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Toward a Systematic Theology of the Sanctuary: Part 1

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RESUMEN

“Hacia una teología sistemática de la doctrina del santuario - Parte I”—Este artículo es parte de un ensayo que ofrece algunas reflexiones preliminares sobre la relación entre el santuario y la teología sistemática, centrándose solamente en unos pocos aspectos que exponen la relación entre los dos. Este artículo considera la naturaleza de los sistemas teológicos, las cuestiones relacionadas con un sistema teológico adventista y la relación entre la teología fundamental y el santuario en particular, con especial atención a algunos puntos de vista generales que compiten entre sí y que están íntegramente relacionados con la manera en que se conciben los principios teológicos más amplios. Esto prepara el escenario para el segundo artículo, que concluirá el ensayo discutiendo un número importante de aspectos sistemáticos que arrojan luz sobre una posible teología sistemática del santuario.

Palabras clave: teología sistemática, santuario, sistemas teológicos, teología fundamental, teología adventista

ABSTRACT

“Toward a Systematic Theology of the Sanctuary—Part I”—This article is part one of an essay that offers some preliminary thoughts regarding the relationship of the sanctuary and systematic theology, focusing on just a few aspects which expose the relationship between the two. This article considers the nature of theological systems, issues related to an Adventist system of theology, and the relationship between fundamental theology and the sanctuary in particular, with attention to some broad, competing views of the sanctuary that are integrally related to the way one conceives of broader theological principles. This sets the stage for the second article, which will conclude the essay by discussing a number of important systematic elements that shed light on a potential systematic theology of the sanctuary.

Keywords: systematic theology, Sanctuary, theological systems, fundamental theology, Seventh-day Adventist theology

TOWARD A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY OF THE SANCTUARY—PART I

John C. Peckham

Introduction

The sanctuary is often underrepresented, reduced to a temporary symbol, and/or entirely ignored in Christian theologies. Even among Adventists, the sanctuary is sometimes treated in ways that (often unintentionally) reduce it to merely a doctrine, perhaps even one that is tacked on at the end of an otherwise fully formed system of thought.¹ As such, I fear that the sanctuary is sometimes understood and/or presented in a way that implies (wittingly or unwittingly) that it is an idiosyncratic addition to the unchangeable gospel of Jesus Christ. This contributes to a potential crisis of thought, given that *if* the sanctuary “doctrine” is indeed an addition to the gospel then it should be rejected in keeping with Scripture’s strong counsel to not receive any gospel other than the true gospel conveyed by Jesus and his commissioned witnesses (Gal 1:8; 2 Cor 11:4).

However, I believe that the sanctuary is integral to the unchangeable gospel of Christ and, indeed, to the entire biblical system of truth. This essay offers some *preliminary* thoughts regarding the relationship of the sanctuary and systematic theology. In my view, to do justice to this relationship would require an entire systematic theology itself (as will be seen, in part, below).² For the purposes of this essay, then, I will focus on just a few aspects which expose the relationship of the sanctuary and systematic theology. This essay is divided into two articles. In this one—the first of the two, I will dis-

¹I am indebted to the work of Fernando Canale for emphasizing this point. See Fernando L. Canale, “Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary,” *AUSS* 36, no. 2 (1998): 183–206.

²In my view, the development of a systematic theology of the sanctuary would require a full-scale treatment of all of the canonical data, which is (obviously) beyond the scope of this essay.

cuss introductory issues relative to the nature of theological systems and the possibility of a systematic theology of the sanctuary.

Theological Systems

What is the Nature of a Theological System?

In order to address this question, it is first necessary to briefly address the nature of theological systems. Just what is a theological system? In this essay, a “system” refers to a group of working parts that contribute to and complement a whole. Imagine a beautiful red sports car sitting in your driveway. Now imagine that there is nothing under the hood of this beautiful car. Without its working parts, this beautiful “car” is not going anywhere. A working automobile requires a *system* of working parts that are properly organized and function harmoniously. If even one significant component is missing or disconnected the car will not work properly (or, perhaps, at all). A car that has all of its working and properly organized components except a fuel tank will, of course, not operate. Conversely, a “car” with all of its components but improperly assembled will also not operate, even if only one crucial component is not properly connected to the others. You might, then, have a nice façade. You might even be able to get people to join you in that “car,” but at the end of the day, you are not going anywhere. For a working system you need all of the working parts to be harmoniously connected. A system without the proper working components simply does not work. Likewise, a collection of working components that are not properly organized is not a system.

Even as various vehicle makes and models are available to lease at your local car dealer, there are various systems of thought vying for attention and adoption in our contemporary world. Within the realm of Christian theological systems alone, there is a dizzying array of competing and, in significant ways, mutually exclusive systematic theologies.³ Indeed, we live in an age of theological confusion, a theo-

³The discipline of systematic theology is broad and undertaken via various diverging methodologies. Minimally, systematic theology involves the study and ar-

logical “Babylon” where many have given up hope of sorting through the various doctrines of those who claim to be espousing the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ. In the “information” age, theological “lessees” are overwhelmed with seemingly viable options and appear to be increasingly uninformed and/or undiscerning.

Similar to the fashion in which parts from different vehicle models may not be interchangeable—indeed one might do significant damage by inserting an incompatible part—theological systems come in varying “shapes” and “sizes” and, while some components of any two systems might be compatible, there are other components that may not be so. Those who do not recognize the systematic nature of theological truth might unwittingly import parts from one “system” of thought to another that simply do not fit and/or damage the system. Conversely, lack of attention to the systematic nature of theology engenders an eclectic cafeteria-style approach where one might haphazardly pick and choose from various components, resulting in a non-working conglomeration that, too often, leads to disillusionment.

An Adventist System of Theology?

Although this scenario affects a myriad of potential worldviews, Adventism is also susceptible to a cafeteria-style mixture of incompatible menu items that might lead to disappointment and disillusionment, particularly regarding the sanctuary. Accordingly, we should be careful regarding just what components (ideas) are adopted and used in our theology and practice. We should not naively adopt and place together diverse pieces from other worldviews and expect a coherent picture to emerge.

In order to differentiate between components of differing systems and discern which parts fit and which parts do not, however, one must possess adequate knowledge of the system and its parts. What, then, does the Adventist system look like? Some seek to answer this question by identifying distinctive Adventist doctrines. If asked the question, what makes Adventist theology distinct, a typical Adventist might

ticulation of an orderly and coherent account of theistic beliefs.

point to the four s's (Sabbath, State of the dead, Second coming, and the Sanctuary). While these are each integral components of Adventist theology, there is far more that is distinctive about Adventism *as a system*.

Indeed, the Sabbath, the state of the dead, and the second coming are by no means beliefs unique to Adventism but they manifest considerable distinctiveness when understood systematically (that is, as part and in relation to the wider system of Adventism). The sanctuary is a bit more distinctive but also loses its force if/when isolated from a system within which it operates and makes sense. In other words, the "sanctuary" *completely* isolated from the broader conception of the God-world relationship generally and the plan of salvation specifically would be gutted of much of its meaning and significance.

In significant ways, the Adventist system is itself a *distinct system* and/or worldview.⁴ To be clear, I do not believe in overemphasizing our differences from other Christians or excluding recognition of our common beliefs.⁵ On the other hand, I do believe that it is essential that we understand and articulate our own distinctive message with humility and integrity, such that we are not "tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine" but equipped to speak "the truth in love" (Eph 4:14).⁶ Here, it is crucial to recognize that all truth is connected to, and grounded in Christ, who is the "way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6; cf. Matt 7:24-29). Thus, any understanding and/or representation of the sanctuary in an explicit or implicit Christ-less fashion posits a pseudo-sanctuary that is anathema to the system of truth.

⁴That does not mean it is distinct in every way or completely different or incommensurable with other systems. What it means is that, as a systematic whole, the Adventist system is distinct. Some theological terms will take on different meanings in one system than they do in another such that any system, in so far as it is not just an addendum to some other system, is necessarily distinctive.

⁵Here, it is essential to recognize that even some beliefs that we share in common with others in a broad sense connote somewhat diverging meanings within different systems. When I say, "Trinity," for instance, I mean something that is in many significant respects the same as what Augustine appeared to mean by Trinity but, also, in other significant respects different from what Augustine appeared to mean thereby.

⁶Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations in this essay are from the NASB.

Fundamental (Canonical) Theology and the Sanctuary

How, then, might we begin to explore the relationship of the sanctuary and systematic theology? How might a systematic understanding of the sanctuary be uncovered and articulated? The answers to these questions are bound up with the approach one takes to theology; that is, one's theological method. Adventist theology is committed to the *sola Scriptura* and *tota Scriptura* principles, which treats all (*tota*) of Scripture as the uniquely authoritative (*sola*) rule of faith.⁷

A fully biblical (or what I call, “canonical”) systematic theology relative to the sanctuary would inform the “doctrine” of the sanctuary by all other canonically derived doctrines and vice versa, allowing Scripture to inform and, where necessary, *reform* any and all theological doctrine in accordance with Scripture's own inner logic. This, of course, requires that any given interpreter(s) self-critically and intentionally subject their own “logic” to that which is in the biblical text. This requires recognition that what we think about the sanctuary (and every other theological topic) is always affected by various presuppositions about who God is and about who we are and about the broader context of history itself, particularly relative to the historical reality, nature, and meaning of the God-world relationship, all of which circumscribe possible understandings of the sanctuary.⁸

The various presuppositions that impinge upon theological thinking (at every level) are typically categorized within the realm of fundamental theology. This is the area of theology that deals with the understanding of first principles, including the nature of: reality, knowledge, God, and the world (where “world” is broadly understood as *everything* in the universe other than God).⁹ Fernando

⁷The *sola Scriptura* principle is often misunderstood and misapplied. For a discussion in this regard, see John C. Peckham, “*Sola Scriptura: Reductio ad absurdum?*” *TJ* 35, no. 2 (2014): 195-223. See also John C. Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

⁸The God-world relationship refers to the relationship between God and everything else, with specific attention to the relationship between God and humans in Christian theology.

⁹Because it deals with these macro-issues, fundamental theology is sometimes

Canale, emeritus professor of theology and philosophy at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, refers to these first principles as macro-hermeneutical principles. These macro-hermeneutical principles are the broad presuppositions that frame and circumscribe theological understanding at what Canale calls the meso-hermeneutical and micro-hermeneutical levels. The micro-hermeneutical level is that of exegesis of individual texts and/or passages and the meso-hermeneutical level deals with theological doctrines. Whereas each of the three (macro-, meso-, and micro-hermeneutical) levels affect one another, one's macro-hermeneutical presuppositions set the parameters within which doctrines (meso-hermeneutics) and biblical texts (micro-hermeneutics) are understood.¹⁰

Whereas, ideally, Scripture itself would provide such parameters, philosophy and tradition have often supplied the conceptualization of these first (macro-hermeneutical) principles, with much of classical theology greatly impacted by the classical Greek worldview. More recently, the worldview of naturalism has provided the first principles of liberal theology.¹¹ Conversely, Adventist theology seeks to derive first principles from Scripture itself, with significant implications for understanding the sanctuary.¹²

conceptualized as consisting of the doctrine of God proper and of theological method.

¹⁰In Canale's words, "hermeneutical principles are a tightly interrelated ensemble of overarching general notions that, because of their all-inclusiveness, condition the entire range of Christian thinking. There are different kinds of hermeneutical principles, according to the realm to which they belong." These include "macro-, meso-, and micro-hermeneutical principles. From macro-hermeneutical principles, which some theologians draw from philosophy but most assume from tradition, we move to the meso-hermeneutical principles used to conceive, formulate, and understand Christian doctrines, and to the micro-hermeneutical principles used to interpret the text of Scripture. The interpretive force moves from macro- to micro-hermeneutics. Thus, for instance, when interpreting a text from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, we apply our macro- and meso-hermeneutical presuppositions consciously or unconsciously acquired from or belonging to a specific theological tradition." Fernando L. Canale, "Deconstructing Evangelical Theology?" *AUSS* 44, no. 1 (2006): 103-104.

¹¹See Fernando L. Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Classical Model," *AUSS* 32, no. 1-2 (1994): 7-28; Fernando L. Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Liberal Model," *AUSS* 32, no. 3 (1994): 169-95.

¹²See Fernando L. Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Historical-Cog-

In order to accomplish this, the interpreter should avoid pitting exegesis and theology against one another. Given an Adventist understanding of the fundamental and unique theological role of Scripture, theology without biblical exegesis is simply not viable.¹³ Conversely, there is no such thing as non-theological biblical exegesis.¹⁴ The subject matter of Scripture is inextricably theological and thus unavoidably involves theological issues/questions, including those as basic and yet profound and complex as: what is God like? Those who do not pay due attention to such issues/questions are even more susceptible to (perhaps subconsciously) presupposing answers to them rather than deriving such answers from Scripture itself (in so far as achievable).

What is most desirable, in my view, is a systematic theology that is fully and continuously submitted to the entirety of Scripture. Systematic theology may be minimally defined as the study and articulation of an orderly and coherent account of theistic beliefs. Systematic theology submitted to Scripture (or, canonical theology), then, would be devoted to the study and articulation of the biblical system of truth as harmoniously connected (i.e., orderly and coherent). Such a (canonical) systematic theology would never reach completion but continually return its proponents back to the text of the canon itself (via a canonical hermeneutical spiral), with ongoing goals of ever-greater correspondence to Scripture (all of it) and internal coherence.¹⁵ Given these goals, rather than pitting exegesis against theology, canonical systematic theology seeks to employ micro- *and* macro-exegesis (that

nitive Model,” *AUSS* 33, no. 1-2 (1995): 5-38; John C. Peckham, “The Analogy of Scripture Revisited,” *MAJT* 22 (2011): 41-53.

¹³Such theology would be limited to general revelation, which is both inadequate and imprecise.

¹⁴A theology without exegesis will be biblically uninformed and thus severely impoverished; an attempt at exegesis without theology fails to deal with the subject matter of the data itself.

¹⁵Canonical theological method thus encapsulates a canonical approach grounded in the *sola-tota-prima-analogia Scriptura* principles with Spiritual discernment, utilizing canonical hermeneutics consisting of an ongoing hermeneutical spiral between interpreter and text and between the horizon of individual texts/passages and the entire canon, and the canonical goals of correspondence to the canon and internal coherence. See Peckham, “The Analogy of Scripture Revisited.”

is, exegesis at the micro- and macro-hermeneutical levels) as mutually informing and reforming, seeking to derive both the specific meaning of individual biblical texts and/or passages as well as broad understandings regarding the nature of reality, knowledge, and the entire God-world relationship from the text itself, recognizing that both levels continuously and unavoidably impinge upon one another.¹⁶

I might briefly illustrate the importance of paying due attention to fundamental theology by considering the example of divine love. Some of the most prominent, yet conflicting, systematic models of divine love are demonstrably beholden to differing pre-conceptions regarding the nature of God, leaving an irreconcilable conflict between competing conceptions of divine love. In seeking to address the ongoing conflict of interpretations in this regard, I asked, what if the typical approach is reversed? That is, rather than assuming that God is like X and therefore divine love is X, what if we invert the order and ask first what is divine love by following a canonical theological method? Doing so involves the attempt to put on the table one's presuppositions regarding what God is like and subject them to the test of the canonical data itself. By following this inverted approach I uncovered (by way of an investigation of all of Scripture) a canonical model of divine love that itself yielded significant (and sometimes surprising) implications regarding the nature of God, his love, and how God relates to the world.¹⁷

Similarly, as shall be seen below, conceptions of the sanctuary are limited and/or excluded by preconceptions about the nature of God and the world (and/or reality generally). Yet, as shall be suggested below, rather than assuming that God is like X and therefore the sanctuary can or cannot be X, what if we first ask how both are depicted in the particular revelation of Scripture? Accordingly, a canonical theology of the sanctuary would involve asking more questions of the text than we might be accustomed to asking.

¹⁶Of course, the meso-hermeneutical level of doctrines is also continually operative but for simplicity's sake I speak here of the hermeneutical spiral between these two, which are both affected by and affect the meso-hermeneutical level.

¹⁷See John C. Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015); John C. Peckham, *The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship* (New York: Lang, 2014).

In order to properly understand the sanctuary, it must be approached as part and parcel of the broader conceptual framework of Scripture. One highly significant question, then, is what does the canonical data regarding the sanctuary teach us about the canonical conceptual framework? That is, what first principles are revealed in the biblical text by close examination of the sanctuary? What does the biblical data relative to the sanctuary entail regarding the nature of reality, knowledge, God and the world? In this regard, we must ask first *not* what does the “doctrine” of the sanctuary teach us but, rather, what does the canonical data teach us about the sanctuary and the broader reality which it portrays? This would then inform our doctrine.

A Tale of Two Sanctuaries

The relationship between the sanctuary specifically, and reality more broadly, might be engaged by asking oneself a simple yet highly impactful question: Is the sanctuary a doctrine? One would be correct to answer yes if one means thereby that there are teachings about the sanctuary that we call the sanctuary doctrine. However, one would be incorrect to answer yes if one thereby means or implies that the sanctuary is *merely* a doctrine. The sanctuary is far more than a doctrine; it is far more than any collection of teachings about it. Among other things, Scripture depicts the heavenly sanctuary as a *real* place (cf. Exod 25:8-9; Heb 6:19-20; 8:1-5; 9:11-12, et al). However, many reject the notion of the reality of the heavenly sanctuary (and other facets of the sanctuary), often on the basis of (conscious or subconscious) presuppositions regarding first principles.

One’s presuppositions regarding first principles dramatically impacts how one could possibly view the sanctuary. For instance, one’s answer to the following question will diverge greatly depending upon the operative conceptual framework (i.e., view of reality, God, and the world): What is the significance of the biblical sanctuary?

On one hand, many Christians, particularly those who adopt the traditional (Thomistic) form of classic theism (discussed later in this essay), might say that the sanctuary was a symbolic earthly location

of ritual that pointed to Christ.¹⁸ Since Christ has come, the sanctuary has passed away and is obsolete. On the other hand, Adventists answer this question rather differently.¹⁹ In my view, the earthly sanctuary was (among other things) a typological ritual system that typified the heavenly sanctuary—which was not made with human hands (Heb 9:24). The earthly sanctuary thus pointed to Christ’s earthly and heavenly ministries (among many other things). Since Christ has come, the earthly sanctuary has passed away and along with it the ceremonial/ritual law that typified Christ’s antitypical ministry. The heavenly sanctuary, however, remains (it was *and* is) a genuine locus of the plan of salvation.²⁰

Conversely, in some Christian theological systems, there simply cannot have *been* or *be* a real spatio-temporal heavenly sanctuary. In this regard, the widely influential, traditional system of (Thomistic) classic theism posits a bouquet of macro-hermeneutical presuppositions that are incompatible with the reality of a spatio-temporal heavenly sanctuary, including (but not limited to) the view that God is timeless and impassible. Here, “impassible” means that God cannot be affected by anything external to him (more on this later in this essay) and “timeless” means that God is incompatible with time where time is the succession of past, present, and future.²¹ Hence, God *cannot* inhabit a spatio-tem-

¹⁸This conception posits that God is necessary, self-sufficient, perfect, simple, timeless, immutable, impassible, omniscient, and omnipotent. For an introduction to these elements of classical theism, see Ronald H. Nash, “Process Theology and Classical Theism,” in *Process Theology*, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 8-12. However, although so-called classical theism serves as a helpful category for recognition and discussion of a prominent stream of Christian tradition, classical theism should not be viewed as monolithic. A number of theologians self-identify as “modified” classic theists, with varying theological systems and nuances.

¹⁹The implied bifurcation here is admittedly simplistic and for the purpose of illustration. There are other possible views between these two that deserve consideration. The point here is not to lump all perspectives under one or the other but to show the stark difference between the permissible conception of the sanctuary given classical first principles and the conception of the sanctuary if one allows for a biblical-historical conception of reality broadly and the sanctuary itself more specifically.

²⁰See the extensive and compelling discussion in Richard Davidson’s forthcoming book, *A Song for the Sanctuary*.

²¹See the extended but introductory discussion in John C. Peckham, “Divine

poral location, including (but not limited to) a heavenly sanctuary, nor temporally function within a spatio-temporal system.²² Many thus dismiss the very possibility of a real heavenly sanctuary out of hand.²³

Yet, on an Adventist understanding of Scripture, the heavenly sanctuary is a real place, integral to the salvific process of reconciliation between God and fallen creatures. As such, God the Father and the Son are depicted as locating themselves within the heavenly sanctuary and carrying out various activities therein, some in the past, others in the present, and some yet future.²⁴ To put it simply, the indexicals “here” and “now” properly apply only to those who inhabit and interact in space and time.²⁵ If God is, by nature (i.e., ontologically) incompatible with spatio-temporality, then “here” or “there” and “now” or “then” do not properly apply to him. Yet, Scripture

Passibility, Analogical Temporality, and Theo-Ontology: Implications of a Canonical Approach,” in *Scripture and Philosophy: Essays Honoring the Work and Vision of Fernando Luis Canale* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 2016), 32-53.

²²Conversely, it should not be thought that the Adventist view entails that God is limited to inhabit the sanctuary or anything else. Cf. 1 Kings 8:27 and the discussion later in this essay.

²³Some Christians may not be consciously aware of these macro-hermeneutical presuppositions but have been impacted by them via their tradition and, as such, find the idea of the heavenly sanctuary ludicrous without perhaps being able to articulate why it strikes them as such. Classical first principles also lead to other significant systematic implications that further rule out the function of the sanctuary as it is conceptualized in Adventism.

²⁴As shall be discussed later in this essay, however, we should be careful not to overinterpret such passages. We do not know precisely *how* God relates to the spatio-temporal heavenly sanctuary and/or in what ways it is like and unlike the created space-time world that we inhabit.

²⁵Those who consider God to be timeless in the classic sense, propose that God can “act” only via a singular timeless act. Thus, it is incorrect to rule out divine “act” semantically (though conceptually this is something rather different than one typically means by “act”) but it is correct to say that God cannot interact. See John S. Feinberg’s description (which he himself does not hold) that God “does everything he plans to do at once. All his actions and response to all of our actions are done in one timeless act.” John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Rev. ed., Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 402. See, further, the discussion in Peckham, “Divine Passibility.”

consistently applies such indexicals to God, not only relative to the sanctuary but throughout the canon.²⁶

Given the (Thomistic) classic conception of God, however, these texts must be interpreted in such a way that they do not entail that God *actually* inhabits locations or experiences temporal events (i.e., that some things are past, present, and future to him).²⁷ In this and other ways, insofar as one adopts the view that God is timeless and impassible (as defined above), the Adventist teaching regarding the sanctuary is systematically impossible. To mention just a few ways in which this is so, in so far as God is viewed as incapable of being affected by anything external to him (i.e., impassible), God is incapable of responsive evaluation. As such, the very concept of God's evaluative judgment as depicted throughout Scripture is excluded.²⁸

Moreover, on particular prominent conceptions of God's sovereignty (which go hand-in-hand with some conceptions of timelessness

²⁶See Peckham, "Divine Passibility."

²⁷Perhaps one of the most direct evidences that God has a future is found in Zeph 3:17, "In that day it will be said ... the LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy" (cf. Isa 65:19; Jer 32:41). There is great mystery here but minimally God is depicted as looking forward to a future when he will delight in his people in the way described here. This (and many other) biblical texts that suggest God's temporal interaction with the world may be explained away by a method that takes all such instances as merely divine accommodation to human language. However, this will not suffice for theology because all of our language is human language and all revelation encapsulated in words requires at least some accommodation. See Peckham, *The Concept of Divine Love*, 17-32. See also John C. Peckham, "Theopathic or Anthropopathic? A Suggested Approach to Imagery of Divine Emotion in the Hebrew Bible," *PRSt* 342, no. 5 (2015): 341-355.

²⁸Note, well, that God's evaluative judgment does not entail that humans accrue merit or deserve God's salvific action on their behalf. However, Scripture consistently witnesses to the fact that God values, appreciates, and takes pleasure in even the smallest of positive dispositions and/or actions intended toward him (see the discussion later in this essay). Although fallen humans of themselves have nothing of value to give to God apart from Him, via the mediation of Christ humans can bring acceptable sacrifices (cf. 1 Pet 2:5). For more on this significant topic, see the conception of God's evaluative love in Peckham, *The Love of God*, 117-145. The repeated emphasis in Scripture on God's evaluative judgment as closely connected to his love opened up new vistas to me in my understanding of the sanctuary.

and impassibility), because God alone is the judge it is deemed impermissible to question him such that the concept of God opening up his “books” for all to see and in this and other ways vindicating his own character via historical manifestation is viewed as nonsensical (cf. Isa 5:3).²⁹ In many such conceptions, rather, God unconditionally and irresistibly determines who is saved and who is lost such that anything like a pre-advent judgment is impossible. For *some* Christians who view God’s salvific “action” as simply his eternal decree to save some, salvation itself is treated as a merely forensic judgment, raising difficulties regarding how judgment according to works fits systematically, leaving the many passages in this regard ignored or underrepresented in those theologies (Rev 20:12–13; cf. 2:23; 22:12; Prov 24:12; Jer 17:10; 32:19; Ezek 33:20; Matt 12:36–37; 16:27; Rom 2:5–11; 2 Cor 5:10, et al.).³⁰

Particular classic presuppositions also impinge upon eschatological and ecclesiological understandings that contradict the sanctuary message.³¹ With regard to the latter, the traditional conception of an

²⁹Although we have no right or standing to bring God into judgment (indeed, we are cognitively insufficient and lack a great deal of information), when God invites humans to “judge” (cf. Isa 5:3) based on the evidence that he has revealed we should also listen and obey. This is a delicate balance. In one sense we cannot and should not attempt to “judge” God. In another sense, God himself calls us to “judge” and recognize that he has vindicated himself and see the beauty and justice of his perfect love.

³⁰Significantly, many Christian scholars do not ignore these texts (though they remain difficult to fit in some systems). For example, Leon Morris explains: “It is the invariable teaching of the Bible and not the peculiar viewpoint of any one writer or group of writers that judgment will be on the basis of works, though salvation is all of grace. Works are important. They are the outward expression of what the person is deep down. In the believer they are the expression of faith, in the unbeliever the expression of unbelief and that whether by way of legalism or antinomianism.” Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 116.

³¹Again, classic theism is not monolithic and not all who self-identify as classic theists would hold all (or even most) of these identified positions. However, a good portion of Christian theologies do hold or entail these principles, which have dramatic impacts even at the lay level. Although many laypersons are unfamiliar with the first principles that provide the parameters of their tradition’s “system,” the parameters are demonstrably operative in what they accept and/or reject. This “trickle down” effect of theological systems should not be underestimated and should re-

immortal soul that immediately receives its “reward” at death (itself beholden to Greek ontological presuppositions) contradicts the pre-advent judgment and executive judgment(s). To take another example (among other possible ones), on some traditional conceptions of the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology), the church is the conduit of salvation, itself and its clergy functioning as mediator (and gatekeeper) between humans and atonement. Whereas according to Hebrews, humans may go (through Christ) boldly to the “throne of grace” (Heb 4:16), on some traditional Christian conceptions, humans may be reconciled to God only through the agency of other humans and, in some cases, via rituals that themselves usurp the heavenly high priestly ministry of Christ, substituting in Christ’s place an earthly priesthood and sacramentology (including transubstantiation) that is itself undergirded by classical first principles.³²

In these and other ways, (Thomistic) classic theism concludes that: (1) there cannot have been or be a *real* heavenly sanctuary (ontological impossibility), (2) the Adventist teaching regarding the sanctuary is systematically impossible. As such, the doctrine of the sanctuary is ontologically excluded, systematically impossible, and naïve. However, Adventism challenges the traditional macro-hermeneutical principles, raising the question, why should we adopt the classical Greek view that God is timeless, impassible, etc.?

What if we instead reverse the methodology? Rather than assuming that God is like X and therefore the sanctuary cannot be X, what if we first ask how both are depicted in the particular revelation of Scripture? That is, rather than presupposing some overarching first principles that will then circumscribe all other theological judgments and biblical interpretations, why not first attend carefully to a close reading of the particulars of biblical revelation and carefully derive our biblical interpretations, corresponding doctrines, and larger im-

mind us, more broadly, of the great importance that we take seriously the articulation of our own theology.

³²It would be too much here to go into the details of how these things fit together but, suffice it to say that once one is aware of the operative macro-hermeneutical presuppositions in traditional Thomistic theism, one can readily see the dramatic impact they have at each level of doctrine and of particular understandings of texts.

plications regarding first principles from the text itself (insofar as possible)? In order to do this, one methodologically tables targeted presuppositions about the nature of God and the God-world relationship in order to allow the text to inform and reform one's larger worldview and provide the doctrinal understanding via the procedures of careful macro- and micro-exegesis.

Conclusion

This article has briefly considered the nature of theological systems, issues related to an Adventist system of theology, and the relationship between fundamental theology and the sanctuary in particular, with attention to some broad, competing views of the sanctuary that are integrally related to the way one conceives of broader theological principles. This sets the stage for the second article of this series, which will conclude this essay by discussing a number of important systematic elements that shed light on a potential systematic theology of the sanctuary.

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