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Worship in the Book of Revelation

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Introduction

The book of Revelation contains 24 references in which the word “worship” appears, in most instances derived from the Greek *proskuneō*, which means to prostrate oneself to pay homage or obeisance. The root of the verb is *kunein*, the Greek term meaning “to kiss.” For the ancient Greeks worshipping chthonic deities, it involved stooping to kiss the earth.

The first reference to the concept of worship occurs in 1:17: “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid, I am the First and the Last.’”¹ This encounter between John and the Lord sets the tone for the whole book. John’s act of humble devotion and submission is similar to that of Abraham and Daniel, and then God speaks.

It is important to note that John was in an attitude of worship when he received the visions and instructions from the Lord (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), when “in the Spirit” he saw and heard what others could not see and hear. This means that in the context of worship, people should expect to receive insight into the Gospel and the Christian life. In order for that to be possible, the focus in worship must be theocentric.

Theocentric Worship

The most profound and dramatic portrayal of theocentric worship is found in Revelation 4-5. All of the action, the symbols, and the sounds image the power and grace of God in the Gospel. The worshipers in chapter 4 gather around the throne of God. The focus of the liturgical action is on God the Creator. In chapter 5 the focus is on God the Redeemer. Father and Son are praised and glorified in what is,

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no doubt, the most sublime expression of theocentric worship ever to be performed. It provides the church of the last-days a stirring example, and demonstration, of the kind of theocentric worship so badly needed. When such worship is undertaken and experienced by the church, human needs will be met as the God worshiped reaches out in grace and mercy through the Word and touches the hearts and lives of those who seek Him.

Liturgy and Spontaneity. If, as the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* suggests, Revelation was written about A.D. 96 during the reign of Domitian, then it seems that the ritual approach to worship and the use of the *Sanctus* and *Doxology* found in Revelation 4-5, as well as other liturgical elements, reflect at least some of the common worship practice of the early Church.²

On the other hand, the worship depicted is characterized by spontaneity. The singing is spontaneous, brought forth by the environment of heavenly splendor and the presence of Deity. There is a spontaneous prostration by the twenty-four elders in response to the *Sanctus* sung by “the living creatures” (4:9). Such a spontaneous response occurs also in 5:8 when the Lamb takes the scroll from the Father's right hand. These acts are so significant they elicit an immediate spontaneous response from the celestial worshipers. While there is certainly liturgical order and progression, there is also a delightful spontaneity.

Lofty and Majestic Worship. In chapters 4-5 worship is shown in its most lofty form. The grand climax is reached when the whole universe worships God. The “Amen!” (5:14) indicates the great controversy is ended, the work of the Church is finished, and the universe is once again at peace and in harmony with its Creator. A most majestic doxology!

The key expression, “You are worthy,” is directed to the Creator in chapter 4 and to the Redeemer in chapter 5. (Such language was familiar to first century Christians, since “*vere dignus*” were the first words of solemn acclamation directed to an Emperor upon his entrance into a city.) In Revelation's majestic service all created beings surrender their crowns to Father and Son (4:10). Creation and redemption, heaven and earth, are bound together in this glorious act of worship. The centrality of Father and Son in worship is established for Christians forever.

Humble Posture. In 4:10 the 24 elders “fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship [*proskuneō*] him. . . .” In 5:14, following hymns of praise, the 24 elders “fell down and worshiped.” A literal translation would be “fell down and prostrated themselves.” (See also

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Rev 7:11; 11:16; 19:4.) Paul's statement, "He will fall down and worship God" (1 Cor 14:25), in the context of a lengthy discussion on worship, seems to indicate that *proskuneō* was probably part of the worship of the NT Church. Apparently the disciples worshiped the risen Christ in the same manner prior to His glorification, and there is no indication that He objected (Matt 14:33; Matt 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52). Why did the Lord's disciples respond to Him in this way?

They saw Him vested with the omnipotence of God. Overwhelmed by this proof of might, they fell down before him and carried out the proskyneses, exclaiming: 'Truly You are the son of God!' The adoration of the risen Lord has a similar background: Now the Lord stood before the disciples as the manifestly divine Lord. The disciples experienced Jesus' saving power. The revelation of the victor evoked the **PROSKYNESIS**.³

The central issue in the great controversy between God and Satan is crystallized in the question of "Who should we worship?" The Devil even sought the worship and adoration due only to Deity from Jesus: "All this I will give you . . . if you will bow down and worship [*proskuneō*] me" (Matt 4:9; Luke 4:7). After the seven plagues are over, "The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent . . . they did not stop worshiping [*proskuneō*] demons, and idols . . ." (Rev 9:20), and "men worshiped [*proskuneō*] the dragon . . . and they also worshiped the beast . . ." (Rev 13:4). The second beast "made the earth and its inhabitants worship [*proskune*] the first beast . . ." (Rev 13:12).

Is not worship the ultimate gesture, sign, testimony acknowledging the dominion of Lord and Lamb? Does the posture reflect attitude and perception? This is spontaneity at its best. Such was Daniel's response when Christ appeared to him. He says, "I was terrified and fell prostrate . . . with my face to the ground" (Dan 8:17-18). What else does one do in the very presence of divinity but adopt an attitude of submissive praise?

Praise and Adoration. It is obvious that praise and submission are the most appropriate responses to the Gospel, the natural consequence of the Gospel. The Lord through Christ created us, and the Lord through the Lamb redeemed us, so we praise God, adore God, giving all glory to Him as we submit our lives to His lordship. Praise is offered by means of action and language. Revelation 4 and 5 portray a dynamic interplay of word, action, and material symbol.⁴ This interplay shapes the worshiper's perception, allowing for a creative and spontaneous response. At such a time action can be as spiritual as

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words. It was not enough for God to declare His love for us; it needed to be acted out in history to have credibility. Similarly, it is not enough for us to declare our love for Him; it must be demonstrated in the obedience of faith and in acts of praise if it, too, is to have credibility.

To enter the presence of the Lord and the Lamb in spoken or sung prayer means to adore Him verbally, to thank Him for who He is and what He does, to confess our sin and to repent in deep humility. Our confession of sin and our confession of faith in Christ give glory to God. The failure to confess sin inhibits praise, just as confessing faith unleashes praise. Such Christian prayer can be called the “supreme moral act.”⁵ In commenting on the mission of the Church to disciple the world, one author says:

The discipleship of the early Christians was evident when in their gatherings they extol their Leader, acknowledge before Him their failures, listen to His words, and seek to know His will for daily living as they challenge and invade the structures of this world.⁶

Praise is intrinsic to the quality of the relationship between the One worshiped and those worshipping. It involves recognition of God’s holiness, respect for His person, Word and will, and joy in His presence. Praise is “an attempt to cope with the abundance of God’s love.”⁷ To praise God is to want to praise Him again and again. Praise is completely voluntary and elicited by God’s love and grace.

Giving God glory is the most natural and proper response to His goodness. The One praised is intrinsically and demonstrably worthy. “The central thrust of the Jewish and Christian tradition is to take up the whole of life into praise of God, making Him central to everything and His glory the goal of the universe.”⁸ In the act of worship the believer joins his life with that of Lord and Lamb and together with other believers constructs a “cathedral of sound.”⁹

Worship Directed to the Deity. The glorified Church, whose worship is portrayed in Revelation 4-5, is enriched by another scene depicting the victorious end-time redeemed before the throne, “they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple . . .” (7:14-15). They are dressed in white robes, they stand “before the throne and in front of the Lamb” with palm branches in their hands, and they cry out “in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (7:9-10). They are the same people identified, while yet on earth, in Revelation 14:1-5.

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The words that are spoken, and the liturgical action, all take place in the presence of the Lord and the Lamb as Creator and Redeemer are praised and adored. The words and actions are not directed to humans, but to the Deity. They recount, recite, the mighty acts of Lord and Lamb in creating and redeeming the world. The entire focus is on the Deity, not on the worshipers.

Words are very often inadequate to express praise and adoration by themselves, as evidenced by the theocentric worship scene in Revelation 4-5. This prophetic scene suggests that “word and gesture belong together.”¹⁰ Authentic Christian worship “draws on the basic human capacities of speech, use of things, spontaneity and silence.”¹¹ Meditative silence is the corollary. When we are silent before the Lord we are able to listen and hear His voice. Some of the most profound and moving worship takes place in an atmosphere of silence.

The idea that worship is a ministry to God, that he loves to be worshipped, and that he made us to worship him dominates the worship of the ancient church. It is early Christian conviction drawn from Revelation 4 and 5. In these chapters, we see the heavenly host gathered around the throne in heaven, singing praises of the Triune God.¹²

Summary. We can only be impressed by the theocentric worship in Revelation. It is not man-centered and narcissistic. The Lord and Lamb are at the center, not human feelings, human experience, or human needs. The worshipers come to meet with Lord and Lamb, to hear them speak, and to respond in faith and obedience. In the contemporary approach it is often an energetic exercise to get people to smile Sabbath morning, to enforce a kind of compulsory friendliness, assuming success to be an indication that everything is spiritually all right. William Willimon perceptively observes:

When is the last time you were afraid on [Sabbath] morning? Our current backslapping conviviality and chumminess with God would seem strange to those who once stammered and shook before the divine, falling flat on their faces before God rather than shouting out a hearty ‘Good morning!’¹³

There are those who would say that contemporary faith is more mature than that of the ancients, when the opposite may actually be the case. We have managed to alter our conception of God from that of the Almighty in the heavens to the “good old boy,” not realizing how

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much we have contributed to the rotting of the religion of our times. A. W. Tozer stated emphatically:

It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity.¹⁴

The response of the redeemed to Revelation 4 is keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, to Revelation 5 is living a transformed life. Both responses acknowledge divine dominion and are acted out in worship.

Central Issue in the Great Controversy

We get the clear impression John received everything in chapters 1-10 while lying prostrate before the Lord. Then in chapter 11 he is told to measure the Temple, its altar and its worshipers. This is a type of judgment or assessment of a situation or condition. It is a prelude to chapters 13-14, which constitute a warning concerning true and false worship. To measure the Church is to ascertain whether the life of the Church, its doctrines, work, and worship, are in harmony with the will and revelation of God found in both Old and New Testaments (the “two witnesses” of 11:3). We expect, in harmony with Scripture, not with sociology and/or culture. God’s true worshipers are those who trace their spiritual ancestry to the Bible-believing Christians of the early Church, to apostolic times, not pre-Reformation or Reformation times.

It is hard to imagine a more critical and decisive situation than that described in chapter 13, which sets the scene for the equally crucial and dramatic events described in chapter 14. A blasphemous religious system united with influential political power (in the guise of true religion) is preaching a false gospel that wins people throughout the world to worship a false god. Furthermore, it is a coercive ministry, because death is the consequence for refusing to worship the false god (13:15).

No greater travesty of the Christian religion could be conceived. It is so contradictory to the nature of God, so inhumane, so out of harmony with the biblical message of atonement, that it could have been conceived and executed only by “Satan, who leads the whole world astray” (12:9). Saddest of all is the realization that this devilish evangelism will be supported and fostered by those who should be on the side of the true God, alongside the true church, preaching the true Gospel and winning people to worship the true God.

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The Bible warns us of the Devil's desire, his perverted plan: "He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess 2:4). The church is the temple of God (2 Cor 6:16). An unprecedented and extremely critical situation will develop on earth due to the enthusiastic evangelism of the Devil's disciples. It must be countered. God acts! Instantly! Rapidly! Revelation 14 provides us with the picture of God's response to the foreseen devastating and diabolical threat.

In contrast to Satan standing on the seashore waiting for the emergence of the church that would allow him to rule, the Lamb of God stands on Mt. Zion surrounded by His end-time faithful ones. He is in charge! All will be well! John the revelator hears the mighty chorus from the heavenly worshipers singing the new song of redemption (Rev 4-5), sung only by those who "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (14:4).

The true church is alive and well. Out of its celestial worship comes its evangelism. Swiftly the eternal Gospel comes forth to challenge the false gospel (14:6). The challenge is universal and comes with "a loud voice" (vs. 7). All people everywhere will hear it. The call is to "worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (vs. 7).

But there is more. The false church is exposed for what it is and is called "Babylon" the fallen. The word conjures up all the apostasy, all the corruption, all the paganism of that ancient kingdom and its diabolical king (vs. 8). Then comes the last word from the throne of God. A loud voice cries so that its message pierces the ears of a world gone deaf to the truth. The judgment of God is greater than the threats of Satan. "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark . . . he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath" (vss. 9-10).

There we have it—the fundamental issue in the age-old controversy between God and Satan: Who is to be ultimately worshiped by mankind and the universe? Seen in this light, worship is certainly not an irrelevant issue for the Seventh-day Adventist church. It is an issue we avoid only at our peril.

Furthermore, worship is not just a central issue in terms of theology, as though it were merely a subject to be discussed and provocatively analyzed. Worship is central for the life of the Adventist church primarily in terms of practice. In other words, the Seventh-day Adventist church, which we believe to be the ecclesiastical manifestation of the last-day church in our time, must be a worshipping church. Worship must be central to its life, for out of worship comes evangelism.

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Worshippers Identified

Between Revelation 13 and the call to worship in Revelation 14:6-12, there is a vivid description of the true worshipers of God (Rev 14:1-5). The call to worship in chapter 14 is given to the world through a specific people. Revelation 14:1-5 identifies and describes them. They are gathered on Mt. Zion, which is a “symbol of rejoicing and security”¹⁵ as well as a place of revelation.¹⁶ God’s people can only stand firm on the rock of faithfulness and endurance. They are with the Lamb, which indicates “triumph over the beast and its image.”¹⁷ They are identified as God’s people, the redeemed and faithful remnant who have His name written on their foreheads.

In contrast to the blasphemy of the beast (13:5-6), a heavenly voice comes from the 144,000.¹⁸ In contrast to Revelation 13 it is a most welcome sound. They sing a new song (vs. 3)! A song of praise, triumph and victory. That which is “new” about it are the events of sacred history directly related to the life and ministry of Christ: His birth, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, High Priestly ministry, and promise to return. The beast makes an image speak (13:15), but only the redeemed can sing the new song. They have been released, by knowledge of the truth and by grace, from slavery to the beast(s) (Rev 13:1, 11). The sound of praise they make is “like that of harpists,” the harp being an instrument uniquely adapted to the praise of God (Ps 149:3; 150:3).

The new song is sung to God, not to humanity. It is not amusement or entertainment. It rejoices in God and in new life, not in life itself. It rejoices in redemption by grace, newness and transformation. The song is reminiscent of the one sung by the Israelites rejoicing in deliverance from Egypt (Exod 15:1-18; Ps 33:3; 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 99:9, Isa 42:10).

Newness of life is indicated by the fact that the singers are pure and undefiled (vs. 4). They have not committed spiritual fornication/ adultery with “the great prostitute” (Rev 17:1), identified as “Babylon the great” (Rev 17:5; 18:2ff). They have cast off adultery and refuse to adore or follow “the beasts” (Rev 13:2, 11). Spiritual virgins keep aloof from Babylon, do not yield to the temptation of spiritual sensuality, and are “offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb” (14:4). Those who yield to falsehood will not stand on Mt. Zion.

The redeemed themselves are the ultimate offering to God. The supreme act of worship is the complete surrender of being and life to God. This is not an offering of self to humanity but to God, to be used redemptively in the world. Tangibly, this means obeying the commandments of God and remaining faithful to Jesus Christ (vs. 12).

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To be “offered as firstfruits” may mean willingness to pay the ultimate price for adherence to the truth—sacrificial people in the final sense.

“No lie was found in their mouths” (vs. 5). Because they serve God, they will not blur distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong, which would only mislead humanity. They speak no false prophecies, but are people of the truth.

They live and speak the truth because they are “blameless” (*amōmos* unblemished), uncontaminated by false ideas and ways of life. They allow God’s commandments (His revealed will) and the eternal gospel to establish beliefs and lifestyle. The followers of the Lamb are distinguished by their possession of the truth, which is the absence, not just the opposite, of falsehood. They will have nothing to do with falsehood, not even a mixture of truth and falsehood.¹⁹ All idolatry is considered spiritual fornication and/or adultery.²⁰ C. Mervyn Maxwell reminds us that

the remnant was promised that their sins would all be forgiven (Jer 50:20), they would be found without iniquity (Jer 50:20; Is 4:2-5), and free from all lies (Zeph 3:13). They would stand on Mount Zion (Mic 4:7; Is 4:2-5; Ob 17; Joel 2:32) in the presence of God and of the Lamb, participating in the glorious singing.²¹

Revelation 14:1-5 identifies and characterizes the people to whom and through whom the call to worship God comes in a crisis time. They are in the position and condition to receive and proclaim the message to worship God and the Lamb. They are not common humanity or those looking for the sacred in the secular. They are the redeemed who have been transformed by the power of grace and love the sacred for its own sake.

The Primary Activity of the Church

The end-time call to worship is given to the church and world by the “first” angel (Rev 14:6-7). The call is addressed to a humanity idolatrous and superstitious, seduced by the beast and the false prophet (13:3-8, 11-17). The call to worship God is seen in contrast to worship of the beast and its image, the ultimate transgression of God’s commandments.

The message of the first angel involves more than an announcement that “the hour of his judgment has come.” It declares what the whole world, and especially the Church, should be doing in light of the present judgment: “Fear God and give him glory.” Only to acknowledge we are indeed in the time of judgment is in itself an incomplete response to this message. The outcome of proclaiming the

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“eternal gospel” increases the numbers of those who worship God, but the ultimate goal of evangelism is to make true worshipers. Thus, evangelism “is the extension of the Church’s worship life into the world.”²²

Therefore, the primary activity of the remnant Church, and its most distinguishing mark, is worship. Seventh-day Adventists are people of submission and of praise. They are a people called out to “proclaim my glory among the nations” (Isa 66:19).

Roy Allen Anderson points out that the eternal Gospel (Rev 14:6) has past and future dimensions: the good news of salvation from sin because of Calvary, and the good news of the imminent return of Christ.²³ This last, of course, not only because of Calvary but because of the High Priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.

However, verse 7 provides additional and specific content of that Gospel as it impinges upon the ministry of the last day Church and upon the world at the time that Church ministers. The eternal Gospel to be preached by the last day Church is a specific call and invitation to “fear” God, to give “glory” to God, and to “worship” God, precisely because the hour of His “judgment” is at hand.²⁴

The two fundamental expressions of worship are “fear” God, and give “glory” to God. The first has ethical/moral overtones and obligations involving obedience as the evidence of faith. The second has liturgical overtones involving the act of worship itself—for individuals and for the corporate body of believers already identified and known as the “remnant.” In this last connection it is important to note the Bible does not recognize a remnant *person*, only a remnant *people*. The remnant is a corporate concept. For example, the Lord’s Prayer was not given for individuals but for the corporate worship of a people. It is addressed to “*Our* Father” (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2). The primary concern of those who pray “after this manner” (KJV) is not for themselves, but for the rule of God in the world and in their corporate lives. In the context of the preadvent judgment, to “fear” God has individual consequences in terms of salvation: to give “glory” to God has corporate consequences in terms of the Church’s mission to the world.

Theocentric Worship. This call to worship is a purely theocentric call. There is no trace of anthropocentricity. It is God who is to be feared, not man. It is God to whom glory is to be given, not man. It is God who is to be worshiped, not man. The worship service is primarily an occasion for God to speak, which is reflected liturgically in that He speaks first, and then His people respond.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has not escaped the shift from theocentric to anthropocentric worship taking place within Protestantism. However, Seventh-day Adventists must recognize this

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shift is out of harmony with, and contradictory to, Revelation 14:6-7. Instead of following the pressures of culture our Church must remain faithful to biblical norms. Worship informed and inspired by the Word of God is the answer to the anthropocentric shift.

The Great Controversy and Worship. Nowhere is the great controversy between God and Satan, between Christ and Antichrist, more manifest, more dramatized, than in the worship of the last day Church. This is because the Church will be at times in direct contrast, indeed conflict, with earthly states and/or apostate ecclesiastical organizations and their officials. This is precisely why the worship of Christians and any form of totalitarianism, religious or secular, are incompatible. Worship is a political as well as religious act, in the sense that it challenges all who would usurp the authority of God. Faithful Sabbath-keeping is a part of this challenge. God alone is entitled to the acclamation and adoration of His people.

This worship by God's people is not just a statement that impacts life on the earth. Its impact is cosmic in that ultimately all powers and principalities will bow and confess the Lordship of Christ (Phil 2:9-11). As Peter Brunner says,

When the congregation in worship professes the dominion of God the Father, of Jesus Christ, and of the Spirit, it does something that reaches far beyond this earthly time. With this profession, the congregation anticipates what all created beings will do either voluntarily or involuntarily at the end of all things (Phil.2:10). The worship of the congregation opens the door to admit the last things, and already participates, in its infirmity and stammering imperfection, in what will one day take place, and is already taking place, before the throne of God. This is a 'final' word that we are here trying to express on worship. The entire way of salvation, which God has traversed with man since creation, reaches its goal here. In the realm of the earthly creature, God again finds a mirror here which catches and reflects His glory.²⁵

New Song. A Christian congregation's worship is a participation with all the saints in the singing of the new song, the song of Moses and the Lamb. When the Church worships Lord and Lamb on earth it enters, as it were, the heavenly sanctuary to join the heavenly host in the singing of the new song. The Church's acclamation in praise is the "medium of perfect communion between God and creature"; it is the "last word (*logos*) with which the church speaks about God (*Theos*)."²⁶ It anticipates a perfect relationship in which both the human struggle against sin and resistance to the work of the Spirit is ended because of the victory of Christ (Gal 5:13-25). Nothing is there to hinder the

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expression of that relationship in worship. No longer are human needs foremost in the worshiper's mind. The worshiper is able to concentrate fully and completely upon offering Lord and Lamb the praise due to them for the victory They have made possible. There is nothing more to do except to glorify Lord and Lamb who have done all, whose work has been finished on earth and has produced the fruit of full salvation and restoration.

In the Church's proclamation to the world, and in its profession of faith, the end-time struggle is evident. However, as Brunner says, the hymn of praise stands "at the end of all struggle. It is basically a hymn of victory."²⁷

In this final word which the creature may say about God, the creature exists only for God, without design, without purpose, undividedly, fulfilling its own essence by the fact that it is no longer, and needs no longer to be, anything but the perfect mirror of God's glory. Thus the hymn of praise is an end-time sign, indicating that God will one day be all in all.²⁸

It is no wonder that so much worship and praise is found in the Bible's last book (Rev 1:6; 4:9, 11; 5:12, 13; 7:12; 11:13; 14:7; 15:4; 19:1, 7). It is obvious—given the end-time message and mission—the end-time Church responds fully to the first angel's message and gives glory to Lord and Lamb in worship.

Distinction between Babylon and End-time Remnant. In order to worship God fully and freely, in order to worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), God's people must recognize Babylon's (apostate Christianity's) fallenness and "come out of her" (Rev 18:4) so they will not "share in her sins." The major sin is the proclamation of "a false god winning people to worship him by means of a false message preached by a false church to the whole world . . . Heaven sees the situation as a divine opportunity and as a prelude to the return of the Lord to earth."²⁹ In addition, the message of Revelation 14:9-11 is a dire warning to those who continue to worship the false god.

Verse 12 further identifies the true worshipers of God, indicating the situation described in the previous verses calls for the kind of commitment referred to as "patient [steadfast] endurance" like that of an Olympic athlete. There is to be no yielding in the time of crisis, rather a stubborn, single-minded purpose will prevail. Such endurance in the face of spiritual adultery and militant religious apostasy must be accepted even unto death (vs. 13). These are the people spoken of as "blessed" dead, admonished to "be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10).

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Distinctions between Revelation 13 and 14 are clear and unambiguous. They call for decisive action, for clear-cut decisions based upon revealed truth, not upon the ideas of men which often blur distinctions and make accommodation which is the “characteristic vice of all idolatry and worldliness.”³⁰ The book of Revelation calls for the kind of mature religious faith that is willing to pay the price of such distinction.

Grand Climax

We cannot act on the basis of ambiguous and uncertain religious beliefs. Only the Church with a certain and unambiguous message has the right, the authority, the audacity, to call people to decision and action. This is especially relevant and critical when judgment is imminent. In the context of a cosmic conflict the world is being called unequivocally to worship, expressed by total loyalty to God and His revealed truth no matter what the cost.

The consciousness of the time of the preadvent judgment moves believers to fear, glorify, and worship God. To lose that consciousness is to lose the sense of urgency for worship and mission on the part of the very Church to which, and through which, the call is made. The “hour of his judgment” (Rev 14:7) impacts the life of that Church. While it is identified as the New Testament Church in terms of origin and belief, it must bear witness in the final *krisis* (judgment) time of history. Its heritage needs constantly to be assessed and repeated in the ceremonies of worship during the last phase of the Church’s life and witness. The consciousness of the hour of the preadvent judgment ought to accomplish for the Church what all the years of formation and reformation did only partially—a complete spiritual surrender to—Lord and Lamb, demonstrated in consistent individual and corporate worship and living.

There can be no compromise with evil on the part of the eschatological Church. No truce with the Devil. The Christian community has been charged by its Lord “to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). The Church was always intended to be an invasion force, permeating culture and its institutions.

The Church does this primarily by its confession concerning Jesus. He is Lord (Phil 2:11; 1 Cor 12:3); He is the Christ, the Messiah (1 John 5:1); He is the Son of God (1 John 4:15). Such confession angers the nations (Rev 11:18), and enrages the “dragon” who makes war against “those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17). In the affirmation “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3) is bound up the content of the Church’s confession, proclamation, and

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motivation for its worship and mission. It is the supreme challenge to any other deity or authority.

The response of God's people in this hour is to worship Him more fervently in dedicated obedience and joyful praise. In the "hour of his judgment" the opinions and philosophies of men do not stand the test of reliability. The Church rests its case on the surety of the Word of God.

To be sure, the Christian gives glory to God by an obedient life, but there is more than an ethical/moral dimension to this call to worship. In view of Revelation 4-5 and 14:6-7, Tozer is right in his observation: "The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian Church today is to purify her concept of God until it is once more worthy of Him—and of her."³¹ God would have a people who acknowledge the dominion and authority and rule of Lord and Lamb. In its corporate worship the remnant Church enters by faith into the heavenly sanctuary and joins the worship of the angelic beings in anticipation of the great marriage supper of the Lamb at the end of the age (Rev19:7-9).

To say of worship, "It doesn't meet my needs!" or "I don't get anything out of it!" suggests the center of worship is the worshiper. No wonder we miss God! No wonder little of real value seldom happens! No wonder church-going becomes a bore! No wonder God's Word is often buried beneath the rubbish of human self-elevation! Worship is in grave danger of becoming just another entrée in the smorgasbord of activities planned to meet every possible human need, and usually failing to do so, failing because the real need is to draw near to God.

If in genuine worship of God a human need is met, it is a by-product, because "the main gift we receive is God."³² In the context of the judgment age in which the Seventh-day Adventist Church lives and ministers, an extremely self-centered and humanistic age, the radicality of worship is indicated by Revelation 14:6-7. When it comes to the planning and leading of worship, "The true prophet is more intent on interpreting the nature and working of God than on fulfilling the needs and wishes of the people."³³ A renewed theocentric experience of acclaiming Lord and Lamb would result in a renewal of both worship and evangelism.

Without a perspective of sacred history, reenacted, illustrated, demonstrated in its corporate worship, the Advent movement will become imprisoned within present culture, perhaps even within its own subculture. The present moment in history becomes the norm. The roots of Adventist worship are not in the 16th or 19th centuries, but in the Old Testament and early Church practices, particularly as represented by the book of Revelation.

HOLMES: WORSHIP IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The sound of the seventh trumpet signals the approaching end of the controversy and announces the final day of deliverance (Rev 11:15). Heavenly voices declare, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever." In response to the resounding declaration of the ultimate victory, the twenty-four elders fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying:

We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth (Rev 11:16-19).

Worship is a sacred drama and as such is both the proclamation and the acting out of the Gospel story that interprets and provides meaning to human existence. "Human life on this earth began with God in worship, and it is to end with God in worship."³⁴ Just as two Sabbaths are like two hands enclosing something special, so between the first worship on earth and the last is the whole history of God's people.

The fundamental need of the contemporary Adventist worshiper is to be enabled to live faithfully, courageously, and obediently during the final events of the great controversy and in the midst of a corrupt world system. Adventist worship will meet this spiritual need only when the Lord and the Lamb are its primary focus, when They are glorified, praised, as the only reliable and dependable Source of overcoming power and grace. As Lind says,

The radical nature of the biblical faith is evident precisely at the point of worship: the affirmation that community is founded upon and maintained by Yahweh's act of grace to which the community responds by corporate acts of praise (faith) and surrender, the acts of worship.³⁵

Perhaps the reason why we do not give glory to God as we should is because, "God's grace is no longer a gift to us" as Willimon says, "it is so utterly expected. It is our right, our privilege, our achievement. This is the blasphemy against which the prophets spoke."³⁶ The struggle of the last-day Church is the same as that of ancient Israel and the early Church: externally with the "Babylon" influence (Rev 14:8; 18:2-5), the forces of evil and apostasy as represented by the beast in Revelation 13, and internally with the preservation of the faith in the face of doubt and skepticism.

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The tragic “Fallen! Fallen!” (Rev 18:2) spoken by the angel about the apostate church, and the “Woe! Woe!” (18:10, 16, 19) cried by those on earth who witness her sad demise, are followed by the joyous and triumphant “Hallelujah!” (19:1,3,4,5,6) from heaven. With a roar like thunder the great hymn is shouted in heaven by the redeemed:

Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants (19:1-2).

Again they shout! “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever” (19:3). A voice then comes from the throne bidding the heavenly worshippers to “Praise our God.” The shouted response returns, an immense roaring chorus:

Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear (19:6-8).

Could it be that a vital element in the loud cry of Adventist missions is the remnant community’s acclaiming its adoration of Lord and Lamb? Could it be that the most effective way to combat the forces arrayed against the faith and against the faithful is to meet them with the choir (cf. 2 Chron 20:21-22)? The Christian religion is not just about morality and character, it is about proclamation and acclamation. Righteousness, peace, and “joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17) are qualities of the kingdom of God. Joy in the Lord is a primary fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).

Ellen G. White comments on the significance of praise for Seventh-day Adventist worshippers in the context of the great controversy and in light of the grand climax:

we shall praise far more than complain. . . .The language of the heart will not be selfish murmuring and repining. Praise, like clear-flowing streams, will come from God’s truly believing ones.³⁷

The temple of God is opened in heaven, and the threshold is flushed with the glory which is for every church that will love God and keep His commandments. . . .We shall catch the themes of song and thanksgiving of the heavenly choir round about the throne. When Zion shall arise and shine, her light will be most penetrating, and precious songs of praise and thanksgiving will be heard in the assemblies of the saints. Murmuring and complaining over little disappointments will cease. As we apply the golden eyesalve we shall see the glories beyond. Faith will cut through the heavy shadow of Satan, and we shall see our Advocate offering up the incense of His own merits in our behalf.³⁸

HOLMES: WORSHIP IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The church of God below is one with the church of God above. Believers on the earth and the beings in heaven who have never fallen constitute one church. Every heavenly intelligence is interested in the assemblies of the saints who on earth meet to worship God. In the inner court of heaven they listen to the testimony of the witnesses for Christ in the outer court on earth, and the praise and thanksgiving from the worshipers below is taken up in the heavenly anthem, and praise and rejoicing sound through the heavenly courts because Christ has not died in vain for the fallen sons of Adam. . . . Oh, that we could all realize the nearness of heaven to earth! . . . Let us remember that our praises are supplemented by the choirs of the angelic host above.³⁹

Notes

- 1 All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 Such a development of liturgical practice of itself does not necessarily represent a drift toward apostasy. That which constitutes apostasy is false theology.
- 3 Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), pp. 211-212.
- 4 C. Raymond Holmes, *Sing a New Song* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1984), pp. 18-19.
- 5 Millard C. Lind, *Biblical Foundations for Christian Worship* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), p. 40.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- 7 Daniel W. Hardy and David F. Ford, *Praising and Knowing God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), p. 1.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
- 10 Brunner, *Worship*, p. 212.
- 11 Hardy/Ford, p. 1.
- 12 Robert E. Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*, Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), p. 40.
- 13 William H. Willimon, *The Bible: A Sustaining Presence in Worship* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1981), p. 89.
- 14 A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), pp. 9-10. While Tozer's observation was made in 1961, the current state of affairs indicates an even worsening situation at the end of the twentieth century.
- 15 J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975), p. 233.
- 16 Compare Hebrews 12:1-29, especially vs. 22: "But you have come to Mt. Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly . . ."
- 17 *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), p. 825.
- 18 The 144,000 is an allusion to the OT remnant which has been redeemed and protected by God to reestablish the nation and deliver her from all enemies preparatory to the day of wrath. See Obad 16-17; Joel 3-4; Jer 2:2-3, 23; Zeph 3:12-13.
- 19 See Zeph 3:9-14.
- 20 See Jer 2:26-28; 3:6-10.
- 21 C. Mervyn Maxwell, "The Remnant in Adventist History." (Unpublished manuscript, 1989), p. 8.
- 22 Holmes, p. 141.

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23 Roy Allen Anderson, *Unfolding the Revelation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1953), p. 150.

24 See William Altink, "1 Chronicles 16:8-36 as Literary Source for Revelation 14:6-7," *AUSS*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Summer 1984, pp. 187-196, and "Theological Motives for the Use of 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 as Background for Revelation 14:6-7," *AUSS*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Autumn 1986, pp. 211-221, for a discussion of these four terms. Whether 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 was actually and consciously used by the writer of Revelation as a literary source or background may be debatable, but the parallels are striking, and we are indebted to Altink for calling them to our attention.

25 Brunner, p. 207.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 210-211.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*

29 Holmes, p. 40.

30 *The Interpreters Bible*, Vol. XII, 12 vols, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 592.

31 Tozer, p. 12.

32 Willimon, p. 34.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

34 Holmes, p. 30.

35 Lind, p. 56.

36 Willimon, pp. 78-79.

37 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, 9 Vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), p. 367.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 368.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 366-367.