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Summer 2017

Searching for the Center of Adventist Theology: What Can Sanctuary, Ritual, and Theology Add to This Search?

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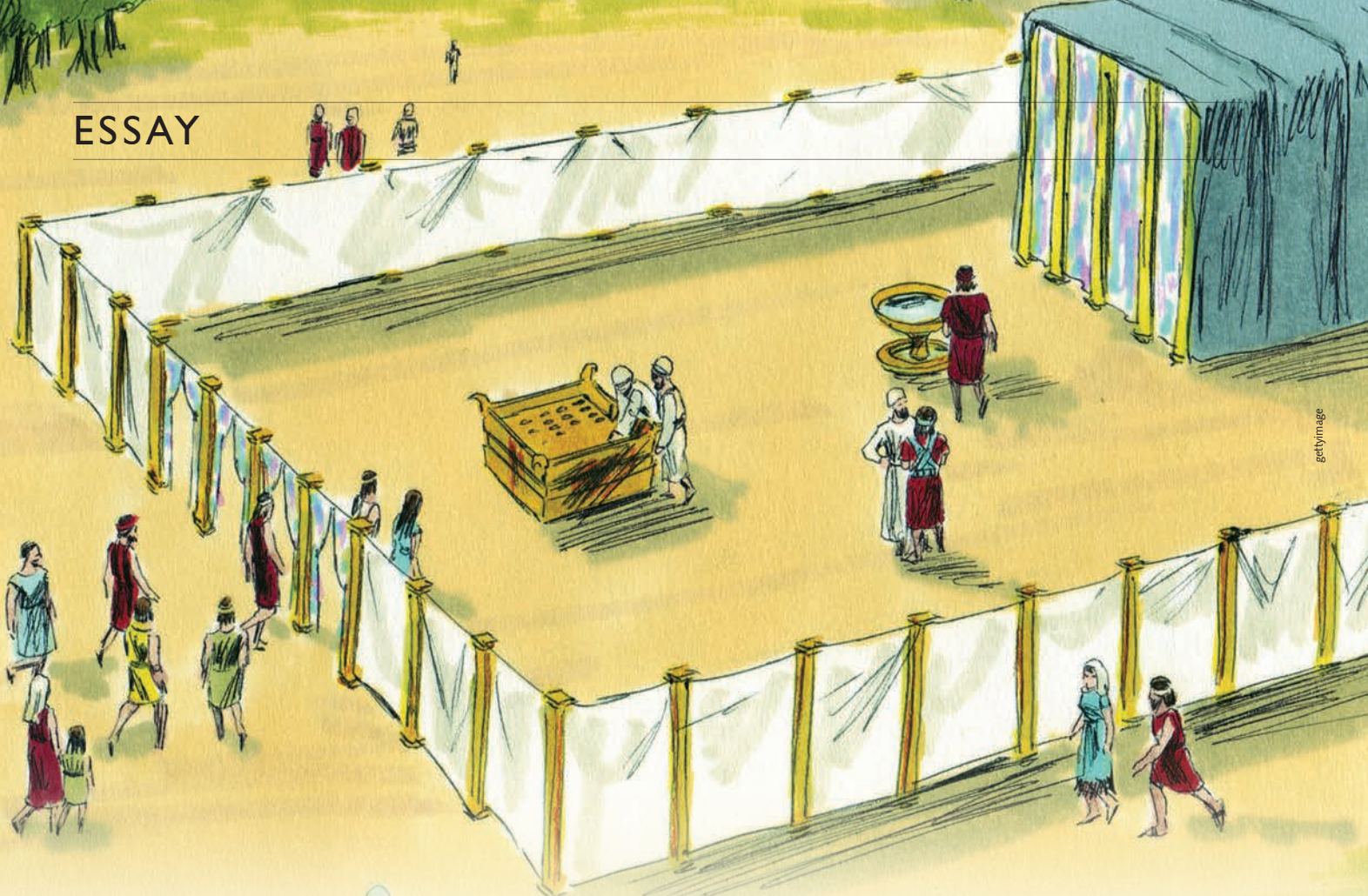
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SEARCHING FOR THE CENTER OF ADVENTIST THEOLOGY:

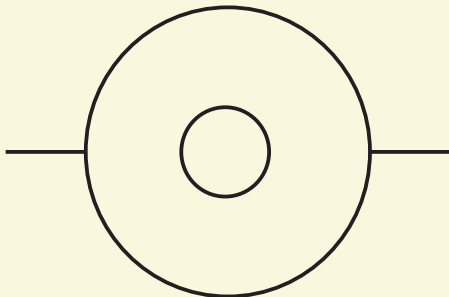
What can sanctuary, ritual, and theology add to the search?

GERALD A. KLINGBEIL

Biblical sacrifice is not to be understood as a bribe. It is public and transparent and involves clearly defined participants. It has to be this way since it is an extension (or a dimension) of the Great Controversy, where a public challenge to God's justice and love required a public divine answer.

The sanctuary¹ played an important role in the religion and history of Israel, and frequent references to it in the Hebrew Bible (HB) are well attested.² Countless studies focusing upon its architecture, personnel, utensils, and its associated rites have been published—even if one disregards those studies that focus exclusively upon the “literary construct” of the sanctuary texts over against the material reality.³ Too often, however, these studies have overlooked the forest by focusing upon the trees. We often look at details (important as they may be) or one element at the expense of others, without considering the larger picture.

Let me illustrate this point. Imagine for a moment the following image: You see two circles, a smaller one and a larger one. Both circles share a common center, thus placing the smaller circle in the center of the bigger circle. Two short, straight horizontal lines connect to the outer circle on opposite sides. Can you see it? Could you draw what I tried to describe in three sentences? Can you guess its meaning?



When we see images (or read texts, which are literary images), we immediately try to decipher and understand. However, interpretation requires context, and there is none for this image. We are not too sure if this is an astronomical mapping of stars or planets with their orbits or if this image represents an architectural or landscape design. I am sure as you look at the image you would be able to come up with many different interpretations (or at least tentative suggestions). That’s how our mind works: We try to make sense of what we see.

Let me tell you what the drawing represents (and here I am indebted to my three daughters and my wife Chantal): It’s a Mexican, wearing a big sombrero, and riding a bicycle—observed from the perspective of a drone hovering above. Now you may wonder, what does this exercise have to do with ritual, the sanctuary, and biblical interpretation? Keep this important question on standby as we delve into the intricacies of sanctuary and ritual studies.

SANCTUARY AND ADVENTIST THEOLOGY

There is a close link between Adventist theology and the sanctuary. After all, following the Great Disappointment in 1844, those Millerites who kept searching understood—through divine guidance and the careful study of Scripture—that the prophetic time of Daniel 8:14, pointing to the cleansing of the sanctuary, was *not* referring to Jesus’ second coming, but rather to a new phase in His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Obviously, my sentence-long summary represented months and even years of wrestling with the biblical text, prayerful discussion, more study, and often tentative conclusions. As the large picture emerged, more attention was paid to sanctuary details—and questions were raised.⁴ The most notorious (or “famous”) in our recent history involved the Glacier View consultation in 1980, dealing with the numerous questions that had been raised by Desmond Ford in his 991-page document *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment*.

Since then, Seventh-day Adventist scholars and authors have worked arduously to further understand the significance of the sanctuary and its related elements in the overall context of Adventist theology.⁵ Roberto Ouro has suggested that the sanctuary (both the “physical macrostructure” as well as the “theological macroconcept”) may be inductively derived at as the biblical center of the HB.⁶ He argues that the sanctuary concept emanates from the biblical text itself and thus does not represent a superimposed external framework or system. His approach is indeed intriguing and follows an important hermeneutical principle: Scripture needs to determine the way and method we read it—not an external system, based on distinct philosophical (or hermeneutical) presuppositions.⁷

However, before attempting to make a judgment call on this proposal, let’s follow Ouro’s methodological suggestion and listen to Scripture itself regarding the significance of the sanctuary.

BACK TO BASICS

The first explicit reference regarding the purpose and function of the sanctuary in the HB can be found in Exodus 25:8: “Let them build me a sanctuary, so that I may tabernacle in their midst” [my translation]. Right from the outset, divine presence is key to understanding the construction of the sanctuary. Most of the times, biblical interpreters (including, and especially, Adventist interpreters) read on to the following verse 9, which continues the divine command, detailing *how* this sanctuary is to be constructed, namely “according to all that I will show you, namely [according to] the model/pattern of the tabernacle/tent and [according to] the model/pattern all its utensils and thus they shall

do.” The crux of Exodus 25:9 has been the significance of the Hebrew noun *tabnît*, which appears 20 times in the HB and can refer to (a) an original miniature model; (b) an architect’s plan; (c) a miniature model that is a copy of an original; (d) an architect’s plan based on an original; or (e) the original itself.⁸ All semantic possibilities suggest an observable link between the model and the reality and are in line with ancient Near Eastern (ANE) concepts of divine dwelling places that are parallel to earthly abodes. However, because of our interest in the larger reality behind the earthly sanctuary, we often tend to overlook the key point of Exodus 25:8, i.e., the divine desire to dwell in the midst of Israel (and by extension, the “world”).⁹ This sense of divine presence is also visible in the Garden of Eden, which represents a link between creation and the sanctuary.¹⁰ The implications of the divine presence on earth (in the sanctuary) are significant and affect theological concepts of holiness, the continuum of pure—impure (as well as profane—holy) and, following the destruction of the temple (and thus the dwelling place of God on earth), required important theological reflections that radically changed the face of Judaism.¹¹

A second highly crucial function of the sanctuary involved the sacrificial system. According to Leviticus 17:8 and 9, sacrifices could *only* be offered at the sanctuary. Thus, following Scripture, the sanctuary did not only function as the divine dwelling place (a sort of “home away from home”) but also as the *only* authorized geographical location (which, during the years of wilderness wanderings, was mobile) where atonement could be effected.¹² It is here that understanding of ritual impacts most significantly our understanding and discussion of the sanctuary—at least it should.



RITUAL AND THE SANCTUARY

The past 30 years have witnessed a tremendous increase in studies that deal with biblical ritual, while at the same time making use of ritual theory.¹³ This development is based on important methodological developments in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and religious studies, where the study of ritual has always played a major role. Scholars like Catherine Bell, Ron Grimes, Jonathan Smith, Mircea Eliade, Victor Turner, and others have made major contributions to our theoretical understanding of ritual, which, in turn, has also influenced the study of ritual in the area of biblical studies.

Beginning with my doctoral research on the priestly ordination ritual found in Leviticus 8 and the larger issue of understanding texts that are describing a reality so far removed from our own, I have repeatedly argued for a way of reading ritual texts in Scripture that pays attention to the important elements of ritual *per se*, while, at the same time, also looks at the bigger picture.¹⁴

In other words, by looking carefully at the tree, we also hope to understand the forest. This reading strategy (distinct from anthropological fieldwork) borrows terminology from linguistics without necessarily utilizing a linguistic model. Key linguistic categories such as morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics provide a way of describing the *form* of ritual (what does the text describe?), the important *elements* of ritual (involving also their interaction, i.e., syntax),¹⁵ the contextual *meaning* of the ritual (whereby important building blocks are integrated into a larger semantic unit), which finally leads to the pragmatic perspective, involving *functions* and *dimensions* (what was the ritual good for?).¹⁶

Let’s take a short breather from foreign-sounding ritual theory and think together about what triggers ritual, and particularly, sanctuary-related (i.e., sacrificial) ritual. Several reasons come to mind: *rites of passage* (as Arnold van Gennep called life-transitioning rituals)¹⁷ involve life transitions, such as coming-of-age rituals, marriages, funerals, ordinations, etc. Feasts and fasts are often *life-cycle markers* (and the HB is full of divinely appointed feasts, often, though not always, linked to the sanctuary). However, the most important function of ritual activity in the Hebrew Bible involved *ritual as a problem solver*.

Just imagine yourself in the sandals of an Israelite who had sinned and had just been convicted of his sinful deed. He would have to offer an appropriate sin (or burnt) offering, following a clear sequence of activities that were place- and time-critical (details can be gleaned from Leviticus 1). He would have to lay his hands upon the head of the animal, transferring his sins upon the sacrificial animal.¹⁸ He would have to slaughter the animal in a specific way while the priest collected the draining blood in a vessel and then sprinkled

it around the altar and, in most instances, inside the curtain separating the holy from the holy of holies. The priest would also have to make sure that the offering was appropriately burned upon the altar.

What would this intricately designed ritual do? On a material level, an innocent animal would have to die for a guilty human being. *However, ritual always goes beyond the obvious or material.* Transferring sin upon the animal, after which the blood of the animal was brought to the sanctuary and sprinkled on the sanctuary furniture, resulted in the sanctuary becoming contaminated, thus requiring the more permanent sin solution/purification that the yearly Yom Kippur ritual afforded once a year (Leviticus 16).

LINK BETWEEN RITUAL, SANCTUARY, AND THEOLOGY: SOME IMPLICATIONS

The interpretation of biblical ritual reminds us not to major in minors—a good lesson for anyone seeking to understand the sanctuary. Following semantic theory that challenges us to not infuse words with meaning (or suggest their meaning based on etymology), but rather understand them in their context, ritual theory invites us to look at the bigger picture. It seems as if the often-asked questions regarding the dimension of the heavenly sanctuary would fall into this category: Was the model shown to Moses exactly like the heavenly sanctuary? Was it on a scale? If so, which scale? These are all questions that defy a clear, Scripture-based answer. However, the biblical description of a corresponding heavenly reality that illustrates different elements and phases of the plan of salvation are indeed clear. Ritual theory does not challenge the existence of a bigger reality; it just cautions us not to step outside of the biblical data in fanciful ways that may result in limiting God.

Here is another implication. As we often struggle to understand biblical ritual (often due to its strangeness reflecting distinct cultural, social, linguistic, and religious realities), we remember that we are dealing with a “second language” and pay more attention to detail, without jumping to (premature) conclusions. We listen more carefully. We look twice. We concentrate hard. This approach is not only needed but very healthy when we think about the sanctuary doctrine in Scripture.

The sanctuary (and biblical ritual linked to the sanctuary) reminds us also of the crucial link between heaven and earth. We are not just lonely, disconnected beings on an estranged planet floating through an immense universe. Through the Word (with a capital *W*) that became flesh and “tabernacled” among us (see John 1:14) we can peek behind the curtain. Matter of fact, Hebrews tells us that we have “an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil” (Hebrews 6:19, NASB), based

on the promise of Jesus’ ministry “within the veil,” at the right hand of the Father. Considering the primary explicit purpose of the earthly sanctuary (i.e., that God wanted to be in the midst of His people [Exodus 25:8]), the sanctuary (both earthly and heavenly) becomes the vehicle to achieve this close link.

Here is another important ramification of the intersection of ritual, sanctuary, and theology. The sanctuary and its complex ritual requirements that were necessary to achieve cleansing need to be understood within the larger co-text of the Great Controversy motif. Salvation needs to be objective, verifiable, public, and transparent. Biblical sacrifice is not to be understood as a bribe or something done under the table. It is public and transparent and involves clearly defined participants. It has to be this way since it is an extension (or a dimension) of the Great Controversy, where a public challenge to God’s justice and love required a public divine answer.¹⁹ The investigative judgment is one important element of this public divine answer.

I confess to being both intrigued as well as nervous regarding Ouro’s suggestion of the sanctuary motif being the center of biblical theology. As has been pointed out elsewhere, the notion of a central theme tends to “flatten” the theological landscape and often invites superficial or “twisted” interpretations.²⁰ However, Ouro’s call to listen to Scripture’s own voice when searching for a center is laudable and right on target. His suggestion may just be this drone-perspective from above that gives us the focus we need to recognize the centrality of the sanctuary to Adventist theology. God did not only provide a way to resolve the issue of sin and separation; He did it publicly, and in a way that was understandable and transparent. His desire to tabernacle in the midst of His people communicates even without words: It speaks of a God who revels in community and intimacy. ☪

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1. This is a revised and condensed version of a study published originally in Spanish as "El santuario, el ritual y la teología: En busca del centro de la teología adventista," *Theologika* 27:1 (2012): 66–85.
2. See, for example, the review article by Michael M. Homan, "The Tabernacle and the Temple in Ancient Israel," *Religion Compass* 1:1 (2007): 38–49. Regarding temple architecture in the ANE (including the Bible) see G. J. Wightman, *Sacred Spaces: Religious Architecture in the Ancient World* (Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement 22 [Leuven-Paris: Peeters, 2007]. Sigurd Bergmann, "Theology in Its Spatial Turn: Space, Place, and Built Environments Challenging and Changing the Images of God," *Religion Compass* 1:3 (2007): 353–379, has provided a helpful study that seeks to integrate theology and religious space. Most recently, Hundley's Cambridge Ph.D. dissertation has revisited the issue of the link between location and divine presence as suggested in the tabernacle and temple texts of the HB. Compare Michael B. Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth: Safeguarding the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle*: FAT 2/50; (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).
3. A helpful overview regarding these trends for the Book of Leviticus between the 1960s and 1995 can be found in Gerald A. Klingbeil, *A Comparative Study of the Ritual of Ordination as Found in Leviticus 8 and Emar 369* (Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 70–89.
4. Names such as D. M. Canwright, A. F. Ballenger, or L. R. Conradi come to mind when considering Adventist questions regarding the sanctuary, 1844, Daniel 8:14, and the investigative judgment.
5. See, for example, A. V. Wallenkampf and W. R. Leshner, eds., *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1981); Samuel Núñez, *The Vision of Daniel 8: Interpretations From 1700-1900* (ThD dissertation, Andrews University, 1987); Fernando L. Canale, "Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36:2 (1998): 183–206; Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character. Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005); Elias Brasil de Souza, *The Heavenly Sanctuary/Temple Motif in the Hebrew Bible: Function and Relationship to the Earthly Counterparts* (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 2005); Martin Pröbstle, *Truth and Terror: A Text-oriented Analysis of Daniel 8:9-14* (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 2006); Fernando L. Canale, "From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology: Part III, Sanctuary and Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17:2 (2006): 36–80; Félix Cortez, "The Anchor of the Soul That Enters Within the Veil": *The Ascension of the "Son" in the Letter to the Hebrews* (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 2007); Marvin Moore, *The Case for the Investigative Judgment: Its Biblical Foundation* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2010).
6. Roberto Ouro, *Old Testament Theology: The Canonical Key. Volume I: Pentateuch/Torah* (Zaragoza, Spain: Luser Reprograficas, 2008), 30–36. Ouro is aware of the problematic nature of finding the center of Old Testament theology, particularly when this is superimposed based on schemes borrowed from systematic theology (as in the triad: God—Man—Salvation or, in systematic terms: Theology—Anthropology—Soteriology).
7. See the publications of Fernando L. Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Ground for a New Approach," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 31:2 (1993): 91–104; _____, "Revelation and Inspiration: Method for a New Approach," *ibid.* 31:3 (1993): 171–194; _____, "From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology: Part III, Sanctuary and Hermeneutics," 36–80.
8. Compare for more details and discussion Richard M. Davidson's *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical typos Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 2 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1981), 372–374; see also Ouro, *Old Testament Theology*, pages 107–109.
9. I have discussed the term *world* in my article, "Finding the 'World' in Biblical Studies: God-Talk, Culture, and Hermeneutics in the Study (and Teaching) of Faith," *Scriptura* 101 (2009): 219–234.
10. Time and space limitations do not allow me to develop this important motif further. See Ouro, *Old Testament Theology*, pages 38–57, and the numerous bibliographical references provided there.
11. A helpful discussion of the implications and reflections of Judaism regarding the question of the divine presence following the destruction of the temple can be found in Risa Levitt Kohn and Rebecca Moore, "Where Is God? Divine Presence in the Absence of the Temple," in *Milk and Honey: Essays on Ancient Israel and the Bible in Appreciation of the Judaic Studies Program at the University of California, San Diego*, Sarah Malena and David Miano, eds. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 133–153.
12. More details and categories can be found in Gerald A. Klingbeil, "Sacrifice and Offerings," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*, 2 vols.; Samuel E. Balentine, ed.; (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2:251–259.
13. See Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth*; Gerald A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible*, Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements 1 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007); James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Wesley J. Bergen, "Studying Ancient Israelite Ritual: Methodological Considerations," *Religion Compass* 2 (2007): 1–8; _____, *Reading Ritual. Leviticus in Postmodern Culture*, JSOT Sup 417 (London-New York: T & T Clark International, 2005); Gane, *Cult and Character*; Ithamar Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, Brill Reference Library of Judaism 10 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003); Frank H. Gorman, Jr., "Ritual Studies and Biblical Studies: Assessment of the Past, Prospects for the Future," *Semeia* 67 (1995): 13–36; _____, *The Ideology of Ritual. Space, Time, and Status in the Priestly Theology*, JSOT Sup 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).
14. See Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 127–146, 205–225; and _____, "Ritus/Ritual," *Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet* (2010), [www.wiblex.de].
15. Nine important categories are included: (1) required situation and context; (2) structure of ritual; (3) form, order, and sequence; (4) ritual space; (5) ritual time; (6) ritual objects; (7) ritual action; (8) ritual participants and roles; and (9) ritual sound and language.
16. Following other researchers of ritual, I have suggested to look at different dimensions (such as e.g., interactive, collective, innovative, traditionalizing, communicative, symbolic, etc.) instead of a set of predetermined ritual types (such as, for example, founding rituals, restoration rituals, or maintenance rituals, as suggested by Frank H. Gorman Jr., *Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time, and Status in the Priestly Theology* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), 53–55.
17. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).
18. Compare the research of Keith E. K. Mattingly, *The Laying on of Hands on Joshua: An Exegetical Study of Numbers 27:12-23 and Deuteronomy 34:9* (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1997) concerning hand-laying rituals, particularly when leadership is transferred.
19. Regarding the importance of the Great Controversy motif for biblical theology see Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology. Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2003).
20. Gerhard Hasel was an outspoken critic of the Old Testament theology center camp, even though he posited God at the center of the HB. See Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991); _____, "The Nature of Biblical Theology: Recent Trends and Issues," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 32:3 (1994): 203–215; _____, "Recent Models of Biblical Theology: Three Major Perspectives," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 33:1-2 (1995): 55–75; _____, "Proposals for a Canonical Biblical Theology," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 34:1 (1996): 23–33.