

THE INDWELLING OF DIVINE LOVE: The Revelation of God's Abiding Presence in the Human Heart

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The indwelling of the Trinity is easy to understand and it is difficult to understand. It is so patent that a child can appreciate its splendor, so mysterious that theologians have disagreed for centuries in explaining its details. Yet there is no truth more central to the Christian mystery than man's union with his God, a truth mentioned repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments, a truth prominent in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, a truth basic to liturgical and contemplative prayer, a truth that many find irresistibly attractive when it is taught in a fresh, scriptural manner.

The indwelling mystery is crucial to the supernatural economy established by an incredibly loving God. It is the teaching of the Catholic Church, based on the manifest testimony of Scripture, that the divine inhabitation is the end or goal of the divine economy.

The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity (John 17:21–23). But even now we are called to be a dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity: "If a man loves me," says the Lord, "he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him" (John 14:23).¹

It is in view of the inbeing of the Trinity—imperfectly grasped through faith, perfectly through vision—that all else in the Christian order of things has been structured. When man sinned, he lost the Trinity and his orientation toward seeing the Trinity. Fortunately, God so loved the world that he sent the way that men might repossess the truth and the life that was to abide in their hearts. The beatific vision is the end of the supernatural economy for every man not only temporally but also ontologically; and the beatific vision implies the indwelling presence—the perfect, fully blossomed indwelling presence of our blessed God in his human habitation.

The incarnation and crucifixion, as well as the Eucharist and the other sacraments, are all themselves directed to the ultimate glorification of the Trinity

¹ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2d. ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 260.

achieved in men through the marvelous intimacy of visional presence. When we proclaim in the Creed at Mass that the Son descended from heaven and became incarnate “for us men and for our salvation,” it is declaring that the hypostatic union itself, together with its redemptive results, is oriented toward this same visional presence, since what is salvation if not the face to face fruition of the Trinity in our risen body?

In this article, I propose to trace out some scriptural themes dealing with the inabiding Father, his Son, and their Holy Spirit. In returning to these themes we hope to better understand the foundations of this profound doctrine of the divine indwelling. These themes, in turn, furnish some of the solid theological bases of a profound prayer life, in addition to offering us deeper insights into the meaning of the incarnation and the divine economy.²

God did not reveal the divine indwelling in an unprepared suddenness. He first laid the foundation centuries before the Word appeared in visible form. He proceeded slowly, methodically, thoroughly. Thus, in this article I propose to follow the divine pedagogy from the preparation of this revelation in the Old Testament to its completion in the New Testament.

Being a part of the supernatural plan for man, divine revelation follows the pattern of a gentle unfolding, like the bud of a rose. This is why the loving kindness of God lifts the curtain before the redemptive plan in the surprisingly general terms of an opposition between two offspring. Slowly he sharpens the message to a Messiah born of a people, then a tribe, finally a maiden. Divine wisdom gradually prepares a people for an exquisite reality—the incarnation of the Word. And the Word, too, once he has appeared, exercises an impressive restraint in letting even his intimates know who he is. God’s workings with men are smooth.

So it is with our indwelling mystery. Were we to imagine that the astonishing declarations of the New Testament on the divine inhabitation through love struck the Jews as entirely strange, we would be gravely mistaken. Yet at the same time there must be no mistake about the fact that this revelation *is* astonishing. There is the promise of Christ quoted above in the *Catechism*: “If anyone love me ... we will come to him and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). There is again St. Paul’s declaration: “Do you not know that you are the Temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you” (1 Cor. 3:16).

When the Jews first heard of this sublime and touching familiarity with the Lord God, they may have been mystified, but we doubt that they were shocked.

2 In this article I am drawing on material originally published in *The Review for Religious*, which has graciously granted me permission to use it here. See “The Indwelling of God: Old Testament Preparation,” *Review for Religious* 26 (1967): 203–230; “Interindwelling: New Testament Completion,” *Review for Religious* 26 (1967): 441–460; “Indwelling Dynamism,” *Review for Religious* 26 (1967): 685–702; “Eucharist, Indwelling, Mystical Body,” *Review for Religious* 26 (1967): 910–938; and “Indwelling Summit,” *Review for Religious* 26 (1967): 1094–1112. See also my *God Dwells Within Us* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1971), 196–221.

They had been gradually prepared to accept this new man-to-God intimacy by a whole series of instructions in the Pentateuch, the prophets, the Psalter, and the wisdom literature. By these teachings the Hebrews had been conditioned to thinking of God as nearby, as warmly dwelling with his people, as taking up a habitation in their midst. It is this conditioning that we will investigate first.

Scripture's Invitation to Intimacy

A common misconception notwithstanding, one of the traits of the Old Testament, at once remarkable and comforting, is the degree of intimacy—and yes, we may say tenderness—that the infinite God encourages between himself and his creatures. This we must appreciate fully as a preparation for our understanding of the indwelling mystery of evangelical revelation. Indeed, the Old Testament is invaluable as a prelude and introduction to the mystery of the Trinity abiding in man's heart.

The ancient Hebrew looked upon the Lord God as being near to some men and afar off from others, as shining upon some and hiding from others. Yet he knew that this God of his was everywhere. Even though the Lord declared himself especially present in some places, he was nonetheless in every place when one really got down to asking the question.

To say that God is in heaven (1 Kings 8:30), is to say that he is everywhere in his exalted majesty. He is repeatedly asked to hear from heaven the prayers of his people (2 Chron. 6:21, 23, 25, 27, 30, 35, 39), and he is so immense that the heavens cannot contain him (1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 6:18). No matter where the evil go they cannot escape the punishing presence of this God (Amos 9:2). Nothing is secret to him who is both close at hand and afar off (Jer. 23:23–25).

In a graphic manner the psalmist well sums up the inescapability of the Lord God:

Where can I go from your spirit?
From your presence where can I flee?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there.
If I take the wings of the dawn,
if I settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall guide me,
and your right hand hold me fast. (Ps. 139:7–10)

As we might expect, the fullest Old Testament revelation of the divine immensity was given toward the end of the ancient dispensation. Written about a century before Christ, the Book of Wisdom speaks not only of God's presence to all things, but also of his *filling* the world and *being in* all that he has made.

The spirit of the LORD fills the world, is all-embracing, and knows man's utterance. Therefore, no one who speaks wickedly can go unnoticed. (Wis. 1:7–8)

You spare all things because they are yours, O LORD and lover of souls, for your imperishable spirit is in all things. (Wis. 11:26–12:1)

God has a personal, dynamic contact with man in the Old Testament. God not only *is* in all things, he has a personalized knowledge and contact with everything that issues from his creating fingers, but especially with his human creations fashioned after his own image. Job lays down that all things lie open to the divine eye. “He beholds the ends of the earth and sees all that is under the heavens. . . . He splits channels in the rocks; his eyes behold all that is precious. He probes the wellsprings of the streams, and brings hidden things to light” (Job 28:10–11, 24). Susanna calls on the omniscience of her God as a witness to her innocence under accusation. “O eternal God, you know what is hidden and are aware of all things before they come to be: you know that they have testified falsely against me” (Dan. 13:42).

God’s Tender Stooping to Humanity

More important still was the ancient Hebrew’s conviction that his Lord God was interested in him, that he saw his every action, that every action had an importance before him. This Lord searched the very heart of man. The first word of the Lord to come to the prophet Jeremiah was a word of personal divine interest shown through knowledge that preceded the prophet’s conception and consecrated him while he was yet unborn (Jer. 1:5). But this provident God looks upon all men, not only his select messengers. He witnesses their inner thoughts, observes their hearts, understands their every deed and watches their every step. The Spirit of this Lord fills the world and embraces all things. He can be named the searcher of hearts and souls (Jer. 1:4–5; Prov. 15:3; Wis. 1:6–7; Sir. 15:18–19; 17:15; 23:19–20).

We can already begin to see why the Hebrew felt so near to his God. God was not an omnipotent Creator who was disinterested in his creation. We think rather that the vivid sense of the divine reality so impressive in the Old Testament was partially due to the Israelite’s conviction of the divine closeness consequent on the divine omniscience. Psalm 139 beautifully illustrates our point by combining in several masterly strokes the Lord’s immensity, his omniscience, his tender care, and his awesome skill.

O LORD, you have probed me and you know me;
you know when I sit down and when I stand;
you understand my thoughts from afar.
My journeys and my rest you scrutinize,
with all my ways you are familiar.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know the whole of it.

Behind me and before, you hem me in
and rest your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
too lofty for me to attain. (Ps. 139:1–6)

This passage obviously merits careful meditation by anyone who wishes to drink in the spirit of God's tender stooping to man, as we shall finally see it revealed in the fullness and beauty of the Gospel indwelling mystery. The psalmist continues by developing the omnipresence of God and its never ceasing providential implications (Ps. 139:7–10). Finally, he reflects on the divine artisan fearfully and wonderfully fashioning his limbs within the very womb of his mother.

We should notice in this section of Psalm 139 that God is especially present in the mother's womb *because he is producing an effect*. This concept of the divine presence explained by effects produced is prominent in theologians' explanations of the indwelling. For our purposes now it is helpful for us to notice that one of the special characteristics indicating the divine presence among the chosen people was a peculiar manifestation or effect. Thus God indicated his presence in the sanctuary by the *Shekinah*, a white cloud. Elsewhere he is present by producing with a strong arm the marvelous works, the *mirabilia Dei*: the fiery bush (Exod. 3:1–4), the ten plagues (Exod. 7:14–11:10), the division of the Red Sea (Exod. 14:10–31), the quail and the manna (Exod. 16:4–36), the water from the rock (Exod. 17:1–7), and especially the awesome theophany on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:16–20:21).

In Psalm 139 this same God is fearfully, wonderfully, but quietly present within the maternal womb, fashioning the psalmist's body and thus showing personal interest and love.

Truly you have formed my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother's womb.
I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works.
My soul also you knew full well;
nor was my frame unknown to you
When I was made in secret,
when I was fashioned in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes have seen my actions;
in your book they are all written;
my days were limited before one of them existed.
How weighty are your designs, O God;
how vast the sum of them!
Were I to recount them, they would outnumber the sands;
did I read the end of them, I should still be with you.
(Ps. 139:13–18)

The God whom the very heavens could not contain chose to reveal to an insignificant nation that he would somehow dwell in their midst—not only on rare and special occasions. He proposed a permanent and calm abiding in the very midst of his people. “I will set my dwelling among you and will not disdain you. Ever present in your midst, I will be your God, and you will be my people” (Lev. 26:11–12; 22:32). Because this nearby God is so sacred, the Israelites must be at special pains to keep their camps becomingly clean during their travels simply for his sake and his presence in their very midst (Deut. 23:15).

Ark, Temple, and the Habitation of God

In a special manner the Lord of hosts dwells in Jerusalem, the faithful city and the holy mountain. “Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and I will dwell within Jerusalem” (Zech. 8:2–3). This special presence of the Lord among his people is to be a reason for their singing and rejoicing (Zech. 2:14–17). Within the chosen nation itself, the Lord God had a sacred abode in his Temple at Zion. Whether his presence in the sanctuary was viewed as distinct from that peculiar to the nation as a whole is not clear, but the mere fact of it is clear and, moreover, indicated in several ways.

Quite simply, God is said to be in the Temple built for him (1 Kings 8:12–13). So he is sought there and prayers reach him in it. “When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; my prayer reached you in your holy Temple” (Jon. 1:5, 8). The priests who serve in the Temple are close to their Lord. The unfaithful Levites “shall no longer draw near me to serve as my priests, nor shall they touch any of my sacred things,” whereas the faithful who cared for the sanctuary during the time of Israel’s infidelity “shall draw near to me to minister to men, and they shall stand before me to offer me fat and blood” (Ezek. 44:13, 15; 2 Sam. 7:6; Exod. 28:35).

Within the Temple itself the Lord is somehow especially found in the holy place, and there he is enthroned (Ps. 22:3; Lev. 16:1–2). Even more specifically, he is on the Ark of the Covenant itself and on occasion he will speak from this sacred spot (Ps. 99:1; 1 Chron. 13:6; Ps. 80:1; Exod. 25:22; Num. 7:89). Here also David sits before the Lord (1 Chron. 17:16).

This divine dwelling is singular enough that the Israelites are to take up a collection of precious materials and then construct a fit habitation for their Lord. “They shall make a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell in their midst. This dwelling and all its furnishings you shall make exactly according to the pattern that I will now show you” (Exod. 25:8–9). Then, in a concrete manner, the Lord God teaches the sacredness of this special presence by prescribing in detail the richness of his habitation (Exod. 25–27).

Over and above the peculiar presence of the Lord to his chosen people in their Temple, it seems that he gave himself intimately to some men and withdrew

himself from others. For instance, while God is close to the humble, he is far from the proud and the wicked (Ps. 137:6; Prov. 15:29). In an exquisite passage we are told of the gentle, kindly, good-giving presence of the Lord to those who love him.

The eyes of the LORD are upon those who love him;
he is their mighty shield and strong support,
a shelter from the heat, a shade from the noonday sun,
a guard against stumbling, a help against falling.
He buoys up the spirits, brings a sparkle to the eyes,
gives health and life and blessing. (Sir. 34:16–17)

It was natural, therefore, to seek the Lord when he was near and to ask for the divine presence.

Seek the LORD while he may be found, call him while he is near.
(Isa. 55:6)

But you, O LORD, be not far from me;
O my help, hasten to aid me. (Ps. 22:20)

Perhaps at once the most homely and the most touching illustration of what we are saying is the account of Moses' familiarity with God. We are told that the Lord would speak to his servant face to face, as familiarly as one man speaking to another. In one of these conversations Moses dares to remind this mighty Lord that he has already called him an intimate friend who had found the divine favor.

So intimate are these two that the puny man dares to bargain with God. "If you are not going yourself (with us), do not make us go up from here," Moses argues. "For how can it be known that we, your people and I, have found favor with you, except by your going with us?" Rather than crush the Israelite as a brash upstart laying down conditions for the Almighty, the Lord gently responds that "this request, too, which you have just made, I will carry out, because you have found favor with me and you are my intimate friend" (Exod. 33:7–19).

Even though Moses was a special intimate with the Lord God, this loving protector wished an astonishing familiarity with each individual among his chosen people. He desired to be personally close to them. He wanted their love, confidence, yearning, delight. He was preparing them for the disclosure of the indwelling presence of the yet unrevealed Trinity.

The most basic of the biblical God-and-man relationships is love, mutual love. The loving kindness characteristic of God in his merciful dealing with his human children occurs in the Old Testament many more times than we should care to count. And the occurrences are strongly worded. Because the skies seem limitless in expanse, the Hebrew sees in them an image of the gentleness of his

God: "O LORD, your kindness reaches to heaven; your faithfulness to the clouds. ... How precious is your kindness, O God" (Ps. 36:6, 8). His goodness shows itself in many ways, but one of the most touching is his fatherly forgiveness. The psalmist confides:

Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior,
and for you I wait all the day.
Remember that your compassion, O LORD,
and your kindness are from old.
The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not;
in your kindness remember me, because of your goodness,
O LORD. (Ps. 25:5-7)

This gentle God wanted the Hebrews to know of his desire to be intimate with them and of the great love he bore toward them, and so he plainly opened his heart and told them so. So close is this familiarity with Israel, too, that he uses the metaphor of marital love to illustrate it.

For he who has become your husband is your Maker. ... For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great tenderness I will take you back. ... With enduring love I take pity on you, says the LORD, your redeemer. (Isa. 54:5, 7)

So touching is this divine love for man, and the consequent closeness of God to man, that he takes man in his arms, draws him on with a kind of human affection, fondles him like a child at his cheeks.

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks. Yet, though I stooped to feed my child, they did not know that I was their healer. ... How could I give you up, O Ephraim? ... My heart is overwhelmed, my pity is stirred. (Hos. 11:3-4, 8)

Rightly may this tender God who stoops to man declare "with age-old love I have loved you" (Jer. 31:3). Rightly, too, does the Book of Wisdom ascribe love as the reason for the divine activity of creation and conservation, as it speaks of God's Spirit being in all things.

You love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned. And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved had it not been called forth by you? But you spare all things,

because they are yours, O LORD and lover of souls, for your imperishable Spirit is in all things. (Wis. 11:24–12:1)

While there is in these texts no clear affirmation of God's special indwelling in those he loves, there is an unmistakable revelation of a love whose consequence is an intimacy and closeness indicated by the images and expressions used—finding favor; intimate friend; taking back with great tenderness; enduring love; embracing man in the divine arms and fondling him at the divine cheeks; the divine heart overwhelmed; age-old love; lover of souls who is in all things. This divine love theme is surely only one step removed from the New Testament's revelation that this God dwells in man's soul as in a temple.

Love and Longing in the Psalms

Not only does God, as revealed in the Old Testament, overflow with an amazing love for his human children, they in turn are to love him in an entire surrender. In the Gospel, Jesus Christ makes this love of man for God a condition for the indwelling presence of the Trinity; thus, we may not omit to notice how the Old Testament prepares for this aspect of the indwelling mystery.

Early in the Hebrew revelation the love-command was given. And it was given with an unusual solemnity, a total wholeness, a remarkable insistence.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest. Bind them at your wrist as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4–9)

Although Deuteronomy does not tell us, as Jesus will later explain, that this is the greatest of all commandments, the author does make clear its centrality by the expressions he uses—take to heart; I enjoin on you; drill into your children; write on the doorposts, and the like. Man's love for God is indeed crucial for his spiritual life.

We would expect, then, a proliferation of love protestations throughout the Old Testament. But we do not find them. This is strange only on first sight. Indeed, a man declares his love for his wife and a mother for her children in many ways besides the plain expression: "I love you." So also the Jew protests his love for God in his countless expressions of wonder and praise for the divine goodness, kindness, mercy, power, and wisdom scattered especially throughout the Psalter.

Yet simple acts of explicit love are not lacking either. The psalmist exclaims and wonders at the goodness of God and then commands the love man should have for him:

How great is the goodness, O LORD,
which you have in store for those who fear you. ...
Love the LORD, all you his faithful ones. (Ps. 31:19, 23).

And the faithful Hebrew does use the simple "I love you" expression toward his Lord:

I love you, O LORD, my strength,
O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer. (Ps. 18:1-2).

The psalmist loves so much that he weeps when he sees men neglect the divine law (Ps. 119:136). He loves the very house of God (Ps. 26:8). The love of man for God in the Old Testament is also expressed in the persistent themes of man's yearning for God. Throughout the sacred pages the Hebrew is admonished to seek, to desire, to yearn after the Lord God, for it is in so longing that he can attain fulfillment and the very divine presence. When the Lord is to scatter his people among the nations he leaves them with the precept: "Yet there too you shall seek the LORD, your God; and you shall indeed find him when you search after him with your whole heart and your whole soul" (Deut. 4:29). This same message the Holy Spirit transmits to Jeremiah for his exiled people: "When you call me, when you pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, you will find me with you, says the LORD" (Jer. 29:12-14).

The Lord wants his people to desire him, to open their mouths that he might feed them (Ps. 81:10). The psalmist invites us to give thanks for the wondrous kindness of the Lord, "because he satisfied the longing soul and filled the hungry soul with good things" (Ps. 107:8-9).

If, then, those who seek the Lord with their whole heart will find him present, as Jeremiah promised, and if this Lord wants the seekers to yearn with an open mouth and ten times more vehemently than their straying (Bar. 4:28-29), then we may conclude that the deeper the longing on man's part, the more intimate the coming on God's part. And it would seem that the Hebrews learned this lesson, that they burned in yearning for the Lord their God.

We feel that ardor in the extraordinary claim of the psalmist:

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)

Dwelling with God is the vehement longing of the psalmist:

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!
My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the LORD.
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. ...
I had rather one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.
I had rather lie at the threshold of the house of God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked. (Ps. 84:1–2, 10)

The extraordinary character of this desire for God and his presence is brought out by the strong words used to translate it, such words as yearn, pine, and cry out. The beauty of the passages in which these longings are expressed merit careful meditation. To quote just two:

As the hind longs for the running waters,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
Athirst is my soul for God, the living God.
When shall I go and behold the face of God? (Ps. 42:1–2)

O God, you are my God whom I seek;
for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth,
parched, lifeless, and without water.
Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary
to see your power and glory,
for your kindness is greater than life. (Ps. 63:1–3)

“Only In God is My Soul at Rest”

The longing of the Hebrew is to rest and delight in the divine presence. This is another persistent theme of the Old Testament’s preparation for the revelation of the divine indwelling. Man is present, intimately present, to that in which he fully rests. He is present, too, in a vital way to that in which he fully delights. Thus the psalmist invites all to take refuge in the Lord that they might be glad and exult in him, for he is joy to those who love him (Ps. 5:11).

Even a man who has sinned grievously can regain the presence of God and enjoy his Savior:

Cast me not out from your presence,
and your holy spirit take not from me.
Give me back the joy of your salvation
and a willing spirit sustain in me. (Ps. 51:11–12)

We may be tempted to see an implicit recognition of the divine presence in the soul contained in the last phrase, since to sustain man's spirit within him God must be there. Yet, while this inference is valid, we cannot conclude for certain that the psalmist was thinking of it.

The communication between God and the soul is brought out in all of its rich personal relationships under the images of the well spread banquet, exultation, night watching, winged protection, a clinging fast (Ps. 63:5–8). And this delightful rest in God, this joyful closeness to him is to be man's lot forever:

You will show me the path to life,
fullness of joys in your presence,
the delights at your right hand forever. (Ps. 16:11)

We are surely now less than a step away from the indwelling presence and its beatifying consequences:

The just live forever, and in the LORD is their recompense,
and the thought of them is with the Most High.
Therefore shall they receive the splendid crown,
the beauteous diadem, from the hand of the LORD—
for he shall shelter them with his right hand. (Wis. 5:15–16)

If man's joy is in the Lord God, if he is destined to possess a life of delights in the divine presence, if his reward is to live in the Lord and thus have his crown forever, it follows that man's heart has only one goal, one destination, one resting place—"Only in God is my soul at rest; from him comes my salvation" (Ps. 62:1). The absoluteness of this statement is striking. Even shocking. To say *in God only* is man's rest is to say that the human heart is weary and disturbed and discontent until it dwells somehow in its Creator. Nothing on earth can satisfy or calm it. Nothing. Perhaps this is why St. Paul will later admonish us to "rejoice *in the Lord* always" (Phil. 4:4) and the Master himself will say "these things I have spoken to you that *my* joy may be *in you*, and that your joy may be *full*" (John 15:11).

We are then, in this yearning of the soul for rest in the divine presence, at the threshold of the new dispensation and its revelation of God's familiarity with man. We cannot say that the Old Testament indicates an appreciation of an indwelling presence. But we can say that the themes we have looked at—the omnipresence of God, his love and abiding presence with his people, his fatherly closeness to men and women, his call to a relationship of intimate mutual love, and their longing for his presence—prepared the Hebrew mind and heart to accept this revelation and to expect that the next step in the divine condescension would be some more intimate union.

The New Revelation: In Him We Have Our Being

Yet the new revelation of the Gospel tells of an intimacy deeper than anyone could have imagined. God is still near, to be sure, but so near that he is within. He now is given to the human person. He abides, dwells, inhabits the temple that man and the Church have become.

As we saw in our study of the Old Testament, the ancient Hebrew was keenly aware of the divine immensity pervading all things from the very heights of heaven to the inner workings within his mother's life-giving womb. In a masterful discourse directed to men of another cultural world, the Athenians, St. Paul presents this same truth:

So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'"

This last remark of the apostle, "in him we live and move and have our being," bespeaks the natural divine presence to creation—God's natural presence in all things. By his divine activity he is closer to us than the very air we breathe. This truth was well expressed by Pope St. Gregory the Great (d. 604) over thirteen centuries ago. God, he said, is

within all things, outside of all things, above them all, below them all. He is above by power, below by sustenance, exterior by magnitude, interior by penetration. On high ruling, below containing, externally surrounding, internally penetrating. He is not above by one part of his substance, below by another, or outside by one part and inside by another. But wholly one and the same, everywhere sustaining by presiding and presiding by sustaining just as he penetrates by surrounding and surrounds by penetrating. ... Within he penetrates without being diminished,

without he surrounds without being extended. He is therefore, both above and below without being confined in a place. He is rich without breadth. He is fine without loss.³

From all this, then, it follows that if a speck of dust lies on the desk before me, God must be wholly within it pouring out its entire "to be" at every moment. If there is a tree on the lawn outside my window, he must at every moment utterly penetrate its every cell or it would immediately vanish into its native nothingness. If there is a star a billion light years from my office—and there are billions of them—the divine power must constantly pervade and pour out its flowing existence. If there is a sinner down the street blaspheming his Maker, that Maker must be in the sinner providing his being and life and breath.

The relation of creation to Creator is quite unlike that of watch to watchmaker. In the latter case the craftsman can make his watch, wind it up, and then die—the watch will continue to be and to run. In the former case, the Creator must at every moment conserve his creature with a continuing creation and provide for its activity with a primal concurrence. God must be utterly everywhere.

Now, if this be so, how can Jesus say that if a man fulfills certain conditions, God will come to that man, as he does in John 14:23? Ordinarily, we do not come to where we are. Yet Jesus says that he and his Father come to a lover but not to a sinner. How do they come? What is this abode they promise to make in the lover? What is new in this presence of God?

We must first grasp the deep differences between a local, spatial, material presence of one body to another on the one hand and a know-loving-enjoying presence of person-friends on the other. There is an intimacy and closeness in the latter that is completely lacking in the former and cannot be supplied by it. Now it so happens, interestingly enough, that the New Testament revelation repeatedly links the interpersonal relationships of loving, knowing, and delighting to the new and special abiding of the Trinity in the hearts of certain men.

If anything is obvious in Jesus' revelation of the divine inhabitation, if anything is crucial to the whole mystery, it is love—love for God primarily, but even love for neighbor. The revelation of Jesus is striking: "If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to dwell with you forever, the Spirit of truth" (John 14:15–17). Consider what is being said: *If* you love Jesus, he will ask the Father to send the Spirit to *dwell* with you forever. This Advocate has always been in a man, but now he will *dwell*, with all the interpersonal overtones the word carries with it. Moreover, this love is mutual: "If anyone love me ... my Father will love him." And the result is the same—the Father, Son, and Spirit, "will come to him *and make our abode with him*" (John 14:23).

3 *Morals on the Book of Job*, Bk. 2, Chap. 12, in *Morals on the Book of Job*, 3 vols., trans. and ed. James Bliss (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1844–1850).

To Abide in Love

When St. John comes to write his first letter, he does not forget the condition of the divine inhabitation he learned from his Master's lips. The doctrine is the same:

And we have come to know, and have believed, the love that God has in our behalf. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. (1 John 4:16)

Now the mystery is seen to be so wrapped up in love that the beloved disciple introduces it with a charming yet profound one-word definition of the dweller: God is love. He tells us, too, that so marvelous, so intimate is this abiding that not only is God in man but man is also in God. He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. The mystery is not only an indwelling, it is an *inter-indwelling*, a mutual indwelling. But what, then, does it mean to speak of the dwelling, abiding, coming of God? How do Father and Son come to a place in which they already are? In answering this question we must remember the context in which Jesus and the apostles were speaking. Distance or nearness to God for the Jews was not so much a spatial matter as it was a question of moral worthiness. For the Hebrew, God looked at the sinner from afar but he came close to the just. Hence, "distance" from God's presence is not a question of feet or miles, since God is absolutely everywhere; rather, that distance was measured in the personal relationship between God and man. When God leaves, it is a withdrawal of friendship. When he comes, it is an arrival of love, the personal intimacy of knowing affection. He is present in the sinner by omnipotence, but in the just he comes as supernatural lover.

The love is mutual, both ways: God for man and man for God. It is this two-way affection that makes the relationship a matter of supernatural friendship. Love is a condition that only a person can fulfill. Because the Spirit is given under the conditions of love and obedience, our texts suggest that this new presence includes a *personal love relationship*. Already, then, we have an element that far transcends a natural omnipresence due to power and knowledge. God is in a tree, but he has no personal love relationship with that tree. Hence, with St. John of the Cross (d. 1591) we can observe:

The soul lives where it loves rather than in the body which it animates, because it has not its life in the body, but rather gives it to the body, and lives through love in that which it loves.⁴

The new love of inter-indwelling intimacy between God and man includes a new supernatural divine disclosure.

4 *Spiritual Canticle*, Stan. 8, 3. Text in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979)

I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate ... whom the world cannot receive because *it neither sees him nor knows him*. But *you shall know him, because he will dwell with you, and be in you*. (John 14:16–17)

In that day *you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you*. ... He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and *I will love him and manifest myself to him*. (John 14:20–21)

The just man, through the indwelling presence, possesses a special knowledge of God. By this mysterious presence of God within we know of the inter-indwelling with Christ and his Father. And we know of our sharing in that communion. The abiding guests somehow make their presence known to their living Temple, in which by the Spirit they have come to abide. “You shall know him *because* he will dwell with you and be in you” (John 14:17). This is a loving, tasting, intimate knowledge by what we may term a supernatural empathy.

Abiding in His Flesh and Blood

This mutual abiding of God and man is central, too, to the mystery of the Eucharist presented in the Scriptures. Here we see the intimate connection between the abiding presence of God promised by the incarnation and the mission given by Christ to his apostles at the Last Supper. In John’s Gospel, notice the striking similarities between Christ’s words about the divine indwelling and his description of the sacramental communion with his body and blood.

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you shall not have *life in you*. ... He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, *abides in me and I in him*. (John 6:54, 57)

What is this “life in you,” if it is not the knowing, loving, and enjoying of the Trinity attained by the gift of the Spirit? Jesus is saying that a man cannot live a trinitarian life unless he is nourished by the Eucharist. But how are we to understand this? How does the Eucharist cause the indwelling life?

God could have set up a divine economy of salvation in which the conferring of divine gifts would depend on the divine will alone. In this case an eternal fiat would have been sufficient to account for all that is. But the New Testament makes it clear that in our present order of salvation, supernatural gifts are dispensed through the human nature of Christ.

When Jesus enters Peter’s house and finds his mother-in-law lying ill with a fever, he does not merely will to cure with an inner act of volition. He chooses, rather, to show outwardly how this miraculous gift is somehow dependent, not

only on his human will but also on his human body: “He *touch*ed her hand, and the fever left her and she rose” (Matt. 8:15). The crowds soon learned the lesson of the divine plan. Luke summarizes their realization that the eternal Word chose to use his human nature as an instrument in effecting supernatural effects: “All the crowd were trying to touch him, for power went forth from him and healed all” (Luke 6:19).

A human nature of itself could not cure Peter’s mother-in-law; but joined to the divine in the person of the Word, it can and does produce supernatural effects—miracles, charisms, grace. The fathers were aware of this causality and among the examples they used to illustrate it was the vivid image of burning coal. Just as the fire in a red-hot piece of coal diffuses its heat through the coal, so does the divine nature of the Word diffuse its miraculous and grace-giving power through his human body and soul.

If, then, all graces in our supernatural economy come through the God-man, it follows that the indwelling grace also comes through him. And if we receive this same God-man, human nature as well as divine, in the Eucharist, it further follows that this Eucharist nourishes the indwelling. Such seems to be the very thought of Jesus himself. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, *abides in me and I in him.*”

The abiding he is talking about is more than sacramental. It is indwelling. We have two reasons for this interpretation. First, the word “abiding” indicates some sort of permanent duration, and yet the sacramental presence is transitory, lasting as long as the sacramental species of bread and wine remain. The sense of Jesus seems instead to be: “If you eat my flesh and drink my blood, I will be in you not only at that moment, but more. I will dwell in you abidingly—that is, I will live permanently in you as a result of your sacramental nourishment.

Our second reason for this interpretation is the very wording of the verse. It is a description of indwelling. The same St. John who reports the indwelling mystery in his Gospel and in his first epistle uses here the same expression:

Abide in me and I in you. ... He who *abides in me, and I in him,*
he bears much fruit. (John 15:4-5)

He who abides in love *abides in God and God in him.* (1 John
4:16)

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, *abides in me and I in
him.* (John 6:54)

It looks very much as though Christ is speaking of the indwelling presence in each case. Further, Christ says that a man cannot live the indwelling mystery if he culpably neglects the Eucharist: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you” (John 6:57). And again, what is this

life? Nothing other than knowing, loving, and enjoying the Trinity. Without the Eucharist, the sacrament of his body and blood given to his Church, the indwelling trinitarian life cannot be otherwise sustained and nourished.

The Joy in the Temple-Soul

Christ gives as the reason for the revelation of the indwelling mystery our mutual delight in God. "These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made in full" (John 15:11). We are perhaps not straining the text to see the expression, "that *my* joy may be *in you*," as probably meaning that the very joy of Jesus also indwells—for God is joy just as he is love. In any event, the verse plainly teaches that to have Jesus abiding in the soul through love is a completely delightful situation: "that your joy may be *full*."

St. Peter, too, relates the experience of God within to our mystery:

Crave as newborn babes, pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow to salvation; if, indeed, you have tasted that the Lord is sweet. Draw near to him, a living stone, rejected indeed by men but chosen and honored by God. Be yourselves as living stones, built thereon into a spiritual house. (1 Pet. 2:2–5)

According to Peter, neophytes in the faith are to crave for spiritual milk—that is, suitable food for their souls, a reference to both the Word of God and the Eucharist. The Greek word for "if" (*ei*) can mean not only "if" but also "since" or "because." The causal meaning is preferable here, for Peter is saying that since these new Christians have tasted how sweet the Lord is, they are all the more to yearn after him and his truth.

Tasting the goodness of a thing can be done only by the experience of it through some sort of contact, the kind of contact that brings the thing tasted within the taster. Hence, when Peter speaks of the just man as tasting the sweetness of the Lord, he is implying an indwelling experience, a delight found in the Lord within. St. Paul likewise speaks of a similar thought often, drawing on the language of the psalms: "Rejoice *in the Lord* always" (Phil. 4:4; Pss. 33:1; 97:12).

Peter likewise refers directly to the indwelling mystery itself when he speaks of the faithful as "a spiritual house," a clear image of the Temple, the privileged habitation of God in the Old Testament. This concept is closely akin to that of Paul when he refers to the faithful collectively as a Temple: "Do you not know that you are the Temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16).

So intimate are the interpersonal relations of knowing, loving, and enjoying in the new revelation that the temple-soul belongs to the abiding Trinity in such a way that it no longer belongs to itself.

Or do you not know that your members are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, who you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought at a great price. Glorify God and bear him in your body. (1 Cor. 6:19–20)

God has purchased this temple-soul by his own blood; it belongs to him alone as his own delightful dwelling. His love for this soul must be inconceivable for he has paid an almost incredible price for it. It is his. Yet at the same time, and even more inconceivably, he is *its* possession. God belongs to man.

Over and over in the New Testament, words are used to describe the divine inhabitation that imply a bestowal of possession rights. Through the *giving* of the Spirit, man somehow owns the Spirit and can enjoy the Spirit.

Therefore, he who rejects these things rejects not man but God, who has also *given* his Holy Spirit to us. (1 Thess. 4:8)

And hope does not disappoint, because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been *given* to us. (Rom. 5:5)

And what agreement has the Temple of God with idols? For you are the Temple of the living God, as God says, “I will dwell and move among them, I will be their God and they shall be my people.” (2 Cor. 6:16)

Redemption and Divine Possession

In our third text, St. Paul explicitly connects dwelling with possession. To appreciate fully Paul’s idea we should recall the two Old Testament texts he is citing. He draws on texts from both the Law and the prophets. He cites first Ezekiel, where God is telling his people that he will make an everlasting covenant of peace with them, that he will multiply them, and place his sanctuary among them forever. God then declares through the prophet: “My dwelling shall be with them; I will be their God and they shall be my people” (Ezek. 37:27). Paul also refers to a text from Leviticus, in which God is likewise speaking of his covenant, of making his people numerous, and of establishing his dwelling among them. He continues: “Ever present in your midst, I will be your God and you will be my people” (Lev. 26:12).

Paul sees a connection in each of these texts between God’s dwelling among his people and the mutual possession one of the other. Because God will dwell with them, he will be theirs and they will be his. Paul amplifies and clarifies the meaning of the Old Testament revelation. God not only dwells among his people. He is in them. They are a Temple, a Temple of a God who is not inert, static, weak, but rather living, dynamic, powerful. They are, therefore, sacred and possessed of a great dignity.

Moreover, for Paul the soul is sealed with the Spirit, indicating that the possessive union is so close that the divine somehow impresses itself into the human:

And in him you too, when you had heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, and believed in it, were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance, for a *redemption of possession* (*apolytrōsin tēs peripoiēseōs*), for the praise of his glory. (Eph. 1:13–14)

The “redemption of possession” may refer, I believe, to the mutual possession resulting from the donation of the Spirit. God possesses man, as Paul indicates (“You are not your own” 1 Cor. 6:19), as a result of the redemption and divine indwelling. Man, in turn possesses God because the Spirit is given to him (Rom. 5:5). This interpretation fits well with John’s description of the result of love: God is in man and man is in God (1 John 4:16).

“For the praise of his glory” indicates the final cause, the motive of the redemption and the mission of the Spirit into the hearts of men. God must be the end of all things, and so the divine habitation is a fact in order that the great goodness and good greatness of God may be honored and loved forever. Such should be the purpose, too, of man’s every act, a mandate that flows from the believer’s identity as a Temple of God. “Whether you eat or drink or do anything else, do all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

The mutuality of interpersonal intimacy—knowing, loving, enjoying, possessing—leads understandably and beautifully to the concept of inter-indwelling. This doctrine is indeed beautiful, since the interpersonal relationships so implicated in our mystery are mutual—God knows, loves, and enjoys us and we, in turn, know, love, and enjoy him.

Transfiguring Consummation

What we see in the pages of sacred Scripture is the final development or fulfillment of a pattern of an astonishing divine-human intimacy. Though shrouded still in deep mystery, the divine indwelling means interpersonal familiarity and intimacy based on a real inhabiting.

And what we have seen is that the new revelation of Jesus Christ must be understood and tasted in the light and savor of the old. If anything at all clearly emerges from our Old Testament study of the Lord God’s intentions toward his people, it is precisely this same interpersonal familiarity and intimacy—just a step short, however, of the inter-indwelling made possible by Christ. With the new revelation comes new love, new knowledge, new delight, inter-abiding, familial adoption and mutual possession.

And the New Testament suggests, however briefly, something of the glorious final outcome of divine inhabitation, when the abiding guests shall be seen face

to face. We shall rise in glorious bodies patterned after that of Christ himself because of the Spirit abiding within (Rom. 8:11). We are destined to be forever in the presence of the Father and to share in the very trinitarian life. There are many mansions in this house of the Father, and the Son has gone to prepare places for his own, so that where he is they also may be. This Son has already prayed, "Father I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me." And he has promised that the good and faithful servants will enter into the very joy of their master (John 14:2-3; 17:24; Matt. 25:21).

But this is no ordinary joy. This is an immersion in Beauty, an enthrallment with the Father seen face to face. "Eternal life is this: to know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). For the Hebrew, "to know" was no mere intellectual matter. It was a meeting with a person, an encounter. A man "knew" his wife in sexual intercourse. Eternal life is a deep drinking of the beauty of the Lord. But this is, of course, through a knowing, even an intellectual knowing.

Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror, but then we shall be seeing face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect, but then I shall know as fully as I am known. (1 Cor. 13:12)

What we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is that when it is revealed we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is. (1 John 3:2)

The throne of God and the Lamb will be in its place in the city; his servants will worship him; they will see him face to face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. It will never be night again and they will not need lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will be shining on them. They will reign forever and ever. (Rev. 22:3-5)

There is no victory like the victory over death, no triumph like the triumph of the resurrection. "Death is swallowed up in victory," shouts St. Paul. "Death, where is your victory? Death where is your sting? ... Let us thank God for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

The Temple that we are is to be transfigured in body as well as in soul, that it might become at last a worthy habitation for the divine fire within. The transfiguration of the Temple is modeled after the very pattern of the risen Lord. The risen Lord remains the cornerstone of the spiritual house. This Jesus "will transfigure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). The transformation of the Temple is a resurrection patterned after that of Christ Jesus.

It is a glorification of our bodies sharing in that of the Lord who, on the mount and in the presence of his disciples was transfigured.

By some mysterious power the abiding Spirit will so transfigure our mortal Temple that it will shed the imperfections of its earthly state and become a worthy eternal habitation of the most sacred God. In the fullest sense we can apply to the transformed elect the praise of the Lord God directed to his people.

You grew more and more beautiful. ... The fame of your beauty spread through the nations, since it was perfect, because I had clothed you with my own splendor. (Ezek. 16:13–14).

So marvelous is this final glorification of God's sons that St. Paul presents the material universe as yearning for its completion as we groan in our bodies, waiting to be set free (Rom. 8:19–23).

If the glorification of the earth is the result of its orientation to man, and if the transfiguration of man is due to his immersion in the beauty of indwelling Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it follows that the final splendor of the whole universe is a consequence of the trinitarian dwelling in man, the pinnacle of visible creation.