

## **The Temple Orientation As An Essential Element of the Gospel** *The High Church Orientation*

Every so often we encounter an event that begs for a shift in perspective if not spirituality. Such an event happened to me about fourteen years ago when an Asian student at Yale named Bim walked into my pastoral study with a heavy heart. The conversation began with his request to read Matthew 10:34-39. As he read the words “for I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother... and a person’s enemies will be those of his own household,” I couldn’t help but notice the tears streaming down his youthful face. Presumably the faith of this young Christian had brought him into some unresolved conflict with his parents? But how strange, I thought to myself, Bim had been a “Christian” for a couple of years now. And based on my previous conversations with him, till now at least, his parents had seemed perfectly fine with it. So what changed? Immediately I began to suspect some youthful accesses or perhaps a bit of fanatical legalism as the culprit, “a common thing for young converts to Christian faith” I thought to myself. And so you can understand my surprise when he explained to me how the issue was something so *conventional* as Christian *baptism*!

Bim was especially concerned with the Biblical commands (“by divine law”) in Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38, and elsewhere that made him feel like baptism was somehow an *essential* element of the gospel! Of course, I tried at first to pursue ways that his parents might be getting the wrong idea from his desire to be baptized, as if it meant that he was rejecting them personally or culturally in some way. But he explained to me it was much deeper than that, that his parents were fine with him being a follower of Christ *by faith*, but they absolutely prohibited him from being a follower of Christ *by baptism*! “My family is Buddhist and Taoist,” he explained. “They respect Jesus and his teachings and are okay with my *faith* in Christ and being a follower of his ethical teachings, but *baptism* is considered a much more serious thing for them.” He further explained how in the Eastern way of thinking, baptism would change his identity as related to his *being* within a spiritual *communion* or *presence* such as could threatened his family! “It’s one thing to adopt Christianity as a philosophy or ethical system” it was explained, “but another thing to change communions.”

In so many words, he was explaining to me how in his families way of thinking, *identity* has less to do with one’s rational beliefs and more to do with one’s communal participation—more to do with *being in communion* than *being in beliefs*. Baptism, as such, was considered far more significant than belief because baptism represented a change in essential being or “identity” and even familial communion in divine presence! So serious was the distinction that he further

explained how his parents were threatening to cut him out of the family and its resources if he were to go through with it in fear that his baptism would offend the family ancestor-gods and bring a curse upon the rest of the family.

Sensing I was getting in way over my head, and still hoping to buy some more time, as much for me as for him and his parents, I counseled patience. No matter though, he insisted that he had been having this conversation with his parents for some time now. "I love my parents and respect them greatly," he said. "But Pastor, what should I do if it comes to Christian baptism *or* my family?" He wanted an answer!

Deep inside, I knew that the answer he was seeking involved much more than I had bargained for within an otherwise *routine* pastoral consultation (which of course begs the question of *routine* within ecclesial *praxis* in the first place). For to be sure, Bim's question was hardly just about baptism! It wasn't even about baptism as a western leaning *covenantal* concept as instituted "by divine law" as it were for the sake of witness. Bim's question was about the church *Totus!*

*Is the church, by her sacred institutions, an essential element of the gospel? Is the Church, more than a witness, the very locus of missions and salvation? Is to remain "not baptized" to miss out on something in terms of the full or total Christ? Is Christian conversion essentially entail Christian baptism?*

As being pressed by his parents' eastern leaning way of thinking, it was about baptism vis-à-vis it mediating the vivifying participation in divine presence-- dare we even say, *theosis!* And at the time, Bim's parents had an infinitely higher view of the church than I did based on my western leaning "by divine law" ONLY way of thinking. For at best, baptism was something we do as commended by divine law for the sake of "witness" less really being engrafted into Christ. In my western way of thinking, "being is believing." For Bim's parents, being is communion. *Either-or?* Or *both-and*—that is the question!

The issue facing me that day was the question of ecclesial ontology. Is the nature of the church linked to her message as divine witness as "by divine law?" Or is the church ALSO by her very nature the mediatorial "presence" of Christ unto salvation albeit ordinarily as to make room for God's sovereign will? Is the church just a credentialing board to preserve the covenantal terms of the gospel through the ages? Or is the church ALSO an effectual power as to transact the covenant *really* as a temple? Is baptism something we do because it is commanded?" Or is baptism, something God does that changes me and my identity in Christ? And then there are the historical confessions even within even my own western leaning tradition such as when John Calvin

confesses about the visibly organized church on earth how *no extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ.*"<sup>1</sup> Is this really true?

This then was the question being raised that day from the other side of the planet (literally and spirituality). It was a question begging for the reunion of all things east and west relative to Christian spirituality, even if by a polar opposite agenda. And to be sure, it was a question that catapulted me into a study of scripture, not primarily at the time because a concern for spiritual ecumenism, but because even by so cursory an encounter, it all sounded so strangely familiar—to canonical spirituality that is.

### **The Old Covenant Temple Church**

Again we acknowledge that the genius of the Bible is its narrative. And we have already discovered that one way to tell the redemptive story is to focus on the history of a sacred romance as preserved by covenant between God and humanity. The story is told so as to consummate in the "marriage of the lamb."

But there is another way to tell the story, equally as prominent as the first and equally vital as an essential element of the gospel. But this time, the story focuses is on what happens right after the marriage of the lamb. It is the story of "heaven" come to "earth" as to revitalize earth as heaven itself (Revelations 22). And according to Revelation 21:3-4, it is an earth that is now the fully realized "temple of God's presence."

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with man. He will tabernacle with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.*

Such then is the ultimate and dynamic blessing of God, no longer the mediated but immediate temple presence of God in the midst of the people. This then is the way our history will end as then to begin a never-ending climax involving a constant state of temple-presence.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37: 48. For works on Calvin's view of the sacraments, see Joseph N. Tylenda, "Calvin and Christ's Presence in the Supper-True or Real", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 27 (1974): pp. 65-75, Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953), John Adger, "Calvin Defended Against Drs. Cunningham and Hodge", *The Southern Presbyterian Review*, 27 (1876),

In so far as it helps us to understand the present, it is especially noteworthy to discern in the description of the future its explicit reference to the past. Specifically, Revelation 21 refers back to Leviticus 26:9ff where there was the anticipated restoration of God's people as foreshadowed in the Old Covenant mediation of God's presence through the temple context. Under the Mosaic covenant, God promised to "set my tabernacle among" them. This of course was accomplished by the temple administration of prophetic, priestly and kingly kinds of ministries that were instituted during the Mosaic context. There were then the sacramental rites of circumcision and sacrifice (priestly structures). There was the government of tribal heads and church elders (kingly structures). And there was the ministry of Word (prophetic structures). God certainly dwelt among them such that the tabernacle of meeting described in Exodus 29:42 was later described as the "dwelling place" of God in Deuteronomy 12:5.<sup>2</sup>

Under the New Covenant, this conception of "tabernacle" is mediated through different corporate structures related to the activity of the Holy Spirit for the church. Paul teaches that "we are the temple of God" and immediately applies the promises and exhortations once given to the Old Covenant church to the New Covenant church (2 Cor. 6:16-18, see then Ezek. 37:26, Is. 52:11, 2 Sam. 7:14.). Paul's teaching for us under the New Covenant was no different than the prophetic teaching under the Old Covenant, that salvation is described with the promise "I will dwell with them" (2 Cor. 6:16). This "dwelling" after the fall and before heaven always included some mediated structure whereby God, in a provisional way, was present to effect his saving activity. And according to Revelation 21, we are to see all this earlier history on earth as both now and not yet happening in heaven. And especially, perhaps more than ever, we need to see how at least from the Biblical perspective, this temple -presence was the very means of God's benediction grace!

### **God Benediction Presence**

Before we taking a brief tour through redemptive history, we should set things up in terms of where it is all going in relation to the gospel, or in Old Covenant terms the "the benediction of God." Have you ever noticed how big a deal the "blessing ritual" was according to the Genesis account of redemptive history? It was the kind of thing people would kill for (Cain and Abel). It motivated mothers to instigate complex deceptions on behalf of their favorite child (Jacob and Esau). And the declaration of blessing was the most celebrated activity of the deathbed ritual throughout Genesis. So what's going on here? What was the meaning of "benediction" as recorded in Genesis?

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<sup>2</sup> See also Ex. 40:34, Ps. 76.2.

For many of us, the word "blessing" severely obscures the canonical use. We use it to "bless " someone when they sneeze (some say after the old myth that an evil spirit is being released) but is our way of saying something like "hope you are well." And of course there is the pious, if not southern "bless your heart" which is a form of pity. And of course there is the "blessing" before a meal. And they of course all have nothing to do with the blessing some would kill for in the Old Covenant.

The most interesting thing about the blessings of the Old Covenant was that it was something that could not be retracted once it was given. In short, the blessing was viewed not only as a declaration or prayer, it was an efficacious event.. You will remember for instance the response of Isaac once it was discovered that he had "blessed" the wrong (according to his human will) child recorded in Genesis 27:27-40, much to the distress of Esau. When Isaac realized what he had done, we are told how Isaac *trembled exceedingly... I have blessed him--and indeed he shall be blessed.*" The strangeness of Jacob's blessing was in the fact that it actually effected something in the future. It transacted a covenant, if not also memorializing it. It somehow placed God's saving activity into a genealogy given this Old Covenant context. It was both a sign and a seal, even as to involve a real and effectual relation between the two.

The reason for pointing this out is that the search for divine benediction will in many ways inform the rest of redemptive history especially related to the importance of the "temple" orientation in relation to God's gospel mission. For the sake of time we won't attempt a tediously demonstration of this in our redemptive survey. And so if briefly, here is what I mean:

We discern first of all how redemptive history begins with the first record of divine blessing in the creation account itself.

Gen. 1:22, And God *blessed* them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

Gen. 1:28, Then God *blessed* them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

There are distinctly two parts to the each of the two blessings. At first glance perhaps, it might seem that God's "blessing" is simply saying "go out and have babies," (fruitful...) and "go out and work the land" (fill and subdue), or something along those lines. That is to view the blessing entirely out of its context both in terms of the semantics and its linguistic place in redemptive history. For the interesting thing is that the very same language of this "benediction" is repeated throughout the

Genesis account of redemptive history into the Mosaic era (which is then to complete the Old Testament).

**Noah:** Gen. 8:17 Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh--birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth--so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth."

**Abraham:** Gen. 17:6, I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

**Isaac to Jacob...** Gen. 28:3, May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples.

**Jacob:** Gen. 35:11, God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you.

**Joseph:** Gen. 47:27, Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly.

**Moses:** Ex. 1:7, But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. (c.f. Lev. 26:9)

Upon a review of each instance noted above, a very consistent pattern emerges. Simply stated, in every instance, there is a necessary causal relationship between the "fill/subdue" and "fruitful/multiply" aspects. More specifically, in each case, the "fill/subdue" language is very clearly related to securing a "place of divine presence." That is, the so called "creation mandate" is in fact a "temple" mandate, even as the words are closely tied to the priestly duties of the temple in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> And the "fruitful and multiply" is very clearly related to the "the mission to expand God's benediction to more and more people. It was the Old Testament equivalent of the "great commission" as was reiterated throughout covenant renewal contexts of redemptive history even into the New Covenant.<sup>4</sup>

This then is the present point—redemption history IS a missional history even if it is a *missional* history that requires a history of *temple place* in so far as it's success is effectually assured.

Therefore, as according to the history we are about to review, to receive the "blessing" was

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<sup>3</sup> In Genesis 1:27-28 the "fill the earth and subdue it" language is clearly priestly, as it is the same language applied to the role given to the cherubim with the flaming swords in Genesis 3:24 in order to guard the entrance back into the Edenic presence of God, and repeated again as to guard the entrance back into holy of holies in the temple (Ex.26:1). Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, (Kline, 1989) p.42,

<sup>4</sup> c.f. Noah-Gen 8:17, Abraham 17:6, Isaac to Jacob Gen.28:3, Jacob: Gen.35:11, Joseph: Gen.47:27, Moses 1:7, Temple:26:9, Prophets: Is. 60 (among many), New Testament, Mt. 28, John 20:21-22, Acts 1:8, etc.

paramount to having the blessing in so far as it the blessing was entrance into the place of God's effectual presence and power. Blessing is power as much as it is promise- the two going together as then to be irrevocable as it where. Often the mission and presence was identified with Land in the context of the Old Testament, but land that was ALWAYS set part as THE place of God's dwelling somehow as by some mediating institution. Sometime the institution of God's "dwelling place" was in motion as it where in route to the promised land of God's eventual dwelling place (c.f. The arks for instance-- both Noah's ark and the Ark of the Covenant in the wilderness as both being related to temple presence).

And so the following brief history could just as well be entitled "the history of benediction power." Or something like that. That is because the Mission of Israel was Mediatorial (by divine place), even as Divine place (temple) was missional by their very nature. The Great Commission as it where was very much related to history of temple. As then related to the New Testament church, Peter explicitly picks this idea up as related to the temple.

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1Pet. 2:9*

As then was once said by Lesslie Newbigin about the relation of church to the church:

Just as we insist that a Church which has ceased to be a mission has lost the essential character of a Church, so must we also say that a mission which is not at the same time truly a Church is not a true expression of the divine apostolate. An unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary church."<sup>5</sup>

And so the way this plays out in redemptive history, summarily, is as follows:

### *Temple Presence In Eden*

Meredith Kline in his *Kingdom Prologue* has meticulously documented how the creation story in Genesis is told in terms of the formation of a cosmic temple formed by the presence of God in Word and Spirit!<sup>6</sup> And creation itself is likewise shown to be God in redemptive mission in so far as the

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<sup>5</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Household of God*, P. 147.

<sup>6</sup> That the whole of creation is meant to portray the building of holy temple of presence can be discerned by the use of such language as the repeated use of "dome" to describe the heavens, the same term used associated with Gods' sanctuary in Psalms 150. Accordingly, Isaiah described God as a great architect-artist who created the world "not to be empty (of Himself)... but as a place to *live*" (Isa. 45:18).<sup>6</sup> And clearly the effortless fiat character of the God's work of creation prevents any misconception of the Creator's Sabbath rest in Genesis 2:1-3 being that of a wearied workman! Rather, a better understanding would be to envision God in session, "seated" upon his throne in His royal creation-temple so as to be worshipped! This fits the

whole account begins with the descent of the Holy Spirit into a place of “chaos,” even as to be given a kingdom order out of the ministry of God’s Word.”<sup>7</sup> Such language unequivocally asserts into the creation account a kind of salvation by means of the advent of divine presence, by Word and Spirit, amidst a holy, royal and priestly creation-temple. Consequently, human vocation is described using priestly terms identical to those used of the Old Covenant priesthood in the temple.<sup>8</sup> And the description of the curse of God against fallen humanity is carefully crafted in terms of being excommunicated from the very presence of God mediated through his holy temple even!<sup>9</sup> That is to say that creation itself sets into motion a redemptive history, which is nothing less than a temple history. Nowhere is this made clearer than when one notices the trajectory of God’s animating “Spirit” acting in and through regulated and visible contexts of worship. For in the words of Meredith Kline,

*The Glory Spirit provided a preview of the finished creation structure, for this theophonic Spirit formation was a divine paradigm, as well as a divine power for the work of creation. Cosmos and man alike were to be formed after this archetypal temple pattern.<sup>10</sup>*

Indeed, the creation of the cosmos is accomplished by the “spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). As shown by Meredith Kline, “the Spirit-Glory of Gen.1:2 represents a coming forth of the Lord of Glory out of an invisible temple into a special earth temple to reveal himself in earth history as the Alpha and Omega.”<sup>11</sup> It is the *identical* language that will again show up relative to the new creation by means of the salvation waters of Noah’s day (executed by means

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image of Isaiah 66:1, where after identifying heaven and earth as God’s “throne-room” the same word “shabbath” for “rest” in Genesis 2 is repeated as to be synonymous with worship. And in Psalms. 132, God’s “resting place” is described as God’s “dwelling place” and the place where we are to worship him at his footstool.”

<sup>7</sup> That the presence of the Spirit is intended to be a salvific presence, is indicated by its descent into a context that was “chaos and void.” Jeremiah 4 uses this same to describe God’s curse upon the world awaiting salvation:23ff! In Gen. 1:1-2, if we interpret the context of the “chaotic void” in light of what is to follow in vs. 3ff, together with prophetic application throughout scripture, the point is that pre-created reality not only lacked in cosmological order, but also a kingdom order!

<sup>8</sup> In Genesis 1:27-28 the divine mandate given to “image of God” is to “fill the earth and subdue it.” This language is clearly priestly, as it is the same language applied to the role given to the cherubim with the flaming swords in Genesis 3:24 in order to guard the entrance back into the Edenic presence of God, and repeated again as to guard the entrance back into holy of holies in the temple (Ex.26:1).

<sup>9</sup> The curse that was enacted against fallen humanity is stated in terms of being excommunicated from out of the temple of God—as from “before the face of God (Gen.3:8, c.f. Lev.23:3). And for what other purpose should we attribute to Genesis when it is carefully noted that humanity was driven from out of the east side of the garden, the very same direction facing the entrance to the Mosaic temple!

<sup>10</sup> Kingdom Prologue, p. 31

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32.



of an ark whose dimensions are intentionally reminiscent of the Mosaic temple)<sup>12</sup>, and then again relative to the new creation by means of the salvation waters of the Red Sea in Moses' day culminating in the presence of Word and Spirit in the Mosaic temple itself.<sup>13</sup> At the risk of getting ahead of ourselves, we can likewise observe how Pentecost is very explicitly told in terms of a new creation event and again by the advent of the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> Believers are described in terms of a new creation<sup>15</sup> by means of the efficacious waters of Christian baptism,<sup>16</sup> waters that are in fact explicitly affirmed as having been prefigured in the Noahic and Mosaic waters of old according to Peter!<sup>17</sup>

### *The Temple Church In Bethel*

During the patriarchal period, God's saving "blessing" was to include a "place" where God would in a special way dwell among them. For the patriarchs, this "place" was Bethel as within the future land of Canaan. In Bethel, God met with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for special occasions of covenant renewal (Gen. 12:8, 13:3, 28:19, 31:13, 35:1-15). And in each of these instances, we notice that Bethel was set apart as a place of meeting with God both by means of word and sacrament. Then, the entrance sacrament was circumcision (Gen. 17) and the covenant renewal sacrament was animal sacrifice at an altar. These rituals were transactions specifically instituted by God and regulated by his own rules. And most especially, the covenant blessing/benediction anticipated by the first creation blessing was being accomplished under the redeeming activity of God! In a provisional and mediated way for the patriarchs (relative to the ultimate climax of redemptive history), God could say, "I am with you" in Genesis 26:24.

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<sup>12</sup> Gen.8:1—the "spirit hovering over the water (Gen. 1:2). Note also how the dimensions of the Ark are given so as to have three levels the same height as the tabernacle, and three sections on each deck the same size as the tabernacle courtyard!

<sup>13</sup> Used in Dt. 32:11 to indicate the divine activity in leading Israel through the wilderness—even as the "wilderness" is directly compared to the formless/void over which the Spirit hovered at creation. In Exodus 19:4, God is again described as bearing Israel on "eagles wings" and the imagery of "hovering." That the "spirit of God" is the "glory-cloud" of Israel related to the presence of God by the Holy Spirit is also noted in Neh.9:19, 20, Is.63:11-14, Haggai 2:5 and Acts 2. E.g. The salvific aspects of creation and the re-creation aspects of redemption are evidenced in the literary connection between the original creation record and certain redemptive recreation narratives such as the flood episode (Gen.8:1), in the Exodus episode (Ex.14:21) and more poetically as the "spirit" of God blows upon the waters in Ex.15:8, 10 and eventually at Pentecost."

<sup>14</sup> See Acts 4:23ff, where it is proclaimed "Lord, you are God who made heaven and earth..." as then to culminate in "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>15</sup> 2Cor.5:5, 17, c.f. Rom.6:4ff, 8:9, 20-23.

<sup>16</sup> See for instance the efficacious language attributed to Christian baptism in 1 Peter 3:21, Titus 3:5, Acts 22:16.

<sup>17</sup> That is, the water of baptism (1 Peter 3:18-22, 2 Peter 3:5-7) is a vivid picture likened by Peter unto the waters of the flood and Red sea, which signifies and affects the salvation of God in Christ as then offered in, by and through the New Covenant church.

Therefore, the same history concerning God's sacramental presence in Eden will continue through the Patriarchal Era by means of God's presence mediated at Bethel (the "house of God"). During this context of redemptive history, Jacob will exclaim, "Surely the LORD is in *this place*" and "how awesome is *this place*! This is none other than the house of God, even *the gate of heaven*."<sup>18</sup> Perhaps even more astounding is the fact that God condescends to identify Himself with His sacramental presence on earth when He proclaims "I am the God of Bethel" (Gen.31:13). As a result, God directed His people to Bethel for the purpose of finding salvation by means of covenant execution and renewal according to Genesis.35:1ff.

The significance of Bethel in relation to the benediction is perfectly illustrated by Jacobs request to be buried in Canaan. As the dying Jacob makes plans for his burial, he has in mind Abraham and Isaac, the covenant that God made with them as passed down to him and the great and precious promises of land (divine place of presence) and mission (innumerable people).

Gen. 48:3 And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he *blessed* me, 4 and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers; I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your offspring after you for a perpetual place.

Jacob, in his request, specifically speaks of the his encounter with God at Bethel as the basis for his wanting to return. And so what did Jacob have in mind by his request to be buried in Bethel except that he was looking for heaven. And what was "heaven" except the place of God's presence, even that presence that had been provisionally mediated through the Old Covenant worship that culminated with the pronouncement of benediction? Bethel, even as with the future Canaan, was a place of covenant renewal and blessing complete with covenant renewal rites and the divine presence of Word and Sacrament. And significantly, it was a place where God was present in order to effect salvation less merely to memorialize it. Bethel had also functioned in a similar way with Abraham and Isaac before him. Thus in the dying words of a tired patriarch, the focus is upon his desire to go home to a place of divine dwelling. We are of course reminded in Hebrews how with Abraham, *he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*

The Temple Church Of Moses

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<sup>18</sup> c.f. Abraham and Bethel in Gen. 12:8, Jacob and Bethel in Gen. 28:16-18

Transitioning then to the Mosaic covenant, John Durham has noted concerning the book of Exodus how “the centerpiece of its theological unity is the theology of Yahweh present with and in the midst of his people Israel!”<sup>19</sup> Durham recounts how God’s revelation to Moses was established by God’s presence, how the very basis of Moses’ confidence was predicated upon God’s promise of presence, how God’s presence established the covenantal relationship, and how God’s presence promised guidance, protection and success in the settlement of the Promised Land. It can be shown how God’s presence solemnized the covenant with Israel, even as the presence of Yahweh was at the center of the elaborate instructions for worship.<sup>20</sup> It is therefore no surprise that when the people wanted to sing songs of praise concerning the blessed salvation of God in celebration of the exodus event, and their subsequent conquest and settlement of Canaan, that what they sang about over and over again was God’s presence.<sup>21</sup>

We should, at this point, observe a very important Old Testament pattern that is already exposed concerning the theological nature of God’s salvation. The pattern concerns a “once and for all” aspect of salvation history related to God’s law giving presence by the Holy Spirit (the covenantal orientation) that is continually applied and experienced by God’s liturgical presence in the Holy Spirit acting through Word and Sacrament in the tabernacle (the temple orientation)! In other words, as illustrated in the Mosaic context, God’s saving activity was related to the “Glory-Spirit” (Kline’s expression) of God that led Israel through the wilderness, even the same “Glory-Spirit” that eventually settled upon the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34. Concerning this pattern, Thomas Torrance has observed that the “once and for all event” of God’s salvation in the exodus was accomplished through the mediation of Moses directly, but then was “remembered and participated in by the liturgy of the Old Covenant as mediated through the priesthood in a secondary sense.”<sup>22</sup>

Even while salvation was an *ongoing and dynamic* reality by means of the priestly liturgy of the temple, it was a *once and for all* historical reality as related to the historically grounded “word-deed-word” pattern of God’s special revelation. Or, to state it differently, one can discern between a “revelatory Word” by the Holy Spirit as contained to the “once and for all” historical aspect and a “dynamic Word” by the Holy Spirit acting continually in the temple. E.g. The “Word” according to

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<sup>19</sup> John Durham, “Exodus”, *Word Biblical Commentary* Vol 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987) p. xxi

<sup>20</sup> Ex.3:6, Ex.4:5; Ex. 3:12, 4:11, 15; Ex. 20:1-8; Ex. 23:20-33; Ex. 24:5-8; Ex. 25-31 respectively.

<sup>21</sup> Ex.15:11ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Royal Priesthood*, p. 4 Looking forward to the New Covenant, Torrance will relate this to the once and for all incarnational ministry of Christ on the one hand, and the ascended ministry of Christ by the Holy Spirit acting through the church on the other hand.

Moses was final and complete under the Old Covenant, even as the “Word” was effectually dynamic within the sacramental liturgy of the Aaronic temple. Accordingly, Torrance explains:

Over against Moses, and in secondary status, Aaron is regarded as the liturgical priest who carries out in continual cultic witness the actual mediation that came through Moses. In this way, the cult was a liturgical extension into the history of Israel and her worship of the once and for all events of Exodus and Sinai... That which took place once and for all in the lawgiving and covenantal atonement is enshrined in the liturgy of the Tabernacle. But it is extended cultically into the life and history of Israel in such a way as to make clear that the priestly sacrifices and oblations are carried out as liturgical witness to the divine glory and obedience to God’s proclamation of his own Name in grace and judgment, in mercy and truth.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, the once and for all two fold “God humanward” and “human Godward” ministry of Moses served to *regulate* and *order* the divine-human union according to static rule of faith and practice handed down by Moses, even the same twofold priestly actions of Moses were observed continually through “Aaron’s supreme function as high priest, bearing the iniquity of the people (Ex.28:38, Lev.10:17, Num.18:23) such as to ascend into the Holy of Holies once a year on the day of atonement” only then to return from behind the veil to the waiting congregation with the blessed “peace be unto you” to put the name of God upon them in benediction (Num.6:22ff).” Again, as noted by Torrance, “That which took place once and for all in the lawgiving and covenantal atonement is enshrined in the liturgy of the Tabernacle.”<sup>24</sup>

The above twofold aspects of incarnation and ascension—both “once and for all” and “continually”—expose both the object-covenant and subject-temple orientation in Old Covenant worship! All in all, the whole liturgy was regarded by the Old Testament as an ordinance of grace accomplished by God and applied by God. It was God Himself who provided the sacrifice, and the whole action is described, therefore, in the form of a divinely appointed response to God’s Word (Ex.25:22, Num.7:89).

All together then, from Eden to Jerusalem, we see how there was never a time in all of Old Covenant history wherein salvation wasn’t being transacted, less witnessed, by the temple-church as the very live giving presence of a living God. So vital was the temple church that it was often praised as a the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Royal Priesthood*, p. 4.

very sanctuary and refuge of God. So for instance, the Psalmist in Psalms 46 gives praise to God who is his very “refuge and strength” and then directly relates this to “the holy place of the tabernacle of the most High, where God is *in the midst of her*” so that “she shall not be moved.”

And so in anticipation of the New Covenant context, would it surprise us if John Calvin, after commenting on Psalms 46, was led *not* to reflect upon the Mosaic context of law and temple as if a past benefit to the people of God, but upon the descent of the Holy Spirit under the New Covenant related to the meaning of the Lord’s supper within the visible church! Indeed, Calvin could preach in the New Covenant sense, “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved” (Ps. 46:5) and then say, “So available is communion with the Church to keep us in the fellowship of God.”<sup>25</sup> Calvin therefore read continuity between the Old and New Covenants regarding a salvation involving a real and efficacious *presence* of God expressed corporately!

Hence it follows, that all who reject the spiritual food of the soul divinely offered to them by the hands of the Church deserve to perish of hunger and famine... With this view, it pleased him in ancient times that sacred meetings should be held in the sanctuary, that consent in faith might be nourished... as when the temple is called God’s rest, his sanctuary, his habitation, and when he is said to dwell between the cherubim’s (Ps 32:13, 14; 80:1).<sup>26</sup>

In the New Covenant therefore, we will want to see “Christ vis-à-vis history” as manifest in his incarnation, ascension and consummation as the “tabernacle of God in the midst of us” (John 1:14). Most especially as involving us today, it pertains to the church of Christ’s ascended ministry as being mediated by the Holy Spirit being built upon apostolic organization with Christ as the cornerstone (of the temple-church that is) that we must now concern ourselves.

### ***The New Covenant Temple Church Of Christ From Incarnation to Ascension to Consummation***

Thomas Torrance has observed how “we cannot pay too much attention to the fact that the Holy Spirit was sent upon the church after the crucifixion, resurrection and the ascension of Christ. In that series Pentecost belongs as one of the mighty salvation events, and to that series the parousia will belong as the last.”<sup>27</sup> Applied then to the ministry of the church, Torrance continues:

The spirit operates by creating out of the word a body that St. Paul calls the Body of Christ.... It is the sphere where through the presence of the Spirit the salvation-events of the birth,

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<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4,1,5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd LTD, 1955), p. 23.

life, death, resurrection and ascension are operative here and now in history, the sphere wherever within the old creation the new creation has broken in with power."<sup>28</sup>

A brief survey of the New Testament will reveal again how Christ's ministry in relation to his God-humanward and Human-Godward activity is *really*, if not also mystically, being accomplished for us and our salvation in, with and through the visibly organized temple church today. And just as related to eternal typifying Moses and Levites under the Old Covenant context, so today we will discern the once and for temple activity of Christ in his incarnational presence as then being continued by his ascension presence today.

### *The Gospels*

In the Gospel of John the scene is immediately following the death of Christ. There was Mary, the grateful disciple of Christ who had experienced the transformative power and love of Jesus who had healed her of "evil spirits and infirmities" (Lk.8:2). This is the same Mary who had witnessed His catastrophic execution by death on a cross, and who stood alone with Jesus' mother before the cross when most everyone else had forsaken Him (Jn.19:25). And now Mary has come to the tomb only to discover that Christ is missing. Thinking his body stolen or desecrated, we are told how Mary began to weep bitterly. Immediately, the narrative wants us to focus on a question—first asked by two angels sitting on either side of where Christ's body would have been, but then again the exact same question by a man standing at the entrance of the tomb who Mary mistakes for the grounds-keeper. Two times it is asked, why are you weeping?" (And we are thinking about now "why do you think?!!)

Written around 70 AD and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, we could safely say that the fledging Jewish-Christian church had entered into a kind of "lost-cause" phase of history *and* spirituality. By "lost cause," it is meant what happens to a nation or cause after suffering defeat as to reconstruct what Charles Wilson has described as the "afterlife of a Redeemer nation that died."<sup>29</sup> That is, in order to replace whatever dreams had been associated with "winning," the loser will often "memorialize" the past as then to cling to whatever ideals they were fighting for, albeit now being realized in a spiritual way as if through a "baptism of blood."<sup>30</sup> This is facilitated by the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.23.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Wilson, *Baptized in Blood, The Religion of the Lost Cause 1865—1920* (Athens, Georgia: UGA Press, 1980).

construction and use of memorial objects such as to help materialize what is otherwise an abstract memory and dream.

In relation then to John's Jewish Christian congregation, even before 70 AD Tacitus of Rome could speak of how those "called Christians by the populace" were considered separately as "a class hated for their abominations" (for instance their cannibalism as associated with the Lord's Supper). But then "the war against Rome deprived them of their Land and Temple and had desecrated their holy places so that their loss was constantly and painfully present."<sup>31</sup> The glory days of Christ's incarnation and resurrection were clearly gone and perhaps even becoming a vague memory amidst an escalation tension and emergent persecution. It concerns then destruction of the temple especially that John is concerned per the sympathy of his congregation in Jerusalem. The temptation would have clearly been to digress into disillusionment such as to become a kind of "lost cause" spirituality such as to cling to the memories of the past albeit in a way spiritualize the future.

Enter then John's gospel and the question "Why are you weeping?" IN other words, how was Mary and the small band of Christian follower to respond after the seeming "lost cause" of Christ's ministry culminating in the death of their hero and would be king? Upon the revelation that the man standing at the door was in fact Jesus, Mary did exactly what you would have expected her to do—she evidently "clung" to Jesus in his flesh in joyful reunion. Jesus' response is as perplexing as it is telling!

*Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. (John 20:17)*

Without the advantage of knowing John's context, we would be tempted to think Jesus was suffering from a "death hangover." But read in the context John's context and the narrative of Christ's teachings and life thus far, Mary's temptation and Christ's response is clearly meant to redirect the spirituality of John's congregation. In so many words, Jesus response is—don't focus on the past, don't "cling" to my incarnation, and don't memorialize me! "For I am ascending!" THE point of John's gospel from the very start was to direct us to an even "greater" temple to come as realized in Christ's ascension ministry. That is, for John and especially related to his congregation, the climax of Christ's ministry was not the cross, not even the resurrection, but the ascension such that the

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<sup>31</sup> May Coloe, *God Dwells With Us* (by Order of St. Benedict. Inc Collegeville: Minnesota, 2001) P.

entire of John's gospel is setting us up for this transitional moment as introduced through Mary's first encounter with Christ after his resurrection.

To begin, John introduces Christ's incarnation as the divine word "tabernacling among us." (John 1:16). Think about the context- the "word" now becoming "flesh" and "tabernacling..." John proceeds to carefully construct his narrative in a way that draws attention to Christ self-revelation within the context of the great temple feasts. For instance, while celebrating the Passover, Jesus is proclaimed to be the true bread from heaven (6:35ff). While celebrating the feast of the tabernacles, Jesus is proclaimed to be the true light of the world (8:12ff). During the feast of temple dedication that celebrated the reconstruction of the temple in 164BC, Jesus is proclaimed to be the consecrated one (10:36ff)—all images of the Old Testament temple now "in Christ" fulfilled! AS noted by Mary Coloe,

"The temple is not a peripheral image. It is used consistently throughout the text and moves beyond the life of Jesus into the life of the community, giving the community a clear sense of identity and a way of sustaining faith in the absence of Jesus.<sup>32</sup>

Turning then to the importance of the ascension, Richard Gaffin, in his *Perspectives on Pentecost* observes how in the first chapter of John there is a close integration of John's ministry of baptizing Christ by water (vs.31), Jesus' own reception of the Spirit (vs. 32) and the promise that Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit (vs. 33). Moreover, in the very next chapter and scene is Christ in the temple. Having expressed his zeal for the temple-household of God, we are immediately cued in to Christ's conversation with the Jews where he explains to them how the temple will be destroyed (remember the context of John's congregation) and yet how Christ will raise it up again.! And the narrator tells us *he was speaking about the temple of his body*. (John 2:19-23,33 ) What body exactly? To be sure, it would related to his resurrected body on earth. But then again, for late first century Christians of John's gospel, that had already happened and passed.

We jump forward again to the strange teachings of Jesus in John 14-17.<sup>33</sup> Often referred to as his 'final discourse', the scene is again a said one as he is telling his disciples that he must die and that he is going to a place where they can't go. But then he makes this promise: "

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<sup>32</sup> Coloe, p. 3

<sup>33</sup> In John 14-16, Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit as yet "another" counselor and comforter. The point being made in 14:12ff especially is that the gift of the Holy Spirit is conditioned upon both His going to the Father and at the same time his coming back to them. Very carefully, Jesus says "I will not leave you orphaned; *I am coming to you*. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (vs. 18-



*"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (Jn. 14:18-20).*

"You will see me...?" And the reader is asking when and on what day? Is he talking about his second bodily return at the consummation of history, or something else? The answer is immediate. In describing their ongoing communion in love upon his ascension, he says regarding his union with the father "we will come.. and we will make our home with him" speaking about the person remaining on earth and who are united in his love in union with the Father (John 14:23, 24-16). He further explains how this is going to be transacted by the Holy Spirit saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and *greater works than these will he do*, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). Clearly, there is an optimism in Christ concerning his ascension ministry that would have encourage the disillusioned band of brothers in John's day living in the sometime tragic circumstances of a "now -not yet" reality on earth. And yet, clearly Christ's point is they will not be left alone! He even explains how it is "better that I leave you" since he says, greater things are to come. This then brings us to the climax of this discourse even as it points us directly to the vivifying presence of Christ on earth during his ascension ministry.

And so this brings us to the great "great commission" according to John, very much reminiscent of great commissions past through the Old Testament. There is benediction of salvation promised in direct proportion to Christ's continued temple presence on earth—e.g. "mission and place!" Jesus is remembered as saying, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you in John 20:21." With specially attention to the "Just as...so" framing of the commission, the focus is again on the Trinitarian unity in mission that is here being related to "those remaining on earth as previously described in union with the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit (John 17). AS to the nature of this union in mission, we clearly discern how it is not merely envisioned as church witness, but the church as Christ's presences. For in the very next sentence, John records the extraordinary event wherein we are told how immediately, (following the "just as.. so" commission), Jesus "breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld" (20:22-23, c.f John 6:56).

From out of the rubble of a lost cause ascends the temple-church albeit united to Christ in heaven and yet to mediate Christ's continued life-giving presence on earth unto salvation. And wouldn't

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20). Christ further speaks of making his "home with them" (vs. 23). And then immediately he says, "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you (vs. 25-26).

this change everything for John's congregation and us? Albeit tempered with the realism of salvation "not yet" fully consummated in the reunion heaven to earth, it allows for an optimism in ministry and life since according to Christ's own words about his ascension ministry by the Holy Spirit, *is to your advantage that I go away*, As described by Douglas Farrow about the ascension temple today, "In the resulting gap a place has opened up for the Eucharistic community as a genuinely new entity within world history, albeit a peculiar one with its own peculiar view of the way things are." He continues, "*The ascension, thus becomes the climax of Jesus-history and the eschatological event fulfilling all the hopes of Israel.*"<sup>34</sup>

### *The Acts of the Apostles*

While we have chosen to focus mostly on John's gospel, but the same two-fold pattern concerning salvific benediction in the Old Covenant can be located in Matthew's gospel wherein the temple-presence of God is clearly "instituted" by Christ in 16:15-19 as then directly related to the Great Commission of God's benediction promise in Matthew 28 wherein it is said "I am with you until the end of the age." The same movement of thought demonstrated in John's gospel in relation to the "two baptism" is also demonstrated in Luke as per his "two" gospels. For in comparing Luke 3:22 with Acts 1:5, Gaffin discerns how "the overall structure of Luke-Acts is related then to the connection between John's water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism."<sup>35</sup> Gaffin therefore comments,

At the Jordan, the spirit was given to Jesus by the Father (Luke 3:22) as endowment for the messianic task before him, in order that he might accomplish the salvation of the church: at Pentecost, the Spirit received by Jesus from the Father, as reward for the redemptive work finished and behind Him, was given by Him to the church as the promised gift of the Father...<sup>36</sup>

In other words, when Luke says in Acts 1:5 *for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now*, he in no uncertain terms renders Christ's reception of baptism during his incarnation as somehow incomplete apart from Christ's gift of baptism after his ascension! Whereas Christ's baptism by John his is forensic solidarity with humanity culminating in substitutionary atonement, Christ's promise to baptize with the Holy spirit anticipates Christ's spirit-filled "temple-church" as clearly articulated in almost these exact same terms throughout the

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<sup>34</sup> Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia* p. 40 and 11 respectively.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Gaffin, *Perspectives On Pentecost*, (Phillipsburg, NJ, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. 1979), p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

apostolic foundation.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, when Peter is asked to explain the meaning of Pentecost, he doesn't preach the "Holy Spirit," rather he preaches "Christ" (Acts 2:14-39). That is, in the advent of the Holy Spirit was the advent of Christ albeit according to the mystery of the Trinity. But is there the flesh of Christ in a visibly organized way even? Is Pentecost just about a message, or is it about a presence.

It will perhaps surprise some that the whole thing is happening in relation to their going up to the temple wherein the ecclesial praxis itself is revealed as the "new temple" of Christ's salvific presence by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:46). We are told how the people "received" the message and "were baptized" even as they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and *koinonia*, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:41-42). These are four elements that will be repeated throughout as per an organizing significance. And this word "koinonia" means "participation" or "communion and is elsewhere assigned to a kind of real "life on life" participation and exchange at the deepest level involving our communion with Christ and one another simultaneously (c.f. 1Cor 10:15-17).

Evidently then, the Christ's promised baptism by the Holy Spirit is accompanied not just by preaching but by church planting. We encounter for instance this striking observation how in summary of the apostolic ministry, we read in Acts 9:31, "then the *churches* throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified" (c.f. Acts 14:23). As Gaffin has observed

Christ and the Spirit are equated in their activity. The two are seen as one, as they have been made one in the eschatological work of giving life to the church, that life which has its visible first fruits in Christ's own resurrection. Accordingly, all who have been incorporated into that Spirit-baptized body and have a place in it share in the gift of the Spirit (1Cor.12:13).<sup>38</sup>

Clearly then, the argument of John and Luke concerning Pentecost is first of all that the advent of the Holy Spirit is the advent of Christ! The Spirit's work is not a "bonus" added to the basic salvation secured by Christ. Rather, the coming of the Spirit brings to light not only that Christ HAS

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<sup>37</sup> By undergoing the baptism of John, Jesus was identified with humanity as our representative and forensic covenant sin-bearer—this being Christ's "once and for all" ministry and the subject matter of the gospels after the pattern of Moses in the Old Testament. And yet, Christ by his ascension ministry of baptism in/with/through the temple church is also the life giving Spirit according to Paul (c.f. Romans 6:1ff). That is, by Christ's ascension, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam *became a life-giving spirit*" (1 Cor.15:45). Peter will later describe salvation in terms of being made partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4)!

<sup>38</sup> Gaffin, p.21.

lived, and HAS done certain things, but that He is the source of eschatological life NOW! And in so far as Christ in the Holy Spirit is directly related to the presence of God in the sacramental church, then of course the church is rendered essential to Christ making good His promise, “And behold, I am with you until the end of the age!” (Mt.28:2), This means that the coming of Christ by the spirit completes the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation. “It is the apex thus far reached in the unfolding of redemptive history.”<sup>39</sup>

*The Apostolic Foundation For A Temple-Church As Codified in the Epistles*

That the visibly organized church is the very enlivening temple-presence of God today is perhaps nowhere made more explicit than in Ephesians. Picking up with Ephesians 2:1, Paul will utilize a “once... but now” literary framework to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in personal salvation as conceived of in covenantal terms especially.<sup>40</sup> The forensic “saved by grace through faith alone” is clearly in view, even as it is related to an vivifying activity of the Holy Spirit to bring us to that faith by regeneration. This then is where Paul moves to the second “once.. but now” logic, but this time clearly related to the vivifying activity of God in the visibly organized church. And yet, all too often, this is where we stop reading. We should therefore be careful to notice how the “once... but now” framework is explicitly repeated by Paul beginning in vs. 11, and completed in vs. 21.<sup>41</sup>

The repetition speaks volumes—as if to say in bold terms, “this is still about the gospel!” This time, the emphasis is corporate, about a people once estranged from God by means of being alienated from the corporate *presence* of God! In the words of Paul, to be separated from the “household of God” (vs. 19) is NOT to participate in the gospel according to vs. 18 where it is said, “for through Him (Christ) we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.” (E.g. No church... no access to God!) The work of the Holy Spirit is attributed to our being “in Him” (Christ) corresponding to being “holy temple...*in the Lord!*”

To put it another way, It would be a stretch to read Paul’s language as pertaining to anything less than a real, visibly organized temple-church as here an essential element of the gospel. So for instance Paul uses the language in vs. 22 of “union in Christ” as then synonymous with “being *built up* together spiritually into a *dwelling place* of God.” This idea of being “built up” is the same word as “being joined together” in Ephesians 4:16 concerning the descent of Christ in the Holy Spirit

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> pote (vs. 2ff)... de« (vs.4ff)

<sup>41</sup> ποτε...νῦν (vs. 11ff)... νυνὶ δὲ (vs.13ff)

related to the ascent of Christ. The offices that are mentioned in this are specifically said to “join together” the body of Christ— this almost certainly a reference to their role of “organizing” churches.<sup>42</sup> As constructed then upon the apostolic foundation, one can at the very least conclude that the construction of an assembly included instructions in “doctrine, sacrament and government all of which was related to the “building of the temple.”<sup>43</sup>

This is perfectly illustrated when Paul speaks about the “pattern of sound words” related to his instructions to his young protégé, Timothy “in order that” he might “know how *one ought* to conduct oneself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14-15). And would it surprise us that Paul’s “instructions” to Timothy covered such topics as instructions on ordination (1 Tim 3), worship (1Tim 2) and doctrine (1Tim 1) as no doubt being worked out in an assembled context? In so are as the practice of these aspects of spirituality are “being joined together” there is a mediated correspondence between Christ in “office” as describe elsewhere:

**King:** “Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies *under His feet*” (1 Cor. 15:24–25).

**Prophet** “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His son, whom He has *appointed heir of all things*, through whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1–2).

**Priest** “And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting *till His enemies are made His footstool*. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us, for after He had said before, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into

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<sup>42</sup> συναρμολογουμένη, see also Ephesians 4:16. According then to Louw and Nida, this word can be used synonymously with “assemble,” arrange, structure or even “organize.” In 1Cor.12:20 for instance, God is said to “structure (συγκεράννυμι) the body of Christ as to give some greater honor than others.. And perhaps most significantly, Titus 1:5 applies the verb ἐπιδιορθο/w to mean “set in order” or even “organize” as to establish a church by means of the training and appointment of elders. Louw & Nida, #62.3,4,5. C.f. T. David Gordon’s “Equipping” Ministry in Ephesians 4?”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March, 1994).

<sup>43</sup> This is perfectly illustrated when Paul speaks about the “pattern of sound words” related to his instructions to his young protégé, Timothy “in order that” he might “know how *one ought* to conduct oneself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14-15). And would it surprise us that Paul’s “instructions” to Timothy covered such topics as instructions on ordination (1 Tim 3), worship (1Tim 2) and doctrine (1Tim 1) as no doubt being worked out in an assembled context? Surely then, the “whole structure” being “joined together” upon the apostolic foundation spoken of in Ephesians included such things! And as such, the “temple” being spoken of in Ephesians is both “spiritual” as to be animated into Christ by the Holy Spirit AND organized as to take on a definable and even “orthodox” form.

their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,' then He adds, 'Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.' Now where there is remission of these, there is no more.' Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin" (Heb. 10:11–18).

The threefold office of Christ as mediated through the visible church is further indicated when one considers what the Bible teaches about the church's ministry.

### **The Prophetic Role of the Church—*Apostolic Confession***

"But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14ff).

"I left you behind in Crete for this reason so that you should put in order what remained to be done by appointing elders in every town....He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it" (Titus 1:5, 9).

### **The Priestly Role of the Church—*Sacramental Worship***

"And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *sharing* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a *sharing* in the body of Christ...You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons....For to begin with when you come together as a church..., For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you preach the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 10:16ff).

### **The Kingly Role of the Church—*Shepherding Love***

"Shepherd the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising oversight...and when the chief shepherd appears" (1 Peter 5:2ff).

"Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears" (Acts 20:28–31).

Surely then, the “whole structure” being “joined together” upon the apostolic foundation spoken of in Ephesians included such things!<sup>44</sup> And as such, the “temple” being spoken of in Ephesians is both “spiritual” as to be animated into Christ by the Holy Spirit AND visible as to take on a definable and even divinely appointed “structure.” The church as such is described by the Apostle Paul as the “*household of God which is the church of the living god, the pillar and bulwark of the truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15).

### **Conclusion: The Benediction of Mission and Presence**

My discussions with Bim happened along time ago. He eventually was baptized and enjoys a very positive relationship with his parents. He is now married with children living on the other side of the globe. And yet thankfully, the globe is no longer so divided as it was, at least not spiritually. Our short survey has perhaps suggested why. Indeed, it is shown that for the sake of God’s full and blessed benediction, we need BOTH, mission and presence, divine law and divine participation, shall we say, covenant and theosis-temple. However we understand the transaction of God’s presence exactly, it is vital that we understand and practice in the presence of God as he is visibly being mediated on earth as he is in heaven. For indeed, we have seen that there was never a time in all of redemptive history wherein God’s benediction was NOT transacted through real, concrete, institutions that “join together” place and people within the threefold presence of Christ as prophet priest and king, in some sense at least.

The last benediction of Christ on earth according to Matthews account is of course the words: And here me, I am with you until the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20). Surely these words means take on a new meaning in light of the benediction history of God through redemptive history. It is paramount to putting the blessing on our heads wherein we are invited into the holy “temple-place of his presence and power such as to not only commission us but to enliven us in the power of his benediction love. That Christ here was envisioning his presence being mediated through the visibly organized church is as much assumed from the Old Covenant

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<sup>44</sup> It is important to see by all this that Christ accomplishes our salvation not through one of these offices alone, but through the exercise of all three, integrated within the one person, Jesus Christ. And now, in the present age, all this exercise of power is said to be mediated to us in the *church* as we look forward to the church of heaven. In the words of John Murray, “We cannot think of Christ properly apart from the church.” John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. I (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976) p. 238.

history of temple as it is the very explicit description of temple by divine institution in Matthew 16.

*But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound [will have been bound] in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed [will have been loosed] in heaven" (Matthew 16:15–19).*

From the context, we know that Jesus is looking forward to His atoning death and resurrection (vs. 21). How then would the long-awaited messianic kingdom be present if Christ has been raised up into heaven? How would His disciples remain under His benediction grace and power. Notice that by Christ's own authorization, the church is provided with the power of the "keys" so as to have the authorized responsibility of "binding and loosing," which is clearly a reference to the priestly preservation of the temple as was first commissioned to Adam and Eve."<sup>45</sup>

And so we see how Matthews gospel also brings together the "mission"(be fruitful and multiply) and temple "power" (subdue and fill) in relation to Matthew 28 and 16 respectively. This suggests that we ought to read Matthews Great Commission with new eyes. With the eyes of those having read redemptive history, and then Christ's institution of the church in Matthew 16, we see shadows

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<sup>45</sup>The idea of "keys" taken from the priestly duty in the OC temple is roughly synonymous with the meaning of "fill and subdue" as previously noted in Genesis commissioning of Adam and Eve. For the meaning of "keys," the Old Testament (1 Chron. 9:17–27, Nehemiah 7:1ff) describes the Temple "gatekeepers" as having the duty of employing keys to open it every morning. The gatekeepers were literally to "guard" (Neh. 7:3ff) the entrance into the Temple. This image of "keys" is expanded in Isaiah 22:20–22, foreshadowing the ministry of the Messiah. Christ's point in Mt. 16 is to affirm this messianic role albeit mediated through the messianic assembly built upon the foundation of the apostles. In the exercise of the "keys" of the kingdom, the gatekeepers (church officers) will open and shut the doors of the visible kingdom of heaven. This will keep the people safe from the kingdom of darkness. Likewise, the language of "binding and loosing" is an ancient Near Eastern way of describing the authority to exercise power. For instance, the word "bind" is almost always used in describing the exercise of government, bringing someone under justice or a sentence of some sort, to be legally restrained; e.g., Herod's arrest of John is referred to as "binding" (Mt. 14:3) and so too the arrest of Jesus (Mt. 27:2). To "bind" someone is to put him under a sentence, thus restraining him. So also, the term "loose" is used when the sentence is pardoned or when someone is restored in a right relation to the governed community. That this language speaks of the exercise of government is clearly evidenced in Mt. 18:15–18. In this passage, the point is in reference to the use of power in the Temple (given that Christ is here speaking while still under the "Old Covenant"). His point is that God is present (authorizes) such exercise of power to *affect* a person's relationship to the Benediction promise.



of the threefold redemptive offices of prophet, priest, and king in the command itself mandated by Christ to his church such that it could be said, "and lo, I am with you always until the end."

**As our Prophet:** *Teach them* (by the authorized preaching of God's word);

**As our Priest:** *Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit* (baptism represents an entrance into the fellowship [communion] of the community that is sanctioned by the Triune God);

**As our King:** *To obey* (which presupposes that teaching is in the context of accountability by some form of government approved of by God).

, Lesslie Newbigin says well how a temple ecclesiology impacts the way we think of missions as to involve the church not as the "source of witness" but the "locus of witness" or the church that is missionary by her very nature! He says:

*The church is not the source of witness, it is the locus of witness.... the presence of a new reality, the presence in the shared life of the church of the spirit ... It's visible embodiment will be a community that lives by this story, a community whose existence is visibly defined in the regular rehearsing and reenactment of the story which has given it birth, the story of the self-emptying of God in the ministry of life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Its visible center as a continuing social entity is that weekly repeated event in which believers share bread and wine as Jesus commanded, as his pledge to them and their pledge to him that they are one with him in his passion and one with him in his victory...<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>46</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, Ch. 10, p. 120