

INTRODUCTION

The singer of Psalm 73 is aggrieved and embittered. He is worn down from trying to reconcile the easy prosperity of the wicked, the constant afflictions of the righteous, and the possibility of God's justice and providence. Nothing about the world makes sense until he enters the Temple.

When I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task.
Until I went into the sanctuary of God—
then I *perceived* their end. (Ps. 73:16–17)

In the Temple, the psalmist is finally given to understand the mystery of the divine plan. The biblical word here—*bin* in Hebrew, *syniēmi* in Greek—does not refer to some ordinary kind of perception, the kind of conclusions that can be reached by flesh and blood, by reason alone. Rather, the biblical word signals the kind of insight that only comes by faith, an understanding of the secrets of the kingdom given by the Father in heaven (Matt. 13:10–17). It is the understanding that the young Christ displayed among the rabbis in the Temple, the understanding of the Scriptures that he revealed to his disciples in the upper room, in the shadow of the Temple, on that first Easter night (Luke 2:47; 24:45).

In the sanctuary of God contemplation is brought to fruition by the gift of divine Wisdom. The Temple is the seat of Wisdom and the dwelling place of the Most High God. And the Temple, in many ways, can be seen as the unifying theme of sacred Scripture. The apostolic writers noticed this, as did the early Fathers of the Church. The classic expression of the theme is still Yves Congar's *The Mystery of the Temple* (1958):

[T]he essential point of God's plan ... could be well formulated in terms of a Temple built of living stones; for God's whole purpose is to make the human race, created in his image, a living, spiritual Temple in which he not only dwells, but to which he communicates himself and in turn receives from it the worship of a wholly filial obedience. ... Hence the story of God's relations with his creation, and especially with man, is none other than the story of his ever more generous, ever deeper presence among his creatures.¹

In the Temple we perceive the "end," the meaning of the salvation history told in the Bible. It is the history of the Father's gracious self-revelation and sharing

¹ *The Mystery of the Temple*, ix.

of his divine presence with his children. We see this “end” in the beginning, on the first pages of Scripture, where the world’s creation is carefully depicted as the building of a cosmic Temple, a holy place for God to dwell with his people. In Scripture’s final pages, we witness a new creation, described as a city come down from heaven, a city with no temple. “Its Temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev. 21:22).

The dwelling of God with his people—first in the Tabernacle and Ark in the wilderness and later in Solomon’s Temple at Jerusalem—shapes the narrative of the Old Testament even as it anticipates the revelation of the new covenant and the new Temple. Everything in the economy of salvation presses forward towards this end. The Temple is the substance of all that Israel longs for.

One thing I ask of the Lord, this I seek:
To dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
that I may gaze on the loveliness of the Lord
and contemplate his Temple. (Ps. 27:4)

Israel’s hope is realized in the coming of Jesus Christ. In him, the Word of God “tabernacles” among us in the flesh (John 1:14). Presented in the Temple forty days after his birth to the Virgin Mary, his life proceeds by a mysterious imperative that he himself announced in the Temple at the age of twelve: “I must be in my Father’s house” (Luke 2:49). Indeed, the “plot” of the Gospels unfolds against the backdrop of Jesus’ pilgrimages to Jerusalem to celebrate the Temple feasts.

In his passion the body of Christ is revealed to be the new Temple, from which flows the new river of life. In offering his body and blood for the life of the world, he reveals himself as the new Lamb of sacrifice and the new High Priest, fulfilling in his person the deepest meanings of the sign of the Temple. Sending his Spirit at Pentecost, he establishes his Church, built on the cornerstone of Christ and the foundation of the apostles, as the true Temple, his Father’s house of many mansions. In the Church, the promise of the Temple is realized. The Church is the house of prayer for all peoples, the holy mountain in which God is worshipped in Spirit and truth. Through the sacramental economy of the Church, the Spirit is given to dwell in believers—divinizing and deifying, making them living stones, Temples of the Holy Spirit.

The Temple theme is perhaps the richest in all of biblical theology, embracing the mysteries of Christ, Church, and Kingdom; liturgy, sacraments, and priesthood; salvation, sanctification, and divine filiation. These are the beautiful mysteries we contemplate in this volume of *Letter & Spirit*.

In “To See Where God Dwells: The Tabernacle, The Temple, and the Origins of the Mystical Tradition,” **Gary A. Anderson** explores a little-studied aspect of Israel’s Temple traditions—how Israel came to believe that the holiness of God’s invisible presence infused the architecture and furniture of God’s dwell-

ing, making these physical objects bearers of the divine presence. As Anderson shows, this belief played an important role in Israel's faith and devotional life. This belief also became influential in the development of early Christian thinking about the incarnation. As the Temple furniture was held to bring one into real contact with God, the early Church Fathers described how the divinized flesh of Christ made visible the glory of the invisible God. As to gaze upon the dwelling of God was to see God, to look upon Christ was to look upon God.

Anderson also sketches some of the early movements of the Christian mystical tradition. He shows how Moses' contemplation of the Tabernacle became a model for mystical prayer, beginning early in the Christian era. Again we see the influence of Jewish faith concerning the holy objects of the divine dwelling. Anderson quotes pseudo-Dionysius' reflections on Moses: "And yet he does not meet God himself, but contemplates, not him who is invisible, but rather where he dwells (Exod. 25). This means, I presume, that the holiest and highest of things perceived with the eye of the body or the mind are but the rationale which presupposes all that lies below the Transcendent One."

Brant Pitre's "Jesus, the New Temple, and the New Priesthood," is a bold investigation of the deep Old Testament figures that inform the self-understanding of Jesus as he is portrayed in the gospels. Pitre argues persuasively that the gospels reflect Jesus' awareness that he is the dwelling-place of God on earth, the foundation stone of a new Temple and a new creation, and the founder of a new, eschatological priesthood that offers a new sacrifice, the Eucharist. Pitre's work advances what he calls a *biblical mystagogy* of the Temple and the Jewish priesthood. As he sheds new light on the biblical origins of the priesthood and the sacramental economy, Pitre also opens up new possibilities for scholarly consideration of Jesus' "self-consciousness."

In "The Rejected Stone and the Living Stones: Psalm 118:22–23 and New Testament Christology and Ecclesiology," **Michael Giesler** seeks the origins of the most ancient christological and ecclesiological traditions in the Church. He explores the Church's belief that it is the Temple of God built upon the cornerstone of Christ. As Giesler shows, this ecclesiology is rooted in Jesus' own teaching, in which he applied to himself Old Testament traditions concerning the divine "stone." Giesler sees a deep connection between this "stone" christology and the Church's Temple ecclesiology. He traces this connection to Christ's words and acts designating Peter as "the rock" upon which he founded his Church. As Giesler notes in a close reading of 1 Peter, it is no coincidence that a New Testament writing attributed to Peter provides the most extended reflection upon the meaning of Christ as the cornerstone of the Church and the Church as a Temple of living stones.

Scott W. Hahn is also studying the Old Testament substrata that inform New Testament christology and ecclesiology. His "Temple, Sign, and Sacrament:

Towards a New Perspective on the Gospel of John,” makes a fresh contribution to the study of John’s christology and pneumatology, as well as John’s understanding of the sacramental ministry of the Church. Through a close reading of John’s narrative, Hahn argues that the evangelist is doing much more than portraying Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel’s hopes concerning the Temple. According to Hahn, John envisions that fulfillment continuing in the Church’s sacraments, exercised by the authority of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The sacraments, he argues, are among those “greater works” that Jesus promised the apostles they would perform: “If one follows the logic and symbolism of John’s Gospel, the sacraments, primarily baptism and Eucharist, truly are the specific times and places where the believer continues to experience Christ as the new Temple.”

Raymond Corriveau, C.Ss.R considers the influence of the Temple theme on early Christian moral teaching. “Temple, Holiness, and the Liturgy of Life in Corinthians” explores an under-appreciated aspect of St. Paul’s teaching—his presentation of the Christian life as a daily offering of one’s self in spiritual sacrifice to God. This cultic and liturgical understanding is tied closely to Paul’s teaching that baptism establishes Christians as “temples” of the Holy Spirit. And, as Corriveau demonstrates, this Temple imagery is crucial to Paul’s ideas about purity and holiness, as well as to his conception of the “priestly” nature of the believer who, “in the living out of his moral life, becomes a priest in the temple of his own body, dedicated to the service of God.”

“The Indwelling of Divine Love: The Revelation of God’s Abiding Presence in the Human Heart,” by **Thomas Dubay, S. M.**, explores the spirituality that flows from the New Testament teaching that the body is a temple, the dwelling place of the Trinity. Dubay retrieves the roots of this teaching through a spiritual interpretation of the “divine pedagogy” found in the Old Testament. He detects a pattern of ever increasing nearness and intimacy with God, preparing the way for Jesus’ startling revelation—that God desires to dwell and abide in the hearts of believers. Dubay offers rewarding insights into the incarnation and the divine economy, while showing how the Temple theme furnishes a theological foundation for Christian prayer and contemplation.

We also present in this volume four specialized studies of key aspects of the Temple theme. **Denis R. McNamara’s** “Living Stones in the House of God: The Temple and the Renewal of Church Architecture,” explores the theological significance of the Temple for designing the church building as the *domus Dei*, or “house of God.” The church, he maintains, is intended to be “an image of the heavenly Jerusalem” in which the building “fulfills the Temple typologies ... not as a shadowy copy of the true Holy of Holies, but as an image of the reality of heaven in true participation.” **William A. Bales’** “The Mystery of His Will”: Contemplating the Divine Plan in Ephesians” offers a close reading of a pivotal New Testament text (Eph. 1:8–10). Bales demonstrates the influence of Daniel’s prophecy on Paul’s

presentation of the divine “mystery,” which he understands to be God’s plan to dwell with his people in an everlasting kingdom.

In “You Are Gods, Sons of the Most High”: Deification and Divine Filiation in St. Cyril of Alexandria and the Early Fathers,” **Daniel A. Keating** contributes to our understanding of the work of the sacraments, especially baptism, in bringing us the fruits of the incarnation—the gift of the Spirit and the sharing in the divine nature. In his beautiful recovery of the Church’s traditional teaching, Keating shows the glorious “end” to which the economy of salvation tends—our “deification” as sons and daughters formed in the image of Christ, destined to live in communion with the Trinity. In “Scripture, Doctrine, and Proclamation: *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Renewal of Homiletics,” **John C. Cavadini** demonstrates how the “scriptural pedagogy” of the *Catechism* can be a powerful tool for the Church’s preachers as they seek to proclaim the great mysteries of the Church and the Eucharist in the economy of salvation.

We conclude this volume of *Letter & Spirit* with excerpts from what we consider to be two of the most important modern expositions of the Temple theme. **Jean Cardinal Daniélou, S.J.’s** “The Sign of the Temple: A Meditation,” is a poetic and patristic reading of the tradition drawn from his classic *The Presence of God*. Daniélou contemplates the mystery of the human purpose in the cosmic Temple of creation: “God has in some way left creation unfinished, and man’s mission is to bring it to fulfillment ... [as] the mediator through whom the visible universe is gathered together and offered up.”

Like Daniélou, **Yves J.-M. Cardinal Congar, O.P.**, sees the priestly work of God’s children culminating in the heavenly liturgy of the new Jerusalem, which we participate in through the offering of the sacrifice of the Mass on earth. Congar’s “Church, Kingdom, and the Eschatological Temple,” excerpted from *The Mystery of the Temple*, is a fitting conclusion to our contemplation of the Temple. He writes: “If there is one obvious direction in the great story of God’s presence to his creatures as it has been made known to us by revelation ... it is surely this—it begins by momentary contacts and visits, then passes through the stage of external mediations that draw God ever nearer to mankind, and finally reaches the state of perfectly stable and intimate communion.”

Congar’s reading of the Book of Revelation reminds us that the Temple is meant to be the template, the form and the model for our contemplation of the mysteries of God’s kingdom. As Moses gazed on the divine plan of the Tabernacle and David on the heavenly pattern for the Temple, we too, like the psalmist, are meant to “contemplate the Temple.”

In bidding farewell to his apostles, Jesus said he was going to prepare a place for them in his Father’s house (John 14:2–3). Thus, he transfigured the mysterious sign of the Temple, revealing it to be an icon of the divine hospitality, the hospitality of God, that lies at the heart of salvation history. From the foundation of the world,

God's desire has been to set a table for his children in his kingdom, to prepare a place for us in his house of glory, the "household of God, which is the Church of the living God" (1 Tim. 3:15).

In the Temple we perceive God's saving plan as a soteriology that is trinitarian, covenantal, and sacramental. We perceive the "end" of that plan in our sharing in the divine nature. It is an intimacy established by Christ's new covenant, through which God bestows the blessings of his presence by sacramental signs, making us his children in the image of his Son. Here, in the state of grace, God comes to abide in us, making each of us a Temple of living stones, a holy place of his dwelling. In the state of glory, we will come to the Father's house to receive the inheritance prepared for us in the many mansions of the heavenly Temple. There we will dwell in the Trinity as now the Trinity dwells in us.