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### Proclamation in the Psalms for Christian Worship

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## **Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.**

Symposium on Worship 2014

### **B20 Proclamation in the Psalms for Christian Worship**

A proclamation is an announcement, a confident saying. A proclamation does not tell us what the proclaimer feels, or what she thinks. A proclamation is not about the proclaimer. It is about what is true in the world.

**(1) God possesses an array of splendid virtues that befit the King of the universe.** These virtues are God's "attributes" in theology, and include God's power, goodness, and righteousness.

--Maybe mentally relocate "king" from the world of ancient political patriarchy to the worlds of C.S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien.

--absolute sovereignty: God is "the Most High" (Ps 9:2).

--over Israel and "the nations" (Ps. 2:11, 67:3). Israel's chutzpah?

--Maybe. But maybe faith that God will "judge *all* the peoples with equity, and guide all the nations on earth"? (Ps. 67:4)

--God is royalty, "the God of glory" (67:3). Glory=*kabod*="lit up weight"

--Universal power, glory, but also compassion (David, Ps. 145)

**(2) God has created and now sustains a wonderful world.**

--Creation was "the show" (Ps. 29:3; 8:3; 19:1; 33:6-9 "effortless"<sup>1</sup>)

--God's power revealed, but also goodness (104)

**(3) Human beings created in God's image (Ps. 8).**

--Humans like ants, and yet . . . all "under their feet" (Gen. 1:26-28 dominion)

--"crowned" us with "glory and honor" (Ps. 8)

--"dominion," not "conquest"

--implication 1: Good creation implies all is potentially redeemable.

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<sup>1</sup> Stacy R. Obenhaus, "The Creation Faith of the Psalmists," [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_psalms\\_obenhaus.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_psalms_obenhaus.html)

--implication 2: responsibilities and rights

**(4) It is fitting to praise God for the divine virtues and to praise and thank God for creation.**

Pss. 33:1; 147:1; 67:3

--upsurge of enthusiasm in it implies singing

--Even the disquieted soul hopes in God and predicts that one day “I shall *again* praise him, my help and my God.” (Ps. 42:11)

--Praising God is a way of squaring up to reality.

--“May the peoples praise you, O God” (Ps. 67:3) Why? Because praise is right and fitting as a response to God’s goodness. Fittingness like a joke.

--It is also plain healthy—“inner health made audible” (C. S. Lewis)

### **Uses of Psalm Proclamations in Worship**

#### Calls to Worship

Psalm 124:8. “Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” Didn’t make ourselves, can’t forgive ourselves, can’t preserve ourselves

Who is calling to worship? King, great God (95:3, 6)

Imperatives (“Sing to the Lord a new song”) or cohortatives (“Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord”). But also proclamations: 24:1-4

#### Prayers of Invocation

--not really invocation, but more like acknowledgment.

--90:1 Dwelling place: “You have made us for yourself” Aug. on the heart’s true home”

Sample prayer of invocation:

In you, infinite God, we live and move and have our being.

**You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.**

Before the mountains were born

or you brought forth the whole world,

**from everlasting to everlasting you are God.**

But we are only mortals,

**creatures of dust who return to dust.**

In the morning you wake us up into the thunder of life.

**In the evening you sweep us away in the sleep of death.**

We are only mortals, mere transients in the world.

**Our days quickly pass and we fly away.**

Our times are in your hands, because

**from everlasting to everlasting you are God.**

So teach us to number our days,

**that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**

Confession of Sin

--Ps. 103:8-13) Sample use in prayer:

Gracious God, we are often hypocritical people whose pious words hide shabby hearts. We dare to confess to you because you are *compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love.*

We are so deeply centered on ourselves, hungering not for justice in the world, but for success in our own lives. We dare to confess to you because *you will not always accuse, nor will you harbor your anger forever.*

You have granted us the miracle of life under the sun, and yet we have too often seen our lives as burdens to be borne rather than as your gift to be celebrated. We dare to confess because you *do not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities* Psalm 103:8-10.

Psalm 51: Gracious God, for as long as we can remember, we have been sinful people, living against the purpose of our own existence. Surely *we were sinful from birth, sinful from the time our mother conceived us.*

We know, O God, that we have wronged others, but in wronging them we have also wronged you. *Against you, uniquely against you, have [we] sinned and done what is evil in your sight* (Psalm 51:5, 3).

Assurance of God's Grace

Ps 103:10-13; 32:1-2; (Isaiah 40:8).

Prayers of the People

--Bookends Ps. 8:1; 27:1; 28:1; 63:1; 90:1 Or convert imperatives to proclamations: (Ps. 37:7; 46:1)

--Refrains after a section (Ps. 68:19; 77:13; 84:5; 88:1; 96:4; 136 throughout).

--Introduce the praise, thanksgiving, or petition that will follow:

O Lord, "*you are [our] light and [our] salvation,*" (Ps. 27) and so we praise you. Light up our lives with your glory and save us from all that threatens. Or,

O God, "*you are [our] rock*" (Ps. 28:1) Shelter us in the shadow of your might. Or,

"*Many, Lord . . . God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us*" (Ps. 40:5). And so we bring you thanks for human love that can be old and deep, for people who may be trusted with our secrets, for children who are delightful in ways we could never really describe. Or,

"*You are a compassionate and gracious God*" (Ps. 86:15). Inspire in us compassion and grace so that we, too, may be kind to the undeserving. Or,

"*You have established your faithfulness in heaven itself*" (Ps. 89:2) so that we cling to your promises and trust you for all that we need.

Also for preaching (moods differ) and for close of worship (145:1-2)