

TO SEE WHERE GOD DWELLS: The Tabernacle, the Temple, and the Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition

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Scholars have long noted that the priestly instructions concerning the construction of the Tabernacle exceed the bounds of what would be ordinarily expected. The sheer volume of detail that is lavished on this building is uncommon for the priestly writer. Generally, he is prolix only when a theme is being introduced for the first time; should a return to the theme be warranted, he is more than capable of abbreviation.¹

This general pattern of composition is not followed in regard to the Tabernacle. Especially striking is the tendency to repeat the list of appurtenances that are found within the Tabernacle (Exod. 30:26–30; 31:7–11; 35:11–19; 39:33–41; 40:2–15; 40:18–33). Six times these items are listed; the final three are perhaps most striking because they occur one right after the other. Indeed, one could say that the account of the Tabernacle ends with a concatenation of three lists of the materials for the Tabernacle and includes only enough extraneous material to keep the thread of a narrative from disappearing altogether.

As Menahem Haran has remarked, “The priestly writers find [this] subject so fascinating that ... [they are] prompted to recapitulate the list of its appurtenances time and again. Their tendency to indulge in technicalities and stereotyped repetitions has here reached its furthest limits.”² I suggest that this is because the Tabernacle furniture was understood as possessing something of the very being of the God of Israel. As such, it bears careful and repeated repetition whenever the occasion arises, not unlike the piling of divine epithets in a psalm of praise or descriptions of the beloved that flow from the pen of the lover. While Mesopotamian

* This essay was first given as a paper at the Ninth Orion Symposium at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel (“Text, Thought, and Practice in Qumran and Early Christianity”). A variant form of this essay will appear in the conference proceedings.

1 Compare, for example, the law regarding how to offer the sin and holocaust offerings in Lev. 5:8–9, 10a; the former law is long and detailed because none of the previous chapters have dealt with this type of offering; the latter is abbreviated because a law already exists to which it can refer (Lev. 1:14–17).

2 Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 149.

scribes could mark temple accessories as divine by using the cuneiform *dingir* sign,³ the Bible could indicate this by way of repetition.

I cannot consider all of the evidence from the biblical period, though some background will be necessary. My essay concerns the role that the Temple and its furniture assume in the Second Temple period (roughly 520 B.C. to 70 A.D.) and beyond. I hope to show the following: First, that the furniture of the Temple was treated as quasi-divine in both literary and iconographic sources during the Second Temple period; second, that the exalted estimation of these pieces of furniture made them dangerous to look at but at the same time, quite paradoxically, desirous or even compulsory to contemplate; third, that the impossibility of dividing with precision the house of God from the being of God led the early Christians to adopt this Jewish theologoumenon as a means of clarifying how it was that Jesus could be both God and man. Finally, I want to suggest how this Jewish tradition came to have a formative influence on the rise of Christian mysticism.

The Ark and the Realism of the Bible's Liturgical Language

Anyone who has worked on the problem of the cult in the Bible knows that there is a highly realistic quality to the liturgical language used therein. The Temple is God's home and hence the spot where he dwells among men. In order to breathe life into this belief, the Bible provides legislation for how to prepare the home for God's dramatic entrance, how to provide God with food in a way that befits his dignity, and finally, how to keep his home clean so that he will remain there and offer his blessings to the worshipers and pilgrims who desire to revere him.⁴ Not unlike kings portrayed in other ancient Near Eastern literatures, the biblical king of kings will, from time to time, make a personal appearance. And, like other devout subjects of the imperial realm, Israelites are urged to appear before him periodically so as to demonstrate their fealty (Exod. 23:17 and parallels).⁵

3 On the Mesopotamian evidence, see below. The *dingir* sign is the cuneiform ideogram that marks a person or object as divine.

4 The best account of the "real presence" of God in the Tabernacle is that of Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*. For a fine treatment of the theme in Mesopotamia, see the classic essay of A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Care and Feeding of the Gods," in *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964), 183–198. On the statue itself, Elko Matsushima writes: "These statues played a central role in many important rituals and religious ceremonies in the temple area and sometimes even outside the temple. The cult statue of the god was fully identified with the god in question and was considered by the worshippers to be actually a living being, able to do whatever a human being does, for example, sleep, wake, or eat, even though the statue was always motionless and dumb." "Divine Statues in Ancient Mesopotamia: Their Fashioning and Clothing and their Interaction with the Society," in Elko Matsushima, ed., *Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the First Colloquium on the Ancient Near East—The City and its Life, Held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo), March 20–22, 1992* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1993), 209.

5 An appearance before a king was a sign of beatitude and favor. This point is driven home in the

This theophanic aspect is most vividly brought to light in the laws for the pilgrimage festivals. According to Exodus 23:17 and its parallels, Israelites must appear three times a year at the Temple in order “to see the face of the LORD.” As noted already by Samuel David Luzzatto in his commentary on Isaiah, but seconded by Abraham Geiger, August Dillman, and most moderns, the decision of the Masoretic Hebrew text to vocalize the verbal stem *ra’ah* as a *niphal* (“to present oneself [before the face of the LORD]”) is not likely the original reading.⁶

The most likely reading of this verse is that the Israelites must come “to see the face of the Sovereign” three times a year. But having made the case for such a reading we have created a new problem. If the command demands that Israel “see the face of God,” how was that command fulfilled? The dramatic theophany that Israel was witness to at the completion of the Tabernacle (Exod. 40:34–35) was certainly not standard fare at every pilgrimage festival. What exactly did later pilgrims see when they ascended the mountain of the LORD?

The most obvious answer would be the Ark. As scholars have long noted, the Ark is regularly identified with the LORD’s presence and at one time in its history was the subject of ceremonial processions. This is certainly implied by the liturgical refrain of Numbers 10:35–36. When the Ark was to set out, Moses would say:

Advance, O LORD!

May your enemies be scattered,

story of Absalom’s banishment from the court of his father, King David. Begrudgingly David accedes to Joab’s plea to normalize relations and allows Absalom to return. Nevertheless, David lets Absalom know that things are still not well by telling Joab: “Let Absalom return to his house; but *my face let him not see*. So Absalom returned to his house, but the face of the king he did not see” (2 Sam. 14:24). The expression, “my face let him not see,” uses the exact same idiom as that found in Exod. 23:17. In Akkadian texts as well, the idiom *amaru pani*, “to see the face of PN,” means to encounter either the king or the god in a face-to-face fashion. See Robert D. Biggs, ed., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, 21 vols. (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1964–2006), vol. 1, A, part 2:21–22. (Hereafter, *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*.) In the case of an audience with the god, the idiom refers to beholding the cult statue.

- 6 See Luzzatto, *Sefer Yeshayahu* [The Book of Isaiah] (Padua: 1855) on Isa. 1:12. Geiger, *Ha-Miqra’ we-turgemav* [The Bible and its Translations] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1949), 218–19; August Dillmann, *Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus* [The Books of Exodus and Leviticus] (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1897), 276. Luzzatto notes the following problems: First, nowhere in the Bible do we find the expected combination of the passive stem “to appear” with an indirect object (*lipne YHWH*); rather this passive stem is somewhat anomalously conjoined to a direct object (*et pene YHWH* or *pene YHWH*). And, more significantly, in every text where the context is some sort of personal appearance—with the exception of those involving God—we invariably find the infinitival form of the N-stem “to appear” spelled with a *heb* after the *lamedh* (for example, in 2 Sam. 17:17 or 1 Kings 18:2). But in Isa. 1:12, Exod. 34:24, and Deut. 31:11, texts that concern coming to the Temple, we find the infinitive spelled without the *heb*. Since the infinitive of N-stem is regularly spelled in a *plene* fashion in biblical texts and only in rabbinic Hebrew do we find regular elision of the intervocalic *heb*, the simplest solution is to assume that the Masoretes have wrongly vocalized these texts. And if these texts have been wrongly vocalized then there is a high probability that Exod. 23:17 has been as well.

And may your foes flee before you!

And when it halted he would say:

Return, O LORD,
Unto the ten thousands of Israel!

A similar identification of the Ark with the being of God is presumed by the entrance liturgy of Psalm 24:7–10, “O gates, lift up your heads! Up high, you everlasting doors, so that the King of glory may come in.” According to Frank Moore Cross, this portion of Psalm 24 is “an antiphonal liturgy used in the autumn festival ... [and it] had its origin in the procession of the Ark to the sanctuary at its founding, celebrated annually in the cult of Solomon and perhaps even of David. On this there can be little disagreement.”⁷

The close nexus between God and this piece of cultic furniture is nicely illustrated in the story of the battle with the Philistines that would eventually lead to the Ark’s capture. Having been routed badly in an initial exchange of hostilities, the Israelite militia regrouped to prepare a new strategy. “Let us fetch the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD from Shiloh,” they decided, “[for] thus he will be present among us and will deliver us from the hands of our enemies” (1 Sam. 4:3). The response to the Ark’s entry into the Israelite war camp reveals how close was the attachment of God’s being to this piece of furniture.

When the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD entered the camp, all Israel burst into a great shout, so that the earth resounded. The Philistines heard the noise of the shouting and they wondered, “Why is there such a loud shouting in the camp of the Hebrews?” And when they learned that the Ark of the LORD had come to the camp, the Philistines were frightened; for they said, “*God has come to the camp.*” And they cried, “Woe to us! Nothing like this has ever happened before. Woe to us! Who will save us from the power of this mighty God?” (1 Sam. 4:5–8).

The highly realistic tenor of the language here must not be overlooked. Though God is not fully reducible to or coterminous with the Ark, his presence is nevertheless so closely interwoven with it that one can point to the Ark as it approaches in military processions and say, “here comes God.”

This entire scene—which demonstrates the rash and ill-considered efforts of the Israelites to misuse this divine image—must be contrasted with the story of David’s ignominious retreat from Jerusalem in the wake of Absalom’s revolt. As David departs, Zadok appeared along with a group of Levites bearing the

⁷ See his *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1973), 93.

Ark. Given that the odds in favor of David's reclaiming his kingdom did not seem high, Zadok drew the only possible conclusion: David's future would depend on divine assistance and the easiest way to assure this would be to bring God along for the departure.⁸ David, however, will have none of this. Not because he views such a stratagem as rooted in a "magical" concept of the Ark. Quite the reverse, David believes himself to be in the process of paying the price for past sins (2 Sam. 12:7–15) and willingly takes upon himself this period of exile from his city and his God. His own words are most revealing: "Take the Ark of God back to the city. If I find favor with the LORD, he will bring me back and *let me see it and its abode*" (2 Sam. 15:25–26). Favor with the deity will be symbolized not only by restoration to his kingdom but by being granted the privilege of *seeing* the Ark.

"Seeing" the Deity

This high valuation on seeing the representation of the deity should not surprise anyone familiar with ancient Near Eastern practice. As early as 1924, and even before, Friedrich Nötscher⁹ argued that references to seeing God in pilgrimage laws and the Psalter were to be understood against the background of the act of displaying the statue of the god or goddess in non-Israelite cultures. Although Israel's cultic life was without a direct and immediate representation of God himself, the Ark and other pieces of the Tabernacle furniture supplied an almost exact parallel.

No better witness to the close nexus between Temple appurtenance and the presence of God could be seen than in the priestly rules about how to disassemble the Tabernacle prior to the Israelite camp's moving to a new destination in the wilderness. The rules are carefully laid out with one goal in mind: the prevention of inappropriate Levitical groups from laying eyes on the holiest parts of this structure. "Let not [the Kohathites] go inside and witness the dismantling of the sanctuary," the writer warns, "lest they die" (Num. 4:20).¹⁰ In this text, seeing the furniture is analogous to seeing the very being of God, which likewise would result in death.¹¹

8 On the theological and political importance of the cult-image to the identity of a people, see Patrick D. Miller and J. J. M. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1977).

9 In his book *"Das Angesicht Gottes Schauen": Nach Biblischer und Babylonischer Auffassung* [Seeing the Face of God: Biblical and Babylonian Perspectives] (Würzburg: Becker, 1924).

10 In a representation of a procession from Palmyra, Syria, in the first century A.D., a portable sanctuary is borne by a camel that is covered by a piece of red cloth. The worshippers greet the artifact with upraised arms as though the deity himself sat astride the camel. See Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 326.

11 See, for instance, Exod. 33:20. In one rabbinic tradition, this law was promulgated because the Kohathite clan was in the habit of "feasting their eyes on the *Shekinah*," who dwelt among the furniture. See *Bemidbar Rabbah* [Midrash on Numbers] 5:9. (For an English translation, see H.

Finally, I might mention Psalm 48, a text that describes in considerable detail the circumambulation of the city of Jerusalem after the destruction of enemy forces that foolishly attempted to overtake it. Having exhorted the inhabitants of Zion and the surrounding province of Judah to stream forth in pilgrimage to celebrate this event, the Psalmist urges them to make a close visual inspection of the architecture of the city. "Walk about Zion, go round about her," he urges, "number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels; that you may tell the next generation that *this is God*, our God forever and ever" (Ps. 48:13–15).

It is the last line here that should occasion some surprise. Here our author seems to take his paean of praise to unimaginable heights. He claims that these buildings testify to the very being of God. Amos Hacham puts his finger directly on the pulse of this text when he writes, "[Regarding the phrase] 'this is God,' the word 'this' [zeh] is similar in meaning to 'look here.' It is an expression of palpable excitement and its point is that the one who sees the Temple in its splendor and glory feels within himself as if he saw, face to face, the glory (*kavod*) of the LORD. He cries, 'this [this building] is God, our God.'"¹²

I suggest that this language is not solely a result of the excess or superfluity that often characterizes the genre of praise (although obviously this is a factor). Rather, these texts exhibit ancient Israel's deeply held view that God really dwelt in the Temple and that all the pieces of that building shared, in some fashion, in his tangible and visible presence. To use a modern metaphor, one might imagine the Temple as a giant electrical generating plant that powered the land of Israel. In its core was a nuclear reactor in which the radioactive rods emitted divine energy that was absorbed by the entire infrastructure of the building. Though the glow was brightest at the center, even the periphery had to be entered and handled with caution. Not even the thickest cement wall or lead surface could prevent these divine energies from overwhelming their boundaries and radiating divinity upon whatever stood in its vicinity.

The Angelic Host and the Aura of God in his Temple

In understanding this biblical motif, Mesopotamian texts provide a very close parallel. "The aura of a god in his temple," W. G. Lambert writes, "could so attach itself to the temple, or architectural parts of it in particular, also to the implements he used, and to the city which housed the temple, in such a way that these various things also became gods and received offerings as a mark of the fact."¹³

Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 vols. [London: Soncino, 1983]). This illustrates nicely the attraction that the Temple appurtenances were felt to possess as well as their attendant danger.

12 *Sefer Tehillim* [Book of Psalms], Daat Ha-Miqra (Jerusalem: Rav Kook, 1990), 278.

13 W. G. Lambert, "Ancient Mesopotamian Gods: Superstition, Philosophy, Theology," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 207 (1990): 129.

Not only was the statue of the god imbued with the veritable presence of the god it represented, but more remarkably, the divine aura was shared by even the furniture and other accessories dedicated to the temple.¹⁴ The whole building pulsed with the presence of the god—the structure of the temple itself literally shared in the presence of the divine.¹⁵

As we will see, this deeply rooted ancient Near Eastern tendency to link the appurtenances of the building to the central cultic image had a vibrant afterlife in post-biblical Judaism. But perhaps even at this point some examples would be in order. In the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*, from Qumran, there is regularly some confusion as to whether a particular title identifies the Holy One, the God of Israel, or one of his angelic host.¹⁶ Such syntactic difficulties are regular enough that one has a hard time imagining that it is the gulf of many centuries between composition and commentary that is creating the problem. The text itself seems to enjoy the confusion it creates, from time to time, between the two categories.

The most likely explanation for this phenomenon is to be found in the Bible itself. As James Kugel has explained, in the course of a theophany, the angel of the LORD will frequently fade into the person of God himself.

The fact that [this confusion occurs] in text after text (even if, after a time, it became conventional) suggests that there was something essential about this confusion. It represents the biblical authors' most realistic sense of the way things actually are. The spiritual is not something tidy and distinct, another order of being. Instead, it is perfectly capable of intruding into everyday reality, as if part of this world.¹⁷

14 Note the concluding observations of Gebhard Selz's remarkable essay, "The Holy Drum, the Spear, and the Harp: Towards an Understanding of the Problems of Deification in the Third Millennium Mesopotamia," in *Gods and their Representations*, Irving L. Finkel and Markham J. Geller, eds., Cuneiform Monographs 7 (Grönigen: Styx, 1997), 184: "A statue of a god was an independent entity, because it stood on a holy place, and had the name of a god, the appearance of a god, and so on. It was these qualities of a statue, including its partaking in certain rituals, which left no doubt that it was the god himself. *The same holds true for the 'cultic objects'; it is their function and their special attributes, including their participation in holy rites, which made them god-like.*" Emphasis added. Compare also the essay of K. van der Toorn, "Worshipping Stones: On the Deification of Cult Symbols," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 23 (1997): 1–14.

15 These Mesopotamian texts had a decisive grammatical advantage over their biblical brethren; they could mark the overflow of the divine energies by attaching a *dingir* sign to lists of temple furniture. See Selz, "The Holy Drum, the Spear, and the Harp," 176–179.

16 The text from Qumran includes a portrayal of a heavenly throne room and a liturgy of angels. See in particular the commentary of Carol Newsom on the seventh Sabbath Song in her *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition*, Harvard Semitic Studies 27 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 213–225. Note also her comment (at 24): "Many occurrences of *elohim* in the Shirot are ambiguous and might refer to God or to the angels."

17 James L. Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 36.

But it is not only the case that angels bleed into God and vice versa; the same syntactic difficulties attend the sanctuary as well. As Carol Newsom has argued, these thirteen songs are organized around the important seventh song.¹⁸ And, as in the two songs that flank this centerpiece (the sixth and seventh), the number seven is itself crucial to its compositional structure. The song opens with seven highly ornate exhortations to the angelic priesthood to commence their praise. Having done this, we move from voices of the angelic host to the sanctuary itself bursting into song.

[And along with the seven groups of angels who were exhorted to sing praise]¹⁹ let all the [foundations of the holy] of holies offer praise, the uplifting pillars of the supremely exalted abode, and all the corners of its structure. Sin[g praise] to Go[d who is dr]eadful in power[, all you spirits of knowledge and light] in order to [exa]lt together the splendidly shining firmament of [his] holy sanctuary. [Give praise to hi]m, O god-[like] spirits, in order to pr[aise for ever and e]ver the firmament of the upper[m]ost heaven, all [its] b[eams] and its walls, a[l]l its [for]m, the work of [its] struc[ture. The spir]its of holie[st] holiness, living god-like beings[, spir]its of [eter]nal holi[ness] above all the hol[y ones.²⁰

The building itself breaks into song, dramatically eclipsing the difference between the angelic host and the building in which they serve. Even more striking is how the text vacillates over just what precisely is the object of praise. With the angels, one is never in doubt that they are the ones who must offer praise. However, the divinized Temple not only offers praise, but itself becomes the object of praise. “Give praise to him, O god-like spirits,” the text exhorts, “in order to praise/confess (*le-hodot*) ... the firmament of the uppermost heaven, all its beams and walls.” Indeed the last sentence quoted above (“The spirits of holiest holiness.”) is difficult to parse grammatically. How exactly is it related to its immediate antecedent, that is, to the list of architectural features of the Temple? Newsom’s commentary is revealing:

The expression *ruhey qodesh qodashim* may mean either “most holy spirits ... or spirits of the holy of holies.” However the title is construed, these angelic spirits are in some way associated with the heavenly sanctuary which has just been described, either as

18 Newsom, *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*, 13–17.

19 The use of *hallelu* as an imperative call to praise marks the beginning, middle and end of the seventh song (see *4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* [4Q403] 1:30, 41 and 2:15). First the angels are called to offer praise, then the Temple itself, and finally, the chariots of the inner sanctum.

20 4Q403 1:41–45.

attendants or as the *animate spiritual substance of the heavenly Temple itself*.²¹

No matter which way we go with these two options we reach essentially the same destination. Either the Temple is such an overpoweringly holy structure that angelic spirits literally ooze from its various surfaces or those surfaces themselves slip into the realm of divine being itself. Hebrew constructions such as *elohim hayyim* ("the living God") that one would normally construe as divine titles now become attributes of the supernal Temple ("a living pulsating godlike [building]").

Although the end of the seventh song is fragmentary, enough remains for Newsom to conclude that the praise moves from the outer parts of the heavenly sanctuary to its inner sanctum and its furnishings. As such, the structure of this crucial middle song anticipates "to a certain extent the structure and content of the ninth through the thirteenth songs."²² And not surprisingly, in these latter songs the structural edifice of the supernal Temple again comes to life so as to voice its praise. Strikingly, Newsom notes, the thirteenth and final song appears to conclude with a systematic list of the contents and structures of the heavenly Temple.

That the Sabbath songs seem to feel no embarrassment about ascribing divine qualities to the Temple provides a striking piece of data against which we can contextualize how the Samaritan version of the Pentateuch and the Septuagint handle several texts in Exodus that speak of "seeing" God. We have already mentioned the command to visit Jerusalem during the three pilgrimage festivals in order to fulfill the obligation of "seeing the face of the Sovereign, יְהוָה." The Masoretes smoothed over this arresting phrase by rendering "to see" in the passive "to be seen/appear."

The Samaritan translation found another way around the problem. Building on the common confusion of the Hebrew letters *daleth* and *resh*, it read the line: "to see the presence of the Ark (reading *aron* in place of *adon*) of the LORD." Though correctly dismissed by text-critics as a secondary reading, it is an invaluable piece of information for the scholar of early biblical exegesis.²³ Minimally, this reading demonstrates that for at least one strand of ancient Judaism, seeing the Ark was a close substitute to seeing God himself. Maximally, it may provide us with a piece of indirect evidence that, in the Second Temple period, pieces of the Temple furniture were taken out of the building and displayed before the eyes of earnest pilgrims.²⁴

Though the Septuagint anticipates what the Masoretes will do with this verse by rendering the verb "to see" in the passive form, in a couple of other places

21 Newsom, *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*, 233. Emphasis added.

22 Newsom, *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*, 9.

23 The importance of this textual variant for the practices of Second Temple Judaism have already been noted by Israel Knohl, "Post-Biblical Sectarianism and the Priestly Schools," *Tarbiz* 60 (1991): 140–141.

24 See the argument of Israel Knohl below.

it replaces the difficult construction of “seeing God” with the notion of beholding the structure in which he dwells. Compare, for example, Exodus 25:8 where Moses is told that the entire purpose of building the Tabernacle is so “that I may dwell among [the people Israel].” The Septuagint replaces the idiom of dwelling with a reference to vision. Build the sanctuary, Israel is exhorted, “so that I may *be visible* among you.”

Similarly, in Exodus 24:9–11, where the Masoretic text declares that Moses and the select group that ascended to the top of Mount Sinai “saw the God of Israel,” the Septuagint introduces a rather significant qualification—“they saw *the place where* the God of Israel stood.”

If we skip ahead to the Book of Revelation, it is perhaps significant that when the Kingdom of God is to be revealed at the end of time and the appearance of God in his full glory would seem to be at hand, what is described is something not unlike what Moses must have beheld at Sinai:

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.” Then the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, singing, “We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth.” *Then God’s Temple in heaven was opened, and the Ark of his Covenant was seen within his Temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail* (Rev. 11:15–19).

The common denominator that binds all these examples together is that of gazing upon the architecture of the sanctuary as a fit replacement for seeing the face of God.

Pilgrimage and the Face of God

Turning to evidence from the post-biblical era, in Mishnah *Hagigah* (1:1),²⁵ we have a piece of *halakhah*, or Jewish legislation, concerning who must make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem:

25 The *Hagigah* (“The Festal Offering”) dates from about 200–220 A.D. For an English translation of the Mishnah, see Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933); Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1988).

All are subject to the command to appear [before the LORD] excepting a deaf-mute, an imbecile, a child, one of doubtful sex, one of double sex, women, slaves that have not been freed, a man that is lame or blind or sick or aged, and one that cannot go up [to Jerusalem] on his feet.

In the Tosefta,²⁶ we find a *baraita*, or oral-law tradition, that attempts to explain just how the various categories described are related to the biblical text which states simply that every male must go up to Jerusalem to see the face of God. According to Rabbi Yehudah (d. 219), “even the blind man [is exempt] because Scripture states that [every one of your males] must see [the face of God] (Exod. 23:17).”²⁷ The striking detail here, is the reading of *ra’ah* as a verb in the *qal* stem. This prompts the intervention of a rabbi who presumes that the verb should be read in the *niphal* and cites in his support 1 Samuel 1:22, the only text in the Bible where the *niphal* reading is unambiguous in regard to the pilgrimage to the Temple.²⁸ This unit of the Tosefta comes to a close with the notice that the sages were inclined to tip the scales of judgment in favor of Rabbi Yehudah’s rendering.

In addition to considering how the biblical text is used in relationship to several other rabbinic texts, Shlomoh Naeh has a very illuminating remark as to just what all of this might mean historically.

It is possible that the cause for the textual differences is not solely due to *tikkune soferim*²⁹ but is also rooted in historical practice. Perhaps what is seen here are two ancient customs or conceptualizations of the command to go up for pilgrimage and “see.” According to one, the pilgrims entered the Temple building and received the presence of the *Shekinah*; according to the other they were not authorized to enter the Temple proper but to bring a sacrifice and “appear” in the courtyard. A similar

26 A supplementary compilation of Jewish oral law, composed perhaps a generation after the Mishnah, in the late third century.

27 Tosefta *Hagigah* 1:1-2. For an English translation of the Tosefta, see Jacob Neusner, *The Tosefta in English*, 6 vols. in 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002).

28 I am not following the text as printed but rather the reconstruction of Shlomoh Naeh, “Ha-im em la-Massoret?” [Did the Tannaim Interpret the Script of the Torah Differently from the Authorized Reading?] *Tarbiz* 61 (1992): 413. What is remarkable here, as Naeh takes considerable care to point out, is that there is no discussion of a dispute between the *ketiv* and *qere*, that is, between what is written in the consonantal text and what is read in the Masoretic text. Rather the ambiguity of the consonantal text is the subject of dispute and Rabbi Yehudah believes that the simplest reading—the *qal*—has the added advantage of providing a scriptural support for a piece of Mishnaic legislation. Unless Israel is obligated “to see God,” how are we to understand the Mishnah’s exemption of the blind? Certainly the blind were able “to appear” before God if that is what the Torah demanded.

29 A quasi-technical term to refer to the “emendations of scribes.”

dispute regarding the participation of the gathered throng of pilgrims at the Temple liturgy during the festival existed between the Pharisee/Sages party and the various sects at the close of the Second Temple period (see Sussman and Knohl³⁰). It is likely that this dispute was a longstanding one inasmuch as it reflects two of the most fundamental positions regarding Temple worship and its place in the life of the community. It is possible that the Talmudic terminology *re'iyat panim* [seeing the face (of God)] and *re'iyat qorban* [appearing with a sacrifice] reflects these two variant conceptualizations.³¹

In a recent article, Israel Knohl has taken this idea of "seeing God" a step further. He begins with a citation of Mishnah *Kelim* (1:8–9):³²

The court of the priests is more holy (than the court of the Israelites) for the Israelites cannot enter therein except to fulfill sacrificial obligations such as the laying on of hands, slaughter, and hand waving. The area between the porch and the altar is more holy (than the court of the priests) for no priest who is blemished or has unkempt hair can enter therein.

These boundaries are transgressed during the pilgrimage festivals. First of all, the Temple vessels which normally belong solely to the inner sanctum move out to the courtyard, and the people who generally are restricted to the outer court can now move into the more sacred area in order to view the vessels.

How do we know that the vessels were displayed in this fashion? Here things are a bit more ambiguous and require some development. In Mishnah *Hagigah* (3:8), the question is asked: "How did they enter upon the cleansing of the Temple court? They immersed the vessels that were in the Temple and said to them: 'take care not to touch the table [or lamp] so as to render them unclean.'" ³³ This Mishnah is quite unclear about just what is meant. Both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds, however, provide a plausible context. They declare that it was customary on festival days to bring the table out of the Temple into the courtyard and to display it to the pilgrims.³⁴ As Knohl observes, this ritual is at variance with scriptural law.

30 Yaakov Sussman, "The History of the Halakhah and the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Tarbiz* 59 (1990): 65–68 and Knohl, "Post-Biblical Sectarism and the Priestly Schools."

31 Nach, "Ha-im em la-Massoret?" 417.

32 Knohl, "Post-Biblical Sectarism and the Priestly Schools." Mishnah *Kelim* [Vessels] comes from the sixth order of the Mishnas and concerns the cleanliness of the sacred vessels.

33 Mishnah *Hagigah* [The Festal Offering] comes from the second order of the Mishnah dealing with the Jewish feasts.

34 Jerusalem Talmud *Hagigah* [The Festal Offering] 3.8 (79d); Babylonian Talmud *Hagigah* 26b. For English translations of the two Talmuds, see Jacob Neusner, ed. *The Talmud of the Land*

For, according to Numbers 4:18–20, even the Levitical priests who had greater privileges than the laity to enter sacred space, put their lives at risk when they gazed upon the sacred furniture of the Tabernacle. Knohl's explanation of this problem is suggestive.

It seems to me that the sages departed from convention and permitted the display of the Temple furniture before the pilgrims so as to allow them to fulfill their obligation "to see the face." Or, to put it another way, the presentation of these holy items before the large assembly created the experience of a public theophany. The Israelites who had longed for the Temple courts and asked "when may I come to see the face of God," went up to the Temple at the pilgrimage feast and gazed upon the vessels of the Temple-service that were brought out of hiding. In this way their spiritual thirst was slaked and they fulfilled the commandment of the Torah that "three times a year each male must see the face of the Sovereign, the LORD, the God of Israel (Exod. 34:23)."³⁵

A Most Radical Form of Anthropomorphism

However we might wish to assess the historical problem as to whether the Temple appurtenances were put on display or not, we can certainly conclude that one significant strand of rabbinic literature assumes as much. And in doing so, these rabbinic texts involve themselves in a logical contradiction. On the one hand the furniture itself, owing to the divine power that was infused within them (see Num. 4:18–20), were extraordinarily dangerous. If persons without priestly status were to catch even a glimpse of them they would be struck dead.

As Daniel Schwartz has argued, one midrashic tradition employed this idea to explain how the Israelite armies in Numbers 31:6 were able to defeat the Midianites.³⁶ When the Midianites attacked Israel, Phinehas displayed the Ark before them and the Midianites, being unworthy of its sight, were instantly slain. A similar understanding is found in the Masoretic text of 1 Samuel 6:19, a text that appears secondary and probably reflects a late scribal attempt to bring the traditions of Numbers 4 into alignment with the care needed when taking the Ark into a public domain.³⁷ However that might be, the lesson is clear: the Ark is not

of Israel, 35 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982–1994); Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation*, 75 vols., Brown Judaic Studies (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1984–1995).

35 Knohl, "Post-Biblical Sectarianism and the Priestly Schools," 140–41.

36 Daniel Schwartz, "Viewing the Holy Utensils (P. Ox V, 840)," *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 155–56.

37 According to 1 Sam. 6:19, when the Philistines had tired of holding the Ark, they sent it back with the indemnity penalty of the notorious "golden hemorrhoids." But when the Ark had made

just a symbol for God; in some very real sense it is so closely linked to God that gazing indiscreetly upon it is an occasion for instant death.

Yet for all their cognizance of the dangers improper viewing of the ark posed for the Israelite community, the rabbis were content at times to ignore them altogether within the context of the religious festival. According to *Yoma*, the Babylonian Talmud's tractate on the Day of Atonement (54a):

[A] Rabbi Judah contrasted the following passages: "And the ends of the staves were seen" and it is written "but they could not be seen without" (1 Kings 8:8)—how is that possible?—They could be observed, but not actually seen. Thus was it also taught: "And the ends of the staves were seen." One might have assumed that they did not protrude from their place. To teach us [the fact] Scripture says: "And the staves were so long." One might assume that they tore the curtain and showed forth; to teach us [the fact] Scripture says: "They could not be seen without." How then? They pressed forth and protruded as the two breasts of a woman, as it is said: "My beloved is unto me as a bag of myrrh, that lieth betwixt my breasts" (Song 1:13).

[B] Rabbi Kattina said: Whenever Israel came up to the festival, the curtain would be removed for them and the cherubim were shown to them, whose bodies were intertwined with one another, and they would be thus addressed: Look! You are beloved before God as the love between man and woman.

This remarkable text engages in the most radical form of anthropomorphism. In the first unit [A] the Ark of the Covenant is imagined as the veritable body of God that beckons the Israelite forward through the power of erotic attraction. Only the veil prevents a full frontal view of a radically feminized form of the deity. Having quickened these carnal desires, the veil is thrown aside [B] so that the pilgrim might behold his God, here described not as an invisible being who sits upon the Ark ("enthroned above the cherubim" in biblical parlance) but rather as one of the cherubim themselves. God is, for the purposes of this text, this particular golden artifact. There is no danger in viewing the Godhead here; quite the contrary, this unveiling of the Godhead seems to be the central rite of the pilgrimage festival itself.

its way back to Beth-shemesh the local townsmen, according to the Masoretic text, made the mistake of gazing upon it. "[The LORD] struck at the men of Beth-shemesh," the text explains, "because they looked into the Ark of the LORD; He struck down seventy men among the people [and] fifty thousand men."

It is tempting to read this in parallel with a tradition found in the *Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael*.³⁸ In view of the command (Exod. 20:23) not to make “gods of silver or gods of gold” to stand “beside the LORD,” the *Mekilta* moves in a surprising direction. One might expect that the normal invective against idols would be standard here. And indeed the *Mekilta* begins its discussion of this verse with traditions precisely of this sort. But at the conclusion of its rather lengthy discussion of this verse, the *Mekilta* abruptly turns in another, quite surprising, direction.

The reference to “gods of silver and gods of gold” is no longer understood in terms of idolatrous images pure and simple. It now refers to aberrant means of producing the cherubim. Lest one presume to fashion them out of silver in place of gold, the Torah declares: “don’t make beside me gods of silver.” Moreover, should one entertain the idea of making four cherubim instead of two then he would commit the sin of making “gods of gold.” The turn taken by the *Mekilta* regarding the last phrase of the verse is most striking.

“[Gods of gold] do not make for yourselves.” This is written so that you would not think that because the Torah has given permission to make them for the Temple so I will make them for the synagogues and houses of study. Accordingly, the Torah teaches: “do not make [these gods of gold] for yourselves.”³⁹

Now admittedly in my translation, I have reconstructed in brackets the object of the verb “to make” in accord with the only possible antecedent provided by the biblical text—*elohe zahav*. One could, however, read the text as Rashi⁴⁰ does and supply a different object—the cherubim—so that there is no mistaking what is intended. I sincerely doubt whether the author of the unit in the *Mekilta* would reprove Rashi for this explanatory gloss. For certainly “*elohe zahav*” does not mean “God conceived of as a piece of gold”; that would be idolatry pure and simple. But it is striking, just the same, that the *Mekilta* is not as worried as Rashi seems to be about the ambiguity of the antecedent.

Indeed this whole unit of the *Mekilta* only works if we presume that the line between “a portion of God’s being represented in golden form” and a “god of gold” is a rather fine one.⁴¹ I see no reason why one could not gloss the turn taken by the *Mekilta* this way: “a golden object that partakes of the divine essence do not

38 A commentary on the book of Exodus. See *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, eds. Hayim S. Horowitz and Israel A. Rabin (Frankfurt: J. Kaufmann, 1931), 241.

39 *Mekilta* on Exod. 20:23.

40 The French rabbi and biblical interpreter (d. 1105). For the text and a translation see Abraham M. Silbermann, *Chumash with Rashi’s Commentary* (New York: Feldheim, 1934), 106a.

41 It offers an intriguing parallel, perhaps, to Rabbi Judah Ha-Levi’s somewhat apologetic reading of the sin of the golden calf (*The Kuzari* 1:92). Israel, he argued, was expecting Moses to bring down some sort of visible token toward which they could “direct their gaze during their devotions.” Israel’s problem, on this view, was not so much the act of venerating a material thing

make for yourselves [that is, to put in your synagogues]." The usage here is a prosaic adaptation of the more poetic language of the Sabbath Songs that did not shrink from describing the supernal Temple as *elohim hayyim* ("the living God").

This text comes tantalizingly close to making explicit what was implied by the Babylonian Talmud's *Yoma* (54a). The cherubim that have been placed in the Holy of Holies are, in some real sense, representations of God's true presence in the Temple. The historian of religion will wish to ask how different this is from the Mesopotamian practice of marking the divinity of temple furniture with the *dingir*-sign? Or, for that matter, from the words of the psalmist who exclaimed when gazing upon the architecture of Jerusalem: "This is God!" (Ps. 48:14).

Carrying the Table of the Presence

Perhaps most striking of all the examples is a tradition found in the Midrash *Mishle*, on the Book of Proverbs. Here the Israelite is defined as the individual who gazes upon the face of God.

The Queen of Sheba brought circumcised and uncircumcised persons before Solomon. They were of similar appearance, height, and dress. She said to him, "Distinguish for me the circumcised from the uncircumcised." Immediately Solomon gestured to the High Priest and he opened the Ark of the Covenant. Those who were circumcised bent over half-way but no more so that their faces might be filled with the radiance of the *Shekinah*. The uncircumcised promptly fell to the ground upon their faces. Solomon said to her, the former ones are the circumcised and the latter are the uncircumcised. She said how do you know this? He said to her, "Is it not written about Balaam, 'he who gazes upon the sight of the Almighty, [fallen (partly over) but with eyes unveiled]?' (Num. 24:4). Had he fallen completely to the ground, he would not have seen anything."⁴²

How then are we to understand this radical disjuncture between a highly-charged Ark of the Covenant that spells immediate death for anyone who would cast eyes upon it and the definition of an Israelite as one who can gaze directly at its center? Certainly Knohl's suggestion is appropriate here—namely, that during the pilgrimages, all Israel is temporarily raised to the status of priest so that they can behold the sacred furniture. Evidently, however, not all Second Temple circles were of one mind on this matter. As Knohl observes, Talmudic tradition has it that

as it was attributing "divine power to a creation of their own." In Judah Ha-Levi, *The Kuzari*, ed. Avraham Yaakov Finkel (Scranton, PA: Yeshivath Beth Moshe, 2000).

42 Burton L. Visotzky, ed. *Midrash Mishle: With Variant Readings and Commentary* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1989), 6.

the Sadducees and Boethusians opposed the display of Temple furniture before the laity. Confirmation of the historical accuracy of a charge such as this can be found in the Temple Scroll from Qumran that emphatically rules out the ritual act of carrying the Table of Presence from its home within the Temple-building itself.⁴³

Additional confirmation of the practice of displaying the furniture can be gathered from a puzzling piece of tradition found in *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 840. The text reads,

And having taken them he brought them into the place of purification and was walking in the Temple. And having approached, a certain Pharisee, a chief priest, whose name was Levi, joined them and said to the Savior: Who gave you permission to enter this place of purification and to see these holy vessels, when you have not washed yourself, nor have your disciples surely bathed their feet? But you, in a defiled state, have entered this Temple, which is a pure place that no one enters nor dares to view these holy vessels without having first washed themselves and changed their clothes.

And immediately the Savior stopped, and standing with his disciples answered: Are you then pure in your present state here in the Temple? And he replied to him: I am pure, for I have washed myself in the pool of David, and having descended by one staircase I came up by another; and I have put on white and pure clothes, and only then did I come and lay eyes on these holy vessels. The Savior answered him saying: Woe unto you, O blind one.⁴⁴

43 Within a list of the Temple appurtenances we read: "[... the altar of] incense; but the table ... shall not depart from the Temple. And its bowls shall be of pure gold." 11QTemple Scroll [11Q19], 3:10–12. Emphasis added.

44 This intriguing document is a fragment of a purported "gospel" that details a conversation between Jesus and a chief priest in the Temple. For the text and translation, see François Bovon, "Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840, Fragment of a Lost Gospel, Witness of an Early Christian Controversy over Purity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000): 705–728. Bovon makes a very strong case that the text should not be read as a window into the world of first century Palestine and hence another piece of information relevant to the quest for the historical Jesus. All of the pieces of this text fit better within the realm of the emerging second or third-century Church. Though I would agree, in the main, with his assessment that every detail in the text that looks Jewish is better understood in the framework of early Christianity, there is one piece of data which just does not work: the presumption that gazing on the sanctuary vessels is a holy act (at 720). There is simply no Christian liturgical counterpart that even remotely parallels it. In private conversation, Bovon confirmed that the parallels he adduced are not quite satisfactory.

As Schwartz has argued, the key point in this text is the claim that only persons of sufficient purity should be allowed to enter the Temple precincts to view the sacred vessels. Like Knohl, Schwartz is inclined to see this argument as to who may view the vessels and under what sort of conditions as rooted in an inner-Jewish dispute over the display of the Temple vessels to the laity.

"On this background," Schwartz concludes, "it is not unreasonable to assume that [the] practice associated with festive celebrations in the Temple, the exhibition of Temple utensils before the crowds of pilgrims, should be understood in [this] way: it was an attempt [by the Pharisees] to let the public share in what priests had claimed as their own prerogatives."⁴⁵ The fact that Jesus desires to see the Temple vessels in this text leads Schwartz to the conclusion that we have before us "another rare instance of Jesus' participation in Pharisaic criticism of the same overemphasis on the part of the priests."⁴⁶

Pompey's Seeing of the Temple Utensils

But from the perspective that I have adopted in this essay, the most interesting part of Schwartz' article derives from his discussion of Josephus. For in Josephus we have a writer who claims a very good priestly pedigree. Schwartz observes that, when writing about the entrance of Pompey into the Temple in 63 B.C., Josephus stresses that Pompey was able to glimpse the Temple utensils.

[I]ndeed, he states that "of all the calamities of that time none so deeply affected the nation as the exposure to alien eyes of the holy place, hitherto screened from view" (*Wars of the Jews*, Bk. 1, Chap. 7, 6, 152). Here, indeed, he is speaking of the sanctuary or the Holy of Holies; nevertheless, the emphasis on sight rather than entry is remarkable. This point is further developed with specific reference to the holy utensils, in the parallel account in *Antiquities of the Jews* (Bk. 14, Chap. 4, 4, 71–72) (although this development is counterbalanced by some new compliments for Pompey): "And not light was the sin committed against the sanctuary, which before that time had never been entered or seen. For Pompey and not a few of his men went into it and saw what it was unlawful for any but the High Priests to see. But though the golden table was there and the sacred lampstand and the libation vessels."⁴⁷

Nor indeed is this the only occurrence of this remarkable point of emphasis. In some half-dozen examples one can point to a similar interest in gazing upon

45 Schwartz, "Viewing the Holy Utensils," 156.

46 Schwartz, "Viewing the Holy Utensils," 157.

47 Schwartz, "Viewing the Holy Utensils," 154.

the Temple and its furniture as over against an interest in physical entry or even touch.

The emphasis that Josephus puts on “seeing” can best be set in perspective through the evidence of Jewish coinage from the early second century, A.D. In a recent article on the typology reflected in coins hailing from the revolt of Bar Kokhba, Dan Barag writes:

In a series of large and important silver coins, Bar Kokhba stamped the image of a Temple-façade along with the words, “Jerusalem” or “Shimon.” On the reverse side he stamped an image of a lulav and etrog along with the words, “Year one of the redemption of Israel.” ... The Temple that appears on these coins ... has four pillars. In the middle of the façade is an object whose identity remains a riddle. It is obvious that this object or symbol possessed tremendous significance, for in contemporary coins of this period we frequently find images of the Temple in whose center is stationed a god or goddess.⁴⁸

Indeed, we can be even a bit more emphatic here. The god or goddess so depicted is the patron of the Temple in question and as such was represented in those temples by his or her statue. As Martin Price and Bluma Trell remark, the statue of the god was normally out of view of the worshipers and so the coins do not reflect what one would have seen if one went to the respective cities and compared the image on the face of the coin to the Temple façade itself.

Indeed the artist often has to widen “the space between the central columns ... to accommodate the image which usually identifies the shrine with no possible ambiguity.”⁴⁹ So, one purpose of bringing the statue forward was to signify just whose town this coin hailed from and under which divine auspices it drew its authority. But equally important, Price and Trell observe, is the manner by which this identification of god and temple takes place—the presentation of the god at the door of the Temple “would suggest the age old custom of [an] epiphany, a god appearing in person before his worshipers.”⁵⁰

Barag concludes that the symbolism of the Bar-Kokhba coins is unambiguous: the Table between the two columns on the front side of the coin “symbolizes the renewal of the liturgy of regular Temple-service: ‘You shall set the bread of presence upon the Table before me on a regular basis’ (Exod. 25:30; Lev. 24:8) and

48 Dan Barag, “The Table of the Bread of Presence and the Façade of the Temple upon the Coins of the Bar Kokhba War,” *Qadmoniot* 20 (1987): 22. The lulav, the frond of a date palm tree, and the etron, a citron fruit, are part of the Jewish ritual for the feast of Sukkot.

49 Martin Price and Bluma Trell, *Coins and their Cities: Architecture on the Ancient Coins of Greece, Rome, and Palestine* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1977), 19.

50 Price and Trell, *Coins and their Cities*, 19.

the lulav and etrog on the reverse side of the coin represent the aspiration to renew the pilgrimage festivals, and in particular, that of Sukkot."⁵¹

In a subsequent exchange of letters, Asher Grossberg mentions the Talmudic interpretations of the Mishnah in *Hagigah* 3:1, as well as the supporting evidence of the *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 840.⁵² In Grossberg's opinion, the two sides of the coins represent a single reality. The Table was paired with the lulav and ethrog because the Table was that piece of Tabernacle furniture that was displayed before pilgrims during the feast of Sukkot. These coins denote a longing to fulfill the commandment of seeing the presence of God during Sukkot.

In Barag's opinion, however, the Talmudic evidence that Grossberg cites (a set of texts that overlap with those cited by Knohl) is purely aggadic or homiletic in character and bears no historical or legal weight. Although Barag correctly notes that the Mishnah in *Hagigah* is by no means a clear reference to the practice of showing the Table to pilgrims (indeed Chanoch Albeck saw the text in a much more pedestrian fashion: the warnings were issued solely to priests attending to the pieces of furniture and had nothing to do with the festivals proper), it is hard to deny the fact that the coins have placed the Table exactly where statues of the god would go in nearly all of the parallel coins found in pagan contexts.⁵³

This reading is suggested further by the combination of evidence from *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 840, the Temple Scroll, as well as more circumstantial evidence such as the Samaritan version of Exodus 23:17, the importance the Septuagint puts on seeing the Tabernacle as a means of seeing God, and the witness of Josephus to the importance of seeing the appurtenances of the Temple.

Though Josephus does not, as Barag observes, mention the ritual of displaying the furniture on festivals, he does remark that the curtains of the Tabernacle were constructed in such a way that they could be pulled back to permit an unobstructed view. Since the Torah gives no hint of such a thing, where would

51 Barag, "The Table of the Bread of Presence," 24.

52 See Grossberg's response to Barag's article in *Qadmoniot* 21 (1988): 81–82.

53 It is worth noting as well that Josephus, in his description of the Tabernacle, remarks that the veils could be pulled aside on festivals so that they would not obstruct the view. As the biblical text itself offers no reason to suggest such things, many historians have cited this passage as an indication that viewing the Temple furniture was a well-known custom of the Second Temple period. The text in question (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 3, Chap. 6, 124–25, 127–128) reads: "The Tabernacle was covered with curtains woven of fine linen, in which the hues of purple and blue and crimson were blended. Of these the first (veil—*paroket*) measured ten cubits either way and was spread over the pillars which divided the Temple and screened off the sanctuary; this it was which rendered the latter invisible to the eyes of any. ... A second (veil—*masak*), corresponding to the first in dimensions, texture and hue, enveloped the five pillars that stood at the entrance, supported by rings at the corner of each pillar, it hung from the top to the middle of the pillar; the rest of the space was left as a passage for the priests entering beneath it. Above this was another covering of linen, of the same dimensions, which was drawn by cords to either side, the rings serving alike for curtain and cord, so that it could either be outspread or rolled together and stowed into a corner, in order that it should not intercept the view above all on the great days." Emphasis added.

Josephus have derived such a detail if not from some sort of contemporary practice? However we might sort out the historicity of the Talmudic sources about the display of Tabernacle furniture—it would be fair to say that the image of the Table of Presence at the door of the Temple indicates for the person who struck this coin that this piece of furniture bore some resemblance to the identity of the God who dwelled therein. If we set this coin next to the rabbinic evidence we can at least say that a goodly number of rabbinic materials imagine that the furniture shares enough of the divine presence that seeing it constitutes a fulfillment of the command, “to see the face of God.”

The Incarnation and the Temple of Christ's Body

Scholars have long been aware that the New Testament and early Christianity thought of the person of Jesus Christ and the community that he founded in terms of the Temple. As to the former, no text could be clearer than the Gospel of John. Early in his ministry when Jesus is asked for a sign to authorize his teaching and actions he declares: “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up.” His interlocutors puzzle over this declaration and wonder how a building that has been under constructions for some forty-six years could be quickly reestablished. At this point the narrator intervenes with an important clarification: “But Jesus was speaking of the Temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the Scriptures and the word that Jesus had spoken” (John 2:21-22).⁵⁴

The early New Testament community was viewed as an eschatological Temple that represents the perduring body of Christ after his resurrection and ascension. This can be seen in Paul's declaration, “Do you not know that you are God's Temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's Temple, God will destroy that person. For God's Temple is holy, and you are that Temple” (1 Cor. 3:16-17).⁵⁵

But my purpose is not to survey the literature about how the Temple serves as a metaphor for Jesus' person or of the community he founded. Rather, I would like to limit myself to how the metaphor of the Temple is associated with the notion of sight—such that looking at the physical body of Jesus becomes tantamount

54 For a recent survey of the issue, see Alan R. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 220 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002). Still very useful is the magisterial survey of Yves Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple* (London: Burns and Oates, 1962).

55 See also 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:20-22; Heb. 13:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:5; 4:17; and Rev. 3:12; 11:1-2. The literature on this matter is considerable. For a brief review see, Richard Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-21),” in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), 165-168. An older survey of the problem can be found in Bertil E. Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament: A Comparative Study in the Temple Symbolism of the Qumran Texts and the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1965).

to beholding the very person of God. And for these purposes there is no better text than John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth."

The key clause in establishing that this text speaks to the matter of the Temple is the phrase, "he dwelt among us." The Greek verb *skēnoō* is clearly borrowed from the story of the Tabernacle in Exodus and served to translate the Hebrew word *shakan/mishkan*. As Raymond Brown remarks, "we are being told that the flesh of Jesus Christ is the new localization of God's presence on earth, and that Jesus is the replacement of the ancient Tabernacle."⁵⁶ This idea dovetails nicely with another major feature of this Gospel, namely, that Jesus is "the replacement of the Temple (2:19–22)," which, as Brown adds, is simply "a variation of the same theme."

Brown also notes the very important connection between the "tenting" of the Word and its becoming visible to the naked eye. "In the Old Testament," he observes, "the *glory* of God (Hebrew: *kabod*; Greek: *doxa*) implies a visible and powerful manifestation of God to men." Then, having reviewed several biblical texts that describe the appearance of God at the site of the Temple, he concludes: "It is quite appropriate that, after the description of how the Word set up a Tabernacle among men in the flesh of Jesus, the prologue should mention that his *glory* became visible."⁵⁷

Brown's observation, however, was made solely on the basis of the Exodus narrative and as such grounds the theology of the prologue in a singular act—the moment when the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle on the day of its completion. What we have shown in this article is that this momentous theophany was routinized in the daily life of the cult. It was not only the Israelites of Moses' day who saw God as he entered his newly dedicated Tabernacle; all Israelites could see God as they ascended to the Temple to participate in the rite of the furniture.⁵⁸ What the post-biblical Jewish materials we have examined provide is a more phenomenological, or even cultic, background against which we can set John's own theology of a visible and Tabernacle-like presence of the *Logos*.⁵⁹

56 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII*, Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 33. Three recent works have treated this theme at great length, Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical Background of John's Prologue*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 89 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 77–113; Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body*; and Craig R. Koester, *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 22 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1989), 100–115.

57 Brown, *Gospel according to John I–XII*, 34.

58 No study of the prologue to John's Gospel and Jewish Tabernacle/Temple traditions has evidenced any knowledge of the role the Temple furniture played in Jewish sources. Compare, for example, the recent and exhaustive survey of Koester, *The Dwelling of God*, 100–115.

59 I should emphasize that the Jewish background I have proposed here does not by any means exhaust the levels of meaning that are inscribed to the faculty of "sight" in John's prologue. As Rudolph Bultmann articulated, the notion of sight in John has at least three discrete meanings (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 69, n. 2): "1. That of the

As is well known, the theme of God being visible to the eye was extremely important to Philo. One of his favorite definitions of the Jewish people is that of a people who have the unique gift of being able to see God.⁶⁰ So salient was this definition for Philo, that Gerhard Delling concludes: “[W]hoever says ‘Israel’ says ‘seeing God.’ The etymology of the name Israel opens the possibility for Philo to express that which is specific of the Jewish religion in a siglum that points to the special relationship between the one God and the Jewish people. For him it attests to the uniqueness of the revelation of God and with it the uniqueness of knowing, of seeing God, that it accords.”⁶¹

What is perhaps worthy of further study is how Philo relates this ability to see God to the revelation of God within the Temple. One of Philo’s proof texts for this concept derives from Exodus 24:11, a text in which the Israelites who have ascended the heights of Mount Sinai are said to see God amid their festal meal.⁶² But more to our point is how Philo relates the *Logos* to the Tabernacle structure.

What is the meaning of the words, “Thou shalt set apart the veil between the Holy of Holies” (Exod. 26:33b)? I have said that the simple holy (parts of the Tabernacle) are classified with the sense-perceptible heaven, whereas the inner (parts), which are called the Holy of Holies (are classified) with the intelligible

perception of earthly things and happenings accessible to all men (1:38, 47; 9:8, etc.); 2. of the perception of supernatural things and events accessible only to a limited number of men (1:32, 33, 34; 20:12, 14, etc.). Whereas in both these cases what is referred to is perception with one’s physical eyes, ‘seeing’ is used, 3. of the perception of matters not visible to the organs of sight. The object of such ‘seeing’ is the revelation-event, or alternatively the person of Jesus the Revealer.” Bultmann, himself, sees John 1:14 as falling under the third category as the perception of Jesus as “God” cannot originate in the physical object of sight itself but must be the subject of a specific moment of revelation. Although this understanding should not be rejected, I would argue that at the same time John compares the presence of God to that of a Temple which was visible to the naked eye. I do not think the inner contradiction would have bothered John just as it does not bother St. Athanasius in the text I will discuss below.

60 See Gerhard Delling, “The ‘One who Sees God’ in Philo,” in *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 27–41. Also see the comprehensive survey of this problem in Ellen Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo’s Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996). Especially useful is Chapter Two, “‘Israel’ and the Vision of God” and chapter three, “‘Israel’ and the Ones who Can See.”

61 Delling, “The ‘One who Sees God,’” 41.

62 The text in question (*On the Confusion of Tongues*, 56) reads: “For we are the ‘race of the Chosen ones of that Israel,’ who sees God, ‘and there is none amongst us of discordant voice’ (Exod. 24:11), that so the whole world, which is the instrument of the All, may be filled with the sweet melody of its undiscording harmonies.” The notion of “seeing God” only works in light of the Masoretic Text; the verb in the Septuagint is a passive. Perhaps Philo has in mind both verses 10 and 11, for in verse 10 the Septuagint declares that the elders could see *the spot wherein God dwells*, that is, they could contemplate the Temple and its furniture but not God himself. Text in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 234–252.

world. *The incorporeal world is set off and separated from the visible one by the mediating Logos as by a veil.* But may it not be that this *Logos* is the tetrad, through which the corporeal solid comes into being? For this is classified with the invisible intelligible things while the other (part of the Tabernacle) is divided into three and is connected with sense-perceptible things, so that there is between them something (at once invisible and visible of substance).⁶³

This remarkable text notes that the Tabernacle neatly divides what is perceptible to the senses (the *three* pieces of furniture that sit in the “holy”) from what is beyond all vision (that is, the being of God himself who resides in the Holy of Holies). Upon four pillars (the tetrad) rests a veil that represents the *Logos* and as such the *Logos* mediates in visible form what remains invisible to the naked eye. This veil would have been seen every day by the priests appointed to tend the menorah and the incense altar. Can we extrapolate from this text that Philo’s definition of Israel as a nation that can see God includes the notion that through the cult the *Logos* has become a mediator in visual form of the Holy One of Israel who is beyond all human knowledge?⁶⁴

The Appearance of God in the Flesh

The Johannine theme that God became visible in the flesh of Jesus had an extraordinary influence in early Christianity. For St. Irenaeus, writing in about 180, the primary reason for God becoming man was that the world could see him.⁶⁵ To see God was to be drawn into the divine realm.

Tertullian (d. 222) reaches the same destination but via a slightly different path.⁶⁶ He was bothered by the fact that God regularly makes himself visible to Israel in the Old Testament yet says at the same time that anyone who gazes upon his face will die (Exod. 33:20). How can these be reconciled? For Tertullian, the Gospel of John provides the key; for while it affirms that no human being has seen the Father (John 1:18), it concedes that human beings can see the Word (1:14). When one reads, then, in the Old Testament of appearances of God to various holy individuals, these are to be understood as nothing other than appearances of the

63 Philo, *Questions and Answers on Exodus*, 2:94. Emphasis added. Text in Philo, *Supplement 2: Questions and Answers on Exodus*, ed. Ralph Marcus, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1953).

64 Compare the lengthy treatment of the concept in Jonathan Z. Smith’s essay, “The Prayer of Joseph,” in his *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 37–39.

65 Irenaeus, *Against the Heresis*, Bk. 4, Chap. 20. Text in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004).

66 Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, Chaps. 14–16. Text in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004).

Word of God prior to his full incarnation. As with Irenaeus, Tertullian sees the purpose of the incarnation as to make God visible to human eyes.

Perhaps even more emphatic about this theme was St. Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395). He writes:

If everyone had the ability to come, as Moses did, inside the cloud, where Moses saw what may not be seen; or to be raised above three heavens as Paul was and to be instructed in Paradise about ineffable things that lie above reason; or to be taken up in fire to the ethereal region, as zealous Elijah was; and not be weighed down by the body's baggage, or to see on the throne of glory, as Ezekiel and Isaiah did; the one who is raised above the cherubim and glorified by the Seraphim—then surely if all were like this, there would be no need for the appearance of our God in flesh.⁶⁷

Why then did Jesus become flesh according to John 1:14? For Gregory the answer resides in what Jewish thought would call *hiddardarut ha-olam* (“the gradual decline of the world”). Because of the overall weakness of the human race at this time, no one could any longer see as Moses saw. Therefore, like a physician matching his cure to the infirmity of the patient, God took dramatic measures and became visible in human flesh.

There is one more twist in the story though that is worth attending to. If Jesus inhabits flesh the way God will inhabit the Temple, just how might we understand the relationship of the Godhead to the building in which it rests. Is the relationship an intrinsic one? By this I mean: is the entire body of Jesus, in all its carnality, divinized by this indwelling? Or to use the Jewish metaphors we have followed: Is the body of Jesus like the Temple walls in the Sabbath Songs, that is, so infused with the divine energies that they come to life and are called *elohim hayyim* (“the living God” or “living divine beings”) during moments of angelic praise? Or is it like the Table of Presence presented before the pilgrims in order to fulfill their obligation to see God; or, like the veil that separates the visible portions of the Temple from the invisible? All of these Jewish metaphors bespeak an intrinsic relation in as much as it is not possible to divide or separate fully the being of God from the objects he inhabits.

The other option is to consider the relationship of the Word to Jesus as more extrinsic in nature. The carnal flesh of Jesus, on this view, is a dispensable vehicle through which the divine medicine has been administered; as such, it can and

67 To *Theophilus, Against the Apollinarians*. Text in Friedrich Müller, ed., *Gregorii Nysseni Opera Dogmatica Minora, Pars 1* [Gregory of Nyssa, Minor Dogmatic Works, Part 1] (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958), 123–24. The translation here is courtesy of my colleague, Brian Daley, who has granted me permission to use it.

indeed must be ignored by spiritual adepts in order to attend to true source of divinity, namely, the *Logos* that resides within. This issue, of course, is not an idle matter; the proper way of rendering John 1:14 became one of the major forks in the road for early Christianity.⁶⁸

For St. Athanasius, writing in the fourth century, there was only one answer to that question: the flesh of Jesus *participates* in the divinity of the indwelling *Logos*. In order to drive home this point, Christian thought would declare that what was predicated of the fleshly-person of Christ could also be predicated of God as well as the reverse (the so-called “communication of properties” or *communicatio idiomatum*).

The manner by which Athanasius arrives at this conclusion depends on a construal of the biblical Temple as a structure that *physically* participates in the life of the God who inhabits it. Athanasius is concerned about the readiness of the Arians “to divide” the person of Christ into two, his human side and his divine side. To do so, Athanasius argues, would be idolatrous because when Christians prostrate themselves before Jesus they do so before the whole person, flesh and body.

If the two are divisible then the act of venerating the person Jesus results in the worship of a creature. “And we do not worship a creature,” Athanasius declares. “And neither do we divide the body from the Word and worship it by itself; nor when we wish to worship the Word do we set him far apart from the flesh, but knowing ... that ‘the Word was made flesh’ (John 1:14) we recognize him as God also, after having come in the flesh.”

How does Athanasius justify his argument from the standpoint of sacred Scripture? By attending to the practice of the Jewish pilgrimage feasts.

But we should like your piety to ask [the Arians] this question.
When Israel was ordered to go up to Jerusalem to worship at

68 On the one side of the fence was the docetic option that claimed that the Word did not so much become flesh as it was made manifest in the flesh. For the problem of rendering the Greek, see Georg Richter, “Die Fleischwerdung des Logos im Johannesevangelium” [The Incarnation of the *Logos* in the Gospel of John] *Novum Testamentum* 13 (1971): 81–126 and 14 (1972): 257–76. He argues that John 1:14 declares that the Word truly became flesh. See also the response of K. Berger, “Zu ‘das Wort ward Fleisch’ Joh. 1:14a” [“The Word became Flesh”] *Novum Testamentum* 16 (1974): 161–66. For Berger, the meaning of the Greek is the opposite of what Richter maintains: “Erscheinen in einer Gestalt, ohne damit diese zu ‘werden’” [“to appear in a form without becoming it”]. He compares this extrinsic connection of *Logos* to flesh to the way God inhabits a Temple (at 164): “Das Erscheinen des Christus im Fleisch und das Wohnen unter/in der Gemeinde bedeutet also nicht, dass der Kyrios mit diesen Menschen identisch wird, sondern dass er in ihnen als in einem heiligen Tempel wohnt (so wie man es sonst vom Pneuma sagt).” [“The appearance of Christ in the flesh and the dwelling in the community does not mean that the Lord becomes identical with these human beings but that he dwells among them as if in a Temple (just as one speaks of the Spirit)”] This precise question, whether God appeared in the flesh or became that very flesh, was the subject of enormous disagreement in the fourth and fifth-century christological controversies.

the Temple of the Lord, where the Ark was, “and above it the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat” (Heb. 9:5), did they do well or not? If they were in error, how is it that those who despised this law became liable for punishment? For it is written that “if a man make light of this command and not go up, he shall perish from among his people” (Num. 9:13). But if they were correct in this practice and so proved themselves well-pleasing to God, then are not the Arians abominable and the most shameful of any heresy, even many times more worthy of destruction?

For they approve the former people [the Jews] for the honor paid by them to the Temple, but they will not worship the Lord who is in the flesh as a God indwelling a temple ... And [the Jews] did not, when they saw the Temple of stones, suppose that the Lord who spoke in the Temple was a creature; nor did they set the Temple at nought and retire far off to worship. But they came to it according to the Law, and worshipped the God who uttered his oracles from the Temple. Since this was so, how can it be other than right to worship the body of the Lord, all-holy and all-reverend as it is, announced by the Holy Spirit and made the vestment of the Word. ... Therefore, he that dishonors the Temple dishonors the Lord in the Temple; and he that separates the Word from the body sets at nought the grace given to us in him.⁶⁹

Athanasius’ point is crystal clear. Just as the Jews had complete justification in prostrating themselves before a building of stone and not dividing the God from the house in which he dwelt—for though they knew God was not limited to the stones nor the furniture, at the same time they did not use that limitation as license for not going up to Jerusalem—so the Christian has complete justification in prostrating himself before Jesus and not dividing the indwelling God from the flesh that contains him.

Given the importance of Athanasius in Church history one might have expected that this “Temple-theology” would have had a long afterlife itself. But in fact it ends with Athanasius himself. This is because of what happens within the school of Antiochene Christianity. There, already with the figure of Theodore of

69 To *Adelphius*, *Against the Arians*, Letter 60: 7–8. Text in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier and J. P. Migne, 1857–1891), 26, 1080–1082. Hereafter abbreviated PG. English translation in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 4, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 575.

Mopsuestia, it is propounded that God abandons Jesus at his passion and lets the man suffer on his own.

Though the textual justification for the position of Theodore is grounded in a textually problematic verse from Hebrews (Heb. 2:9; for more on this, see note 71 below), the larger thematic argument comes from the metaphor of a Temple. For though God can indwell the Temple such that his presence infuses even the furniture and masonry, he can also depart from the Temple and go into exile.⁷⁰ Pursuing this model to its logical end, Theodore, and later, most notoriously Nestorius (early fifth century), argued that the indwelling of God in Jesus' body like a Temple was a wholly extrinsic affair. In some parts of the Gospel story, they argued, we see only the weak human body that Jesus inhabits, in others the deity bursts on to the scene; at the crucifixion, God literally departs from his Temple and leaves the man Jesus to die on his own.⁷¹ Hence, to be consistent with the New Testament evidence, Theodore declared, we must be able to divide the human figure from the divine being who indwells him.

In the aftermath of the Nestorian controversy we see the rejection of the Temple metaphor as a means of understanding the incarnation⁷² and its transferral

70 See the discussion of Theodore in his commentary on the Nicene Creed (*Homily 6, 6*). Throughout this text he distinguishes what happened to the man Jesus—here described as the material framework of the Temple—in contrast to God who resided within him, here understood as comparable to the glory of the LORD that sits atop the Ark and is free to come and go as it pleases. “It is not divine nature that received death, but it is clear that it was that man who was assumed as a temple to God the Word which was dissolved and then raised by the one who had assumed it. And after the crucifixion it was not divine nature that was raised but the temple which was assumed, which rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and sat at the right hand of God; nor is it to divine nature—the cause of everything—that it was given that every one should worship it and every knee should bow, but worship was granted to the form of a servant which did not in its nature possess (the right to be worshipped). While all these things are clearly and obviously said of human nature, he referred them successively to divine nature so that his sentence might be strengthened and be acceptable to hearers. Indeed, since it is above human nature that it should be worshipped by all, it is with justice that all this has been said as of one, so that the belief in a close union between the natures might be strengthened, because he clearly showed that the one who was assumed did not receive all this great honor except from the divine nature which assumed him and dwelt in him.” For photographs of the Syriac original see Raymond Tonneau, *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste* [The Catechetical Homilies of Theodore of Mopsuestia] (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949), 140–143.

71 Theodore grounded this remarkable assertion in a textual variant of Heb. 2:9. “And in order to teach us why he suffered and became ‘a little lower [than the angels],’ he said: ‘*Apart from God* [in place of, ‘by the grace of God’] he tasted death for every man.’ In this he shows that divine nature willed that he should taste death for the benefit of every man, and also that the Godhead was separated from the one who was suffering in the trial of death, because it was impossible for him to taste the trial of death if (the Godhead) were not cautiously remote from him.”

72 Pope St. Leo the Great, *Sermon 2*, 1 [3,1]: “For this wondrous child-bearing of the holy Virgin produced in her offspring one person which was truly human and truly divine, because neither substance so retained their properties that there could be any division of persons in them; *nor was the creature taken into partnership with its Creator in such a way that the one was the in-dweller, and the other the dwelling* (*nec sic creatura in societatem sui Creatoris est assumpta, ut ille habitator,*

to the person of the Virgin Mary.⁷³ For with Mary, the extrinsic element of the Temple metaphor is altogether apt and fit. She does not become God but she does “house” God in the most intimate way imaginable.⁷⁴ Here, the extrinsic manner of relating God to Temple is put to good use. In late Byzantine hymns to Mary the Tabernacle/Temple imagery reaches new heights.⁷⁵ The cult of Mary in the medieval period is greatly indebted to this development of the Temple figure.

Seeing God in the Temple: A Summary of the Evidence

It has often been stated that because of Israel’s radically anti-iconic stance, it came to prefer forms of revelation that were mediated by word rather than sight. This assertion, like all such truisms, is to some extent accurate. Nevertheless, as we have seen in this article, it should not be assumed that because Israel rejected the

et illa esset habitaculum; sed ita ut naturae alteri altera misceretur); but so that the one nature was blended with the other. And although the nature which is taken is one, and that which takes is another, yet these two diverse natures come together into such close union that it is one and the same Son who says both that, as true man, ‘He is less than the Father,’ and that as true God ‘He is equal with the Father.’” For Leo it is crucial that there be no division between God and man in the person of Jesus Christ. As a result, the Temple-metaphor as deployed by the Antiochene school is allowed no place at the table. In Leo’s mind, Nestorius had effectively divided the in-dweller (God the Son) from the dwelling (Jesus as man) and hence ruled out any direct comparison of Jesus to the Temple. For the Latin original, see *Sermons [de] Léon le Grand* [Sermons of Leo the Great], ed. René Dolle, Sources Chrétiennes 22 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1964), 94–99. The note appended by Dom René Dolle, the editor of the text, is worth citing (at 97, n. 3): “C’était là, en effet, une expression employée par Nestorius pour caractériser l’union du Verbe divin avec l’homme Jésus. Dans une lettre à S. Cyrille, il écrivait: ‘Il est exact et conforme à la tradition évangélique, d’affirmer que le corps du Christ est le temple de la divinité’ (PG 77, 49), texte qui pouvait certes s’entendre dans un sens orthodoxe mais qui prenait un sens très particulier dans le contexte de pensée nestorienne.” [(The Temple-metaphor) was, in effect, an expression employed by Nestorius for characterizing the union of the divine Word with the human Jesus. In a letter to St. Cyril, he wrote: “It conforms exactly to the Gospel tradition to affirm that the body of Christ is the Temple of the Divinity,” a text that can be heard in an orthodox fashion but which assumes a very peculiar sense in the context of Nestorius’ thought.] English translation in *St. Leo the Great: Sermons*, trans. Jane Patricia Freeland and Agnes Josephine Conway, The Fathers of the Church 93 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1996), 88.

73 Leo the Great, *Sermon 22*, 2, “For the uncorrupt nature of him that was born had to guard the primal virginity of the Mother, and the infused power of the divine Spirit had to preserve in spotlessness and holiness *that sanctuary which he had chosen for himself*: that Spirit (I say) who had determined to raise the fallen, to restore the broken, and by overcoming the allurements of the flesh to bestow on us in abundant measure the power of chastity: in order that the virginity which in others cannot be retained in child-bearing, might be attained by them at their second birth.” For the Latin, see *Léon le Grand*, 80–81. English translation in *St. Leo the Great: Sermons*, 82.

74 On this theme, see my essay, “Mary in the Old Testament,” *Pro Ecclesia* 16 (2007): 33–55.

75 The florid use of Temple imagery to fill out the figure of Mary is nicely illustrated in the collection of homilies from the seventh century and later assembled by Brian Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1998). What had once been standard predications of Christ (see the text of Athanasius above) now become standard for the figure of the Virgin.

representation of God in statuary form in the Temple, it thereby rejected all linkages of God to a specific physical domain.

As Haran has pointed out with such clarity, the realistic language of the cult—that is, the providing of the Deity with light, a pleasing aroma, and food—presume that some aspect of the Deity has actually taken up residence within the confines of the Tabernacle. Moreover, according to the priestly narrative, he sits astride the Ark of the Covenant and is veiled from view by both the darkness of his inner cella and the outstretched wings of the cherubim that stand in front of him.

Because his presence was thought to be localized in precisely this location, the effect of this theologoumenon on the entire Tabernacle compound was almost exactly that of what we find in other ancient Near Eastern settings. The aura of the Deity's presence was so overwhelming that all parts of the Temple-compound came to share in its effulgence. There is ample biblical proof that this was believed to be the case: first, the injunction one finds in the psalms "to gaze" upon the Temple or the presence of God within the Temple; second, the original form of the pilgrimage laws which most certainly commanded that Israelites "see the face of the LORD"; and third, the priestly fascination with the architectural detail of the Tabernacle, a fascination that leads him to repeat the list of its appurtenances whenever his narrative will allow him.

And again, as we have seen, this evidence is greatly extended when we move into the Second Temple period. The Samaritan and Septuagint versions alter the Masoretic text at several occasions to inform the reader that seeing God means seeing either the place where he dwells (the structure of the Tabernacle itself) or the Ark itself. Josephus strikingly emphasizes in numerous places that the entrance of non-Israelites into the Temple confines was not problematic because of the danger of encroachment on sacred space but because they thereby viewed what pagan eyes were forbidden to see. And most striking is the ritual of taking the Temple vessels out of the Temple so that they can be viewed by pilgrims. This was done, no doubt, with the intention of allowing these individuals the opportunity of fulfilling the mitzvah of *re'iyah*, or "seeing" while they were in Jerusalem.

As Knohl has suggested, the ruling of the Temple Scroll that these vessels ought to remain within and not be subject to such movement provides strong evidence that this ritual was more than simply a product of rabbinic imagination. Nothing more strongly suggests the close nexus between God and the house he inhabits than this practice. If God is not somehow fused with the very furniture of this building how could viewing it fulfill the mandate for the pilgrim?

Michael Wyschogrod has argued that the Temple provides a close, though not exact, analogy to what Christianity means by the doctrine of incarnation: "The God of Israel is a God who enters the world of humanity and in so doing does not shun the parameters of human existence that include spatiality."⁷⁶ Indeed, when

76 Michael Wyschogrod, "A Jewish Perspective on Incarnation," *Modern Theology* 12 (1996): 195–209.

God assumes residence in the Tabernacle, he so ties his personal identity to that building that praise of the building can come close to praise of God himself.

This close continuity of God and Temple would seem to be radically compromised by its destruction in 587 B.C. and 70 A.D. Some Christian apologists were certainly alert to this fact and used the Temple's destruction as a basic building block in their argument that God had permanently abandoned the Jews. But, in fact, just the opposite occurs. As the Temple vessels are removed from the building just prior to this catastrophic end, God's presence and future promise of restoration becomes tied to where these vessels are interred and when they shall be revealed. The attachment of God to his home continues even after that home is destroyed.

This analogy of the Temple to the incarnation was not lost on early Christianity. Beginning with John 1:14 we see an attempt to describe the tabernacling presence as God's becoming present in Jesus such that he can be "seen" among men and women. For decades after the appearance of John's Gospel, debate raged, however on just how God was attached to this person.

Did he actually become the (now divinized) flesh of Jesus Christ, the claim of nascent orthodoxy, or did he simply make use of the ordinary human flesh as the occasion to manifest himself in a way that only those with the proper esoteric knowledge could ascertain, as the Gnostics claimed? To answer this question, St. Athanasius turned to a set of logical relations that would have been most at home in Second Temple Judaism. He asked whether the pilgrims to Jerusalem, when they prostrated themselves in veneration before the building distinguished between the invisible God who dwelled there and the very brickwork that enclosed him. At some theoretical level, of course, a distinction could and must be made, but the manner in which the Deity overtook the space in which he was housed was so overwhelming that any distinction at the phenomenological level of human experience was not possible. As God became one with his furniture so God became one with flesh.

The Tabernacle and the Mystical Turn

But the story of Christian exegesis is not exhausted by this specific christological turn. The narratives about the Tabernacle, narratives so beholden to technical detail that they become nearly unintelligible to modern readers, became a favorite site for mystic contemplation for many spiritual writers.

Blessed John of Ruusbroeck, a fourteenth century Flemish mystic wrote an extensive commentary on this portion of the Bible entitled, *The Spiritual Tabernacle*. "Although its heavily allegorical character may not be attractive to modern readers," a recent commentator remarks, "it seems to have been very popular in Ruusbroeck's own day, at least if we deduce this from the fact that more manuscripts of this treatise are extant than those of any other of his writings."⁷⁷

77 John Ruusbroeck: *The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works*, introd. and trans. James A. Wiseman,

The impetus to accord such importance to the biblical material on the Tabernacle begins with St. Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*. In this work, the ascent of Moses to the top of Mount Sinai to contemplate the heavenly Tabernacle became the very model for the life of serious prayer and contemplation. Moses, as the first mystic adept, has paved the way for the rest of humanity to follow.

But more important than Gregory was the influence of pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, active in the fifth and sixth centuries and the undisputed father of Western mystical tradition.

It is not for nothing that the blessed Moses is commanded to submit first to purification and then to be separated from those who have not undergone this (Exod. 24:15–18). When every purification is complete (his forty days of fasting) he hears the many-voiced trumpets (Exod. 20:18). He sees the many lights, pure and with rays streaming abundantly. Then, standing apart from the crowds and accompanied by chosen priests, he pushes ahead to the summit of the divine ascents. *And yet he does not meet God himself, but contemplates, not him who is invisible, but rather where he dwells* (Exod. 25). This means, I presume, that the holiest and highest of things perceived with the eye of the body or the mind are but the rationale which presupposes all that lies below the Transcendent One. *Through them* (that is, the *physical* appurtenances of the Tabernacle in Exod. 25), however, his unimaginable presence is shown, walking the heights of those holy places to which the mind at least can rise.⁷⁸

The striking line here is how Dionysius understands the function of all the textual detail in Exodus 25–40. Moses is called to the top of Mount Sinai for an intimate audience with God, yet the direct vision of God is something that no human person is able to withstand.

How was God to mediate his presence to this budding novice of the religious life? According to Dionysius, who is clearly following the lead of the biblical text, Moses does not see God himself but rather confronts the next best thing. He is allowed to contemplate the invisible God in the visible form of his domestic furniture. For, as he argues, it is through this furniture that “his unimaginable presence is shown.” To paraphrase Dionysius, we cannot see God face to face but he has graciously consented to let us see where he dwells.⁷⁹

The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1985), 24.

78 This text is taken from Paul Rorem, “Moses as Paradigm for the Liturgical Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius,” in *Studia Patristica*, 18:2, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1989), 275–279.

79 Before closing I should adduce one modern parallel that might make this abstract concept

more concrete. Two of the most heavily visited tourist sites in the United States are the Oval Office and Graceland Mansion—the former being the office of the President and the latter the home of the performer, Elvis Presley. Now even in this visual age, where photographs and film-clips (readily available on youtube.com) of these two men are a dime a dozen, it is striking to hear what tourists say when they can lay their physical eyes on the furniture used by them. Numerous persons report an intimacy that overwhelms the senses. It is as though an unimagined part of that person came vividly to life. Somehow the possessions themselves and the way they are configured in a room conveys something crucial to their being. An explanation for this is not difficult to find. If the identity of a person we love and admire is always elusive no matter how often we see them, then our best chance to achieve a fuller knowledge is to avail ourselves of every possible clue to their identity. Non-verbal cues are often as good and sometimes even better than verbal ones. There is much to be learned from how someone dresses and comports himself. Equally revealing are decisions about one's domicile and how to organize the domestic space within. For individuals such as the President or Elvis, where there is little or no opportunity for face to face contact, perhaps one of the best ways of learning about who they are is seeing how they arrange their most intimate living spaces. If I have been successful in this essay, I will have advanced the thesis that the same holds true for God himself.