

Text for ‘Advent Theology’ Website

‘God-talk’ happens.

Minimally, ‘God-talk’ can be called *theology* (from two Greek words: *theos*—God; and *logos*—word, talk, reason). But not all ‘God-talk’ makes sense or is helpful. Thus theology, as a more formal enterprise, seeks to figure out what’s going on here, and critically pursue the truth of the matter. It’s racking one’s brains to “speak well of God.”¹ In short, theology is taking rational trouble to figure out what’s going on with such talk. This is what you will find on this site.

But, as is to be expected, in the course of such inquiry different kinds of theology emerge.² While we are interested in the whole range of different possibilities, this site seeks to argue for, and give expression to, a quite distinctive kind of theology. We are calling it ‘Advent Theology’ for three reasons: its object is the purported ‘Coming of God’ (i.e. the events of the *Advent*: past, present and future); thus its subject-matter is ‘God with us’ (Emmanuel); and its procedure is thorough-going inquiry (into potentially all things) in the ‘wake of the coming God.’

Two important clarifications:

1) While Advent theology arises out of a quite particular historical movement and community, and seeks to recommend itself to such a global enterprise (by now, some 25 million strong), it is not to be misunderstood as simply an attempt to describe a particular denomination’s theology. Advent theology is distinctively Adventist, but it is also ecumenically Christian. Furthermore, if it is on the right track, it will seek to become a universal catalyst in the global human quest to form more sustainable and authentically humane, human communities.³

2) For many in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination (now the largest of all the historical forms of Adventism that arose in the mid-19th century) to speak of ‘the Advent’ conjures up the notion of “the Second Advent” (and associated visions of an immanent ‘end of the world’). While to speak of “the Advent” in most of the rest of Christendom is to evoke the memory of the incarnation in “the First Advent” (i.e. Christmas). In our talk of ‘Advent Theology’ we do *not* mean either apocalyptic speculation about the future, *nor*

¹That is speak both *rightly* (i.e. rationally and coherently) and *appropriately* (i.e. compellingly and winsomely) of God. The phrase is drawn from the title of one of Edward Vick’s early books, *Speaking Well of God: A Statement of the Christian Doctrine of God*, Studies in Adventist Theology series (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979). Vick was one-time professor of theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. To my knowledge, he is the first Adventist scholar to have an earned PhD in the explicit field of Systematic Theology from a major theological school (Vanderbilt University, Divinity School). For another (perhaps more controversial) example of Adventist talk about God, see, Richard Rice, *The Openness of God* (Tacoma Park: Review and Herald Press, 1980).

²For a fuller explanation and sort of ‘topographical map’ of various kinds of ‘God-talk’ click [here](#).

³In fact, it ultimately sees its catholic vocation, not only to herald the call to ‘Come out of Babylon (i.e. any imperial form of religious/social/political/economic domination), my people’ (Jeremiah 54: 45; Rev. 18:4), but to provide a *sanctuary* for such exiles.

mere nostalgic evocation of nativity scenes from the past. We are referring to a trans-historical triaxial *theodrama* that together constitutes the ‘Advent’ or coming of God in three dramatic ‘Acts’: creation / covenant; incarnation / salvation; consummation / ‘New Heavens & a New Earth’. We are talking about the historical *emergence* of the awareness, presence and self-disclosure of God.⁴

What you will therefore find on this site is an emerging articulation of the *theodrama* of the Advent and its implications for life and practice.⁵ While it will be ‘in construction’ for some time to come, here are the five kinds of materials/resources/functions you will find as you navigate around:

a) Publications, presentations, papers, works in process, authored by John W. Webster.⁶ The site is his, and one of its purposes is to archive, organize and gradually make more accessible material produced over the nearly 50 years of his career as a systematic theologian and teacher.

b) Projects. Some of the above mentions material consists of incomplete projects (e.g. publications, monographs, drafted but unfinished multi-volume works). The main hindrance to their being published is that they all seek to formulate and articulate a major ‘paradigm-shift’ (T.S. Kuhn) in Adventist theology. This cannot be effectively done in drips and dabs, for the coherence is in the ‘whole’ not in its individual parts. Parts will seem incoherent until seen in the light of a new whole (like what happens in a Gestalt-switch). Hopefully, it might become possible to have other like-minded folk participate in helping to move some of these projects forward.

c) Conversation. In due course, the plan is to open the *forum* features of the WordPress site to enable comment, dialog and multiple-participant conversation around these themes and projects. Critical engagement would be most welcome!

d) Blog. Eventually, it might be helpful to use the blogging features of the site, to provide current, topical comment on relevant issues as they arise. We will have to see. This might require a retirement before anything like this is even half-promised.

e) Repository and/or links to related works produced by others that might further the aims and goal of the site.

⁴For a fuller, yet still introductory, treatment of these notions, [click here](#).

⁵If you are curious about what this means, here is a non-technical treatment of our take on what it means to be an Adventist in narrative form, from a 30,000ft perspective. [Click here](#)—What does it mean to be an “Adventist”?

⁶[Click here](#) for some biographical information and a CV.