



Exuberant Praise: A Pentecostal Reading of Psalm 150

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Abstract

Enthusiastic praise of God has been a vital characteristic of the Pentecostal movement, and Pentecostals have appealed to Psalm 150 as justification for their extravagant worship. Therefore, the methodology of this article views Psalm 150 through the lens of Pentecostal spirituality and offers a contemporary appropriation of this biblical text for contemporary worship. The methodology includes historical–grammatical exegesis that focuses on the rhetorical effect of the poetic structure and content. The psalm is examined in light of its theology of worship, its role as the final song in the Psalter, and its implications for Pentecostal worship. The wide variety of musical instruments named in Psalm 150 suggests that any and all kinds of instruments can be used in worship. Colonialistic restrictions on instruments should be avoided. Many contemporary Pentecostal congregations have adopted a concert-like approach, in which everyone’s attention is directed toward the stage, where professional musicians enact a performance of praise. The instruments found in Psalm 150, however, include those that are played by the non-professionals, whom we would call the laity. Furthermore, participative community is implied in the invitation for “every breath” to praise the Lord.

Keywords: worship, musical instruments, dancing, music, charismatic, Psalter

I. Introduction

Early Pentecostal leader Aimee Semple McPherson asserts, “Some folks seem to think the devil has a monopoly on all the dancing and joy; but dancing and joy really belong to God” (1919, 4). She cites Psalm 150:4, “Praise him with the tambourine and the dance;” then, she quotes lyrics from Fannie Crosby (1885): “the children of the Lord have a right to shout and sing, for ... we are going ... to the palace of the King.” Psalm 150, in my view, proclaims that the devil does *not* have a monopoly on joy. I argue here that the final psalm not only *allows* God’s people to worship enthusiastically but *demand*s that they do so with “every breath” (Psalm 150:6).

Enthusiastic praise of God has been a vital characteristic of the Pentecostal movement (Alvarado, 2012, 139), but not everyone has approved of Pentecostal fervency. Responding to criticism, Steven Land explains that the exuberant worship of Pentecostals is generated by their apocalyptic spirituality, which Land characterizes as “a passion for the kingdom,” which is “ultimately a passion for God” (Land, 2010, 2, 97, 120, 173-180, 212, 219; cf. Cartledge, 2004, 36).

Inasmuch as Pentecostals have appealed to Psalm 150 as justification for their extravagant worship, I have chosen to examine the biblical text through the lens of Pentecostal spirituality and



offer a contemporary appropriation of the psalm in dialogue with early Pentecostal literature. The Psalm will be examined in light of its structure, its content, its theology of worship, its role as the final song in the Psalter, its affective rhetoric, and its function in Pentecostalism.¹ As a hermeneutical circle, my context within the Pentecostal worshipping community contributes to a fresh perspective on the text, and the biblical text contributes to a deepening of Pentecostal theology and spirituality.

II. A Translation of Psalm 150

הַלְלוּ יְהוָה	¹ Praise YAH!
הַלְלוּ-אֱלֹהֵי בְּקִדְשׁוֹ	Praise God in his sanctuary;
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּרִקְיעַ עֲזָזוֹ:	Praise him in his strong firmament.
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּגִבּוֹרֹתָיו	² Praise him in his mighty acts;
הַלְלוּהוּ כְּרֹב גְּדֻלּוֹ:	Praise him according to his abundant greatness
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתִקְעַ שׁוֹפָר	³ Praise him with blast of horn;
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּנֶבֶל וְכִנּוֹר:	Praise him with harp and lyre.
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתֶף וּמְחֹל	⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dance;
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּמִנִּים וְעוּגָב:	Praise him with strings and flute.
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי-שִׁמְע	⁵ Praise him with cymbals of attention;
הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה:	Praise him with cymbals of acclamation.
כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל יְהוָה	⁶ Every breath should praise YAH;
הַלְלוּ-יְהוָה:	Praise YAH!

III. The Structure and Genre of Psalm 150

A. Structure of Psalm 150

The poetic structure of this brief psalm consists of three parts. verses 1-2, verses 3-5, and verse 6 (Auffret, 2002, 257; Human, 2011, 4). The psalm is framed by the repeated imperative “Praise YAH!” Fokkelman (2002, 154, 172) argues that “Praise YAH!” in v. 1 is “outside the poem proper,” but “Praise YAH!” in v. 6 serves as the second colon of the last poetic verse (Cf. Goldingay, 2006, III, 749). However, Allen (2002, 501-502), places both appearances of “Praise YAH!” outside the poetic structure. In either case, this inclusion functions as a powerful literary device in each of the five final psalms. Thematically, the psalm can be outlined as follows.

- A. Initial exhortation to praise (v. 1a)
- B. Places of praise (v. 1b and 1c)
- C. Motives for praise (v. 2)
- D. Means of praise (vv. 3-5)
- E. Universality of praise (v. 6a)

¹ The Pentecostal movement is a global, diverse, and multifaceted tradition; therefore, I do not claim to speak for all Pentecostals. However, I do have a broad knowledge of global Pentecostalism. I have worshiped in Haitian, Romanian, Jamaican, Puerto Rican, and African-American churches within the USA, and I have worshiped in Pentecostal congregations outside the USA in the following countries: Romania, Haiti, South America, Korea, South Africa, and the Philippines.



F. Continuing exhortation to praise (v. 6b)

Within this simple structure that answers the questions What?, Who? Where?, Why?, and How?, (Mays, 1994, 450). Pierre Auffret identifies dance as the rhetorical center and, therefore, the “eminent expression of praise” (2002, 257).

Carroll Stuhlmueller suggests that the ten imperatives in the main body of the poem correspond to the Decalogue, and the thirteen total exhortations to praise match the thirteen attributes of Yahweh that were revealed to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7 and the thirteen times that God spoke in Genesis 1 (Stuhlmueller, 1988, 433).² The number ten can also represent “totality and perfection” (Zenger, 2011, 657). The ten imperatives would also duplicate the ten occurrences of “Praise YAH!” that begin and end the five final psalms (146-150). Adding the two framing “hallelujah’s,” makes a total of twelve imperatives, and the number twelve “evokes both the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve months of the year” (Zenger, 2011, 657).

B. Genre and Date of Psalm 150

At first glance, Psalm 150 would appear to fit into the form-critical classification of the hymn. A hymn normally consists of three parts, 1. Call to praise, 2. Motive for praise, and 3. Renewed Call to praise. The shortest example of the hymn is Psalm 117.³

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. Call to praise | “Praise YAHWEH, all nations;
Worship him, all peoples,” (v. 1) |
| 2. Motive for Praise | “because (כי) his loyalty is strong toward us,
and his faithfulness is forever!” (v. 2a) |
| 3. Renewed call to praise | “Praise YAH” (v. 2b) |

The call to praise serves as only one element of the hymnic form, appearing at the beginning (and often at the end as well). In Psalm 150, however, this one element is creatively expanded into an entire psalm (Goldingay, 2006, III, 746-747; Mays, 1994, 449).⁴ While the hymns of praise include a section that details the motive for praising God (e.g. Psalms 47:2-5; 96:4-6; 98:1-3), Psalm 150 is “only a SUMMONS TO PRAISE” (Gerstenberger, 2001, 458, emphasis original).⁵ Motives for praise are included in v. 2, but they are presented as prepositional phrases connected to the imperative. The entire psalm, therefore, is “just one richly varied introit” (Mowinckel, 1967, 83; Zenger, 2011, 656).⁶

The mention of the “sanctuary” (v. 1), the plural form of the imperative, and the use of the ram’s horn (often used for gathering the people) combine to indicate that “The Psalm was not composed

² See also Mathys (2000), who notes that the Psalter names ten authors of the Psalms (332).

³ The following Psalms (among others) also exhibit the three-part hymnic structure. 29, 47, 98, 113, 145, 146, 147, 148, and 149. See Mays (1994, 27).

⁴ Compare the way in which the statement of trust that is found in the lament (e.g. Psalm 4:5 [6]) was expanded into a new type of psalm, the psalm of trust (cf. Psalms 23, 27, 91, 125).

⁵ The motives for praise are often (but not always) introduced with the Hebrew כי, translated ‘because’ (e.g. Psalms 47, 96, 98, 100, 103, 117, 147, 148, 149). Hymns that do not utilize the word כי include Psalms 29, 81, 111, 113, 134, 146, and 150.

⁶ After analyzing the rhetorical purposes found in the psalms, Foster, (2008) alters the form-critical category of hymn to include Psalm 150 and names his revised category the ‘Call to Praise’ psalms. Other Call to Praise psalms are 29, 47, 81, 96, 98, 100, 103, 111, 113, 117, 134, 146, 147, 148, 149 (76).



for individual reading or meditation, but for communal use in worship performances” (Gerstenberger, 2001, 460; Dahood, 1966, III, 359; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1993, 1188).

The date of Psalm 150 is uncertain. Its position at the end of the Psalter does not necessarily indicate a late date. Therefore, it could have been written either before or after the exile, but Goldingay argues that the references to the ram’s horn and the cymbals point to a preexilic date for its composition. The Hebrew words for “trumpet” and “cymbals” that are used in Psalm 150 are different from those found in the book of Chronicles, which is known to be postexilic (Goldingay, 2006, III, 747).⁷

IV. Overview of Psalm 150

A. Initial Exhortation to Praise (v. 1a)

Like the four hymns that precede it, this psalm begins with the imperative, “Praise YAH!” (הללו יה). In the ANE languages, הלל carries the suggestion of loud cheering, voicing of admiration, or speaking well of someone; therefore, it is translated “praise.” It signifies the showing of approval or the lauding of someone (Köhler, 2001), I, 249; Clines, 1993), II, 561): “This root connotes being sincerely and deeply thankful for and/or satisfied in lauding a superior quality(ies) or great, great act(s) of the object” (Coppes, 1999, 217). The imperative, therefore, is a call or exhortation to praise.

The book of Psalms teaches us that praise is fundamental to life. “Praise is [humanity’s] most characteristic mode of existence. praising and not praising stand over against one another like life and death. praise becomes the most elementary “token of being alive” that exists” (Rad, 1962), I, 369-70). Moreover, praise is the basic human obligation. Karl Barth argues, “We misunderstand the Old Testament if we do not realise that this element of praise or doxology is the basic note” (2004, I, 471-72).

Regarding the significance of this call to praise, Claus Westermann writes, “...the call issues forth unrelentingly, untiringly, ever anew, because that for which it calls is recognized as absolutely necessary, sustaining, supportive of the community ... Through God’s praise, the congregation expresses its self-understanding, its being vis-a-vis God” (1997, 372).

Who is to be praised? The object of praise is YAH, which is a short form of Yahweh, the personal name of the God of Israel. He is God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and he is the God who met Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3. He is the God who spoke to the Israelites from Mt. Sinai and said to them, “I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:2). He graciously offered his covenant to the Israelites and claimed them as his own special possession. Praise flows out of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. It is an expression of Israel’s covenant commitment to Yahweh, and Israel’s praises are in direct response to Yahweh’s covenant faithfulness as embodied in Yahweh’s $\tau\omicron\nu$ (“steadfast love”) (Brueggemann, 2005, 7-9).

⁷ Psalm 150 uses שפר and צלצל, but Chronicles has חצוצרה and חלהת.



B. Places of Praise (v. 1b)

“Praise God in his sanctuary.” Praise is directed to “God” (אלה), the divine name that is “used to indicate God in all his might” (Tesh & Zorn, 1999, 537), his powerful sovereignty” (Ross, 2011, III, 964-965), or to stress the “universality of God/יהוה” (Zenger, 2011). The change in divine name may be connected to the reference to the “firmament” at the end of the verse. It was El who created the firmament in Genesis 1:6. Also, the name “El” would also contribute to the alliterative repetition of the letter “l” (“*hallelu El*”). Anthony Ceresko argues that the naming of God as “El” in v. 1 is an alphabetic compositional device. He suggests that successive letters of the alphabet are stressed as the psalm moves forward, beginning with the letter *alef* in the word “El” and concluding with the letter *tav* in the word ללהלה, (“praise”), found in v. 6. Ceresko’s proposal explains both the presence of the name “El” in v. 1, when “Yahweh” might be expected, as well as the grammatical change from imperative to jussive in v. 6 (Ceresko, 2006, 42-44).⁸

Where should praise take place? Worship should take place in God’s “sanctuary,” and it should take place in God’s “strong firmament.” The Hebrew ישיקדו can be translated “his holiness” (as Amos 4:2) or “his holy place,” i.e. “sanctuary.” The LXX reads, “holy ones” (ἁγίους), which is unlikely, given that the Hebrew word is singular. In Psalms 60:8 and 108:8, ישיקדו is translated “his holiness” by the NKJV, ESV, and NASB; but it is rendered “his sanctuary” by the NRSV, CEB, NIV, NJB, and TNK. In Psalm 150, the parallel with “firmament” suggests a location for God rather than a characteristic of God. Still, the sanctuary can be either the heavenly or the earthly temple. Goldingay, Dahood, Calvin, and Limburg argue that the parallel with “firmament” suggests the heavenly temple.⁹ Calvin writes that God is located in heaven, but the worshipers are located on earth, and they are exhorted to “lift their eyes towards the heavenly sanctuary” (1849, V, 320; contra Ross, 2011, III, 966). “Yahweh is in his sanctuary; Yahweh – his throne is in heaven” (Psalm 11:4). Samuel Terrien, however, understands the “holy place” to be “the temple of Zion” which served in tradition as the “navel of the earth,” where heaven and earth were joined together (2003, 928; cf. Brueggemann & Bellinger, 2014, 618).¹⁰ Zenger agrees that the earthly temple is “more probable in this passage, because our psalm is especially concerned with bringing together the earthly (v. 1b) and heavenly (v. 1c) praise of YHWH and filling the whole cosmos with it” (2011, 658).¹¹ Derek Kidner remarks, “So the call is to God’s worshippers on earth, meeting at his chosen place, but also to his heavenly host ... to mingle their praises with ours. Earth and heaven can be utterly at one in this. His glory fills the universe; his praise must do no less” (1975, 528).¹² The ambiguity of this verse could have been removed by substituting for “sanctuary” either “heaven”

⁸ Ceresko’s proposal is rejected as ‘rather improbable’ by Zenger (2011, 658).

⁹ Dahood argues on the basis of the parallelism that the heavenly sanctuary must be in view (1966, III, 359). Cf. Goldingay (2006, III, 747); Limburg (2000, 505); and Calvin (1849, V, 319). However, the contrast between heaven and earth is sometimes expressed through parallelism (i.e., Psalms 69:35; 73:9, 25; 76:8; 79:2; 89:6; 102:25). Therefore, Lennox (1999, 433), understands ‘sanctuary’ to refer to the Jerusalem temple.

¹⁰ Cf. Carro, Poe, & Zorzoli (1993), who write, ‘*Santuario* podría ser el universo como su santuario, pero es mejor tomarlo como el templo. Se empieza en el templo pero Dios recibe alabanza de todo el universo’ (443). Cf. Henry (1994), who writes ‘Let his priests, let his people, that attend there, attend him with their praises. Where should he be praised, but there where he does, in a special manner, both manifest his glory and communicate his grace?’ (953).

¹¹ Cf. Berlin & Brettler (2004), who interpret v. 1 to mean that the ‘site of praise is enlarged to include the whole world’ (1446).

¹² Cf. Kraus (1989), who writes, ‘At the holy place heaven and earth touch each other. For that reason the heavenly world is repeatedly drawn into the hymns. In v. 1 the appeal makes its way into the heavenly sphere’ (570).



(as in Psalm 148:1, “praise him in heaven”) or “the assembly/congregation” (as in Psalm 149:1, “praise him in the congregation”). Therefore, I understand the ambiguity to be suggestive of both the heavenly and the earthly temples. After all, God has a throne in heaven and in the Jerusalem temple.¹³ In any case, the emphasis is upon the “quality of holiness” (Auffret, 2002, 259). God is holy, and his presence creates holy space.

The Hebrew word רָקִיעַ (“firmament”) is exceedingly difficult to translate into a single English word because of the differences between ancient and modern cosmologies. The firmament is “the firm vault of heaven” (Köhler, 2001, II, 1290), that was created in Genesis 1:6. It is the dome or arch of the sky, “considered fixed above the earth” (Clines, 1993, VII, 552). The “firmament” is often used as a synonym to “heaven” (e.g. Psalm 19:1), but, as Goldingay points out, “the psalm is thinking of the solid dome in the heavens, above which Yhwh’s throne sits, securely established by Yhwh” (2006, III, 747). It is God’s “divine residence” (Allen, 2002, 403). By itself, the firmament would represent God’s power, especially the power of creation; but here we have the “firmament of strength.” The Hebrew עֲזָתוֹ means “his might, strength” (Köhler, 2001, II, 805. Clines, 1993, VI, 322);¹⁴ therefore, the adjectival construct phrase should be translated “his strong firmament.”¹⁵ Matthew Henry explains the significance of praising God in his strong firmament. “*Praise him* because of his power and glory which appear in the firmament, its vastness, its brightness, and its splendid furniture; and because of the powerful influences it has upon this earth. Let those that have their dwelling *in the firmament of his power*, even the holy angels, lead in this good work” (1994, 954, emphasis original). Psalm 150:1 “states the obvious truth that [the firmament] belongs to God, and that God is to be praised on account of it” (Barth, 2004, 137).

C. Motives for Praise (v. 2)

Why should God be praised? After examination of the hymns, which he describes as the “Call to Praise” psalms, Robert Foster concludes that the motives for praise can be organized under two categories; 1. “attributes of YHWH,” and 2. “deeds ascribed to YHWH” (2008, 84). Although in Psalm 150 the motives for praise do not constitute a separate section (see discussion above), they are present in the psalm in the form of prepositional phrases. The general attribute to be praised is God’s “abundant greatness,” and the deeds to be praised are “his mighty acts.” Therefore, Psalm 150 encompasses and summarizes all of the hymns of praise, without supplying a detailed list of God’s attributes and actions. After all, the works of God have been recited repeatedly in the Psalter, and God’s character has been celebrated throughout the book. The following list is but a brief reminder of God’s works and greatness as found in the Psalter. the Lord is our shepherd (23:1); he is our rock and our fortress (18:2); the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof (24:1); the Lord is our light and our salvation (27:1), he brought us up out of a horrible pit (40:2); he is our refuge and strength (46:1); the Lord is good (34:8), his mercy is everlasting (106:1), and his truth endures to all generations (117:2); he forgives all of our sins (86:5); he heals all of our

¹³ Cf. Ross (2011, III, 965), who suggests that the terminology may be ‘deliberately ambiguous, including both the heavenly and earthly sanctuaries in the expression.’

¹⁴ Dahood’s translation of עֲזָתוֹ as ‘his fortress’ is doubtful (*Psalms*, III, 360), given that it is not rendered ‘fortress’ in other Old Testament texts. Ross (2011, III, 966) translates the entire phrase, ‘in the firmament where his power is displayed.’ Against other interpreters, Schaefer (2001) understands ‘in his strong firmament’ to refer to human worship that takes place on earth ‘under the mighty dome of the sky’ (345).

¹⁵ The Hebrew רָקִיעַ is not in apposition but is in construct; contra NJB, NEB, and Bratcher & Reyburn (1993, 1188). The appositional form would be בְּרָקִיעַ (cf. Genesis 1:8). See Joüon & Muraoka (1991), who describe this kind of construction as genitive of ‘quality’ (§129.f) and provide the following examples. Exodus 5:9; 29:29; Leviticus 10:17; Proverbs 1:10.



diseases (103:3); his greatness is unsearchable (145:3); the Lord created the heavens and the earth (96:5); he cares for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (94:6); the Lord reigns forever (97:1). Goldingay asserts, therefore, “To attempt to say something final about Yhwh would inevitably be anticlimactic” (2006, III, 747).

Worshippers are commanded to praise God for “his mighty acts.” The extremely concise wording of Psalm 150 results in several ambiguous words and phrases. In the clause “praise him for his mighty acts” (הַלְלוּהוּ בְּגִבּוֹרֹתָיו), the preposition ב creates an awkward and unique construction. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, whenever the verb הַלל is followed by a motive for praise, that motive is normally introduced by כִּי and a verbal clause.¹⁶ When הַלל is followed by ב, the ב signifies location or means.¹⁷ Therefore, the preposition ב in v. 2a would most naturally be translated “with,” as it is in verses 3–5 below. The resulting translation would be “Praise him with [recital of] his mighty acts,” indicating that the recitation of God’s mighty acts is one means of expressing praise (Berlin & Brettler, 2004, 1446). Thus, Psalm 150:2a would be a restatement of Psalm 145:4, “One generation shall praise your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.” However, the preposition ב can also mean “because” (Genesis 18:28; Zechariah 9:11; Lamentations 2:29; Nehemiah 10:1; Daniel 10:2) (Köhler, 2001, I, 105). Therefore, the clause can be translated “Praise him because of his mighty acts,” a meaning that fits thematically into the hymnic genre and is parallel to the following line. “Praise him according to his abundant greatness.”

In Hebrew, “mighty acts” גבורת is the plural of גבורה “strength, might.” The plural means “feats of strength” and is used many times in reference to God’s mighty deeds (e.g. Deuteronomy 3:24; Psalms 20:7, 71:16, 106:2, 145:4, 145:12, Isaiah 63:15) (Brown et al., 1979, 150; Clines, 1993, II, 305; Köhler, 2001, I, 173). Schaefer names God’s mighty acts as “creation, deliverance from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the giving of the law at Sinai, the entrance to the Promised Land, the choice of Mount Zion as God’s residence on earth—God’s historical actions on behalf of Israel and every human” (2001, 345–346).

Other Biblical texts glorify God for his “mighty acts.” Moses speaks to God and says, “O LORD God, ... what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like your works and your mighty deeds? (Deuteronomy 3:24). The psalmist writes, “I come with praise of your mighty acts, O LORD God (Psalm 71:16); “Who can express the mighty acts of the LORD? Who can declare all his praise?” (Psalm 106:2); “One generation shall praise your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4); and “make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom” (Psalm 145:12). The Jews in exile pray to God, “Look down from heaven, and see from your holy and glorious dwelling; Where are your zeal and your mighty deeds?” (Isaiah 63:15).

Worshippers are also commanded to praise God for “his abundant greatness.” God’s “greatness” (גָּדְלוֹ) (Clines, 1993, II, 324; Köhler, 2001, I, 179) is his majesty, his “magnificence” (Brown et al., 1979, 152). His greatness is proven by his “great works and mighty acts” (Deuteronomy 3:24) and by his redeeming of Israel from Egypt (Deuteronomy 9:26). The adjectival form, “great,” is used

¹⁶ E.g., ‘because (כִּי) he is good’ (Psalms 106:1; 135:3); ‘because (כִּי) it is good to sing praise’ (Psalm 147:1); ‘because (כִּי) he delivered the poor’ (Jeremiah 20:13). I was able to find one exception, where the motive is expressed through the preposition על. ‘I praise you for (על) your righteous judgments’ (Psalm 119:164).

¹⁷ E.g., ‘in the assembly’ (Psalms 22:23; 35:18; 107:32); ‘in the gates’ (Proverbs 31:31); ‘in the heights’ (Psalm 148:1); ‘Praise him with ...’ (Psalm 150:3, 4, 5).



of God more frequently than the noun form. The power of Yahweh is great (Exodus 32:11). God is greater than all other gods (2 Chronicles 2:4). He is “great and awesome” (Nehemiah 4:8). God is great (Nehemiah 8:6, Psalms 99:2, 135:5; Isaiah 12:6; Jeremiah 10:6). He is great and “does wonders” (Psalm 86:10). God “is great and abundant in power” (Psalm 147:5). He is the “great God” (אל גדול) – Deuteronomy 7:21; 10:17; Nehemiah 1:5; 9:32; Psalms 77:14; 95:3; Jeremiah 32:18; Daniel 9:4). God’s works are great (Deuteronomy 11:7; Judges 2:7; Psalm 111:2). His glory is great (Psalms 21:6; 138:5), and his name is great (Joshua 7:9; 1 Samuel 12:22; 1 Kings 8:42; 2 Chronicles 6:32, Psalms 76:2; 99:3; Jeremiah 10:6; 44:26; Ezekiel 36:23; Malachi 1:11). His mercy is great (1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chronicles 1:8; Psalms 57:11; 86:13; 108:5); his goodness is great (Nehemiah 9:25); and his compassion is great (Isaiah 54:7). God has done great acts of salvation and judgment (Deuteronomy 10:21; Job 5:9; 9:10; 37:5; Psalms 71:19; 106:21). A slightly different form of the noun “greatness” (גדולה) is also applied to God as an attribute (1 Chronicles 29:11; Psalms 145:3; 145:6).

As if it were not enough to acknowledge the greatness of God, Psalm 150:2 commands the hearers to praise God in accordance with his *abundant* greatness (קָרַב גְּדֻלּוֹ). The Hebrew רב can mean many in number (a multitude), but it can also mean a large “quantity, abundance” (Brown et al., 1979, 913).¹⁸ God’s greatness is abundant.

D. Means of Praise (vv. 3-5)

How should God be praised? God should be praised with every kind of musical instrument, with every kind of jubilant expression, and with every breath. “Music provides the singing with a special power which is appropriate for the majestic greatness of the God of Israel” (Kraus, 1989, 571). The psalmist insists that every musical instrument should be used in praising the Lord. All humans have preferences for certain musical instruments; but, apparently, Psalm 150 invites us to use all sorts of instruments in praising God. Those of us who cannot play musical instruments can dance unto the Lord. Other physical modes of worship are mentioned in earlier psalms, such as the clapping of hands and shouting.

A variety of musical instruments are attested in ANE iconography (Crenshaw, 2001, 76). The exact identification of each instrument continues to be debated, but “what is clear is that this praise is not timid. It is to be done with enthusiasm” (Limburg, 2000, 505). Psalm 150 is “a witness to the power of music, its amazing potential for evoking beauty and feeling and for carrying vision beyond the range of words” (Mays, 1994, 450). Psalm 150 calls upon God’s people to apply themselves “diligently to the praises of God” and “to bring to this service all their powers, and devote themselves wholly to it” (Calvin, 1849, V, 320).

1. Ram’s horn

The ram’s horn (שׁוֹפָר) (Gerstenberger, 2001, 460; Škulj, 1998, 1120)¹⁹ was an

unfinished, twisted animal horn, originally without a special mouthpiece (one was created by cutting off the tip of the horn). Given the technique for blowing it, this was not a melodic instrument but one used for signaling; by

¹⁸ Cf. e.g., Genesis 27:28 ‘abundance of grain;’ Psalm 145:7 ‘abundant goodness.’

¹⁹ Ross (2011, III, 967) states that שׁוֹפָר could mean ‘trumpet,’ but he does not supply any evidence. Austel (1999, 951) insists, ‘In the Old Testament [שׁוֹפָר] is always used of the curved musical instrument made of the horn of a ram.’



blowing breath (תקע, “push, strike”) into it one can produce a long-held sound or rhythmic series of sounds (Zenger, 2011, 659).

It was sounded on ceremonial occasions (Leviticus 25:9; Psalm 81:4; Joel 2:15; 2 Samuel 15:10), during battle (Judges 3:27; Jeremiah 4:5; Hosea 5:8), and to signal a theophany, “And Yahweh will appear over them ... and the LORD Yahweh will sound the shofar” (Zechariah 9:14; cf. Exodus 19:16-19; 20:8). The shofar announces Yahweh’s presence before his joyful worshipers, “With trumpets and the sound of the shofar, shout joyfully before the king, Yahweh” (Psalm 98:6; cf. Psalm 47:5; 1 Chronicles 15:28; 2 Chronicles 15:14). We read that David brought up the ark of Yahweh “with jubilation and the sound of the trumpet” (2 Samuel 6:15). The sounding of the shofar “often signaled the start of a special occasion” (Lennox, 1999, 433), and here it may signal the beginning of worship.

2. Harp and lyre

These are stringed instruments, but their exact nature is disputed by scholars (Zenger, 2011, 660). They are mentioned in connection with a liturgical setting (Lennox, 1999, 433).²⁰ The נבל was a stringed instrument in the harp family. Škulj asserts that it was one of the “bow harps without a front support and with a sounding box clad in leather in the upper part. It was the second most important musical instrument of the Temple liturgy” (Škulj, 1998, 1121).²¹ The כנור was also a stringed instrument, probably with two arms and a yoke upon which the strings were stretched (Škulj, 1998, 1122).²²

3. Tambourine and dance

Nancy DeClaisse-Walford points out that “Music and dancing were an integral part of worship” in ancient Israel (2014, 1009; cf. Udoette, 2010, 258). The tambourine and dance were utilized in celebrations such as the one that is recounted in Exodus, after the Israelites escaped from Egypt and passed through the Red Sea. They began to sing and rejoice, and “Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing” (Exodus 15:20). The narratives about David include similar celebrations. Following David’s first great victory, “it happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments. (1 Samuel 18:6). Later in David’s story, he returned the Ark of the Covenant to its rightful place inside the Tabernacle. As he entered Jerusalem, “David danced” before the LORD with all his might ... So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with jubilation and with the sound of the ram’s horn” (2 Samuel 6:14-15).

The דב was a percussion instrument, often called a tambour or tambourine (Clines, 1993, VIII, 662; Köhler, 2001, II, 1772; Brown et al., 1979, 852). The tambourine had a round wooden frame with a skin stretched over it like a drum (Škulj, 1998, 1123). The dance (מחול) was “usually a group round dance with musical, instrumental or vocal accompaniment,” closely associated with the use of the tambourine (cf. Psalm 149:3) (Škulj, 1998, 1124; cf. Kraus, 1989, 571; Köhler, 2001, I, 568). As was mentioned above, Auffret argues that dance, though silent, occupies the central

²⁰ According to Mathys (2000), we know relatively little about the Israelite temple service; therefore, caution should be exercised when making assertions about the instruments and their uses (330-31).

²¹ Translated ‘harp’ by Clines (1993, V, 595); and by Köhler (2001, I, 664).

²² Translated ‘lyre’ by Brown et al. (1979, 490); and by Clines (1993, IV, 435). Köhler translates it as a ‘zither’ (2001, I, 484).



position in the psalm's structure; and, therefore, is the most important expression of worship (2002, 260).²³

In many parts of the world, dance continues to be a common element in worship. For example, Donatus Udoette explains that “any meaningful worship in Africa has to be accompanied with vibrant singing, dancing to the tunes of musical instruments, and clapping of hands” (2010, 269). However, persons from the west “have sometimes frowned at music and dancing within liturgical contexts in Africa. Westerners tend to think that it is improper and indecent to sing and dance the way Africans do within liturgical contexts” (Udoette, 2010, 257). William H. Willimon, however, celebrating the geographical shift in global Christianity, writes, “So you and I can give thanks that the locus of Christian thinking appears to be shifting from North America and Northern Europe where people write rules and obey them, to places like Africa and Latin America where people still know how to dance” (1993, 233).

Dancing has been a part of Pentecostal worship from the beginning of the movement. In 1919, the subject of dancing is addressed in *The Bridal Call*, a periodical published by Aimee Semple McPherson. Citing Psalm 150:4 along with Psalms 14:3 and 20:11, McPherson insists that “dancing and joy really belong to God.” Christians should dance because “Within the heart of him whose hopes are built upon the solid foundation of Christ and His righteousness, there is joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1919, 4). A few years later, R:L. Stewart, encourages the readers of the *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* to worship in the dance. He writes, “how many of our folks have praised the Lord in the dance since 1917. We praise Him with the organs all right. Well, why not in the dance?” (1923, 6).

4. Strings and flute

It is unclear which instruments are indicated by the Hebrew words מנים and עוגב. Zenger suggests that they may be “generic designations for stringed instruments and wind instruments” (Zenger, 2011, 661). Edo Škulj insists that the Hebrew מנים is a “completely unclear expression ... probably a stringed instrument” (Škulj, 1998, 1124), and the lexicons translate the plural form as “stringed instrument” (Brown et al., 1979, 577; Clines, 1993, V, 336-37; Köhler, 2001, I, 597). The עוגב may have been “a wind instrument from the nomadic period ... a folk instrument ... a pipe” (Škulj, 1998, 1125). The Targums translate it into Aramaic as an אבובא; which is a reed-pipe or flute (Brown et al., 1979, 721).²⁴ If it does refer to some kind of flute, it would be a reed or pipe with holes. Ancient Near Eastern depictions include both the single flute and the double flute, which had two reeds played simultaneously.

5. Cymbals

The Hebrew צלצלים signifies a percussion instrument that we call cymbals (Clines, 1993, VII, 127. Köhler, 2001, II, 1031). According to Škulj, the “cymbals found in excavations were made of bronze ... The average diameter of the finds is about 12 cm” (1998, 1126). Two types of cymbals are named in Psalm 150:5. Ivor H. Jones calls the first type “cymbals of attention.” He argues that שמע “has cultic associations” and may suggest “attention of the congregation to the word of God” (1986, 111).²⁵ The Hebrew phrase בְּצִלְצְלֵי-שִׁמְעַת could be translated simply “with cymbals of

²³ Auffret writes, ‘*Ainsi la danse, expression muette de la louange, jouit-elle d’une position centrale au beau milieu de l’orchestre pourrait-on dire, position qui à elle seule exprime l’importance que le texte entend lui donner*’ (2002, 260).

²⁴ Clines (1993, VI, 287) and Köhler (2001, I, 795) also define it as a flute or pipe.

²⁵ My translation (‘cymbals of attention’ and ‘cymbals of acclamation’) follows Jones.



sound,” apparently signifying loud or noisy cymbals (Köhler, 2001, II, 1574; Clines, 1993, VII, 127). The second type are “cymbals of acclamation” or “cymbals of clashing” (Clines, 1993, VIII, 678).²⁶ The Hebrew תְּרוּעָה. “is a cultic word used of cultic acclamation (cf. Ps 33:3; 47:6; 89:16),” hence the Vulgate “*jubilationis*” (Jones, 1986, 111).²⁷ It signifies a loud shout or noise. Context determines whether the shout is generated by surprise, defeat, victory, or joy (Longman, 1997, III, 1082-48). As a shout of joy, it can mean “jubilation” or “joyful shout” (see e.g. Psalm 100:1, “shout to the LORD”). The two categories of cymbals may specify two different kinds of cymbals, two different manner of striking the cymbals (Zenger, 2011, 662) or, as Goldingay suggests, “two different functions fulfilled by the same instrument at different times” (2006, III, 749).

6. The full orchestra

If the cymbals are only one instrument that is used in different ways, then seven instruments are named in Psalm 150 (Schaefer, 2001, 345). The number seven has the symbolic meaning of “perfection” (Vette, 2016, 254).²⁸ This list of instruments “along with dance encompasses all the ways by which people express God’s praise with the body, the hands, and the throat” (Schaefer, 2001, 345). The list includes “instruments that would be played by priests (horn), by Levites (harp, lyre, cymbals), and by laypeople (tambourine, strings, pipe)” (Goldingay, 2006, III, 748).

This listing of different instruments played by separate groups (priest, Levite, laity) suggests full congregational participation in worship: “Everybody, with all known instruments, was invited to praise God in this final poem of the Psalter” (Gerstenberger, 2001, 460). “The tambourine, strings, and flute were instruments which enlivened secular festivities ... Thus, the praise embraces liturgical and secular settings and everybody participates” (Schaefer, 2001, 345). The presence of so-called “secular” instruments would call into question the common Evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Greek orthodox prohibition of such instruments.²⁹

The use of a variety of instruments has been a long-standing practice within Pentecostalism. The plethora of instruments was noted on one occasion at the Angelus Temple in Los Angeles, where Aimee Semple McPherson served as pastor. McPherson names “dozens of instruments,” including the harmonica, the organ, xylophone, marimba, the golden harp, triangle, auto-harp, the “Silver Band ... and instruments too numerous to mention” (1925, 22).

James Mays explains the value of the music that is created by a multitude of instruments.

This emphasis on music in the final psalm ... is a witness to the power of music, its amazing potential for evoking beauty and feeling and for carrying vision beyond the range of words into the realm of imagination. That we sing the praise of God is no accidental custom. Music performed, sung, enacted is so much a dimension of praise that words of praise without music need to be musical in rhythm and elegance if they are to serve as praise (1994, 450).

In his book that claims to be a *Biblical Theology of Worship*, Evangelical scholar Daniel Block complains about the movement away from the pipe organ (which is not found in Scripture) as the

²⁶ On the Day of Atonement, the shofar is to be a שופר תְּרוּעָה, ‘blaring ram’s horn’ (Leviticus 25:9).

²⁷ Jones observes that the pairing of the words ‘attention’ and ‘acclamation’ also ‘provides a resonant alliteration ... suited to psalm translation work’ (111).

²⁸ Gerstenberger (2001, 459), however, argues for two different kinds of cymbals, which results in eight instruments.

²⁹ As noted earlier, see e.g. ‘*Musicam Sacram*,’ #63.



primary source of worship music (2014, 228). Like many others in the West, Block is guilty of the colonial sin of imposing his preferences upon everyone else. He is highly selective, ignoring the biblical texts that do not support his own preferences in worship style.³⁰

To repeat what I stated above, the Pentecostal tradition has been open to a variety of instruments. Harvey Cox, in his celebrated study of Pentecostalism, devotes an entire chapter to the importance of music; and regarding Pentecostalism's openness to a broad variety of musical styles, Cox observes,

Most pentecostals gladly welcome any instrument you can blow, pluck, bow, bang, scrape, or rattle in the praise of God. I have seen photos of saxophones being played at pentecostal revivals as early as 1910 ... I have heard congregations sing to the beat of salsa, bossa nova, country western, and a dozen other tempos (1996, 142-43).

While I applaud Cox's observation and could testify of my own experiences as confirmation, I must also confront the ugly truth that Pentecostals have been, at times, just as biased and unkind as anyone else in their unwarranted restrictions on musical instruments and styles. In various Pentecostal contexts, I have witnessed bans on Christian rock music, drums, electric guitars, and liturgical dance. Moreover, Pentecostal missionaries have imposed artificial prohibitions on native peoples (Alexander, 2012, 63).³¹ While personal preference and parochial traditions deem certain instruments to be more sacred than others and, therefore, more appropriate for worship, the book of Psalms seems to suggest that all musical instruments can be adapted as vehicles of worship.

E. Universality Praise (v. 6)

Who should praise Yahweh? The hymns often name their audiences near the beginning of the psalm (Tesh & Zorn, 1999, 540). "All the earth" is called upon to praise the Lord in Psalm 96:1. In Psalm 97, it is the "earth" and the "isles" who offer praise (v. 1). Other psalms name the addressees as "the peoples" (99:1), "all lands" (100:1), "my soul" (103:1; 104:1), "seed of Abraham" (105:5), "the redeemed" (107:2), "servants of the LORD" (113:1; 134:1; 135:1), "all nations" (117:1), "all his angels" (147:2), and "Israel" (149:2). Here in Psalm 150, however, "The expected vocative identifying those to whom the summons is addressed is delayed until the final line (v. 6), where the transition from imperative to jussive mode gives the vocative a special emphasis" (Mays, 1994, 449-450). Only in the final verse, following the climactic clashing of cymbals, is it revealed that it is "every breath" who should praise the Lord (Zenger, 2011, 663).

³⁰ Block does not comment on the variety of instruments found in Psalm 150. Regarding the final psalm, he makes only the following observations. verse 3 shows that the *shofar* was used to praise Yahweh (227, n. 21); verse 6 states the 'inclusive nature' of worship (1, n. 2); and Psalm 150 serves as conclusion to the Psalter, a 'final exclamation of praise' (230). The Roman Catholic position regarding musical instruments in worship is stated in '*Musicam Sacram*. Instruction on Music in the Liturgy' (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, March 5, 1967). Three points are worth noting here. 1. The 'pipe organ' is the preferred instrument (#62). 2. Cultural preferences for certain instruments should be taken into consideration (#63). 3. 'Secular' instruments are 'altogether prohibited' (#63). (But who gets to decide which instruments are 'secular'?)

³¹ Alexander's work is an attempt to give voice to indigenous peoples. For further discussion of musical instruments within the Native American/First Nations contextual movement, see also Bear-Barnetson (2013) and Church (2017).



The series of imperatives is broken in v. 6 by the *yiqtol* (jussive in function), a change that “gives emphasis to the concluding verse” (Brueggemann & Bellinger, 2014, 619). With the jussive the verse reads, “Every breath *should* praise the Lord.” Although jussive *yiqtol* normally occupies the first position in the sentence, it can also occupy the second position, particularly when it follows an imperative, as it does here (Niccacci, 1987, 7-9; 1990, 76-80).³²

“Every breath should praise YAH.” Whereas the object of praise at v. 1b is “EI,” the object in v. 6a is “YAH.” Therefore, inside the outer frames of “hallelujah,” the divine names “EI” and “YAH” are “noteworthy as framing devices” (Brueggemann & Bellinger, 2014, 618).

The fact that the verse does not begin with the verb draws attention to the subject, “every breath.” Adina Moshavi calls this construction “preposing” and argues that it is a “descriptive focusing” technique. It is used here to add further description to the previous commands (2nd person plural) that are addressed to “you.” In answer to the hypothetical question, “Who are the subjects that being told to praise the Lord?,” the answer is “every breath” (Moshavi, 2010, 130-31).

The noun נשמה (“breath”) is used of God and of human beings (cf. Deuteronomy 20:16; Josh. 10:40; 11:11, 14; 1 Kgs 15:24). The word “breath” is found only one other place in the Psalter: “the breath of the spirit from your nostrils” (18:16). Zenger argues that the “focus on human beings here is not an anthropocentric narrowness but corresponds to the dynamic of the psalm’s structure” (2011, 663). The mention of “breath” recalls the creation of the first human and his animation by God, who “blew into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). From John Calvin to James Limburg, a number of interpreters have understood the phrase “every breath” to indicate both humans and animals (Clines, 1993, V, 779),³³ a view that is based partly upon Genesis 7:21-22, “And all flesh died that moved on the earth. birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All which was on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.” The word “all” in v. 22 may be taken to include animals, but it more likely refers to the humans who are mentioned at the end of the previous verse. The effort to include animals may be fueled by Revelation 5:13, where “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea” is heard giving praise to the Lamb, but perhaps Psalm 150:6 is a concise restatement of Psalm 148:10-14, which reads, “Beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and maidens together, old men and children! Let them praise the name of the Lord.”³⁴

³² The verb ‘praise’ (תִּהְלֵל) is singular because when the subject is modified by ‘all’ (כָּל), it is normal for the verb to agree with the genitive which, in this case, is singular (‘breath,’ הַנְּשָׁמָה). See Joüon & Muraoka (1993, §150.o).

³³ Cf. Schaefer (2001, 345), Limburg (2000, 506), Kidner (1975, 529), and Calvin (1849, V, 321), who also include animals in number of those who have breath. The corresponding verb form נָשַׁם (‘to gasp’), is found only in Isaiah 42:14, ‘like a woman in labor ... I will gasp.’

³⁴ Cf. Barth (2004, Part 1, II, 107), who writes,

An audible call is made to all things to praise God. to all lands (Psalm 100:1), to all the earth (Psalm 66:4), to all people (Psalm 67:5), even to the congregation of the gods (Psalm 82:1), to everything that hath breath (Psalm 150:6), to all things that are (Psalm 148). We hear continually that the earth as such is God’s (Psalm 24:1–2, 50:10, 95:4f.), and therefore that all the blessings of creation come from God (Psalm 36:6–10, 65:7–14); but also that the lordship and the judgment overall and upon the whole world is God’s (Psalm 96, 97, 99). Again and again the heavens, the sea, the storm, the mountains, the earthquake, the world of plants and beasts, the nations and their rulers, and in the height the angels, are all appealed to as the creatures, the servants and instruments and therefore the loudly speaking witnesses of God.



Karl Barth comments on the human obligation to give one's breath back to God in praise. Barth states that the breath that is in every creature "puts it under obligation to praise the Lord because according to Psalm 104:29f, it is His, the Lord's breath, by which the creature is created and without which it would inevitably vanish away at once" (2004, Part 1, IV, 60-62).³⁵ John Wesley concurs, and in his sermon, "The Circumcision of the Heart," he exhorts,

Let the spirit return to God that gave it, with the whole train of its affections ... Other sacrifices from us he would not; but the living sacrifice of the heart he hath chosen. Let it be continually offered up to God through Christ, in flames of holy love ... Let all your thoughts, words, and works, tend to his glory. Set your heart firm on him, and on other things only as they are in and from him. Let your soul be filled with so entire a love of him, that you may love nothing but for his sake (1872, V, 211-212).

The invitation for "every breath" to praise the Lord is extended to worshipers of all ages, even to the "babes and infants" of Psalm 8:2. From the beginning of the Pentecostal movement, children have enjoyed offering their praises to God. We read of one Pentecostal worship service in 1925 in which the musicians ranged from "tiny five-year-old Barbara Bell, ... playing her triangle, up, up, up in age to the snowy haired old lady of ninety years who sang and played her auto-harp" (McPherson, 1925, 21).

"Every breath" also includes persons with disabilities. Many of God's children suffer from physical or mental limitations, but those limitations should not separate them from the believing community. Persons with disabilities should be integrated into the life of the local church the same as anyone else. In an early work, I wrote earlier about a significant encounter with an elderly woman in Wynne, Arkansas, who was confined to a wheelchair and crippled by a stroke.

Whenever I would conduct worship services in the nursing home in which she lived, I would ask the people to share a testimony of God's goodness. This precious sister would lift her right hand (the left was paralyzed), and she would attempt to utter praises to God as tears flowed down her cheeks. The stroke made her praises unintelligible to onlookers, but they were music to the ear of God (Martin, 2016b, 2).

V. A. Psalm 150 as Conclusion of the Psalter

Positioned at the end of the canonical Psalter, Psalm 150 has been understood as the closing doxology that summarizes and characterizes the entire collection (Ross, 2011, III, 962).³⁶ Its singular message is the exhortation to praise (הלל) God; thus, the Hebrew name of the Psalter is תהלים – "Praises."

The Psalter concludes with five "Hallelujah" psalms, each one beginning and ending with הללו יה – "Praise YAH." The five final Hallelujah psalms echo the fivefold structure of the Psalter itself.³⁷ Robertson writes, "The final grouping of *"Hallelu-YAH"* psalms (Psalms 146-150) clearly intends

³⁵ See also Barth (2004, Part 2, III, 361-62), where he argues, 'the fact that God has breathed into' us the breath of life leads to the conclusion that to "praise God is in fact our natural office."

³⁶ Cf. Robertson (2015, 265), who argues for 'deliberate placement' of all the hallelujah psalms, including Psalm 150.

³⁷ For a balanced evaluation of the proposed fivefold structure of the Psalter, see Wilson (1992). He concludes that the fivefold division is a 'real, editorially induced structure' (131).



to serve as the climactic conclusion of the whole of the Psalter” (Robertson, 2015, 267). Books I through IV of the Psalter each end with a doxology, and Psalm 150 is often viewed as the doxology for Book V (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1993, 1188). A more recent proposal, however, suggests that Psalm 145:21 is the closing doxology for Book V, and Psalm 146-150 form a fivefold conclusion to the Psalter that echoes the fivefold structure of the whole (Scaiola, 2010, 702).³⁸ Psalm 150:6 (“Let every breath praise the LORD.”) is a restatement of the closing wish of Psalm 145:21b, which reads, “let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever” (Wilson, 1992, 131-132).

Wilson argues that Psalm 150 brings closure to the Psalter in a fashion that complements its beginning in Psalm 1. He writes that Psalm 1 “is the entry point to the way of life that issues forth ultimately in praise” (1992, 137).³⁹ Terrien proposes further that Psalms 149 and 150 stand in reverse parallel to Psalms 1 and 2 (2003, 930).

Although the Psalter is “dominated by prayer” (Goldingay, 2006, III, 749), as expressed in the psalms of lament, there is a movement, a progression, a “trajectory of complaint to thanksgiving and praise” (Gerstenberger, 2001, 460).⁴⁰ The first major concentration hymns begins at Psalm 95. Along with the movement towards praise, the Psalter also moves from the individual psalms towards communal psalms. Although the movement of a reader through the text of the Psalter is a linear one, from lament toward praise, the corresponding movement in real life, according to Brueggemann, consists of a repeated cycle that moves from orientation to disorientation to new orientation. John Goldingay describes the movement through life “as not simply circular” but as an upward spiral.⁴¹ This psalm comes at the end because this kind of unrestrained worship would be presumptuous if it did not follow the psalms of lament, psalms of trust, and psalms of historical recital. Scott Ellington writes, “Often lament precedes praise, energizing it and giving it content” (2008, 62). The highest praise is preceded by the deepest struggles.

This final psalm might be called a psalm of absolute praise. In Psalm 150, the focus of the attention is no longer on our prayers and how God answered us; but the emphasis is upon God,

³⁸ Cf. Brueggemann & Bellinger (2014, 618). Thomas McElwain links the sections of the Psalms to different feasts in Israel, and he argues that the five final psalms were associated with the Feast of Tabernacles (1994, 119-120).

³⁹ Cf. Scaiola (2010, 710), who writes,

The praise of God, the finishing line and goal of the book, is not only reserved to a special people, but becomes a perspective, a lifestyle offered to all those who are willing to accept it, agreeing with the values the Psalter has progressively indicated, starting with that ‘man’ who in Ps 1 whispered the *tôrāh* of YHWH and rejoiced in it ‘day and night.’

⁴⁰ This movement is described by Robertson (2015, 267); he writes,

The final editor(s) of the Psalter lifts the eyes of *Yahweh’s* worshipping people above the strife and struggle of the first two Books of the Psalter (Psalms 1–72), above the painful experience of the exile as vividly depicted in Book III (Psalms 73–89; cf. Psalms 74, 79, 80, 89), and even beyond the repeated declaration of ‘*Yahweh Malak*’ (‘The LORD reigns’) in a context of national exile as affirmed in Book IV (Psalms 90–106). By the ten-fold ‘*Hallelu-YAH*’ concluding Book V, the celebrative consummation of the Psalter has come.

See also Foster (2008, 87-88), who argues that after reading the closing hymns of the psalter, the act of re-reading of earlier laments is transformed, so that the reader who ‘prays the psalms of supplication and lament does so with a new expectation that not only will YHWH answer these prayers and laments, but also she/he will join the psalmists in confidence at the end, calling others to the praise of YHWH’ (88).

⁴¹ Brueggemann and Goldingay are cited by Ellington (2008, 65). See Goldingay (1981, 85-90) and Brueggemann’s appreciative response (1982, 141-142).



his nature, his holiness, his power, his majesty, his love, and his grace. The praise is focused entirely upon God, his glorious character, and his works.

Erich Zenger proposes that Psalm 150 “presents a miniature ‘theology’ of the Psalter.” This theology includes four points.

(1) the psalms are “court music for YHWH the king:” They are the expression of joy at his presence (even when they are “complaints”) ... (2) The individual psalms are a practice for and an anticipation of the cosmic feast at the perfection of the world. They keep alive the hope that Yhwh’s universal royal rule is inevitably coming. (3) In singing/praying the psalms, “all breath,” that is, human beings, realize their specific divine competence and kinship to God, to the extent that they give the divine gift of their “breath” its highest possible form of expression ... (4) Human happiness, which the Psalter at its beginning in Psalm 1 presents as the “way of righteousness,” is perfected in the praise of YHWH ... Psalm 1 and Psalm 150 establish the arc of tension. from *Torah* to *Tehillah* (2011, 663).

Furthermore, by ending with an imperative, Psalm 150 is not the end. Instead it “provides an open ending to the Psalter and sets the question for faith communities of whether they will fulfill the summons” (Brueggemann & Bellinger, 2014, 619). The praise of God, therefore, must “continue, and on coming to an end begin anew” (Gerstenberger, 2001, 460).

VI. The Affective Impact of Psalm 150

Thomas G. Long proposes that the psalms, because of their poetic multi-layered character, may be approached in at least four ways. 1. One may “follow the structure.” 2. One may “focus on the main image or images.” 3. One may “experience the mood of the psalm.” 4. One may “listen for the theological testimony of the psalm” (2014, 31-42).⁴² It should be clear by now that my Pentecostal approach includes all four of Long’s proposed methods. However, I have highlighted Long’s third pathway – experiencing the mood of the psalm – but have described it as the affective component or affective dimension. The affective dimension of a psalm includes the mood, but it also includes the effect of the psalm upon the hearer. When I speak of the affections, I mean more than “emotions.” Emotions are temporary responses to surrounding stimuli, but affections are lasting dispositions, our deepest desires. Pentecostal theologian Dale Coulter writes, “As innate dispositions, the affections are movements that arise from human nature and also form it in particular ways as persons habituate themselves to this or that set of objects” (Coulter, 2013, 157). While the “theological testimony” of a psalm tells the hearer what to believe, the affective component tells the hearer what to desire and how to feel. As poetry, the psalms move the hearer

⁴² As an example of how to experience the mood of the psalm, Long points to Psalm 150 and to the ‘sheer exuberance’ expressed in it. He writes that Psalm 150 ‘is an eschatological breakthrough, an anticipation of those rare moments of ecstatic experience in which the superabundance of God’s glory overflows and floods the hearts of worshippers who are “lost in wonder, love, and praise”’ (29). Cf. Crenshaw, (2001, 37), who speaks of the ‘emotional fervor’ of the Psalter’s piety, and he applauds the appropriateness of Psalm 150 as a conclusion to the book.

This rousing crescendo resulting from the union of musical instruments and songs of worshippers brings the collection to a fitting close. Voices raised in praise of Yahweh, musical instruments in the divine service, children of God in sacred space – all these appropriately come to rest in Yahweh and create a resounding echo. hallelujah.



toward certain emotive responses and inner dispositions.⁴³ The psalms are not afraid of human affections and emotions. In fact, the psalms encourage emotional response; they generate an emotive environment; and they help to shape the hearers' affections. In this section, I will examine the affective dimension of Psalm 150, especially as it relates to the Pentecostal affections.

In most cases, the first step in analyzing the affective impact of a text would be to identify the affective terminology (words like "love," "joy," "fear," etc.) and the emotive images (such as mention of enemies, family, troubles, and metaphors for God). The affective dimension of Psalm 150, however, is indirect rather overt, and implicit rather than explicit. Therefore, it may be profitable to describe the most prominent of the Pentecostal affections and then show how they intersect with Psalm 150. Steven Jack Land argues that the Pentecostal experiences of regeneration, sanctification, and Spirit baptism generate the three affections of "gratitude as praise-thanksgiving, compassion as love-longing, and courage as confidence-hope" (2010, 47, 135-59). Building on Land's approach, John Christopher Thomas names five affections that connect broadly to the elements of the Fivefold Gospel. The belief in and experience of Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Spirit Baptizer, Healer, and Soon Coming King produce the corresponding affections of gratitude, compassion, courage, joy, and hope (Thomas, 2012, 117). These affections/dispositions form the "integrating center" of Pentecostal spirituality (Land, 2010, 50, 52, 63); therefore, I will briefly discuss each of them in relation to Psalm 150.

1. Gratitude

Inasmuch as gratitude is expressed as thanksgiving and praise, it obviously intersects with Psalm 150. Gratitude is the necessary ground and origin of praise; therefore, if the hearer is exhorted to praise God, it is assumed that gratitude is present. The praises of Psalm 150 are an expression of gratitude for God's "mighty acts" and God's "abundant greatness" (v. 2). The connection between salvation and gratitude is apparent when we consider the content of God's "mighty acts," which would include the exodus and other works of salvation. The call to praise God in his "sanctuary" and "strong firmament" also implies gratitude for God's power and sovereignty. The repeated call to praise God and the recounting of musical instruments creates in the hearer a feeling of awe and anticipation that concludes with an explosion of gratitude at the end, when "every breath" is urged to praise Yahweh.

2. Compassion

Sanctification produces compassion, which is expressed through love and longing. The love is twofold. love for God and love for neighbor. Although the love of neighbor is not explicit in Psalm 150, Joachim Vette argues that the implications of verse 6 reach beyond the liturgical setting and find fulfillment in the worshipers' active "confession of God as king" through service to and solidarity with the poor, widows, orphans, and strangers (2016, 245).

Love for God is expressed throughout the psalm in every utterance of praise because praise is an act of love. Conrad Schaefer observes,

Everybody wants to love someone, but the question is, whom to love? The Psalter offers the best option. Here we discover that we can choose because we were first chosen. We love because someone first loved us. The inspiration of these poems is just this, that God loved us first and is

⁴³ See my earlier arguments regarding the affective component of the psalms in Martin (2010, 708-727; 2013, 54-76; 2014a, 1-24; 2014b, 339-353).



dedicated to being the object of our love, so that at every turn he is revealed as the font and the goal of life. Inspired by love, the poet invites the believer to praise and pray to God with the divinely inspired words. The poet invites us, praise God and you will come to know your first lover, for you could not praise had God not first chosen you, love you, lived in you (2001, 346).

3. Courage

In both Old and New Testaments, the Holy Spirit bestows courage upon God's people, courage to overcome adversity, to sacrifice self-interest, to defend the community of faith, and to speak God's word. Praise is an act of courage, and praise produces courage because praise acknowledges the active role of God in the world. The praise of God is liberating because it trusts in the power of God and minimizes all other powers. The people of God have nothing to fear because God is on his throne, which stands above his "strong firmament." Walter Brueggemann asserts that this courage, this trust

enacted in worship arises because the singer-speaker of praise has found the one praised to be completely available. That is, the basic trust necessary to full praise arises out of intimate, genuinely covenantal communion in which the one praised has been put at risk, placed under test, and has been found ... wholly reliable (1992, 14).

4. Joy

Praise is an expression of gratitude, but it is also an expression of joy (Zenger, 2011, 663). In fact, claims Westermann, "this praise of God can take place only in joy, that it is an expression of joy addressed to God. One cannot, therefore, hear the call to praise God in the OT without hearing the encompassed call to joy" (1997, 372). The hearing of Psalm 150 generates feelings of joy. From the blast of the shofar (v. 3) to the sound of the harp, the lyre, and the cymbals, joy flows forth. At the center of it all we witness the joyful dance, accompanied by the expressive tambourines. In fact, joy may be the affection that is most powerfully displayed and formed by Psalm 150. The worshipers are completely taken up into "lyrical self-abandonment" (Brueggemann, 1991, 67) as they shout the praises of God and dance in his presence. It is what Pentecostals describe as "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). The Pentecostal outbursts of joy have been criticized as escapist enthusiasm, but I would point to John Goldingay's comments as a defense of joyful praise. Goldingay writes that Psalm 150 "ignores the possible anti-intellectual or escapist implications of its enthusiasm in order to fulfill this function. It is prepared to take that risk in order to remind us that sharp thinking and social function are not the only important things in the world" (2006, III, 750). Westermann adds, "In short, the intellect cannot praise God – only the breathing, rejoicing, singing person. An existence relative to God is intended that absolutely cannot come about through reason" (1997, 373).

5. Hope

The language of Psalm 150 evokes wonder, awe, humility, faith, and hope (Zenger, 2011, 663). It demonstrates that "theology, when chanted, receives the power of hope" (Terrien, 2003, 930). Pentecostal hope is associated with the return of Jesus. Jesus Christ is our soon coming king. This eschatological hope is imbedded in praise, and praise "is essential to" the continuation of hope (Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 619). Kraus recognizes this hope-filled anticipation emerging from Psalm 150. He writes,



Worship in Israel, because it concerns the God who is to come, possessed and unmistakable orientation to the future. Waiting for Yahweh, hoping in him, and above all the expectation of the universal fulfillment of the divine election and destiny of Israel in the world of the nations – these are the things that determined the nature of worship in Jerusalem (1986, 102).

Most of the psalms intersect with only one or two of the Christian affections, but this brief survey of the five prominent Pentecostal affections reveals that Psalm 150 connects in at least a small way with each of them. Matthew Henry's comments on Psalm 150 illustrate the psalm's diverse impact.

Praise God with a strong faith; praise him with holy **love and delight**; praise him with an entire **confidence** in Christ; praise him with a believing triumph over the powers of darkness; praise him with an earnest **desire** towards him and a full **satisfaction** in him; praise him by a universal **respect** to all his commands; praise him by a **cheerful submission** to all his disposals; praise him by **rejoicing** in his love and solacing yourselves in his great goodness; praise him by promoting the interests of the kingdom of his grace; praise him by a lively **hope** and **expectation** of the kingdom of his glory (1994, 954, emphasis added).

VII. Conclusions and Implications for Pentecostalism

If the Pentecostal movement is to maintain its vitality from generation to generation, it must periodically reclaim the passion for the praise of God that we find demonstrated in Psalm 150. The biblical text functions as a vehicle of spiritual formation that can inform Pentecostal spirituality and practice in the following ways.

First, Psalm 150 stresses the importance of genuine praise as a response to God's character and God's works. The verb for "praise" (הלל) is found thirteen times within the six short verses of this powerful psalm. Only Psalm 136, with its twenty-six occurrences of the phrase "his lovingkindness is everlasting," contains more repetition than Psalm 150. The Psalter concludes with repeated injunctions to praise God; therefore, the significance of wholehearted praise for God cannot be overstated.

Second, the practice of praise in Psalm 150 is focused upon God alone. Pentecostals face the danger of seeking out experiences rather than seeking God for God's sake. In the past, Pentecostals called this kind of shallow emotionalism "wild fire." On the one hand, it is all too easy for worship to become no more than entertainment or self-gratification. On the other hand, genuine encounter with God results in a dramatic experience where one is in awe of God and of God's loving care for his creation.

Third, the wide variety of musical instruments named in Psalm 150 suggests that any and all kinds of instruments can be used in worship. Colonialistic restrictions on instruments should be avoided. The choice of instruments depends in part upon local cultural considerations, but efforts should be made to expand the number of instruments in order to reflect the spirit of Psalm 150.

Fourth, Psalm 150 calls for participative praise from the entire congregation (and from the entire world). The praise of Psalm 150 is communal, as indicated by the imperatives in the grammatical



plural. “you all praise the Lord.” Wilson writes, “It is within the community of faith that the isolated individual finds identity, affirmation, renewal, restoration, and a hope for the future. That is the reason to praise – now as well as then” (1992, 139). Unfortunately, many contemporary Pentecostal congregations have adopted a concert-like approach, in which everyone’s attention is directed toward the stage, where professional musicians enact a performance of praise. The instruments found in Psalm 150, however, include those that are played by the non-professionals, whom we would call the laity. Furthermore, community is implied in the invitation for “every breath” to praise the Lord. Psalm 150 invites an egalitarian approach to praise, a democratization of praise – the kind of praise that characterized early Pentecostalism universally and continues to characterize many Pentecostal churches today. This participative praise includes praise offered by both women and men, by children and adults, by every social class and economic strata, by people of every educational level, and by people with disabilities.

Psalm 150 is a model for the Pentecostal tradition’s life of praise. It is the greatest example of absolute praise, and its placement at the end of the Psalter points to the fact that our goal as God’s people is to worship God completely. As we journey with God, we live before him, pray unto him, our give thanks unto him. We experience the ups and downs of life and sometimes seem to be going nowhere. However, Psalm 150 teaches us that we have one goal, and we are headed in one direction—our goal is the place of absolute praise. One day, every knee will bow before him, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11). We are moving towards the day when everything in heaven will praise God, everything in the earth will praise God, and everything under the earth will praise the name of the Lord. Every part of creation will give praise and glory to God (Revelation 5:11-14). Our goal is a time and a place where there will be no more sun because the Son of God will be the light. And God’s city, the holy city, new Jerusalem, will come down from God out of heaven, and the city will be in the midst of his people, and God will dwell in the midst of us, he will be the temple. We will live and remain in his presence to glorify and praise him for ever and ever.

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