

TEMPLE AND LITURGY
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A temple dominated Jerusalem for over one thousand years: it was the focus of religious and economic life, a place of pilgrimage and, in the later centuries, the centre of a huge diaspora. Study of this temple, however, has come to mean the quest for physical remains: for the site, for the stones and even for the temple treasure. The site has almost certainly not been correctly identified - which may account for nothing yet being found - and the temple treasure has become the stuff of adventure films. A standard work of reference - *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* - gives only the practical details about the temple: priestly families and the hierarchy, revenues and management of temple funds, upkeep of services, temple security, the duty rotas of the Levites¹. There is nothing about temple worship, what it all meant. In other words, *the heart of the ancient faith is missing from most contemporary accounts of the temple.*

As a result, it is assumed that little is known about the temple, and so the origins of Christian worship are sought in communal meals and in the synagogue, even though almost nothing is known about synagogue worship. I do not know of any study that compares temple and synagogue, and reaches the conclusion that the synagogue was the more likely root of Christian practice. The temple has been simply ignored, even though the earliest glimpse of Christian worship, found in the Book of Revelation, is set in the temple; Jesus was described as the great high priest (Heb.4.14); a large number of priests became Christian (Acts 6.7); and the first Christians in Jerusalem worshipped in the temple every day (Acts 2.46).

For many years, the quest to recover the world of the temple was, for me, a fascinating field of research, but vast. It extended from the first temple as it was remembered - perhaps with the golden haze that can soften a distant but still cherished memory - to the corrupt reality of Herod's monstrosity, which St John described as the great harlot, 'the mother of harlots and of earth's abominations', drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (Rev. 17.5-6). Then, in February 1999 I was present, for the first time, at an episcopal liturgy of the Orthodox Church. My eyes were opened, and I realised that I was looking at temple ritual. Since then, I have been searching in early Christian material for evidence of the temple roots of Christian practice.

During the five centuries or so before the time of Jesus, the story of the original temple had become fused with the story of Eden. Both had been lost, but the early Church claimed that both had been restored. The Christians saw themselves as the new temple, or rather, the restored true temple, the living temple. Had not the risen LORD promised the faithful that they would eat again from the tree of life in Eden? They were restored Adams. At the climax of St John's vision, the tree of life appears again (Rev.22.2), and the servants of the LORD stand beside it in the holy of holies, all wearing the sacred Name on their foreheads. This means they are all high priests. In temple tradition, Adam was the original high priest, driven from Eden and barred from the tree of life. When the risen LORD promised the angel of the church in Ephesus that the faithful Christian would again eat from the tree of life (Rev.2.7), he was reversing the story of Eden. The LORD also promised that the faithful would 'have the right to' the tree of life (Rev.22.14), which means more than just access to its fruit, as we shall see. The entire New Testament is woven through with temple imagery, and it would be extraordinary if this had not also been true of Christian worship.

¹E Schürer. *The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, rev. G Vermes and F Millar, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973-

As with any paradigm shift, it is not necessary to deal with the questions generated by existing paradigms, but only with those arising from the ancient sources themselves. A paradigm shift requires a new reading of the primary materials and a reconstruction of the entire field, so to speak, from new fundamentals. Existing facts have to be examined and rejected if they prove to be not facts but only hypotheses that have acquired the status of fact by repetition; and premises have to be examined to see what conclusions have been hiding within them.

Here, briefly, are some of 'facts' that have to go:

- That the present Hebrew Scriptures are what Jesus knew. The Qumran texts show beyond any doubt that the Hebrew text was altered after the advent of Christianity - exactly as Justin said in the mid second century. The Western Church has, in effect, the wrong Old Testament.
- That the Judaism reconstructed from post Christian rabbinic texts reflects the situation in New Testament times. Scholars are increasingly accepting that rabbinic Judaism was a 'new' religion, developed after the destruction of Jerusalem. It was the Christians who claimed continuity with the temple, who claimed that they had preserved the teaching of the high priests, who claimed to be the true heirs of the ancient faith..
- That the Old Testament is about God the Father, and that Philo and Justin, and indeed all the earliest Christian writers who found the Son of God in the Old Testament were re-reading the texts, or somehow mistaken: Philo was too influenced by his Greek environment, and Justin was an example of Christian special pleading. But the LORD of the Old Testament was, from the very beginning, the LORD of the New Testament - exactly as St John explained in his prologue. One of the Qumran fragments of a different version of Deuteronomy shows that God Most High [i.e. the Father] had many sons, one of whom was Yahweh, the LORD, to whom he allotted Israel. Yahweh was the Son of God. Thus the Jerusalem Bible, which chose to use Yahweh in the Old Testament and the Lord in the New Testament destroyed, with one editorial decision, the unity of Scripture and a good deal else besides.
- That we have any truly 'primary' sources. It is most unlikely that Jesus thought and taught in Greek, and so behind all the Greek New Testament there is a Semitic world view and in many cases the word play that characterises that culture.
- That the Mosaic covenant was the one 'replaced' by Jesus at the last supper. The covenant for the putting away of sins - as Matthew defined it for his community of Hebrew Christians (Matt. 26.28) - was the high priestly 'eternal covenant', renewed each year by the blood of the Day of Atonement. This means that the 'new covenant' was most likely the 'renewed covenant', as the Hebrew word would have implied. This has huge implications for Jewish Christian relations.

There are many examples, but these must suffice.

Christian means anointed, and this has only one context: the original temple - because there was no anointing oil in the second temple. According to Jewish tradition recorded centuries after the time of Jesus, and so presumably known in his time, there were many differences between the first temple and the later temples². Key symbols were missing from the later temples: the fire, the ark, the menorah, the Spirit and the cherubim - and the anointing oil. These, they said, would only be restored in the time of the Messiah, when he rebuilt the true temple. The Messiah restoring the temple was the question raised at Jesus' trial, and so when he was accused of planning to build a new temple, it was logical for the high priest to ask: 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' (Mark 14.58-61). If Jesus was the Messiah, he would restore the temple; that was the expectation of the time³.

² Numbers Rabbah XV.10

³ See, for example 1 Enoch 90.28-9

When the original temple was destroyed, the ark was hidden away, as were the manna, Aaron's rod, and the anointing oil.⁴ Consider what this implies: *nobody was anointed after the destruction of the first temple*. There were no anointed high priests: they were called the high priests of many garments⁵. The Christians, on the other hand, called themselves anointed, they named Jesus the Anointed One, and at baptism they were marked with a cross which had been the ancient sign for anointing a high priest⁶. The writer of Hebrews, describing the ark, the manna and Aaron's rod in the temple, must have been thinking of the long lost original temple because all these were missing from the later temples (Heb.9.4). The Christians also knew that the anointing oil used in the temple - whose predominant perfume was myrrh - was blended to imitate the oil expressed from the tree of life.⁷ When they had access to the tree of life, they also had access to its oil.

How was the lost oil restored? Here we need to read underneath the Greek text of Matthew's gospel, and ask about the magi, and why this story was significant for his Hebrew Christians. There had been a Hebrew version of Matthew⁸, and in Hebrew 'from the east' and 'from ancient times' are the same word, *miqqedem*. Wise men from ancient times brought gold, frankincense and myrrh. Now there was a temple story, known before the time of Jesus but preserved by the Christians in the *Book of the Cave of Treasures*, that when Adam was driven from Eden, the archangels took pity on him and gave him three treasures to remember Eden, that is, the original temple: the archangels gave him gold, frankincense and myrrh. The myrrh was the myrrh oil used for anointing, and so Matthew's story implies that the infant Jesus was the new Adam, receiving the gifts that the angels had given the first Adam. It is interesting that some Ethiopian ikons of the magi depicted them as three angels! They still knew the real meaning of the story.

In the original temple, the myrrh oil had been the sacrament of *theosis*, becoming divine. When the human king was anointed, he became the Son, the Melchizedek high priest. All this lies buried under the presently disordered text of Psalm 110, one of the most quoted texts in the New Testament: 'The LORD says to my Lord...'. Verse 3 reads, in the RSV, '... on the day you lead your host upon the holy mountains, From the womb of the morning, like dew your youth will come to you.' This can hardly be called a translation. The curious line: 'like dew your youth will come to you' conceals how the oil - known as the dew of resurrection - enabled the king to be born as the Son, the Melchizedek priest. The Hebrew that gives 'Your youth will come to you' is better pointed to read 'I have begotten you' - which is how the Old Greek understood the text; and so the original text was probably: 'I have begotten you with the holy oil as the Morning Star...'. It is interesting that some early Christians read 'from the womb' as 'from Mary' - a perfectly possible way to read the letters if they are written in the ancient script used for liturgical texts⁹. 'With the holy oil I have begotten you from Mary as the Morning Star...' In the original temple context, this was the human king becoming the divine Son by means of the oil of resurrection. In temple ritual, the anointed one was, by definition, resurrected as Son of God.

This is what underlies the awkward Greek of Paul's credal statement in Romans 1.3-4: 'descended from David according to the flesh, and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead'. In other words, the Holy Spirit named him Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead. Now Jesus was named Son of God at his baptism - and there is much evidence to show that Jesus understood his baptism as his own experience of resurrection, the moment

⁴ Babylonian Talmud *Horayoth* 12a

⁵ Mishnah *Horayoth* 3.4

⁶ Babylonian Talmud *Horayoth* 12a

⁷ *Clementine Recognitions* 1.45-6

⁸ Eusebius *Church History* 3.24. Jerome had read the Hebrew Matthew in the library at Caesarea, see Jerome of Psalm 135

⁹ Eusebius, *Commentary on the Psalms*, P G-L XXIII.1344. I do not know of an English translation.

when he was anointed with the Spirit. This opens the way into an immensely complex pattern of imagery and into early Christian baptismal practices, which also derived from this temple ritual, and included the bishop saying: 'You are my Son. I have this day begotten you.'¹⁰ Suffice it here to say that Leo the Great knew that this was the meaning of the myrrh oil brought by the magi – that it was the sacrament of *theosis*. In an Epiphany sermon in the mid fifth century, he said: 'He offers myrrh who believes that God's only begotten Son united to himself man's true nature.'¹¹

How might a temple setting illuminate our understanding of the Eucharist?

First a little about the meaning of the temple building itself, because this gives the world view and the context. The temple represented the whole creation, both visible and invisible. The veil of the temple separated the holy of holies - which was the invisible world, eternity, the state of God and the angels - from the visible material creation in time. Both were part of the one creation, and the shape of the temple symbolised the LORD enthroned in the midst. This is what Jesus meant by 'The Kingdom of God is in the midst of you.' (Luke 17.21). The veil distinguished eternity from time, and the unity from the distinct beings of the material creation. In the holy of holies there was neither time as we know it nor matter, and so there could be, by definition, nothing to divide and separate. It was the state of unity, divine unity.

The story of creation in Genesis 1 corresponded to the shape of the tabernacle or temple,¹² and the formal assembly of the tabernacle, described in Exodus 40, shows that the stages of building corresponded to the six days of creation. Everything began with Day One, not 'the first day' as most English versions say. Day One was understood to be the state of unity underlying the material creation, and thus outside any temporal sequence: it was Day One, not the first day. The second day was the firmament to separate heaven from earth, represented by the veil to separate the holy of holies from the great hall of the temple. And so on. The sixth day was the creation of Adam, which corresponded to the consecration of the high priest.

Adam was the Image, and so the high priest in the temple 'was' the LORD; he wore the Name on his forehead, and his actions in the temple ritualised the work of the LORD in creation. The entire temple service was to maintain the creation, teaching the Creator's laws and offering the healing rituals necessary to reintegrate those who had been excluded by sin. The purpose of the place of worship was to make visible the reality of God in the midst of creation; 'Make me a holy place, that I may dwell in the midst' or 'that I may be seen in the midst.' (Exod. 25.8, MT and Lxx). The high priest Simeon the Righteous¹³ taught that the world was sustained by three things: by the Law, by the temple service, and by deeds of loving kindness.'¹⁴

The temple world view envisaged a great covenant of wholeness that bound all creation: it bound the visible creation to all the parts of itself and the whole to the Creator who was the source of its life. Recent scholarship has used the term 'cosmic covenant', but in the Old Testament it is called 'the covenant of peace', that is, of wholeness, and 'the covenant of eternity', binding the temporal to the eternal. The verb 'create', *bara* which is only used of divine activity, is related to the word for covenant, *b'rit*, and both mean 'binding'. Anything that broke these bonds was, by definition, sin. In the New Testament, this appears as 'The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph.4.3).

¹⁰ See my book *Temple Themes in Christian Worship*, London: T&T Clark, 2007, p.100 citing R H Connolly *Didascalia Apostolorum*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929, ii.32, p. 93

¹¹ Leo the Great, Sermon 36

¹² For our purposes these are the same, although there were different details of actual representation such as the size or rather, scale.

¹³ Either Simeon I, high priest about 280BCE, or Simeon II, high priest about 200 BCE.

¹⁴ Mishnah Aboth 1.2

The 'covenant of peace' was maintained by the high priests; in fact, that was their only function. The gory story of Phineas the high priest protecting the covenant by killing two people who had sinned and thus broken a vital bond shows how the temple words were used in primitive sources; the Lord then 'gave' to Phineas the covenant of peace, because he made atonement (Num. 25.12-13). *Atonement was the ritual to restore a broken covenant bond, and thus restore the protection the covenant gave to those within its bonds.*

In the temple, the greatest rite of healing was the Day of Atonement which followed a period of fasting at new year. Two identical goats were chosen, and lots decided which goat was to represent Azazel, the chief of the fallen angels, and which to represent the LORD. The goat to represent the LORD was sacrificed and its blood, that is its life, was taken into the holy of holies. As the high priest emerged, he sprinkled and smeared the blood in various parts of the tabernacle/temple 'to cleanse and to hallow it from all the uncleannesses of the people of Israel' (Lev.16.19).

In the temple context, this meant that the life of the LORD was coming from heaven to cleanse and hallow the creation that had been polluted by human sin. Since the goat represented the LORD, and the high priest also represented the LORD, this was a ritualised self offering of the high priest as the LORD. Hence the emphasis in Hebrews 9.12, that Christ the high priest offered not the substitute blood of goats and calves, but his own blood, making himself the means of a new covenant. The covenant here is primarily the eternal covenant, not the Mosaic covenant.

The rite of atonement restored the broken covenant bonds by putting away the effects of sin, and this is exactly how Matthew, writing for the Hebrew Christians who knew many covenants, defined the covenant at the last supper. He described Jesus, our great high priest, saying: 'This is my blood of the covenant,¹⁵ which is poured out for many for the putting away of sins.' (Matt.26.28). People were included in this act of healing if they had repented and done whatever they could to make amends for wrong actions. Thus the Jubilee was proclaimed on the Day of Atonement, and people played their part in the great atonement by restoring their society to the state of the sixth day of creation, when there was no debt or slavery, and Adam ate from the fruits of Eden and did not have to toil to grow food, 'and God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good' (Gen.1.31).

Atonement is at the heart of Christianity, and yet the original context, and so the original meaning, has been all but lost. A false paradigm leads to unhelpful speculation and irrelevant questions. Two examples must suffice.

In 1968, F W Dillistone, in his influential study of atonement, wrote this: 'From the New Testament there come hints, suggestions, even affirmations of a comprehensive cosmic reconciliation.' He doubted this came from Hebrew thought, and continued: 'It was not until early Christian witnesses found themselves confronted by pagan systems in which a full theory of cosmic redemption played a prominent part that the effect of the work of Christ upon the cosmos at large began to receive serious consideration.'¹⁶ That is, quite simply, wrong.

Or there are the statements of the Doctrine Commission in their 1995 report *The Mystery of Salvation*: 'This message [of atonement] which lies at the heart of the gospel, raises numerous consequential questions. The most obvious of these is why the death of Christ should have this astonishing result.'¹⁷ Discussing Hebrews, they noted the importance of 'sacrificial metaphor', and suggested that many

¹⁵ or 'the blood of my covenant'

¹⁶ F W Dillistone, *The Christian Understanding of Atonement*, Welwyn, 1968, p. 47

¹⁷ *The Mystery of Salvation*, Church House Publishing 1995, p. 97

different types of sacrifice had been conflated to reveal the meaning of Jesus' death - Day of Atonement, covenant, purificatory rites, communion offerings and so forth... 'but there is no doctrinal statement anywhere of how precisely the death of Christ atones for sin.'¹⁸ All these types of sacrifice were part of the Day of Atonement, *which does explain how the death of the LORD, the great high priest, effects atonement and cosmic healing*. It is possible that there is no clear statement in the New Testament because no such statement was necessary.

Temple theology suggests that the context of the Eucharist is predominantly the Day of Atonement, and that Passover is a relatively small element. The Easter events took place at Passover time, although exactly how they related to Passover is not clear: John and the Synoptic gospels do not agree on the date of the last supper, and if Jesus was the Passover lamb, as John says, then the last supper was not a Passover meal. All the synoptic gospels say that the bread was ordinary bread, not the unleavened bread of Passover. Paul received the teaching that 'Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures' (1 Cor.15.3), but dying for sin has no connection to Passover; nor did covenant have any link to Passover, nor is there any passage in our current Old Testament that says this. Jewish sources known to be contemporary - Josephus, Philo - did not link Passover to the Christian themes of covenant renewal and atonement. Passover was linked to Abraham's offering of Isaac, the Akedah, (Jubilees 17.15-18.3), and to the covenant with Abraham, but the Abraham covenant was not linked to atonement.

Drinking covenant blood for the putting away of sins was not a Passover concept; it was the ritual of the Day of Atonement when the eternal covenant was renewed. Consuming blood is also a problem in a Jewish context – *except on the Day of Atonement*, when the officiating priests had to eat a small part of the entrails of the sacrifice, 'unwashed and with vinegar.'¹⁹ They were consumed with their blood, and the Letter of Barnabas explained that this was why Jesus drank vinegar before he died; he was preparing himself to be the sin offering of the Day of Atonement.

Hebrews, as we have seen, understood the death of Jesus as the Day of Atonement offering, made with his own blood and not with the substitute blood of a goat, and Peter's sermon in Solomon's porch explained that the events of the final Day of Atonement had already begun: repent, he said, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of renewal may come from the presence of the LORD. (Acts 3.19). This is not Passover or even Pentecost teaching; it is Day of Atonement.

What, then, of the bread? There had been two rituals that were the exclusive preserve of the high priests: one was offering the blood of the Day of Atonement; the other was eating the bread of the presence. This was the holiest of all the offerings, the only cereal offering taken into the temple itself. But whose presence? The oldest prescription in Exodus says 'You shall set the bread of the presence before my presence always' (Exod.25.30). Jewish tradition remembered that the bread of the presence had been Wisdom's bread, given to Abraham by Melchizedek.²⁰ Ben Sira, writing in Jerusalem about 200BCE, had Wisdom say of herself: 'Those who eat me will hunger for more.' (Ben Sira 24.21), and the refugees who fled to Egypt in 586BCE recalled that they had made bread to represent the Queen of Heaven, whom others remembered as Wisdom.²¹

The bread of the presence, according to Leviticus, was a 'memorial' offering, 'azkarah (Lev.24.7), and the Targums make it clear that the bread was the 'memorial', rather than the incense set with it. Now the word translated 'memorial' can also mean 'invocation', and this latter seems the more likely meaning, because the bread of invocation then became the high priest's 'most holy' food. Holiness came to the

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 98

¹⁹ Letter of Barnabas 7, also Mishnah Menahoth 11.7

²⁰ Thus Leviticus Rabbah XI.9; Genesis Rabbah XLIII.6.

²¹ Jer.44.16-20; 1 Enoch 93.8.

bread. 'Most holy' does not mean 'very holy'; it means actively holy, imparting holiness. The invocation bread was the means of feeding holiness to the high priest. The ambiguity of that crucial word - was it memorial bread or invocation bread - still affects how we understand 'Do this in remembrance of me' (1 Cor.11.24), because underlying Paul's Greek there would have been Jesus' words that were necessarily ambiguous, meaning both 'Do this to remember me' and 'Do this to invoke me.'

So whose 'presence' was the high priest consuming? The rules for the bread of the presence set out in Leviticus say, literally, 'and *she* shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it.' (Lev.24.9). The Samaritan text actually says 'they shall eat her.' Bread is a masculine noun in Hebrew, so who was the 'she' who fed the high priests with herself and thus imparted holiness? The high priests were nourished each Sabbath with Wisdom, and this was 'the eternal covenant.' (Lev.24.8). This means that Wisdom enabled them to perform their other role of maintaining the eternal covenant. The weekly renewal of the bread of the presence shows that the seven days in the temple changed the status of the bread: when the fresh bread was prepared, it was set on a marble table, but when the week-old bread was brought out, it was set on a table of gold - a sign of inner temple furnishing - before being distributed to the priests.²² The bread had become most holy.

The prophet Malachi condemned the impure bread set in the second temple, and prophesied a time when there would again be a pure cereal offering in every place (Mal.1.11). This was quoted as a prophecy of the Eucharist in the Didache and by Justin²³ - in other words, the Eucharist was understood from the beginning as restoring the true bread of the presence, the bread of Wisdom. Hence the Eucharistic prayer over the bread in the Didache: 'We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the life and *knowledge* which thou hast made known to us through thy servant Jesus'²⁴, and hence too the thanksgiving : 'Thanks be to thee... for the *knowledge* and faith and immortality which thou hast revealed to us through thy servant Jesus.'²⁵ Bishop Serapion's prayers were similar. In the Acts of Thomas, the apostle celebrated a Eucharist of bread and water, when he invoked 'the compassionate mother, the one that reveals the hidden mysteries.'²⁶ Eating the bread imparted Wisdom, who, in temple tradition was the bond of the covenant, holding all things together in harmony (Prov. 8.30).

How does the Day of Atonement context illuminate our understanding of the Eucharist?

- It shows that atonement was the Creator's self giving to renew the world that had been polluted by human sin. This is the starting point for our teaching about the environment.
- It shows that the covenant of the last supper was not a new covenant but a renewed covenant, the high priestly eternal covenant renewed by self sacrifice to uphold the creation.
- It shows that the first Christians thought of themselves as the new high priesthood, consuming the most holy food, and so acquiring Wisdom, a different way of knowledge that holds all things together in harmony.
- It explains why the sacrifice of Christ had what the Doctrine Commission called 'the astonishing result' of effecting atonement.
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And a good deal more.

There is much work to do, *and much to be undone*.

²² Mishnah *Menahoth* 11.7

²³ *Didache* 14; Justin, *Trypho* 41

²⁴ *Didache* 9

²⁵ *Didache* 10

²⁶ *Acts of Thomas* 121

Let me conclude with the story of Aladdin. He had a wonderful old lamp, but did not know its true value and power. He was persuaded by someone who did know its value and power to exchange it for one that was shiny and new and much more attractive. But when he rubbed the shiny new lamp, nothing happened.