

## “EMPTY FORMS OR VITAL TEACHER?” THE ROLE OF RITUAL IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND NURTURING

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*Taking as its point of departure the current discussion and vote about the twenty-eighth fundamental belief (“Growing in Christ”), voted during the last session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in St. Louis, Missouri, this study evaluates the contribution that ritual (both biblical and modern) can make to encourage this growth. After a brief definition of ritual in the larger context of ritual theory and practice, the study argues that historical as well as theological aspects are responsible for the often negative stance of Seventh-day Adventists towards ritual in religious practice. Next, the NT ritual of communion is analyzed from the perspective of ritual theory and biblical exegesis. Finally, the conclusion emphasizes the importance of ritual for the nurture and growth of church members in practical terms, as well as its capacity as a valuable missiological tool.*

*Key Words: spiritual growth; ritual; mission; communion; baptism; ritual theory*

### 1. Introduction or What Has Ritual to Do with Spiritual Growth and Nurturing?

During the fifty-eighth General Conference session in St. Louis, Missouri, June 30–July 9, 2005, delegates of the world church of Seventh-day Adventists voted to include a twenty-eighth fundamental belief, entitled “Growing in Christ” (now included as number 11 in the list of their basic beliefs).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The wording of the voted fundamental belief is as follows: “By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus’ victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and

During the time of the often heated discussion, the delegates felt that it was important to highlight the importance of personal spiritual growth in the face of the forces of evil.

In the context of the general topic of the conference at which this study was first presented ("Growing in Christ: Conversion, Baptism, and Growth") particular attention will be given to ritual as a tool for nurturing converts.<sup>2</sup> While it is commonplace to focus on the ritual of baptism in the context of conversion, very little attention has been given to the function of ritual in the process of nurturing new church members.<sup>3</sup> For more than a decade I have been interested in studying the neglected field of biblical ritual, paying careful attention to recent discussions in ritual theory. A monograph-length treatment of ritual and ritual texts in the Bible is slated to appear in the first half of 2007.<sup>4</sup>

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in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience. (Pss 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Col 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; Luke 10:17–20; Eph 5:19, 20; 6:12–18; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 2 Cor 3:17, 18; Phil 3:7–14; 1 Thess 5:16–18; Matt 20:25–28; John 20:21; Gal 5:22–25; Rom 8:38, 39; 1 John 4:4; Heb 10:25)."

- 2 This study was presented at the *Ninth International Theological Forum*, organized by the Theological Seminary at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, from October 29–31, 2006. I would like to express my appreciation for the fruitful interaction with the participants of this forum as well as for the observations and suggestions made by the readers of the article connected to the international review board of *JAAS*.
- 3 The literature concerning the importance of baptism (biblically, theologically, and practically) is vast and I will only refer to some more recent works. Many of these discuss the ritual of baptism against the larger context of ritual transformation and are thus highly relevant for this study. See, e.g., Richard E. Averbeck, "The Focus of Baptism in the New Testament," *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1981): 265–301; Mark McVann, "Reading Mark Ritually: Honor-Shame and the Ritual of Baptism," *Semeia* 67 (1994): 179–98; Christian Strecker, "Notizen zur Bedeutung des Rituals im Neuen Testament," *Glaube und Lernen* 13 (1998): 38–49. Richard E. DeMaris, "Funerals and Baptisms, Ordinary and Otherwise: Ritual Criticism and Corinthian Rites," *BTB* 29 (1999): 23–34; Gerd Theissen, "Die urchristliche Taufe und die soziale Konstruktion des neuen Menschen," in *Transformation of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions* (ed. Jan Assmann and Gedaliahu A. G. Stroumsa; SHR 83; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 87–114; Thomas A. Rand, "Set Free and Set Right: Ritual, Theology, and the Inculturation of the Gospel in Galatia," *Worship* 75 (2001): 453–68; and David S. Dockery, "Baptism in the New Testament," *SwJT* 43.2 (2001): 4–16.
- 4 Gerald A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible* (Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming). Most of my ritual research has focused on the ordination ritual of Lev 8 and other biblical ritual, e.g., Gerald A. Klingbeil, "Ritual Space in the Ordination Ritual of Leviticus 8," *JNSL* 21 (1995): 59–82; idem, "The Syntactic Structure of the Ritual of Ordination (Lev

In this study, I first provide a concise definition of ritual, followed by a brief look at the general appreciation of ritual in conservative scholarship. The next section focuses on post-baptismal ritual as known from the NT. Finally, we look at possible areas where ritual could be used more powerfully in the practical work of nurturing new converts in order for them to truly "grow in Christ."

## 2. What Is Ritual?

Ritual does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, it is influenced and shaped by the larger worldview, socio-economic, and religious conditions, and is not restricted to religious contexts but exists in many different areas of life. One can think, for example, of coming-of-age celebrations in distinct contexts. For white South Africans, both in the Afrikaaner and the English subculture, the celebration of the twenty-first birthday is important and marks the step into complete adulthood. Traditionally, the parents present a symbolic gift, often including the key of the house or a symbolic key, which would indicate that the son or daughter is now considered free to come and go. Obviously, the son or daughter had come and gone before, had driven a car, had been studying at university or had been holding down a job but, in the worldview of white South Africans, 21 marks the entrance to full responsibility, apparently rooted in European traditions of the past century

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8)," *Bib 77* (1996): 509–19; idem, "Ritual Time in Leviticus 8 with Special Reference to the Seven-day Period in the Old Testament," *ZAW* 109 (1997): 500–13; idem, *A Comparative Study of the Ritual of Ordination as Found in Leviticus 8 and Emar 369* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1998); idem, "The Anointing of Aaron. A Study of Lev 8:12 in its OT and ANE Contexts," *AUISS* 38 (2000): 231–43; idem, "'Who Did What When and Why?' The Dynamics of Ritual Participants in Leviticus 8 and Emar 369," in *Inicios, fundamentos y paradigmas: estudios teológicos y exegéticos en el Pentateuco* (ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil; Serie monográfica de estudios bíblicos y teológicos de la Universidad Adventista del Plata/River Plate Adventist University Monograph Series in Biblical and Theological Studies 1; Libertador San Martín, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2004), 105–34). More recently, I have also focused on the function of ritual in evangelical and Seventh-day Adventist theological thinking: Gerald A. Klingbeil, "Between Law and Grace: Ritual and Ritual Studies in Recent Evangelical Thought," *JATS* 13.2 (2002): 46–63; the larger context of ritual in biblical theology: idem, "Altars, Ritual and Theology—Preliminary Thoughts on the Importance of Cult and Ritual for a Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures," *VT* 54 (2004): 495–515; ritual against the larger context of the study of the Pentateuch: idem, "La perla perdida (o escondida) del Pentateuco: relevancia, significado y función del ritual bíblico," in *Volviendo a los orígenes: entendiendo el Pentateuco. Ponencias teológicas presentadas en el VI Simposio Bíblico-Teológico Sudamericano* (ed. Merling Alomía et al.; Lima, Peru: Universidad Peruana Unión, 2006), 217–46.

where 21 was often considered the legal age. The giving of a key, in the context of a birthday celebration in the presence of family and important family friends, represents ritualized behavior, although it is not connected to religion per se.<sup>5</sup>

In Peru, the twenty-first birthday has no specific significance, but the fifteenth birthday is a major event (especially for girls).<sup>6</sup> People of all social backgrounds splurge to provide the adequate frame for their daughter's "entry" into society, even if they cannot really afford it. Dresses are made especially for this occasion, sometimes copying elements of the wedding ritual.<sup>7</sup> The extended family (which can number hundreds of people) are invited to share in this event and often help also financially, logistically, and materially. Again, elements commonly found in ritual or rites are utilized in an essentially non-religious context. Additional examples from distinct cultures could be added here, including retirement ceremonies, wedding anniversaries, etc. Thus, ritual is present and observable in all contexts of life, in all cultures, as well as in places entirely disconnected from religion.<sup>8</sup>

In view of the fact that ritual is so prevalent and embedded in all cultures and aspects of life, defining it is a risky undertaking. A wide range of definitions abound which do not only differ in minute specifics but often depend heavily upon underlying philosophical presuppositions.<sup>9</sup> One could write an extensive study discussing only the evolving definitions of ritual.

<sup>5</sup> An interesting discussion of the birthday party as a rite or ritualized act can be found in Cele Otnes and Mary Ann McGrath, "Ritual Socialization and the Children's Birthday Party: The Early Emergence of Gender Differences," *JRitSt* 8.1 (1994): 73-93.

<sup>6</sup> This is not just a phenomenon of Peruvian culture but is reflected in many Latino cultures.

<sup>7</sup> Often, there are maids of honor and other elements that seem to reflect wedding symbolism.

<sup>8</sup> See Ithamar Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (Brill Reference Library of Judaism 10; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 3: "However, on a general epistemological level, I consider rituals to be structured forms of human behaviour which, initially, have no specific links to religious issues."

<sup>9</sup> In order to illustrate this point one needs only to consult Appendix 1 in Jan Platvoet, "Ritual in Plural and Pluralist Societies," in *Pluralism and Identity. Studies in Ritual Behaviour* (ed. Jan Platvoet and Karel van der Toorn; SHR 67; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 42-45, which presents in chronological order 24 different definitions of ritual beginning in 1909 with van Gennep and ending in 1991 with the definition of David Parkin. Cf. the helpful historical review found in Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1-60.

My personal definition of ritual is not revolutionary and focuses predominantly upon the phenomenology of ritual and its included dimensions. I am indebted here to the work of Dutch scholar Jan Plotvoet who defines ritual as:

... that ordered sequence of stylized social behaviour that may be distinguished from ordinary interaction by its alerting qualities which enable it to focus the attention of its audiences—its congregation as well as the wider public—onto itself and cause them to perceive it as a special event, performed at a special place and/or time, for a special occasion and/or with a special message.<sup>10</sup>

This definition recognizes the social dimension of ritual, and does not focus exclusively upon religious ritual (although it includes it). It also emphasizes important components of ritual. These components include the use of space, time, actions, as well as the participants involved. This definition relates to ritual as a part of life and not as a conglomerate of “odd” elements unrelated and disconnected from the reality of a particular culture or society.

### 3. Ritual and Conservative (including Seventh-day Adventist) Biblical Scholarship

Interaction with ritual has always been consciously and unconsciously an important part of the big religious picture. Ritual has often been a defining characteristic to indicate membership in a specific religious group (e.g., circumcision). Rituals such as baptism mark a change of status within a particular religious group and ritual forms also an essential part in the preservation of the identity of a religious group.

Considering the vital nature of ritual within the religious community, one would expect extensive studies and writings on the subject. In 2000, I undertook a survey of Evangelical academic publications, including Seventh-day Adventist publications, in order to gauge the attitudes towards ritual.<sup>11</sup> Figure 1 below is a summary of the findings.

<sup>10</sup> Plotvoet, “Ritual in Plural and Pluralist Societies,” 41.

<sup>11</sup> The following journals were reviewed: *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (1990–1999), *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1990–1999), *Emmaus Journal* (1991–1999), *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* (1990–1999), *Trinity Journal* (1990–1998), and the *Westminster Theological Journal* (1990–1999). For the indicated time periods all articles of these journals were reviewed.

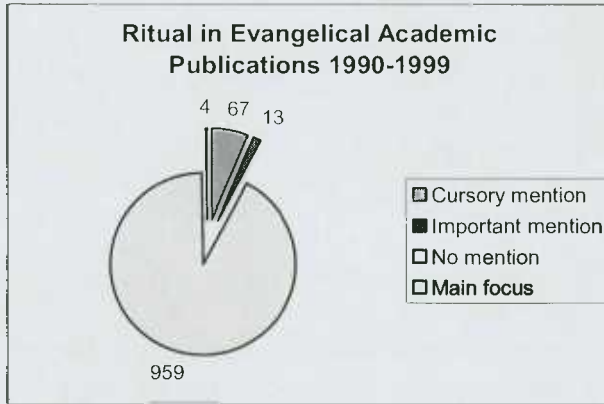


Figure 1: *Ritual in Evangelical Academic Publications 1990-1999*

Out of the 1043 reviewed articles 959 (91.94%) do not contain any reference to "ritual." Sixty-seven articles (6.42%) mention the term but do so in a non-technical way, often assuming concepts without introducing them. Most examples found in this group mention the term "ritual" only in a cursory way and, interestingly enough, a large number of these also belong to the field of NT studies, where the dichotomy between salvation by "ritual" and salvation by faith is assumed for most of the standard references discussing Paul's theology or his controversy with the so-called "Judaizers." Very seldom is this dichotomy *adequately* discussed.<sup>12</sup> Only thirteen articles (1.24%) could be classified as containing important references to ritual, though they do not focus *exclusively* on ritual.<sup>13</sup> Three of these articles belong to the field

<sup>12</sup> For the particular references see Klingbeil, "Between Law and Grace," 49-51.

<sup>13</sup> These articles include the following, ordered alphabetically and chronologically according to journals: Ángel M. Rodríguez, "Leviticus 16: Its Literary Structure," *AUSS* 34 (1996): 269-86; H. Wayne House, "Resurrection, Reincarnation, and Humanness," *BSac* 148 (1991): 131-50; David J. MacLeod, "The Present Work of Christ in Hebrews," *BSac* 148 (1991): 184-200; Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40-48," *BSac* 152 (1995): 279-89; David J. MacLeod, "The Primacy of Scripture and the Church," *Emmaus Journal* 6 (1997): 43-96; Terence Kleven, "Hebrew Style in 2 Samuel 6," *JETS* 35 (1992): 299-314; Meredith G. Kline, "The Feast of Cover-Over," *JETS* 37 (1994): 497-510; Betty Talbert-Wettler, "Secular Feminist Religious Metaphor and Christianity," *JETS* 38 (1995): 77-92; John W. Hilber, "Theology Of Worship In Exodus 24," *JETS* 39 (1996): 177-189; William D. Spencer, "Christ's Sacrifice as Apologetic: An Application of Heb 10:1-18," *JETS* 40 (1997): 189-197; Bruce R. Reichenbach, "'By His Stripes We Are Healed'," *JETS* 41 (1998): 551-60; David A. deSilva, "The 'Image of the Beast' and the Christians in Asia Minor: Escalation of Sectarian Tension in Revelation 13," *TJ* 12 (1991): 185-208; Theodore A. Turnau III, "Speaking in a Broken Tongue: Postmodernism, Principled Pluralism, and the Rehabilitation of Public Moral Discourse," *WTJ* 56 (1994): 345-77.

of missiology and practical theology, and one study to the field of historical theology. By far the most references to ritual were found in the biblical studies section, involving studies of the Day of Atonement in Lev 16 and in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Revelation 13 and Ezek 40–48 also are discussed.<sup>14</sup>

Looking at this meager evidence one wonders why conservative scholarship, including Seventh-day Adventist scholarship, interacts so little with ritual and ritual studies, particularly when one considers that nearly 20% of the Pentateuch should be considered ritual texts.<sup>15</sup> I can see four possible reasons as to why ritual studies are the stepchild of twenty-first century conservative scholarship.

First, as Gordon McConville observed in 1981, legislation on ritual is often “quietly and piously consigned to oblivion.”<sup>16</sup> This was, in his opinion (and still is), mainly due to the perceived “barbaric” nature of some of these rites and the underlying assumption of evolutionary development from primitive to more sophisticated forms of religion which do not require the spilling of blood or any other rituals to achieve reconciliation. Somehow, evangelical (and SDA) scholarship have been caught between law and grace, focusing upon the latter at the expense of the former.<sup>17</sup> Evangelicals claim a strong heritage of early Protestantism and it might just be this Protestant bias against biblical ritual that is coming to the surface. Julius Wellhausen, a Protestant, co-developed the (in)famous *Neue Dokumentenhy-pothese* in order to synthesize a religious system of Israelite religion that was acceptable to Protestant theology,<sup>18</sup> clearly standing against Judaism and its

<sup>14</sup> A more detailed analysis of each individual study can be found in Klingbeil, “Between Law and Grace,” 53–55.

<sup>15</sup> See Gerald A. Klingbeil, “El género olvidado: los textos rituales en el Pentateuco,” in ‘Y Moisés escribió las palabras de YHWH.’ *Estudios selectos en el Pentateuco* (ed. Merling Alomía; Investigaciones bíblico-teológicas UPeUenses 1; Ñaña, Lima: Ediciones Theologia, 2004), 267–95, and also the appendix in idem, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible*, 245–52. Out of 5,852 verses comprising the five books of the Pentateuch 1,165 verses should be considered as belonging to ritual texts, which approximates 19.90% or roughly one fifth of the Pentateuch.

<sup>16</sup> J. Gordon McConville, “The Place of Ritual in Old Testament Religion,” *IBS* 3.3 (1981): 120.

<sup>17</sup> Similar explanations can be found in Frank H. Gorman Jr., *The Ideology of Ritual. Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology* (JSOTSup 91; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 8, and Philip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness. A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 16–19.

<sup>18</sup> See here the references in Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 16, note 2. Cf. Cees Houtman, *Der Pentateuch. Die Geschichte seiner Erforschung neben einer Auswertung* (Contributions to

accompanying legalism.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the early Protestant disdain for ritual also seems to represent a strong reaction against the ritualistic emphasis of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>20</sup> In a similar way, the early Christian church tried to distinguish itself from Judaism and Jewish practice which was mostly associated with ritual.<sup>21</sup> It seems strange that, while Adventism does not share the evolutionary concept of religious development nor feels a particular need to set itself apart from Judaism, we seem to have embraced the Protestant anti-ritual mindset—if through nothing else than our silence on the topic.

Second, relevance is in vogue these days. Worship needs to be “relevant.” Meditation, Scripture reading, preaching, and mission need to be relevant. So, when discussing ritual texts from a distant past, the question of

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Biblical Exegesis and Theology 9; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 113, where the author writes: “Es ist offensichtlich, dass Wellhausen auch im dritten Hauptteil nachweisen will, dass die Religion des alten Israels von Freiheit, Natürlichkeit und Spontanität bestimmt wird und dass erst mit dem Aufkommen des Gesetzes zur Zeit Josias der Übergang zum Judentum stattfindet, in dem sich die Gesetzesreligion dann zum Gegenpol zur Religion des alten Israels entwickelt.”

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Greg C. Chirichigno, “A Theological Investigation of Motivation in Old Testament Law,” *JETS* 24 (1981): 306, note 15: “This interpretation can be found in Alt, ‘Origins,’ 84–85. Wenham, *Numbers*, 27–28, examines the prejudice that has prevented much discussion concerning the significance of OT ritual, particularly the sacrificial system. He critiques J. Wellhausen’s work, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1878), noting two presuppositions that run through it. The first is that freedom and spontaneity are good (early), the second that organization and ritual are bad (late). Such presuppositions have affected Evangelicals, who fail to realize the significance of ritual and minimize the importance of form and organization in both religious and secular callings.” Chirichigno is referring to the works of Albrecht Alt, “The Origins of Israelite Law,” *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (trans. R. A. Wilson; Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 81–132; Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC 4; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), and Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1885; reprint Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973).

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, in his famous polemic entitled *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* and published in 1520 wrote: “To begin with, I must deny that there are seven sacraments, and for the present maintain that there are but three: baptism, penance, and the bread. All three have been subjected to a miserable captivity by the Roman curia, and the church has been robbed of all her liberty.” Timothy F. Lull, ed., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 274. I am indebted to one of the referees of *JAAS* for this helpful reference.

<sup>21</sup> A good example of this is the Christian dealings with the OT Sabbath. Cf. Gerard Rouwhorst, “The Reception of the Jewish Sabbath in Early Christianity,” in *Christian Feast and Festival. The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture* (ed. Paul Post et al.; Liturgia Condenda 12; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 223–66.



relevance is often raised. Frequently, the explicit "non-human" nature of cultic and ritual texts makes them difficult to understand. The often technical and repetitive language challenges both the biblical scholar and the lay reader.<sup>22</sup>

Third, there appears to be a distinct bias in NT studies against ritual. Ritual is viewed as "dead," "legalistic," and part of a Judaism that was always in confrontation with the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. As a result, a certain dichotomy between the Hebrew Bible/law/ritual and the NT/grace/freedom is postulated which does not reflect Scriptural realities.<sup>23</sup> New Testament ritual exists and not only includes baptism and communion. In order to understand the structure and message of NT texts, one needs to grasp their frequent ritual focus.

Fourth, one major issue connected more with worldview than specific exegetical presuppositions should also be noted. Most of us are children of modernism. However, modernism's emphasis upon the concrete, countable, and visible does not provide a fertile ground for studying and understanding rituals that functioned in a pre-modern society with its distinct values such as community, hierarchy, faith, order, tradition, etc.<sup>24</sup> In other words, it is difficult for us to delve into ritual, having been brought up in a culture where we want to count and reason before we believe and feel. Adding to the problems, biblical rituals are only present in written form and cannot be observed. Furthermore, they belong to a cultural stream far removed from much of our present experience. Having lived in Africa, South America, and now Asia for over a year, it is enlightening to see how "simple," often "under-educated" lay members or even new believers handle and understand ritual texts from the Hebrew Bible that would only cause some raised eyebrows and a quick but determined flip of the page in a modern Western church context.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. K. C. Hanson, "Transformed on the Mountain: Ritual Analysis and the Gospel of Matthew," *Semeia* 67 (1994 [1995]): 147-70; idem, "Sin, Purification, and Group Process," in *Problems in Biblical Theology. Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* (ed. Henry T. C. Sun et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 167-91.

<sup>23</sup> A good example of this tendency can be seen in the discussion of Rom 10:4. Cf. Robert Badenas, *Christ the End of the Law. Romans 10.4 in Pauline Perspective* (JSNTSup 10; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 7-36, for a history of research. A recent evangelical exegetical commentary by Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT 6; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), interprets the term in question as "end" instead of "goal," thus following long established traditional lines of argumentation.

<sup>24</sup> Some pertinent observations can be found in Darrell Jodock, *The Church's Bible. Its Contemporary Authority* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 15-20, 34-42, 72-84.

#### 4. Ritual in the Context of the New Testament: The Case of Communion

While ritual is often associated with the Hebrew Bible and thought to play little part in the NT, even a superficial reading of the NT text will reveal a large number of references to ritual or ritual activity. One has only to think of the frequent references to baptism (e.g., Matt 3:6; Mark 1:8; Luke 12:50; John 3:22; Acts 8:12; 1 Cor 1:14, etc.),<sup>25</sup> laying on of hands (e.g., Acts 8:18; 1 Tim 4:14, etc.), anointing (e.g., Luke 7:46; James 5:14, etc.), references to eating food offered to idols (1 Cor 8:1–13; 1 Cor 10:18–19, etc.), eating of unclean foods (Acts 10, etc.), celebration of sabbaths or other holy days (Mark 2:23–3:6; Luke 6:1–11; Col 2:16, etc.), prayer,<sup>26</sup> communion, circumcision (Luke 2:21; John 7:22–23; Acts 7:8; Rom 2:25, etc.), fasting (Matt 6:16; 17:21; Mark 2:18; Acts 10:30, etc.), modes of worship, including covering (or uncovering) the head (1 Cor 11:5). Ritual serves as an underlying connector between the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, it seems that an understanding of ritual is essential in order to discover and effectively communicate biblical theology and practical biblical truths. By way of example we will examine the NT ritual of communion.

In the NT context, the communion ritual<sup>27</sup> involves two main ritual objects: bread and wine (Matt 26:26–30; Mark 14:22–26; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 11:23–26).<sup>28</sup> Both of these were the common daily fare of the ordinary peas-

<sup>25</sup> References to baptism abound in the NT, particularly the Gospels and Acts. In 1 Cor Paul discusses baptism a number of times in the context of theology.

<sup>26</sup> The references to prayer are too numerous. Prayer is an important element in the life and ministry of Jesus as well as in the early Church. Concerning the early Christian's attitude toward synagogue prayer, see William Horbury, "Early Christians on Synagogue Prayer and Imprecation," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 296–317.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of terminology, biblical references, theology, and the often diverging history of interpretation of the communion meal throughout the Christian era see Karl-Heinrich Bieritz, "Eucharist: Overview," *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (ed. Erwin Fahlbusch et al.; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 2:163–66; Jürgen Roloff, "Eucharist: NT Texts," *ibid.*, 2:166–68; Günther Schnurr, "Eucharist: Development in the Church and Theology," *ibid.*, 2:168–73; Karl-Heinrich Bieritz, "Eucharist: Contemporary Practice," *ibid.*, 2:173–76.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists. Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 1–32 and 218–49, has provided a fascinating study of the bread-and-water tradition in the NT and the early Christian communities. His introductory section on the importance of food in ritual is very helpful. Cf. Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 231–66.

ant living in Palestine. Although the text does not mention it explicitly, the requirement for the Passover celebration (which coincides with Jesus' last supper with his disciples) demanded bread without yeast.<sup>29</sup> There is also not much information concerning the nature of the drink. The three Gospels containing this particular narrative all refer to ποτήριον "cup" (Matt 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17; cf. 1 Cor 11:25–27), which does not provide any specific indication of what kind of drink was employed in the ritual.<sup>30</sup> The only indication given is found in the later promise of Jesus not to partake "of this fruit of the grapevine" until the final eschatological banquet.<sup>31</sup> Most commentators consider this a clear indication that the "cup" was filled with wine, although some have strongly argued against fermented wine.<sup>32</sup> The meal established by Jesus to commemorate his sacrificial death is clearly modeled along the lines of the Passover meal which involved the drinking

<sup>29</sup> In the prescriptive section of the Passover in Exod 12:15 the MT indicates the requirement to eat *maṣṣôt*, "unleavened bread." Some important studies on the ritual aspect of the Lord's Supper can be found in George May, "The Lord's Supper: Ritual or Relationship? Making a Meal of It in Corinth, Part 1: Meals in the Gospels and Acts," *RTR* 60 (2001): 138–50, and idem, "The Lord's Supper: Ritual or Relationship? Making a Meal of It in Corinth, Part 2: Meals at Corinth," 61 *RTR* (2002): 1–18, and also Paul Post and Louis van Tongeren, "The Celebration of the First Communion. Seeking the Identity of the Christian Ritual," in *Christian Feast and Festival. The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture* (ed. Paul Post et al.; Liturgia Condenda 12; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 581–98. Another interesting study that takes the ritual dimensions of both Passover and Communion into consideration can be found in Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "'Not by Bread Alone...': The Ritualization of Food and Table Talk in the Passover Seder and in the Last Supper," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 165–91.

<sup>30</sup> Paul refers to the same element of the Lord's Supper as ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας "the cup of blessing" in 1 Cor 10:16 or as ποτήριον κυρίου "the cup of the Lord" in 1 Cor 10:21. Interestingly, Luke seems to present a sequence of cup–bread–cup, thus involving an additional cup rite that is unique and not present in the other Synoptic Gospels. On the basis of its exceptional attestation and due to its more difficult nature it should be accepted as the original text. See the arguments and bibliography for this minority view in Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (2 vols.; BECNT 3B; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2:1721–24.

<sup>31</sup> The Greek utilized here is ἄμπελος "grapevine" which in both the LXX and the NT is utilized to indicate the full plant (Gen 40:9–10; 49:11; Lev 25:3–4; Jdg 9:12; John 15:1–5; James 3:12; Rev 14:18–19), albeit sometimes in metaphorical contexts. Concerning the eschatological banquet and Jesus' promise see Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (WBC 33B; Dallas: Word, 1995), 774.

<sup>32</sup> See Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Wine in the Bible. A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1989), 156–62. A history of vine and viticulture in ancient Israel can be found in Carey Ellen Walsh, *The Fruit of the Vine: Viticulture in Ancient Israel* (HSM 60; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000).

of four cups (*m. Pesah.* 10).<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, in both the Jewish and the Christian ritual the focus is upon eating, drinking, *and* talking about it. There is a clear connection between the two ritual moments in terms of shared time (i.e., evening), mention of the Passover lamb, the existence of at least two cups of wine (Luke 22:17–20), the recited blessings over bread and wine, and the dipping of bread into condiments (Mark 14:20) coinciding with *m. Pesah.* 10:4.<sup>34</sup> There is an additional link between the Jewish Passover and the Christian ritual based upon the concept of sacrifice. Jesus interprets the breaking of bread in terms of a sacrifice which is assimilated by eating it in commemoration of this sacrificial act (Matt 26:26). This is a concept of sacrifice that is also present in the Hebrew Bible<sup>35</sup> and easily connects the Christian ritual with the practice found in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>36</sup> This ritual underlines the importance of an understanding of OT ritual in order to build on the ritual introduced in the NT.

Even though there are many similarities between the Old and New Testament rituals, there are, however, also differences. While both rituals refer to a past event and reinterpret the present reality by looking at this past event, their intentions are distinct. The Christian ritual is one of both separation and re-integration, particularly when one considers its first century C.E. historical context. Due to distinct historical and also theological reali-

<sup>33</sup> See here also Bock, *Luke*, 2:1723. The four cups were drunk (1) with the preliminary course to bless the day; (2) after a liturgical explanation indicating the reasons for the celebration of the day and coinciding with the singing of the Hallel psalms; (3) following the meal of the lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs; and (4) following the concluding portion of the Hallel psalms.

<sup>34</sup> This has also been discussed in more detail by Brumberg-Kraus, "Not by Bread Alone..." 166–67.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Douglas, "The Eucharist: Its Continuity with the Bread Sacrifice of Leviticus," *Modern Theology* 15 (1999): 209–24. According to Douglas, a careful reading of the Pentateuch suggests that (1) for the biblical author(s), animal life is on the same plane as human life; (2) cereal offerings, far from being subsidiary to animal sacrifice, were recognized as separate, as holy, and as bearing covenantal implications; (3) in Leviticus, sacrifice is regarded as spiritual and note must be made of the interchangeability of words for material and spiritual food, bread and flesh, wine and blood, life and soul. Thus, on this paradigm, by analogy, the cereal offering is equivalent to an animal sacrifice. This would mean that Christian Eucharistic language would have required little break with older religious paradigms.

<sup>36</sup> It should also be remembered that Jesus employed ritual language in the installation of the Eucharist. Particularly in the context of the drinking of the wine he utilizes the term ἐκχέω "pour out" (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20), which is widely used in the LXX, particularly in ritual contexts, as can be seen in Lev 4:7, 12, 18, 25, 30, 34; 8:15; 9:9; 14:41; Num 19:17; etc.

ties, Christians sought to distinguish themselves from Jews and Jewish practice. This aspect of separation is indicated by focusing upon the bread as a symbol of the death of Jesus and leaving out completely the important Passover lamb required in Exod 12. However, the ritual contains an important aspect of re-integration: the emphasis on the common cup shared among the participants, which centers on the establishment of a new community. Food and drink metaphors in Scripture often emphasize the element of community.<sup>37</sup> This particular aspect of present and future community building is absent in the Passover ritual, which was primarily a ritual of re-integration,<sup>38</sup> remembering the saving events of YHWH.

In this brief discussion of the Jewish Passover and the Christian communion rituals several observations can be made. First, we see the interdependence of the ritual systems of the Old and New Testaments. New believers would need to be guided into an understanding of the OT rituals in order to understand, appreciate and fully participate in the rituals of the NT such as communion or baptism. Second, we see that a study of ritual deepens and reinforces theological concepts and leads to more clarity and a better understanding of abstract concepts.

## 5. "The Conclusion of the Whole Matter is..."

In conclusion, I would like to highlight some of the potential that ritual holds with regard to the nurture of new members as well as the possibilities that ritual holds for missions.

First, a better understanding of the importance and role of biblical ritual will no doubt provide the best introduction to the religious world of both the Old and New Testaments. Dealing with the elements and intricacies of ancient religious reality will help the modern believer appreciate and understand the ancient Israelite religion. And because of the interconnections between the Old and New Testament ritual systems, this in turn will facilitate the new believer receiving new and important input from both Old and New Testament teachings. Biblical ritual goes beyond the mere description of ancient Israelite religion and points to the essential elements of biblical theology. After all, the importance of blood, sacrifices, holiness, and purifi-

<sup>37</sup> See Adele Reinhartz, "Reflection on Table Fellowship and Community Identity," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 227-33; and, more detailed, Eleonore Schmitt, *Das Essen in der Bibel. Literaturethnologische Aspekte des Alltäglichen* (Studien zur Kulturanthropologie 2; Münster: LIT Verlag, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> Brumberg-Kraus, "'Not by Bread Alone...,'" 181-89.

cation—so prevalent in the ritual texts of the OT—mark crucial points in the history of salvation that find their counterparts in NT theology.

Second, as Seventh-day Adventists we pride ourselves in being people of the Book. If, however, we continue to ignore the genre of ritual texts, particularly in the study of the Pentateuch, we will cut out roughly 20% of its content. Clearly, we cannot afford to lose even 1% of the biblical text if we truly consider it divinely inspired.<sup>39</sup>

Third, as has been pointed out, ritualization is an important aspect of human existence and is ever present in our personal lives. “Engaging the ritual materials [of the Bible] is not simply a matter of understanding texts, but also a matter of understanding ourselves.”<sup>40</sup> Ritual can tell us more about ourselves and what is important to us. In this sense, ritual may be an important element in distinct forms of therapies, including pastoral counseling, family therapy or grief recovery.<sup>41</sup> Meaningful ritual cannot be only a tool to begin a healing process (e.g., after the loss of a loved one), but also a means to open hearts and minds to God’s unfailing love.<sup>42</sup>

Fourth, a better understanding of the way ritual functioned in ancient times will help us devise ways of utilizing rituals profitably in a modern context of worship and adoration. In this sense, ritual studies are important to practical theology and liturgical research, as has been shown in many recent studies.<sup>43</sup> In practical terms, the knowledge of ritual theory and basic

<sup>39</sup> See Klingbeil, “Between Law and Grace, 46–63.

<sup>40</sup> Frank H. Gorman Jr., “Ritualizing, Rite and Pentateuchal Theology,” in *Prophets and Paradigms. Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker* (ed. Stephen Breck Reid; JSOTSup 229; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 183.

<sup>41</sup> A good introduction to the possibilities and connecting points of therapy and ritual can be found in Kimberly Ann Holle, “Strategic Family Therapy and Turner’s Ritual Theory: Cross-Cultural Comparisons in the Process of Becoming,” *JRitSt* 14.2 (2000): 48–57. Compare also Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, “When the Cradle Is Empty: Rites Acknowledging Stillbirth, Miscarriage, and Infertility,” *Worship* 76.6 (2002): 482–502; David Newson, “Christian Ritual and the Meaningful Language of Loss,” *CurTM* 29 (2002): 282–87; Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, “Crossing Boundaries: Virtue or Vice for the Twenty-first Century?,” *Cross Currents* 52 (2002): 385–403; Gary W. Reece, “Disenfranchised Bereavement: Pastoral Care of Complicated Grief Reactions to AIDS-Related Losses,” *American Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 3.3–4 (2001): 207–28; and Nathan R. Kollar, “Rituals and the Disenfranchised Griever” *Liturgy* 9.2 (1990): 71–79.

<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, the study of Richard M. Litvak, “Rabbinical Counseling Strategies for Facilitating Grief: An Integration of Jewish Traditions of Mourning and Counseling Psychology Interventions,” *Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal* 41.3 (1994): 25–38, draws upon rabbinical and OT ritual conventions.

<sup>43</sup> See here, e.g., Mike Parker, “Culture and Worship,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 20 (2002): 161–76; Rand, “Set Free and Set Right: Ritual, Theology, and the Incul-

ritual elements may be an important tool in making our worship services more meaningful and may enable us to communicate profound theology in ways that are easily remembered and memorized. This final aspect, memorization, is important, particularly in view of the fact that ancient Israelite society was first an oral society where texts were read in public contexts and orally transmitted and internalized. It seems clear that within such a context a heavily structured ritual is a unique vehicle to re-member important theological concepts. This is, after all, why Jesus introduced the communion supper with all its relevant elements. Ritual utilized in this sense teaches and preaches more effectively than a thousand words. It also connects to the multimedia invasion of twenty-first century worship and even goes beyond it. We should remember that multimedia is not only limited to video screens, fast computers, nice Powerpoint presentations or fancy sound effects. Ritual in church can also function as multimedia and needs to be utilized more often. However, while standard multimedia tools often tend to overwhelm or bore audiences, ritual draws the worship participants into the action. We need to think of creative, modern ritual acts that will communicate effectively to a visual generation. Perhaps it is time to recognize that the design of the church service involves more than determining how many people will be up-front, who will preach, how long the sermon should last, and what kind of music (both congregational and individual) should be utilized and is appropriate. We have recognized this principle in many other contexts, e.g., in wedding ceremonies that include the lighting of two candles or the tying of a knot of two individual ropes. However, too little creative work based upon sound ritual theory is being undertaken in the context of worship ritual.

Fifth, missiologists have already recognized the immense potential of biblical ritual and ritual theory for missiology.<sup>44</sup> While Western societies are

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turation of the Gospel in Galatia," 453-68; Paul Post, "Introduction and Application: Feast as a Key Concept in a Liturgical Studies Research Design," in *Christian Feast and Festival. The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture* (ed. Paul Post et al.; Liturgia Condena 12; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 47-77; Roy M. Oswald, *Transforming Rituals. Daily Practices for Changing Lives* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1999); and Ronald L. Grimes, "Liturgical Renewal and Ritual Criticism," in *The Awakening Church. 25 Years of Liturgical Renewal* (ed. Lawrence J. Madden; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992), 11-25.

<sup>44</sup> See Matias H. Kung, "The Ritual Dimensions of the Tabernacle Worship and Their Missiological Implications" (Ph.D. diss.; Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2001). Cf. also the insightful comments concerning healings and miraculous signs (often appearing in ritual contexts) in the context of world mission found in Pardon Mwansa, "Healings and Miraculous Signs in World Mission," in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century* (ed. Jon L. Dybdahl; Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 1999), 125-31. Successful contextualization also requires adaptation of liturgy and ritual since ritual is primarily

generally lacking in ritual elements, countries in the Third (or Fourth) World often have a rich cache of rituals as an integral part of their cultural systems. Most believers and non-believers in these countries will relate more easily to the multi-media approach of OT ritual than to the theoretical theology found in Pauline writings. If one also takes into consideration the important history of storytelling in these countries, the utilization of OT ritual and narrative to reach these people groups needs to be recognized.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore—and this is a highly contentious issue also in Adventist theology—the conscious adaptation of known ritual for teaching and preaching purposes needs to be considered, without falling into the trap of “paganizing” Christianity.<sup>46</sup>

Sixth, and finally, ritual (and prior to that, our understanding of ritual) may provide a way to overcome the spreading cancer of increasing isolation so common in modern society (and not only in the western world). It is within such a context that ritual plays an important role in communication.<sup>47</sup> Ritual expresses, reinforces or even constitutes the values and structures of a given society or community.<sup>48</sup> Basing himself upon work done by

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dependent upon worldview and cultural contexts. See Gordon Christo, “Staying Within the Boundaries: Contextualization of Adventism for India,” *JATS* 13.2 (2002): 1–14; and Clifton Maberly, “Buddhism and Adventism: A Myanmar Initiative,” in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century* (ed. Jon L. Dybdahl; Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 1999), 232–40. A non-SDA perspective can be found in A. H. Mathias Zahniser, “Ritual Process and Christian Discipling: Contextualizing a Buddhist Rite of Passage,” *Missiology* 19 (1991): 3–19.

<sup>45</sup> An interesting study of this aspect can be found in Pablo Richard, “Biblical Interpretation from the Perspective of Indigenous Cultures of Latin America (Mayas, Kunas, and Quechuas),” in *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. Mark G. Brett; Biblical Interpretation Series; Boston: Brill, 1996), 297–314.

<sup>46</sup> This can be observed in many areas of Roman Catholicism theology and practice. See, e.g., William L. Wonderly, “The Indigenous Background of Religion in Latin America,” *Practical Anthropology* 14.6 (1967): 241–48; Stephen Holler, “The Origins of Marian Devotion in Latin American Cultures in the United States,” *Marian Studies* 46 (1995): 108–27.

<sup>47</sup> See Paul A. Soukup, “Ritual and Movement as Communication Media,” *Journal of Communication and Religion* 11 (1988): 9–17.

<sup>48</sup> Peter J. Leithart, “The Way Things Really Ought to Be: Eucharist, Eschatology, and Culture,” *WTJ* 59 (1997): 161. While Leithart’s study is predominantly concerned with a discussion of the often limited perspective about the Eucharist, his observations on ritual and the functions of ritual in general are nevertheless valid and important. He draws primarily upon the works of prominent anthropologists, such as Douglas, Turner, and Leach.



Catherine Bell,<sup>49</sup> David P. Wright rightfully states that “ritual does not simply communicate something about social relationships, it creates them.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, ritual plays a vital role in initiating or maintaining communication and community. While individual ritual does exist, most ritual takes place in a public forum and creates community. Suddenly, we belong together, bound by a common purpose and experience, and committed to the same values. This is, after all, the purpose of clan and tribe in the OT context and of the NT church.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, ritual may play a significant role in reaching out to non-believers who feel isolated as well as in nurturing and establishing new church members within the church community.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 69–93.

<sup>50</sup> David P. Wright, *Ritual in Narrative* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 12.

<sup>51</sup> See the creative study of Efraín Velásquez, “La tribu: hacia una eclesiología adventista basada en las Escrituras Hebreas,” in *Pensar la iglesia hoy: hacia una eclesiología adventista. Estudios teológicos presentados durante el IV Simposio Bíblico-Teológico Sudamericano en honor a Raoul Dederen* (ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil et al.; Libertador San Martín, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2002), 25–40.

<sup>52</sup> A good discussion of the different worldviews of premodernism, modernism and postmodernism can be found in Chantal J. Klingbeil, “Iglesia y cultura: ¿amigas o enemigas?,” in *Pensar la iglesia hoy: hacia una eclesiología adventista. Estudios teológicos presentados durante el IV Simposio Bíblico-Teológico Sudamericano en honor a Raoul Dederen* (ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil et al.; Libertador San Martín, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2002), 354–60. Cf. the observations found in Jodock, *The Church’s Bible*, 15–20, 34–42, 72–84.