

NOTES



LIVING STONES IN THE HOUSE OF GOD: The Temple and the Renewal of Church Architecture

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Two fundamental biblical concepts still inform our understanding of Catholic liturgical art and architecture: *synagogue* and *temple*.¹ Many recent interpretations of the notion of active participation in the sacred liturgy, however, emphasize the external and communitarian aspects of liturgical participation. Consequently, today's liturgical and architectural establishments are far more comfortable thinking of the church building as synagogue than temple. Liturgical specialists, who have at times even secularized the concept of synagogue and redefined Catholic church buildings as "meeting houses," remain suspicious of the use of Temple language for liturgy and its allied arts.² For this reason, the notion of the church building as *domus Dei*, or "house of God," derived from the Temple, has taken a distant back seat to the notion of the building as *domus ecclesiae*, the "house of the Church" or "house of the people of the Church."

The results of this theological imbalance have appeared clearly in much recent liturgical architecture. The formal, polyvalent, public and cultic aspects of liturgical architecture have been diminished in recent years, replaced instead by designs emphasizing the casual, domestic, and intimate. The "real" Church, some claim, is the members of the congregation in whom God now dwells, because the New Testament speaks of God's presence no longer dwelling in a Temple but in the "living stones" of the *ekklesia*.

Some Catholics have interpreted this theology of living stones to mean that church buildings need no longer be sacramental or have any relation to the Temple. At first glance their questions seems reasonable: if God no longer needs animal

¹ The ideas developed in this essay are drawn from my forthcoming book *Shadow, Image and Reality: Beauty, the Bible and Catholic Liturgical Architecture* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2009).

² See for instance, Marchita Mauck, *Shaping A House for the Church* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 1990) and Richard Vosko, *God's House is Our House: Re-imagining the Environment for Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006). One publisher even named its line of short books on Catholic liturgical architecture the "Meeting House Essays."

sacrifices or desires a temple building limiting his presence to a small room visited once per year, and his presence is found in his people, then what is the need for an elaborate church building? A good Catholic understanding of the topic gives us an answer by bringing us back again to the “both/and” approach to these terms. Simply put, a Catholic church building finds its theological underpinnings in both the synagogue and the Temple, yet ultimately transcends them both to become an image of the heavenly Jerusalem.

A church depends on at least three theological foundations. First, it is a memory and fulfillment of the Temple. Second, it stands as a transformed synagogue, a witness to the Christians who gather in a particular place which speaks of the newly-reordered relationship between God and humanity. Lastly, and most importantly, the art and architecture of a church building are sacraments of a glorified heavenly future, revealing to us the beauty of our heavenly destiny, thereby enthusing us for the work of being conformed to Christ. This essay serves as an introduction to the first of these three theological sources, bringing the evidence of God’s revelation found in the shadows of the typology to light in order that we might better understand how the Temple theology operative in Scripture and the liturgy can give intellectual roots to the current task of the church architect.

Between Synagogue and Temple

In his classic, *Liturgy and Architecture*, Louis Bouyer argued that the synagogue almost exclusively provided the immediate architectural precedent for the church building. He gave the synagogue a high dignity, arguing that Jews of the late Second Temple era and the early Christians understood the synagogue as more than a classroom; they saw it as a place for the prayerful hearing of Scripture, where its revelations were proclaimed, discussed, and understood. Bouyer argued that the synagogue was always associated with ritual celebration and was “closely connected with the acknowledgement and the cult of a special presence of God” and therefore linked with the Temple of Solomon.³ Its “seat of Moses,” which he argued would eventually be adopted in early Church architecture for the bishop’s throne, formed a natural focus of the teaching authority of rabbis who carried on the living tradition.

The synagogue then, Bouyer claimed, provided the obvious model for many early Christian churches; that the word “temple” does not even appear in the index of the original 1967 edition tells us something of Bouyer’s interest in the Temple as conceptual model for the church building. The Temple, after all, so closely tied to the old Law, was a place where God’s presence was exclusive and limited, and involved the offering of animal sacrifices, which, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews explicitly stated, were no longer necessary.

3 Louis Bouyer, *Liturgy and Architecture* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1967), 8–24.

It should not be surprising that we have similar difficulties understanding the Temple in our own day. One could even argue that most Christian denominational divisions about liturgy break on how the continuing role of the Temple is understood. The Old Testament says much more about the Temple than the synagogue, since the latter finds its great period of growth after the destruction of the Temple in the first century. But at first glance, Scripture does seem to set up a certain paradox between the major uses of each building: ritual animal sacrifice and offerings of vocal prayer.

Books like Exodus, Leviticus, and Kings are heavy with minute details of the bloody ritual sacrifices of the Tabernacle and Temple. Yet Psalm 50, Isaiah 1:11, and 1 Samuel 15:22 tell us that God has no need for bullocks and the flesh of animals. Instead, what pleases him are obedience and an upright heart. This tension was evident between the different groups within Judaism that opposed and promoted the Temple worship, and no clear resolution is evident in the Old Testament.

However, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote in *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, the solution to this seeming contradiction is found in the person of Jesus Christ, who reconciles the differing strands of Judaism by being the *Logos incarnatus*, the Word made flesh.⁴ In Christ, the Word and the sacrificial victim are brought together into one, and so the Eucharistic Prayer spoken at every Mass is in fact a sacrifice of praise, the praise of God by people with upright hearts offering the one sacrifice of Christ to the Father.

"Here at last is right worship," according to Ratzinger, a real sacrifice offered in spirit and truth. He laments that modern theological discussion has made the synagogue the "exclusive model for the liturgy of the new covenant ... in strict opposition to the Temple which is regarded as an expression of the Law and therefore as an utterly obsolete 'stage' in religion." The result, he argues, has been "disastrous," because the notions of priesthood and sacrifice "are no longer intelligible" therefore making the "comprehensive 'fulfillment' of pre-Christian salvation history and the inner unity of the two testaments disappear from view."⁵

History in the Ages of Shadow, Image, and Reality

Ratzinger brings the various strands of Old Testament, New Testament and eschatological thought together by using the patristic concept of *shadow, image, and reality*, a trio of words which serves as a handy interpretive guide for the large meta-narrative of salvation history.⁶ The term "shadow" applies to the Old Testament's preparation through typological precursors, while "reality" speaks of the time when God's restoration of his creation will be complete and all will enjoy heavenly glory. By contrast, our earthly sacramental worship happens in a time of

4 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 47.

5 Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 49.

6 Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 54.

the *image*, a sacramental participation in reality which is something between the Old Testament shadow and unmediated participation in the things of heaven.

In the Jerusalem Temple, God gave the chosen people a shadow of the Christ who was to come. Our time, the time of the New Testament, is a time of dawn. The rising sun proves to us that the darkness is vanquished but has not yet reached its zenith, just as creation still awaits full divinization.⁷ In this understanding, Christ's victory over sin and death is real and operative—the veil separating heaven and earth is torn, and grace flows freely even as the pilgrim Church journeys toward full attainment of its goal. Today, in the sacramental worship of the Church, humanity is given the image of a glorious heavenly future as an efficacious means of full, conscious, active, and fruitful participation in the earthly liturgy's foretaste of the reality of heaven.

The image like the shadow "is only mediated through the signs of salvation," Ratzinger claims, and therefore "we need mediation," because as yet, "we do not see the Lord 'as he is.'"⁸ So here we find the essence of the "already but not yet" nature of the time of image and its architectural theology.⁹ Mediating signs and symbols provide the means by which "we learn to see" heaven's openness. These signs and symbols are the vehicle through which we "know the mystery of God in the pierced heart of the crucified."

In other words, we participate in the heavenly liturgy, not in shadow as in the Old Testament, nor fully as we will the end of time, but in a sort of "in-between" pilgrimage in which heavenly things are mediated in the very material of this earth. Christ's "once for all" is accomplished, but the heavenly Jerusalem is still under construction as salvation history continues to unfold toward completion.

"Christ is being brought to fulfillment in his Church ... and all of us contribute to its fulfillment ... which will reach completion only on judgment day."¹⁰ Here the ministerial role of the liturgical artist and architect finds its greatest dignity. The work of the liturgical architect becomes *a part of the process in making God "all in all" by showing us what our glorified future looks like.*¹¹ The Temple, whose characteristics in size, proportion, and ornament are revealed in Scripture by God himself, form an essential part of this understanding.

This rich layering of meanings in liturgical architecture has found rather little consideration since the Second Vatican Council, which grew out of the twen-

7 Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 54.

8 Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 60.

9 Jean Carbon, *Wellspring of Worship* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 77–78.

10 St. John Eudes, *Treatise on the Kingdom of Jesus*, 3–4, in *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, The Divine Office, 4 vols., (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1975). 4:559–560. In order to preserve the living connection between Scripture, liturgy and scholarship, I am citing patristic readings found in the Church's official prayer, the Divine Office, also known as the Liturgy of the Hours.

11 Compare 1 Cor. 15:28.

tieth-century liturgical movement's desire to rebalance the relationship between Word and Eucharist, synagogue and Temple, and between priest, rite and people. However, as often happens, certain exaggerations arose which tended to see the church as a de-sacralized synagogue which was commonly called a "meeting house" or the "skin for liturgical action." A faulty antiquarian mindset often led to the substitution of a domestic model of architecture for the notion of church building as an evocation of the synagogue, the Temple, and the Heavenly Jerusalem. Glory was replaced by earthiness and anticipated eschatology by a supposed sincerity and commonness.

A crucial notion to understanding the relationship between the Temple and today's church building remains: we do not imitate the Temple today because the Temple in itself was glorious. To do so would be like returning to animal sacrifice because it was dramatic. We look to the lessons of the Temple because it gave us a foreshadowing knowledge of heavenly glory. Today's church building shows us the Temple fulfilled and transfigured as the heavenly Jerusalem, and is as different from the Temple as the Mass is from the sacrifice of bulls. Nonetheless, understanding biblical typologies gives us an insight into the very reality we celebrate now, so unveiling the mysteries of the Temple can help us recover new aspects of a theology of liturgical architecture which is deep, rich, and rooted in biblical promises.

Salvation History and the Preparation for Divine Friendship

The Temple, of course, rightly finds its place in salvation history. Though the Fall brought about a rupture in God's relationship with creation, in his mercy and love he desired to restore all to himself. The Old Testament chronicles God's free and gracious attempts to call his people back to himself, making covenants and promises so that God might be once again "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

In the well-known narrative, God intervenes with Abraham, Moses, and Jacob. In a high point of the salvation story, God gives Moses the Ten Commandments, revealing how he wants his people to live. More than the stern dictates of a tyrannical God, the commandments were a merciful revelation, a loving disclosure of his own inner logic about how to restore divine order to the world. A world without false gods, theft, adultery, covetousness, false witness, and so on is a world which more closely resembles its original state and is therefore more like what God intends it to be. In this light, St. Irenaeus could rightly say that the Ten Commandments "prepared man for friendship" with God and harmony with his neighbor, and thereby "raised man to glory because it gave man friendship with God."¹²

But after teaching man how to act, God teaches him how to worship, telling Moses to build his desert Tabernacle (Exod. 25–39), and David and Solomon how

12 St. Irenaeus, *Treatise Against Heresies*, Bk. 4, Chap. 14, 2–3, in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Office of Readings, Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent, 2:177–178.

to build the great Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 5; 2 Sam. 7). In each case, God's presence with his people moves more and more toward inwardness: from things such as burning bushes to persons such as Moses; from fleeting moments in the desert to sustained presence in the Temple; from simple presence of action to the joy and peace of communion.¹³ Even in the time of shadow, the process of undoing the Fall is begun as God leads Israel back to himself. Despite the disobedience and chastisements of the chosen people, God's self-revelation continues in preparation for a high point of salvation history: the incarnation. In the incarnation, a God who was distant and veiled becomes yet more imminent and legible by taking human form. In Christ, God speaks in a language humans understand from a human-divine mouth to humanity's natural ears. In making God present in his very body, Christ becomes the new Temple, and in sharing his presence through the sending of the Spirit, the Church becomes incorporated into this same Temple as a Mystical Body with Christ as its head.

Christ promises a glorious heavenly future where God is all in all, later revealed in apocalyptic terms to St. John in the Book of Revelation. Art and architecture feature prominently in this divine project of salvation history—not as a human adjunct to some gossamer spiritual plan, but with hard and fast architectural directions given by God himself. After the Fall, Scripture reveals a three-part narrative. First, in the Old Testament, the Temple and city of Jerusalem establish an image of God's presence with humanity that prepares the world for the coming of Christ. Second, Christ comes at the incarnation to form the Christian community into a Temple of "living stones." This "Temple," in the age of the Church, is made in the image of Christ's Mystical Body. Though it remains bound to the fallen world, it works with and reveals God's grace, slowly restoring the world to the fullness of what God wants it to be. Third, at the end of earthly time, the new heaven and new earth show God's complete indwelling and reunification of himself with his creation. In each case, the notions of sacrifice and presence remain. Yves Congar called the mystery of the Temple an episode in the story of God's "ever more generous, ever deeper presence among his creatures."¹⁴ This story continues today, and therefore the Temple still has lessons to teach.

Enthroned on the Mercy Seat

In the beginning, God met Adam and Eve in the garden, which was the place of God's presence and therefore the primordial Temple. After the Fall, God's presence manifests itself in different ways, from the burning bush (Exod. 3:2) to the fire, cloud, and thunder of Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:16). But these appearances would eventually become more frequent and of greater intimacy, and to allow for this,

13 See Yves Congar, *Mystery of the Temple: The Manner of God's Presence to his Creatures from Genesis to the Apocalypse* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1962), xi.

14 Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple*, x.

God instructs Moses to build the Tabernacle in the desert. This Tabernacle was a semi-permanent tent-like structure which could be taken down and moved, and formed the first of the shadowy revelations of Temple theology.

Much of the Book of Exodus is filled with painstaking detail as to how it should be built. Different materials for the tent-like fabric were specified for different sections, with special mixtures of colored wool and linen, acacia wood, gems, and clasps of bronze, silver and gold. The three segments of the building's design were directed by God to have specific proportions, with the last two separated by an elaborately woven veil which included images of cherubim.

The rarest and most precious materials were reserved for the cube-shaped inner room called the most holy place or Holy of Holies, the home of the Ark of the Covenant atop of which God's presence, the *Shekinah*, settled down in the form of a cloud. A cedar box covered in gold, the Ark served as a container for a jar with manna from the desert (Exod. 16:33), Aaron's staff which had miraculously flowered into almond blossoms (Num. 17:8), and the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Guarding the Ark were gold-covered statues of cherubim.

Though Jewish traditions differ as to some of the details of the Ark and its ornamentation (one calls it God's footstool while another calls it God's throne, for example), it marked the place of God's dwelling and presence, and gives us one of God's names: "the one enthroned between the cherubim" (Isa. 37:16). Later called by Luther the "mercy seat," this area atop the Ark is known as the *kapporeth*, a Hebrew word with a double meaning; it is both a literal cover, as it was for the physical Ark, but also something which covered, in the sense of "cleansing" or "wiping out." For this reason, the *kapporeth* is sometimes called the propitiatory or place of atonement, because the presence of God is holy and wipes out the guilt of sin. In the time of shadow, the area atop the Ark was the throne of God on earth. All of this finds its completion in the reality of the eschaton, prefiguring the Book of Revelation's description of the throne in heaven upon which the one was seated and surrounded by angels (Rev. 4:2).

In Moses' Tabernacle, God directed that the High Priest wear an *ephod*, a colorful embroidered vestment. Moreover, the High Priest was directed to wear a breastplate in which were set twelve gemstones in four rows of three: sard, topaz, emerald; garnet, sapphire, diamond; hyacinth, ruby, amethyst; beryl, carnelian, jasper. These stones represented the twelve tribes of Israel—that is, all of humanity—being brought into the presence of God for transformation.

In the time of shadow, these mute stones were simply minerals of exceptional light and color, but would eventually be understood as prefiguring the "living stones" of the Christian era of grace. Later, the reality of heaven itself would be described in similar terms; the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem are described symbolically in the Book of Revelation as being composed of these twelve gemstones, meaning that the city is composed of God's redeemed and fulfilled creation. In the time

of reality, God has filled all with his presence, bringing everything together in radiant ordered harmony. The heavenly city, then, is the completion and perfection of the shadowy Temple typology, and it is precisely this glorious heavenly future that today's liturgical art and architecture are called upon to make present. The texts of Vatican II remind us that liturgical art and architecture should be "worthy, becoming and beautiful, signs and symbols of *heavenly realities*."¹⁵

A Theology of the Covenant in "Built Form"

The Tabernacle can be understood as a precursor for the permanent Temple built by Solomon in the tenth century B.C. After a period of relative peace and stability in Jerusalem, the construction of Solomon's Temple grew from the sudden realization by King David of a breach in architectural decorum. After building himself a house of stone and cedar (2 Sam. 5:11), David suddenly realized that the Ark of the Covenant where God dwelled was still housed in a tent like that in the time of Moses.

David says to the prophet Nathan: "I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent" (2 Sam. 7:1). Later, the Lord visits David and encourages him in this thinking, saying: "Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ... I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle" (2 Sam. 7:5–6). This problem of decorum occurs later in Scripture with the rebuilding of the second Temple under the auspices of the Persian King Darius. When facing resistance to the reconstruction of the Temple after its destruction by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., the Lord spoke through the prophet Haggai saying: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" (Hag. 1:3). This lesson in architectural hierarchy remains potent throughout salvation history and becomes a formative notion in our own day for the building of churches.

Though David collected money and materials for the Temple, it fell to his son Solomon to actually build it.¹⁶ Despite the differing takes on the building of the Temple in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, the directions for building the Temple are quite specific, and the Scriptures describe these instructions as coming directly from God. The Temple of Solomon bears a formal similarity to the Tabernacle of Moses, being made up of three parts. The porch or *ulam*, opened to the *hekal* or holy place, a large rectangular interior room decorated with gold, palm trees, and flowers. The most sacred precinct was the Holy of Holies (the *debir* or most holy place), a cube-shaped room of 20 cubits on each side paneled in gold-covered cedar in which was placed the Ark of the Covenant and its attendant cherubim.

15 Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (December 4, 1963), 122, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbot (Chicago: Follett, 1966), 174. Emphasis added.

16 Solomon himself would later be seen as a type of Christ, since Christ, the "Son of David," builds the Temple of his body, the Church.

The *hekal* and the *debir* prove most important for the study of contemporary church architecture because, along with Noah's Ark, they represent the earliest use of architectural typologies in salvation history; hence they provide the theological foundation for buildings which would follow. They can also help today's architects understand that church buildings come with a revealed and developed intellectual pre-history that can determine the theological ideas that should go into designing a new church. The Temple is not simply a now-defunct building of the Old Testament, but a window into how a loving God desired—and we might even say required—a theology of the covenant in built form.

Israel and the Temple in the Divine Plan

After centuries of theological and historical preparation, Solomon's Temple became the preeminent place of contact with God and surety of his presence. Though there had been many smaller Temples in the region, under King Solomon these buildings were ordered to be destroyed, and the Temple of Jerusalem increased greatly in importance. What had been one Temple among many became central and now also royal. Here the twelve tribes of Israel, divided and scattered, found the possibility of a natural focus. The process of unification which runs through God's mission of salvation here finds its precursors in location, liturgy, government, and architecture.

Once per year in the well-known ritual for the Feast of the Atonement, the Jewish High Priest passed through the Temple porch and larger interior room, and then entered the Holy of Holies. He brought the blood of animals to sprinkle and atone for his own sins, thereby making him worthy to act as intercessor for the people. Bringing the prayers of praise and petitions of the people to God, he entered into God's presence in the Holy of Holies amidst dense clouds of incense, then returned with the animal blood, pouring and sprinkling it and thereby bringing God's blessing. Because it had been brought into God's presence in the Holy of Holies, it was considered transformed because "the presence of God is holy and confers holiness."¹⁷

David had placed the Temple atop Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, now more often called the Temple Mount. Though much of the information about the historical setting of the Temple remains obscured by the lack of archaeological work on its site, the symbolic importance of the location would not have been lost on Jewish and early Christian thinkers. Every aspect of God's intervention in the life of his people was considered part of the divine plan to return his lost people to himself by revealing himself in symbolic form.

The location of the Temple in the heart of David's city was already charged with meaning based on important events believed to have occurred there. Scripture tells us that the Lord was displeased with David's plan, incited by Satan, to count

¹⁷ Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple*, 16.

the people of Israel while leaving out the tribes of Levi and Benjamin in the numbering (1 Chron. 21). David was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite when he suddenly saw a vision of an angel threatening to destroy the city. Because David and the elders repented, the Lord ultimately relented and destruction was averted. Averting the judgment of God would become a critical Christian motif, where Christ becomes the victim offered in humanity's place. The stone on the threshing floor is said to have become the location for the construction of an altar and eventually the Holy of Holies of the Temple itself.

But the stone of the threshing floor was already layered with meaning. It was understood as the site of Abraham's offering of his son Isaac, the place from where the waters of Noah's flood welled up, and the spot where Jacob's dream and vision of heaven took place.¹⁸ The Temple's location was therefore overlaid with symbolic meaning useful to Israel and later to Christianity: each was a precursor of the Messiah. On this spot Abraham prefigured Christ by offering his own beloved son. Jacob's dream showed the ladder by which angels traveled between heaven and earth, making the things of heaven knowable to humanity. The floodwaters of Noah represented chaos and evil, and the rock which capped them revealed God's power to keep evil in check, as evidenced by the repeated mention in the psalms of the Lord as rock of salvation, controlling the waters. As such, the Lord could control the chaos of sin brought about by the Fall and initiate his plan of salvation.

It goes without saying that building the Temple was a large and costly operation. It meant coordinating the movements of people and gathering materials from all around the known world. It required everything that the earth and humanity could offer: stone, timber, gold, silver, bronze, copper, iron, linen, dyes, and wool. It also required human effort and cooperation: quarrying, log-cutting, mining, linen making, dyeing, weaving, carving, transport and so on. It also made necessary international cooperation: cedar from Lebanon, architects and bronze founders from Tyre, and Phoenician transport ships.

The directions for the plan, fittings and furnishings of the Temple were quite specific, and Margaret Barker reminds us that "Israel herself remembered that the Temple in all its detail was part of the divine plan, revealed, along with the commandments, on Sinai."¹⁹ The specific attributes of the Temple, then, were not to be changed arbitrarily. They revealed something specific about God and his plan for salvation. In a symbolic reading, building the Temple meant taking inert matter from around the earth and shaping it through the use of intellect, will and God's revelation to join an almost unimaginable number of individual parts into an ordered whole in which God would dwell. Here again is the typology of the

18 Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991), 19.

19 Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 17.

later Mystical Body of Christ or “God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:9) and the heavenly city of Jerusalem. At the heart of the Christian revelation is the notion that many will become one, formed into the image of Christ who is the image of the Father and where He dwells. Since many nations were called upon to build the Temple and all of Israel was called to worship there, the Temple prefigured that time when all nations would be called back to God.

The Heavenly Garden and the Mountain of the Lord

One of the great Temple images is that of the garden. Quite simply, the *hekal* of “the Temple interior was a garden representing the heavenly garden on the mountain of God, the original Garden of Eden.”²⁰ Genesis tells that the original garden contained the Tree of Life, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, as well as other trees which were “pleasant to the sight and good for food,” revealing that there once existed an original state of order, peace, fertility, and right relationship with God.

When our first parents defied the wishes of God and ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, this right order was disrupted, and the Lord ordered Adam and Eve forth from the garden. He sent the aforementioned cherubim to place a flaming sword to guard the gate to prevent their return. This sword became a potent image of the separation of man from full union with God, and St. Gregory the Great would later write that the “sacred blood of Christ has quenched the flaming sword that barred access to the Tree of Life. The Christian people are invited to share the riches of Paradise.”²¹ This new access to Paradise occurred fully in Christ, but even in the Temple the typological preparation for this reality was already at work.

The understanding of the Temple as garden is not hard to fathom; the biblical description of the Temple’s interior is full of vegetal forms. The cedar within the *hekal* “was carved in the form of gourds and open flowers” (1 Kings 6:18), and received “carved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, in the inner and outer rooms” covered in gold (1 Kings 6:29). Since the instruction for building the Temple is to be understood as revelation and not merely as some sort of arbitrary interior decoration, the precision of the detail given in the Scriptures meant that this architecture would reveal something specific which could not be changed without damage to God’s disclosure. In this way, it was more than a neutral skin for cultic action merely intended to keep out the weather. As God’s “house,” it prefigured where God would dwell, becoming a revelation of his heavenly dwelling and how it would be opened to humanity once again. It also became an image

²⁰ Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 27.

²¹ St. Leo the Great, *Sermon 15:3–4*, in *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent, 2:313–314.

with a multiplicity of meaning that the word “house” implies: family dynasty, royal lineage, and kingdom.

A symbolic reading of this garden-like ornament provides the key to understanding this artistic command of God: in his desire to reunite himself with his creation, God has here invited humanity back into a glorified Garden of Eden. This time, the creature goes past the cherubim carved in the doors, recalling the same cherubim which had formerly prevented Adam and Eve’s return to the Tree of Life. Now humanity, represented by the Jewish priests, walked around with the angels in the garden as an image of a restored earth, making things appear to “be” again what they once were.

In one sense, then, the *hekal* or Holy Place serves as a memory of the original Garden of Eden in which God “walked” with our first parents without the necessity of a Temple. The Temple’s *hekal* is a recall, but a “shadowy” preparation for the time when the restoration brought about in Christ would be real and effective. That time is now in the age of the Church. The garden room of the Temple, the holy place, finds its fulfillment in the nave of today’s church, a place of invitation back into right relationship with God.

Passing Beyond the Veil

In Solomon’s Temple, the Ark of the Covenant found a permanent home. It rested in the *debir* or Holy of Holies, a cube-shaped room in the rear of the Temple. Separating the *debir* from the *hekal* was the great veil. This extravagantly rendered tapestry literally obscured the view between the two rooms, but was understood symbolically to represent all that separated heaven and earth. In order to enter the Holy of Holies and be in God’s presence on the Feast of the Atonement, the earthly High Priest literally had to *pass beyond the veil*, giving us to this day the allegorical phrase used to describe a person leaving this world at death. As Barker has written:

[The] *hekal* represented the earth and the *debir* the heavens; between them was the veil which separated the holy place from the most holy (Exod. 26:33). The veil represented the boundary between the visible world and the invisible, between time and eternity. Actions performed within the veil were not of this world but were part of the heavenly liturgy. Those who passed through the veil were the mediators, divine and human, who functioned in both worlds bringing the prayers and penitence of the people to God and the blessing and presence of God to his people.²²

22 Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 105.

Composed of wool and linen, it was woven from blue, purple and crimson threads in a description quite similar to those given to Moses for his desert tabernacle (2 Chron. 3:14; Exod. 26:31–33). Presumably, like at the Tabernacle of Moses, the veil also had images of the cherubim woven into it, again suggesting those angelic guards of the garden.

The veil was immense, estimated to have been composed of 200 square meters of wool and linen. Because it was sprinkled with blood, it needed to be washed frequently and it was reported that 300 priests were needed to immerse it. The Mishnah tells that 82 young women were necessary to weave each of the two veils made every year.²³ The need for observant Jewish women to be constantly busy weaving new veils has given us the iconic tradition of the Virgin Mary doing needlework when Gabriel appeared to her at the Annunciation.²⁴ The weaving the veil signifies the Virgin's role as *Theotokos*, the God-bearer who "wove" the presence of God in her own womb. Like the actual veil in the Temple, the Christ woven in her body both revealed and concealed the presence of God.

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus, who lived at the time of King Herod's Temple, believed the veil served as a symbol of the cosmos. The scarlet color suggested fire, he said, the linen represented the earth, blue the air, and purple the sea (as the blood of fish joined to the blue of the waters).²⁵ Moreover, Josephus tells that the veil "had also embroidered on it all that was mystical in the heavens."²⁶ Elsewhere, Josephus wrote that the veil of Moses' desert Tabernacle, which would likely have served as a carefully respected model for the Temple veil, was "made in way of imitation and representation of the universe."²⁷

Writing in the first century, the Greek-speaking Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, described the veil as "woven of such and so many things as the world was made of, [being] the universal Temple which [existed] before the holy Temple."²⁸ Like the garden of the holy place which presented a new earth, the veil symbolized that all of creation had been brought to divine worship, including the

23 Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 106.

24 *The Book of James*, Chap. 9. An apocryphal gospel probably written in the second century, *The Book of James* is sometimes also known as the *Protoevangelion*, and was mentioned by Origen. Though not given the weight of Scripture, this document has proven greatly influential over the centuries. It relates that the Virgin Mary, who had been educated at the Temple, was chosen by the High Priest to work the scarlet and purple threads when the angel Gabriel appeared to her to announce that she was to bear Christ. See *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 361–367.

25 Barker, 109. See also Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 3, Chap. 6; Bk. 3, Chap. 7, in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 85–88; 88–91.

26 Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Bk. 5, Chap. 5, in *The Works of Josephus*, 705–709.

27 Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 3, Chap. 7, in *The Works of Josephus*, 88–91.

28 Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 109, citing Philo of Alexandria, *Questions and Answers on Exodus*, 2:85.

sea and the heavens. Similarly, Josephus writes that the seven branched candlestick in the Temple represented the 7 known planets.²⁹

Interestingly, when entering the garden-like *hekal*, the High Priest wore a garment of materials similar to the veil, symbolically enrobing himself in all of creation and bringing it into the presence of God. Exodus 28 describes these priestly garments of the desert Tabernacle made of blue, purple and scarlet threads. Josephus described the robes of the priests in Moses' tabernacle as being symbolically composed of all creation as well. The vestment was also described as "being like lightning in its pomegranates," with bells sewn on that were said to represent thunder.

Semi-precious stones called sardonyxes were attached to the shoulders of the High Priest's *ephod*, which Josephus tells us were emblematic of the sun and the moon.³⁰ Each of the twelve gems of the High Priest's breastplate were carved with the name of one of the sons of Israel, described in Exodus as being "like a signet" and each engraved "for the twelve tribes" (Exod. 28:17–21). Josephus' commentary on the priestly garments in the Temple of Solomon reveals that they were similar to those of the Tabernacle.³¹ In the time of shadow, the earthly High Priest obediently followed the Law in this ritual, but as is evident in the Letter to the Hebrews, Christians would later see Christ as the true (or better yet, the "real") High Priest who took on human nature, entering the real Holy of Holies in heaven, tearing the veil and bringing heaven and earth together.

In the time of image, we see all of this Temple symbolism as the bringing of creation back to God to be made complete once again in the process of the "undoing" of the Fall. The twelve stones symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel (and therefore all of humanity), the fabrics the four basic elements of the world, the power of lightning and thunder the majesty of God, and even the sardonyxes as the sun and the moon. Writing in the late second century, St. Clement of Alexandria saw a mystic meaning in the Tabernacle and its furniture, echoing Josephus's explanation of the four colors of the woven threads. He called the garment of the High Priest the "symbol of the world of sense," which prophesied Christ's "ministry in the flesh" in which he took on the matter of the universe in order to return it to God for transformation.³² Bringing creation to God meant that God could therefore offer it back divinized and ordered, blessed by his presence.

Interestingly, though, the High Priest removed his outer garment and wore only white linen robes into the heavenly *debir*. "In the *debir* he no longer represented the created world, but was deemed one of the heavenly entourage. The white linen garment was the dress of the angels, given to favored human beings upon their as-

29 Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 3, Chap. 7, in *The Works of Josephus*, 88–91.

30 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 3, Chap. 7, in *The Works of Josephus*, 88–91.

31 Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Bk. 5, Chap. 5, in *The Works of Josephus*, 705–709.

32 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Bk. 5, Chap. 6, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 452–453.

cent to heaven.”³³ Clement of Alexandria deciphers this linen garment as evidence of the High Priest’s purified ascent to a more heavenly state, a precursor of the “bright array of glory” of the “ineffable inheritance of that spiritual and perfect man” after becoming “son and friend” of God once again.³⁴

Like today’s altar servers who wear white albs because they enter into the sanctuary of a church building, the High Priest joined the white-robed heavenly beings by crossing the veil and entering the Holy of Holies, into the presence of God. Just as the Jewish High Priest brought all of creation and all of humanity to God, so today’s priest, who acts as Christ, brings all of creation to the Father, wearing above his white alb the vestments of color, gold, embroidered flowers and saints, speaking on behalf of all present and the entire world. He does this by walking through the modern-day *hekal* which we call the nave, and then enters into our sacramental image of the *debir*, the sanctuary.

The High Priest in the Holy of Holies

The Holy of Holies, or the *debir*, was the innermost region of the Temple building, a cube-shaped room in which God chose to dwell and which made present in earthly time and space the timelessness and spacelessness of heaven. Here was placed the Ark of the Covenant which had been carried around with the desert Tabernacle since the time of Moses, though by the time of Christ, the Second Temple enlarged by Herod no longer contained the Ark, since it had disappeared after the time of the Babylonian captivity.

God’s directions for building the Holy of Holies in both the desert Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple insisted that the proportion of the twenty cubits on each side be maintained. In the Book of Revelation, heaven itself would be described to St. John as cubic in shape as well, revealing something of the “shape” or nature of God. This understanding of the cube as a heavenly shape again comes through in the writings of Josephus, who says that the area within the cubic Holy of Holies in Moses’ tabernacle was “a heaven peculiar to God.”³⁵

Medieval theoreticians of numbers sometimes described the Son as the square of the Father, since as the perfect image of the Father, Christ could be understood as a multiplication of him.³⁶ Taking this idea further and continuing the process with the Holy Spirit, one might see the nature of God as having simi-

33 Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, 113.

34 Clement, *Stromata*, Bk. 5, Chap. 6, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2:452–53.

35 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 3, Chap. 6, in *Works of Josephus*, 85–88.

36 See Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 27, citing Thierry of Chartres’ quest to explain the Trinity through geometrical hypotheses: “Thierry recalls that Plato, ‘like his master Pythagoras,’ identified the metaphysical principles of monad and dyad with God and matter, respectively. God is the supreme unity, and the Son the unity begotten by unity, as the square results from a multiplication of a magnitude with itself. Rightly, Thierry concludes, is the Second Person of the Trinity therefore called the first square.”

larities with the cube as a qualitative ratio. The number of persons of the Trinity total three when added, thereby maintaining threeness, yet, when cubed ($1 \times 1 \times 1$ or 1^3), the number “one” still remains one. Though it would take the Christian revelation to make this Trinitarian numerology more fully understood, the shape of heaven was clearly associated with the cube, which was itself associated with God, and this typology served for later interpretation in the Book of Revelation.

But in ancient Jerusalem, to enter this cubic room in the Temple and step into the presence of God was *to be made holy*. Here the High Priest entered to perform the atonement rites, sprinkling blood from a slaughtered animal and then exiting the Holy of Holies to pour the blood on the altar in the *hekal*. This atonement ritual signaled God’s pledge of fidelity to his covenants with his people and the spreading of his divine life from his heavenly throne to earthly reality. This bloody ritual seems so foreign to modern sensibilities, but it was a typological precursor of the coming of Christ, the true High Priest. As Robert Barron has written, the earthly High Priest “was acting as the mediator between divinity and humanity, a priest offering sacrifice on behalf of the people and, strangely enough, on behalf of Yahweh himself. In the process, he was making symbolically real the restoration of creation according to God’s intentions.”³⁷

This role of earthly High Priest as mediator who passes beyond the veil into heaven, pleads for his people, and returns with the blessings and divine life of God was understood by the earliest Christians as a preparation for the coming of the true High Priest, Jesus Christ. Christ bridged the great divide between heaven and earth, tearing the veil which separated them, and allowing the sacramental flow of divine life to gush to his creation, causing it to become divinized and restored to full unity with its creator. When Christ came as the true High Priest, he did not enter into a mere shadowy copy of heaven as did the human High Priest. He entered into the reality of heaven itself in the supreme atonement, returning with the blessings of God’s presence in a more efficacious form. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews understood this symbolic reality:

... when Christ came as a High Priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent ... he entered once and for all into the holy place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. ... For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence on our behalf. (Heb. 9:11–12, 24)

This reality is made present again in Catholic liturgy today as it recalls the Temple liturgy. The priest reenacts, or more accurately, reveals by making present,

37 Robert E. Barron, *The Eucharist* (New York: Orbis, forthcoming 2008).

the actions of Christ himself, making the eternal reality of Christ's intercession at the right hand of the Father knowable to our senses. In a great continuity with the Jewish tradition, today's Catholic priest sacramentally re-presents the reality of Christ as heavenly intercessor, and only secondarily serves as the recall of the Jewish High Priest. Since Christ did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it, the old Law of the Temple is not erased, but continues in a way entirely transformed by Christ for our own day. Similarly, the church building fulfills the Temple typologies as well, not as a shadowy copy of the true Holy of Holies, but as an image of the reality of heaven in true participation.

In the Book of Revelation, the angel shows John an image of the Church, saying "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9). This fully divinized Church is then described as being cubic in shape and now *composed of* twelve gems similar to those found on the breastplate of the high priest (Rev. 21:16). The living stones of the earthly Church, then, become completely transformed to be the radiant gems of the heavenly city, God's building completely restored and filled with divine life. Our earthly church building is intended to show this reality now by way of foretaste.

In symbolic language, this bride, the Church, is a *polis* made up of the twelve tribes—now all of humanity—having been fully conformed to the "shape" or image of God, joyfully and peacefully taking their places as destined for them. When speaking of heaven, the seventh- or eight-century hymn, *Urbs Beata Jerusalem* ("Blessed City of Jerusalem"), still used in the Church's liturgy at the dedication of a church, says that "its stones are fashioned by many a stroke and blow of the Savior-mason's hammer and chisel. Thus shaped they go to the making of this mighty structure, each being fitly joined to each and finding its appointed place in the whole building."³⁸

Read in this light, Josephus' description of the Temple stands pregnant with theological content waiting for Christian fulfillment: "[T]he whole structure of the Temple was made, with great skill, of polished stones, and those laid together so very harmoniously and smoothly ... that the agreement of one part with another seemed rather to have been natural."³⁹ This imagery of the many coming together as one, undoing the divisions of the Fall, becoming again "as it was in the beginning," is symbolized to this day in our church buildings, where many stones come together to form the place not only where God's presence dwells, but to show what the heavenly reality might be like.

In a similar way, the churches we build and the images we put in them are not an unnecessary clinging to the things of worship before Christ. Because architecture is the built form of ideas, it recalls the buildings and events of the Old

³⁸ Translation taken from *The Hours of the Divine Office in English and Latin*, vol. 2 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1964), 922.

³⁹ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 8, Chap. 3, in *The Works of Josephus*, 216–218.

Testament. However, it presents them to us today in a completely transformed manner. This is fitting for us, as beings who acquire knowledge through our senses. It is also fitting for God, who made us to be so. Some limited written evidence indicates that the early Christians imitated the Temple of Solomon in their buildings, suggesting that the basilican church form composed of a porch, nave, and sanctuary bore resonance for those who understood Temple worship. Eusebius would make this comparison explicit by calling a bishop who built a great church the new Solomon, Zerubbabel and Bezalel. He also called the altar in the church the "Holy of Holies."⁴⁰

The Earthly Priest "in Persona Christi"

The Temple and its art and architecture can make us look with new eyes at what our priest is doing at every Mass: acting *in persona Christi*, making present to us again the very action of Christ, the true High Priest.⁴¹ When an earthly priest enters through the front door of a church, past the porch, processing in white alb and circular embroidered vestment through the nave as an image of restored creation, he does what the High Priest of the Temple did. More importantly, he does what Christ did in coming to earth in the incarnation, taking on the matter of the universe and walking again with his creation as he once did in the Garden of Eden, then proceeding into God's presence in the sanctuary.

This gives a whole new meaning to the vegetal ornamentation found in churches throughout the centuries, be it the leafy capitals of columns or floral patterns in stone, paint or stained glass. It also informs us as to the nature of a church sanctuary and its iconography as a point of destination filled with images of the heavenly realm. Throughout history, the Temple as revealed building and prefigurement of heavenly realities is never far away from the minds of the Church's great builders.⁴²

40 Eusebius, *The Church History*, Bk. 10, Chap. 4, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 1, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 375. Solomon, of course, was the "builder" of the first Temple, Bezalel was the builder of Moses' Tabernacle, and Zerubbabel served as architect for the building of the second Temple after its destruction by the Babylonians.

41 Pope Pius XII stated the theology of the priesthood beautifully in his 1947 encyclical on the liturgy, *Mediator Dei*: "The priest is the same, Jesus Christ, whose sacred person his minister represents. Now the minister, by reason of the sacerdotal consecration which he has received, is made like to the High Priest and possesses the power of performing actions in virtue of Christ's very person. Wherefore in his priestly activity he in a certain manner 'lends his tongue, and gives his hand' to Christ." Text in Pamela E. Jackson, *An Abundance of Graces: Reflections on Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2004), 141.

42 For a seminal exposition on the medieval understanding of the role of the Temple in Gothic architecture, see Otto Georg von Simson *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*, Bollingen Series, 48 (New York: Harper & Row 1957), esp. 37–38; 95–96. See also Wayne Dynes, "The Medieval Cloister as Portico of Solomon," *Gesta* 12 (1973): 61–69.

When the earthly priest steps from the nave to the sanctuary, he enters again into our sacramental presentation of the heavenly Holy of Holies. He goes to the altar bringing the prayers and petitions of the people to the Father as well as offerings of grain and wine. In an echo of Melchizedek as well as the Passover rituals of the Last Supper, the Catholic priest of today brings bread and wine, offers a sacrifice of praise in the sanctuary, and then returns with the gifts transformed as bearers of the divine life in the Eucharist. In many Orthodox and Eastern Catholic traditions, the altar is not only understood as a heavenly table, but also the throne of God like the Ark, where his presence remains and where heaven and earth meet. The walls are enriched with images of the angels and saints of heaven. Since the faithful are members of the Mystical Body by virtue of their baptism, they share in the common priesthood as well, offering Christ to the Father with the priest in real participation.

While in the Temple the Ark contained the old Law of the Ten Commandments and God's fleeting presence rested atop it, the fulfillment of the new law is found in the Eucharistic presence. This abiding presence in the reserved Blessed Sacrament links directly back to the Temple without limiting God's presence to a single place or building. In the time of image, Cardinal Ratzinger writes, our tabernacle with the reserved Blessed Sacrament serves as the new and fulfilled version of this abiding presence, where "his presence (*Shekinah*) really does now dwell among us."⁴³ His active presence gushes beyond the veil and out to the world in the people of his Church, yet they continually return to his altar for nourishment and restoration.

The centrality of the idea of Christ's body as the new Temple demands a certain investigation into the nature of the old Temple. To see the Temple as something foreign to Christianity is to deny God's loving preparation in the time of shadow. The Temple indeed served as a touchstone for the earliest Christians, who came to understand how God would redeem them by looking at the Old Testament typologies that relate to the Temple.

As Orthodox theologian Leonid Ouspensky has written, after the apostles were denied access to the synagogues and the Temple, "they built Christian sanctuaries, and they did so in strict accord with the revealed character of the place of worship, with the very principle according to which the tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple has been built."⁴⁴ The New Testament is full of references to the Temple, and many of the activities of the earliest Church occurred in its courts. The words *Temple*, *priest* and *offering* permeate the christological and ecclesiological language of the New Testament as well as the Book of Revelation. In understanding the Temple, then, we come to better understand the Church.

43 Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 89.

44 Leonid Ouspensky, *The Theology of the Icon* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1978), 23.