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The Creation Integration: Recovering



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Introduction I begin with the spectacular scene in the book of Revelation, chapters 4 and 5. John the seer is summoned for a while to become a spectator at the heavenly court, watching as the whole of creation pours out its ceaseless praise before its Creator. Revelation 4 and 5 is not a vision of the ultimate future (i.e., people sometimes think "This is what it will be like when we get to heaven"). No, the vision of the future in Revelation is found in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. Rather, this is a vision of the heavenly dimension of present reality.

Interlocking Spheres Of Creation Indeed, it seems in the first two verses of chapter 4, that when it says "Come up to heaven" and when John says, "I was in the Spirit," these are functionally equivalent; heaven and earth are the interlocking spheres of God's single creation. When John is in the Spirit, he is suddenly open to and aware of the heavenly dimension of what we call ordinary life.

The scene laid out before him begins with a description of the heavenly throne room itself, rather like the one in Ezekiel chapter 1. God himself is not described (that is significant), but a sense of God's presence and majesty fills the whole passage. We are not surprised, therefore when the first thing that actually happens is worship - though we are perhaps surprised that the first worshipers are the animal kingdom, rather than the human. The four living creatures – the lion, the ox, the one with the human face, and the eagle. They have six wings like the seraphim in Isaiah 6, and they praise God ceaselessly with the Trisagion:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, Who was, and is and is to come.

And then in the context of this praise from all creation, 24 elders, representing the people of God from the Old Covenant and the New, fall down and declare that God is worthy of this worship because He is the powerful Creator of all. The English word "worship" is etymologically related to the word "worthy," and this is one of its classic expressions. Worship means acknowledging the worth, the majesty, the worthiness of the One who is worshiped – the One Who is sitting on the throne in this vision. It means gladly recognizing and celebrating the fact that this God is Who He is, and does what He does.

Emerging Truths On Worship Already, two fundamental points emerge.

1) First, biblical worship is grounded in the fact that God is the Creator of all.

Any attempt to slide off into a dualism in which creation is secondary, or shabby or downright bad is ruled out.

2) Second, the task of humans is to bring to conscious thought and expression the worship which the rest of creation is offering.

Heaven and earth are full of God's glory, but we humans, God's "image-bearing" creatures, are called to know that "it is so," and to put that into words of praise. That is what you do every time you say "hallowed be Thy Name," or "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit."

Now, all this, of course, is a reprise

Biblical Worship



"Christian worship is about telling and reenacting the story"

of Genesis 1, "God saw all that He had made and said that it was good." After the creation of humankind, God said that it was "very good." Mankind, man and woman, made in God's image – are designed to be the climax and flower of creation.

Humans And The Creation Project Genesis 1 was a project, not a fixed tableau – and the project misfired. In Revelation 5, we see that God is holding a scroll, the scroll which contains, we understand, God's sovereign purpose for the world. But the scroll needs somebody to open it, and John weeps because nobody can do so. More specifically, it requires a human being to open it, but no human being is qualified.

Then we look and see the Lion, who is also the Lamb, the Messiah, the Root of David who has conquered, because He is also the Lamb who was slaughtered - and Who now sends God's sevenfold Spirit out into the world. He is the One who can take forward God's project, not just for human beings, but for the whole creation.

And the result is a new outburst of praise. Revelation 5 builds on Revelation 4, and this time the song of creation is taken up into the song of redemption, this time there is instrumental music, there is incense, there is prayer, and there is singing, because this is the new song, the song of new creation, taking up the elements of creation and celebrating their redemption. The song which opens up the new world of possibility for worship, this is the song which celebrates the Messiah's saving death and resurrection, and its result in creating humans as kings and priests to bring God's wise order to the world.

At the end of the passage, the four living creatures reply "Amen," at the end of the song, so we find ourselves back where we were at the start.

Worship As Progression And Integration See how it works: 1) creation worships God the Creator, 2) humans bring that worship into conscious articulation, 3) then humans worship God for redemption, and 4) creation says "Amen."
We note the integration of heaven and earth. Of creation and human in this worship. We note also that the purpose of God is not to save humans *from* the world, but to save humans *for* the world – to enable them to be His kings and priests, bringing His fresh, wise ordering and redemption to creation.

The old caricature of heaven, of being a rather boring place with nothing to do but play harps all day, arises from a misreading of the whole book. Already in this scene, and then more fully at the end of Revelation, God's people are not just worshipers, but also workers, bringing God's new creation into reality – and the worship is the beginning of that task, as we shall see.

Re-telling And Re-enacting The Story
At the end, the vision is not of humans escaping from this world and going off into heaven, but of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth. Christian worship as outlined here, is about telling and re-enacting the story of what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will do – like the great psalms and songs of the Old Testament. It celebrates God's mighty deeds, and in so doing, helps forward the next stage of the redeeming purpose.



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