC, 52A-C; Dallas, TX: Word, 1997-98), I, 329.
8 The interpretation of Christ’s crucifixion as a paschal sacrifice is well known in the New Testament and the early Christian literature (1Cor. 5:7; 1Pet. 1:19; Heb. 9:14; Col. 2:14; John 19:33, 36; Justin Martyr, Dial. 111.3). The connection is especially clear in the
emphasized at the first place within the introductory description of the Lamb figure which characterizes him as ὠς ἐσφαγμένον (5:6). The same quality is repeated twice more in the chapter in the first two hymns directed to the Lamb (5:9, 12). The term ὁφάζω means “to slaughter, either animals or persons; in contexts referring to persons, the implication is of violence and mercilessness.” Michel notes that in spite of the non-biblical use of the term for ritual slaying, ὀφάζω is in LXX hardly a technical term for sacrificial ritual, but rather a profane expression. However, in a number of cases it appears as the translation of θησεω or κτήσεω which designate animal or even human sacrifices. The perfect passive participle ἐσφαγμένον indicates an abiding condition as the result of a past act of slaying. The sacrificial aspect is further supported by the cultic reference to the Lamb’s blood as a ransom for people purchased for God (5:9). Thus, Jörns rightly notes that in the Lamb symbolism of Rev. 5 we have a cultic typology. The particle ὠς in front of ἐσφαγμένον in 5:6 is also significant in this regard. Corresponding to the Hebrew ז it introduces the Christological interpretation of the Lamb imagery in the form of visionary language.

In 5:8 further cultic aspects are introduced. The singing elders hold in their hands cultic instruments (κιθάρα; “lyre”) and cultic utensils (φιάλη; “bowl”). κιθάρα as a rendering of ρωνκ in LXX is of central significance among the instruments mentioned in the Old Testament. Although it was

Fourth Gospel in which Christ is designated as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29; cf. 1:36). However, the expression is most likely pre-Johannine (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985], 96). Rudolf Schnackenburg (Die Johannesbriefe [HTKNT, 13/2; Freiburg: Herder, 5th edn, 1975], 37) notes the same emphasis on the expiatory function of Christ in 1Jn 1:7, 9; 2:1-2; 3:5; 4:10. The typological nature of the paschal symbolism in regard to Revelation’s Lamb is widely recognized: just as the blood of the paschal lamb functioned as the crucial motif of salvation in historical exodus event, similarly the death and resurrection of Christ is the basis of the hope of the eschatological people of God in the last book of the New Testament. For this aspect of Revelation’s symbolism, see e.g. Holtz, Christologie, 44-47; Hoffmann, Destroyer and the Lamb, 117-19.

9 LN §20.72.


11 For animal sacrifices in cultic rituals, see: Lev. 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:5, 15, 24, 29, 33, 6:18; 7:2; 14:5, 13; 1Sam. 1:25; Ezek. 44:11. For human sacrifices to Yahweh, see Gen. 22:10; 1Sam. 15:33. For human sacrifices to pagan gods, see Ezek. 16:17-21; 23:39; Isa. 57:5.

12 Klaus-Peter Jörns, Das hymnische Evangelium: Untersuchungen zu Aufbau, Funktion und Herkunft der hymnischen Stücke in der Johannesoffenbarung (SNT, 5; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971), 50.
used on a wide variety of occasions, its role in the temple context in psalm-singing, liturgical praise and worship was particularly esteemed. Görg notes that ἁρμύριον music is a fitting symbol of rejoicing, therefore its appearance in the heavenly praise scene is very appropriate. φιῦλη, the other cultic object in the hands of the elders in 5:8, designates a libation utensil used in a liturgical setting. Since LXX renders it always as a translation of ὁμολογία, it becomes a technical term for “bowl used in offering.” These bowls are pictured as filled with incense (γεμοῦσας θυμαμάτων), a further cultic aspect which designates the prayers of the saints. The idea of priesthood is part of the cultic picture of ch. 5, since the twenty-four elders are portrayed as acting in a priestly role. Also, the priestly function is directly stated as an effect of the Lamb’s salvific work and is portrayed in terms of making people kingdom and priests (ἐποίησεν αὐτούς … βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερείαν). 18

1.2.2. Political Symbolism

The parallels of Rev. 4 with the Roman imperial imagery continue in ch. 5 with some new elements. It has been suggested by Aune on the basis of artistic sources that the opening scene portraying “the One sitting on the throne” with the sealed biblion in his right hand (5:1) is reminiscent of the depiction of a princeps surrounded by his council and holding a libellus, a petition letter in the form of an open scroll. More convincing, however, are the parallels between the acclamations addressed to the emperor and the

13 Besides the cultic context ἁρμύριον occurs on numerous other occasions. It provided music during secular celebrations (Gen. 31:27; Isa. 24:8) and in times of lament or mourning (Job 30:31). However, it could be used by prostitutes and the wicked (Job 21:12; Isa. 23:16), but also in connection with miraculous healings (1Sam. 16:16, 23) and prophetic ecstasies (1Sam. 10:5) (Joachim Braun, Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine: Archaeological, Written, and Comparative Sources [trans. D.W. Stott; The Bible in its World; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002], 16-19).

14 2Sam. 6:5; 1Chron. 15:16; Ps. 43:4; 57:7-9; 71:22; 81:1-3; 92:1-3; 98:4-6; 108:1-3; 147:7; 149:3; 150:3.


16 Exod. 27:3; 38:3; Num. 4:14; 1Kgs 7:40f.

17 BAGD, 858. See e.g. Exod. 38:23; Num. 4:14; 2Kgs 12:14; 25:15; 1Chron. 28:17; 2Chron. 4:8; Neh. 7:70.

18 The idea of the kingly–priestly role of God’s people in Rev. 5:10 is an allusion to Exod. 19:6, a text with a well-known cultic significance.

Lamb in 5:9-14. The emphasis on consensus omnium, a universal consent, is of a particular significance in this regard. Though Aune acknowledges that little is known about this idea, it is clear that consensus omnium is considered of fundamental importance for the legitimacy of the empire and establishing of the principate’s authority.\textsuperscript{20} The liturgical material of Revelation, including the three hymns of ch. 5 (vs. 9-10, 12, 13), reveals close parallels with this Roman idea. Aune convincingly argues that this literary feature reveals a polemical intention on part of the author:

> During the late first century, when the argumentum e consensu omnium had become particularly important in imperial propaganda, it is striking that the Apocalyptist should emphasize both the social breadth as well as the numerical strength of those who celebrate the sovereignty and power of both God and the Lamb. Indeed, those who proclaim the eternal kingship of God and the Lamb are more numerous and more representative than those who are depicted as participating in the rituals of imperial accessio and adventus.\textsuperscript{21}

The significance of the imperial background in the interpretation of Revelation’s concept of ἐξ οὐς has been often noted (5:2, 4, 9).\textsuperscript{22} Since the term has no great importance in the LXX and Jewish literature, viewing the concept primarily against the Graeco-Roman background is even more justified. The term appears in the Graeco-Roman context around the turn of the era as a distinctive qualification for a person worthy of a high position and honour. The significance of merit as the reason for holding of an office

\textsuperscript{20} The principate of Augustus was founded on the basis of agreement of three powerful groups: the senate, the equestrians and the people. Therefore, the emphasis on the universal consensus became one of the fundamental governing principles of the empire as expressed by the often repeated formula of Augustus in the Res Gestae Divi Augusti 34: “per consensus universorum potitus rerum omnium” (“by universal consent taking control of all things”). For textual and numismatic evidence on the consensus omnium, see Aune, “Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial,” 16-20; Klaus Oehler, “Der consensus omnium als Kriterium der Wahrheit in der antiken Philosophie und der Patristik,” Antike und Abendland 10 (1961), 103-29.

\textsuperscript{21} Aune, “Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial,” 20.

of influence is well attested. It was even a major qualification in the choice of the emperor, and also in his deification by the Senate after his death.\textsuperscript{23} Stefanovic notes in his comprehensive survey of the Roman \textit{\ddot{a}ξιος/dignus} concept that this quality, though not reserved exclusively for the emperors, “when linked to the throne (as in Rev. 4-5) it had royal significance.”\textsuperscript{24} Similarly, in Josephus the concept is applied to the Israelite kings Saul and Solomon in the context of their coronation.\textsuperscript{25}

1.3. Interpretation

1.3.1. The Drama of the Scroll

While Rev. 4 focuses on the heavenly throne and its context, the climax of the vision is reached in the dramatic scene of ch. 5 evolving around the sealed book and the Lamb, which lie at the “theological heart” of the book of Revelation.\textsuperscript{26} The scene begins with a reference to “the One sitting on the throne,” the central figure of ch. 4, but the attention is directed to a new feature, the sealed \textit{βιβλίον}, which is located \textit{ἐπὶ τὴν δεξίαν τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου}. The translation of the phrase \textit{ἐπὶ τὴν δεξίαν} is problematic, primarily because of the meaning of the preposition \textit{ἐπὶ}. Three possible readings have been suggested: (1) God is holding the book “in” his right hand;\textsuperscript{27} (2) he is holding it “upon” the right hand, on the open

---

\textsuperscript{23} For the concept of merit in the Roman world, see Martin P. Charlesworth, “Pietas and Victoria: The Emperor and the Citizen,” \textit{JRS} 33 (1943), 1-10.
\textsuperscript{24} Stefanovic, \textit{Sealed Book}, 179.
\textsuperscript{25} Josephus, \textit{Ant}. 6.66; 6.346; 7.338.
\textsuperscript{26} Loren L. Johns, \textit{The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into its Origins and Rhetorical Force} (WUNT, 2/167; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 159.
palm; and (3) the book is located at his right side. It is well known that the expression “God’s right hand” is an Old Testament anthropomorphism representing his power and authority. However, the emphasis of the description is not on the physical attribute, but on the close relation of the scroll with the One who holds it and on the hidden nature of the scroll’s sealed content. Through this opening picture a sense of expectancy is created, since the details suggest a sort of divine decree.

The vision of ch. 5 revolves around the rhetorical question raised in 5:2, which provides the focus for the development of the drama: τίς ἄξιος ἀνοίξαι τὸ βιβλίον καὶ λύσαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ (“Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?”). The opening of the seals is strongly stressed in the chapter, since ἀνοίξαι is repeated four times before the introduction of the Lamb and once additionally in the hymnic praise of this redeemer figure. Still, the main emphasis is on the concept of worthiness, the qualification needed to perform the task of opening the sealed book. It has been convincingly argued that ἄξιος ties the scene together, since the term itself appears repeatedly throughout the drama: in the opening question of the angel (5:2), in John’s response to the universal quest for an ἄξιος...
The cosmic significance of the drama around the opening of the scroll is clearly highlighted. The importance of the task is indicated by the motif of universality which is reflected in three different expressions. First, in the formula “no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth” (5:3), which is part of the response to the universal search for an ἀξιός figure. Second, in the hymnic statement about the effect of the Lamb’s sacrifice, which purchases people “from every tribe, language, people and nation” (5:9). Third, in worshiping of “the One sitting on the throne” and the Lamb by “every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth and in the sea” (5:13). As Roloff rightly notes, the task of opening the scroll is not related to the disclosure of the future, but it rather implies “the discharge of God’s plan for history vis-à-vis the world, the setting in motion of the world event toward the end that God has planned for it.” The distress over the possibility of this plan not being realized is indicated by John’s weeping. Thus, at the beginning of ch. 5 a rhetorical tension is built by “underscoring both the importance of history’s resolution and the tragedy that proceeds from the lack of such a resolution.” However, after the dramatization John’s attention is directed to the Lion/Lamb figure, who appears on the scene as an ἀξιός figure providing a solution to the cosmic problem.

1.3.2. The Lion/Lamb Figure

The Lion/Lamb figure, introduced at the heart of Rev. 5, has been rightly considered to be “one of the most mind-wrenching and theologically

33 Murphy, Fallen is Babylon, 192.
35 The reason for John’s weeping has been interpreted similarly in Caird, Revelation, 73; Beale, Revelation, 348. Less likely is the interpretation that argues for weeping over the “moral incapacity” of the created beings (Swete, Apocalypse, 77; Charles H. Talbert, The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John [Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1994], 28-29) or because John could not find out the content of the scroll (Beckwith, Apocalypse, 508; Moffatt, “Revelation,” 383). Also a symbolic interpretation of the weeping has been suggested. Roloff (Revelation, 77) views John’s reaction as “the retrospective summary of the heretofore vain and shattered messianic expectation of Israel,” while Johns (Lamb Christology, 163 n. 46), on the basis of the typological function of weeping in the Jeremiah and Baruch tradition, suggests “a response to the judgment of God,” a heightened “pathos in one’s recognition that injustice is prevailing and God’s will is being thwarted.”
36 Johns, Lamb Christology, 170.
pregnant transformations of imagery in literature."\(^{37}\) As "a spectacular tour de force,"\(^{38}\) it is of crucial significance for understanding Revelation’s rhetoric and theology generally.

It is while weeping over the cosmic problem that John first hears of "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (ὁ λέων ὶ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰουδα) as a solution, further qualified as "the Root of David" (ἡ ρίζα Δαυίδ). These titles are drawn from Gen. 49:9 and Isa. 11:1-5. Both were loci classici of Jewish Messianic hope in the first century C.E., understood as referring to the rising of the Messiah, the king par excellence, who will sit upon the throne of David.\(^{39}\) They were also favorite texts at Qumran that were interpreted with strong militaristic overtones.\(^{40}\) Therefore, the connection between the imagery of the Lion of Judah and Root of David and the idea of triumph in Rev. 5:5 strongly evokes messianic overtones and points to the appearance of a new David, victorious over the enemies of Israel.\(^{41}\)

Hearing about the Lion is followed by the vision of the Lamb, who is described in terms of his physical appearance before any motion is indicated. Most importantly, he has been slain (ἐφαγμένον), but he is pictured also as having seven horns (κέρατα ἑπτὰ) and seven eyes (ὀφθαλμοί ἑπτὰ). The question of the source of John’s lamb imagery has generated much discussion.\(^{42}\) I find the interpretation of the imagery in

---


\(^{39}\) For the messianic interpretation of the “Lion of the Tribe of Judah,” see 1QSb 5:29; 4Ezra 11:37-12:2. For the “Root of David” as a messianic title, see 4QFlor 1:1-12; 4QPsSa’ Frag. A; Psx. Sol. 17:24, 35-37; 4Ezra 13:10; 1En. 49:3; 62:2; T. Jud. 24:4-6.

\(^{40}\) For both passages combined, see 4QPBless; 1QSb 5:20-29; 4Ezra 12:31-32.


\(^{42}\) The following general suggestions have been put forth: (1) the Christian interpretation of Isa. 53 (Comblin, Apocalypse, 17-34); (2) astrological speculation (Franz Boll, Aus der Offenbarung Johannis: Hellenistische Studien zum Weltbild der Apokalypse [Stoicheia: SGAWGW, 1; Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1914], 44-46; Bruce J. Malina, On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995], 78-79, 101-04, 111-12); (3) Jewish liturgical practices (Holtz, Christologie, 44-47; Hoffmann, Destroyer, 117-19); (4) traditions of animal imagery in Jewish apocalypticism (Charles, Revelation, I, 141; C.H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954], 230-38). The imagery has also been considered by source critics such as Weyland and Vischer a later Christian interpolation into an originally Jewish source (see Wilhelm Bousset, Die Offenbarung
terms of reflecting primarily sacrificial ideas most convincing. As has been pointed out above, the sacrificial idea is recalled primarily by the paschal lamb typology. This interpretation is supported by the application of ἐσφαγμένον to the Lamb, the strong cultic background of the vision and Revelation’s interpretation of the Lamb’s victory in terms of a new exodus. The Lamb imagery also alludes to the suffering servant of Yahweh in Isa. 53, a concept frequently applied to the passion and crucifixion of Jesus in the early church.\(^3\) The suffering servant is compared to a lamb led to slaughter (ὅς πρόβατον ἔπλος ὀφειλήν ἔφεσθή; 53:7), a statement thematically mirrored in the Lamb concept in Rev. 5. Also the idea of the vicarious and redemptive nature of the servant’s suffering, running throughout the entire description of Isa. 53, shows close affinity with the concept of ransom in Rev. 5:9. Thus, we can speak of a joint paschal/servant of Yahweh sacrificial background, which might be further supported by the possibility of a common background in the Aramaic ḡen with its twofold meaning: “lamb” as well as “boy” or “servant.”\(^4\)

Revelation’s Lamb imagery is primarily rooted in a sacrificial background, but it has a militaristic overtone generally in the book. On the basis of Jewish apocalyptic literature, this leads to a suggestion of the influence of the concept of divine warrior ram alongside or instead of the sacrificial background.\(^5\) While the Lamb in Rev. 5:6 is pictured with seven horns and the horn as a symbol of power has a long tradition in Hebrew

---

\(^{3}\) Acts 8:32; Barn. 5:2; 1 Clem. 16:7; Justin, Dial. 72:3; 114:2.

\(^{4}\) Heinrich Kraft, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (HNT, 16a; Tübingen: Mohr, 1974), 109; Beale, Revelation, 351.

\(^{5}\) Three texts have primarily been used to argue this tradition: T. Jos. 19:8; T. Benj. 3:8 and 1En. 89-90. Though T. Jos. 19:8 is often viewed as a valid argument (e.g. John C. O’Neil, “The Lamb of God in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs,” JSNT 2 [1979], 2-30), Joachim Jeremias (“ἀμνὸς” in TDNT, I, 338-41[338]) notes: “The description of the Redeemer as a lamb is unknown to later Judaism; the only possible occurrence (Test. Jos. 19) falls under the suspicion of being a Christian interpolation.” The same is the case with T. Benj. 3:8 (contra B. Murmelstein, “Das Lamm in Test. Jos. 19:8,” ZNW 58 [1967], 273-79). Horned lambs appear also in 1En. 90:9 representing the Maccabees, while the Messiah appears as a lamb with “big black horns” in 90:30. However, these figures are part of the complex animal allegory of 1En. 85-90, which portrays David and Solomon also as lambs before they become rams ascending to throne (89:45, 48). Also significant is a late (11th century C.E.) tradition preserved in Targ. Ps.-J. Exod. 1:15, in which Moses is portrayed as a lamb who destroys Egypt.
thought, the evidence for establishing the existence of a militaristic lamb-redeemer figure in the apocalyptic traditions of Early Judaism is weak. For this reason its influence on the Revelation lamb imagery cannot be demonstrated in spite of the militaristic character of this figure in Revelation. The possibility of translating ἄρνιον as a “ram” has also been suggested. Under the influence of Charles, attention has often been drawn to the difference between the lamb terminology of the Fourth Gospel (ἀρνιόν) and that of Revelation (ἀρνίων). However, the fact that, in spite of the exclusive use of ἄρνιον in Revelation, the term also occurs in Jn 21:15 with the identical meaning to ἄρνιος has been overlooked. This connection is attested also in numerous Old Testament and Jewish texts. The linguistic evidence suggests that Revelation’s ἄρνιον should be translated as a “lamb” or a “little lamb,” though the character of the figure also includes a military aspect despite the lack of a direct influence of the concept of the apocalyptic warrior ram. It can be concluded that John’s Lamb imagery is unique and creative not just because of the Lamb’s combined functions, but also because of his unprecedented physical appearance with seven horns and seven eyes.

The Lion/Lamb imagery in Rev. 5:5-6 reflects John’s literary technique of juxtaposing more than one image with a single referent. There is a disagreement concerning the purpose of the juxtaposition, which is understood in various ways, depending on the interpretation of the Lamb

---


47 For a comprehensive discussion on the question, see Johns, Lamb Christology, 76-107.

48 This idea is argued in Friedrich Spitta, Streitfragen der Geschichte Jesu (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907), 172-224. For a persuasive critic, see Otfried Hofius, “ἀρνίον—Wider oder Lamm? Erwägungen zur Bedeutung des Wortes in der Johannesapokalypse,” ZNW 89 (1998), 272-81.

49 Jer. 11:19; Ps. 93:4; 6; Isa. 40:11; Pss. Sol. 8:28; Josephus, Ant. 3.221, 251.

50 Gyula Takács uses the Hungarian expression “bárányka” (“little lamb”) consistently in his commentary as a translation for ἄρνιον. For his explanation, see A Jelenések könyve: egzegézis (Budapest: Paulus Hungarus–Kairos, 2000), 130. However, it is acknowledged that by the first century the term ἄρνιον most probably had no longer a diminutive nuance (BAGD, 108), but was synonymous with πρόβατον (“sheep”; e.g. Jn 21:15-17). Beale (Revelation, 354) rightly notes that “if the diminutive nuance still held, it intensified the contrast between the powerful lion image of Old Testament prophecy and the fulfillment through the little, apparently powerless lamb.”
imagery. It has been argued by the proponents of the militaristic lamb figure background that there is neither contrast nor surprise in the Lion/Lamb juxtaposition—the imageries appear rather as complementary.

On the other hand, it needs to be observed that the Lamb imagery continues to make its presence felt throughout the book, while the Lion from the tribe of Judah completely disappears. The reason for the Lion’s giving way to the Lamb is interpreted by Strawn as grounded in the ambivalent use of the Lion imagery in the precedent literature. As he rightly notes, the symbol is “potentially ambiguous of an image to serve as the primary metaphor for the Messiah-Christ figure.” Therefore, it is more appropriate to view the juxtaposition as a technique of reinterpretation of the traditional messianic material. In this regard Sweet rightly argues that “what John hears, the traditional Old Testament expectation of military deliverance, is reinterpreted by what he sees, the historical fact of a sacrificial death.” The result of the reinterpretation is the forging of a new symbol of conquest by sacrificial death. However, Bauckham rightly warns that the juxtaposition does not dismiss the hopes embodied in John’s messianic titles, but only reinterprets them. In line with this reasoning

---

51 For the overview of the discussion, see Rebecca Skaggs and Thomas Doyle, “Lion/Lamb in Revelation,” CBR 7 (2009), 362-75 (367-71).
55 Bauckham, Climax, 183. It has been also argued that the Lion/Lamb juxtaposition involves mutual interpretation and not simply the replacing of one element with another. For example, Resseguie (Revelation Unsealed, 34) points out: “The Lion of the tribe of Judah interprets what John sees: death on the cross (the Lamb) is not defeat but is the way to power and victory (the Lion). In this instance, seeing also reinterprets the hearing. The traditional expectation of messianic conquest by military deliverance (the Lion of Judah) is reinterpreted so that messianic conquest occurs through sacrificial death (the Lamb).” While Steve Moyise (“Does the Lion Lie Down with the Lamb?” in Studies in the Book of Revelation, ed. Steve Moyise [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001], 181-94[189]) is also a proponent of the mutual interpretation, he criticizes Resseguie for inconsistency in his application of this principle.
Knight aptly speaks of “a powerful subversion of reality,” since the conquering, represented by the Lion, alludes to the cross, the manner of the conquest. Though the object of the conquest is not specified, the cumulative aorist of ἐνίκησεν emphatically stresses the completion of the victory, probably over all that is opposed to God’s rule. Thus, the theology of the cross is given central significance in Rev. 5.

1.3.3. The Lamb and the Throne

The Lamb’s sharing of God’s throne is almost unanimously accepted in reference to Rev. 3:21, 7:17 and 22:3. He is also somehow related to the throne in 5:6; however, the meaning of the ambiguous phrase ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζωῶν καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων (“in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders”) has given rise to divided opinions concerning the precise relationship. The crux interpretum is the translation of the expression ἐν μέσῳ. As Aune notes, three major possibilities have been argued concerning this noteworthy translation problem. First, ἐν μέσῳ refers to a position “in the middle” of an area. Following this rendering BAGD suggests the translation “on the center of the throne and among the four living creatures.” Second, the expression points to the distance between two things. According to this possibility the Lamb is positioned somewhere “between” the throne, the four living creatures and the elders. Third, ἐν μέσῳ designates a position within an area occupied by other objects. The translation is “among” or “with” which positions the Lamb standing in close proximity to the throne. An argument will be suggested here in favor of the first translation, which positions the Lamb on the throne. While this

---

56 Jonathan Knight (Revelation [Readings; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 63) rightly recognizes that the association of the victory motif with the cross is a shared idea of Rev. 5 with the Fourth Gospel.
58 Aune, Revelation, I, 352.
59 BAGD, 635.
60 Charles, Revelation, I, 140.
61 Aune, Revelation, I, 352.
view has been widely advocated, no answer has been offered to the objection of the Lamb’s distance from the throne. It has been pointed out by opponents of this view that the text mentions the Lamb’s movement towards the throne and taking of the scroll immediately after the initial introductory description in which \( \text{ἐν μέσῳ} \) defines the Lamb’s position in relation to the throne (5:6-7). The discussion in this section, besides offering an argument for Christ’s enthronement in ch. 5, will also attempt to provide a satisfactory answer to this objection.

The occupation of the heavenly throne by the Lamb in 5:6 is often justified almost exclusively on the basis of the wider context of Christ’s enthronement in the book (3:21; 7:17; 22:3). Knight is one of the rare exceptions, as he goes beyond the contextual argument and provides substantial exegetical evidence. He convincingly argues that the correct translation of 5:6 needs to be balanced around the three \( \text{καὶ} \) references. He suggests that the translation approach focusing on \( \text{ἐν μέσῳ} \) is inadequate, since it results in removing the creatures from the

---


64 This is usually characteristic to the Christological studies as e.g. Hengel, Studies, 150-51; Bauckham, “Throne of God,” 64; Gieschen, “Lamb,” 236.

thrones in Revelation (4:6), at least to the extent that they allow the Lamb to intervene between the throne and them. Since the geography of the throne reflects an arrangement in concentric circles, Knight logically concludes that “the Lamb cannot stand between the throne and the creatures and also among the elders.” For this reason he claims that the viewpoint focusing on the three καί references and the phrases following them indicate the following interpretation: “The first phrase states that the Lamb occupies the throne of God. The second phrase states this means by definition that the Lamb also stands in the midst of the living creatures. The third phrase states that the Lamb sits among the elders in the sense that the elders surround the throne of God and form a protective boundary for it.” Knight’s argument is persuasive. According to his interpretation, the text further stresses the central significance of the introduction of the Lamb, who steps into the throne-room drama as a major figure of the book. Though it seems that his introduction is deliberately postponed until ch. 5, he is impressively promoted here to an elevated position indicated through occupation of the heavenly throne. It would be strange if the display of the Lamb’s unique

66 Knight, “Enthroned Christ,” 46.
67 Knight, “Enthroned Christ,” 46.
68 It has been argued on the basis of a three-part ancient Egyptian enthronement pattern that the scene of Rev. 5 is to be interpreted as an enthronement of Christ (See e.g. Holtz, Christologie, 27-29; George R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation [NCB; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978], 110; Roloff, Revelation, 75-76). This view has been strongly criticized by W.C. van Unnik (“‘Worthy is the Lamb’: The Background of Apoc. 5” in Mélanges Bibliques en hommage au R.P. Béda Rigaux, eds. Albert Descamps and R.P. André de Halleux [Gembloux: Duculot, 1970], 445-61). More recently, Stefanovic (Sealed Book, 206-25) persuasively argued for an enthronement ritual primarily on the basis of parallels with coronation scenes of the Old Testament. This approach has been supported also by Margaret Barker ("Enthronement and Apotheosis: The Vision in Revelation 4-5" in New Heaven and New Earth: Prophecy and the Millenium—Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston, eds. P.J. Harland and C.T.R. Hayward [VTSup, 77; Leiden: Brill, 1999], 217-27). Similarly, Beale (Revelation, 356-57) subscribes to this view, mostly because of the close affinity of Rev. 5 with Dan. 7. In contrast, the enthronement view has been recently labelled by Aune (Revelation, I, 336) as a “scholarly myth.” He rather views Rev. 5 as describing the investiture of the Lamb, since this concept “refers to the act of establishing someone in office or the ratification of the office that someone already holds informally.” According to a further interpretive possibility Rev. 5 reflects only a commission in the heavenly court similar to the Old Testament prophetic commissions (Hans P. Müller, “Die himmlische Ratsversammlung: Motivgeschichtliches zu Apc 5:1-5,” ZNW 54 [1963], 254-67; Heinz Giesen, Die Offenbarung des Johannes [RNT; Regensburg: Pustet, 1997], 159-60). The combination of the enthronement and commission interpretations has also been advocated (Eduard Lohse, Die Offenbarung des Johannes [Neue Testament Deutsch; Göttingen:
significance in the heavenly setting was otherwise in a book that advocates high Christology.

An examination of ch. 5 reveals further evidence which indirectly point to the Lamb’s sitting on the throne in the throne-room vision. First, the worship offered to the Lamb by the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, the many angels and every creature (5:8-14) implies his divine character. As Gieschen notes, “The veneration of the lamb... is another way through which this scene depicts Christ within the mystery of the one God, because to worship anyone other than YHWH is idolatry.”

Out of the five hymns of the vision two are directed to the Father (4:8, 11) and two to the Lamb (5:9-10, 12). While the two pairs of doxologies share a number of motifs that imply the unique relation of the two figures, the praise reaches its climax in the fifth hymn in which they are jointly worshiped. This scene “rounds off the vision” and conveys the closing message that “the One sitting on the throne” and the Lamb are divine beings of equal status, who act jointly towards the same end. It would be inconceivable if the idea of divine unity was not expressed by sharing the same divine throne in a vision which primarily highlights the elevation of the Lamb.

Second, the taking of the scroll in 5:7 presupposes an act of coming to the divine throne (ηλθεν και ειληφην; “he came and took”). Though the idea of transferring authority has been generally noted in the text, the significance of the background in Dan. 7:13 has often been overlooked.

Beale convincingly argues that this Danielic text is the only Old Testament passage in which “a divine, Messiah-like figure is portrayed as approaching God’s heavenly throne in order to receive authority.” He calls our attention to numerous parallels between the two scenes: the opening of books (βιβλοι in Dan. 7:10; βιβλίων in Rev. 5:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9), approaching God’s throne (ἐρχομαι in Dan. 7:13; ἐρχομαι in Rev. 5:7), receiving authority to reign (διδωμι in Dan. 7:14; λαμβάνω in Rev. 5:7),

---

Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, [1960], 44).
designating both figures’ authority by τιμή (Dan. 7:14; Rev. 5:12-13) and δόξα (Dan. 7:14; Rev. 5:12-13), and a universal recognition of the received authority (Dan. 7:14; Rev. 5:13-14).73 Again, the Lamb’s possession of the throne is implied by the concepts of authority and reign, and also indicated by the universal recognition of his elevated status. Third, the repeated emphasis on the “right”of “the One sitting on the throne” (5:1, 7) might possibly be an allusion to the enthronement tradition of Ps. 110:1 (ἐκ δεξιῶν μου; “at my right hand”),74 which played a central role in the expression of Christ’s ascension to the throne in early Christian writings.75

As mentioned above, the most common objection to the interpretation of Rev. 5:6 in terms of the Lamb’s occupation of the throne is the statement ἐλήφη ὁ Λαμbs (5:7) in 5:7. The expression implies distance between the divine throne and the Lamb, and also movement in the direction of the throne for the purpose of taking the sealed book. This objection is based on the presupposition of chronological continuity between 5:6 and 5:7 which holds that the Lamb’s location ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου in 5:6 is the starting point of his movement towards the throne in 5:7. For example, Beale states that the “broader context of 5:9ff. would imply that there he is sitting on the throne,” while “in 5:6 it appears that the Lamb is near the throne, preparing to make his approach to be enthroned.”76

I would like to suggest that there is a chronological discontinuity between 5:6 and 5:7 which explains the tension between the occupation of the throne in 5:6 and the distance in 5:7. The argument in favor of this suggestion is based on the understanding of 5:5-6 in terms of John’s identification–description literary technique. Stefanovic explains the essence of this pattern followed in Revelation: “Whenever a new key player in the book is introduced, he/she is first identified in terms of his/her personal description or historical role. . . Once the player is identified, John moves into the description of the player’s function and activities that are

73 Beale, Use of Daniel, 211-12.
74 On the contrary, Hengel (Studies, 151) denies John’s allusion to Ps. 110:1 here, though, he advocates Christ’s sitting on the throne in Rev. 5:6. He argues that John probably intentionally avoids the language of Ps. 110:1 and the possibility of “an all too anthropomorphic conception of a bisellium with two ‘gods’ . . . sitting next to one another.”
76 Beale, Revelation, 350.
especially important to the vision.” This literary technique is universally applied to all the major characters of Revelation including the Lamb. Since he appears for the first time in the book in ch. 5, the description of his physical characteristics and status is given before any of his activities are narrated. Actually, the language used in 5:5-6 is the language of identification/description, in contrast with that of 5:7-14, which is the language of action. While 5:7-14 records an action taken by the Lamb with the reactions to it within the heavenly setting, in 5:5-6 he is merely identified in terms of his qualities and status. For this reason the relationship of the two passages within the same vision cannot be interpreted in terms of chronological continuity, because of a major difference in their literary and theological function.

At the end of this discussion it is appropriate to note that the throne motif plays a central role both in the introduction of the Father in ch. 4 (ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενον; 4:2) and the Lamb in ch. 5 (ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου; 5:6). While both figures are pictured in the throne-room vision as occupants of the heavenly throne, there is no indication of a throne rivalry, since John’s view is that the Lamb shares God’s throne. This idea is consistent in all the texts which relate the Lamb to the heavenly throne (3:21; 5:6; 7:17; 22:3). Knight rightly concludes of the implication of the concept of a shared throne: “Two beings, one throne means one shared authority and as close a possible union as it is possible to achieve.” The rest of the book of Revelation describes how this shared authority is practiced and the challenge to it handled.

2. The Heavenly Temple Festival (7:9-17)

The second most developed throne scene in the book of Revelation is described in 7:9-17. The heavenly throne is referred to seven times in this

---

77 Ranko Stefanovic, “Finding Meaning in the Literary Patterns of Revelation,” *JATS* 13 (2002), 27-43(28-29). This literary technique is first employed in 1:9-20 which introduces the speaker who addresses the seven churches in chs. 2-3. In ch. 4 “the One sitting on the throne” is introduced, while ch. 5 introduces the Lamb, who will break the seals of the book in 6:1-8:1. In 7:4-9 the 144,000, who reappear in 14:1-5, are characterized. In ch. 11 the identification of the two witnesses (11:4) is followed by the description of their activities and experiences. Ch. 12 introduces the women clothed with the sun (12:1) and the dragon (12:2-3), while in ch. 13 the two beasts are characterized before describing their activities (13:1-2, 11). In 17:3-5 the same literary technique is applied to the prostitute sitting on the beast, etc.


79 Knight, “Enthroned Christ,” 47.
section and it functions as the focal point of this scene of celebration. The term θρόνος four times signifies the center of heavenly geography (7:9, 11[2x], 15), twice it appears within a circumlocution for God (7:10, 15) and in the climactic section of 7:14-17 it is once associated with the Lamb (7:17).

2.1. Contextual and Structural Considerations

The heavenly temple festival of 7:9-17 forms the climax of the Seven Seals heptad. The whole of ch. 7 is strategically located after the sixth seal which portrays in the language of the Day of the Lord the universal expression of the wrath of God and the Lamb in terms of cosmic turbulence (6:12-17). Since the sixth seal is concluded by a rhetorical question concerning the survival of the parousia (τίς δύναται σταθήματι; “who can stand”; 6:17), the vision of ch. 7 appears to provide an answer to it. Thus, we have here an interlude that functions as a wider interpretive framework against which the entire vision of 6:1-8:1 may be understood more profoundly. The throne motif indicates not just a literary, but also a theological relationship between the sixth seal and the heavenly temple festival. In both contexts people are depicted as facing the divine throne. While in 6:16 the throne is associated with wrath and judgment, in ch. 7 its function is positive as the elect stand in front of it in celebration. The contrast between the two groups, standing in front of the throne in two different contexts, is deepened by ascribing universality to both. This connection provides a contextual argument for the centrality of the throne

---

81 The close relation of Rev. 7 with the Seven Seals vision is demonstrated in the following studies: Håkan Ulfgard, Feast and Future: Revelation 7:9-17 and the Feast of Tabernacles (ConBNT, 22; Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1989), 31-34; Müller, Microstructural Analysis, 252-69; Stephen Pattemore, Souls under the Altar: Relevance Theory and the Discourse Structure of Revelation (UBSMS, 9; New York: UBS, 2003), 128-30. These studies argue that Rev. 7 is the expansion of the sixth seal of 6:12-17. This view has been rejected in Frederick David Mazzaferri, The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective (BZNW, 54; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1989), 335-36.
82 The group of the “kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man” (6:15) hiding from the throne of God are contrasted to the “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” (7:9) which celebrates the victory in God’s presence. While the motif of universality is applied to both groups, their relation to the divine throne seems intentionally contrasted.
motif for the vision of 7:9-17 in which all of the action revolves around the heavenly center.

The answer to the question “who can stand?” (6:17) receives a two partite answer in ch. 7, as indicated by the structuring device μετὰ τούτο εἶδον / μετὰ ταύτα εἶδον. In the two scenes of the vision the people of God are portrayed through two different descriptions. In 7:1-8 they are the sealed 144,000, while in 7:9-17 they are the great multitude standing in front of the throne. The two scenes are thematically closely related in spite of the shift in the location: while the sealing of the 144,000 takes place on the earth, the celebration of the multitude of elect is in the heavenly context. Since all seven throne references of the vision are found in the heavenly scene, our investigation will primarily focus on 7:9-17.

2.2. Background

The scene of 7:9-17 is related to the same heavenly context as the throne-room vision in chs. 4-5. Since both visions share the heavenly temple/palace setting, the cultic symbolism naturally continues. At the same time Israel’s prophesied restoration forms another major background, which needs to be discussed.

2.2.1. Cultic Symbolism

The similarities between the cultic aspects of 7:9-17 and chs. 4-5 are numerous. It has been persuasively argued that especially the comparison with ch. 5 reveals many striking parallels. In contrast to the throne-room vision, from which the term ναός is absent, the location of the heavenly temple festival has been clearly identified. Namely, in 7:15 it is stated that the saints “are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple” (ἐν τῷ ναῷ αὐτοῦ). On the basis of the parallelism which identifies serving God in his temple (λατρεύω) with being before the throne (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου) it can be concluded that the throne is located in the heavenly ναός. A strong cultic connotation is evoked also by the use of

---


λατρεύω, which appears in LXX as a “distinctively religious” expression.\textsuperscript{85} Strathmann observes that παιζ (“to serve”) is translated with λατρεύω in LXX with religious reference, whereas δουλεύω is used for rendering human relations. He concludes that “the translators . . . thus attempted to show even by their choice of words that the relation of service in religion is something apart from other relations.”\textsuperscript{86} The priestly function of the saints in the heavenly ναός is also indicated by their white garments purified with blood (7:14) and by their service “day and night” (7:15). As Aune notes, such an unending service in the heavenly throne room exceeds normal worship practices at the Jerusalem Temple which involved cessation of service between the evening and morning sacrifices.\textsuperscript{87}

The cultic background of the vision surfaces further in the liturgical material of 7:9-12 and possibly in the reference to God’s tabernacle presence among his people in 7:15 (σπετρώσατέ ἑαυτῷ αὐτῷ) which has been often viewed as an allusion to the concept of God’s shekinah.\textsuperscript{88} One of the most debated cultic symbols of the vision is related to the palm branches in the hands of the great multitude (7:9). There have been some attempts to link the imagery with the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles arguing that this event comprises the basic background to the entire scene.\textsuperscript{89} However,

\textsuperscript{85} H. Strathmann, “λατρεύω” in \textit{TDNT}, IV, 58-65(60). This is the first of the only two occurrences of “λατρεύω” in Revelation. In the other reference in 22:3 the servants of God are also related to the heavenly throne which appears as the joint throne of God and the Lamb.

\textsuperscript{86} Strathmann, “λατρεύω,” 60. For translation of παιζ as λατρεύω, see e.g. Exod. 3:12; 4:23; 7:16, 26; 8:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7, 8, 24, 26; 20:5; 23:24, 25; Deut. 4:19, 28; 5:9; 6:13; 7:4, 16; Josh. 22:27; 24:14-24; 31:22 is translated as δουλεύω e.g. in Exod. 14:5; 12; 21:2, 6; Deut. 15:12; 18; Judg. 3:8, 14; 9:28, 38 and consistently in Genesis.

\textsuperscript{87} David E. Aune (\textit{Revelation}, II, 475) refers to Ezek. 46:1-3 and \textit{m. Tam.} as his primary evidence in making this point.


\textsuperscript{89} The most detailed exegetical argument in favor of this view is presented by Ulfgard (\textit{Feast and Future}, 35-41, 69-107), who believes not only that the “exodus pattern” is of central importance for the understanding of 7:9-17, but also that the Feast of Tabernacles is a secondary influence. Earlier studies emphasizing the Feast of Tabernacle background include e.g. J. A. Draper, “The Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles: Revelation 7:1-17,” \textit{JSNT} 19 (1983), 133-47; J. Comblin, “Le reassemblment du peuple de Dieu: Ap 7,2-4, 9-14,” \textit{As Seign} 66 (1973), 42-49. For a critical evaluation of this approach, see Aune, \textit{Revelation}, II, 448-50. Following a different line of reasoning, Ford (\textit{Revelation}, 126) suggests that the
nothing in the text warrants the specific identification of the festival. While the palms in the hands of the saints have been viewed as the major indicator of the Feast of Tabernacles festival in 7:9-17, the imagery does not necessarily connect the scene to this specific festival, since the palm shows also a more general affinity with the Hebrew cultic setting, as both Solomon’s temple and the temple in Ezekiel’s vision were decorated with images of palms. For this reason I rather align myself with Stevenson’s more general and cautious suggestion that 7:9-17 depicts essentially a heavenly temple festival in which the entire community of the faithful is gathered in front of the heavenly throne celebrating victory and offering praise to God.

2.2.2. Israel’s Prophesied Restoration

It has been noted by Beale that the reward set out in the climactic section of the vision (7:15-17) is described in the language of Israel’s latter-day prophesied restoration. Particularly relevant at this point is the idea of God’s tabernacling presence in 7:15 (σκηνωσε), which is an allusion to the restoration prophecy of Ezek. 37:26-28 (κατασκηνώσει) as confirmed by the verbal connection.90 Isa. 49:9-10 lies also in the background to the Revelation scene. The link is supported by numerous parallels related to the theme of the comfort of divine presence: never being hungry or thirsty, protection from the scorching sun, springs of living water and God’s shepherding. The possibility of a link between the innumerable multitude of saints (7:9) and the Abrahamic promise of innumerable descendants has been also observed.91 The scene of 7:9-17 could be understood against this background in terms of the ultimate fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise, and also as the restoration of Israel in the church, which appears as a continuation of the true Israel.

branches may be attributed to the influence of the Maccabean victory, since 1 Macc. 13:51 refers to the Jews returning to Jerusalem after their victory “with praise and palm branches.” 90 Beale, Revelation, 441-42.

91 E.g. Pierre Prigent, Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John (trans. Wendy Pradels; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 288; Aune, Revelation, II, 466-67; Brian K. Blount, Revelation: A Commentary (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2009), 150. Aune notes that the promise to Abraham took two forms: the promise of innumerable descendants and that he would be father of many nations (Gen. 17:4-6; 35:11; 48:19; Rom. 4:16-18; Justin, Dial. 119-120; Josephus, Ant. 4.115-16). He views the reflection of the former promise in Rev. 7:9a and the later in 7:9b. While this promise began to be fulfilled by the time of the exodus (Exod. 1:7; Deut. 1:10; 10:22) the multitude in Rev. 7:9 reflects the ultimate fulfillment.
2.3. Interpretation

2.3.1. People of God in Rev. 7

Two groups of people of God are introduced in Rev. 7 which appear for the first time in the book: the 144,000 (7:1-8) and the great multitude (7:9-17). There is no consensus on the question of the relationship between these two groups of God’s servants. While numerous contrasts have been noted, they have also been simply identified, or a distinction has been suggested according to which the 144,000 appear as a sub-set of the great multitude. I would like to offer an argument here in favor of the view that the two representations highlight two different aspects of the same group. First, this view is based on Revelation’s identification–description literary pattern such as when John first hears about a new participant or group in the book’s drama and this is followed by a viewing of the same figure or group. Thus, John first hears about the 144,000 and subsequently sees the great multitude—and the vision interprets the audition. Second, there is a parallel between the experiences of the two groups. While the sealing of the 144,000 indicates passing through turbulent times in the near future, it is explicitly stated that the great multitude is coming from “the great tribulation” (7:14). Third, the temporal and geographical differences indicate a tension, rather than a difference. Bauckham convincingly argues that both descriptions portray a messianic army, but in a different time and role. Whereas in 7:4-8 a military census preceding a holy war is recorded, in 7:9-10 the successful completion of the battle by the victorious army is celebrated. Bauckham notes that the militaristic interpretation is indicated further by the symbolism of 7:9-17: the term ὀχλος can designate also “army,” the white

---

92 Andrew Chester (Messiah and Exaltation: Jewish Messianic and Visionary Traditions and New Testament Christology [WUNT, 207; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007], 175) notes the following differences between the two groups: (1) the 144,000 is specifically numbered, while the great multitude cannot be numbered; (2) the former is symbolically represented in terms of the twelve tribes of Israel, while the later is a multinational crowd; (3) the geographical location of the 144,000 is the earth, while the great multitude is set in the heavenly world; and (4) the 144,000 is portrayed before an eschatological disaster, while the great multitude after it.

93 Charles, Revelation, I, 199-201; Prigent, Apocalypse, 288.

robes appear as the festal garments of the victory celebration (Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 12; 2Macc. 11:8) and the palm branches are a reminder of the celebration of triumph of the Maccabean warriors (1Macc.13:51; cf. T. *Naph.* 5:4). Thus, it is appropriate to hold that the two groups of Rev. 7 represent two distinctive experiences of the people of God: the militant church on earth (7:1-8) and the triumphant church in heaven (7:9-17).

The great multitude is introduced with four characteristics in its identification–description pattern: (1) it is uncountable; (2) it is universally international; (3) it stands before the throne and the Lamb; and (4) the saints who comprise it are wearing white clothes and holding palm branches (7:9-10). Most significant for the purpose of our research is the multitude’s standing in front of the throne and the Lamb (ἐστὶν τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ άρνιον; 7:9). The syntax reveals that θρόνος functions here as a circumlocution for God. The form of the circumlocution is unusual, since God is logically expected to be identified with the well-known throne circumlocution formula as in other places even within the same vision (7:15). However, in the construction the Lamb is juxtaposed with the throne, which indicates equality of status between God and the Lamb. Though the occupation of the throne by the Lamb is not stated in 7:10, the unity of the two figures is clearly emphasized in the text as they are pictured functioning closely together.97

95 Bauckham, *Climax*, 225-26. More controversial is Bauckham’s interpretation of the great multitude as martyrs. This view is also advocated in Johannes Weiss, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes: ein Beitrag zur Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte* (FRLANT, 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1904), 66-67; Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 288; Johann Behm, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD, 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), 46; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (MNTC; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947), 138-43; Caird, *Revelation*, 95; Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation* (SP, 16; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 131. The martyrological interpretation faces several difficulties. The claim of 7:14 which identifies the great multitude as those “who have come out of the great tribulation” yet have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb” does not necessarily imply the idea of martyrdom. White garments should rather be understood as “a polyvalent metaphor for salvation, immortality, victory and purity,” the moral quality of those standing in the presence of God (Aune, *Revelation*, II, 410). Therefore, the emphasis is more on the victory over the satanic forces and faithfulness to Christ in the midst of the eschatological trial.

96 As noted above, the white garments and the palm branches are associated with victory and feast celebration, themes meaningful in a military context of describing God’s holy army. This is far from suggesting that these symbols are capable of conveying only this meaning. For a symbol analysis, see Ulfgard, *Feast and Future*, 81-85, 89-92.

GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

The throne as the center of the heavenly realm is brought into focus again in the vision of the heavenly temple festival. A significant aspect of the great multitude’s characterization in its identification–description pattern is its standing in front of the throne (ἐστώτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου; 7:9). This is the first time in the book that creatures different from celestial beings appear before the throne in a heavenly context. Spatafora interprets the “standing” of the multitude as an allusion to their resurrection. He differentiates between the functions of the prepositions ἐνώπιον and κύκλῳ, as they define differing relations to the heavenly throne in 7:9-17: the standing of the elect in front of (ἐνώπιον) the throne refers to the multitude’s service, while the angels’ standing around (κύκλῳ) the throne suggests more the notion of belonging to the same sphere. This suggestion is, however, based on an artificial distinction, since standing and serving do not necessary exclude each other in God’s presence. On the other hand, ἐνώπιον is used in Revelation not only of the creatures, but also of the seven spirits (1:4; 4:5), the sea of glass (4:6), the golden altar (8:3) and the lampstands (11:4) as merely physical location is indicated. Still, I concur with Spatafora’s observation that the standing of the multitude in front of the heavenly throne includes more than just designating their location in the vision. The expression is of theological significance for the development of the throne motif in the book, since it occurs within the identification–description pattern of God’s people. While on one hand it gives an explicit answer to the question “who is able to stand?” (6:17), more significantly for our research, it introduces the elect primarily in terms of association with the divine throne.

I would like to suggest that a consistent pattern emerges gradually in Revelation which highlights the significance of the throne motif in the book. God is introduced in the visionary part as “the One sitting on the throne” (4:2), the Lamb as located in the midst of the throne (5:6), and the heavenly beings, including the living creatures, the elders and the angelic hosts, as standing in front and around the throne (4:4, 6, 11), whereas the elect’s identity (7:9) is also intimately tied to the heavenly throne. This consistency clearly indicates the identity-defining function of the throne.

---


99 The connection between 7:9 and 6:17 is indicated by the verbal parallel related to the verb Ἰστήμενος.
motif throughout the book, which, concerning the great multitude, is further
highlighted by their depiction as serving God day and night before his
throne in the heavenly temple.

2.3.2. Function of the Throne in the Context of Restored Relationships

The high Christology hinted at in the hymnic acclamation of the
celebrating saints (7:10) is expounded in the explanation of the heavenly
festival vision by one of the elders in 7:15-17. Though the throne motif is
featured throughout the depiction of God’s people in ch. 7, it is particularly
central to the concluding scene. While the term θρόνος appears three times
in this section, more significant is that the entire vision climaxes in
picturing the Lamb at the center of the throne (τῶν ἁρμόνων τὸ ἅνα μέσον τοῦ
θρόνου; 7:17).

The central idea of the scene of 7:15-17 is the fulfilment of the promise
of the ultimate restoration of the divine–human relationship. Both the
human and the divine aspect of the relationship are clearly indicated. On
one hand, the devotion of the elect to the relationship is expressed by their
engaging in an unending priestly service indicated by the use of the
distinctive cultic term λάτρευω. The reference point of their service is the
divine throne, since they are described serving in front of it in the heavenly
temple day and night (7:15; cf. 7:10). On the other hand, the throne is also
central to the expounding of the divine aspect of the relationship. In 7:15-17
both the Father and the Lamb are pictured in distinct texts as occupants of
the heavenly throne and the benefits of their presence for redeemed

---

100 On the basis of structural considerations the scene of 7:1-8 could be related to the
time of the sixth seal, while 7:9-17 portrays a scene occurring after the end of the great
tribulation (Mounce, Revelation, 165; Smalley, Revelation, 198). As an alternative view, it
has been argued primarily on the basis of temporal aspects that the vision should be
understood as an ongoing process that will not be completed until the eschatological
consummation (Charles, Revelation, I, 212-13; Uilfgard, Feast and Future, 100-04; Beale,
Revelation, 443-45). For example, Charles argues this thesis on the basis that οἱ ἐρχόμενοι
in 7:14 retains its temporal force as a present participle, therefore the martyred souls are still
in the process of arriving from the great tribulation. On the other hand, it has been
convincingly argued that in spite of the present participle form οἱ ἐρχόμενοι is to be
translated in the past tense, since it expresses a simultaneous action with ἐπλυναν (“washed”)
and ἐλευθεραν (“made white”), the two main verbs of 7:14 that are both in aorist (Aune,
Revelation, II, 473; cf. Osborne, Revelation, 324). Daniel B. Wallace (Greek Grammar
Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI:
Zondervan, 1996], 625) confirms this translational possibility: “The present participle is
normally contemporaneous in time to the action of the main verb” (cf. BDF §339).

80
GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

humanity are listed only after emphasizing their throne occupation. Thus, in 7:15-16 the promises of spreading God’s tent, the protection from hunger, thirst and scorching heat immediately follow the reference to the throne of the Father within the well-known formula ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου. Similarly, the blessing of the springs of the living water is preceded by the reference to the Lamb at the center of the throne. Thus, both aspects of the restored divine–human relationship meet in the divine throne: the service of the saints is turned towards the throne, which represents its occupants, while the divine blessings are explicitly initiated from the throne. It seems that the centrality of the throne motif in these texts highlights that the sovereign reign of God and the Lamb are the necessary context for the realization of the promises of restoration. The reference to wiping away all tears as the fulfillment of the restoration promise of Isa. 25:8 is an appropriate conclusion for the vision, as it summarizes the effect of the reign of God and the Lamb over the elect in terms of the termination of all curses that were a consequence of the broken divine–human relationships.

3. The Throne in the New Jerusalem (22:1-5)

The vision of the New Jerusalem (21:1-22:5) is traditionally viewed as the ultimate fulfillment of the whole salvation history. After the introductory vision of the coming of New Heaven and New Earth (21:1-8), the New Jerusalem is portrayed in terms of the Holy of Holies (21:9-27) and the new Garden of Eden (22:1-5). The most significant appearance of the throne motif in chs. 21-22 is the double reference in the climactic scene of

---

101 Gieschen, “Lamb,” 236-37. Gieschen views the concluding statement of ch. 7 as a strong indication of the unity of God and the Lamb. He suggests that the impression from the syntax is that the concluding reference to God in the sentence ἐξάλειψεν ὁ θεός πάν χάριν ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν (7:17) encompasses a reference both to “the One sitting on the throne” (7:15) and “the Lamb in the midst of the throne” (7:17). This exegetical alternative should not be discounted, but it lacks the support of compelling evidence.

102 William J. Dumbrell (The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21-22 and the Old Testament [The Moore College Lectures; Homebush West: Lancer Books, 1985]) convincingly argues that Rev. 21-22 is constructed to demonstrate the fulfillment of the major ideas of salvation history. He traces the historical development of the themes of New Jerusalem, new temple, new covenant, new Israel and new creation, pointing out how they climax in the New Jerusalem vision. As Dumbrell demonstrates, the vision appears not only as an appropriate way to finish the book of Revelation, but also as a grandiose conclusion of the entire Bible’s story-line.
the vision (22:1, 3) which provides the clearest statements in the book about the joint occupation of the divine throne on the part of God and the Lamb.

3.1. Contextual and Structural Considerations

The phrase ἔδειξεν μοι (“showed me”) in 22:1 clearly indicates the beginning of a new section (22:1-5), similar to 21:9-10. While in 21:9-17 “the bride. . . the Holy City” is revealed, the attention shifts in 22:1-5 to the regained Eden. There is no unanimity concerning the relation of 22:1-5 to the rest of the vision. Rissi, following Lohmeyer, marks off the section as an independent vision, basing his argument on the structuring formula, the repetitions from ch. 21 and the introduction of the new imagery of Paradise. Similarly, Aune objects that the use of Paradise imagery does not cohere particularly well with the earlier description of the New Jerusalem as an enormous cube. On the other hand, Fekkes questions the conclusion of Rissi and offers an argument in favor of the thematic unity of 21:22-22:5 based on the use of Isa. 60:19 in inclusio fashion in 21:23 and 22:5a. In line with Fekkes, Mathewson observes repetition of a number of significant ideas in 22:1-5 from the preceding section, which indicates continuity according to his interpretation.

The vision of 22:1-5 is best regarded as the conclusion to all of ch. 21. It seems that the purpose of adding fresh imagery lies in generating a sense of climax. The focus is on what stands at the center of the city: the worshipping community’s source of life. Thus, 22:1-5 is a new section contiguous with the previous descriptions, but it also introduces fresh imagery for depicting a new aspect of life in the New Jerusalem. The developments in this section clearly reveal rhetorical and thematic progress. The centrality of the throne motif in 22:1-5 significantly contributes to the climactic tone not only of the vision of chs. 21-22, but the

---

104 Aune, Revelation, III, 1175.
106 Similarly to Fekkes, David Mathewson (A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1-22.5 [JSNTSup, 238; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003], 186) refers to the presence of Isa. 60:19 in both 21:23-26 and 22:5 as a link between the two sections. He notes that the shared background of the sections is the description of the temple in Ezek. 47, the use of the number twelve (21:12; 14; 22:2) and the “street” (21:21; 22:2).
107 Mathewson, New Heaven, 187.
entire book. Moreover, it suggests an inclusio with the opening throne scene (chs. 4-5), which sets the throne in the focus of attention as the central motif in the book of Revelation.

3.2. Background

There is a consensus that the Garden of Eden tradition forms the primary background of 22:1-5. While it is well known that different Jewish and early Christian eschatological conceptions draw on Garden of Eden imagery in the same way as John does, it is often assumed that John’s vision is primarily modeled on Ezekiel’s utilization of the creation narrative in Ezek. 47:1-12. I hold that the combined influence of Genesis’ Garden of Eden tradition and Ezekiel’s utilization of it most appropriately explains the imagery of Rev. 22:1-5.

The influence of Ezekiel’s vision is regularly dealt with in the scholarly literature on the topic; however, the examination of the parallels with the creation-fall narrative of Genesis is very often neglected. To address this need I suggest five parallels in this regard. First, the river of the water of life (ποταμός ὕδατος ζωῆς) alludes to the river flowing out of Eden (Gen. 2:10; ποταμός). Second, the tree of life appears in both contexts (ξύλου ζωῆς in Rev. 22:2; ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς in Gen. 2:9). Third, the curse (κατάθεμα) is

---


109 E.g. Steve Moyise, Old Testament in the Book of Revelation (JSNTSup, 115; Sheffield: JSOT, 1995), 81; Beale, Revelation, 1103.


111 The translation of ξύλων ζωῆς in Rev. 22:2 has attracted some discussion. While the form in 22:2 is singular, a common tendency is to understand it in a collective sense (“trees”) (e.g. Beckwith, Apocalypse, 765; Charles, Revelation, II, 176; Bratcher, Handbook on the Revelation, 312). On the other hand, the translation as a plural has been criticized e.g. in Édouard Delebecque, “Où situer l’Arbre de vie dans la Jérusalem céleste?” Note sur Apocalypse XXII, 2,” RevThom 88 (1988), 124-30.
banished from the New Jerusalem, while in the fall narrative it appears as a consequence of the sin (ἐπικατάφεσις; Gen. 3:14, 17). Fourth, the promise of seeing God’s face reflects the undoing of the fall’s consequence of banishment from the divine presence (Gen. 3:23). Fifth, the elect’s reign (βασιλεύσεως; Rev. 22:5) reflects Adam’s original commission to rule over the created world (ἀρχής; Gen. 1:28). The five suggested allusions do not have equal strength. Whereas the first two are supported by verbal parallels, the other three reflect only thematic correspondence. John does not identify the new creation with the Garden of Eden, but describes the New Jerusalem in the language of Paradise. Such an approach is not new, since in the Old Testament and particularly in the Jewish apocalyptic literature the Garden of Eden imagery and the motif of eschatological temple/city appear as closely related.\footnote{For the comprehensive treatment of the question in the Old Testament, see Terje Stordalen, “Heaven on Earth— Or Not? Jerusalem as Eden in Biblical Literature” in Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2-3) and its Reception History, eds. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg (FAT 2/34; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 28-53. Just as it is stated that the earth shall return to a state of primeval chaos, the New Jerusalem is sometimes linked with Paradise itself, not just with the new creation (2Bar. 4:1-7; 1En. 90:33-36). In the description of the consummation of ages in T. Dan 5:12 Eden and New Jerusalem are set in a parallel: “Saints shall refresh themselves in Eden, the righteous shall rejoice in the New Jerusalem.” It is also said that Paradise was sometimes hidden only to be revealed in the future (2Bar. 59:8; 4 Ezra 7:123; 8:52; 2En. 8:1-6).}

The intertextual relation with Ezek. 47:1-12 is also striking. Vanhoye suggests the following parallels: the river flowing out, the tree(s) on either side of the river, the production of fruit and leaves for healing.\footnote{Albert Vanhoye, “L’utilisation du livre d’Ezéchiel dans l’Apocalypse,” Bib 43 (1962), 436-77(470-71).} On the other hand, numerous discontinuities have been also observed with Ezekiel’s imagery: the river of life; the river flows \textit{from} the throne \textit{through} the city; the tree of life; the tree apparently stands \textit{in} the midst of the street; the tree produces twelve fruits; the healing is for the nations.\footnote{Mathewson, \textit{New Heaven}, 188.}

For the sake of our research it is significant to note the fundamental difference between Revelation’s, Ezekiel’s and Genesis’ designation of the river’s source. In Genesis the river starts from Eden and it is divided into four branches (Gen. 2:10). On the other hand, in Ezekiel it issues from the temple and runs to the Dead Sea (Ezek. 47:8-9). In contrast, in Rev. 22:1-5 the throne of God and the Lamb is pictured as the source of the water of life, since their presence replaces the temple on the New Earth (21:22). This
variety reveals that though John creatively utilized the traditions of Genesis and Ezekiel, his description is distinctive.115

3.3. Interpretation

While Rev. 22:1-5 is a textual unit which utilizes the Garden of Eden imagery, there is a shift of tenses in the description. The present participle verbs of the first two verses (ἐκπορευόμενοι, ποιοῦν and ἀποδίδον) are followed by a series of future verbs in 22:3-5 (ἔσται, λατρεύσοσιν, φωτίσει and βασιλεύσωσιν). Aune explains the change as an indication that the author has shifted from describing his visionary experience to a prophetic scenario expected to take place.116 Nevertheless, the throne appears in both contexts as the joint throne of God and the Lamb, I suggest, with two different theological meanings.

3.3.1. The Throne as the Source of Life

In the concluding vision of the book of Revelation the throne is pictured as the focal point of the new creation. It functions as a life-giving source in 22:1-2 from which wells up the river of the water of life that runs through the city watering the tree of life.117 Thus, the throne is closely related to two life-images: the “water of life” (ὕδωρ ψωμί) and the “tree of life” (ζύλον ψωμί). These images are also juxtaposed in 1QH 8:5-7 and they are found in Hellenistic descriptions of the afterlife.118 Bauckham notes that appearing together they “represent the food and drink of eschatological life” which come from God “who is himself the life of the new creation.”119 Thus, God’s presence mediated through these images of life embodies life in its fullest sense, the “life which is eternal because it is immediately joined to

---

116 Aune, Revelation, III, 1178.
117 Several MSS (1611  2329 pc) suggest τοῦ στόματος (“out of mouth”) instead of τοῦ θρόνου as the source of the water. Beale (Revelation, 1105-06) notes that the στόματος reading fits into John’s style, because ἐκπορεύομαι (“proceed”) occurs five times as part of clauses with ἐκ τοῦ στόματος. Nevertheless, the variant τοῦ θρόνου is preferred, because it is supported by a large amount of good quality external evidence.
118 Ps.-Plato, Axioschus 371c.
119 Bauckham, Theology, 133.
The entire picture conveys the impression of the “fructification of the new cosmos.”

It is stated in 22:1, 3 that the divine throne is occupied jointly by God and the Lamb (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀρνίου). This is the third context in the visionary section of the book in which the Lamb is pictured on the throne and at the same time it is the clearest statement of the shared occupancy. Whereas in 5:6 and 7:17 the Lamb’s and the Father’s occupation of the throne are separately stated within the same contexts, in the concluding vision of the book they are finally pictured as juxtaposed, sitting together as equal occupants of the same divine throne. Hengel calls our attention to the increasing precision of Revelation’s author in defining the communality of the throne throughout the book that reaches complete clarity in 22:1-5. The concluding scene also encapsulates the climactic Christological message of the book, since sharing the throne between God and the Lamb on equal terms implies the notions of divine unity and shared sovereignty.

The vision of the joint throne of God and the Lamb in the eschatological Garden of Eden setting emanates a rhetorical energy which makes it a fitting conclusion of the book’s visionary part. It has been rightly concluded by Deutsch that: “Paradise is, of course, the symbol of primeval completeness, a completeness which follows the defeat of the

---

120 Bauckham, Theology, 141.
121 Beale, Revelation, 1107. Beale (The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God [NSBT, 17; Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004], 313-34) argues that the paradise temple of Rev. 21-22 encompasses the entire geography of the new creation. He views the “rationale for the world-encompassing nature of the paradisal temple . . . in the ancient notion that the Old Testament temple was a microcosmic model of the entire heaven and earth.”
122 Hengel, Studies, 151.
123 The divine unity is further highlighted in chs. 21-22 by the statement that both God and the Lamb form one temple (21:22) and the shared title Ἀλφα καὶ τὸ Ω (21:6; 22:13; cf. 1:8). Also, the employment of a singular possessive pronoun such as applied at the same time both to God and the Lamb serves the same purpose: δούλοι αὐτοῦ (22:3), λατρεύσαντι αὐτῷ (22:3), πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ (22:4) and ὅνομα αὑτοῦ (22:4).
124 Grant Macaskill (“Paradise in the New Testament” in Paradise in Antiquity, eds. Markus Bockmuehl and Guy G. Stroumsa, 64-81[78]) suggests that the river of life is the representation of the Spirit in the throne scene of 22:1-5 and the image functions as “a symbol of the fellowship with the triune God that is mediated by the Holy Spirit.” He concludes that the throne in New Jerusalem is the throne of a triune God. While no strong evidence supports this hypothesis and the background in the Paradise tradition is against such symbolical interpretation, Macaskill’s suggestion deserves a further investigation.
GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

waters of chaos. Thus, it is only fitting that the perfection of a restored or new order be symbolized by the image of Paradise. End-time has become primeval time, assuring communities under crisis of the ultimate victory of life and order.”

The final visionary scene also settles the question of power which is the central issue in the book. It portrays the victorious side of the cosmic conflict, the legitimate occupants of the throne, but at the same time it underscores the fundamental difference between the nature of God’s rule and the rule of the earthly powers. Whereas the beast’s regime is self-fulfilling and life-denying, God’s reign is life giving because it seeks the welfare of his creation.

3.3.2. The Cultic-Governmental Center of the New Creation

In the section of the concluding vision with the series of verbs in the future tense (22:3-5) the throne of God and the Lamb is portrayed as the cultic-governmental centre of the new creation around which all activity revolves. Though Aune holds that the repeated reference to the throne in 22:3 is “somewhat redundant” after 22:1, I would like to suggest that the author’s decision reflects intentionality. Namely, the function of the throne in 22:3-5 is nuanced from its theological meaning in 22:1-2 discussed above. Similar to the throne-room vision in chs. 4-5, the throne appears in 22:3-5 in a blended cultic and political function and it is deliberately freed of all the association of human rule.

The New Jerusalem appears in chs. 21-22 as a city of kingly–priestly character. As the seat of the divine kingdom it houses the throne as its “main quality,” the symbol of the ruling authority of God and the Lamb. The fact that a divine throne is present in the city expresses the idea that the political structure of the new creation is theocracy, a veritable kingdom of God. On the other hand, the New Jerusalem is pictured also as the

---

126 Resseguie, Revelation Unsealed, 73.
127 Aune, Revelation, III, 1179.
128 Mathewson, New Heaven, 204.
129 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Priester für Gott: Studien zum Herrschafts- und Priestermotiv in der Apokalypse (NTAbh, 7; Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), 352.
eschatological Holy of Holies, filled by God’s immediate presence. The need for any temple building ceases, since the divine presence is unrestricted (21:22). The theocentricity, strongly emphasized in Rev. 4-5, is in focus again in the description of the eschatological kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{132} The location of the throne on earth implies the moving of the divine governmental center into a new context. The relocation from heaven to the new earth is made possible because of the permanent removal of any curse from the earth announced in 22:3 (πᾶν κατάθεμαι οὐκ ἔσται, “any curse there shall not be any more”). The exact meaning of κατάθεμαι and the literary relationship of the mentioned phrase to the rest of the vision is an interpretive ambiguity closely related to the function of the throne. It is often assumed that the term refers to a cursed thing.\textsuperscript{133} However, this is unlikely, since that would account for a mere repetition of the thought from 21:27. It is more appropriate to interpret κατάθεμαι as designating the curse itself. As a translation of ζημία, it includes “the sense of the sacred ban placed by Yahweh on enemies of his rule, requiring that they be utterly destroyed.”\textsuperscript{134} The idea is employed in this sense in Zech. 14:11 (οὐκ ἔσται ἀνάθεμα ἐτί; “there will no longer be a curse”), a text which seems to be in the mind of Revelation’s author, since it refers to the restoration of Jerusalem in the eschatological context.\textsuperscript{135} As has been argued above, the reference is to be understood also against Gen. 3:17-19 and in that sense the allusion implies the restoration of the Edenic conditions.

The removing of the curse makes possible the dissolution of all the distance between the occupants of the throne and the created world. The unrestricted approach to the divine throne is closely related to the promise of seeing God’s face (22:4) and reflects the successful undoing of the consequences of a human rebellion in the Garden of Eden.\textsuperscript{136} This scene of

---

\textsuperscript{132} Bauckham, \textit{Theology}, 140.

\textsuperscript{133} E.g. Swete, \textit{Apocalypse}, 296; Beasley-Murray, \textit{Revelation}, 332; Bratcher, \textit{Handbook on the Revelation}, 313.

\textsuperscript{134} Bauckham, \textit{Climax}, 316.

\textsuperscript{135} The terminological difference between κατάθεμαι (Rev. 22:3) and ἀνάθεμα (Zech. 14:11) is not decisive, for both verbs are a legitimate rendering of ζημία. Aune (\textit{Revelation}, III,1179) argues against the same background claiming that κατάθεμαι refers specifically to “the curse of war.” However, this interpretation is too narrow. It is more appropriate to view destruction as the effect of the ban, as Bauckham regards the total destruction of Babylon in Rev. 18:2 “the effect of the ban on her” (Bauckham, \textit{Climax}, 318).

\textsuperscript{136} The idea of seeing God’s face reflects full awareness of the presence and power of God in biblical literature (Job 33:36; Ps. 10:11; 17:15; 3Jn 11). It also appears often as an eschatological blessing (Ps. 84:7; Mt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14; 1Jn 3:2; \textit{Jub.} 1:28; 4Ezra 7:91, 98;
immediate access to the divine throne is in contrast to the limited approach to God in the throne-room vision of chs. 4-5 in which his face cannot be seen by humanity and even the heavenly beings form inner circles (the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders). The explanation for the contrast between the different manifestations of divine sovereignty lies in the issue of presence and absence of sin in the universe. However, in the final throne scene of Revelation the sin is past and the divine sovereignty meets unrestrictedly with human freedom at the throne.

Besides the function of symbolizing the divine ruling presence in the new order, the throne motif also reflects cultic aspects. The community of the redeemed is pictured in 22:1-5 in a dual priestly-royal role. The motif of priesthood surfaces in the use of the cultic term λατρεύω (22:3) and in the idea of access to God’s presence. In this regard, also significant is the expression τὸ δύναμα αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν (“his name will be on their foreheads”; 22:4), which recalls the inscription “Holy to the Lord” engraved on the golden plate of Aaron’s turban (Exod. 28:36-38) pointing to unique status. The royal character of the community merges with the cultic aspects, since the terms βασιλεύω and λατρεύω designate roles simultaneously practiced by the elect. Though the idea of their reigning is not expressed by the throne motif in the final vision of Revelation, the application of βασιλεύω to the elect is to be understood as the climactic fulfilment of the promise in 3:21. The dual function of the elect not only fulfils the priestly-royal promises of the programmatic statement of the exodus (Exod. 19:6), but at the same time it indicates the restoring of the ultimate value given to humanity in the Garden of Eden in Adam’s kingly-priestly role. Dumbrell rightly observes that the new community is the “legatee of all the promises given to national Israel... In these people all the symbolism of the Old Testament which emphasized Israel’s function—covenant, land, temple, priesthood, kingship—has been gathered together.”

---

1 En. 102:8.
137 Bauckham, Theology, 142.
138 The elect’s reign is also anticipated in Dan. 7:18, 27 and Rev. 1:6; 5:10, where the idea of reigning appears without a direct reference to throne(s).
140 Dumbrell, End of the Beginning, 160.
4. Conclusion

In this article three contexts have been investigated in Revelation in which the Lamb appears as sitting on the throne (5:6; 7:17; 22:1, 3). Whereas the idea of the Lamb’s throne occupation is not disputed in 7:17 and 22:1, 3, scholarly opinion is sharply divided over the interpretation of 5:6. Even the proponents of the Lamb’s throne occupation in ch. 5 justify their interpretation almost exclusively on the basis of the wider context of Christ’s enthronement in the book. This article offered a detailed exegetical argument in favor of this position. An answer has been also suggested to the question of the Lamb’s distance from the throne in the scene, generally avoided by the proponents of Christ’s enthronement in ch. 5. I have argued that the solution for the problem of distance lies in interpreting 5:5-6 in terms of John’s identification-description literary technique, which makes room for the possibility of chronological discontinuity between 5:6 and 5:7.

It has also been demonstrated that the Lamb’s throne occupation is never separated from the Father’s, since in all chapters in which the Lamb is on the throne, the Father appears also in the same role. The shared throne occupancy does not indicate a rivalry, but rather a shared authority and a close union that implies high Christology. Thus, the communality of the throne is defined in increasing precision throughout the book as it reaches its climax in the concluding scene of 22:1-5 in which God and the Lamb are clearly juxtaposed in the new creation context.

Two further conclusions emerge on the basis of our investigation which, I suggest, point in the direction of the throne motif’s centrality in Revelation. First, it was demonstrated in my article on God’s throne in Revelation (“Thrones in the Book of Revelation 1”) that the major characters in Rev. 4 are all identified in their identification–description pattern in relation to the throne: God (4:2), the twenty-four elders (4:4) and the living creatures (4:6). This tendency continues in ch. 5, since the Lamb (5:6) and the host of angelic beings (5:11) are introduced similarly in terms of their relation to the throne. Thus, the identification–description literary technique brings the throne into focus as the point of interest and sets a pattern which is, I suggest, followed consistently throughout the book as discussed in regard to the elect in ch. 7. Second, the fact that the visionary part of Revelation starts with a throne scene (4:1-5:14) and also ends with a throne scene (22:1-5) suggests a throne inclusio. Significantly, in both scenes the Lamb appears in a major role. In the first vision he is enthroned, while in the last it is disclosed that he practices his ruling authority on equal
GALLUSZ: THRONES IN REVELATION

terms with the Father. Thus, the book is framed by the throne motif and this *inclusio* points to the legitimacy of the divine rule in the universe.

Laszlo Gallusz is a New Testament Lecturer at the Belgrade Theological Seminary, Serbia. He completed doctoral studies in 2011 at Karoli Gaspar University of the Reformed Church in Budapest, Hungary. His primary research interests are New Testament exegesis and theology, the Book of Revelation, eschatology and the apocalyptic literature. He has published two books and numerous articles on English, Hungarian, and Serbian languages. laszlogallusz@gmail.com
The Everlasting Covenant

Peter M. van Bemmelen
Professor Emeritus
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Andrews University

Introduction
The expression “the everlasting covenant” is a distinctly biblical expression. It occurs sixteen times in the Old Testament and once in the New Testament. The Hebrew phrase is berith olam, which in the Septuagint is translated with some form of the Greek words diathēkē and aiōnios. The word berith is of uncertain derivation; it is generally translated in English with the word covenant. It can refer to an agreement between two human beings as in Gen 21:27. More frequently, however, it refers to a covenant between God and humanity.¹ But, as becomes evident from a careful study of the Scriptures, the deepest meaning of the concept of the everlasting covenant is found in the covenant relationship between the Persons of the Godhead. Although the biblical evidence for this fact does not lie on the surface, it is a purpose of this paper to show that this intra-divine covenant relation is foundational to all divine-human covenant relationships. The primary focus for our study is Scripture. In an appendix we will briefly look at the subject in the writings of Ellen White.

The Everlasting Covenant in the Old Testament
It is widely recognized that the covenant is a very prominent concept in God’s dealings with humanity. Of the more than 285 occurrences of

the word *berith* in the Hebrew Scriptures, the large majority have to do with the covenant relationship between God and His chosen ones. The sixteen occurrences of the expression everlasting covenant all belong to this category.

The first reference to everlasting covenant is in Gen 9:16; “The rainbow shall be in the cloud; and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” This everlasting covenant is initiated by God, as is clear from Genesis 9:8-11. Verse nine is very emphatic, “And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants [margin: seed] after you.” The promise of this covenant is that there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth (vs. 11) and to confirm the certainty of this promise God sets the rainbow in the clouds as a token of the covenant. This covenant pertains to all generations from the time of Noah until the present. Other promises included in this covenant are reminiscent of the original promises given to Adam and Eve but with certain qualifications and restrictions as a consequence of human sin (cf. Gen 8:15-9:7 with Gen 1:3-30).

In context not much is said by God about the foundation of this covenant. It is mentioned earlier that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen 6:8), and from this it may be deduced that the everlasting covenant which God established with Noah and his seed is rooted in the grace of God.

The next three references to an “everlasting covenant” are found in Genesis chapter seventeen. Already in Genesis 15:18-19 we are told that “the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates,’” but it is not until years later that there is an extensive account of the Lord’s covenant with Abraham as recorded in Genesis 17:1-22. The initiative, as in the case of the covenant with Noah, is entirely with God. We read in vss. 1-2 that the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”

---

The word covenant occurs no less than 13 times in chapter 17 of Genesis. In the covenant God makes a number of promises to Abram, whose name is changed to Abraham because God will make him the father of many nations (vss. 4-5). Genesis 17:7-8 seems to express the heart of the covenant promises when God states clearly the scope and purpose of His covenant in these words, “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants (or seed) structures the relationship between Yahweh and His people. Through Abraham and his descendants God intends to bring blessing and salvation to all the nations on earth, in other words to the entire human race. This purpose is stated first to Abraham (Gen 12:3; 22:18), and is repeated to his son, Isaac (Gen 26:4), and to Isaac’s son, Jacob (Gen 28:14). Of special significance is the expression “in your seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed,” which is interpreted by the apostle Paul to refer to one seed, namely Christ (Gal 3:16). However, it is evident from Galatians 3:26-29 that the covenant promise of blessing applies to all who through faith in Christ are counted as seed of Abraham. In Christ they all are one (vs. 28) and are accepted as children of God. In and through Christ the purpose of the everlasting covenant with Abraham is realized.

While the explicit references to God’s covenants with Abraham are found mainly in Genesis chapter 17, the promises made by the Lord throughout Abraham’s life are all included in the covenant. It is, therefore, scripturally sound to say that the promises of Genesis chapters 12 and 22 are covenant promises, though the word covenant does not occur in these chapters.

That God’s promises are basic to the covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants did not mean that the human recipients were to remain passive. God expected a response. An important aspect of this response was circumcision. God said to Abraham, “This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you. Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be
a sign of the covenant between Me and you . . . . My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:10, 11, 13). Whoever was not circumcised had broken the covenant and should be cut off from his people (vs.14). The covenant relationship meant total trust in God and commitment to God. The Lord said to Abraham, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless” (vs.1).

It is evident from the New Testament that circumcision is not required of Christians. This is the clear decision of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:24-29) and is stressed by the apostle Paul in his letters (1 Cor 7:10-19; Gal 5:6; 6:15; Col 3:10-11). What implications does this have in regard to God’s eternal covenant with Abraham and his seed? Does the abolition of circumcision mean that God’s covenant promises to Abraham also have come to an end? To the contrary! The Lord’s covenant with Abraham and the covenant promises pertain to all who have the same faith as Abraham. Jesus, marveling at a Roman centurion’s faith in the authority of Christ’s word, declared that many (who would manifest such faith) “will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 8:11). The Lord clearly included Gentile believers among the recipients of the covenant blessings. This, of course, is fully in harmony with the original promises of God’s everlasting covenant with Abraham that in him and in his seed “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3; 22:18).

Jesus’ words indicate that faith as the human response to the promises of God is crucial to the covenant relationship. Such faith manifests itself in trust in God’s mercy and obedience to God’s will. God testified of Abraham to his son Isaac, “Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Gen 26:5). These words were spoken hundreds of years before God proclaimed His commandments, His statutes, and His laws to Moses and the people of Israel at the time of the Exodus. Though the Book of Genesis does not specify the content of God’s commandments, statutes, and laws, which Abraham obeyed, there is no reason to doubt that this referred primarily to the law of the Ten Commandments and included laws on sacrifice and circumcision.

Several centuries later, when the Israelites, the descendants of the patriarchs, were in bondage in Egypt, the Lord remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and called Moses to lead God’s people
out of Egypt and to bring them to the promised land (Ex 6:2-8). The Lord repeated that the purpose of His covenant with the patriarchs and with the Israelites was to establish a special relationship. “I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Ex 6:7).

At Sinai the Lord reminded the Israelites of the fact that He had indeed delivered them as He had promised and then invited them to accept the covenant relationship. “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:4-6). In other words, God was asking the Israelites to accept the everlasting covenant, which He had established with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The covenant promises and conditions were essentially the same for the Israelites as for their forefathers. The ultimate purpose was also the same.

The fact that God promised that Israel was to be a kingdom of priests signified that He intended to reveal Himself and His salvation through Israel to the other nations of the earth. This salvation was revealed both through prophets who prophesied of a Redeemer to come and through the sanctuary with its priesthood, sacrifices, and sacred feasts. Eventually God added to these the promise made to King David, that from him would come a seed, a son, whose kingdom would be established forever (2 Sam 7:12-16). David recognized the extraordinary greatness of the promise made by God and humbly accepted it, fully trusting in the veracity of God’s words (2 Sam 7:18-29). At the end of his life, David referred to this as an everlasting covenant that the Lord had made with him (2 Sam 23:5). Undoubtedly, God’s covenant with David was understood by David as fully in harmony with the everlasting covenant God had made earlier with the patriarchs and with Israel (1 Chr 16:14-18; Ps 105:7-11). But the realization of this everlasting covenant, confirmed by God to succeeding generations, was still future.

It is in the Book of Psalms that we find intimations that the Son of David, who will rule forever, not only over Israel but over all the earth, is more than merely a human being. In Psalm 2, it speaks of the kings of the earth and the rulers rebelling against the Lord and against His
Anointed, determined to cast off their rule. The Lord responds to this rebellion with the declaration, “Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion” (vs. 6); and the Son declares the decree, “The Lord has said to Me, You are My son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession” (vss. 7-8). Psalm 110 speaks of this same relationship, but here the promised King is referred to as Lord and priest. “The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies;” and again, “The LORD has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (vss. 1-2, 4).

It is not possible to deal here with critical questions that have been raised in regard to these announcements. It is clear, however, that according to the New Testament, the words of Psalm 110:1 are understood by Jesus as referring to Himself (Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42) and are applied to the risen Christ in the rest of the New Testament, either by direct quotation (Acts 2:33-34; Heb 1:13) or by allusion (Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22). The words of Psalm 2 are also quoted as referring to Christ (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:4; 5:5), as is the declaration of Psalm 110:4 (Heb 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21). On the basis of Psalm 110:1, Jesus confronted the Pharisees with the enigmatic question how the Messiah could be both the Son of David and yet be acknowledged by David as Lord. They had no answer to that question, because they did not want to acknowledge that Jesus was more than a mere man, nor that He was the long-expected Messiah.

Further Light on the Everlasting Covenant Through the Prophets

It must be admitted that in the Old Testament the primary focus of the expression the everlasting covenant is the covenant that God makes with His chosen ones: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the people of Israel, and David. It is also clear that the ultimate goal of this covenant is universal in scope; the Lord intends that through Abraham and his seed all nations of the earth will be blessed. The initiative is completely with God, but the covenant relationship requires a response of faith and obedience. That was true for Abraham (Gen 15:6; 26:5) and that was true for all his descendants (Deut 5:26-29). Unfortunately, throughout their
history, the people of Israel many times turned away from God and broke the covenant. But even in times of near general apostasy, the Lord reconfirmed the everlasting covenant. God’s faithfulness to His covenant is a prominent feature in the messages of prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

The prophet Isaiah prophesied in the kingdom of Judah in a time of widespread apostasy. Through His prophet, the Lord strongly rebuked rulers and people for their unfaithfulness, their rebellion, and their hypocritical religion. There were also stern messages for many other nations, including Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and Tyre. The prophet announces that the Lord will bring His judgments upon the earth. In chapter twenty-four of his book, Isaiah announces a universal judgment on the earth and its inhabitants and utters the divine indictment: “The earth also is defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isa 24:5). While this prophecy may have had a primary application for Isaiah’s own time, the universal scope of its language suggests that it has a wider global application. And, if the Lord indicts the inhabitants of the whole world for breaking the everlasting covenant, then it is clear that the everlasting covenant includes the entire human race.

A remarkable feature of Isaiah’s prophecies is the inclusion of the Gentiles in the fulfillment of the covenant promise. Isaiah predicts the fulfillment of the Lord’s everlasting covenant with David (Isa 55:3-4), the everlasting rule of a special Child, a Son, whose name is absolutely unique: “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6). He will govern “upon the throne of David and over His kingdom” yet, “the Gentiles shall seek Him” (Isa 11:10). In the latter part of Isaiah’s prophecies, there are predictions of the Servant of the Lord, who is to bring Jacob back to God and to gather Israel to Him. But that is not enough. The Lord’s purpose is global and includes all nations. “It is too small a thing that you should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6). The promised King and the promised Servant are the same Person, even the promised Seed of the everlasting covenant.

Through later prophets further light was revealed in regard to the everlasting covenant, especially through the prophet Jeremiah. While
Jeremiah witnessed the collapse of the kingdom of Judah and the demise of the house of David, he predicted, like Isaiah, that the covenant promise of the Lord to David would yet be fulfilled. “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will raise to David a branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness” (Jer 23:5-6; repeated in very similar words in Jer 33:14-16).

It was through Jeremiah that the Lord announced His intention to make a new covenant. “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31). While the Lord states that this covenant is not according to the covenant He made with their fathers at the time of the Exodus, the promises and the purpose of the new covenant do not seem to differ from those of the everlasting covenant. “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. . . they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jer 31:33-34).

In fact, in a later prophecy, while Jeremiah was shut up in the court of the king’s prison during the final siege of Jerusalem, the Lord refers to this new covenant as an everlasting covenant. He promises that, after the people of Israel have gone into captivity, He will gather them and bring them back to their place. “They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me” (Jer 32:38-40). In a second message to Jeremiah in prison, the Lord repeats the promise that a Branch of righteousness from David will rule. He then compares His covenant with David with His covenant with the day and the night. Neither of them can be broken (Jer 33:20-21, 25-26).
The Everlasting Covenant in the New Testament

The expression “everlasting covenant” occurs only once in the New Testament (Heb 13:20). It is evident, however, that the everlasting covenant which God established with Abraham and his seed, with the people of Israel, and with king David, finds its fulfillment in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is highly significant that the Gospel of Matthew, the first book of the New Testament begins with these words, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matt1:1). Immediately, the New Testament focuses on Jesus as the seed, promised by God when He established the everlasting covenant with Abraham and later with David.

While the expression “everlasting covenant” occurs only once in the New Testament, the Greek word διαθήκη occurs thirty-three times in the Greek New Testament. This is in harmony with the Septuagint, which translates the Hebrew בְּרִית predominantly with the word διαθήκη. The Vulgate translates the word berith in the Old Testament mostly with two Latin words, foedus and pactum, rarely with the word testamentum. Unfortunately, in its translation of the Greek New Testament, the Vulgate never translates διαθήκη with foedus or pactum (although they are the common Latin words for a covenant or agreement); it only uses testamentum to translate the word διαθήκη.

The translators of the King James Version were influenced by the Latin text of the Vulgate and in a number of places, where it would have been correct to translate the Greek word διαθήκη with the English word covenant, they opted to follow the Vulgate and used the word testament instead. Newer translations have corrected this confusing translation by a more consistent use of the word covenant in translating the word διαθήκη. We will follow in this respect the Revised Standard Version.

In the announcement of the angel Gabriel to Mary that she would conceive and bear a son, who was to be called Jesus, he declared, “He

---


will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). In other words, God’s eternal covenant with David was to be fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of Mary. A similar thought is expressed in the words of Zechariah, the priest, who, moved by the Holy Spirit, prophesied that the Lord God of Israel had raised up a horn of salvation for His people in the house of His servant, David (Luke 1:67-69) “to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham” (Luke 1:72-73). Again God’s eternal covenant promises to David and Abraham are recognized as meeting their fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth.

The Gospels are permeated with evidence that in Jesus Christ the covenant promises are coming to fruition, although the word covenant, besides the one reference in Luke 1:72, is only found in Jesus’ words to his disciples at the last supper. “He took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Matt 26:27-28). Or, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). From this we may conclude that Jesus refers to His death on the cross, when His blood would be poured out on the earth, as the decisive event by which the new covenant would be confirmed.

However, the disciples did not grasp the significance of Christ’s words until after His crucifixion and resurrection. On the evening of the resurrection day Jesus appeared to His disciples in the upper room. He reminded them of the words He had spoken before, that “everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). Next, He showed them from the Scriptures that “the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47). Then they began to understand that the promises of the everlasting covenant, of which Moses, David, and the prophets had written, were fulfilled through their Lord, Jesus the Christ. That understanding would grow under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit who, according to Jesus’ promise, should guide them into all truth (John 16:3).
Throughout the rest of the New Testament there is ample evidence that the apostles believed that the promises of the everlasting covenant, as revealed to patriarchs and prophets, had been and were being fulfilled in the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly intercession of Christ at the right hand of God the Father. Also, in the proclamation of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, first to the Jews and then to all nations. Peter on the day of Pentecost already showed that God’s covenant promise to David had been fulfilled in the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus at the right hand of God (Acts 2:22-36). Soon after, Peter in another address to the people of Israel repeated that “The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus,” and that the predictions that the Christ (the Messiah) should suffer had been fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 3:13-18). Peter then reminded them that they were “the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed’” (Acts 3:25). Peter proclaimed that the promises of the eternal covenant found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

The Everlasting Covenant in the Pauline Writings

The word covenant may not occur very often in Paul’s letters, but the concept is certainly in his thought and ministry. It is evident that the death and resurrection of Christ are central to Paul’s theology. He wrote to the Corinthians, “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). In the same letter Paul reminds his readers of the words of Jesus at the last supper when He gave them the cup, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:25). God has called and enabled him and his fellow workers “to be ministers of a new covenant,” (2 Cor 3:6) to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are ambassadors for Christ, for God through Christ gave them the ministry of reconciliation, namely that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19).

In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul further develops the idea that the covenant which God made with Abraham is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:15-18). According to Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians, the wonderful
news of the gospel is that Gentiles, who believe in Christ, are no longer “strangers to the covenants of promise,” but as Paul assures them, “now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:12,13). From these passages we may deduce that the blood of Christ, which represents the death of Christ for our sins, is the blood of the new covenant of which God has made Paul a minister.

The fullest development of covenant theology in the New Testament is found in the Epistle to the Hebrews. For the purpose of this study we include a discussion of Hebrews under the Pauline writings, without trying to resolve the question of the Pauline authorship of this Epistle. It is evident that no other New Testament book treats the theme of the covenant so fully or provides us with a deeper understanding of Christ’s death and high priestly ministry as fulfilling the promises of the new covenant. Because Jesus Christ lives forever and is holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens, He is the surety and High Priest of a better covenant than the covenant made at Sinai “because it is enacted on better promises” (Heb 7:22-25; 8:6). This better covenant is the new covenant that was announced by the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah (Heb 8:8-12). As High Priest, Christ ministers in the greater and more perfect tabernacle, even the heavenly sanctuary, where He presents “his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12). It is highly significant that the blood of Christ, the blood of the new covenant, is in the same Epistle referred to as “the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20). This shows that the new covenant is identical with the everlasting covenant. While it was already clear from the book of Jeremiah that the promises and purpose of the new covenant were the same as those of the everlasting covenant, it is in Hebrews that we find that it is Christ’s blood and His heavenly intercession as High Priest that brings those promises and that purpose to fulfillment.

It is evident that no other New Testament book deals so fully with the subject of the everlasting covenant. At the same time, there is good reason for investigating whether other books throw more light on the nature of that covenant without explicitly using the expression ‘everlasting covenant.’ Especially passages referring to the significance of the blood of Christ and the realization of God’s purpose through Christ, we may expect to provide further insight into the subject of our study.
More Light from the New Testament

The blood of Christ is the blood of the everlasting covenant. The apostle Peter speaks about that blood. He writes, “You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:18-19). Peter is talking about the blood of the everlasting covenant. Immediately he adds, “He [Christ] was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake” (1 Peter 1:20). The Greek word προεγνωσμένου, in RSV translated as “was destined before,” can be translated as “was chosen before” (NIV) or as “was preordained” (KJV). This suggests that before the foundation of the world, before the human race was created, it was foreordained or destined beforehand that Jesus Christ would shed His blood, would die to redeem human beings from sin and its fatal consequence—death, eternal death. A similar thought is expressed by the apostle Paul in Eph 1:3-8. Here we are told that God the Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to be His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will. This was accomplished because in Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.

These two passages show that the redemption we have through the blood of Christ was foreordained, was and is the outworking of God’s eternal purpose. This means that the everlasting covenant is primarily a covenant between the Father and Christ that Christ would take humanity and shed His blood to redeem humans from sin. According to Ephesians 1:5 this divine purpose is rooted in God’s love. It is not accidental that the announcement of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is preceded earlier in the chapter by a revelation of God’s everlasting love (Jer 31:3). The most famous text in the Bible—John 3:16—seems to reveal the same sequence. “For God so loved the world”—His everlasting love, “that He gave His only Son”—His everlasting covenant; “that whoever believes in Him”—result of the proclamation of the everlasting Gospel; “should not perish but have eternal life”—everlasting redemption through the blood of the everlasting covenant. John 3:16 does not use explicit covenant language, and yet it sums up the essence, the root, and the fruit of the everlasting covenant.
Appendix: Ellen White on the Everlasting Covenant

Ellen White referred quite often to the everlasting covenant. Such references can be found throughout her writings, but it is in the latter part of them that her fuller explanations of the expression “everlasting covenant” are found. In the earlier references, the phrase “everlasting covenant” occurs mostly in Scripture quotations containing that phrase. In the earliest version of her Great Controversy series, the four volumes entitled, *Spiritual Gifts* (1858-1864), there are such quotations from the book of Genesis (9:16 in 3SG 74; 17:7 in 3SG 102; 17:19 in 3SG 103). In the first volume of this series there is an interesting reference to the everlasting covenant in connection with the final deliverance of the saints shortly before Christ’s second coming. “And as God spake the day and hour of Jesus’ coming, and delivered the everlasting covenant to his people, he spake one sentence, and then paused, while the words were rolling through the earth. The Israel of God stood with their eyes fixed upwards, listening to the words as they came from the mouth of JEHOVAH, and rolled through the earth like peals of loudest thunder. It was awfully solemn.” (1SG 205-206).

It is in writings from a later date that Ellen White elaborates on the deep significance and eternal nature of the everlasting covenant. In an article entitled “Christ our Hope” (ST 8-24-1891), she places side by side the expressions “covenant of redemption,” “covenant of grace,” and “everlasting covenant,” and appears to use them as synonyms:

> The terms of this oneness between God and man in the great covenant of redemption were arranged with Christ from all eternity. The covenant of grace was revealed to the patriarchs. The covenant made with Abraham four hundred and thirty years before the law was spoken on Sinai was a covenant confirmed by God in Christ, the very same gospel which is preached to us. (next, Gal 3:8-9 is quoted). The covenant of grace is not a new truth, for it existed in the mind of God from all eternity. This is why it is called the everlasting covenant.

In another article she wrote, “The covenant of mercy was made before the foundation of the world. It has existed from all eternity, and is called the everlasting covenant.” Then she adds this intriguing and very comforting thought, “So surely as there never was a time when God was
not, so surely there never was a moment when it was not the delight of the eternal mind to manifest His grace to humanity” (ST 6-12-1901).

The everlasting covenant was first and foremost a covenant made between the Father and the Son. She describes how the angels, looking upon Christ dying on the cross asked with intense emotion, “Will not the Lord Jehovah save Him?” In response to that question these words were spoken: “The Lord hath sworn, and He will not repent. Father and Son are pledged to fulfill the terms of the everlasting covenant. God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (YI 6-14-1900). She then adds this explanation: “Christ was not alone in making His great sacrifice. It was the fulfillment of the covenant made between Him and His Father before the foundation of the world was laid” (Ibid.).

Peter M. van Bemmelen is emeritus professor of systematic theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary, Andrews University. He received his Th.D. from Andrews University in 1987 and his dissertation, Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sanday and Warfield, was published in 1988 by Andrews University Press. Van Bemmelen has worked as pastor, administrator, and teacher in five different countries. He has taught theology for more than thirty years at Caribbean Union College in Trinidad, Newbold College in England, and since 1993 at Andrews University. He has contributed articles to several periodicals and to symposia, among them Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology (2000), Understanding Scripture an Adventist Approach (2006), Christ, Salvation, and the Eschaton: Essays in Honor of Hans K. LaRondelle (2009), and Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers (2010).

vanbemp@andrews.edu
The Sola Scriptura Principle in the Current Debate

Aleksandar S. Santrac, D.Phil., Ph.D.
Professor of Religion, Philosophy & Ethics
University of the Southern Caribbean, Trinidad, WI
Extraordinary Associate Professor of Dogmatics
North-West University, RSA

Introduction

In this article, I would like to present the contemporary Evangelical position on the sola scriptura principle, in the context of ecumenical dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church and the brief conversation with a current Adventist position. The preliminary working definition of the sola scriptura principle, from the conventional Protestant/Evangelical standpoint, may include:

1. the primary and absolute authority of the Scripture, as originally given, as the final court of appeal for all doctrine and practice;
2. the sufficiency of the Scripture as the final written authority of God;
3. the clearness (perspicuity) of the essential biblical message;
4. the primacy of the Scriptures over all tradition rather than a total rejection of tradition and,
5. the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture without external authority.

---

1 This article is partially a brief excerpt from my Sola Scriptura: Benedict XVI’s Theology of the Word of God, PhD dissertation, North-West University, RSA, 2012.
In the ecumenical dialogue between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics elements (ii), (iv) and (v) become especially pertinent. This is the reason I have chosen to discuss the principle by Scripture alone from the perspective of: (1) the scope of the authority of the Scripture (and tradition) within the particular debate about the nature of the Word of God as a broader expression for God’s revelation, and (2) hermeneutical principles for biblical interpretation that endorse either self-sufficiency of Scripture or a need for a teaching office of the Church.

Dutch theologian Peter van Bemmelen, retired professor of Andrews University and my colleague, who once taught at the University of the Southern Caribbean, brilliantly recognized the general and modern trend of the shift in Evangelical theology regarding the understanding of the authority of Scripture and nature of tradition. He says:

Protestants are moving closer to the Catholic position. Even evangelical scholars have begun to put greater emphasis on the consensus and authority of Christian tradition. It seems that this inevitably must lead to a curtailment of the sola scriptura principle, which for many centuries was held to be a fundamental principle of Protestantism.³

In addition, regarding the hermeneutical principles, a notable evangelical scholar says: “Contemporary evangelical scholars widely differ from hermeneutical emphasis in the writings of Reformers. Evangelical studies converge with non-evangelical (catholic?) studies in many ways.”⁴ Both van Bemmelen and Goldsworthy, therefore, underline the fact of resurgence of the Evangelical understanding of tradition and consequently restrictions of the principle by Scripture alone.

My task in this article is to investigate the feasibleness of these observations. First, the sola scriptura principle was redefined by certain theological modification seven during the early post-reformation and pre-evangelical period. Several examples validate this point. My focus will not be on a specific Christian denomination or tradition but on several representatives who belong to diverse protestant traditions.

³ Peter van Bemmelen, “Revelation and Inspiration” in Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology; ed. George W. Reid (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 52.
Pre-Evangelical Understanding of the Scripture Principle

John Wesley (1703-1791), father of Methodism, believed that the pathway to spiritual truth was threefold: Scripture, reason and experience. The conventional Wesleyan Quadrilateral apparently includes Tradition as well which is indeed the experience of “historical consciousness” of the community of faith. As a continuation of Protestant orthodoxy it seems apparent that Methodism drifted from the original Reformers’ by Scripture only. Reason, experience and Tradition played equal roles in the theological and spiritual search for the ultimate truth of God. In this historical context it seems that this broadening of the Scripture principle brought a new understanding of revelation and the Word of God in general, as well as the endorsement of *prima scriptura* principle. If Scripture is not self-sufficient, or if it is somehow limited in the spiritual and theological understanding of God, a new condition appears in the theological understanding of *revelation*. Scripture ceased to be the only focal point of God’s revelatory activity. This is exactly what neo-orthodox theologians emphasized in their theological structure.

Traditional Reformers’ theology of Scripture is primarily shaped and modified by the twentieth century neo-orthodox views of God’s revelation. Emil Brunner (1889-1966) believed that the idea whereby the Word of God was equated with the words of Scripture goes back to a late Jewish innovation. The Bible is human word *about* God, not God *Himself* as He confronts me in Christ, His transcended Word, argues Brunner. It is not personal but impersonal objective revelation. There is an abyss between human words and God’s Word. The Bible is a human historical word about the divine *personal* Word, and for that reason it participates in the inadequacy and fallibility of all that is human. Christianity, therefore, is

---


8 Ibid., 23.

9 Ibid., 47-49. See Jewett, 216.
not about “the words” but “the Word of God.” Scripture represents “human testimony about God.”

It appears that Brunner believes that the Bible bears record of revelational events. It is not revelation in itself. For neo-orthodoxy revelation is continuously a subjective experience. It is widely accepted that Brunner stressed the non-propositional nature of revelation and the non-identity of God’s Word with the human words of the Bible.

Consequently, Brunner, as a neo-orthodox theologian, claimed that Jesus Christ is Himself the only ultimate revelation of God and personal Word of God, and as such the only true meaning of the Scriptures. For Brunner, The Bible is not the ground of Christian faith, but its means. “I do not believe that Jesus is the Christ because I believe the Bible. Because I believe in Christ, I believe in the Scriptures” says Brunner. In other words, the Bible becomes the Word of God to me in the moment of revelation when I become “contemporaneous” with Christ. It has only instrumental authority, and it is closely related to historical encounter. If Brunner’s position is disapproved, from the perspective of traditional Protestantism, his theology is but a step further in the direction to say that God may reveal Himself apart from and even outside of the Bible. This might be a limitation of scriptural authority and self-sufficiency. Furthermore, Paul King Jewett, in his “Emil Brunner’s Doctrine of Scripture” (1957), asks a crucial question:

Though we may be bound to a given means, God is sovereign. Why should he be bound to means? Since the Bible is not itself God’s Word,

11 Ibid., 155.
12 Ibid., 217-8.
17 Ibid., 220.
18 For further research see John Goldingay, Models for Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 299-313.
but only a means of revelation, who is to say that God could not speak through other means, other books?\textsuperscript{19}

Brunner would have replied that the Bible, so far as it is God’s Word \textit{to us}, is not like other religious books.\textsuperscript{20} Nevertheless, post-Reformational limitation of scriptural authority, as the factual written Word of God, whether by reason, encounter or tradition is more than evident. The concept of the Word of God has been reformulated into a broader principle that encompasses revelation(s) of God “beyond what is merely written” in the Scriptures. In these ecumenical terms, Joseph Ratzinger and the current Pope Benedict XVI says:

It is untenable on the basis of the objective structure of the Word, on account of its own dynamic, which points beyond what is written. It is above all the most profound meaning of the Word that is grasped only when we move beyond what is merely written.\textsuperscript{21}

Apparently, Joseph Ratzinger shared the neo-orthodox position on God’s revelation. Brunner’s project of the encounter theology is, therefore, a valuable ecumenical input about Jesus Christ as the ultimate and personal Word of God that validates the witness of the Scriptures and gives meaning to the proclaimed Word. Ecumenical theologian, \textit{par excellence}, however, is his contemporaneous theological giant, Karl Barth.

Karl Barth (1886-1968), probably the most important Christian thinker of the twentieth century, similarly believed that the Bible was human testimony in which the voice of God could be heard. In as much as the Bible is proclaimed in the Church it becomes the Word of God.\textsuperscript{22} The Word revealed and the Word proclaimed takes logical precedence. However, three forms of the Word of God (the Word as revelation, proclaimed Word and the written Word) should never be regarded in isolation. For Barth,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Jewett, 237.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Brunner, \textit{The Philosophy of Religion}, 154.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Joseph Ratzinger, \textit{Pilgrim Fellowship of the Fathers} (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005), 34.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God, vol 1, part 1} (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1936), 136.
\end{itemize}
Scripture is the witness to the revealed Word or divine revelation. In his own words:

The Bible, further, is not itself and in itself God’s past revelation and is God’s past revelation in the form of attestation. By really attesting revelation the Bible is the Word of God.

Correctly understood, this “attestation” (verification or testimony) is always related to a crucial agent of God’s revelation, personal Word of God through Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, though not revelation, Scripture might be called God’s written Word. “By becoming the Word of God in virtue of the actuality of revelation, the Bible and proclamation are also the Word,” says Barth. Scripture, therefore, becomes the Word of God in revelational encounter within human existence, or as Bruce McCormack nicely put it “the being of the Bible as the Word of God, as Holy Scripture, is a being in becoming.” This is an apparent inspiration of existential philosophy. Barth unequivocally stated:

The Bible is the Word of God only as a means because again and again apart from human decision or initiative God uses the Scriptures to produce the miracle of faith in Jesus Christ.

The witness of the Holy Scripture is in fact witness to Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Luther Barth unequivocally affirms that the Bible is the Word of God as the genuine and supreme criterion of the proclamation and also of dogmatics. In fact, Luther’s paradox of equation/distinction of the

---

24 Idem, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God, vol 1, part 1, 125.
26 Barth, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God, vol 1, part 1, 131; 136.
28 Barth quoted in Grenz & Olson, 71.
29 Barth, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God, vol 1, part 1, 485.
30 Idem, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God, vol 1, part 1, 302.
**SANTRAC: SOLA SCRIPTURA PRINCIPLE**

Word of God/revelation and the Holy Scriptures is partially endorsed.31 Magisterial reformers, of course, did not accept so-called position “Tradition 0” (or solo scriptura) as Radical reformers did, but endorsed the position “Tradition I” which takes into consideration Church fathers and the broader Church tradition.32

Placing Barth’s theology into an active ecumenical dialogue with Roman Catholicism there are a few remarks he made about the Word of God that might be alluring in this context. Barth unequivocally affirmed:

> Holy Scripture is the Word of God to the Church and for the Church. We will not be obedient to the Church but to the Word of God, and therefore in the true sense to the Church.33

In ecumenical terms, Barth, therefore, affirms the paradoxical tension between the authority of the Scriptures (the Word of God) and the authority of the Church. Obedience to the Word of God always comes first because it is the obedience to Christ as the revealed Word of God, but this obedience is, by its virtue of submission to the community that produced Scripture,

---

31 This paradox is described in the following statement: “Hence, *Word and Scripture were neither identified nor separated by Luther despite the demands of human reason*. Faith testifies rather to a self-disclosing God hidden under the “servant rags” of the testimony of believers to God’s mighty acts in history. *Luther does not pretend to understand or explain this mystery of divine revelation*. In the simplicity of faith which gratefully accepts all the precious gifts of God as miracles, Luther characteristically treasures the Scriptures as “the swaddling clothes and manger in which Christ was wrapped and laid (WA 10, 576). The manger is not itself the baby, but one must first go to the manger if the baby is to be found: so too with Holy Scriptures and the Word of God” (William H. Lazareth, “Luther’s ‘Sola Scriptura’: Traditions of the Gospel for Norming Christian Righteousness” In *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, Neuhaus, Richard John, ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989], 60.)

32 Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Canon Press, 2001), 97; 128; 146. Mathison argues: “The reformers did not reject tradition; they rejected one particular concept of tradition in favor of another concept of tradition. The Reformation debate was originally between adherents of two different concepts of tradition. One concept, which had its origins in the first centuries of the Church, defined Scripture as the sole source of revelation and the only final and infallible standard. The other concept of tradition, which was not hinted at until the fourth century and which was not clearly expounded until the late Middle Ages, defined Scripture and tradition as two separate and complementary sources of revelation” (Ibid., 345).

obedience to the Church as well. This makes Barth fully ecumenical. Both
the authority of the Word and the Church are preserved in the dynamic and
dialectic way. Nevertheless, the additional emphasis on the obedience to
the Church (endorsement of tradition) seems to curtail the conventional
Protestant understanding of the sola scriptura principle both in its element
of the authority and hermeneutics.

In the same neo-orthodox terms some of the notable contemporary
theologians like Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–), a German theologian of
revelation as history, emphasized that the Bible cannot be a deposit of
divine revelation. Pannenberg affirmed that Scripture is the sourcebook of
a specific tradition in relation to history of religions. Therefore, the
doctrine of Scripture cannot any longer be the foundation of theological
reflection. The authority of the Scripture is the goal and not the
presupposition of theology.

Pannenberg’s theory of revelation as history is an apparent constraint on a traditional understanding of the sola scriptura principle. Scripture, according to evangelical tradition, is not just the inclusive part of God’s revelation as history but an exclusive deposit and criterion of His special revelation in history.

Even C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), probably the most populist theologian
of the twentieth century, did not see Scripture as God’s Word proper but
rather the vehicle that has been chosen and elevated above itself for this
calling. In the spirit of Barth and Brunner he claims:

> It is Christ himself, not the Bible, who is the true Word of God. The
  Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will
  bring us to Him.

Scripture, thus, has only instrumental authority and represents the means
through which God’s personal Word speaks.

To sum up, even before modern Evangelicalism adhered to the
modification of the Scripture principle, a curtailing of the sola scriptura
principle had become evident. On the basis of the nature of revelation and
the concept of the authority of the Word of God, these theologians claim
that Scripture cannot be equated with the general revelation of the Word of

---

34 Grenz & Olson, 196.
Santrac: Sola Scriptura Principle

God, and that Scripture principle must be understood only in conjunction with an experience of the encounter with God (neo-orthodoxy), or antiquity of church tradition and constructions of human reason (traditional and ecumenical Roman Catholicism). Scripture, however, remains the Word of God not only as a witness, but also as a revelation of God. It seems apparent, therefore, that ecumenical efforts for the unification of Protestant/Evangelical and Catholic positions had started long before modern Evangelicalism.

Contemporary Evangelical Theology of the Scripture Principle

In regard to the evangelical understanding of Scripture, first of all, we must have in mind the fact that evangelical thought underwent considerable evolutionary process. In this development, varieties of evangelical understanding of Scripture emerged.36

In this section, I will try to situate different notable representatives of evangelical Scripture principle in its historical context of the recent period, namely, to present each of them consecutively both in the historical and theological sense of the understanding of the sola scriptura principle. Prior to this task I think it would be appropriate to mention the unified evangelical understanding of the Bible—the so called “high view” of the Scriptures.37

36 That is why in hermeneutics, for example, we have different forms of evangelical hermeneutics: evangelical docetism, evangelical Zionism, evangelical Judaism, evangelical Bultmannism, evangelical Schleiermacherism, evangelical Catholicism, evangelical pluralism, or evangelical pragmatism (Goldsworthy, 167-180).

37 Steve Lemke, in his “Contours of a Constructive Evangelical View of Biblical Authority and Inspiration” brightly summarized this view in the following statements:

1. A high view of biblical inspiration affirms that all Scripture is true.
2. A high view of biblical inspiration presupposes a confessional stance (hermeneutic of affirmation rather than a hermeneutic of suspicion).
3. A high view of biblical inspiration takes authorial interest seriously.
4. A high view of biblical inspiration makes good hermeneutics imperative.
5. A high view of biblical inspiration is careful not to impose modern standards of truth or accuracy which were unknown in that era and alien to the author’s purpose.
6. A high view of biblical inspiration, while acknowledging that there are phenomena in Scripture which appear inconsistent or inaccurate, affirms that these difficulties can be resolved.
7. A high view of biblical inspiration views the Bible as a divine/human book (Steve W. Lemke, “The Inspiration and Authority of the Scripture” In Biblical Hermeneutics: A
The “high-view” proposition of faith represents the foundational dogma of the authority and interpretation of the Bible, and in that sense, a confirmation of the *sola scriptura* principle. Speaking about relationship between the high view of the inspiration of the Bible and the *sola scriptura* principle, the following comment by Fernando Canale is very beneficial:

The issue of revelation and inspiration is assumed but does not define the *sola scriptura* because those who have a high view of Scripture still do not side with the *sola scriptura* and follow tradition. The reverse, however is true, those that do not accept a high view of the origin of Scripture do not hold to *sola scriptura*, which means they accept tradition as a complement to Scripture more readily.\(^{38}\)

Dialoguing in the conservative Evangelical terms about the authority of the Bible as a self-sufficient revelation of God, it seems that Millard Erickson (b. 1932), following Bernard Ramm’s principle of derived authority, correctly highlights:

> God Himself is the ultimate authority in religious matters. He has the right, both by virtue of who he is and what he does, to establish the standard for belief and practice. With respect to major issues he does not exercise authority in a direct fashion, however. Rather, he has delegated that authority by creating a book, the Bible. Because it conveys his message, the Bible carries the same weight God himself would command if he were speaking to us personally.\(^{39}\)

*Sola scriptura*, therefore, has been emphatically expressed on the basis of the origin and authority of the Scriptures. Erickson criticized the Roman Catholic position, on the one hand, which maintains that only through the church can we understand the Bible, and rationalism, on the other hand, which claims that human reason is the means of establishing the meaning and divine origin of the Bible.\(^{40}\) Consequently, “as belief in the sufficiency of biblical authority declines, theologians tend increasingly to rest faith

---

\(^{38}\) Fernando Canale, “Comments on my paper ‘Sola Scriptura in the Current Debate,’” September 22, 2011, University of the Southern Caribbean, Trinidad, WI.  


\(^{40}\) Ibid.
SANTRAC: SOLA SCRIPTURA PRINCIPLE

upon something additional to the Bible." Erickson emphatically states: “Whenever a tradition, whether it is a teaching of ancient origin or of a recent popular leader, comes into conflict with the meaning of the Bible, the tradition must give way to the Scripture.” Apparently, Erickson, at least in theory, confirms the conventional expression of the principle by Scripture alone.

Moderate shift from the traditional evangelical understanding of the sola scriptura principle started with the theological interpretation of one of the “fathers” of evangelicalism, Carl F. H. Henry (1913-2003). In his article, “Divine Revelation and the Bible”, he extensively treats the topic of the relationship between God’s revelation and the Scriptures. He claims:

The term “revelation” and “Scripture” assuredly are not synonymous. No era of Christian thought has made the egregious error of equating them absolutely, although modern opponents of historic Christianity frequently gain sympathy for their low views of the Bible by imputing excessive and obviously objectionable claims to the theological tradition. When Christianity speaks of the Word of God, it designates not only the rhema theou, the spoken and written word of God in the grammatical sense, but also logos theou, the personal Word, or the speaking Logos, the agent in creation and the supreme revelation of God incarnate.

For Henry, the category of revelation is, therefore, broader than the category of the spoken and written words of Scripture, since it covers special historic events that the Bible normatively interprets, including the incarnation. Special revelation is broader than the Bible in an added sense. If revelation is always broader than the Scriptures, the key question would be: What does it include then? James Barr (1924-2006), a more outspoken liberal scholar, articulates:

The Bible is not the product of a few inspired individuals who wrote down a complete text of their book at the beginning, but the product of

42 Idem, Christian Theology, 258.
44 Ibid., 255.
community tradition in which utterances, writings and accounts have been adjusted for new circumstances and added to with new insights plus interpretations of the old.\textsuperscript{45}

The Bible would be, therefore, a product of a long process of formation and revision of traditions.\textsuperscript{46} In ecumenical terms, Barr comes very close to the Roman Catholic position on canonization and the progressive development of the Word of God (as a much broader concept than what is merely written) within the community of faith.

Furthermore, regarding the authority and interpretation of the special revelation, contemporary “postmodern” and ecumenical theologian Clark Pinnock (1937-2010) affirms:

What the coming of the Spirit does mean for our doctrine of revelation is that the norms given in a classical disclosure are dynamic in the sense that they can be dynamically interpreted and freshly applied in ever-changing situations. It means that revelation is not locked in the past as a collection of inflexible rules but is a disclosure that comes alive today.\textsuperscript{47}

For Pinnock, the Bible is not a self-sufficient set of propositions but the means of grace by which God is able to speak to us in new ways.\textsuperscript{48} Pinnock does not speak only about contextualization or Calvin’s accommodation principle. In postmodern hermeneutical terms, he speaks about multiple meanings of written revelation in different circumstances. Regarding the Bible vs. Tradition issue, Scripture is just a part of tradition without its proper sense, says Clark Pinnock.\textsuperscript{49} In ecumenical terms, how different this position is from a Roman Catholic position at the Council of Trent, known as partim/partim which says:

. . . clearly that this (biblical?) truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions which, received by the

\textsuperscript{45} James Barr, Escaping From Fundamentalism (London: SCM Press, 1984), 71; 127.
\textsuperscript{46} Idem, Explorations in Theology 7: The Scope and Authority of the Bible (London, SMC Press, 1980), 58.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 15.
Apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down even unto us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand. 50

Defending the concept of tradition interpreted by some Catholic thinkers, Clark Pinnock says that tradition is just amplification and interpretation of the Word in the community of faith. It has to be respected, but also accepted critically. 51

Donald Bloesch (1928-2010), one of the notable evangelical scholars who write in ecumenical terms expressed his protestant belief in the Scriptures. In terms of Karl Barth, he affirms that only the Word of God is infallible:

Foundation of the Christian faith is not the infallibility of the papal office or even of church tradition, not even the canon of Holy Scripture, but the living God Himself and his Word that is both ever new and ever the same. This Word created both the community of faith and the canon of Holy Scripture, and this Word therefore judges both church and Scripture. 52

In these ecumenical terms, Bloesch, equating the transcendent Word with revelation of God, concludes his interpretation of the Word of God:

By rediscovering the transcendence and dynamism of divine revelation, both Catholics and Protestants might come to a new understanding of the relationship between church tradition and Scripture, and a convergence on this issue might indeed become possible. 53

Bloesch apparently offers the possibility of ecumenical reconciliation of Evangelical principle sola scriptura and the Catholic principle of Tradition, expounded in Dei Verbum at the Vatican II:

51 Pinnock, 151.
53 Ibid.
Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end.\(^{54}\)

Bloesch clearly endorses the concept of revelation proposed at Vatican II as one “divine wellspring” manifested in holy tradition and Holy Scriptures. In its ultimate form and within hermeneutical principles of sensus plenior (deeper sense) offered by Donald Bloesch, the authority of the Scriptures is even validated by the community of faith inspired by the Spirit. Magisterium of the Church as the interpreter of the deposit of faith is indispensable in this process as well. Therefore, on the ground of both the authority of Scripture and its interpretation contemporary Evangelicalism departed from the traditional sola scriptura principle.

The emphasis on the community of faith as the foundational principle of the validation and understanding Scripture becomes essential in the theology of Stanley J. Grenz (1950-2005). He claims that origins of the Scriptures are in the community of faith:

The Scriptures witness to the fact that they are the final written deposit of a trajectory that incorporates a variety of elements, including oral traditions and other source documents. Within the community these took on a life of their own, as it were, forming part of the authoritative materials that the community under the Spirit’s direction interpreted and reapplied to new situations. . . . Our Bible is the product of the community of faith that cradled it. The compiling of Scripture occurred within the context of the community, and the writings represent the self-understanding of the community in which they developed.\(^{55}\)

In ecumenical terms, Grenz positively regards recent developments which reveal that Evangelicals accept the concept of tradition, and that after all, Christianity existed before the Bible. Catholics, on the other side, affirm


\(^{55}\) Stanley J. Grenz, \textit{Theology for the Community of God} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 386.
that the primary function of tradition is to point us back to Scripture. Grenz says that the devaluation of tradition was a reaction to the Council of Trent. The Reformation overreacted with theological conclusion that the sole source of theology has become the Scripture. He also laments over the fact that the Tradition has been lost in Evangelicalism. Quoting Richard Lints, Grenz expands some reasons for that: inductive Bible study, para-church trans-denominational approach (evangelical movement has no cohesive tradition), and a-historical devotional piety. There is a danger that the Bible can be “enslaved” by individualism (reading the text only for ourselves). If we reject historical tradition we deny the apostolic sources and adhere “to the biases of our own situation.” Tradition is a historical deposit—a heritage that provides hermeneutical trajectory in which our own theological discourse can properly transpire. Scripture, heritage and culture, therefore, are a threefold, interrelated single source for theology. They are inseparable. Evangelicalism is firmly grounded in the tradition of the church, concludes Grenz, in clear ecumenical terms.

To sum up Grenz’s contemporary interpretation of the Scripture principle, he explicitly affirmed the *sola scriptura* principle only in the context of authority of the community (church) and tradition. The interpretation of the Bible should be based on the Spirit-based multiple messages found in the Scriptures as an instrument, and given to the church as fresh and new in every age. Obviously, Grenz was one of the “postmodern” evangelical theologians who paved the way for the ecumenical understanding of the Scripture principle, accepted by the Roman Catholicism as well.

In conclusion, Peter van Bemmelen, was quite accurate in his observations. In the existing debate between evangelicalism and Roman

---

58 Ibid., 109.
60 Grenz, “How Do We Know What to Believe?,” 28.
61 Ibid., 33.
Catholicism of the twentieth and twenty-first century, the *sola scriptura* principle has undergone serious transformation from the time of the Reformation. The Scripture principle is always undermined and devalued when we affirm that the Scripture is only a *part* of the transcendent specific revelation of God. If the Scripture is only a part of dynamic Word of God, then where will we be able to find the rest of it? Would it be the Spirit, tradition, community of faith, experience, philosophy, encounters of mystical theology etc? Furthermore, regarding the dynamic relationship between revelation and the Scriptures, the dilemma James Packer (b. 1926) recognized is still valid:

> If the relation between Scripture and revelation is not one of identity, what is it? And how, in detail, are we to distill God’s revelation from the total contents of the Bible?\(^{63}\)

Though we might agree that the revelation of God is a dynamic, multifaceted and mysterious reality, if we do not recognize equality between His revelation and the Word, we do not have the ultimate norm or standard of the validity and truthfulness of the revelation of *one* and *true* God. It seems that ecumenical Scripture principle avoids this important theological predicament. This calls for the further clarification especially within the recent Adventist theology.

**Adventist Perspective on Sola Scriptura**

In perplexing historical and modern (post-modern) experiences of God that do not correspond to the authoritative “it is written” it is always possible to mislay the uniqueness of Adventist theology of revelation and Scripture. Ellen G. White clearly stated:

> The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience (White, *GC*, vii).

> The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the

---

\(^{63}\) James Packer, *God has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 27.
SANTRAC: SOLA SCRIPTURA PRINCIPLE

standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested... (White, GC, vii).

Regarding faith and morals, we have no other specific revelation (tradition) that needs to guide us and bring us to salvation in Christ except Scripture and Scripture only. Apparently, Ellen G. White confirms the traditional position of the Reformers (though even Luther and Calvin were supporting the “Tradition I” position that includes theological insights from Church tradition).

In recent debates on sola scriptura within Adventist theological circles Fernando Canale made probably the most significant contribution. He argues:

Adventists should not continue to assume that Protestant and Evangelical theologies and ministerial practices are compatible with the sola-tota-prima Scriptura principle and with Adventist theology. As a forgotten task, the Biblical Reformation of the Church lies still in the future.⁶⁴

Canale, furthermore, developed his emphasis on the incompatibility between Protestant/Evangelical/Ecumenical and Adventist understanding of the sola scriptura principle in his two-part article The Eclipse of Scripture and the Protestantization of the Adventist Mind.⁶⁵ In his own words his “general purpose in this and the next article is to trace some signposts of the eclipse of Scripture in recent Adventist experience.”⁶⁶ I do not have space here to explore all the different thought-provoking details of the presented historical departure from the Adventist idealistic Canale’s sola-tota-prima Scriptura principle. It seems that his conclusion is the following one:

In our quest to understand the progressive eclipse of Scripture in Adventist thinking and practice, we have discovered that the sola-tota-prima Scriptura principle is the ground on which Christ’s Remnant Church stands or falls. The application of this principle requires that the Church should interpret Scripture from Scriptural presuppositions (Scripture

⁶⁶ Canale, The Eclipse of Scripture, part 1, 137.
interprets itself). Early Adventism stood on the *sola Scriptura* ground because they interpreted the whole of Scripture in the light of the Sanctuary doctrine. This marked the dawn of Scripture in the incipient discovery of an historical understanding of Christian theology, and led Adventists to come out of Protestantism.\(^{67}\)

Canale concludes:

> Few realize that the Evangelical interpretation of the Gospel as the new hermeneutical key (hermeneutical condition of theological method) *stands on tradition* and implies the rejection of the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle thereby eclipsing Scripture with culture and tradition.\(^{68}\)

Uniqueness of Adventist theology and Adventist movement as the Remnant, according to Canale, therefore, lies in the fact that pioneers recognized the hermeneutical key of the Sanctuary and applied it to all the teachings and the writings of the Bible (Scripture interprets Scripture). Unlike Evangelicals, therefore, who developed this hermeneutical key from the tradition of the Reformers (Gospel/Cross), Adventists offered a new insight into the understanding the Bible based on theology and experience of the Sanctuary. According to this view, it seems that Canale supports “Tradition 0” position, namely the position of the Radical reformers who claim that nothing but the Bible is the ground for theological system (*sola scriptura*). Luther and Calvin endorsed the teachings of the Church fathers (tradition) and developed “Tradition 1” position.

The indispensable debate over the role of Ellen White’s writings in relation to Scripture is offered in a brilliant article by Merlin Burt.\(^{69}\) In Adventist theology Ellen White’s writings, therefore, do not represent the additional Word of God, but only points to the existing biblical revelation as the ultimate norm of faith and morals. Therefore, the principle of *sola scriptura* has been preserved.

---

\(^{67}\) Canale, *The Eclipse of Scripture*, part 1, 160-161. For Sanctuary as a hermeneutical key see also part 2, 132.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 161.

\(^{69}\) “Ellen G. White and Sola Scriptura.” Seventh-day Adventist Church and Presbyterian Church USA Conversation Office of the General Assembly PC (USA), Louisville, KY, August 23, 2007. Presented also at Third Interdenominational Theological Symposium, University of the Southern Caribbean, Trinidad, WI, September, 2011.
Nevertheless, in the dialogue with Evangelicals or Roman Catholics the discussion might not end here. Apparently, Canale would deny the theological role of Ellen G. White as a “tradition” of the Church. In a general sense, he calls for the hermeneutical task of interpreting Scripture apart from the tradition of the Adventist community of faith. Therefore, the “Tradition 0” principle is endorsed and supported.\textsuperscript{70} If the testimony of Ellen G. White is not an addition or an additional theological interpretation of the hermeneutical key apart from the Word of God, the question remains: what is then the role of the Spirit of Prophecy? If it is not the Word of God and equal with Scripture, then why shouldn’t it be labeled as “tradition”? Mere visionary repetition of the biblical scenario does not seem the only purpose of Ellen G. White’s writings. According to recent Adventist interpretation she was a prophet “to the Scripture.”\textsuperscript{71} The purpose, what is important for this debate, was to provide the hermeneutical key of the Sanctuary.

It is quite implausible that pioneers of Adventist faith would have recognized this key without the aid of Ellen White’s visions and interpretations of the Bible. Having this in mind, the role of the Spirit of prophecy has to be clearly defined. For example, the New Testament is not just an appendix to the Old Testament but the dynamic and living interpretation of the Old Testament that becomes the Word of God. If Ellen White’s writings are not the prophetic Word of God in this sense, then what are they? Whatever is the answer to this question, which is not the primary purpose of this article, one thing is clear: Adventist theological system is based on the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the hermeneutical key of the Adventist “tradition” and historical-theological consciousness of the church which idealistically should be grounded in Scripture as well. Even if this hermeneutical key is strictly biblical (as revealed by the Spirit) still it remains the part of the prophetic interpretation of the book which cannot interpret itself by its very nature of being a book. It requires the spiritual

\textsuperscript{70} Of course, Tradition 0 position is plausible only if tradition represents philosophical and theological foundations and assumptions opposite to the Bible (Ibid.)

\textsuperscript{71} Merlin Burt, \textit{Ellen G. White and Sola Scriptura}. Seventh-day Adventist Church and Presbyterian Church USA Conversation Office of the General Assembly PC (USA), Louisville, KY, August 23, 2007.
community of faith and the theological role of the teaching office.\textsuperscript{72} It seems that “Tradition 0” or the \textit{sola scriptura} position, as contemporary Evangelicalism already pointed out, is implausible and impossible.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The \textit{sola scriptura} principle should not be undermined by the tradition of the community of faith, if this tradition strives to recognize and endorse the hermeneutical key offered by the Spirit of God in the biblical revelation. Nevertheless, due to extra-biblical foundations of faith and morals, the ecumenical Evangelical theology of the Scripture principle might not be based on the theology of Christ-centered revelation of God. On the other hand, the Adventist theology needs to grow in the understanding of the importance of the role of tradition within its community of faith and its relationship to the written closed canon of the Word of God. Therefore, there is no genuine Scripture principle or the principle \textit{sola scriptura} without the ultimate authority of Christ in the Bible and the community of the Spirit (with its living teaching office), who clearly has to affirm the self-sufficiency of the Word of God, scrutiny of every extra biblical revelation, and practical spiritual hermeneutics (according to the Spirit) that leads us to salvation in Jesus.

\textbf{Aleksandar S. Santrac}, D.Phil., Ph.D. is Professor of Religion, Ethics and Philosophy at the University of the Southern Caribbean, extraordinary associate professor of dogmatics at North-West University, RSA and Tutor for graduate studies, Greenwich School of Theology, UK. alex.santrac@gmail.com and website www.aleksandarsantrac.com

\textsuperscript{72} By \textit{teaching office} I mean the authoritative body of the Church which preserves and upholds the faith and morals revealed in the Holy Scripture. This was an apostolic office in the apostolic church. It is distinguished from the traditional role of the \textit{magisterium} in the Roman Catholic Church which operates in defense of \textit{partim/partim} structure of revelation.
On Being the Remnant

Fernando Canale
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventists claim to be the remnant church of biblical prophecy. Following the historicist method of prophetic interpretation they see themselves as the end time remnant predicted in Revelation 12:17. Specifically, they see their movement meeting the identifying marks of the remnant in the book of Revelation. These marks include commandment keeping (12:17), having the testimony of Jesus (12:17), perseverance (14:12), having the faith of Jesus (14:12), and proclaiming the three angels’ messages (14:6-12). Adventists teach that one should keep all the commandments of God, believe in gift of prophecy manifested through the writings of Ellen White, persevere, have the faith of Jesus (the truths of the Bible that Jesus believed and taught), and preach the three angels’ message of Revelation 14:6-12 that prepares God’s people for the Second Advent.

With the passing of time, however, some Adventists have become more hesitant about their identity as the remnant. Although they are aware of the identifying marks of the remnant, they find it increasingly difficult to understand what makes them the remnant and explain it to other Protestant

---

2 For an explanation of the identifying marks of the remnant see ibid., 140.
3 Ibid., 158.
To them a simple exegetical exposition of the identifying marks of the remnant in Scripture does not suffice. After all, other Protestant Christians interpret these texts differently. Moreover, how could the keeping of the Sabbath, having a manifestation of the gift of prophecy in the writings of Ellen White, and preaching the Gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages make Adventism the only true visible expression of God’s church on the planet? After all, other Protestant Christians keep the commandments, even the seventh-day Sabbath. They also have manifestations of the prophetic gift, persevere in the faith of Christ and preach the Gospel. If Adventists and Evangelicals preach the same Gospel, other Christian denominations also should belong to the visible church as the body of Christ, and therefore, to the remnant.

Protestants generally think the “church” is the spiritual invisible interdenominational body of Christ. From this perspective, they must find the idea that one denomination is the true visible Church of Christ odd, misguided, unbiblical, and perhaps presumptuous. Clearly, a simple declaration that Adventism is the Remnant church because we fit the identifying marks of the Remnant presented in the book of Revelation is insufficient both for church members and for fellow Christians.

In this context we need to ask ourselves some important questions. What does it mean to be the Remnant? How does the Remnant relate to other Christian denominations and the ongoing Ecumenical movement? What is the ground on which the Remnant stands? What transforms a group of Christians into the Biblical Remnant? In other words, we need to look beyond the identifying marks and think about the essence or basic characteristics of the Remnant and the ground on which it stands.

I do not intend to prove that the Seventh-day Adventist church is the remnant church but to show to Adventists and non-Adventists the understanding that undergirds the claim and mission of the remnant. Moreover, I will not address here the biblical grounds for my ecclesiological, theological, and philosophical assumptions. I will only attempt to draw an introductory and incomplete picture of what it means to be the remnant in our times.

---

In Scripture the nature and existence of the Remnant is embedded in the history of salvation and becomes a synonym for the people of God both as Israel and the church. Paul clearly conceived the Christian church as the remnant of Israel (Romans 11:16-26). He sees the emerging Christian church as “grafted,” “nourished,” (v. 17), and “supported” (v. 18) by faith in God’s covenant with Israel. As Israel, the church stands on its faith in God’s word and covenant with Abraham. As branches, both belong to the same cultivated olive tree, and, receive by faith their nourishment from its “holy root” (vv. 16-17). The church is a “cultivated tree” that stems from a “holy root.” The preceding context strongly states that God has not rejected Israel (v. 1) and suggests that the “cultivated tree” is the concrete remnant of Israel, chosen by God’s grace (v. 5) and constituted by the faith.

---


6 In Romans 11:1-2, Paul affirms that God has not rejected Israel whom He foreknew. Foreknowledge takes us back in the history of Salvation to the time before time, that is, the time when God devised the plan of salvation (predestination) on the basis of his foreknowledge (Romans 8:29). For an introduction to the biblical understanding of foreknowledge and predestination, see Fernando Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2005), 104-64. Based on His foreknowledge and predestination God chose (Romans 11:6-11) to create the nation of Israel to be His chosen instrument to bring salvation to all the nations of the earth. Assuming this theological context, in Romans 11:2, “Paul reflects the common OT and Jewish corporate sense of election, according to which God’s choosing of the nation Israel guarantees blessings and benefits (as well as responsibility; note the continuation of Amos 3:2, cited above) to the people as a whole but does not guarantee salvation for every single Israelite (see again the argument of 9:6-29).” Douglas J. Moo, “The Epistle to the Romans,” *The New International Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1996), 674-75.

7 “By placing the verb at the earliest possible position in the question [Romans 11:1], the words ‘God’ and ‘his people’ stand next to each other so as to express the inconceivability of God actually turning his back on his chosen people. Numerous passages in the OT express the idea of an absolutely irrevocable commitment of Yahweh to Israel. The exclamation ‘By no means!’ expresses ‘abhorrence’ at this incredible possibility.” Robert Jewett, Royd David Kotansky and Eldon Jay Epp, *Romans: A Commentary, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, Press, 2006), 653.

8 In Romans 11:2-4, the reference to “[t]he 1 Kings passage, which is one of the seminal ‘remnant’ texts in the OT, suits Paul’s purpose admirably, with its contrast between the apparent hopeless state of Israel and God’s assurance of his continuing care for the people.
response of part of Israel (v.23). In this way, Paul describes the emerging Christian church to which he belongs (v. 1) as the remnant of Israel, God’s tenderly cultivated olive tree. Paul’s view suggests that the eschatological remnant described by John in Revelation 12:17 is not to be understood as an entity different from the church but as the church itself, the historical-spiritual continuation of the church as remnant of Israel.

The Biblical anticipation of the emergence of an end time remnant and the description of its identifying marks alert Christians to its appearance and mission. However, we should not think about the remnant as an entity that will come into existence only at the end time before the second coming of Christ. Instead we should think about the remnant as a biblical designation applied to the historical and spiritual development of God’s people, both Israel and the church, through the history of salvation. The “remnant,” then, is a qualifier describing the historical-spiritual reality of God’s Church throughout the history of redemption. In fact, there is an eschatological remnant because the historical nature of God, His covenant, and the history of salvation require and open up the future for His faithful people, the church.9

through his preservation of a remnant of true believers. It is possible that Paul also finds a parallel between Elijah and himself: each is a key salvation-historical figure, is confronted with the apparent downfall of spiritual Israel, but finds new hope in God’s preservation of a remnant of true believers. For God’s preservation of a remnant is not only evidence of his present faithfulness to Israel; it is also a pledge of hope for the future of the people.” Moo, “The Epistle to the Romans,” 676-77. Paul “makes the comparison between Elijah’s situation and his own explicit. As God had ‘left for himself’ a solid body of faithful worshipers in Elijah’s time, so ‘at the present time,’ the time of eschatological fulfillment, he has brought into existence a ‘remnant.’ No more than the defection of Israelites to the worship of Baal in Elijah’s time could the widespread Jewish indifference to the fulfillment of God’s promises in Paul’s day invalidate God’s faithfulness to Israel and thereby cause his word to ‘fail.’” (cf. 9:6a). Ibid., 677. The “remnant motif” was already a technical and dynamic historical category biblical writers used to refer to Israel’s development and eschatology. On the use of the historical pattern of the remnant in the Old Testament, see Gerhard F. Hasel, The Remnant: History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1980). See also, Li, “The Remnant in the Old Testament,” 23-41.

9 “In the Hebrew Bible the remnant motif was from the start incorporated into salvation history and became gradually employed to express the future expectations of the Yahwistic faith. The remnant and the possibility of a future are so deeply connected that where there is no ‘remnant,’ there is no future.” Li, “The Remnant in the Old Testament,” 24.
The Essence of the Remnant

Due to its historical nature, the people of God always exists as a remnant, that is, as the rest, residue, or last ones to join the long history of believers who no longer exist. Additionally, because God’s people’s commitment to God is always under attack by the forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:16-17) it can survive only by holding fast through faith to God’s word and covenantal promises (Ephesians 6:13-19). These facts help us to understand why in Scripture the word remnant not only names the eschatological church but also and mainly describes the essence of the Church as historical and faithful to God’s revelation in Scripture.

Within the broad context of the history of salvation, covenant, and divine election, two essential characteristics of the people of God (Israel, church, and eschatological remnant) are faithfulness\(^\text{10}\) and mission. The remnant church was, is, and will be the community faithful to God’s call.\(^\text{11}\) The existence of the church depends and stands on her faithfulness to God’s word (Psalm 78:8; Acts 11:21-23; 16:5).\(^\text{12}\) Without faith in God’s word in Scripture, the church becomes a human organization.

The origin of the Christian church took place because the God of the Old Testament fulfilled his covenantal promise to the world (Genesis 3:15) and to Abraham (Genesis 12:3) by revealing his being and character in

\(^{10}\) “The fundamental characteristic is a living faith. According to the NT, the church is a society not of thinkers or workers, but of believers. ‘Believers,’ or ‘those who believed,’ is constantly used as a synonym for the members of the church (cf. Acts 4:4, 32; 5:14; 15:5; 18:27; 1 Thess. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:12). Baptism, which from the start was the entrance rite into the church and a sign of belonging to the body of Christ, was essentially a rite of faith and of confession (Acts 2:44; 8:12; 16:31–33; 18:8). This church-building faith was no mere act of intellectual assent, but the symbol of an intimate union between the believer and Christ, which resulted in a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).” Dederen, “The Church,” 561.

\(^{11}\) “In Christian parlance ekklesia denoted the “congregation” or community of those called by God, out of the world, to be His people. Theirs was the society of those who were free but always conscious that their freedom sprang from obedience to their Lord…God in Christ is the authority that has constituted the ekklesia. It belongs to God because He has called it into being, dwells within it, and rules over it.” Ibid., 542.

\(^{12}\) “There is an historical pattern in the Old Testament motif of the faithful remnant. We find that after the Lord chooses a faithful remnant out of a larger group, this faithful remnant later tends to depart from the Lord to such an extent that the Lord chooses a new faithful remnant from that group, this initiating the cycle again.” Li, “The Remnant in the Old Testament,” 31.
Jesus Christ’s life and death on the cross (Matthew 16:16-18; John 14:8-10). More precisely, the Christian church emerged as a faithful remnant of God’s people who by faith embraced God’s revelation in the Old Testament, and Christ’s revelation in the New Testament (Hebrews 1:1-2). Thus, the Church is the historical-spiritual community that gathers around, coheres in, stands on, and testifies about Jesus. The Church exists because of her faith in Christ and her witnessing Christ to the world. In the most real sense the Church exists in-Christ. Her existence is spiritual. It takes place as a historical communal relationship of faith in His Word and His mission as revealed through the history of salvation and recorded in Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In the history of salvation, then, the eschatological remnant is not something new but rather is the continuation of the Christian church as remnant of Israel. Her nature and existence revolves around her spiritual faithfulness to Christ’s Word and mission. Consequently, in order to move beyond only the claim of being the eschatological remnant on the basis of its identifying marks to actually being the remnant God will use with power in the end time, Adventists should examine their faithfulness to Christ’s Word and His mission within the general context of Christian Church history.

**The Emergence of Tradition**

Soon after the apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, proclaimed the revelation of God in Jesus Christ among them in the New Testament writings, Christians began to use them not only as rule of faith but also as spiritual food. Together with the revelations God gave previously during Old Testament times they became the theological and spiritual ground for the Christian Church.

The process of receiving, appropriating, and spiritually internalizing God’s word, however, always involves interpretation. Due to many and complex historical reasons early in her history the Christian church progressively adapted her teachings and liturgical forms to Greek

---

13 For an introduction to the “In-Christ” motif in the writings of Paul see Ivan T. Blazen, “In Christ: Union with Him as Savior and Lord in Paul,” in *Biblical Research Institute Release - 2*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005).
ONTHE REMNANT

ontological categories. Christian leaders facing the world of culture, science, and reason, decided, for various reasons, not to reject the leading scientific culture of their days: Greek philosophy in its Neoplatonic format. Historians of Christian theology label this process the “hellenization” or alternatively the “de-Judaization” of Christianity. By adapting to the cultural trends of their days early Christians progressively and radically replaced the macro hermeneutical presuppositions New Testament writers took from the Old Testament canon. I have no doubts that in so doing Christians thought they were faithful to God and desired to advance His mission on earth. Unfortunately, they progressively neglected Isaiah’s injunction to use Scriptural teachings as interpretive principles to evaluate new spiritual events (Isaiah 8:20). Moreover, they also failed to follow Christ’s hermeneutical practice when He used Old Testament teachings and categories as interpretive principles necessary for a proper explanation of His salvific ministry and death on the cross to his disciples (Luke 24:27).

The replacement of Old Testament macro interpretive principles with interpretative principles derived from Greek philosophical categories led to the development, consolidation and dominance of Christian tradition in all levels of Christianity, such as Scriptural interpretation, theological constructions, ministerial practices, liturgical forms, and missionary strategies. As this situation ruled unopposed for over a thousand years, a systematic mingling of philosophical views about God, human nature, reason, and the world, permeated all levels of Christian thought, life, and action, becoming ingrained in Christianity itself. For spiritual purposes Scripture was replaced by the sacramental system of liturgy and worship.

14 Adolph Harnack describes the Christian Church of the middle of the third century as “a new commonwealth, politically formed and equipped with fixed forms of all kinds. We recognize in these forms few Jewish, but many Greco-Roman features, and finally we perceive also in the doctrine of faith on which this commonwealth is based, the philosophic spirit of the Greeks.” As consequence, “The Christian Church and its doctrine were developed within the Roman world and Greek culture in opposition to the Jewish Church.” Adolf Harnack, History of Dogma, trans. Neil Buchanan, 7 Volumes vols. (New York: Dover, 1961), 1: 45-46.


Although Scripture was never absent from Christian tradition the new philosophical hermeneutics decisively distorted its teachings and weakened its power. Eventually, it contributed to the church’s self understanding as being the replacement of Israel rather than as being its remnant.

The Emergence of Scripture and the Anonymous Remnant

The “synthesis” between Greek macro hermeneutical interpretive principles and biblical data on which Christian tradition stands sheltered a fateful conflict that sooner or later was bound to create theological and spiritual inconsistencies along the way. For example, Luther noticed a glaring irregularity: clearly, the system of meritorious works did not fit experience or the clear teachings of Scripture. With a God-given conviction and staunch determination he turned to Scripture to fight against tradition and reform the church. Scripture was emerging from tradition.

With the passing of time Luther’s and Calvin’s “turn to Scripture” intensified and disseminated throughout Europe and America. In the process, mainline and radical reformations progressively rediscovered and integrated forgotten biblical teachings into the fabric of Christianity. Notably, English Puritan theologians during the seventeenth century and John Wesley during the eighteenth century used Scripture to challenge tradition. Simultaneously, the discovery of further biblical teachings produced an ever-increasing doctrinal and theological fragmentation of Protestant Christianity.

In fact, the “turn to Scripture” by mainline and radical reformations did not challenge but assumed and used the interpretative principles Christian tradition had drawn from Greek philosophical ideas. This little noticed fact buried deep in the history of Protestant and Evangelical experiences may explain why the emergence of Scripture that followed in the wake of the Reformation did not produce a unified alternative to Roman Catholicism but rather an ever increasing fragmentation of Christianity in doctrines, practices, and denominations that still goes on unabated.

Nevertheless, from an historical perspective the Protestant “turn to Scripture” involves the progressive emergence of an incipient “anonymous” remnant. It is a remnant because it springs into existence from faithfulness to Scripture rather than tradition and philosophy. It is anonymous, because lacking the features or marks that characterize and identify the remnant it cannot be recognized as such. Finally, it is incipient because it exists in an embryonic stage of development. Consequently, the anonymous remnant
is a provisional stage in the process of the restoration of the Church back to its biblical nature as the remnant of Israel.

Perhaps, the analysis of change in scientific thought and practices advanced by philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn may help us to better understand the unstable existence of the anonymous incipient remnant that emerged as a result of the Reformers’ “turn to Scripture.” Kuhn argues that “normal” science produces discoveries that become the foundation guiding the search and interpretation of new data and discoveries. With the passing of time, accumulation, and refinement of knowledge produces a body of information forming a “tradition of normal science.” Normal science, in turn, becomes the interpretative paradigm guiding scientific interpretation, knowledge, and, practice. Yet, when the paradigm cannot interpret or assimilate new data or discoveries anomalies arise that lead to crisis in scientific interpretation and to a period of “extraordinary science.” When this happens the interpretive paradigm is challenged, studied, and eventually replaced by a new one, giving rise to a “scientific revolution.” We should keep in mind that the new interpretive paradigm is not the articulation or extension of the old one. It is rather “the reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field’s most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications.”

A group of Christian theologians led by Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng recognized the value of Kuhn’s analysis of scientific revolutions and applied it to the field of Christian theology with the purpose of interpreting Christian traditions and advancing the development of ecumenical theology and practice. Clearly, Küng and his group

---

19 Ibid., 42.
20 Ibid., 52-53.
21 Ibid., 52.
22 Ibid., 85.
understood that the questions facing Christianity in the third Christian millennium were about hermeneutical macro interpretive principles. However, their theological commitment to tradition did not allow them to properly recognize the true nature of the “anomalies” that the emergence of Scripture brought about by Luther and the Protestant Reformation introduced into the fabric of Christianity. Obviously, they did not understand either the true nature of the theological crisis and hermeneutical revolution facing Christianity.

Let us now apply Kuhn’s description of macro hermeneutical change in the thinking patterns of the scientific community to the thinking and practice of the Christian church. This will help us to examine the way in which the Protestant “turn” to Scripture yielded the emergence of the anonymous, incipient, and unstable remnant.

Because faithfulness to Scripture and its mission belong to the essence of the remnant we will focus our brief analysis on theological change, that is to say, change in the understanding of the doctrines of Christianity. An attentive reading to the history of Christian doctrines reveals that Christianity soon developed a theological tradition that consolidated throughout the Middle Ages. Guided by Neoplatonic and Aristotelian hermeneutical principles, Augustine and Aquinas respectively are perhaps the most distinguished systematizers of Christian tradition. Up to the present time, this tradition corresponds to Kuhn’s “normal science.” Let us call it then, “normal theology.”

According to Kuhn, progressively anomalies arise. Anomalies come from new data, teachings, or events that do not “fit” with the system of normal science. As the system of normal science solves new challenges, it becomes stronger and more precise. Yet, eventually some anomalies that do not fit the system arise. To solve them creative thinking is needed. Here, “creative thinking” means “thinking outside the box” (the box being tradition). As mentioned above, Martin Luther noticed a glaring inconsistency between Paul’s clear teachings on justification by faith and the traditional teachings of the church on meritorious works and assurance of salvation. 

---


24 ———, *Theology for the Third Millennium*: xii.

25 Ibid., 47-63, specially page 59.
of salvation through plenary papal indulgences. In his attempt to solve these anomalies, however, Luther was still thinking inside the box of normal theology and using the sources he found in that box: tradition and Scripture. We all know that the system of normal theology did not like the “fixing” Luther advanced with his “justification by faith alone” proposal and placed him “outside” its community.

As Luther’s insight caught the imagination of his time, anomalies rising from Scripture challenging the system of normal theology multiplied. In time, this trend gave rise to a period of theological crisis stemming from the Protestant “turn to Scripture.” However, after almost five centuries of “theological crisis” and fragmentation no theological revolution has taken place. A period of “extraordinary science” Kuhn’s analysis predicts has not yet been replicated with a period of “extraordinary theology.” According to Kuhn’s analysis of scientific revolutions a period of “extraordinary theology” should replace the old hermeneutical paradigm, where normal theology drew from Greek philosophical ideas, with a new one. Clearly, a theological revolution commensurable to what Kuhn describes as a scientific revolution has not happened yet. Why not?

A main reason for the absence of extraordinary theology and the onset of a theological revolution is that the Protestant “turn to Scripture” never challenged the hermeneutical principles of normal theology. Although with the passing of time the Protestant Reformation led to the rediscovery of a veritable wealth of Scriptural teachings and practices, it never challenged tradition’s philosophical interpretation of the foundational macro hermeneutical principles. Hence, the much-heralded Reformation principle of scripture alone (“sola Scriptura”) never actually challenged the interpretive role of tradition based on Greek philosophical ideas on the reality of God, human nature, the world, the whole of reality (ontology and metaphysics), and reason (epistemology). More precisely, main line Reformers used Scripture to challenge doctrinal points in tradition but never the hermeneutical and methodological basis on which Christian tradition stands. On the contrary, tradition is the explicitly recognized source of Biblical hermeneutics. Additionally, even when the Radical Reformers like the Anabaptists departed from the mainline Reformation by

---

explicitly applying the “sola Scriptura” principle in a radical way and thereby further leaving tradition behind, they never challenged the macro hermeneutical principles of normal theology either.

Will the Protestant “turn to Scripture” ever produce a period of extraordinary theology challenging and replacing the macro hermeneutical paradigm of normal theology?

In conclusion, because the church stands on Christ as revealed in Scriptures the Protestant turn to Scripture initiated the emergence from tradition of the Biblical remnant albeit in a “stealth” or “anonymous” provisory way. The anonymous remnant was provisory because the Protestant commitment to Scripture did not challenge the ontological, metaphysical, and hermeneutical presuppositions on which Christian traditions had built their theological and ecclesiological systems. Because Protestantism still shares these basic guiding assumptions with Roman Catholicism, its turn to Scripture is partial and produces systemic and theological inconsistencies that unavoidably generated an ever-increasing ecclesiological fragmentation. Due to this situation Protestantism became unable to fully emerge as the Biblical remnant church. Instead it became shaky and in need of theological answers and ecclesiological stability. With the passing of time this search for answers will cause the anonymous remnant to pave the way to the rise on one side of the emerging remnant, and, on the other side, of the emerging church.

**The Emerging Eschatological Remnant**

During the Eighteenth century the anonymous remnant intensified and expanded throughout the American frontier beyond the restraints imposed by tradition and organized established denominations. In this environment the Protestant turn to Scripture generated two revivals of practical piety among common folks and shaped the culture of the times.27 During this period growing grassroots dissatisfaction with doctrinal inconsistencies generated by the Protestant Reformation motivated serious Bible students to search for a way to overcome tradition and ecclesiological fragmentation through a deeper and more inclusive understanding of Scriptures. Unlike

---

the Magisterial Reformers (sixteenth century) and the English Puritans (seventeenth century) this search did not originate with the professional clergy and theologians but with the laity. It grew from the basic and naïve conviction that Scripture can interpret itself. This radical view implicitly departed from the hermeneutical perspective of the Magisterial Reformers that set the patterns, limits, and hermeneutical principles of what we know today as Protestant or Evangelical theology. The refusal to use tradition as a source of theology and a hermeneutical guide could be traced back to the Radical Reformers’ call for a restoration of Biblical, mostly New Testament, Christianity. In eighteenth century America various restorationist groups embraced this approach to Christian theology in an attempt to overcome what had gone wrong with the Catholic Church and historical churches of the Reformation.

In this environment and out of the second American revival (1800-1830) interest in the study of the long forgotten apocalyptic prophecies of the Old and New Testaments intensified, and, in


29 According to Steven L. Ware “restorationism may be viewed primarily as an interpretive framework used to varying degrees by nearly every Protestant group.” He goes on to explain: “Stated bluntly, there was a widespread but not always consciously articulated perception among early radical holiness leaders (as well as among many other Protestants) that something went very wrong early in the history of the church. Following the apostolic era of the first century, during which time the church was marked by the purity of apostolic teaching, the exemplary character of sanctified lives, and the power of the Holy Spirit’s demonstrations among them, the church slowly sank into corruption. Over the next few centuries pure apostolic Christianity was corrupted through the development of ecclesiastical hierarchies, the addition of pomp and splendor to worship, and the wide acceptance of Platonic philosophy. The result was a medieval Roman Catholicism which was marked by moral laxity, persecution of non-conformists, and continual dissension with kings and emperors in a struggle for political power. The church became a religious system in which, as viewed by restorationists, much of the truth of Christianity is ‘buried beneath the rubbish,’ buried so deep that it has been ‘scarce seen or heard of for a thousand years.’” Steven L. Ware, “Restoring the New Testament Church: Varieties of Restorationism in the Radical Holiness Movement of the Late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries,” Pneuma; The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies 21, no. 2 (1999): 235.

30 Ibid., 236.

31 McGrath, Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution–A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First: 164.
consequence, attention shifted from the first to the second coming of Christ. By a careful application of the well-established historicist method of prophetic interpretation to the study of Daniel chapter 8 and 9 a veritable ecumenical movement emerged mostly out of laity belonging to various protestant denominations announcing the visible and historical coming of Christ on October 22, 1844. Out of the Great Disappointment that crushed the sincere expectations of the “Advent Movement” a very small number of believers sought answers in Scriptures for their predicament. When on October 23 they turned their eyes to the reality of the Heavenly Sanctuary where Christ since His resurrection and ascension had been ministering salvation to human beings they found the explanation for their disappointment. Christ was not coming to earth but entering in the most Holy place in the Heavenly Sanctuary. Eventually, this discovery gave rise the Seventh-day Adventist church and its claim of being the remnant church of biblical prophecy.

However, in turning their attention to Christ in the heavenly sanctuary the group of evangelical believers that later became the Seventh-day Adventist church did not discover a new doctrine or information unknown to Christians. Rather, to the contrary, Protestant theologians had also recognized the New Testament belief that Christ, since his resurrection and ascension, sat at the right hand of His heavenly Father in the heavenly sanctuary, where he has been ministering continuously for our salvation.33 This being the case, then, one may ask what thus far neglected theological truth, that may sustain the claim of being the remnant church did this group of untrained young evangelical believers discover in Scripture when they revisited the interpretation of Daniel 8:14? The answer to this question is probably none. Adventist historians have long recognized that Adventists’ doctrines were known as such in earlier periods of church history and notably during the emergence of the anonymous remnant.34

---

32 Ware, “Restoring the New Testament Church: Varieties of Restorationism in the Radical Holiness Movement of the Late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries,” 237.
However, with the passing of years, new generations of Adventists concluded that early pioneers discovered the biblical doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment prior to Christ’s second coming. If this is the case, are these “distinctive” doctrines enough to sustain the claim of being the remnant. Many Adventists and non-Adventists correctly wonder whether the “discovery” of the sanctuary doctrine is enough to sustain the claim of being the remnant church, the only true visible church on earth at the end time. For them, having a few “distinctive” doctrines is not enough to back such a far-reaching claim. Thus, we need to give a closer look to the theological and ecclesiological experience of the early Adventists pioneers.

During the first six formative years that followed the Great Disappointment, early Adventist pioneers continued their search for Biblical truths beyond the interpretation of prophecies and the doctrine of the sanctuary. Their genius was not to discover these truths, most of which had been already recognized and accepted by many in the anonymous remnant. Instead, they made a small step that was to generate a gigantic theological revolution in Christianity: They used their newfound insights into the way in which prophecy and the sanctuary interrelate in Scripture as the hermeneutical presuppositions needed to understand the entire Bible, the whole range of Christian doctrines, and the mission of the Church. Perhaps Ellen White summarized this epoch changing experience best when she explained, “The subject of the sanctuary was the key which 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."

Kuhn’s analysis of “scientific revolutions” we are using to probe into the development of the Christian church may help us to understand the magnitude of what Adventist pioneers accomplished in a few years by pressing on the search for truth guided by the *sola* and *tota Scriptura* principles. In their determination to understand prophecy, the Protestant “turn to Scripture” had finally advanced from the initial phase, when new discoveries in biblical research progressively generate anomalies to the decisive time of “extraordinary theology” when the old paradigm is replaced by a new one. In other words, when Adventist pioneers used their understanding of apocalyptic prophecies and the Sanctuary as an interpretive paradigm they effectively replaced the interpretive paradigm Christian tradition had drawn from extra Biblical philosophical ideas. This paradigmatic epochal shift in the hermeneutical paradigm made possible the emerging of the visible remnant from Scripture. The remnant visible Church had finally arrived to challenge the theological and ecclesiological status quo. The Protestant “turn to Scripture” embraced by the “anonymous remnant” eventually had given way to the “biblical hermeneutical turn” embraced by the emerging incipient visible Remnant.

Would the anonymous remnant embrace the “biblical hermeneutical turn” and join forces with the emerging remnant in the work of “extraordinary theology” it entails? Alternatively, would the anonymous remnant fully embrace the hermeneutical principles of Christian tradition that it never challenged or gave up? Recent developments indicate that a substantial portion of the anonymous remnant is becoming the emerging Church. This “church” emerges from tradition. By embracing tradition evangelical leaders attempt to overcome the theological contradictions and ministerial anomalies by dividing the already fragmented protestant tradition. By failing to apply the “turn to Scripture” to the interpretation of the hermeneutical principles, and fully embracing the non-biblical interpretation of the ontological, metaphysical, and hermeneutical principles of “early” Christian tradition the emerging Church is returning

---

to Rome intentionally. Nonetheless, at this time not all the anonymous remnant is embracing the emerging Church movement. A large sector remains wholly committed to the “turn to Scripture” and yet they still implicitly and inadvertently assume the hermeneutical paradigm of Christian tradition. Consequently, this sector remains unstable because it is unable to overcome the contradiction between their theological data and hermeneutical presuppositions. Eventually, as its members may join the emerging church or the emerging remnant, the anonymous remnant may vanish.

Even so, the biblical hermeneutical turn of early Adventist pioneers, revolutionary as it was and is, only signals the birth of the remnant, not its fully-developed existence. The history of Adventism so far makes this development possible, not actual. The Biblical remnant, then, exists not as a finished reality but as the ongoing process of becoming the church Christ gathers around Him by His presence and words. In its essence the remnant church exists and grows in its becoming and being as Christ generates its message and mission.

To properly understand the meaning of being the emerging incipient visible Biblical remnant church in the context of the end times of the history of salvation, we need to consider briefly its message and mission. However, before moving in that direction we need to highlight the manner in which the “biblical hermeneutical turn” embraced and advanced by early Adventist pioneers relates to the essence of the Christian remnant church.

**Christ, Hermeneutics, and the Remnant**

How does the hermeneutical turn from tradition to Scripture relate to ecclesiology? Concretely, in what way does the hermeneutics of Christian tradition (Catholic and Protestant) and the hermeneutics of Adventist pioneers shape their understanding of the Christian church?

One indirect way to see how the hermeneutical turn from tradition to Scripture relates to ecclesiology is to consider the influence of hermeneutical presuppositions on the doctrinal system of the church. In this approach, hermeneutics relates to ecclesiology by generating alternate

---

understandings of the entire ensemble of Christian doctrines and practices thereby producing two competing and incompatible ways of understanding Christianity.

The incompatibility between the traditional and Adventist theological systems stems from the conflicting views Christian tradition and Adventists assume about the nature of reality. Christian tradition embraces the view of reality inspired and mediated by Greek Neoplatonic ontology and articulated by Aristotelian metaphysics. Adventists, naively and implicitly embrace the view of reality expressed and assumed by biblical writers. The former places the reality of God, His acts, and human spirituality outside the realm of time, space, and history. The latter, places the reality of God, His acts, and human spirituality inside the realm of time, space, and history. These opposite views about reality (ontology of God, human beings and the world), the whole (everything in the universe in relation to God) become unavoidable assumptions at the time of interpreting Scripture, understanding its doctrines and fulfilling God’s will and mission. The difference and conflict between them could not be greater or more inclusive. Only one can be the actual church of Christ.

Churches based on tradition ignore and replace the view of reality (ontology) and the whole (metaphysics) God revealed in Scripture. In so doing they distort the biblical teachings about God, Christ and salvation. This fact disqualifies them to represent the God of Scripture and to the claim of being Christ’s visible church on earth. However, this first approach deals with ecclesiology indirectly, via the doctrine and practices of the church. Yet, there is a direct way in which hermeneutics conditions the essence of Christian ecclesiology.

We turn our attention now to a direct way in which the hermeneutical turn from tradition to Scripture relates to ecclesiology. In general, most Christians agree that by essence the church is the spiritual community of Christ on earth that exists because of her faith relationship with the real presence of Christ. Ecclesiological disagreements revolve around the way in which Christians interpret the real presence of Christ as the ground and center of the Christian church. Clearly, any exposition of the presence of Christ depends on one’s preunderstandings on the nature of God, human beings, and Christ assumed by the interpreter. And these, in turn, depend on the preunderstandings the interpreter assumes about the general nature of reality as a whole (ontology and metaphysics). Let us consider, then, the way in which hermeneutical presuppositions influence the understanding
and experience of the presence of Christ. This approach will help us to see how hermeneutics relates to ecclesiology by generating alternate understandings of the presence of Christ thereby producing two competing and incompatible grounds for the Christian church.

Roman Catholics and a large sector of mainline Protestant denominations believe that after Christ’s ascension to heaven we have access to His real presence in or through the sacraments. Christ’s presence in the sacraments then, is the essence, center, and foundation of the Christian Church.

This belief springs from the hermeneutical assumption that God’s spiritual reality and our spiritual realities are neither temporal nor material. Within this hermeneutical assumption, God can relate directly to separate souls (souls without a body, as the angels are according to tradition) but not to souls incarnated in material bodies. Since humans souls exist in an essential connection to a material body, God needs to use a material element to reach the soul. Thus, to become present to incarnate souls God uses a material element to bridge the material ontological gap that exists between God’s non-historical reality and the non-historical reality of the human soul. In the case of Christ, his body is the material vehicle God used to make his spiritual non-historical nature present in the times of the disciples. After the ascension of Christ’s body to heaven God uses other material vehicles (wine, water, bread, etc.) to communicate the presence of Christ’s divinity and humanity to the Christian Church.

Tradition teaches, then, that Christ’s spiritual, non-historical, divine presence becomes real to us through material signs and symbols (sacraments) we apprehend with our spirits. It is important to bear in mind that the divine presence mediated by the sacraments is the same the disciples experienced through the human body of Jesus Christ. This relation takes place in the “spiritual” timeless realm outside the every day flow of historical events. The sacraments, then, provide the material element God needs to become present to our embodied souls.

According to tradition, then, God relates to our immaterial (spaceless and non-historical) souls without the need of the historical mediation of Christ as revealed in the New Testament. The human Christ is no longer

39 Although Christians have developed various ways to understand the sacraments, all of them see the presence of God in or through them.
God incarnated but the sacrament necessary for the eternal timeless God to communicate his spiritual presence directly to our souls. Thus, through the sacraments, Christian believers do not relate to the incarnated Christ ministering for them in heaven but directly to God’s own transcendent unmediated non-historical being.

Radically departing from this view, Seventh-day Adventism believes that after Christ’s ascension to heaven, believers experience His real historical presence in the heavenly sanctuary by faith through prayer, study, and obedience to his words (Scripture).

Adventists are not the first Christians to accept this view but are the first to take the revolutionary step to use this biblical belief as the key of the hermeneutical presuppositions required for the entire theological system and for the biblical understanding of the real presence of Christ who is the center and ground of the Church. By taking this small step, Adventists effectively rejected the Neoplatonic-Aristotelic-Augustinian-Thomistic ontological ground on which traditional churches stand and replaced it with the biblical ontology-metaphysics of God in His sanctuary relating historically to historical temporal beings (Biblical ontology of human nature). In so doing Adventists radically depart from traditional conservative and modern Protestant and Evangelical theologians. Clearly, when understood historically, the resurrected and ascended Christ cannot be at the same time present in or through the sacraments and bodily in the heavenly sanctuary. To claim He is present in the sacraments involves the spiritualization of Christ.

---

40 Early in the Protestant Reformation Zwingli understood Christ’s presence was tied to his body in heaven, see, for instance, W. P. Stephens, “Zwingli’s Theology,” in The Encyclopedia of Christianity, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 5: 864. He used this idea as presupposition to reject the traditional view that Christ was present in the bread and wine of the Holy Communion. Thus, he “argued that Christ’s body could not be present on many altars at one and the same time, since after the ascension it was restricted to one location at God’s right hand.” Scott Hendrix, “Luther’s Theology,” in The Encyclopedia of Christianity, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999-2003), 3: 373.

41 To say that Christ is present in the sacraments necessarily involves the spiritualization of the historical reality of Christ in heaven, which the implicit ontologies of God’s timeless being and the immortal soul require. Wolfhart Pannenberg represents well theologians working from the perspective of “normal” traditional theology when he considers Zwingli’s hermeneutical use of Christ’s bodily presence in the Heavenly Sanctuary as a “hindrance.”
Therefore, in Adventism the heavenly-sanctuary-word-prayer-personal relational dynamics replaces the impersonal ritualistic mechanics of the sacraments as the essence, center, and foundation of the Christian church as the remnant of Biblical history and prophecy. Believers no longer experience the presence of Christ in and through the mediation of the liturgical rituals of the church. Instead, through the understanding of Scripture and prayer, believers encounter the presence of Christ who as an historical living person in heaven is the mediator between God’s transcendent being and his creatures. Moreover, He is also the merciful high priest ministering salvation and providentially guiding believers. In this ontological context the remnant church exists and stands as the spiritual and visible community that grows out of the redemptive-mediatory work Christ performs in the heavenly sanctuary; and, by accepting his love and sovereignty in faith and obedience, accepts Christ’s given mission to proclaim his gospel of the kingdom of God to the world.

Unquestionably, the turn to biblical hermeneutics belongs to the macro historical level of theological and ecclesiological developments. Thomas Kuhn’s analysis of scientific revolutions we explained and used earlier in this article may help us to properly understand its implications in the area to a correct understanding of the sacraments. “On the matter of the real presence Zwingli was hampered by this idea of the exalted Christ being tied corporeally by his session at the right hand of God.” Wolfhart Pannenberg, Systematic Theology, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991-1998), 3:310-11; ibid. Calvin, though, following Scriptural evidence from the Gospels argues that Christ real body presently exists in heaven but makes room for his presence to be real in the sacrament through the Holy Spirit, not bodily as Roman Catholic dogma affirms, but in the mode of “majesty, providence, and ineffable grace.” John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. Henry Beveridge (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), IV, xvii, 26. Although Calvin goes further than Luther in challenging traditional thought on the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine, he remains closer to tradition than Zwingli by embracing the ontology of tradition that “hampers” (to use Pannenberg wording in the quotation above) him from accepting the ontological implications of the biblical teaching by which Christ’s presence is indivisibly in heaven and tied to his body in space and time. In the final analysis, with some caveats, Calvin embraces Christ’s real presence in the bread and the wine. He concludes, “[b]ut when these absurdities are discarded, I willingly admit anything which helps to express the true and substantial communication of the body and blood of the Lord, as exhibited to believers under the sacred symbols of the Supper, understanding that they are received not by the imagination or intellect merely, but are enjoyed in reality as the food of eternal life.” Ibid., IV, xvii, 19.
of Christian ecclesiology. The acceptance of the biblical teachings about Christ’s historical and bodily presence in the heavenly sanctuary produce a radical change at the ontological foundations of Christian theology and ecclesiology. The temporal historical ontological framework of Scripture definitively replaces the timeless non-historical ontology of Christian tradition. The hermeneutical consequences of this ontological shift are momentous and all inclusive. Its consistent application by Adventists believers to the entire system of Christian theology, worship, and ministerial practices amounts to a macro paradigm shift at the very foundation of Christian theology that initiates a period of extraordinary theology and sets the stage for the emergence of the eschatological remnant of Biblical prophecy.

**The Bread of Life**

The Church as a spiritual visible community exists because it receives its nourishment from Christ, its center and foundation. Teaching in the synagogue, Christ taught: “I am the bread of life... The one who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:35, 58 NRSV). Traditional ontology dictating the hermeneutics of traditional churches led them to interpret Christ’s teachings on the “Bread of Life” in a sacramental way. They see Christ teaching that by partaking in the bread and wine Christians actually eat His real spiritual being which is “spiritually” present “in” the bread and wine. According to this view, the soul of the believer actually “feeds” from the very substance of the transcendent God. It “feeds” from the actual power of divine life. The “feeding” does not take place in the realm of every day life but in the “parallel realm” of spiritual substances (God and the soul). This transaction, therefore, is mechanic and impersonal.

The radical paradigm shift in ontological views that generated the remnant church dictates a different hermeneutical commitment that leads to interpret Christ’s teachings on the “Bread of Life” historically and personally. According to biblical ontology, the “bread of life” is the real incarnated Christ that came down from heaven (John 6:33, 39) and as he went back up to heaven (John 6:62) now feeds us the words of life He spoke personally and through the prophets (John 6:63) and by the teaching ministry and providences of His representative the Holy Spirit.

According to Scripture, then, the “feeding” on Christ that generates the church does not take place mechanically in and through the sacraments as an impersonal encounter with God’s transcendent reality. Instead, the
“feeding” on Christ that generates the remnant church takes place as an historical experience that involves the whole being in and through the words of Scripture as a personal encounter with the incarnated Christ in heaven. The spiritual feeding Christ speaks about, then, takes place in the realm of our every day lives within the sequence of time and the spatiality of our bodies not in the ethereal, non-historical, non-spatial realm of traditional Christian spirituality. In short, a personal spirituality centered in Christ’s words and historical acts replaces an impersonal spirituality centered in the transcendent, non-historical substance of the divinity.

The Message

Precisely because according to Christ believers feed from his words of revelation in Scripture, the spirituality of the remnant church is essentially and indissolubly connected to its message. Adventists talk much about their “message.” But what is a message? A message is a communication addressed to a recipient. Clearly, the recipient is the world, but what is the content of the communication God expects the remnant to deliver to the world? Progressively, Adventists answered this question in various ways generating confusion. Because of its essential role in the life and mission of the church we need to become familiar with the contents of the message God expects us to live and proclaim to the world.

When we speak about sending a “message” to somebody we generally have in mind something short and to the point. Not surprisingly, most Adventists think about the message of the church as something brief. Some believers may find difficulty in identifying it. Others may readily identify the “message” of the Church with some of the so call distinctive truths, as, for instance, the seventh-day Sabbath, the second coming, the health reform, the gospel, or the three angels’ messages. Is the message of the Church something short that can be delivered quickly even as a mail person delivers mail? Let us reflect for a moment in the message of the church as it relates to the essence and mission of the Church.

Ellen White frequently wrote about the message of the Church. According to her, the message of God gives the remnant church is the same Gospel commission Christ gave to the disciples before His ascension to
That being the case, one wonders about the contents of Christ’s commission to the Church. Is the Gospel commission the proclamation of divine grace? Certainly, but the proclamation of “the mysteries of the grace of God,” requires the inclusion of “the whole counsel of God,” “the saving truths of the third angel’s message,” and “the especial truths that have separated us from the world and made us what we are.” Let us explore these rather succinct and technical points a little further in order to appreciate their spiritual and practical meaning.

The message God gives the church to proclaim is a message about God’s grace. But grace is not a thing or a power but an essential characteristic of God’s person who by nature is merciful and gracious (Exodus 34:6; Deuteronomy 4:31, Psalm 116:5). Grace, then, is revealed and experienced through divine actions. Consequently, the mission of proclaiming God’s grace requires the church should make all of God’s acts as revealed in Scripture known to the world. The proclamation of God’s grace, then, coincides with the proclamation of His acts.

Moreover, according to Paul, the message the church proclaims includes nothing less than “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27 ESV). “God’s counsel” refers to the “plans of his heart” for all generations (Psalm 33:11 NRSV) that in His eternal wisdom and understanding God designed (Job 12:13, Proverbs 1:25, 8:14), and, by the free decision of His will predestined for our salvation before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:11). The “counsel of God” or “plan of salvation” the Trinity predestined for our salvation includes, among other things, Christ’s incarnation and ministry (2 Corinthians 2:7; 1:30), the goal that human beings should become holy (Eph 1:4), and transformed in the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) through Christ’s redemptive sacrifice (Eph 1:7), forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7), and adoption in the family of God (Eph 1:5). The

45 ———, Life Sketches Of Ellen G. White: Being A Narrative Of Her Experience To 1881 As Written By Herself; With A Sketch Of Her Subsequent Labors And Of Her Last Sickness, 329.
proclamation of “the entire counsel” of God, then, coincides with the proclamation of the entire plan of salvation.

The “saving truths of the third angel’s message” include, among other things, the eternal gospel, the fear of the Lord, God’s judgment hour, the worship of God the creator, the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14: 6-13). The proclamation of “the saving truths of the third angel’s message, then, identifies especial aspects of God’s message that his Church will emphasize before his second coming.

“The especial truths that have separated us from the world and made us what we are” include issues like, for instance, the sanctuary doctrine, the non-immortality of the soul, the law of God, the Sabbath, and the three angels’ messages. These truths are “especial” because they provide the biblical hermeneutical foundations to interpret, the “saving truths of the third angel,” the “whole counsel of God,” and the “mysteries of God’s grace.”

On the one side, this brief exploration into the contents of the message of the remnant shows that the message is not something brief that can be swiftly processed and disseminated without much personal involvement. On the other side, many may find this extended notion of the message complicated, disconnected, and overwhelming.

At first glance, the message so described seems complicated, because having various parts it requires closer attention. The message seems disconnected because its many parts appear to stand as independent components detached from each other. The message seems overwhelming because its perceived intricateness and lack of connections puts it over the head of individuals superficially acquainted with the Scriptures. Perhaps intellectuals or specialists could get the “message” but not common folks. This very common negative feeling about the message normally awakens when we become aware of its unavoidable complexity: the message has many truths. Unfortunately, some of us deal with this disquieting feeling by simplifying the message and reducing it to the truth or truths with which

we relate better. The result is an emasculated message and the loss of the power, unity, and mission in the Church.\(^{47}\)

This situation arises when we fail to perceive the way in which all the parts of the message interconnect and form a perfect, complete, and harmonious system of truth. However, through Bible study and prayer anyone can perceive the complete and perfect harmony of the Biblical message as the pioneers did. Then, its complexity will become accessible to students of the Word and lead them to experience the most rich and satisfying personal encounter with Christ.

How do we come to perceive the inner theological, spiritual, and experiential harmony that exists between the manifold components of the Adventist message? We do it by using the “landmarks” or “pillar” truths of Adventism as hermeneutical tools to understand how the Bible “unfolds a complete system of theology and philosophy.”\(^{48}\) This biblical system of theology and philosophy articulates all the contents of the remnant church’s message. The message of the remnant, then, is a complete system of theological and philosophical truths that replace the system of theological and philosophical truths of tradition. This is the reason why the remnant church stands in discontinuity and replaces the churches of traditional Christianity.

**Presuppositions of the Message**

The biblical message of the remnant church stands on three major methodological principles of theology and the practice of ministry. The first fundamental principle makes Scripture the only source of our knowledge of God, the *sola, tota, prima Scriptura* principle. Its application leads to the second and third principles. The second principle is the principle of reality. According to this principle ultimate reality is historical rather than timeless, spaceless, and non-historical as tradition assumes. The third principle is the principle of articulation. This principle deals with the way in which the manifold components of historical reality interconnect forming a whole. The historical Christ “connects” the whole of reality historically, thereby replacing the “chain of being,” “order of being,” or

---

\(^{47}\) For a good explanation of this phenomenon, see, George R. Knight, *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2008).

\(^{48}\) Ellen White, *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, MI: International Tract Society, 1894), 106.
“pyramid of being” tradition uses to articulate biblical contents and spiritual realities. The consistent application of the second and third principles helps the remnant church to go beyond the theological and ecclesiological fragmentation that followed the Protestant “turn to Scripture” and its failure to overcome the hermeneutical rule of Christian tradition.

The conviction that the Bible is the only source from which the community can derive its knowledge of God is clearly stated in the first Fundamental Belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In scholarly circles we refer to this principle under the label of the sola and tota

---

49 This will be enlarged and clarified later on in this chapter.

50 Through the centuries radical Protestants experienced the “turn to Scripture” as what some historians call “primitivism,” a going back to a golden age before the distortion brought about by tradition. This they argue is impossible. The implication is that Christians cannot reach unity by working from Scripture alone. “Primitivism . . . in its search for a pristine fount in biblical time and especially for the simpler, less complicated realities of the New Testament, makes two misjudgments. It underestimates the hold of our own times on our vision of the Scriptures. And it overestimates our ability to get back, to recover that ideal time—the Old Testament for some Puritans, the Gospels for the Anabaptists, the Acts for the Pentecostals, or the Epistles for fundamentalists—in its original purity.” Noll, “Rethinking Restorationism: A Review Article,” 21. The last portion of Noll’s comment, however, seems to indicate that fragmentation originates from the inability to grasp the entire system of Scriptural truth. They failed to find in Scripture the principle of reality and the principle of articulation.

51 According to Mathison, the sola Scriptura principle as experienced by the Radical reformers destroys the authority of Scripture because it calls for an individualistic hermeneutics to decide its meaning. As you read the following quotation you should bear in mind that Mathison uses the label “solo scriptura” to refer to the Radical Reformation claim to get the truth without the help of tradition. He reserves the label “sola Scriptura” label to the Magisterial Reformers who used the hermeneutical guidance of tradition. “The doctrine of solo scriptura, despite its claims to uniquely preserve the authority of the Word of God, destroys that authority by making the meaning of Scripture dependent upon the judgment of each individual. Rather than the Word of God being the one final court of appeal, the court of appeal becomes the multiplied minds of each believer. One is persuaded that Calvinism is more biblical. The other is persuaded that dispensationalism is more biblical. And by what standard does each decide? The standard is each individual’s opinion of what is biblical. The standard is necessarily individualistic, and therefore the standard is necessarily relativistic.” Keith A. Mathison, The Shape of Sola Scriptura (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), 246-47. Individualism, in turns, ends up creating new human traditions, Mathison, The Shape of Sola Scriptura, 253.
Scriptura principles. These principles replace the multiplicity of sources of Christian tradition and unleash the two methodological principles that give rise to the remnant church. Meanwhile, the leading sector of the “anonymous remnant” still grounds its hermeneutical principles on tradition failing to see the need for the “biblical hermeneutical turn.”

At this point a question arises, does Adventism have a principle of reality and a principle of articulation? The answer to this question is yes Adventism has them; although so far Adventist theologians have not explicitly identified and formulated them as such. While Adventists are not used to thinking about the reality and articulation of their message, they have since early days operated assuming biblically defined notions about them. These preunderstandings arose from the pioneers’ hope on Christ’s personal historical second coming, and, after the Great Disappointment, by following Him into the heavenly sanctuary.

In synthesis, Adventists assume that reality is historical both for human beings and for God (ontology). They also presuppose implicitly that the whole of reality is the common history of God with His creatures (metaphysics). By understanding reality as existing in one single historical level where God and humans as spiritual beings interact Adventists effectively rejected and replaced the Neoplatonic cosmological dichotomy between the realms of spirit (heaven) and history (creation). Finally, Adventists have always assumed that the historical, incarnated, resurrected, and ascended Christ is the principle of articulation of all realities in the vast universe from past to future eternity.

---

52 “Instead of advocating chaos, the Evangelical church must regain an understanding of the Reformation doctrine of sola scriptura, which is essentially nothing more than the early Church’s doctrine of Scripture and tradition framed within a different historical context. The Church must affirm that Scripture is the sole source of revelation. The Church must affirm that Scripture is the sole, final, and infallible norm of faith and practice. And the Church must affirm that Scripture is to be interpreted in and by the communion of saints within the theological context of the rule of faith. Only by rejecting all forms of autonomy, institutional or individual, can any branch of the Church be in obedience to Jesus Christ the Lord.” Ibid., 347.
Message as System

By using these principles Adventist pioneers discovered a “complete system of truth, connected and harmonious.” The remnant came to existence not because they came to a correct understanding of prophecy but because the sheer beauty and power of the complete system of connected and harmonious truth they discovered in Scripture left them no other option before God.

The system brings all the teachings of Scripture together into a harmonious whole centered and articulated by the living historical person of Christ; the historical incarnated Christ that died, resurrected, ascended to heaven, ministers for our salvation, and will come to take us home forever. Adventists know this system as “the Great Controversy theme.” Yet, the Great Controversy is much more than a biblical “theme” or “motif.” The Great Controversy is the gospel-message-system, because it unfolds the history of God’s love for the world and the universe. Adventists preach the same gospel that the disciples proclaimed after the resurrection. “They had a Gospel to preach—Christ in human form, a Man of sorrows; Christ in humiliation, taken by wicked hands and crucified; Christ resurrected, and ascended to heaven, into the presence of God, to be man’s Advocate; Christ to come again with power and great glory in the clouds of heaven.” The incarnated Christ, then, “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.”

_____________________________________

53 White, The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation, 423.
54 This is what Ellen White briefly summarized by stating that the complete system of truth they were able to experience showed to them that God had directed the great Advent Movement revealing to them their position (to be the Remnant Church) and duty (their mission to the world as the Remnant). Ibid.
restoration of the new earth, the cross is the great central truth around which cluster (1) all biblical truths, (2) Christ’s work of atonement in the soul of the believer, and (3) the history of the church in heaven and earth. In short, the historical resurrected Christ himself “the Son of God is the center of the great plan of redemption which covers all dispensations. He is the center of all doctrines. The “completeness” of

58 “The Sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary. I present before you the great, grand monument of mercy and regeneration, salvation and redemption,–the Son of God uplifted on the cross. This is to be the foundation of every discourse given by our ministers.”———, Gospel Workers (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 315. However, the cross should not be reduced to justification by faith as the theology of the anonymous remnant claims. Instead, “[t]he atoning sacrifice, the righteousness of Christ, is to us the vital center of all truth. In the cross of Calvary, mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. The law and the gospel are in perfect harmony; they are interwoven as the warp and the woof. They shed a flood of light amid the moral darkness of the world, stimulating, renovating, sanctifying, all who will believe the truth, all who will gladly and gratefully accept the light coming from the throne of God.”———, “Missionary Work,” Review and Herald, September 29, 1891, par. 8.

59 The cross is the center of Christ’s work of atonement in the soul of the believer. “To love God with all the heart, to be a partaker with Christ in His humiliation and suffering, means more than many understand. The atonement of Christ is the great central truth around which cluster all the truths that pertain to the great work of redemption. The mind of man is to blend with the mind of Christ. This union sanctifies the understanding, giving the thoughts clearness and force. . . .”———, Lift Him Up (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 229.

60 Finally, the cross at the center of Christ’s central work of atonement is the center of church history and the church of the redeemed in heaven. And the cross and Christ’s work of atonement is the center of Church history. “The church history upon the earth and the church redeemed in heaven all center around the cross of Calvary. This is the theme, this is the song,—Christ all and in all,—in anthems of praise resounding through heaven from thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand and an innumerable company of the redeemed host. All unite in this song of Moses and of the Lamb. It is a new song, for it was never before sung in heaven.”———, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), 433.


62 “Christ is the center of all true doctrine. All true religion is found in His word and in nature. He is the One in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered; and the teacher who learns from Him finds a safe anchorage.”———, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1943), 453.

156
the system of truth revealed in Scriptures includes everything Christians need to know in faith and practice.\footnote{63}

Moreover, the system of which Christ is the center includes not only the intellectual level of doctrines but through them also the spiritual level of the soul’s union with Him on which the Biblical church stands and exists. The biblical system of truths Christ articulates into a harmonious whole is the spiritual bread that nourishes and unites the soul with Christ thereby generating the existence of the Church.\footnote{64} In other words, through the teaching ministry and providences of the Holy Spirit the complete system of divine living truths centered in Christ penetrate, cleanse, and sanctify the soul.\footnote{65} In this way the church gathers around Christ “the center of all love and light.”\footnote{66}

\footnote{63} “The Lord has uttered His voice in His Holy Word. Those blessed pages are full of instruction and life, harmonious with truth. They are a perfect rule of conduct. Instructions are given, principles are laid down, which apply to every circumstance in life, even though some particular case may not be stated. Nothing is left unrevealed which is essential to a complete system of faith and a correct line of practice. Every duty that God requires at our hands is made plain; and if anyone fails of eternal life, it will be because he was self-sufficient, self-confident, full of vain conceit, and did not rely solely upon the merits of the blood of Christ for salvation. None will err from the right path who meekly and honestly take the Bible as their guide, making it the man of their counsel.”———, Mind, Character, and Personality, 2 vols. (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1977), 2:784.

\footnote{64} “The cause of division or discord in the church is separation from Christ. The secret of unity is union with Christ. Christ is the great Center. We shall approach one another just in proportion as we approach the Center. United with Christ, we shall surely be united with our brethren in the faith.”———, Manuscript Releases, 21 vols. (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen White State, 1981, 1987, 1990, 1993), 15: 301.

\footnote{65} “The oil so much needed by those who are represented as foolish virgins, is not something to be put on the outside. They need to bring the truth into the sanctuary of the soul, that it may cleanse, refine, and sanctify. It is not theory that they need; it is the sacred teachings of the Bible, which are not uncertain, disconnected doctrines, but are living truths, that involve eternal interests that center in Christ. In Him is the complete system of divine truth. The salvation of the soul, through faith in Christ, is the ground and pillar of the truth.”———, Ye Shall Receive Power (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1995), 16.

\footnote{66} “The more closely we walk with Christ, the center of all love and light, the greater will be our affection for His light-bearers. When the saints are drawn close to Christ, they must of necessity be drawn close to each other, for the sanctifying grace of Christ will bind their hearts together. You cannot love God and yet fail to love your brethren.”———, Manuscript Releases, 15: 88.
The History of God’s Love

Adventists have a history to tell to the world. The biblical history of God’s love is their message. By living this message in everyday life they become part of God’s history of salvation as the eschatological Biblical remnant. They are God’s visible remnant church because they experience spiritually and proclaim this history to the world. This history is the complete harmonious system of biblical truths centered in the historical acts of Christ from before the creation of the world to the unending ages of future eternity. As noted earlier, Adventists refer to this history as the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan.

Christian denominations have neglected, forgotten, and rejected this history because hermeneutical assumptions led them to spiritualize it. The ontologies of God and the soul Christian tradition assumes have no place for God acting historically as an agent among other historical agents as Christ did during His life and ministry in Palestine. Thus, the Great Controversy became spiritualized as the “story” of Christ’s ontological “descending” from the Father (incarnation) and “ascending back” to the Father (“decarnation”). The history of God became a story.

In this “story” the personal historical relationship that Christ had with his disciples when he lived on earth is replaced by the platonic idea of communion as participation. After the resurrection believers are thought to relate directly with God by “participating” in its being. Tradition understands “participation” as a “sharing-in-being,” “mutual indwelling,” and “mutual interpenetration” of the timeless non-historical reality of God with the soul. Participation, then, defines communion as the relationship

---

67 Irenaeus and later tradition used “to describe the kind of relationship that humanity enjoys with the triune God.” Julie Canlis, Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 6.
68 George Hunsinger explains that according to Christian tradition κοινωνία “means that we are not related to God or to one another like ball bearings in a bucket, through a system of external relations. We are rather, something like relational fields that interpenetrate, form, and participate in each other in countless real tough often elusive ways,” George Hunsinger, Disruptive Grace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 257. Quoted by Canlis, Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension, 7-8.
of the soul with the timeless God through the ascended Christ. Thus understood, communion with God frees human souls from their present association with matter and historical events and unites them with the timeless realm of the Trinitarian life.69 Clearly, participation in the being of God replaces the biblical personal, social, spiritual, face-to-face, fellowship (communio κοινωνία) with the incarnated historical Christ that lies at the foundation of the Great Controversy.

Calvin, arguably the leading systematic thinker of the anonymous remnant also spiritualized the history of God’s Great Controversy with Satan by translating it into Neoplatonic ontological categories. This becomes apparent, for instance, when we discover that Calvin spiritualized the obvious historical meaning of communion with Christ in Scripture by embracing the traditional notion of “participation.” Communion with Christ, according to Calvin, cannot be understood in terms of fellowship or society basic to the Great Controversy but rather as the “unity by which the Son of God engrafts us into His body, so that He communicates to us all that He is. We so draw life from His flesh and His blood, that they are not improperly called our food.”70 We can see why the anonymous remnant’s strong and unremitting dependence on Calvin’s theological system prevents it from embracing the biblical history of God’s love and, therefore, from becoming the visible remnant of biblical prophesy.

However, more conservative and biblically minded Evangelical denominations do still think historically and have not surrendered completely to the spiritualization of God’s history of love.71 Yet, the influence of traditional hermeneutical ideas still operates in the background of these denominations, leading them to reduce the history of God to the history of Christ’s incarnation on earth. In the practice of spirituality, the

69 ———, Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension, 3, 43-44, 177-78.
70 Calvin Letter to Martyr (8 August, 1555; CO 15.723), quoted by ibid., 13.
71 See for instance, Henry M. Morris, The Long War Against God: The History and Impact of the Creation/Evolution Conflict (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 199. “…the modern creation-evolution conflict is more than a mere scientific controversy, or even a battle between science and religion, as evolutionists pretend. It is nothing less than a new and critical phase in the age-long conflict between the only two basic world views. One is centered in the Creator of the world and his redemptive work on behalf of that lost world; the other is centered in the creatures of that world, not only man and his self-oriented goals, but also in the devil himself, who is ultimately behind all rebellion against God.”
history of God’s love is reduced to Christmas and Easter. And even this history is understood as a symbol of a non-historical spiritual reality that transcends and leaves behind human history.

At the antipodes of tradition, the history of God’s love takes place within the temporal, spatial, and material realm of creation. Spiritual communion with God happens as a historical social relationship between creatures with the ascended incarnated historical Christ ministering from the heavenly sanctuary. Christ is the center of human reality, and therefore, of human and cosmic history. Ellen White’s massive five volume theological commentary on Scripture, the Great Controversy ("Conflict of the Ages") series, starts and ends with the words “God is love,” thereby indicating that God’s history reveals his loving merciful being and character.

According to Scripture, the history of God’s love in creation and redemption is an extension of the eternal history of love of the three persons of the Godhead. We can trace the origins of this history back to the time before the beginning of Creation when through divine infinite wisdom the three persons of the Trinity planned the design of the universe. From love and through love they thought to share their life by opening themselves to their creatures.

At the beginning of God’s way, before the beginning when God created the universe, Christ was appointed to be the great center of creation (Proverbs 8:22-23, ESV), to play the role of mediator between the infinite transcendence of the being, life, and history of the trinity and the limited reach of the life, being and history of the creatures to be. According to

---

72 “I suggest that according to Prov 8, at the beginning of creation, we find a situation of equal members of the Godhead as Co-creators. There is no reference to a time before which One of the Members of the God-head did not exist, nor a reference to the eternal subordination of One Member of the Godhead to Another Member. Rather, there is described a time, before the creation of the universe, when, presumably by mutual consent, one Person of the Godhead is ‘installed’ (nskIII) in a role of Mediator. While the Person we call the Father continued to represent the transcendent nature of the Godhead, the Person we know as the Son condescended in divine *kenosis* to represent the immanent aspect of divinity, coming close to His creation, mediating between infinity and finitude, even before sin. This is not a subordination of the Son to the Father, but a voluntary condescension to be installed into a mediatorial role, representing the divine love in an immanent way to His inhabited universe.” Richard Davidson, “Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17, no. 1 (2006), 54.
God’s design all things in the universe will hold together in Christ (Colossians 1:17). In other words, Christ was appointed to be the center 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. God’s love is direct, personal, and historical. Through Christ’s mediation God’s wisdom and law will become the basis of spiritual order among free beings created in the image of God.

Also, before the creation of the world, God knew in detail what would take place after He created the universe. God knew His creatures would rebel against the spiritual order centered in Christ and challenge His historical sovereignty. God also knew about the suffering and death that would follow as a consequence of the new spiritual order their creatures would generate by rejecting Christ’s mediatory role in creation. Yet, God created the universe anyway. Many Christians who question God’s love forget God decided that Christ, the center around which all things cohere in the universe, should become a human being and die in the place of His rebellious creatures. God’s love in Christ’s incarnation and death was the way to respond to the creature’s challenge to Christ’s sovereignty and restore the spiritual harmony in the universe.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth even when He did not need to do it. Yet, in love, He did. When God created the historical reality of the universe perfect spiritual harmony existed, until controversy arose in heaven and on earth. In love He allowed the other than Himself to exist over against Him to the point of challenging His sovereignty, wisdom, love, law, and government. Only a God of love could create a universe that will cause Him infinite suffering while pursuing the well being of His creatures. Through the rebellion of His creatures, the history of God’s love became the history of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan.

Ever since the rebellion against God’s government by spiritual creatures in heaven and on earth began, the history of God’s love carried on with the aim to restore creation back to its original spiritual harmony articulated through His law and eternal love. Beginning with Satan’s rebellion in heaven and its expansion to the Garden of Eden, Christ has continued to be the heart around which all things cohere together.

Christ is the historical agent of the great acts of God’s covenant of salvation. The preaching of the Gospel before the flood, the call to Abraham, Christ’s presence and revelation at Sinai, His incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly ministry are some of
the actions the Second Person of the Godhead executed in history to
achieve a full restoration of the perfect spiritual harmony that existed in the
beginning of Creation.

The history of the universe thus revealed in Scripture and articulated
in the person and work of Jesus Christ helped the Biblical visible remnant
to understand the long and deep history of God’s love for His creatures. It
integrates all the teachings of the Scriptures and doctrines of Christianity
into a comprehensive and harmonious whole.

Understanding this history has profound implications for Christian
theology because it replaces the macro hermeneutical perspective that
tradition draws from classical and modern metaphysics or postmodern
metanarratives and metahistories. As a biblical historical metanarrative
the history of God’s love enlarges and reinforces the “biblical
hermeneutical turn” that helped Adventist pioneers to free themselves from
the hermeneutical dominion of Christian tradition and overcome the
inconsistencies and ambiguities generated by the anonymous remnant’s
“turn to Scripture.” With the passing of time, the theological and spiritual
strength of the historical metanarrative of the Great Controversy brought
about the emergence of the Biblical visible remnant church. This insures
faithfulness to the gospel of Christ and the apostolicity of the Church.

Understanding the history of God’s love also has profound implications
for Christian spirituality because it facilitates a deep and steady personal
relationship with God. When by faith the believer understands and obeys
God’s words he or she feeds on Christ the Bread of Life. God’s words
through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit penetrate deep in the heart
of believers transforming them in the image of Christ. Communion with
God is no longer participation in His being experienced through the
liturgical mechanics of the sacraments leaving the heart empty. Instead,
communion with God is a personal ongoing dialogue with the incarnated,
ascended Christ ministering in the heavenly sanctuary. This dialogue is

73 The word “metahistory” refers to the overarching narrative or “grandrécit” that gives
order and meaning to the historical record, especially in the large-scale philosophies of
history of writers such as Hegel, Marx, or Spencer. See, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*

74 The apostolicity of the Church according to Scripture is not based on apostolic
succession but on faithfulness to the gospel of Christ. See for instance, Dederen, “The
Church,” 563-64.
very real and takes place in everyday life through Bible study, prayer, obedience, and mission. This experience that unites each believer in fellowship with Christ and simultaneously with each other is the spiritual ground on which God’s visible remnant church on earth stands.

**The Mission of the Remnant Church**

When through faith and obedience believers accept Christ’s message and fellowship with him in everyday life they become his disciples (John 8:31) and through adoption (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:5, Ephesians 1:4) share in the history of God’s family (Galatians 6:10, Ephesians 2:19, 3:15) and its mission (Matthew 28:19-20). Thus, in the spiritual relation of the believer with Christ His message and mission belong together and are essential to the existence of the Church. Without this message, the mission of the church is powerless. Without this mission, the message of the Church is fruitless. The Church as a spiritual entity exists, then, when believers unite around Christ by experiencing in their lives His message and mission.

The mission of the church is to share Christ’s message to the world. The message of Christ includes the history of His love from before Creation, through the history of sin, to the restoration of the original harmony in love among all creatures and God. Adventists discovered this message through a series of historical experiences that they saw reflected and announced in the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14.

As explained earlier, their discovery of the system of “present truth” sprang from their unwavering commitment to the *sola Scriptura* and *tota Scriptura* principles inherited from the anonymous remnant, and the paradigmatic change in biblical interpretation and doctrinal thinking they discovered. In short, they found out the way in which all biblical doctrines belong together in a complete and harmonious system of present truth based only on Scriptural hermeneutical assumptions. This philosophical and systematic achievement became the message that originated the existence of the remnant church. Arthur White characterized the few formative years of Adventist thinking after the Great disappointment as a “scattering time” (1845-1850) when “the invulnerable structure of truth to present to the word” was discovered by way of “thorough Bible study and the confirming

---

55 Ibid., 549, 51.
work of the Spirit.”

By the end of this period, when everything in experience and biblical understanding fit together, Ellen White confidently wrote: “we know that we have the truth.” Adventist pioneers referred to this system of truth under the label of “present truth,” the “three angels’ messages,” and the “platform of truth.”

———, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” Present Truth (1850): par. 8. “I also saw that the shepherds should consult those in whom they have reason to have confidence, those who have been in all the messages, and are firm in all the present truth, before they advocate any new point of importance, which they may think the Bible sustains. Then the shepherds will be perfectly united, and the union of the shepherds will be felt by the church. Such a course I saw would prevent unhappy divisions, and then there would be no danger of the precious flock being divided, and the sheep scattered, without a shepherd.”

———, Manuscript Releases, 6:388. “Dear Brother Rhodes was with us in our last conference. It was good to see his face once more and cheering to hear him talk the plain cutting truth of God from the Bible. How plain our position is! We know that we have the truth. Brother Rhodes has now gone in company with Brother John Andrews to the eastern part of the State to hunt up the scattered sheep. We have received two letters from them. God is at work and is bringing souls from the rubbish to the clear light of truth. We have received cheering letters from different places. God is with Israel,” Letter 30, 1850, p. 2. (To Brother and Sister Loveland, December 13, 1850).


164
After this initial discovery, Ellen White enlarged this system of truth in considerable detail in her voluminous writings. After Ellen White’s death, Adventist believers found it easier to draw the message of the church from her writings than from Scripture. On the positive side, this practical procedure allowed successive generations to keep the message and mission of the church alive. However, on the negative side, this practical procedure distanced the church from Bible study and the unwavering commitment of early Adventist pioneers to the *sola* and *tota Scriptura* principles.

While some Adventists found it easier to retrieve the message from the writings of Ellen White, others turning to Scripture found it harder to prove Adventists doctrines and practices only from Scripture. Correctly convinced that Adventism should build only on Scripture the latter group eventually deemphasized the message of the remnant and, with the passing of time, replaced it with the message they found in the Protestant churches. As a result of this situation, an increasing number of Adventists no longer experience or proclaim the coherent system of biblical truth the pioneers discovered and Ellen White expanded in her writings. They reduce the mission of Adventism to the dissemination of present discrete doctrines, practices, and services that fail to include the coherence of all biblical data, doctrines, and history in the living person of the incarnated Christ. Consequently, the message and mission of the remnant no longer departs from and challenge the message and mission of Christian tradition and the anonymous remnant. The remnant no longer aims at establishing “Christianity upon an eternal basis.”

---

80 White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation*, 401.

81 “As the end approaches, the testimonies of God’s servants will become more decided and more powerful, flashing the light of truth upon the systems of error and oppression that have so long held the supremacy. The Lord has sent us messages for this time, that will establish Christianity upon an eternal basis; and all who believe the present truth, must stand, not in their own wisdom, but in God’s wisdom, and raise up the foundations of many generations; and they will be registered in the books of heaven as ‘repairers of the breach,’ the ‘restorer of paths to dwell in.’ In face of the bitterest opposition, we are to maintain the truth because it is truth. God is at work upon human minds; it is not man alone that is working. The great illuminating power is from Christ; the brightness of his example is to be kept before the people in every discourse. His love is the glory of the rainbow encircling the throne on high.” Ellen White, “Let the Trumpet Give a Certain Sound,” *Review and Herald*, 165
Instead, some Adventists in our days assume the message and mission of Adventism and the anonymous remnant is one and the same. Not surprisingly, deep doctrinal divisions within Adventism generate spiritual disunity, a declining mission, and uneasiness among some sectors with the “inherited” claim of being the visible remnant church of God on earth. These developments endanger the very existence of the Remnant and the success of its mission.

In spite of this situation, Adventism continues to emphasize the global mission of the Church albeit in increasing disconnection from the complete and harmonious system of biblical truth. Even those who identify the mission of the remnant with the “three angels’ messages” or “present truth” tend to miss the inner coherence of the biblical system and its unifying and transforming power. They do so by proclaiming the “distinctive” doctrines of Adventism but failing to use them as the key that opens to view the whole and harmonious system of biblical truth. In so doing, they stop short from experiencing and communicating the message of Adventism, and from accomplishing its mission.

In this environment, the mission of the Church shrinks to baptisms and numbers as the measure of its success. The history of God’s love turns into a few distinctive disconnected doctrines. Consequently, the remnant misses the spiritual power of God’s message and replaces it with ideas and methods devised by human minds. When the remnant no longer understands its mission as the restoration of Christianity to its eternal

December, 13 1892, par. 5.


84 For a simple explanation of the dangers facing Adventism, see, Knight, *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism*.

85 Ellen White warned us about the danger of measuring success by numbers. “If you lower the standard in order to secure popularity and an increase of numbers, and then make this increase a cause of rejoicing, you show great blindness. If numbers were evidence of success, Satan might claim the pre-eminence; for, in this world, his followers are largely in the majority. It is the degree of moral power pervading the College, that is a test of its prosperity. It is the virtue, intelligence, and piety of the people composing our churches, not their numbers, that should be a source of joy and thankfulness.” White, *Christian Education*, 42.
biblical basis it runs the risk to become institutionalized and pursues its mission in unbiblical ways following the lead of tradition.

The question arises, is it possible to ground the Adventist message, as discovered by the pioneers and expanded by Ellen White, on the Bible alone? Would Adventists be able to discover the history of God’s love from Scripture alone without quoting from Ellen White? The call to being the remnant demands a positive answer to this question.

Due to the present development of Adventism in the world of scholarship this question must be answered at the sophisticated level of theological and scientific scholarship. This task involves all sectors and levels in Adventism and calls for a renewed commitment to (1) the sola, tota, and prima Scriptura principles (the turn to Scripture away from tradition and culture), and toward (2) the hermeneutical role of the Adventist pillar doctrines (the biblical hermeneutical turn) embraced by Adventist pioneers. Moreover, it requires that Adventist scholars, pastors, administrators, and laypersons, recognize the philosophical nature of the biblical hermeneutical turn and the systematic nature of the “invulnerable structure of truth” discovered by the pioneers. This aspect of the task implies a substantial broadening of current theological practices to include the as yet untrodden areas of biblical philosophy and biblical systematic theology. Simultaneously, current ministerial and missionary practices also need substantial broadening to include the areas of education and discipleship.

The implementation of these tasks will allow Adventists to experience in their lives the discovery of the harmonious and complete system of truth by themselves. By understanding in spiritual depth the history of God’s love and becoming part of it Adventists will obtain a first hand experience on being God’s visible remnant church. They will also grow spiritually in union with Christ and with each other, which are the necessary

---

86 “When we bring our hearts into unity with Christ, and our lives into harmony with His work, the Spirit that fell on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost will fall on us.”———, Testimonies for the Church, 4th ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), 8:246.

87 “Christ is the uniting link in the golden chain which binds believers together in God. There must be no separating in this great testing time. . . . The children of God constitute one united whole in Christ, who presents His cross as the center of attraction. All who believe are one in Him.”———, Lift Him Up: 296.“The people of God will be abiding in Christ,
conditions for success in the final mission of proclaiming and sharing God’s history of love in Christ’s historical acts of salvation from past to future eternity.

In summary, the mission of the Remnant consists in sharing the message and spiritual experience that grounds its existence as the visible community of Christ. In being the remnant, mission and message belong together. Mission cannot exist without message, and message cannot exist without mission. While the mission describes the experience of the message, the message outlines the nature and contents of the spiritual experience of union with Christ. The summary and essence of the message-mission experience of the remnant centers in the entire biblical system of theology and philosophy the pioneers labeled under the rubrics of the “three angels message,” “present truth,” and the “platform of truth.”

Mission is not merely the sharing of doctrines but also of the spiritual historical experience articulated by them. Thus, Christ’s disciples understand and live in their daily lives the message they share and proclaim. Moreover, they understand their experience of being the remnant as part of the actual real history of God’s love in the Great Controversy against Satan.

The mission-message of the remnant is broad and all-inclusive. It helps disciples to discover the inner coherence of the entire Bible and all its doctrines. Moreover, it brings intellectual, spiritual, and existential coherence to the brokenness brought up by sin and rebellion against God. Here lies the power of the Gospel to restore life and hope. The mission-message of the remnant meets well the needs for meaning and spiritual coherence of our postmodern culture. At the same time, it implies

the love of Jesus will be revealed, and one Spirit will animate all hearts, regenerating and renewing all in the image of Christ, fashioning all hearts alike. As living branches of the True Vine, all will be united to Christ, the living head. Christ will abide in every heart, guiding, comforting, sanctifying, and presenting to the world the unity of the followers of Jesus, thus bearing testimony that the heavenly credentials are supplied to the remnant church. In the oneness of Christ’s church it will be proved that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world.” ———, *Selected Messages*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958, 1980), 1:385.

88 “In unity there is a life, a power, that can be obtained in no other way. There will be a vast power in the church when the energies of the members are united under the control of the Spirit. Then will God be able to work mightily through His people for the conversion of sinners.” ———, *Testimonies for the Church*, 7: 236.

168
a veritable and wholesale departure and replacement of the theological and philosophical systems and spirituality embraced by Christian tradition and the anonymous remnant. In so doing, the mission of the remnant establishes Christianity on its eternal basis.

**Summary and Conclusions**

Adventists claim to be the visible Remnant Church of Christ because they see themselves fulfilling the identifying marks of the Remnant included in the book of Revelation. Because many inside and outside the church feel such a sweeping claim needs stronger explanation, in this article I explored briefly the grounds and the meaning of the Seventh-day Adventist claim to be the visible eschatological remnant church of Christ.

A brief analysis of biblical data showed that the Church exists in-Christ. Her existence is spiritual because of her faith in Christ’s words and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, her engaging in Christ’s mission to the world as recorded in Scripture. Moreover, Scripture applies the “remnant” designation to the historical and spiritual development of God’s people, both Israel and the church, throughout the history of salvation. Consequently, we should not understand the eschatological remnant described by John in Revelation 12:17 to be an entity different from the church but as the church herself, the continuation of the New Testament church as the remnant of Israel. The nature and existence of the remnant church, therefore, is grounded on her spiritual faithfulness to Christ’s Word and mission as recorded in Scripture.

Early in her history, however, the Christian church progressively abandoned the hermeneutical presuppositions New Testament writers took from the Old Testament canon and replaced them with Greek ontological categories. This “hermeneutical turn to Greek philosophy” distorted biblical teachings and produced the reinterpretation of Scripture and its teachings. Moreover, it led Christian tradition to replace Christ’s presence in the heavenly sanctuary with the liturgy and sacraments of the church. In this way, the church chose to stand on a new alien spiritual ground thereby rejecting the biblical spiritual ground on which the New Testament church as the remnant of Israel stood. Although Scripture was never absent from Christian tradition the new philosophical hermeneutics decisively distorted its teachings and weakened its power. Eventually, it contributed to the church’s self understanding as being the replacement of Israel rather than...
as being its remnant, to ground its existence on the sacraments, and to the claim of apostolic succession.

Although the mainline and radical reformations’ “turn to Scripture” led to the discovery of forgotten biblical teachings they stopped short from challenging the hermeneutical principles of Christian tradition. This fact prevented the churches of the Reformation from becoming a unified theological and ecclesiological alternative to Roman Catholicism. Instead, the Protestant “turn to Scripture” fragmented the Christian church into an increasing number of denominations. Yet, in spite of these shortcomings, the discovery of biblical truth and emphasis on the Biblical Christ brought about by the Protestant “turn to Scripture” generated an “anonymous remnant.” In other words, disseminated among the denominational fragmentation of Christian tradition the Remnant Church began to gather around the Christ of Scripture anonymously and without a visible face.

Following the pattern of scientific and theological development outlined by Thomas Kuhn and Hans Küng, the anonymous remnant’s “turn to Scripture” intensified leading to the unavoidable “biblical hermeneutical turn” generated by early Adventist pioneers. Seventh-day Adventist identity as the remnant church, then, does not stand on the scriptural marks of the remnant, or the teaching of isolated Christian doctrines such as the seventh-day Sabbath, the manifestation of the gift of Prophecy, the sanctuary or the three angels’ messages. Instead it stands on Scripture, alone (sola), completely (tota), and hermeneutically (prima). According to Scripture, however, the remnant exists in spiritual union with Christ. This union flows from the discovery, acceptance, and spiritual internalization of the complete and harmonious biblical system of theology and philosophy that the “biblical hermeneutical turn” opened to view.

More precisely, as the “biblical hermeneutical turn” replaced the “philosophical hermeneutics” embraced by Christian tradition and the anonymous remnant, the spirituality of Scripture centered in the presence of the historical incarnated Christ in the heavenly sanctuary replaced the spirituality of Christian tradition centered in the imaginary presence of Christ in the liturgy and sacraments of the church. The remnant church, then, stands on the same biblical spiritual ground on which Israel and the remnant of Israel in the New Testament church stood, and, eats the same spiritual food they ate (1 Corinthians 10:1-5). In this way, the biblical remnant of Israel church of the New Testament emerged from Scripture in
eschatological times. The anonymous remnant mutated into the visible eschatologically biblical remnant church.

The challenges facing the remnant are gigantic and epochal. Being the remnant is not easy but Christ brings it about through His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the providential work of the Holy Spirit. Being the Biblical remnant is not a possession or badge of honor to brag about, but responsibility, service, and mission. Believers do not inherit the Church but bring it into existence through faithfulness to the Christ of Scripture and His salvific mission. The remnant exists as the unfinished process of reviving and reforming of the Christian church out of the wilderness of human traditions.

Being the Remnant is the spiritual experience of being-in-message. This means that the message/system of the remnant belongs to its very existence and life. The message of the remnant church is the process of historically appropriating the complete system of theology and philosophy Adventists know as the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. The message of the Church coincides with the history of God’s love and salvation. On top of that, we should bear in mind that message and spirituality belong together. Consequently, the spirituality of the remnant springs from the internalization in the heart of Christ’s teachings and history of love. As believers unite with Christ in spirit they become completely loyal to Him and fully identified to His laws, teachings, and promises. Being-in-the message means a being-in-the-history of God’s love and therefore assumes a deep understanding of this history as presented in Scripture. Because being-in-the history of God is an existential spiritual experience of the whole being it involves a radical departure from the spirit of the world and human cultures.

Being-in-message requires Adventists should articulate in detail the contents and power of the “complete system of theology and philosophy” early pioneers discovered and outlined. Can the Great Controversy theology and philosophy masterfully developed by Ellen White be presented on the basis of the sola, tota, and prima Scriptura principles at the scholarly level of systematic theology and philosophy? Would Adventists at the beginning of the twenty-first century extend the theological and philosophical revolutions initiated by the pioneers in the scholarly areas of philosophy, systematic theology and the sciences? Would Adventists present to the Church and the world the complete system of biblical doctrines without using human traditions or the writings of Ellen White (sola Scriptura)?

171
Would Adventists show the beautiful inner historical systematic coherence of Christ’s acts of redemption and teachings throughout the entire Bible (tota Scriptura)? Would Adventists use the biblical philosophical and theological systems as principles to guide scientific and philosophical research in all areas of human knowledge and spirituality (prima Scriptura)? To answer these questions the Remnant Church must challenge tradition with Scripture in the scholarly areas of philosophy, systematic theology, and the sciences.

Being the Remnant is the spiritual experience of being-in-mission. This means that the mission of the remnant belongs to its very existence and life. The mission of the remnant church is the historical process of witnessing the message and mission of Christ. In its essence, the remnant is a call to repentance extended to Christian tradition and the anonymous remnant for neglecting and replacing the real living Christ with human traditions and teachings. In this broad context, mission is an invitation addressed to every human being to leave the ways of the world and culture and follow the spiritual ways of the Christ of Scripture. The mission of the remnant church, then, is to share the experience of understanding and belonging to the history of Christ’s love and redemptive acts thereby making and gathering a community of spiritual disciples ready to share the same experience and eager to meet Christ personally in the new earth. By fulfilling its mission the remnant is destined to become the ecumenical biblical alternative to the ecumenical traditional alternative spearheaded by the Roman Catholic church.

Being-in-mission requires that Adventists should uplift the Christ of Scripture by experiencing and sharing the complete and harmonious system of philosophy and theology to the church and to the world. This message/system (the three angels’ messages, present truth, platform of truth) is powerful because it includes all doctrines and data of Scripture in a coherent all encompassing spiritual historical metanarrative centered in Christ. In this metanarrative the cross is the center of attraction, and the incarnate resurrected Christ ministering in the Heavenly Sanctuary is the center of spirituality and salvation. Would Adventists live and proclaim the Christ of Scripture without using sources, methods, liturgies, and spiritual disciplines derived from tradition and culture? (sola Scriptura)? Would Adventists live and proclaim the whole message (doctrines) and historical spirituality of Christ and not just some isolated doctrines and practices of their choice (tota Scriptura)? Would Adventists use methods, liturgies, and
practices of the anonymous remnant only after critically adapting them to the complete and harmonious spiritual system/message of Scripture (tota Scriptura)? Would Adventists call believers out of the traditional and nominal Christian churches to join the biblical remnant church? To answer these questions the remnant church must challenge tradition with Scripture in the scholarly areas of ministry, mission, spirituality, and religious education.

Being the remnant is the spiritual experience of being-in-hope. This means that hope belongs to the very existence and life of the remnant. In other words, the remnant church is the historical process of preparing a people for Christ’s judgment and second coming. Being-in-hope means that the remnant lives in anticipation of eternity. Believers eagerly expect to meet Christ face to face, exactly as the disciples did, very soon when He returns back historically, visibly, and in glory and majesty. At that time, He will restore everything in heaven and on earth back to the original perfect harmony of love.

Being-in-hope requires Adventists should live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4) (mission) in all the words that come from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4; Romans 10:17) (message). Hope makes the message and mission of the Remnant real. Would Adventists trust and hope only, completely, and hermeneutically in the imminent, historical second coming of the Christ of Scripture? To answer this question Adventists need the revival and reformation of their lives, their homes, and their Churches. Revival comes from totally surrendering to the real Christ of Scripture, His love and promises. 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.”

---

89 White, The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation, 678.
Fernando Canale is Emeritus Professor of Theology and Philosophy at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, where he has taught since 1985. Before coming to Andrews University, he was a pastor in Argentina and Uruguay and taught Philosophy and Theology at River Plate Adventist College in Argentina. canale@andrews.edu