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## Theological Practices for Sustaining Community Renewal at Speedway Church of Christ

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## ABSTRACT

This project assembled a group of potential small-group facilitators for the purpose of drafting a small-group discussion guide to be used at the Speedway (Indiana) Church of Christ. The guide was intended to aid the discernment of missional practices which sustain the renewal of the wider community. Focusing on the Gospel of John, the intervention attempted to recover a temple Christology, construing the incarnation, ministry, death, and the lifting up of Jesus within the larger story of the temple's ongoing re-creation of the world. In bestowing his glory upon the church, Jesus sends the church into all the world, as the Father had sent him, as a renewed temple and a mysterious agent of ongoing creation. Thus, the temple's iconic creational functions, architecturally expressed on Zion and embodied in Jesus Christ, act as spiritual and imaginative sources for the church's own practices of community renewal. The group sessions produced the discussion guide entitled *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Discussion Guide for Discerning Missional Practices*. This thesis assesses this artifact's reliability and its wider theological significance for missional ecclesiology, suggesting further areas of research.

Theological Practices for Sustaining Community Renewal at Speedway Church of Christ

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

By

Kent A. Ellett

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This thesis, directed and approved by the committee for the thesis candidate Kent A. Ellett, has been accepted by the Office of Graduate Programs of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry



Assistant Provost for Graduate Programs

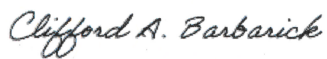
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Of course, I owe a debt of gratitude to the six congregational participants who walked through this intervention with me. For administrative and research reasons, their identities here remain anonymous, yet they are known in the heavens for the ways they tirelessly surprised and challenged me to think differently about how temple language bears upon our shared context. Additional thanks goes to Dr. Carson Reed whose patient assistance has always been valuable—none more than his connecting me with Avery Silliman, whose art now adorns this project's primary artifact. Within a very short time, Avery visually grasped the essence of temple ecclesiology and its importance for the missional imagination.

These days, I'm increasingly thankful for the numerous people, now living and dead, whom I ever carry with me in my ministry. None, however, have had such an obvious impact on this project as Professor J. Gerald Janzen. His unequaled blend of wide-ranging attentiveness, exegetical daring, philosophical acuity, and poetic sensitivity are exceeded only by his gracious friendship expressed to me during the twenty years

since his so-called retirement. Time and again, I have come to conclusions only to realize that Gerry has long been leading me to such discoveries, which seem to percolate up from the ground of our being. I cannot help but express what I admit feels like a filial aspiration that this project makes some faithful use of his work.

My grandfather, Quentin Ellett, would now be 102, but his hunger for theological reflection, always written large on his countenance, remains for me an unveiled sign of the powers of the coming age. While I can only hope someday to exhibit something of my mother's compassion and retain some remnant of my father's tenacious discipline, it was in my grandfather that I first saw that glorious interpenetration of heaven and earth which Jesus, the temple, makes possible.

Finally, I dedicate this to my wife, Amy, without whose encouragement and sacrifice I could not have even begun this project. Without her patience and unfailing love, my life and ministry would simply not be possible.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Context Description**

The Speedway Church of Christ, formerly the Blaine Avenue Church of Christ, was established in 1885 as a Christian Church on the then-west edge of Indianapolis. Its history may be understood in terms of Robert Dale’s theory of organizational life-cycles.<sup>1</sup> Its founding dream was described by one member in a preface to the church record book (circa 1950). The church, he said, existed to hold up a “light for the divine pattern” of the church. That “pattern” insisted on mutual edification, opposing located clergy, instrumental music, and Sunday schools. Records and stories strongly suggest that the Blaine Avenue congregation saw itself as an attractional model of church, valuing what leading members perceived as primitive church organization where the church officers were charged with maintaining austere liturgical structure.<sup>2</sup>

One working-class family dominated church leadership for 70 years. Officers who were not related to the leadership were occasionally employees of this leading family who operated a successful grocery store in the neighborhood. Rooms above the store

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1. Robert D. Dale, *To Dream Again: How to Help Your Church Come Alive* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1981).

2. “Attractional” describes a vision of church that emphasizes inviting people into liturgical settings so as to assist individuals with their spiritual lives. It is used here to describe the antithesis of “missional” church as it is described in Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

were given to people who were “down on their luck.” These people would work at the grocery store provided that they also attended church at Blaine. Thus, while the church’s liturgical life was sacralized and sharply divided from business and community life, individuals within the congregation still had a significant neighborhood presence, growing to 125 members by the mid-1920s.

Divisions occurred over subsequent decades so that by the 1950s the congregation only hovered between thirty and fifty members. Between 1955 and 1960 the congregation began redefining itself against a debating spirit, which then prevailed within Churches of Christ.<sup>3</sup> This second iteration of the congregation was still an attractational model of church, adhering to most of its former church procedures, but this time, it featured a located minister who began collecting refugees from religious legalism of various kinds. Interest in keeping the peace created strong opposition to liturgical change or local mission beyond that of supporting the “personal work” of the minister.

This model of church grew modestly until the neighborhood changed. Appalachian immigrants and other minorities moved into the neighborhood. The daughter of the grocery owner was injured in a shooting, and the store was sold. At the same time, much of the older leadership died. By the 1960s many members no longer lived in or served the neighborhood. The flight to Speedway (an independent town of 10,000 inhabitants on the west side of the Indianapolis metropolitan area) in 1980 was seen as an attempt to market church services in a more secure place. Nevertheless,

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3. While more conciliatory in tone, J. D. Thomas’s work on biblical interpretation illustrates the way numerous issues were debated at the time. See J. D. Thomas, *We Be Brethren: A Study in Biblical Interpretation* (Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1958).

members did not live within the Speedway city limits, and thus no sustained efforts were made to engage Speedway's schools, leadership, or culture for nearly twenty years.

In 2006 after the death of the aforementioned minister who led the second iteration of the church, the emerging leadership of the congregation acknowledged that the fifty-member congregation was again going through a liminal period and that the congregation ought to engage in a series of missional experiments. The church decided to become a satellite for a local Thanksgiving dinner for community members. Thereafter, the church began an after-school program in conjunction with the local elementary school, and in the fall of 2018, this work was expanded to five days a week, employing a young member of the congregation.

In 2008 a large part of the membership affirmed that the congregation should embark on a process of searching for vacant housing to use for rehabilitation as a means of helping people make new starts in Christian community. In late 2011 the first of three houses on Alton Street was filled with a missionary family in the neighborhood. A second was filled by an elderly couple who lost their son to murder in 2014, and the third house was leased to a single mother with two children in 2018.

Nevertheless, energy for community work was declining. In 2015 the church had applied to the Indianapolis Center for Congregations to receive a grant of up to \$30,000 in matched funds for expanding the after-school ministries. The Center for Congregations accepted this proposal with the stipulation that the church, like all applicants, engage in a period of discernment about its holistic congregational commitment to serving the community. What the leaders discovered was that there was even less energy for any kind of sustained, collective, community ministry than the waning participation in the church's

housing rehabilitation ministry had already suggested. The energy that did exist for community involvement ultimately did not coalesce into a cohesive congregational sense of direction. In the end the church withdrew from the grant program because of a lack of energy for any additional collective engagement with the community.

### **Problem Statement**

The theological impasse that hampered Blaine Avenue's capacity to rethink mission in the inner city after its neighborhood changed (facilitating the congregation's flight to Speedway) is the same theological block that made it seem unnecessary to engage the church's social setting in Speedway for twenty years. It arises from a dualism that relegates church life to a sacred and spiritual domain. It abandons or ignores the supposedly secular, embodied space, economy, and social realities of the city.

These insular habits of mind are only beginning to give way at Speedway. The most active members have an intuitive sense that the church's community development project and the after-school programming have something to do with the congregation's emerging sense of identity. Yet, the church as a whole has not yet replaced its dualistic and attractional ecclesiology or its attractional blueprint, which is an inheritance from the first dream. The congregation has been experiencing a crisis of imagination. The church does not have a vocabulary with which to articulate a new missional ecclesiology or its attendant practices. Thus, the church has not settled on a defining dream. The resulting uncertainty about whether new directions "will work" or, more profoundly for some, the feeling that community involvement is merely a distracting sideline saps the congregation of much of its energy for community mission. To use Thomas Kuhn's language, the older ecclesial "paradigm" has collapsed, but the congregation lacks a new controlling



paradigmatic image of church which can open up a new symbolic world.<sup>4</sup> The congregation needs a theological pattern or blueprint as a source of imaginative power to discern and sustain missional practices. Put another way, the congregation lacks a theologically focused blueprint for discerning congregational practices that sustain community renewal.

### **Purpose Statement**

If the church is to continue to engage neighborhoods and to do community development ministry, such work must be firmly rooted in an understanding of the essential nature of the church as well as a sense of the congregation's particular vocation. The intervention of this project thesis attempts to visually and conceptually reclaim an ecclesiology of the temple of God in Jesus Christ for that purpose.

Richard Hays, in his 1996 book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, demonstrates the importance of controlling "focal images" in the process of doing ecclesial ethics.<sup>5</sup> For many traditional Churches of Christ, the focal image for the church is shaped by reference to passages such as Ezek 43:10, Exod 25:40, Heb 8:5, and Phil 3:17 where the paradigmatic ecclesial "pattern" (Greek *typos*) or blueprint occurs in contexts having to do with the earthly temple patterning the spiritual realities of the heavenly temple. However, in these traditional Church of Christ contexts, the church is not seen as an earthly model or blueprint embodying heavenly reality or participating in the temple's re-creative function in the world. Without a robust temple ecclesiology that

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4. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), i–xiv.

5. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 193–205.

sees the church as a blueprint of heavenly reality, the ecclesial “pattern or blueprint” becomes a mere procedural manual for a religious organization.<sup>6</sup> It is thus hoped that revisioning ecclesial identity by revivifying temple metaphors will evoke a kind of “resonance” among older members through an intentional revisioning of the same kind of architectural metaphor.<sup>7</sup> This intervention acknowledges the paradigmatic value of texts such as Heb 8:5 but also understands that the blueprint diagrams a far different ecclesial and heavenly reality than traditionally envisioned.

Therefore, while the use of architectural metaphor is fitting in light of Speedway’s past and in terms of its current need for blueprints with respect to its housing rehabilitation work, the more pressing motivation for using architectural language is to reclaim a central and ubiquitous ecclesial theme—the church as the temple of God. For instance, J. R. Lanci argues that for Paul the “temple serves as an engine, a source of imaginative power, to articulate and propel his ecclesiology.”<sup>8</sup> R. J. McKelvey suggests that unlike the metaphor of Christ’s body, which primarily is used to illumine the church’s internal life, the temple metaphor is of particular value for understanding the

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6. The blueprint remains a popular ecclesial metaphor driving some traditional Church of Christ ecclesiology. “Is there likewise a blueprint provided by the Lord for worship in the New Testament?” See William J. Stewart, “The Pattern for the New Testament Church,” Limestone Church of Christ, 24 December 2006, <http://lookinguntojesus.net/the-pattern-for-the-new-testament-church>. Or “when a contractor builds a house, he follows a pattern known as a blueprint.” Wayne Greeson, “God’s Pattern,” The Church of Christ in Zion, Illinois: Nondenominational Christianity. <https://www.padfield.com/1994/pattern.html>.

7. My use of “resonance” here is greatly influenced by J. Gerald Janzen and his reading of Samuel T. Coleridge. See J. Gerald Janzen, “Toward a Hermeneutics of Resonance: A Methodological Interlude between Testaments,” in *When Prayer Takes Place: Forays into a Biblical World*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Patrick D. Miller (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 241–99.

8. John R. Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth: Rhetorical and Archaeological Approaches to Pauline Imagery* (New York: Lang, 1997), 5.

church's worshipful mission in, with, and to the world.<sup>9</sup> For all of these reasons, it is appropriate that the resulting discussion guide, which became this intervention's primary artifact, take on the form of a spatial "blueprint" where the temple and ecclesial functions imagined in the later chapters of the study guide are visually represented with spatial imagery as well as conceptual language.

I met for twelve weeks with six of Speedway's members to collectively draft a kind of temple blueprint for discussion that these members would then be able to use in facilitating small group discussions. A conceptual artist was to illustrate the discussion guide wherein aspects of the temple's architecture would be used to launch studies exploring different features of the early church's temple ecclesiology. Lessons would typically include prompts for doing appreciative inquiry by asking how members have experienced or envisioned the church fulfilling the temple's missional purposes. Thus, the purpose of this project was to draft a small-group discussion guide that took on aspects of a temple-blueprint that guides the discernment of congregational practices which sustain community renewal.

### **Description of the Intervention**

Twelve group sessions were prepared to last approximately ninety minutes. Each session was initially planned to be held in varying places of existing mission which might have suggested forms of missional practice for Speedway.

The structure of each group session owed its shape to the theoretical framework outlined by Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGregor in their book, *Primed to Perform*. Doshi

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9. R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 186.

and McGregor's theory, itself a synthesis of the "self-determination theory" of Richard Ryan and Edward Deci and the "Job Enrichment" studies of Richard Hackman and Greg Oldham, was developed in the workplace. It suggests that any organization's energy level for adaptive work primarily depends on a work-culture's capacity to help people connect that work to a sense of play, purpose, and potential.<sup>10</sup>

Sessions were intended to use forms of *play* along with appreciative inquiry to help participants access their own images associated with their sometimes implicit sense of life-purpose.<sup>11</sup> Second, each group session sought to appreciatively integrate those images of life-purpose with images of the eschatological temple in an effort to reclaim this metaphorical system of forging an ecclesial identity or *purpose* which propels community mission.<sup>12</sup> The last segment of the group sessions asked the participants to imagine existing and new congregational practices that exhibited Doshi and McGregor's "potential" for living out their individual and ecclesial identity as a community-renewing temple. Group participants were asked to evaluate the *potential* that these or similar practices might have in light of temple theology in Speedway's particular context. In light

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10. Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGregor, *Primed to Perform: How to Build the Highest Performing Cultures Through the Science of Total Motivation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015).

11. While Doshi and McGregor's notion of "play" does not necessarily involve more than that pleasure which arises subjectively within a player while playing, that pleasure remains for the player somehow intimately connected with the player's own sense of meaning. My own usage of the word "play" is in some continuity with the work of Martin Heidegger and particularly that of Hans Gadamer. Gadamer suggests art or playful creation is not an exercise in sheer subjectivity but one that has a structure which plays the player—where the player's own self-understanding is disclosed and placed in dialogue with ontological matters at hand. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 101–69.

12. In addition to Doshi and McGregor, during this period of the group sessions I drew from work done by Garrett Green who characterizes Christian salvation as in part a conversion of the imagination which is ultimately dependent upon a paradigmatic image. See Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

of this discussion, members were to assist in drafting discussion prompts and other materials for a study guide which would structure the congregational process of discerning congregational practices which sustain community renewal.

### **Definitions**

While the congregation itself constitutes a form of community, the use of “community” in this thesis refers to the wider neighborhoods, space, and social networks in which the congregation is situated. This intervention seeks to develop a missional ecclesiology that understands the church as being collectively sent into the wider community as a sign pointing to and participating in God’s re-creation of all things including nature, space, economy, and social structures as well as the people who inhabit them. Much traditional ecclesiology might be described as “attractional,” wherein the church invites people into liturgical settings so as to assist individuals with their spiritual lives. Within this “attractional” frame of reference, impact on the community is of secondary importance, and such impact is generally made by individuals rather than the collective church effort. The missional ecclesiology here recommended continues to value the church’s attractional charisms. In fact, it sees the church’s compelling invitation for others to participate in ecclesial life as a complementary aspect of the same re-creative dynamism which flows missionally outward into the world. The primary emphasis of missional language is not to criticize practices of welcoming or internal edification but to emphasize that the truly attractive community is also sent into the wider community, collectively participating in the re-creation of both people and place.

## Assumptions

While some liminality is necessary for deep forms of transformation, wilderness wandering is not intended to be a permanent state. It drains a people of energy and hope. However, experimental practice and disciplined reflection can, in time, lead to new orientation and relative confidence in fresh ministry goals.

This thesis also assumes the ontological presence of a heavenly temple, and as such, it is necessary to acknowledge that this work is assuming a view of the world which even some clergy regularly deem “fanciful . . . contradicting contemporary cosmology.”<sup>13</sup> While acknowledging that canonical metaphor participates in a transcendent reality far beyond itself, metaphorical systems are inescapably present in all language, and canonical metaphors are faithful as far as they go. One cannot merely divorce the immanent metaphor from its heavenly referent or change metaphorical systems without significant distortion.<sup>14</sup> There are enough similarities between all metaphorical systems for older cosmologies to possess a degree of accessibility, continuing to function with

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13. Ruth C. Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 145, 185.

14. My formal introduction to these matters was in the field of literary criticism. For a discussion of how Chaucer defends the philosophical realism of the Augustinian tradition, deconstructing what was for him an incipient philosophical nominalism, see David Williams, *Language Redeemed: Chaucer's Mature Poetry* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007). Samuel Coleridge perhaps makes this point best. He speaks of a human “mediatory power” which incorporates “images of the sense . . . into a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves and consubstantial with the truths of which they are the conductors.” R. J. White, ed., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume 6: Lay Sermons* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1972), 29. For an extended treatment of how T. S. Eliot insists on the impossibility of abstracting from the metaphor which in its particularity “incarnates” the Transcendent, see G. Douglas Atkins, *Literary Paths to Religious Understanding: Essays on Dryden, Pope, Keats, George Eliot, Joyce, T. S. Eliot and E. B. White* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

authority and validity.<sup>15</sup> God's particular self-revelation in Jesus Christ must be understood within the New Testament's own socio-linguistic worlds.<sup>16</sup>

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

This intervention is designed for the Speedway Church of Christ only. It is intended to address that congregation's lack of sustained energy for missional practice, but it is delimited in its focus on addressing the anxiety and weariness associated with congregational liminality. It does not address the lack of energy for community building projects or children's ministry which may attend certain forms of inward spirituality. It cannot address the low energy levels associated with old and later middle age, or the physical arduousness of demolition and construction work which are inherent in forms of missional practice. It is limited in that the researcher cannot measure these various kinds of weariness separately. The study guide itself will not generate or sustain energy for practices of community renewal. People still need to be responsive to the call to discipleship and full participation within the life of the heavenly temple. Finally, the thesis is potentially limited by the participants' knowledge that they are being studied and

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15. While Alexander Campbell's rules about purity of speech are often criticized, his concern for protecting canonical metaphorical systems against translation into other language systems is at the heart of his polemic against philosophical theology—the "language of Ashdod." Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System in Reference to the Union of Christians and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity as Pleaded in the Current Reformation* (Cincinnati: H. S. Bosworth, 1866), 6.

16. Linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson demonstrate that metaphor simply pervades our conceptual system. Ideas, time, and emotions must be "grasped" in clearer, metaphoric terms. The most basic metaphors are grounded in fundamental experience. It is particularly significant for this thesis that human conceptual language is particularly rooted in "spatial" experience. In addition, metaphors combine to form a structured gestalt which structures reality in a specific way. These metaphorical systems cannot be escaped, nor can they be changed without significant distortion. The authors argue, "We can no longer pretend to build an account of concepts and knowledge on objective, literal foundations. . . . At the same time what we have found is fundamentally at odds with certain key tenets of postmodernist thought, especially those that claim that meaning is ungrounded and simply an arbitrary cultural construction. . . . There appear to be universal metaphors [as well as] cultural variation." George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 273–4.

in this case wish for the researcher's project to succeed. This potential limit is known as the Hawthorne effect.<sup>17</sup>

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17. Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 82.



CHAPTER II  
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

**Theological Foundations**

The intervention described in chapter one attempts to recover a temple Christology potentially generative of missional energy and vision within the church. Building on the work of G. K. Beale, J. Gerald Janzen, Jon Levenson, Nicholas Perrin, and others, this intervention locates the historical Jesus within the history of temple renewal movements. Drawing largely on the Gospel of John, this project conceives the canonical Jesus within the wider metanarrative of the temple, beginning in Eden and ending with the story of the temple’s role in the reintegration of heaven and earth. John’s Gospel depicts Jesus as the temple of God, construing the incarnation, ministry, death, and the lifting up of Jesus within the larger story of the temple as a “fundamental underlying narrative.”<sup>1</sup>

The temple Christology of the Gospels, particularly that of John, emerges within the cosmological framework and missional imagery expressed in Near-Eastern and Jewish temple architecture. God’s temple in Israel acted as a means of connecting heaven and earth, renewing all of society—indeed cultivating, structuring, and unifying all of creation. Thus, understanding the multifaceted ways the temple functioned as the locus and agency of community renewal in Israel’s history places the church in a position to

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1. Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 9.

appreciate the ways Jesus cultivates and structurally unifies creation, embodying the divine glory and power associated with the Jewish temple.

This view of Jesus is central for the church's own self-understanding in that the early church saw itself as embodying Christ's missional vocation as the temple of God. The Pauline corpus widely sees the church itself as having become the renewed temple through her union in and with Jesus Christ. Thus, the temple's cultivational and structural functions (revealed first in Israel and then in Jesus Christ) unite the world and act as spiritual and imaginative sources for the church's own practices of community renewal.

This chapter unpacks the theological case in a four-part argument. First, it begins by insisting on a temple Christology. Second, that temple Christology must be understood in continuity with Israel's temple and its mission. Third, Jesus's mission is understood as a renewal of the temple's mission. Fourth, the Church in Jesus Christ is built into the temple and inherits the Christological temple's mission.

### **Part 1. Jesus's Missional Identity as the Renewed Temple**

Jesus in himself renews God's temple. While Jesus's demonstrations against the temple drive the climactic narratives in the Synoptics, it is John who insists on laying out a temple Christology from the very outset.<sup>2</sup> John's prologue will thus serve as this project's point of departure.

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2. Timothy C. Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in Its Narrative Role* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). Gray demonstrates that Jesus self-consciously saw his mission as that of renewing the temple, illustrating how the climactic narrative in Mark is almost exclusively driven by Jesus's repeated demonstrations against the Herodian temple. Jesus's trial revolves precisely around his identity and intent with regard to the temple, and thus support John's interpretation of Jesus as the temple.

## Temple Christology in the Johannine Prologue

John's prologue locates the gospel within the drama of ongoing creation, and the linking of divine Light and divine Word (1:1–3) evokes a resonance with the temple theology that we will explore in Pss 19 and 50. This Light, like the lights of the temple, resists the darkness, and the Word becomes flesh and “pitched a tabernacle (*eskienosen*) among us” (John 1:14 NIV). The incarnation itself, then, is set within the metanarrative of the temple. The incarnation is an inauguration of the renewed tabernacle of God's covenantal presence (Exod 25:8) manifesting the glory which had surrounded the tabernacle in Exod 40:34 but which never appeared in the Second Temple.<sup>3</sup> The advent of Jesus in John is an eschatological return of God's visible temple glory.

As such, Jesus is the temple luminary through which prophetic vision has been restored to Israel. John 1:51 is the climax of the story of the calling of Philip and Nathanael. Here, Jesus promises Nathanael greater vision than the one that had already moved him to faith. In the encounter Jesus virtually replicates the Septuagint of Gen 28:12 telling Nathanael, “I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” As we shall see the Bethel experience is a form of temple experience. Jesus, in providing Nathanael with a vision, is demonstrating himself to be the renewal of the true “House of God,” the true “Gate of heaven” where heavenly and earthly connective ladders are again possible.<sup>4</sup>

The sign of the eschatological wedding banquet which Jesus performed in Cana is said to have “revealed his glory” (*doxa*; 2:11). This glory is canonically tied to the glory

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3. 2 Maccabees 2:7–8 cited in Paul M. Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2006), 119.

4. Hoskins, *Jesus*, 125–35.

which filled tabernacle and temple, and the meaning of *doxa* is contextually governed by its previous use in John 1:14 where the glory seen in Jesus is the glory of the tabernacle made flesh among the believing community.<sup>5</sup>

In John 2:19-1 the temple Christology is made explicit. John's Jesus claims to be the temple of God. He does this within the Herodian compound after ceremonially cleansing it and referring to it as his "Father's House" (2:16).

Such a claim should be understood in continuity with Israel's own history and theological expectations. John believes that it is in fact Jesus's own glory which Isaiah had seen filling the temple and commissioning Isaiah's ministry (12:41). The early church believed Jesus, the true temple, continued to be uniquely present on Zion; for in a climactic theophany of Acts, Paul's mission to the Gentiles is launched by Jesus from within the Herodian temple precincts (Acts 22:17–21). The Jewish Jesus affirms that salvation expands from the spiritual portal which had been Jerusalem (4:22). Therefore, it is fully within the framework of the Jewish temple theology that Jesus makes the claim that the structure of his own body is renewing the temple of Israel's God. In referring to his "body" (carrying both corporeal and corporate-ecclesial resonances), Jesus is referring to no other temple than the one which had manifested itself in Eden and had been renewed on Moriah, on Bethel, on Sinai's cosmic Mountain, in the tabernacle, and in successive structures built upon Zion.

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5. Richard Baucham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 55.

## Jesus and the Narrative of Temple Renewal

John emphasizes that Jesus is renewing the temple in a tradition that had often renewed the temple in form as well as holiness. Christ's followers "remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me'" (2:17). Jesus's zeal in cleansing the temple is seen as replicating Davidic zeal in renewing the tabernacle by replacing its structural form with that of a temple.<sup>6</sup> Jesus's zeal is part of a history of such passionate movements for temple renewal where new forms of the temple fulfill the functions of the previous structure while also extending the mission and transcending the theological vision of the previous expression.

Thus, the phrase "temple renewal" is much to be preferred over "temple replacement."<sup>7</sup> The same perichoretic mystery connecting heaven and earth is present in successive structures. The tabernacle restores something which was lost in the defilement of Eden. Solomon's Temple maintains the tabernacle's functions and symbolism but exceeds it in size, benevolent capacity, and in expanding its metaphorical system by combining the priestly functions inherited from Sinai with the royal priesthood associated with Jerusalem and Zion. In like manner the prophetic depictions of the eschatological renewal of the temple extend the creative mission of the cult and transcend any impression that the temple is bound by human structure or restricted to localization. When Ezekiel imagines the glory of the Lord returning to Jerusalem, "it enters the rebuilt temple from the East. The implication is that the glory of the Lord during the exile is

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6. Hoskins, *Jesus*, 190–1.

7. "Replacement" suggests a discontinuity that is not intended and which cannot be supported by the biblical narrative. For instance, "renewal" can accommodate the church's continuing reverence for Zion and participation in its cult even as the dynamic power of Zion is being manifested more and more in the life and witness of the community of Jesus's disciples.

‘hidden’ among the exiles in Babylon” from whence it returns.<sup>8</sup> Ezekiel 11:16 in fact reads, “Though I sent them far away among the nations . . . I have been a sanctuary (*migdaz*) for them in the countries where they have gone.” In other words, when the psalmist longs to “dwell in [God’s] tent forever and take refuge in the shelter (*beseter*) of your wings” in Ps 61:4, he recognizes that there is a shelter which is made specially manifest in the particular three-dimensional space of the temple (between the wings of the cherubim), but that this shelter is simultaneously transcendent and beyond localization in the heavens. Thus, Ps 81 celebrates that the exodus takes place because God, long before the establishment of the tabernacle, answers Israel out of the “hiding place” (*beseter*) of thunder. Prayer still “takes place”—a “place” both within Israel’s heart and in the heavens. It is this transcendent hiding place or shelter in which successive forms of earthly temples participate and derive their significance.<sup>9</sup>

Temple theology—specifically temple Christology—then, structures John’s Gospel. Yet, in many churches such temple passages receive at best a kind of uncomprehending gloss. This may be in part the result of emphasizing divine omnipresence in a way that precludes the possibility of any special localization of God’s presence.<sup>10</sup> The incarnation does not require us to graduate from a primitive theology that

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8. J. Gerald Janzen, “Toward a Hermeneutics of Resonance: A Methodological Interlude between Testaments,” in *When Prayer Takes Place: Forays into a Biblical World*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Patrick D. Miller (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 2.

9. Janzen, “Toward,” 2.

10. One of the difficulties in reviving a robust temple theology has to do with the notion that once Jesus became the new temple the church came to graduate from the idea of sacred geographical space. A common interpretation of Solomon’s dedicatory speech echoed by Stephen in Acts 7 would have us believe that Solomon did not think God’s presence could invest a temple made with human hands, substituting the notion of the divine Name resting in the temple not the literal divine presence. Yet, the glory visibly did fill the temple space. Solomon’s and Stephen’s concern is not that God’s presence cannot be uniquely present

sacralizes particular space. To the contrary, the incarnation demands that God's presence be capable of perfect, specialized localization. Paul envisions outsiders coming into the temple of God's presence—in the middle of a deferential prophetic community in Corinth—where the divine presence is so uniquely manifest that the visitor might exclaim, "God is really among you" (1 Cor 14:25). The worshiping community when it gathers for prayer, even outside of any building, always inhabits scandalously particular space. Our own metaphorical systems betray this truth: Whenever we speak of any kind of divine and human communion actually happening, we say it "takes place."<sup>11</sup>

Within this tradition of zealous temple-renewing, Jesus's act of renewing the deputized earthly place in which God may choose to manifest God's special presence does not seem odd. That God chooses to do so in the person of Jesus of Nazareth rather than in another building built "by human hands" (2 Cor 5:1) is also not unprecedented in light of the fact that Israel's God is described as such a dwelling, hiding place or a sanctuary (Isa 8:14). In fact the royal and priestly "house" of God" is a formalized double entendre referring simultaneously to both the dynasty of priest-kings and the temple itself. Nathan's response to David's initial intention to build a shrine for God revolves around this repeated play on the word "house." "David will not build a house (temple) but God will build a house (dynasty) for David" (2 Sam 7:11). Thereafter, "house" carries with it this double resonance.<sup>12</sup> It is not difficult to see how the priest-king might function by metonymy as the temple especially since Jesus in the parable of the tenants is

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and manifest in a particular place, but that such specialized localization could never exhaust the transcendent presence of the one who fills everything in every way (Eph 1:23).

11. Janzen, "Toward," 2.

12. Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1985), 98.

portrayed as establishing a renewed priestly set of tenants or “house.” Matthew 21:41–43 moves back and forth between referencing priestly community and structural house with the same adeptness as 2 Sam 7. Within this conceptual world the idea of the renewed temple becoming a person or a participatory community of persons as well as a structure, even considering the elasticity of poetic language, is not a stretch.

In John Jesus’s opposition cannot see the shape of the temple’s change in form because, like Jeremiah’s opposition, they have lost “the sense of the delicacy of relationship between higher and lower Jerusalem.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus’s detractors miss the significance of God’s glory dwelling within the temple of Jesus’s body, because they flatly identify the mystery of the heavenly temple exclusively with the dead structures of the Herodian complex. In response to their demand for a sign of Christ’s priestly authority to renew the temple, Jesus answers: “‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’ [The Jews] replied, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?’ But the temple he had spoken of was his body” (John 2:19–22).

This is the first of a series of John’s asides which introduces an obtuseness in Jesus’s interlocutors about the earthly and heavenly interpenetration of the temple. This obtuseness which cannot see past the physical sign of the mystery in which the sign participates, then, is first introduced as the result of a defunct temple theology that has been flattened and demystified. The subsequent inability to grasp the nature of being born again from above, the refusal to come into the light, the inability to recognize water which permanently alleviates thirst, the lack of taste for bread from heaven, or ears to

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13. Levenson, *Sinai*, 98.



hear the voice of God in the hiding place of Ps 81's thunder (John 12:29) are all instances of Jesus's interlocutors not being able to see symbols of temple function as participatory signs of a transcendent, heavenly reality.

In John 4:20–24 the issue arises again in terms of the proper site of the temple. Garazim and Zion both look forward to the renewal of their respective regional cults. Without denying Jerusalem's unique vocation, Jesus relativizes the question of locale and raises the greater question about the capacity for perceiving the spiritual interpenetration of the heavenly and earthly temple when that temple is spiritually manifest in truth—face-to-face—with the woman at the well! In each case participatory temple-signs of the eschatological creation have for numerous characters in John's Gospel lost their ability to point beyond themselves, and therefore, when the heavenly temple is “spiritually” and “truly” present, Jesus's interlocutors cannot perceive it.

#### Jesus within the History of Temple Reform Movements

The early chapters of John's Gospel, then, introduce Jesus's person and ministry within a scriptural tradition that repeatedly longs for the renewal of the temple and its spiritual connection between God and creation—a true perichoresis between heaven and earth. Often such an incarnation of divine glory is deemed a late invention of John's churches; however, Nicholas Perrin situates the historical Jesus within this tradition of temple renewal movements which existed long before, during, and after the historical Jesus's lifetime. So prevalent was the expectation of the temple's renewal in Israel that a temple Christology is precisely what an historian of the period might come to expect.

Perrin emphasizes that the Psalms of Solomon sect, which wrote their Psalms sometime in the 60s BCE, saw the problem with Israel and creation in terms of a corrupt

priesthood and desecrated temple. In their writings they accuse the Hasmonean establishment of adultery, incest, judicial heavy-handedness, ostentation, exploitation of widows, and stealing from the sanctuary. The community believed that this wickedness brought about the temple's subsequent desecration by Pompey. The community, however, understood itself as an alternative to the temple establishment seeing itself as expression of a transition into the eschatological renewal of the temple. This faithfulness was expressed in the community's willingness to suffer, identify with the poor, and drive out sinners from the temple.<sup>14</sup>

Perrin finds it hard to imagine such charges carrying weight if they were utterly baseless, especially in light of the fact that Qumran (100–50 BCE) points fingers at the Hasmonean Priests in astonishingly similar ways. Qumran also was a counter-temple movement which believed in the defilement of the Jerusalem cult because of the priesthood's fornication, arrogance, theft, and addiction to "wicked lucre."<sup>15</sup> Qumran, however, looks forward to when its party of Yahad will not only identify with the poor and be willing to suffer but also be

truly established, an eternal planting, a temple for Israel, and mystery!—a holy of holies for Aaron; true witnesses to justice, chosen by God's will to atone for the land to recompense the wicked their due. They will be said to be 'the tested wall, the precious cornerstone' whose foundations shall neither be shaken nor swayed, a fortress . . . all of them knowing the Covenant of Justice and thereby offering a sweet savor. They shall be a blameless and true house in Israel, upholding the covenant of eternal statutes. They shall be an acceptable sacrifice, atoning for the land and ringing in the verdict against evil so that perversity ceases to exist.<sup>16</sup>

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14. Perrin, *Jesus*, 21–29.

15. Perrin, *Jesus*, 32.

16. Perrin, *Jesus*, 33.

Setting aside for a moment all the ways in which this confirms that much New Testament language is in fact temple language about the renewal of all creation, it's important to notice here that the Qumran community, very much like the later church, self-consciously sees itself as transitioning into the renewed temple itself. Qumran's temple-identity drove its sense of vocational purpose in shaping society and creation. The community sees itself as instrumental in the dawning of the new age. As such, the entire Qumran community is viewed through the lens of temple imagery. They are a temple garden—an eternal planting, the mysterious sign of divine presence in the holy of holies, an unshakable protective compound holding forth the light of God's statutes which banishes evil and atones for the land in ongoing creation. The temple is renewed in the persons of the community in a way that anticipates the later Christology and ecclesiology of the church.

Thus, Jesus's ministry takes place in an historical context where there is both a canonical expectation of temple renewal and a contemporary ethical analysis which sees a pressing need for it. Consequently, John's accounting of the temple demonstration in the second chapter may be taken with absolute historical as well as theological seriousness.

Furthermore, the earliest Christian documents, the Pauline epistles, repeatedly represent the church as a new temple movement (1 Cor 3; 2 Cor 4:16–5:5; 6:16ff). McKelvey, in fact, suspects that the Old Testament passages from which Paul derives the church's temple theology existed “in catena form before [Paul] took them over.”<sup>17</sup> By the

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17. R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 98.

time of Eph 2:18–22, the consequence of Christ’s death on the cross is that the church is created in Christ Jesus into a heavenly temple where there is no dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Greek.<sup>18</sup> Christ’s saving work has constituted a new temple in his body in which all nations are integrated and invited to participate. The church’s earthly racial and ethnic integration is then a participatory sign of the perfectly integrated heavenly temple into which Jesus has built the church.

For now, the point is that such a transcendent ecclesiology grows directly out of the earliest Christology of temple glory. This type of reflection would persist well into the second century. In the Epistle to Barnabas, the church seeks “to be a perfect temple for God.”<sup>19</sup> Ignatius tells the Ephesians, “You are stones of the temple . . . drawn up on high by the instrument of Jesus Christ, which is the cross . . . by which you ascended, and your love . . . led up to God. You are . . . God bearers, temple bearers, Christ bearers.”<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Ignatius believes that Christ’s saving work had built his church into the heavenly dwelling place of God. The lifting up of Jesus both on the cross and in his exaltation, which John 12:32 promises will draw all men to Christ’s self, is here interpreted as drawing believers up into an ascent into heaven. As a result of that mysterious ascent, believers bear or carry around with them God, the temple, and Jesus.

Ignatius, of course, is echoing 1 Pet 2:4–5 which also depicts the church as having been built into a temple. “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but

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18. I am not convinced that Paul could not have written Ephesians himself, and if the letter has been shaped by a later Pauline community, the temple theology of Ephesians may be interpreted in deep continuity with that which appears in the undisputed letters.

19. Barnabas 4:11 in Perrin, *Jesus*, 50.

20. Ignatius, Ephesians 9:11 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 53.

chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Given the prevalence and persistence of themes of temple renewal in the New Testament and in the theological tradition in the decades before and after Jesus, one wonders why temple Christology does not have a more prominent place in the church’s reflection. Perrin answers this question by enumerating the ways temple theology is missed in verses such as 1 Pet 2:4–5. First, he believes there is a tendency to interpret the words as if they are “rhetorical flourish” so that the communal identity and ethics Peter is encouraging are allowed to remain rooted in de facto forms of popular theology rather than in the ontological reality and experience of being built together into sacred space with Christ. Second, while it is true that “household” refers to the worshipful and intercessory ministry of the church as a royal-priestly family, this collapses the structural metaphors into the royal-priestly ones and ignores the canonical double entendre present in the word “house.” Third, “spiritual” in “spiritual house” is often taken to mean “not structural, physical or literal” when “spiritual” actually refers to the house’s moral quality.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps a more fundamental reason the church may give temple Christology little more than a gloss is that before Jesus’s vocation as temple can be appreciated, the temple’s role in the entire Bible’s narrative of creation must be recovered. A temple Christology makes sense only within the wider metanarrative of the temple’s mission in Israel and creation.

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21. Perrin, *Jesus*, 55–57.

## Part 2. The Temple and Israel's Mission

The claim that Jesus embodies the presence and creative power associated with the Jewish temple cannot be properly interpreted apart from understanding the multifaceted ways the temple functioned as the locus and agency of community renewal in Israel's history and imagination. This section about the missional functions of the Israelite tabernacle and temple develops three interrelated concepts embedded in Near-Eastern and Israelite temple cosmologies. First, the tabernacle and Zion are envisioned as a participatory blueprint or reproduction of the heavenly temple. Second, the heavenly temple (and the earthly one as it participates in heaven) maps an ideal or eschatological version of the entire cosmos. Third, the earthly cult on Zion, interpenetrating heaven, intentionally understands itself as drawing all of creation toward that eschatological ideal. All three fully interwoven convictions create the symbolic world and the series of images of ongoing creation in which Jesus's ministry and subsequent Christian mission first emerged. As a result, this section concludes by surveying the interwoven forms of Jewish temple imagery upon which primitive Christology and ecclesial mission depended.

### A Participatory Sign of the Interpenetration of Heaven and Earth

Israelite religion did not develop in an historical vacuum. While Israelite faith in its totality is unique, it is composed of elements and cosmological assumptions that were common to Israel's surrounding environment. Jon Levenson insists there are Near Eastern parallels "to almost every aspect of Israel's culture. Her laws resemble Mesopotamian law; her temple is typically Canaanite; even her monotheism . . . is composed of elements attested outside herself."<sup>22</sup>

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22. Levenson, *Sinai*, 10.

Zion's temple, then, like most Near Eastern temples, functions as a participatory blueprint, model, or sign of the heavenly temple itself. The heavenly temple is the earthly temple's cosmic archetype which exists "beyond localization."<sup>23</sup> Psalm 11:4 says, "YHWH is in his sacred temple, YHWH's throne is in the heavens." It should be emphasized that the earthly blueprint not only depicts but participates in heavenly reality. Levenson writes, "The earthly and the heavenly [temples] are not closed to each other, but open, and interpenetrating on Zion."<sup>24</sup> The temple, where the ark resides, embodies the footstool of God's throne which extends into the heavens (Ps 132:7).

The notion present in Exod 25:40, namely that the tabernacle is an architectural model (*tabnit* or *typos* in the LXX) of a heavenly temple, has roots stretching back as far as the Sumerian King Gudea of Lagash, who was given a dream of a plan for the sanctuary of Ningirsu.<sup>25</sup> In Israel the exactitude of the *tabnit* has more to do with being precise about the content of visual theology than about precision with regard to architectural elements per se. David, likewise, provides Solomon a pattern (*tabnit*) of divine origin for the first temple in 1 Chr 28:11–19 that while theologically exact is somewhat architecturally different. The instructions for the tabernacle which Moses receives in Exod 25—"see that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain"—in fact depict Sinai (and later Zion) as a *typos* or imprint of the Near Eastern cosmic mountain after which Near Eastern temples were patterned so as to "reach up to Heaven."<sup>26</sup> Likewise, W. Ross Blackburn argues that the tabernacle reflects the Sinai

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23. Levenson, *Sinai*, 140.

24. Levenson, *Sinai*, 142.

25. Levenson, *Sinai*, 140.

experience where the mountain is the meeting place of heaven and earth. The cloud that fills the tabernacle is the one that had enveloped Sinai. Only Moses is permitted to ascend to the top of that mountain, veiled in a cloud of glory and divine presence. Blackburn continues his description of the layout of Sinai.

A second zone: extends upward from the border of the mountain [Sinai] where a select group of Aaron, his sons and the seventy elders are permitted after covenant sacrifice. The third zone at the foot of the mountain contained an altar for burnt offerings and was guarded by a border to prevent the common Israelite from ascending the mountain. . . . The tabernacle exhibits this tripartite structure [of the Sinai experience].<sup>27</sup>

Subsequently, the temple on Zion (as the tabernacle before it) becomes a participatory sign of the cosmic “Mountain of the Lord.” The identification of Zion with the temple, then, goes far beyond the fact that the temple geographically rests on a hill in Jerusalem; it is that the Temple Mount is a structural sign of the invisible cosmic mountain itself. The identification of the temple with God’s footstool in Ps 132:7 replicates the image of the divine feet resting on Sinai in Exod 24:10.

Therefore, J. Gerald Janzen insists that the movable tent of the tabernacle means that “Mount Sinai and the burning bush will travel with the people.”<sup>28</sup> The resulting picture, then, is that the meeting place between heaven and earth is perpetually carried within Israel’s midst. The purpose of the tabernacle in Israel was to create a place for divine presence. God intended that Israel “make a sanctuary for [God’s self], *so that I*

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26. Cylinders of Gudea B. 1.1–10 in G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 151. See also Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

27. W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 131.

28. J. Gerald Janzen, *Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 191.



may dwell among them” (Exod 25:8).<sup>29</sup> After God’s glory refills the tabernacle in 40:34 signaling the restoration of the nation after its rebellion at Sinai, the tabernacle and its priestly functions make it possible for Israel to fulfill its vocation to the nations.

“Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). The tabernacle is emphatically missional for it is the manifestation of God’s glory in the middle of Israel which makes Israel’s priestly declaration of God’s glory among the nations believable (1 Chr 16:24; Pss 9:11; 96:3; Isa 66:19).

Yet, for Janzen, the tabernacle is not just a palpable sign of divine presence in Israel; for “as often as Israel’s priests enter the Tent, they are in *God’s* midst.”<sup>30</sup> Subsequent history only amplified this conviction that God not only was present in Israel, but Israel was encompassed by God. Psalm 125 is a song of ascent in which the worshiper is ascending more than mere real estate. Ascending the Temple Mount on pilgrimage was a moral and spiritual transformation; it is an ascent up the cosmic mountain into an experience of the “unshakable” center of the cosmos.<sup>31</sup> There God is not only in Israel but Israel is surrounded by God. “Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken, but enduring forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem so the LORD surrounds his people now and forever” (Ps 125:1–2).

Consequently, to enter the profoundly sacred space of the temple is not only to recognize that the eternal God scandalously reveals himself within the particulars of Israel’s history and community as an indictment of all uninaugurated eschatology, but it

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29. My translation. Both Janzen and Blackburn translate *vashaakantiy* as indicating purpose. Blackburn, *The God*, 133; Janzen, *Exodus*, 191.

30. Janzen, *Exodus*, 192. Italics mine.

31. Levenson, *Sinai*, 175.

is also to recognize (against pantheism) that even the highest heavens are themselves enveloped within a God who always transcends his creation.

The significance of these convictions can hardly be exaggerated. Janzen points out that the dual belief—that God dwells in his people on earth and that his people through their priestly representatives dwell in and with God on his transcendent mountain—has crucial New Testament parallels.<sup>32</sup> The temple’s participation in and patterning of heavenly reality is what is behind the use of the word *typos* in Heb 8:5 where the earthly temple is a sign of the heavenly one. Thus, the fact that the earthly Zion is structured to usher the worshiper into an experience of heavenly reality is the likely theological background for construing the church’s present ascendance into heavenly Zion in Heb 12:22. This aspect of temple theology also provides the likely structure for understanding Paul’s idea of participating in a “Jerusalem that is above” wherein the church shares in the heavenly, vivifying grace of the Spirit (Gal 4:25–26). Janzen believes that the mysterious openness between heavenly and earthly temples of which Levenson speaks provides the probable matrix for understanding the Pauline notion of participation “in Christ . . . in the heavenly realms” (Eph 1:3; 2:6, 19–20).<sup>33</sup> While the connection between temple language and Pauline participation language is not always as explicit as it is in Eph 2, it is unnecessary for this intervention to demonstrate the ways subsequent theological language for mystical union, indwelling, or theosis is dependent upon temple theology. It is sufficient to recognize that Jesus and the early church inherited a visual theology in Israel that bore witness to the mysterious possibility of the

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32. Janzen, *Exodus*, 193.

33. Janzen, *Exodus*, 193.

interpenetration of the divine and human—heaven and earth—within a pure and functioning temple.

#### A Cosmic Map of the Heavenly, Idealized Creation

If this first dimension of Israelite temple cosmology is suggested by Ps 78:69— “[God] built his sanctuary like the heavens”—then the second, theological premise necessary for this project can be anticipated by the second half of that same couplet: “He established [the sanctuary] forever like the earth.” Near Eastern temple faith sees the temple as a visual microcosm of all creation. The temple presents an idealized or eschatological version of the entire world as it currently exists in ideal form within the heavenly temple. The temple signifies and participates in God’s creative power which draws creation toward God’s primordial or eschatological ideal. Levenson writes, “The temple is the epitome of the world, a concentrated form of its essence, a miniature of the cosmos . . . this idea underlies the [temple’s architectural] symbolism executed by the Phoenician king Hiram for King Solomon” (1 Kgs 7:23–26).<sup>34</sup>

The design and decorations of the temple described in 1 Kgs 7 are familiar to archeologists from the excavation of other Near Eastern temples. Additionally, the thematic content is equally familiar to most readers of Genesis in that it is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden where the life-giving power and the very presence of God is made manifest. Eden as a temple compound is elevated, which explains why the living streams of the temple flow missionally outward.<sup>35</sup> This temple-garden is replete with both lush vegetation (as later depicted in various ways on the temple) and a Near Eastern sacred

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34. Levenson, *Sinai*, 138.

35. Ezekiel 28:14–16 depicts Eden as such a temple mountain.

tree within the temple compound that participates in the creative life of God. Adam, like Near Eastern priest-kings and like later Levitical servants, was to “till and keep” the sacred compound just as the priestly cult “cultivates” and extends the tabernacle compound’s fructifying power (Gen 2:15, Num 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:56). The garden has a barrier against outer chaos and desert just as the temple is a gated compound. The garden is guarded by two cherubim not unlike the cherubim guarding the entrance to the holy of holies or flanking the mercy seat on earth as they also flank the heavenly temple throne. The entrance to Eden, like that of the tabernacle, faces east. Eden, like the tabernacle, has a repository of gold and onyx stone within it, and onyx, far more than gold, is associated exclusively with the construction of the tabernacle.<sup>36</sup> By the time of the writing of Genesis, these Edenic elements had long been embedded into the architecture of Israel’s tabernacle and temple as a *tabnit* or *typos* of the Eden or paradise above. While not every scholar will agree that the Garden of Eden is envisioned as the first earthly temple and its surrounding garden, this intervention sides with scholars like Levenson who see too much temple imagery in the description of Eden to deny it. He writes, “To say that the mind of ancient Israel did not make an equation between the Gihon of Genesis 2:13 and the Gihon [spring at the temple] of 1 Kings is indeed to strain the imagination . . . it is reasonable to assume that in Zion [Israel] saw the cosmic mountain which is also the primal paradise.”<sup>37</sup> The earthly temple in its undefiled state imaged God’s heavenly and eschatological ideal for creation. The story of Adam as the representative priest-king being exiled from the temple where God walks and being banished from the garden that

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36. Beale, *The Temple*, 66–80.

37. Levenson, *Sinai*, 130–1.

has been defiled by his violation of boundaries in the “cultivation” of the compound becomes the prototypical motif through which much of the rest of the story of creation is read. The problem with the world is that it groans under the defiled priesthood of Adam and the loss of the re-creative temple function. It is therefore a grace of temple renewal that God in Exodus brings Israel again “to himself” (Exod 19:4) making Israel a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” God does this in part by the erection of a newly functioning sanctuary made according to the pattern of Eden, the pattern of the heavenly temple, the pattern of idealized creation. The tabernacle functions at the center of Israel’s priestly vocation as a sign of ideal creation extending God’s creative wisdom and influence over all the earth.

Again, it is useful to anticipate the significance of such a point that will be revisited. The fact that the temple participates in and signifies God’s eschatological and heavenly ideal for all creation has ongoing significance for understanding the New Testament’s “realized eschatology” wherein believers are said to presently experience eternal life or wherein the church in Jesus Christ is already the first-fruits of a new creation. Such beliefs arise out of a Jewish milieu permeated by convictions about the way the temple functioned in history as an eschatological and participatory sign of new creation.

Such beliefs were constitutive of Clement of Alexandria’s assertion that the earthly church is an icon (*eikon*) of the heavenly church (*eikon tes ouraniou ekklesias*) which currently expresses God’s eschatological will.<sup>38</sup> Clement cites Col 3:1–11 where

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38. Clement, of Alexandria, Saint, approximately 150–approximately 215, Otto, 1868–1949. Stählin, and Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. *Clemens Alexandrinus* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1905), Stromata IV 8.66.

the church has been raised into heaven and “hidden with Christ in God.” The word *eikon* in this context describes the church as imaging the heavenly Christ to whom it is united. In other Pauline contexts *eikon* is used to describe such earthly and visible manifestations of invisible heavenly reality. Jesus is a visible *eikon* of the invisible God (Col 1:15). *Eikon* is likewise used when describing the interpenetrating visual exchange that takes place between believers and the heavenly Christ (2 Cor 3:18). As a result, even more gloriously than Moses who reflected heavenly glory when he ascended the cosmic mountain at Sinai (and in the Tent of Meeting), the whole church now enters an utterly unveiled heavenly sanctuary wherein the church is renewed as the *eikon* of its creator by means of an interpenetrating visual exchange with Jesus. It is in the light of this profound capacity for new creation through heavenly encounter with Christ that the Hebrew writer similarly complains that ritual sacrifices at Israel’s tabernacle were but a shadow (*skian*) of the good things of the coming eschaton (*mellonton agathon*). Rather, it is through participation in Christ’s sacrificial renewal of the actual heavenly sanctuary that one might experience the very participatory *eikon* of the heavenly things themselves (*auten ten eikona pragmaton*; Heb 10:1).

Wolfhart Pannenberg develops his concept of the church as a proleptic sign of God’s future out of such texts, citing also Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine’s visions of an earthly church serving as an imitation (*imitatio*) of a heavenly church in which the eschatological future is proleptically present. For Pannenberg “the future of God is already present . . . and accessible to people through the church and its

proclamation and its liturgical life.”<sup>39</sup> The church becomes an historical and revelatory “sign” of and a “tool” for the inbreaking of God’s future.<sup>40</sup>

Again, it is unnecessary to demonstrate that much subsequent realized eschatology arises from texts that speak of the temple’s mysterious participation in God’s future creation. It is sufficient only to acknowledge that temple theology provides a primitive, canonical, and visual way for the church to own its vocation as such a proleptic sign.

### The Temple’s Mission in Ongoing Creation

The third dimension of Hebrew temple cosmology critical for this project follows from the temple’s function as an idealized microcosm. In participating in God’s future stored in the heavens, the earthly temple and its cult act as an agent of new and ongoing creation drawing the world toward God’s eschatological moment. By mysteriously participating in heavenly reality, signifying God’s ideal world, and proleptically drawing the world toward God’s ends, the temple embodies Israel’s distinctive mission to all creation.

The temple’s missional agency in ongoing creation is here explored in three interrelated ways. First, the temple cult and its worship itself is believed to restrain forces of chaos and have a sanctifying influence over the land. Second, the functioning of the cult is part of what G. K. Beale describes as “the expanding purpose of temples” wherein the temple’s sacred space advances making Israel fruitful so that as a priestly nation it might sacralize the entire world. Third, the temple’s expansive role in ongoing creation

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39. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 37.

40. Pannenberg, *Systematic*, 45.

may be understood through central theological images embedded in Israel's metanarrative, embodied in the temple's architecture, and enacted through its ritual practice.

### ***Ritual and Liturgical Restraints on Chaos***

While many studies become mired in impenetrable cultic detail, this project maintains that it is necessary to emphasize only the theological connection between the overall performance of the temple cult and the process of ongoing creation. A cursory glance at the more holy parts of the temple complex would reveal the presence of the large basin of water called the Sea. Again, definitive interpretation of the detailed design of the basin is likely to prove elusive, but at a foundational theological level, it is possible to affirm that the temple cult through its large basin is containing the chaotic waters of the Sea in much the same way as the Spirit hovers over the waters in the beginning of the Genesis creation account. Chaos is being neutralized in the temple cult.<sup>41</sup>

The priestly view of creation is not about the creation of matter ex nihilo—as much as this may be a vital theological concept. The priestly writers view the act of creation as a shaping of space so that life may thrive in holiness. Levenson insists Gen 1 is not about “the banishment of evil, but about its control. It describes a process of separation and distinction in which otherwise . . . dark forces are . . . overcome by placement in a structure in which they are bounded by new realities created by divine speech.”<sup>42</sup>

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41. Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 121.

42. Levenson, *Sinai*, 127.



The Israelite priest, then, is imaging God's creative work while "making distinctions, assigning things their proper category and assessing their fitness."<sup>43</sup> The cult contributes to the healthy ordering of creation and the control over the chaotic sea (Ps 46; Job 38:11) by ritually enacting the distinction between the holy and the common for between the temple and ordinary reality lies "a barrier of holiness, a palpable energy or force which resists the intermingling of the two modes of reality."<sup>44</sup> The temple stores the deep in its vaults (Ps 33:4–7). Maintaining this division, then, is a basic act of ongoing creation.

This doesn't merely apply to the priestly maintenance of sacred space. Sacrificial offering and priestly cleansing is about restoring ritual purity after accidental or illicit intermingling of sacred ordered creation and that which is common. The observance of the religious festivals and their offerings "draw future generations to the events of the exodus by together participating" in Israel and the world's deliverance through God's ongoing acts of dividing chaotic waters.<sup>45</sup>

Sabbath keeping also enacts the possibility of actually entering God's rest (Ps 95:11) wherein creation is properly ordered and chaos held at bay. Levenson argues that the two broad interpretations of the Sabbath in the Hebrew Bible are linked.<sup>46</sup> Sabbath both participates in Israel's liberation from slavery and also images God's primordial repose on the seventh day, because the exodus is seen as an ongoing act of new creation. In this way Israel preserves the Near Eastern connection between a divinity's

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43. Levenson, *Creation*, 127.

44. Levenson, *Sinai*, 127.

45. Blackburn, *The God*, 51.

46. Levenson, *Creation*, 101.

cosmological victory, rest, and enthronement in the heavenly temple.<sup>47</sup> In Israel creation enters into the unshakeable nature of God’s enthroned rest. Psalm 93:1–2 makes exactly this point. “The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. Your throne was established long ago.”

Liturgical pilgrimage, adjudication of cases, and other temple rites, in their own way, order society around the holy center of divine presence and the creative speech which divides and orders chaotic waters. Levenson concludes that the creative ordering of the world at the temple becomes “something that humanity can not only witness and celebrate, but something in which it can also take part.”<sup>48</sup>

If the maintenance of the distinction between the holy and the common participates in God’s act of creation, so also does the priestly rehearsing of divine creational speech give order to the world. Gerald Janzen draws attention to how priestly speech “exemplifies what J. L. Austin calls ‘performative speech,’ in which words do not simply refer to something but actually accomplish what they say.” The locution “I love you” does not merely inform but is a performance of its message. God’s speech act of “let there be light” in Gen 1:3 is therefore the primordial and unmediated example of a speech act with its own creational force dividing light and darkness and structuring them into their appropriate cycles. The divine speech act is performative in that it accomplishes what it says.

Liturgical speech performed in the temple—no less than the temple itself—participates in its heavenly counterpart imaging God and rehearsing God’s performative

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47. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 157.

48. Levenson, *Creation*, 127.

speech which is packed with creational power. Janzen focuses on the priestly blessing of Num 6:24–26 as a preeminent example of how priestly speech performs the blessing which it invokes. Uttered within the mysterious union of earthly and heavenly Zion, the blessing mediates what has been hidden since the violation of the covenant—namely the utter peace of the favor of the divine countenance.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, temple worship is not seen primarily as an insular form of consolation but as a missional act of re-creation. This creational power of the temple liturgy might further be demonstrated in the performative speech characteristic of the climactic Psalms. Psalm 148 is a temple liturgy which celebrates the authority of Israel, mystically present in Zion, to convene all heaven and earth with a direct line to exhort heavenly beings, all the earth and sea, young and old to join in the concerted harmony found in the temple’s praise of Israel’s God. Verse 14 says, “[God] has raised up for his people a horn (of authority), the praise of all his saints.” Eric Zenger writes, “That horn includes the authority of worshipers to praise in such a way that creates community, advances harmony, leads to the perfection of creation and history.” All this is “a special task given to Israel.”<sup>50</sup>

Psalm 149:6 extends the idea further where the cause of justice is advanced in song: “May the praise of God be in their (Israel’s worshipers) mouths be as a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints.” Zenger comments

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49. Janzen, “Toward,” 38–49.

50. Frank Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150, Hermeneia Series* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 629–40.

that “Psalm 149 presents a summary of the theology of Zion, but now with a focus on the children of Zion” and their liturgical power for accomplishing royal justice. The Psalter sung in faith, then, is a sword which “restores Yahweh’s world order.”<sup>51</sup>

Psalm 150, the last of the five summary Psalms, exercises liturgical authority in singing what we have called performative speech. The song commands all creation to align itself in praise of the cosmic center. Moreover, the Psalter ends with a final act of the temple’s performative speech which creates harmony and order in the universe: “let all breath praise the LORD.”

### ***The Expanding Purpose of the Temple***

A second entry into the temple’s missional role in ongoing creation is through an exploration of what G. K. Beale describes as “the expanding purpose of temples.”<sup>52</sup> It may be useful to trace the expansive vocation of the temple by sampling one image of the temple’s powers of continuing creation—that of the temple’s living waters. The image of living water will be discussed further as part of the temple’s matrix of creational metaphors, but here, the discussion of this temple image is functioning to illustrate that the temple’s purpose is not merely insular but expansive and missional.

Immediately following the creation of the heavenly temple in Gen 1, the first earthly temple, Delight (Eden), appears in the biblical narrative when streams of creative water percolate from the otherwise infertile ground. Thus, the temple garden owes its very origins to God’s waters lying beneath the ground of all being. The wellsprings of all life expansively erupt to cover the whole face of the ground (*kol paniym haadama*).

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51. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 653. This theological background should thus give shape to the Christian understanding of Jesus’s liturgical entry or ascent into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

52. Beale, *The Temple*, 81.

These are the likely antecedents of the four rivers which subsequently extend the water of life from the Garden of Delight, which these waters have already irrigated. The image seems to be that these waters raise or exalt the temple complex above all other hills. The introductory psalm insists that instruction and worship make people like the sacred trees watered beside precisely these temple streams. Psalm 92 reiterates that members of the covenant are blessed by God's defeat of evil (ostensibly through the operation of the temple) and share in the age-defying flourishing of the sacred trees planted in the courts or temple garden of God. When the psalmist celebrates that the foundations of the cosmic mountain are established in Jerusalem, he celebrates the continuation of the primordial temple springs as it is sung of Jerusalem: "All my fountains are in you" (Ps 87:7).

Nevertheless, Isaiah records that Israel rejected the "gently flowing waters of Shiloah," probably Siloam, the healing pool symbolically fed by Jerusalem's temple fountain. The result is that the temple's floodgates do not hold back the chaotic and deadly Assyrian waters that sweep across Israel and Judah during the time of exile (Isa 8:6).

Renewal of the covenant and renewal of the expansive, vivifying nature of the temple cult then become central canonical concerns. The celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles involves water rituals at the temple which anticipate living water again flowing out of Jerusalem at the eschatological Feast of Tabernacles. Ezekiel, too, envisions that streams will flow outward from beneath the threshold of the temple to expand, enlivening the desert, fructifying the land, and providing vegetation with leaves for healing and fruit for sustenance every month. The temple mysteriously irrigates plants which bear fruit instantly each month both "in season and out of season" (Ezek 47:1).

In all these cases the life-giving streams run expansively away from the temple, fructifying and healing chaotic or desert conditions. Beale argues that this expansive vocation of the temple is intimately related to Adam's commission to be fruitful, increase, fill, and subdue otherwise hostile earth, ruling over creation. It needs to be emphasized that while this is a command for humanity at large (Adam), the commission is delivered in language which frames Adam's mission as that of a representative priest-king cultivating a temple wherein the purposes of fertility and the expansion of controlled order over chaotic forces is directly in view.<sup>53</sup>

The priestly vocation to be an expansive blessing continues in the altar making of Noah and the patriarchs and perhaps most notably in Jacob's experience in Gen 28:12–15, which, despite its familiarity, requires extensive citation here.

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring."

Jacob's conclusion is that "this is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." If the resonance of "house of God" and "gate of heaven" were not enough to establish Bethel as a proto-typical temple, Beale demonstrates that the motif of a ladder is a common feature in Near Eastern temples. Jubilees 32:16–32 says angels had to visit Jacob in order to prevent him from making at Bethel a temple "enclosure" and turning the place into an "eternal sanctuary." Qumran, likewise, believed the

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53. Beale, *The Temple*, 117. I speculate that there may be some resistance to recognizing Adam's priestly vocation because the Yahwist writers of Gen 2 are generally identified with royal theology. Yet, this does not take into consideration the priestly dimensions of most Near Eastern kingship, hence the order of Melchizedek, nor the canonical coherence between priestly and royal traditions.

eschatological temple would be established “in accordance with the covenant which I made with Jacob at Bethel.”<sup>54</sup> Yet, what is of particular importance is not merely that Bethel is in fact a form of temple. It is also that the priestly blessing that emanates from the house of God has the creative power to multiply Israel and bless all the families of the earth through this performative speech-act uttered to the ancestors.

The expansive nature of the temple’s ministry is also prevalent in the prophets who look forward to the renewal of the temple and the exercise of its creational power even amidst the experience of the earthly temple’s physical destruction and Babylonian exile. We have seen this as we surveyed the healing and fructifying image of the temple’s living streams. Other temple functions could also illustrate the temple’s expansive missional vocation. Isaiah, for instance, emphasizes the temple’s liturgical feasts which assure Israel that all nations will feast and worship at Zion, the voracious monster of death will itself be swallowed up, tears will be wiped away, and disgrace forever removed from the earth (Isa 25:6–8). It is through the restoration of the Temple Mount and its creative function, then, that Israel’s expansive ministry to all nations and all creation would be restored.

Zechariah 1:16–17 promises YHWH’s return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of God’s house with consequences for the fertility of creation and the ultimate integration of all the nations. However, Zech 2:5 and 14:20–21 begin to anticipate the ultimate success of the temple’s mission. Levenson writes:

Zechariah speaks not only about the enlargement of Jerusalem but refers to its entirety as a holy sanctuary in which God’s flaming glory will reside. . . . The shekinah presence of God, formerly sequestered in the old Holy of Holies will burst forth from the heavenly sanctuary and encompass the entire future new Jerusalem. Holiness will spread throughout the future new Jerusalem and Judah.

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54. Beale, *The Temple*, 100–4.

God's fiery presence fills the eternal city to its unwallled limits. . . . [Jerusalem] is in its entirety a temple, hence it has no temple within it.<sup>55</sup>

It is not difficult, then, to imagine why the temple and Jerusalem are equated. However, it does bear emphasizing that passages like Zech 2:5 and 14:20–21 do not diminish the role of the temple, rendering the temple penultimate. Rather, such places anticipate that as the temple's sacred space expands to sacralize all nature, the entire world becomes a temple. The sacred/profane distinction implicit in the physical barriers of traditional earthly sanctuaries breaks down. Thus, the book of Revelation, as it depicts the final remaking of the earth, imagines that there will be no temple for the entire earth will be sacred, utterly permeated by the presence of God and all the temple's previous functions. The earth will finally live into its image as it was primordially and prophetically exhibited in the heavenly temple, making earth and temple one (Rev 21:22).

Zion's interpenetrating relation with the heavenly temple, forming a sign or blueprint which both signified God's idealized will for all creation and participating in the source of missional power for renewing that creation, then provide the conceptual backdrop for appropriating various forms of the temple's missional imagery. Being a transcendent expression of the presence of heaven on earth, the temple provides a visual theology of ongoing re-creation rendered in sacred, thematic architecture.

### ***Missional Imagery in the Temple***

In order to discuss these broad missional functions, we have already begun to develop the meaning of the architectural imagery ever-present in the temple complex. In exploring the meaning of the basin called the Sea, we have examined the temple's worshipful restraint upon forces of chaos. Architecturally and liturgically, the temple

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55. Beale, *The Temple*, 143.



contains the chaotic Sea. In addition, the temple missionally gushes forth springs of living water to expansively enliven the land.

In further analyzing the temple's missional imagery, it is important to note that Israel did not experience this architectural theology in isolated or analytical fashion. While it is necessary for this intervention to analyze component temple images, it is important to note that this assortment of images functions as part of a coherent faith in the God of Zion. Psalm 36:7–9 illustrates how such temple themes often recur in combination much in the same way that people simultaneously experienced the full matrix of metaphors as they walked into the temple precincts and encountered the temple's sacred, visual architecture.

How priceless is your unfailing love!  
Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings.  
They feast on the abundance of your house (*bayith*)  
you give them drink from your river of delights.  
For with you is the fountain of life;  
in your light we see light.

Here, the temple acts as a sign of covenantal love. The temple's various shadows provide a canopy, covering, or hiding place of covenantal protection beneath the wings of the cherubim. This image is combined with feasting on the abundance of the temple storehouses, drinking from the temple's life-giving fountain, and experiencing the vivifying light of the temple luminaries.

In unpacking this matrix of mixed metaphors, this intervention is not intended even as a cursory survey of the operations of the temple cult. Nor does it intend a thorough exploration of the temple's furniture or architecture. With the Hebrew writer we must say, "we cannot discuss these things in detail now" (Heb 9:5). Rather, the forms of

visual imagery are here selected because of their perceived significance in depicting the temple's missional purposes.

Broadly speaking, we may follow Paul in cautiously dividing these missional images into two categories: first, horticultural images which have to do with cultivation and second, structural images which have to do with unification and edification. Thus, we may hear the temple theology behind Paul's insistence that the church is both "God's field, God's building" (1 Cor 3:9). This coupling of horticultural and structural temple images is never far from Paul's prayerful imagination as he seeks for the church to be both "rooted and established in love" (Eph 3:17).

#### Cultivation Metaphors

Exploring first the cultivational metaphors, it is useful to note that the command to Adam to tend (*shamar*) the Garden of Delight, echoes or anticipates the use of the verb *shamar* in Num 3:7–8, 8:26, and 18:5–6 where it describes the priestly liturgical duties associated with the tabernacle. The priestly metaphor for tending garden explains the relationship between the words *cultivation* and *cultic*. The priests of such temples cultivate the life-giving sources of God's grace by ritually and liturgically cultivating a temple garden that images God's heavenly ideals for creation. Such cultivation resists the chaotic intermingling of holy and profane as a farmer resists weeds intermingling in his garden. The song about the vineyard of the Lord in Isa 5, generally taken to be the background for much of the language in the parable of the sower, laments the fruitless cultivation of the temple compound. The defiled state of the temple garden embodies the defiled state of the temple cult, and it comes to be choked with thorns and briars (Isa 5:6). The holy maintenance of the cult then has ongoing missional significance.

## Containing the Sea

The preceding sections have touched on certain cultivational metaphors. For instance, it has been shown that the temple contains a bronze basin or Sea as part of the temple's architecture which assures the worshiper that God has floodgates and containers which withstand the resurgent and monstrous forces of chaos in the world. God through the cult continues to restrain chaos in ritual acts of ongoing creation. It is not necessary to revisit this discussion. Here it is only necessary to note the metaphor will have continuing significance in the wide drama of ongoing creation. Among the first forms of creative or performative speech in Gen 1 is God dividing the waters, verbally placing them behind the temple floodgates and in its vaults. Such metaphors continue to be alive in the division of the waters in the exodus, in Christ commanding the storm, in bestriding Galilee, and ultimately in creating a whole earth-temple without any chaotic Sea (Rev 21:1). Israel, Christ, and the church are missionally tied to the temple's ongoing battle with the disintegrative forces of the deep lodged in creation and in society.

## Living Water

Another image of cultivation—the image of irrigating and living water—has already been described in connection with the temple's expanding function. It is left here to only note that temples throughout the ancient world were regularly built over springs. The Gihon is in that sense typical, and the waters of the eschatological temple, like the primordial ones in the Garden, have a life-giving and fructifying function over the people and the land. The healing power expected from Jerusalem's pools beneath the temple in Jesus's day are very likely connected to Israel's faith in the temple and, as a result, the way Jesus expresses himself as the renewed temple. This mythos was by no means

restricted to Israel. It may have served, for instance, as a backdrop for the way the Corinthians understood Paul's temple ecclesiology. The temple of Aphrodite atop acro-Corinth is built over a spring. In the New Testament period, Corinth was known as "well-watered." The temples adjacent to the Agora were supplied with artificial sources of water. The temple mythos was very much alive even as the original springs no longer provided enough water for the growing colony's needs.<sup>56</sup>

### Light

In Ps 36:9 the psalmist links the temple fountain with another of the temple's cultivating functions: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light." The metaphor of light is in fact so ubiquitous that expressions like "the light of God's presence" have lost their resonance with the *shekinah*, the *kabod* or Greek *doxa*, the lampstands, or other temple functions which illuminate Israel's path. Yet, Ps 4:6 insists that it is the light of God's countenance which is at stake in the performance of right temple sacrifice. Safety and joy come far more from the heavenly connection with God's countenance than from the actual grain and new wine with which the offerings are made. The light of God's countenance is what projects light into human eyes and is in this sense the very essence of being alive. "Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death" (Ps 13:3).

While the contemporary church readily makes the association with light and God's instruction and truth, it has often lost the temple theology behind this association. The metaphor of light in this respect may be understood very directly in that the priesthood has a teaching ministry. Malachi 2:7–8 reads, "For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is the

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56. John R. Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth: Rhetorical and Archaeological Approaches to Pauline Imagery* (New York: Lang, 1997), 31.

messenger of the LORD Almighty.” Psalm 43:3 prays, “Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.” Psalm 118:27 experiences the emanating light of God in the performance of festal processions leading toward the temple. In such cases the missional sending of the light, again, shines light outward while drawing the enlightened toward Zion. The temple’s light is, thus, simultaneously missional and attractional. The temple’s ministry among the nations involves both expansive and invitational dimensions. Micah 4:2 proleptically imagines that in being drawn toward Jerusalem the nations will missionally disperse the law.

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths.”  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Psalm 19:1–14 fleshes out some additional contours of the way the light of the temple draws people in wisdom to Zion. This Psalm celebrates God’s arrangements of all the lights of the cosmic sky within the heavenly temple, and they are likely represented on the ceiling and curtain of the earthly temple as well. In a profound sense, then, God creates the world from Zion. It is the point from which “the primal ray of light” emanated.<sup>57</sup> God is said to have pitched a tent for the sun, charting its movement. Such heavenly lights “day after day pour forth speech” which participates in the glory of God in such a way that the light of the truth of the Word of God transcends all linguistic boundaries. The law in this sense is embedded in the nature of creation; it radiates from

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57. Levenson, *Sinai*, 135.

the (heavenly and earthly) Zion reviving, making wise, producing joy, giving light to the eyes, and especially enabling blameless participation in the covenant.

According to Ps 50:2 it is the light of God emanating from Zion which ultimately exercises judgment and maintains the covenant: “From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth” (*Elohim yapha*). God’s shining is associated with divine speech and judgment which requires the operation of the temple to be faithful in covenant as well as ritually correct. The Psalm imagines God descending on Zion summoning the faithful from both heaven and earth in a trial wherein God testifies that the temple cult’s efficacy in ongoing creation depends on covenantal righteousness and not on a dead ritualism.

#### The Temple Garden

The temple’s careful arrangement of the heavenly lights bestow a revelatory Word—a wise and life-giving light to the earth. It is this heavenly light which also maintains the special character of a third missional image of cultivation—that of the temple garden. Ancient temples widely retained the mythos of a temple garden and agricultural fertility even when the actual architecture of a temple did not continue to emphasize large gardens.<sup>58</sup> The wall decorations and pillars in Solomon’s Temple simulate flowering plants and trees, which, as we have seen, both echo Eden and proleptically participate in the eschatological healing and abundance which the renewing power of the temple would bring (1 Kgs 6:29; 7:15–24; 2 Kgs 25:17). We have also noted the way the operation of the priestly ministry was itself metaphorically considered

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58. Retaining the symbolism of the temple being built over an ancient threshing floor is in this sense characteristic.

a form of cultivation of the temple garden, and that the “fertility” of the priestly work was thought to have a fructifying and healing influence on the land.

Additionally, it is useful to note that the liturgical use of living water, the organization of heavenly light, and the priest-king’s maintenance of the temple garden are all persistently and widely embedded in the understanding of Near Eastern kingship. There is a ninth century relief of the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II ritually nourishing the tree of life under the light and auspices of the winged sun disc of the God Ashur in the British Museum. The picture in Canaan is very similar. An eighth century relief of the Aramean king Bar Rakkab from Zinjirri depicts the king holding a flourishing fertility plant beneath a heavenly symbol of Baal. A sixth-century relief features an enthroned Chaldean King watering the national tree of life in his temple court receiving light from the sun representing the god Shamash.<sup>59</sup> Thus through the worship and covenantal service of the temple, the garden’s health, healing, fertility, and abundance are cultivated and protected from destructive predators and unruly vegetation. This is likely part of the background in Jesus’s own promise of abundant life through Jesus’s own sacrificial maintenance of the gate of the temple—or the Royal Shepherd’s enclosure (John 10:9–11).

This mythology is understood by the biblical prophets and can be used to reinforce the authority of truly anointed kings and priestly establishments. However, when existing powers are deemed to be defiled, the language of political regime change or divine judgement on malfunctioning temple cults necessarily involves the severing of the nourishing connection between the structured heavenly bodies and the temple garden.

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59. John Gray, *Near Eastern Mythology* (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1988), 45, 60, 100.

The sun is darkened, the moon is turned to blood, or the map of the sky is turned back like a scroll or garment (Ps 102:25–27; Rev 6:12–14) as a way of describing the severing of divine sanction on a ruling authority and its cultivated influence over the land.

Likewise, politically revolutionary language involves the cursing, cutting down, or transplantation of national trees<sup>60</sup> (Ezek 17:3, 22–24; 31:1–14). The language of political restoration takes on the metaphor of a branch or shoot growing from the previous stump of the national tree and royal line (Isa 4:2).

### Structural Metaphors

Along with the temple cult's "cultivational" metaphors of water, light, and garden, temple functions are also described in social and structural terms. Quite prominent among these visual metaphors is the way the temple exhibits God's unifying or reconciling agency.

### Structural Unity

At first glance, a unifying agency may not seem to be an image but instead abstract conceptual language. However, a fitting icon for this temple function may be Ps 118's capstone. A capstone ties different architectural loads together into an eye-pleasing architectural unity. In using the rejected building material as a central stone of the temple, God has integrated the rejected and the marginal and used that stone in uniting different loads. It forms a gate so that the righteous may enter and be completely integrated into the life-giving ministry of God. Likewise, Ps 48 celebrates the beauty of God's holy mountain. It is emphatically a visual piety (Ps 48:2). Its beauty lies in the way its

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60. This is undoubtedly the necessary background for understanding Jesus's cursing of the fig tree. The cursing and withering of the cultic tree frames Jesus's demonstration against the Herodian complex (Mark 11:12–14, 20–21).



architecture connects heavenly loftiness with the joy of the land. All of creation is structurally and architecturally connected around a visual center. Most importantly, the temple connects God and the city. God is “in her citadels” (v. 3). It is the mere vision of Zion which causes enemies to flee (v. 5). Zion’s integrated defenses, then, are not the result of military engineering alone. They visually depict the transcendent. Heavenly security is expressed in a way that is visually and structurally palpable. What was previously only heard Israel now comes to “see” in Jerusalem (v. 8).<sup>61</sup> Within the temple God’s worshiper is overwhelmed with a consuming sense of intimate and unfailing love, and yet the praise heard within the sanctuary reaches and connects to the ends of the earth (vv. 9–10). Levenson writes,

the theology of creation [is] rendered in glyptic craftsmanship. In the temple, God relates simultaneously to the entire cosmos . . . it is the point in relation to which all space attains individualization and meaning. The center sustains the world, as the umbilical cord sustains the embryo, or as the seed sustains the seedling, except that the world does not outgrow its center.<sup>62</sup>

This divine capacity to integrate life is part of what is understood in various kinds of guilt offerings which ritually cleanse and reintegrate members of the community (e.g., Lev 5:15–19; 14:12–25; 19:21). Psalm 133:1–3 calls special attention to the temple’s unifying phenomenon within a series of psalms which celebrate a festal procession which ascends the cosmic mountain into such a mysterious experience of all things being integrated. “Behold, how good and pleasant” (*tov* and *naiym*)—often adjectives in the Psalms describing God himself—“it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.” This unity

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61. Note the intertextual resonance with Job 42:5. This suggests that the resolution of Job’s faith crisis has to do with Job’s grasping something of the creative divine mystery which the temple structurally incarnates for the eye. Narratively speaking, Job does not enter the temple, but the temple structurally represents something of the theophany he encounters as he is reminded of the Lord’s creative mastery over chaotic forces.

62. Levenson, *Sinai*, 139–40.

is then likened to the abundance of anointing oil on the high priest's head. The oil, which ministers power to convey priestly blessing, drips down from the beard into the robes. The point is that the dramatic ritual actions of the priests in the temple enact this unifying blessing. Likewise, the temple's mysterious unifying power is also compared to the heavenly "dew of Hermon" (the divine mountain of Baal-Hermon in 1 Chr 5:23), which in this case is said to fall on "the mountains of Zion." This eschatological dew carries with it nothing short of the power to reunite the dead with the living and renew Israel's agency in God's ongoing re-creation of the world (Isa 26:19).

Developing this theme another way, Isa 2:2 envisions the eschatological renewal of Jerusalem, and the unifying power of the temple is central to accomplishing God's purposes in reconciling or integrating all nations.

The mountain of the LORD's temple will be established  
as chief among the mountains;  
it will be raised above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it."

The eschatological temple feast accomplishes the same unifying goal for all nations. "On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples" (Isa 25:6). Similarly, Zechariah sees the eschatological Feast of Tabernacles as a mechanism for drawing former enemies into the life of Israel (Zech 14:16). Isaiah's inauguration of the creation of the new heavens and earth involves the gathering of "all nations and tongues" (66:18). Thus, the theme of reunification of all nations by means of the reconciling power of the new Jerusalem is the fertile, "elevated" ground out of which Acts 2 grows.

## Repository of Gifts

Another structural image related to the incorporation of the nations at Zion involves the motif of the nations bringing gifts to Israel. The temple functions as a repository of such gifts. Psalm 76 begins celebrating that God, emanating from the temple, “broke the flashing arrows” of Israel’s enemies, and the Psalm ends with an exhortation to the neighboring lands to bring gifts (76:13). This is important not only in establishing the economic mission of the temple, but also in acknowledging that while often in opposition to surrounding powers, the temple cult ultimately unites the nations. It invites (or compels) the nations to make substantial contributions and gifts to the cause of God in the world.

The tabernacle even before the kingship and the temple was the center of Israel’s economic life. The tabernacle was to be made from gifts given for its construction (Exod 25:1–8). Israel shows its repentance after the golden calf incident by stripping off their ornaments and contributing freely to the construction of the tabernacle (Exod 35:21–29). Additional gifts were given for the performance of cultic work (Num 7:3–5). In Josh 6:19 a treasury accompanies the tabernacle, and during the monarchy the treasury of the temple was supplemented by those of the adjoining royal palace (2 Kgs 24:13). Janzen emphasizes then that God of the exodus, who reveals himself as divine freedom, inhabits the gifts and free hospitality of his people, infusing such participation in the temple’s missional benevolence with a saving power.<sup>63</sup>

Psalm 68’s interpretation is difficult, but it seems celebratory in the same manner of Ps 76. The descent of God from the heavenly sanctuary gains a victory over Israel’s

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63. Janzen, *Exodus*, 193–4.

enemies. God then ascends to Zion using the spoils of war stored in the temple treasury to minister to the poor.<sup>64</sup> The psalmist writes, “Kings and armies flee in haste; in the camps men divide the plunder” (Ps 68:12). And then, critical for the later church’s ecclesiology, it continues:

When you ascended on high,  
you led captives in your train;  
you received gifts from men,  
even from the rebellious —  
that you, O LORD God, might dwell there. (Ps 68:18)

The purpose of the temple repository is not to merely store gifts but to symbolize the unlimited resources of God for sustaining justice and providing sustenance to the poor.<sup>65</sup> These gifts are often received from external or foreign sources, and yet, they are disseminated and further the mission of the kingdom. Missional thinking today emphasizes that the kingdoms of the world often have gifts to contribute to the ecclesial temple, which acts missionally in the wider culture. The temple establishment’s refusal to address such issues of social justice became a sure sign of the temple’s defilement. God insists, “It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses” (Isa 3:14–15).

Shadow, Canopy, Hiding Place

Such benevolent storing of heavenly resources is only one aspect of a wider canopy of covenantal protection under which God protects his people. Exodus 14:19–20 provides the likely narrative background for understanding this temple function. It

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64. Frank Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100, Hermeneia Series* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 165–6.

65. Given the structure and interpenetration of earthly and heavenly temples, the New Testament invites the church to see this benevolent dimension of Israel’s life as symbolic of God’s heavenly ascendancy and the storing up of heavenly or eschatological resources. Giving on earth lays up treasures in heaven (Matt 6:20; 1 Tim 6:18–19). Heavenly riches make possible earthly love (Eph 3:14–16).

records, “The angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel.”

The cloud of God’s protective presence here takes an architectural form of a pillar, because it emanates from the heavenly temple. This is the cloud which later envelops the tabernacle (Exod 33:9) with similar protective effects (Num 12:5–10). Subsequently, the temple acts as a symbol of God’s covenantal, protective presence surrounding the faithful with the “unshakable” presence of God (Ps 125:1). The faithful thus affirm:

For in the day of trouble  
    he will keep me safe in his dwelling;  
he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle  
    and set me high upon a rock. (Ps 27:5; see also 31:20; 91:1)

Levenson notes that eschatologically Isa 51:16 identifies the temple with not only the land of Israel but the people of Israel who are also designated as Zion—fully “hidden” within the temple.

I have put my words in your mouth  
    and covered you with the shadow of my hand —  
I who set the heavens in place,  
    who laid the foundations of the earth,  
    and who say to Zion, “You are my people.”

Levenson comments on this covering with the shadow of God’s hand, which mediates covenantal protection. “Here the people of Israel have been identified with the Temple Mount; the restoration of the one goes hand in hand with that of the other.”<sup>66</sup>

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66. Levenson, *Sinai*, 137.

Such ideas present possible backgrounds for understanding how the early church saw itself as protected or “hidden” (*kekruptai*) with Christ in the heavenly temple (Col 3:3). Jesus teaches the church to pray to God who is in the “secret place” (*en to krupto*), and Jesus promises God will reward such a prayer offered “in the secret place” (*en to krupto*). Janzen suggests that the clue for understanding this language lies in the way Jesus is echoing Isa 26:20–21 where Israel is told to enter their rooms, shut the door, and hide themselves (*LXX apokrybethi*) from judgment for the “Lord is coming out of his dwelling.” From this vantage point, the ministry of the temple in providing a protective hiding place interpenetrating heaven and earth begins to take shape.<sup>67</sup> The temple mission is to spread a protective canopy over the whole earth.

Israel, however, abused such assurances, occasionally giving the people a false sense of security by keeping forms of temple ritual, perhaps even reciting “the temple of the Lord” as a mantra, all the while living lives that were moral breaches of covenant.

Levenson describes Jeremiah’s audience at the gate of the temple as follows:

For them, the delicate, highly poetic image of the cosmic mountain had become a matter of doctrine, and the doctrine can be stated in one prosaic sentence: In the temple one is safe. The temple does not thrill them and fill them with awe; the vision of it does not transform them. For them, the appropriate response to sight of the temple is anything but the radical amazement of a pilgrim. Instead, the temple in their eyes is simply a place like any other, except that there the long arm of moral reckoning will not reach. . . . In other words they have lost the sense of the delicacy of relationship between higher and lower Jerusalem, and have assumed that the latter always reflects the former perfectly.<sup>68</sup>

Levenson, thus, returns the conversation to the ways in which the temple’s theological blueprint was intended to not merely act as a sign of presence within Israel

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67. Janzen, “Toward,” 303–7.

68. Levenson, *Sinai*, 169.

but as a sign that Israel had its existence within a transcendent, covenantal, and holy God who with performative speech restrained chaos by separating the holy from the common. Through the temple God renewed the earth with vivifying streams and provided wisdom, illumination, and justice from the center of creation, filling the earth with healing and fertility, structurally uniting all nations, storing riches for mutual thriving, and creating a place of safety where the divine presence could be enjoyed and extended throughout the cosmos. By preparing a tabernacle for God's immanent presence, Israel came to embody its priestly mission to the nations in cultivating and structuring all creation (Exod 25:8; 19:6).

### **Part 3. The Temple and Christ's Mission**

The previous two sections develop the idea that John's prologue conceives the incarnation to be a return of the visible glory which once filled the Tent of Meeting and which in Jesus Christ has again "pitched its tent" in Israel. It has been established that such a transcendent Christology is historically credible in that it corresponds with the expectations of Jewish temple renewal movements in the centuries before and after Jesus's historical life.

Furthermore, the previous section demonstrates how this temple Christology emerges from the Near Eastern and Jewish cosmological framework embodied in Israel's temple theology and architecture. Israel's temple establishes the narrative arc through which God chooses to act and in which subsequent theological reflection takes place. The temple expresses a symbolic world using a matrix of horticultural and structural images of ongoing creation on which primitive Christology and early ecclesial mission depended.

This section now returns to the Gospel of John attempting to illustrate how Jesus's ministry, death, and lifting up fit within the larger story of the temple as its "fundamental underlying narrative."<sup>69</sup> The Johannine Jesus embodies the temple of eschatological promise, functioning not only as blueprint or sign of interpenetrating heavenly and earthly reality but also a participatory sign and a missional agent of new creation. His ministry, death, and resurrection embody the temple's cultivational and structural imagery in drawing all men and creation to himself.

#### Participatory Sign Uniting Heaven and Earth

Jesus says, "When [someone] looks at me, he sees the one who sent me." And also to his disciple: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?" (John 12:45; 14:9–10). The perichoresis of Father and Son in this passage is consonant with the interpenetration of earthly and heavenly temples. This interpretation is bolstered by the numerous texts which describe the mutual interpenetrating *doxa* of Father and Son. "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself" (John 13:31–32). It should be noticed that this perichoretic glory has interpenetrating earthly and heavenly dimensions. Jesus prays, "I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed" (John 17:4–5). The temple associations with both the interpenetration of heaven and earth and the use of the word glory are highly significant. Since John beheld in Jesus that glory which filled the tabernacle, John

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69. Perrin, *Jesus*, 9.



believes the earthly temple in Jesus is no less an exact *typos* of heavenly glory than Zion had been.

### Proleptic Sign of Eschatological Creation

Likewise, Jesus as the temple acts as a physical sign that participates in eschatological creation. The life of the coming age is something which may be presently possessed (forms of the verb *echo*). In John 5:24 Jesus speaks of walking through from death to life as if it were a kind of metaphorical pilgrimage. This may have become a dead metaphor by the time Jesus uses it, but such usage is likely rooted in the practice of temple pilgrimage. In the context of Dedication, Jesus is in the temple complex where he expresses himself in terms of a protective enclosure for the sheep to whom he presently gives eternal life.

Jesus's mission as ministering present participatory signs of eternity can be seen throughout the Book of Signs. Raymond Brown believes John's Gospel is structured by moving through cycles of the Jewish liturgical calendar showing Jesus to be the embodiment of the hope held out for creation in the temple liturgies associated with Israel's major feasts.<sup>70</sup> At Passover Jesus multiplies the bread of heaven—the source of abundant life in the midst of the desert descends from the bread of the heavenly temple. In John 6:54 Jesus offers himself in terms of a renewed form of temple-fellowship offering, the ingestion of which results in the present experience of the “life of the [coming] age.” At the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus is the water of eschatological Tabernacles (as in Zech 14:8). At Dedication, again within the Herodian complex, he images new eschatological creation in that he is a present source of eternal life and

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70. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John (I-XII)*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

protection (John 10:22–28). Jesus is the gate to the safe eschatological pasture—the gate into that lively compound where all sheep are protected from wolves and (perhaps, like Samuel in the tabernacle) they can hear the voice of divine revelation. Thus, Jesus, like the Jewish temple, multi-valiantly bears the proleptic image of the new creation.

#### Missional Agent of Ongoing Creation

By extension, Jesus like the temple of old is also the missional agency of ongoing creation. Jesus’s mission is rooted in the missional sending of God (John 1:14; 7:29). The appearance of Jesus is that of the heavenly tabernacle coming into the world full of a glory that both renews and transcends that which invested the Tent of Meeting (John 1:14). This inaugurates the new incarnation of the temple’s mission in ongoing creation. The Light and Life sent forth from heaven resists the power of chaotic darkness. The light of Jesus “opens men’s eyes” (John 9:17–32). Jesus comes turning water tanks into a sign of the eschatological wedding feast and speaking of proleptic forms of new birth from above (*genneithei anothen*; John 3:3, 7). He offers an eschatological spring which insures a person against further thirst. The presence of the Spirit who makes this possible is subsequently given to the church which continues to extend the missional blessing. Jesus engages in healing that surpasses that of the current stirring of temple waters (John 5 and 9), hovers over the chaotic waves of Galilee’s deep thus ensuring safe passage (John 6:16–24), feeds the multitudes in the wilderness with the bread of life (John 6), and restrains robbers and wolves by the structure of his compound (John 10).

This expansive missional agency of Jesus, the temple, can perhaps be seen most clearly in John 7 at the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus claims to be the real object or source to which the ritual water irrigating the temple compound in the tabernacle ceremony

points. This ritual water was poured in anticipation of the eschatological Feast of Tabernacles when Zechariah envisioned living water flowing from the renewed temple. Jesus identifies drinking from his own fount with that eschatological temple reality. John explains that such drinking from Christ in turn causes the believer himself to have a “belly from which comes a sudden flow of recreative water” (*koilias autou rhousousin houdatos zontos*). The *koilia* may refer to Christ’s belly as well as to that of believers, and even if the temple-water’s overflow is intended to be flowing only from believers’ emotive center, it is likely that the fountain originally came from Christ’s own *koilia* (John 7:31–39).<sup>71</sup> This is important because the picture of living water flowing from the belly of Christ perfectly fits the preserved images of numerous Near Eastern kings where the temple’s ritual water overflows from their belly or breast.<sup>72</sup> Jesus’s claim, then, is not of a novel kind; the imagery is very ancient, and the revolutionary consequences of claiming to be the priest-king of the temple and the source of heavenly life would have been understood. The Johannine irony of this ritual is that when water once more pours ritually from Christ’s belly in 19:34, it is from a cruciform altar that cleanses and renews the world. The story of the cross is thus set within the frame of the story of the temple and its eschatological renewal of the sacrificial system and re-creative waters.

#### Temple Rededication and Mission in Ongoing Creation

The Book of Glory is also full of temple imagery which emphasizes Jesus, the new temple’s expansive agency in ongoing creation. Beginning in John 12:28–32, Jesus says:

“Father, glorify your name!”

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71. Hoskins, *Jesus*, 161.

72. Gray, *Near*, 61.

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”

It is possible to interpret this scene as a form of temple dedication where the divine glory breaks out of heaven and glorifies Jesus the temple. If the Johannine Christology is preeminently one of the temple of God, then the preceding verse in John 12:23—“the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”—will likely suggest the hour in which God’s glory demonstrably invests the temple.

Such an interpretation of John 12:28ff is supported in four ways. First, the setting of this passage involves the pilgrimage and ascent up the holy mountain and arrival at the temple for Passover. While the exact location of this narrative cannot be pinpointed, the temple destination of the pilgrimage and of those worshipping at the feast cannot be in doubt.<sup>73</sup> Numerous commentators have noted that the images here mirror the Synoptic accounts of the Mount of Transfiguration, which is again a noted ascent up the cosmic mountain which envelops Jesus with heavenly glory.<sup>74</sup>

Second, Jesus’s prayer concerning the divine name echoes Solomon’s prayer prayed at his temple’s dedication. Solomon repeatedly petitions that the temple be a resting place for the “Name” (1 Kgs 8:16, 18, 19, 20). Solomon trusts in the divine promise that “my name shall be there” (1 Kgs 8:29), and significantly for the reading of John, God answers not only by filling the temple with glory but by verbally responding in

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73. Contra Leon Morris in Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 530.

74. Brown cites Bultmann et al. in Brown, *The Gospel*, 465–80.

1 Kgs 9:3, “I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever.”

That the whole scene of John 12 is a kind of dedicatory prayer for temple investiture to which God responds by both glorifying Jesus’s name and answering Jesus is further supported by Jesus’s assertion that “now the prince of the world will be ‘driven out’” (*ekbleitheatetai*). Forms of *ekballo* are used in only four other places in John. In 2:15 Jesus “drives out” the moneychangers from the temple. In the Bread of Life discourse, Jesus assures his own that they will not be thrown out from the experience of being fed by heavenly bread—also a temple theme (6:37). This protective pastoral care is contrasted with the Pharisees who cast the man born blind out of their presence—probably out of their synagogue (9:22, 35). Pastoral care is again in focus in John 10:4 where the good shepherd protects his sheep within the sheep enclosure, which functions as a metaphor for the temple compound. When the sheep are “cast out” of the pen, the good shepherd (the glory of the tabernacle) “still goes before them.” In each case *ekballo* describes being cast outside of covenantal boundaries—twice describing someone being cast out of the temple enclosure or its metaphor. It is, therefore, more than plausible that Jesus is saying that the Prince of the World is being cast out of the true temple area as a kind of temple cleansing. This is an idea with which John of Patmos in Rev 12:8 seems to be familiar. Augustine, too, believing the church to be in Jesus the earthly temple, acknowledges that the Devil has not stopped tempting the church, but “it is one thing to reign within, and another thing to lay siege from without.”<sup>75</sup>

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75. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 52.6–9, in *John 11–21*, ACCS IVb, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 69.

Finally, the drawing power or unifying agency which Jesus exhibits by virtue of his being “lifted up” (*hupsoo*) sounds again themes of the temple’s unifying agency which have been previously explored. As the light of Zion expands, it also draws all nations to itself. Paul Hoskins places the lifting up of Jesus (his death and glorification) within the imaginative framework of temple theology. He notes the Septuagint of Isaiah often equates *hupsoo* and *doxa*, and Isa 2:2, a prophesy of the temple’s exaltation, is the likely background for Jesus’s use of *hupsoo* in John 12.<sup>76</sup>

In the last days  
the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established  
as chief among the mountains;  
it will be raised (*hupsoo*) above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.

In other words, the events of Jesus’s passion and glorification draw all things together and constitute the eschatological restoration of Jerusalem’s temple and its agency in unifying the nations of the world to God’s self. This is the likely reason that John goes out of his way to mention that Greeks have come to Zion to see Jesus in this moment (John 12:20). The double entendre of Jesus’s being lifted up on the humiliating cross and simultaneously exalted is to be understood both in terms of Christ’s renewal of the temple’s sacrificial system and elevated capacity to be visibly exalted above all hills, drawing all nations and nature to God’s self. The emphasis on the distinctively missional nature of Jesus’s being a lifted-up temple mountain is not meant to deny that Jesus, like Zion before him, possesses many manifold attractions. The point is that this attractational ministry is in fact visible to the wider world. The new temple’s integrative power is

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76. Hoskins, *Jesus*, 152–60.

understood within the temple's expansive ministry in living among and integrating all nations.

As one would expect, there seems to be a heavenly dimension of this rededication of the temple. In John 14:1–2 Jesus anticipates his ascension and the heavenly preparation of a place in the heavenly temple (Father's house) where believers may dwell. The use of "rooms" (*monei*) suggests that in Jesus's ascension he prepares multiple dwelling places within the house of God where many people may mysteriously participate in heavenly reality. Janzen suggests comparing the "rooms" within God's heavenly house to what one thinker has called "openings." "[There are openings]—realms of experience through which, if we pay close attention, we can sense the reality of something beyond the reductionistic world of material systems and can look into the world of what Vining [a secular thinker] calls with misgivings, 'spirit.'"<sup>77</sup>

G. K. Beale argues that the plural dwelling places (*monei*) reflects the Jewish expectation that all holy ones would have a dwelling in the eschatological temple, and it is such dwelling places within heavenly reality that Jesus promises to open for believers.<sup>78</sup> Psalm 90:1 draws on this conceptual world where God himself is said to be a dwelling place (*ma'on*). Thus, it is likely that Jesus in John 14 promises to further prepare such places of mutual dwelling, which have already been explored as "hiding places." Such a perichoretic dwelling in the heavenly temple while on earth functions as an eschatological sign, and Jesus likewise promises to come back again so that communion and shared presence is forever assured. Brown recognizes that this likely

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77. Janzen, "Toward," 287.

78. Beale, *The Temple*, 200.

reflects the wider Christian belief that the ascendant Christ enters the inner sanctuary in Hebrews and that in Rev 12:8 evil beings lose their “place” in heaven as a result of Christ’s work.<sup>79</sup> Perrin and Morris cite studies which understand the Father’s house not merely as heaven but the place where servants participate in eschatological reality in the present. In my view Perrin’s analysis here suffers from a false bifurcation of the eschatological and heavenly temple, not sufficiently recognizing the way the eschatological is already present in heaven.<sup>80</sup> McKelvey recognizes that “Father’s house” echoes John 2:16 where it refers to the temple, but he retreats from the obvious temple interpretation of “Father’s House” because he cannot follow John of Patmos or Ezekiel in conceiving of multitudes having enough places with God in the heavenly temple.<sup>81</sup>

The mutual indwelling in the temple’s compartments—the *monei*—is similar to the language of mutual indwelling in the image of the sacred vine being tended by the high priestly gardener in the temple garden in his ritual effort to fructify all creation (John 15:1–3). “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man should ‘dwell’ (*menon*) in me and I in him he will bear much fruit”<sup>82</sup> (John 15:4). It is no coincidence that Jesus appears after his death on the third day (on which the temple was to be rebuilt) as a gardener in a garden; numerous commentators hear the resounding imagery of temple and creation renewal as Christ appears to Mary in risen glory as a “cultivator” of the garden into which his followers are ingrafted.<sup>83</sup>

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79. Brown, *The Gospel*, 620.

80. Perrin, *Jesus*, 54; Morris, *The Gospel*, 567–8.

81. McKelvey, *The New*, 141; Perrin, *Jesus*, 54.

82. Translation mine.

83. Brown, *The Gospel*, 990. Brown notes that both Hoskins and Lightfoot perceive that Jesus is here emblematic of a renewed priestly Adam and gardener of a renewed paradise.



Thus, in his resurrection Jesus unleashes creational power—the eternal life that is present in the wellspring of all being, in sacrificial food, and in the eternal voice recognizable within the temple compound (John 4:14; 6:27; 10:28). The temple, fully rededicated and glorified, then ultimately propels creation forward through acts of performative speech that breathe the breath of life on a new humanity, giving Jesus’s own followers Christ’s own missional sending: “As the Father sent me I am sending you” (John 20:21).

#### Embodiment of the Temple’s Missional Metaphors

Thus, John’s Gospel presents Jesus as the renewed temple. Jesus images the Father, embodying heavenly realities. He signifies an eschatological vision for the world. Jesus in his incarnation, ministry, passion, and exaltation acts as a missional agent of ongoing creation drawing all people and all things to himself.

All of this is expressed using the metaphorical system and temple cosmology which existed in Israel and to a greater or lesser degree in the ancient Near East. The temple’s cultivational metaphors are most prominent in John’s exposition of the divine *doxa*. Jesus restrains the chaotic deep, commands the dead, and invests his followers with the Spirit through acts of performative speech. Jesus is the vivifying and instructive light, the living water, and the sacred vine integrating and fructifying people as the resurrected gardener of all present and future creation.

Structurally speaking, Jesus is a storehouse of the bread of life, and Jesus is the visionary “ladder” or the “gate” of heaven’s protective compound. As such, he provides

many “dwelling places” of covenantal presence in which people may abide participating in Christ’s unification of all nations.

#### **Part 4. The Temple and the Church’s Mission**

Having established that Jesus himself is the renewed temple, it is necessary to demonstrate the metaphorical coherence of the church also being that temple in Christ. Thus, the first question this concluding section addresses is how did the church move from confessing Jesus as the temple to a place where its Apostles could say, “We are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor 6:16)? It is not necessary to establish a single definitive answer to this question, because doing so would likely miss the multivalent nature of mythopoeic signs. Rather, it is only necessary to illustrate various ways within the system of metaphorical signs thus far developed that the early church widely came to see itself as an expression of the renewed temple—the special intersection of heaven and earth and a special sign and agency of God’s ongoing creation in its community and in the world.

##### **The Church as Temple in John’s Gospel**

Again turning to the Gospel of John, it can be seen that the Johannine church roots its inheritance of the temple vocation in Christ’s own priestly blessing and prayerful consecration of believers as the temple.<sup>84</sup> At Tabernacles Jesus claims to be the source of the temple’s living water but promises that drinking of his fount makes it possible for believers to themselves become streams of living water. John says that this is a reference

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84. By contrast, the Synoptics provide a rather straight-forward approach to the problem of how the church came to occupy the same sacred space as Jesus. The parable of the tenants trades on the ancient temple imagery of the priestly cultivation of the ritual garden in indicting the existing priestly rule of Jerusalem. The conclusion of the parable asserts, “He will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” The Synoptic Jesus’s sacrificial efforts for temple renewal involved the replacement of the corrupt priesthood with new priestly stewards or tenants of his appointing. The raising of the temple of Christ’s “body” in three days, then, includes a corporate as well as corporeal dimension.

to the giving of the Holy Spirit, whom the resurrected Jesus confers upon his followers by an act of priestly blessing. In an act of performative speech or creative breath, Jesus bestows the Spirit and says that as the Father sent Jesus (into the world as a tabernacle of glory), so also “I am sending you” (John 20:21).

Jesus’s blessing, ordaining, and sending of his disciples in John 21 has already been anticipated in 17:18. In this prayer for those who would believe through his disciples’ message, Jesus says, “My prayer is . . . [that] all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:20–22).

The church thus supernaturally shares in Christ’s vocation by virtue of sharing in the perichoretic life of Father and Son. The unifying agency present in the temple is to be present within the life of the church, because the church has been drawn into the divine space and perichoretic union that is characteristic of the divine life.<sup>85</sup>

Such texts are so vital for the later development of Trinitarian orthodoxy that it is often missed that the prayer of John 17 is a prayer for the church’s consecration and integration into the divine life. Jesus begins this prayer, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son” which echoes and extends Jesus’s prayer of John 12:27–28 which states: “It was for this very reason I came to this hour. Glorify your name.” It has already been argued that Jesus’s prayer in John 12 is asking for heavenly glory to envelop and fill

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85. Raymond Brown commenting on these verses in John 17 anticipates the cognitive problem of the church assuming the same temple agency as Jesus: “From the viewpoint of a later and more precise theology, one might like to have a sharper differentiation than John provides between God’s incarnation in Jesus and God’s indwelling in the Christian . . . that such a distinction *may* be indicated by John’s custom of referring to Jesus as *huios*, while Christians are designated *tekna*.” Brown, *The Gospel*, 769.

Jesus, the renewed temple. The statement, then, of John 17:22 of “I have given them the glory that you gave me,” appears to be nothing less than Jesus’s investiture of the church as the temple in which the divine glory resides. From this frame of reference, John 17:17–19—“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified”—appears to be a temple or priestly consecration prayer wherein Jesus’s followers receive Christ’s contagious form of temple holiness.

The entirety of this prayer, in fact, is filled with temple imagery which suggests that Jesus is praying for the establishment of a temple of believers. They are not only said to become participants in glory, but are said to receive the life of the new age (*aionos zoe*; v. 3), become God’s covenantal possession (v. 9), and receive the protective power of the divine name intimately associated with the temple (v. 11).<sup>86</sup>

For John the culminating reason that the church is the temple is found in the crowning sentence (v. 26) of this consecrating prayer “that I myself may be in them.” Thus, Christ is within the church every bit as much as Christ has already prayed that the church be enveloped within the Triune life (John 17:20–22). This is consonant with the way that the tabernacle of presence is within Israel and yet God still surrounds Israel. It is also perhaps this very interpenetrating dynamic which Paul is describing when he insists

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86. Brown makes the connection to the protection the divine name, *ego eimi*, has in the midst of the garden in the next chapter in 18:5. Yet, Brown also cites texts such as Prov 18:10 as background where “the name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and are safe.” That the name is in Proverbs, a place into which someone may run, is more than suggestive. Psalm 61:3–4: “For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.” Such passages depicting the protective power of the name as a protective space in part depend on 1 Kgs 8:16–20 where in the Solomonic dedication the temple is a resting place for the name. Solomon’s prayer likewise stands in relation to Moses’s prayer at the Tent of Meeting when he asks to see God’s glory—the very thing Christ wishes to offer his disciples in John 17:24. It is then that it is said that God’s name is caused to pass in front of Moses.

that all races and classes of people have been joined because Christ both encompasses and indwells them all—“Christ is all, and is in all” (Col 3:11).

### The Church as Temple in Paul

In Paul there are no parables predicting that the church would become a new priestly establishment as in the Synoptics, nor are there overt prayers for the consecration of the church’s temple mission as in John. Yet, Paul’s temple ecclesiology still arises from the way he sees the church participating in Jesus’s restoration of the temple and its “glory” to Israel. Pauline ecclesiology is a function of Paul’s temple Christology.<sup>87</sup>

N. T. Wright suggests that the church reread Rom 3:23 in light of the role of “glory” in the wider temple narrative. It is grammatically possible to translate *husterountai teis doxeis tou theou* as “All have sinned and **lack** the glory of God.” The existential problem within Judaism leading up to Jesus and Paul is that the Herodian compound lacks the glory of God. As in the days of the exile, the glory seems to have departed (or never been).<sup>88</sup> *Hustereo* in Rom 3:26 is usually translated “fall short” in order to emphasize the sinful moral agency which fails to measure up God’s law. This is not implausible, because as is evidenced, instruction and glory are interwoven themes. Yet, *hustereo* occurs sixteen times in the New Testament, and in every other case it means “to lack.” While humanity certainly falls short of God’s moral standards, the reading might better inhabit the overarching narrative of the Bible and the theology of

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87. David Peterson, “The New Temple: Christology and Ecclesiology in Ephesians and 1 Peter,” in *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology*, ed. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004), 169.

88. N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God, Parts I and II* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 531.

Romans if *hustereo* were rendered the lack of the distinctive temple glory. It is precisely this hope, which the presence of temple glory engenders, that Jesus restores (Rom 5:2).

To express it differently, the problem with the world as Paul sees it is that the primordial ancestor, having been made in the image of God as a *typos* of the eschatological humanity who is coming (*typos tou mellantos*; Rom 5:14), has actually defiled the temple. As a royal and priestly representative of humanity, the Adam has “by one act of disobedience” defiled God’s mechanism for ongoing creation. Thus, creation itself “groans” looking forward to its “deliverance from corruption into the freedom of the children of God’s [temple] glory” (*doxeis ton teknon tou theou*; Rom 8:21). The dynamic interplay between heaven and earth uniquely present in a renewed, fruitful, and glorified temple is blocked. The result is the reign of sin and death.

From this point of view, Christ’s one act of sacrificial obedience (Rom 5:18), stands in a long tradition of efforts to renew the temple. Jesus renews the representative priesthood by becoming the second humanity. It is permissible, then, to wonder if the unifying agency, which “brings together all things under one head,” is in fact the priestly headship wherein creation is intimately connected to the representative’s priestly cultivation (*anakephalaiosasthai ta panta*; Eph 1:10). The doctrine of recapitulation would then be resituated within a context of temple creationism. Be that as it may, Jesus’s sacrifice restores temple function; right sacrifice restores righteous relation with God and creation, bringing the creative grace and life of the new age (Rom 5:21).

From this frame of reference, the mystery which Paul’s gospel announces is none other than “Christ in you, the hope of (restored temple) glory.” The point here is not to oppose the interpretation of glory as eschatological bliss but to place the church’s

glorious hope back into the story of the temple, where the interpenetration of divine glory and the community of faith is a sign and embodiment of the covenant. Within that mysterious place of covenantal indwelling, Christians know that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” This “Christ in you, yet, all are in Christ” dialectic reflects the quintessential temple reality which has served as a sign of the covenant in Israel.

Nowhere does this temple language become more explicit than in Eph 2:19–22.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Here, ethnically diverse church members are called fellow-citizens (*sumpolitai*) of God's “house” (*oikeioi tou theou*).<sup>89</sup> The structural metaphors in the following verse strongly suggest that house here (and elsewhere) is a structural temple as well as a dynastic metaphor. The whole building (*oikodomei*) or the entire temple complex grows and is built together so as to support the holy shrine or temple (*naos*). Finally, the temple is the dwelling-place (*katoikteirion*) of God.

In a multivalent way, then, Paul draws a picture of temple ecclesiology. It remains to work exegetically backward and forward from 2:19–22 to further develop this. Toward that end, it is foundational to notice that the church's vocation as the dwelling place of

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89. “House” would have been a recognized double entendre. Citizenship in the ancient world cannot be divorced from cultic allegiance. House as being identified with the dynastic family and house as being identified with the ritualized space are very closely related. In fact, in the ancient world one's cultic allegiance defines and functions as a test of one's loyalty to the polis or empire. A fellow citizen within a royal priestly household would participate in the priestly family's cultic house, especially when the royal palace is attached to the temple and together often constitute the same complex. Biblical interpretation often suffers from the excessive bifurcation of priestly and royal imagery. This harsh dichotomy is not reflective of the Near East generally; it is not reflective of Adam, Melchizedek, David, Solomon, Jesus, or the royal-priestly ecclesiology of 1 Pet 2:9.

God is a direct consequence (*ara*; v. 19) of Christ's reconciling work done on the cross (2:16). Thus, in this passage the cross is an act of temple re-creation. What has changed in the temple besides the sacrificial altar and Christ's own sacrificial offering? The "dividing wall of hostility," which most commentators identify as the partition between the court of the nations and the more holy precincts of the Jerusalem temple, is taken down in Jesus's renewed temple. In Christ himself a new priesthood of one humanity (v. 15) is formed which represents and integrates both Jews and the nations. The temple by bestowing the same Spirit upon all races makes access to the Father come through a common access point (2:18). The story of the cross is thus embedded in the wider story of the temple. Christ's work of reconciliation clearly includes the forgiveness of sins of individuals, but the cross as a work of temple creationism is fundamentally about reconciling and integrating nations within a new temple that structures a whole new creation.

Having established Jesus's sacrificial offering as a form of temple building, the question then arises, "Where is this remade and racially integrated temple?" Certainly, the Jerusalem complex was not physically renovated without a court of the Gentiles. Jewish temple theology would expect that YHWH's throne is in the heavens. "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne." How should a heavenly temple affect the reconciliation of earthly nations? Again, Jewish temple tradition would expect that the heavenly temple provides a transcendent pattern of all eschatological creation, and the earthly participatory *typos* of that temple would itself be a kind of proleptic blueprint of eschatological reality. What we read in Ephesians resonates very closely with that view.



The fourteen-verse introductory sentence of Ephesians begins with a paeon of praise to God who has “blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (1:3). “In the heavens” (*en tois epouraniois*) occurs again in 1:20 where Jesus has been seated at the right hand of God *en tois epouraniois*, and then the phrase occurs significantly in 2:6 where “God has raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms (*en tois epouraniois*) in Christ Jesus.” Thereafter, *en tois epouraniois* is used where the church is said to make this mystery of the integration of the nations known to the heavenly rulers and authorities (3:10).

One explanation for why every spiritual blessing is given to the church in the heavens and that the church is said to have a witness to powers “in the heavenly realms” is that the church receives the blessings of salvation as a result of being mysteriously raised and built into Christ in the heavenly realms as 2:6 says. All of the *en Christo* language from 1:3 forward has been describing blessings “in the high heavens” made possible by Christ’s ascension. There is more than ample justification then for believing the temple of Eph 2 is *en tois epouraniois*—in the high heavens.<sup>90</sup> Paul somehow sees that the dividing wall between nations has been taken down in the heavenly temple. Israel’s separate priestly vocation has given way to a heavenly sanctuary which is now fully integrated. Christ’s death ushers in the reconstruction of a heavenly temple wherein Jew and Greek are together enveloped by Christ in heaven as much as they are indwelt by Christ on earth.

How does Paul know the heavenly temple has been reconstructed and ethnically integrated through Christ’s saving work of temple creationism? Perhaps his knowledge

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90. Peterson, “The New,” 172.

comes from a visionary experience of heaven such as in 2 Cor 12:2. Visionary experiences of the heavenly temple are present in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel as well as in Jewish Apocalypses such as 1 and 2 Enoch where the prophetic visionary sees the heavenly temple transformed.<sup>91</sup> Such an interpretation of the origin of Paul's vision of the removing wall between the court of the nations and the exclusively Jewish parts of the temple is also not unlike the ascendant vision of John on Patmos who also sees continuous transformations of the heavenly temple in which "every nation, tribe, people, and language are now standing before the throne" within the holiest parts of the temple (Rev 7:9).

However, Paul believes the church as a whole is capable of some form of spiritual ascent up the cosmic mountain, and there it is unfadingly changed by a visual exchange with the exalted Christ (2 Cor 3:18). Either by specialized vision or by a broader experience of ecclesial grace, Paul portrays a participatory mystery wherein the whole ecclesial temple comprised of all nations coheres "in Christ."<sup>92</sup> It becomes a renewed holy temple structurally enveloped by Christ. Thus, the integrated church on earth becomes a present and participatory sign of the heavenly temple and its eschatologically unifying reality.

From this perspective it is perhaps easier to see that Paul's metaphor of ingrafting the Gentiles into Israel's national tree in Rom 11:17ff is embodying exactly the same

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91. See John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); See Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1993).

92. Too much ink has been spilled trying to determine whether *en* in *en Christo* is locative or instrumental. If Pauline participation language is temple language, and in Eph 2 it demonstrably is, then *en* may be taken both ways, for the temple is always both the locus and the agency of ongoing creation. A thorough grammatical analysis of "in Christ" language can be found in Constantine Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 67–200.

kind of temple message present in Eph 2. Romans 11 should not be read as if the Jewish tree is merely a free-floating secular, agricultural metaphor. Rather, it is the sacred tree of Israel's temple compound which Christ has recultivated in the heavenly temple garden. Christ's saving work regrafts all nations into God's chosen heavenly temple-ideal.

### The Church as a Participatory and Proleptic Sign

Having attempted to illustrate how John and Paul see the church as the temple of God, it remains to suggest ways that temple imagery propels ecclesial mission in the New Testament. By functioning as a palpable sign of divine presence and a proleptic sign of God's eschatological will for creation, the church is called to embody the missional agency expressed in the temple's cultivational and edifying metaphors.

John R. Lanci recognizes the ubiquity of temple imagery in the Bible and argues that for Paul the "temple serves as an engine, a source of imaginative power, to articulate and propel his ecclesiology."<sup>93</sup> Lanci's approach, derived mostly from the Corinthian correspondence, is to be sharply distinguished from the approach taken in this project. Lanci refuses, quoting Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "to essentialize" the image of the temple. This is to say he does not believe temple metaphors point to or participate in ontological realities. Lanci is merely interested in the heuristic value of temple images and their rhetorical power.<sup>94</sup>

The strength of Lanci's analysis is that he demonstrates the ways in which temples functioned in Corinth as central places of community and economic life. A

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93. Lanci, *A New*, 5.

94. Lanci, *A New*, 76.

temple ecclesiology clearly points the church toward liberative socio-economic practices within the wider community as part of the church's temple vocation.

Yet, the value of the of the temple cannot remain merely heuristic; it must be ontologically generative of such social mission. The temple's agricultural and structural metaphors are not merely illustrative of forms of social service, but they participate in such service's generative wellspring.

Lanci misses that the Corinthian correspondence says that temple dynamics give the church a mysterious confidence (3:4; 5:6). Bold persistence emerges within a world which invites others to see the creative light and the treasure (both temple images) stored within the church as a sign of eschatological glory (4:16; 5:6). By seeing the unseen, the church views difficulty as only temporary. The church becomes persistent and competent ministers of reconciliation (5:11, 28), because the "coming age's weight of glory works in us [the church]" (*aionion baros doxeis katergozetai hemin*; 2 Cor 4:17) In another context Paul insists that the church is a *typos* of a heavenly and peculiar form of social engagement (*politeuma*) so that the church's sacrificial life emanates from and carries the unction of heaven (Phil 3:17–20). The church's missional engagement is not only expressed by a system of symbols but propelled by the interpenetrating mystery of heaven and earth which gives rise to the temple mythos from the start.

#### The Church's Mission and Cultivation Metaphors

Using the agrarian language of the temple cult, participation within the temple really does "cultivate" missional energy. This section can only hope to provide the briefest sampling of the way in which the New Testament uses temple metaphor to help the church envision and generate wider social mission.

### ***Worship and the Ordering of Creation***

Having noted the way priestly ritual resisted ongoing forces of chaos in Israel and in Jesus Christ, it is necessary to turn to the way the church inherits, at least to some degree, Jesus's power over the forces of chaos. Its performative speech is able to "remove mountains into the sea" (Mark 11:23). James insists that the prayers of the church continue to have effectiveness over natural forces of infertility and sickness. Elijah's prayerful influence over nature is cited as a means of awakening the church to its power on others behalf (Jas 5:16-8). The church need appeal no further than its own experience of answered prayer to illustrate its continuing ministry against the forces of chaos in the world. Yet through a whole range of reconciling ministries, the church helps contain reactivity and retaliatory violence. Furthermore, the church senses that the prayers and ministry efforts rise before God, and that through the church's connection to the heavenly temple an angel may take a censer filled with fire from the heavenly altar and hurl it to earth (Rev 8:4-5). The church's liturgy participates, and perhaps originates, in heaven so that its songs still sing justice into existence no less than the climactic songs of the Psalter. While much more can be said, temple ecclesiology helps the church attend to the formative and cultural community-shaping power that it possesses through priestly speech, intercessory prayer, acts of reconciliation among individuals and groups, and its liturgy.

### ***Living Water***

The ecclesial temple in Jesus Christ is a source of living water. John 7 ties the living water metaphor to Christ's bestowal of the Spirit which enlivens the church and empowers its ministry. It is beyond the scope of this project to enumerate the ways that

the Holy Spirit generates and sustains missional witness in the New Testament. It is sufficient to acknowledge that Jesus at Tabernacles begins expanding this temple metaphor so that it includes the Holy Spirit's transformation of persons into a community of believers who are full of a shared mysterious life.

Nevertheless, this expansive interpretation should not be held in discontinuity with the way the metaphor functioned in Israel. The living water exists within the temple not merely to enliven the temple but to extend the temple's vivifying ministry to the wider community and the land. Temples in Israel and in Paul's missional context function in conjunction with communal baths which seem to retain the connection with the temple and its powers of healing (John 9:7). The metaphor of living water also retains its ecological function as "the river of the water of life" in Rev 22:1–2. That the recapitulation which Christ accomplishes from his temple throne includes the re-creation of "all things," has continuing import for the church's missional practice as stewards of a new creation (Eph 1:10).

### ***Light***

The early church retained the temple metaphor of the creative light which shines forth from Zion (Ps 50:1–2). Some scholars do not believe that Jesus's teaching depicting his followers as the "light of the world, a city on a hill that cannot be hidden" is dependent on Zion's holy hill and its role as an eschatological light to the nations (Isa 51:3–4), but Jesus's language unquestionably resounds the very imagery of the temple's expansive light thus far developed.<sup>95</sup>

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95. W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, ICC (New York: T&T Clark, 1988), 475.

This intervention depends on a theory of resonance which believes metaphors exist within wider narrative systems. It is the widely understood stories which keep metaphors alive. If light is merely a free-floating expression for visible good, then little more is being said in Matt 5:14 than Jesus's followers are moral exemplars of good deeds for which others may occasionally observe and be thankful. However, if Jesus is saying that his followers are the heavenly light that Israel had previously glimpsed in the Temple, then the band on the hill of Beatitudes is a manifestation of the New Jerusalem. They are now the light to all nations in contrast to the existing temple establishment. Such words pack a revolutionary and cosmological punch for which the previous verses promising persecution then make sense.

First Peter 2:9–10 may be an echo of such Synoptic language; it demonstrates that the church may interpret its identity as bearing precisely this light of the house of God stating, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” Subsequent verses indicate that the light's deeds will missionally lead the nations to glorify God.

A similar kind of usage is found in Ephesians. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (5:8). Here, Paul asks the church to conceive that its word and praxis are participating in the kind of heavenly light that has the capacity to shine into others and raise the dead. This is suggestive of all kinds of ecclesial proclamation, teaching, and community training. Such ministry anticipates the day John of Patmos sees when the holy city on the cosmic hill is not at all hidden but coming down and enveloping all creation so that there is no night there (Rev 22:5).

## *The Temple Garden*

The New Testament also retains the image of the temple garden as a sign of God's dynamic power to propel various kinds of social, spiritual, and physical healing ministries for the nations. Paul's prayer in Eph 3:14–21, for instance, uses layer upon layer of temple imagery in his petition that the Ephesian church would grasp the vital power and love available to sustain the mission to the gentile nations.

Paul addresses God as the one from whom the whole church family in both heaven and earth derives its divine name. Bearing the Name is a temple function (1 Kgs 8:44, 48). Additionally, Paul prays that “out of God's riches of glory” God would strengthen the church. Such language likely is the result of the heavenly temple being a repository of gifts. The end of this petition seeks that Christ might “dwell” (*katoikeo*) in the church. *Katoikeo* is a common word used in the LXX to describe dwelling in God's temple or “house.”<sup>96</sup> Then, with regard to the temple garden metaphor under consideration, Paul prays that the church would be “rooted” (*rhizoo*) and “established” (*themelioo*) in love. This usage combines agricultural and structural metaphors which connect to God's dynamic power.<sup>97</sup> This generative power participates in the temple's unifying agency in gathering all the saints together, and it provides a capacity to grasp the “measure” of God's love. This image of measuring the dimensions of divine love again echoes language used to describe the dimensions of the eschatological temple (e.g., Zech 2:2).

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96. Wright, *Paul*, 357. Wright notes the temple significance of understanding the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. LXX of Psalm 23:6 and 27:4 may be among the most noted examples.

97. See this repeated combination in Mark 12:9–10 and 1 Cor 3:9—both temple contexts.



Paul's use of the image of being "rooted" in a love that sustains integrative ministry among both Jew and Greek is not unlike John of Patmos's use of the temple garden image where the eschatological tree of life in the midst of the temple garden is specifically related to the "healing of the nations" (Rev 22:2). The missional value of this imagery is not merely heuristic. Rather, it points to a generative reality and an eschatological goal for all creation. This is proleptically revealed in the temple mystery and the fruitful and healing ministries in which the church may participate.

### Mission and the Structural Metaphors

#### *Unifying Agency*

The theme that the building of the new ecclesial temple draws all nations together in unity has been developed pointedly in the treatment of Eph 2:16–22 above. However, nowhere is this aspect of temple function more dramatically portrayed than in the narrative of the church's foundation in Acts 2.

It is generally acknowledged that in uniting all nations and proclaiming the wonders of God in various tongues that Pentecost reverses the consequences of the making of the tower of Babel. Less often is it pointed out that the confusion of languages in Genesis is the result of a toweringly idolatrous temple construction. The events of Pentecost by contrast point to the unifying agency of Christ's temple. Acts 2 points to the "reality of the [ecclesial] temple in the midst of the old Jerusalem temple" which was passing away.<sup>98</sup>

They were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:2–4)

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98. Beale, *The Temple*, 204.

The intensity of the sound in the upper room, the image of fire, and the descent from heaven are all three images widely seen as echoes of the Sinai experience through which the tabernacle was built to replicate (Exod 19:16–20). Luke Timothy Johnson notes that nowhere else other than the LXX of Exod 19:16 do all three words or symbols cluster together.<sup>99</sup> The phenomenon of the sound which “filled the entire house” is reminiscent of the moments when the glory of God filled the tabernacle and temple (e.g., Exod 40:34; 1 Kgs 8:10). Additionally, Beale notes that the image of tongues of fire occurs in the fifth chapter of Isaiah between the song which judges the temple vineyard and Isaiah’s restorative vision within the temple. God judges Israel as if they were vegetation within the representative compound. The divine “tongue of fire” licks and consumes the disobedient stubble (Isa 5:24). In Isa 30:28–30 as Jews ascend the mountain of the Lord in a sacred festival, they hear the voice of God as a “tongue of consuming fire” in ways that alternately judge and renew. Likewise, as Enoch ascends the cosmic mountain he finds the heavenly temple built of “tongues of fire.”<sup>100</sup> Qumran believed that the Urim and Thummim projected “tongues of fire” when God provided prophetic answers in the midst of his cloud of glory.<sup>101</sup>

To the cumulative weight of this, one may add Peter’s citation of the prophet Joel as a lens for understanding what is happening at Pentecost. The problem addressed by the prophet Joel is not to be understood in geopolitical terms or even primarily in terms of the

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99. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sacra Pagina: The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 46.

100. 1 Enoch 14 in Beale, *The Temple*, 206.

101. 1Q29; 4Q376 in Beale, *The Temple*, 207.

foreign invasion of Israel. The problem in Israel, as Joel understands it, is the defilement of the land and the suspension of temple offerings (Joel 1:12–13). The solution offered in Joel is for the priests to call a sacred assembly before the temple and to minister before the people (Joel 1:14; 2:15). In repentance they should collectively pray for the renewal of the nation. The prophesied answer the Lord will give on his “Day” both restores the productivity of the land and renews the temple’s effectiveness.

The section of Joel which Peter quotes concerning the “pouring out God’s spirit on all people” has to do with God’s renewal of the temple’s ministry. In the Old Testament the Spirit is poured out on priests who serve in the temple or on kings or prophets who serve in conjunction with the temple.<sup>102</sup> The pouring out of the Spirit on all men and women, young and old represents a massive renewal of the temple and an expansion of its fructifying ministry.

That heavenly bodies are darkened and/or are changed, as we have seen, is language for regime change which is made possible by changes in the way the heavenly temple orchestrates such principalities and powers from the heavens. The result of this new infusion of prophetic ministry and regime change in the nations is that those who call upon the divine name will be saved.<sup>103</sup> “For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance” (Joel 2:32). The conclusion is that because of the judgment and renewal of the temple’s prophetic ministry on the Day of the Lord, the temple’s function in providing a place for ostensible presence will be renewed and the land will be healed by the temple’s function.

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102. Beale, *The Temple*, 209.

103. See previous discussion about the temple bearing the divine name in 1 Kgs 8:16–20.

“Then you will know that I, the LORD your God,  
    dwell in Zion, my holy hill.  
Jerusalem will be holy;  
    never again will foreigners invade her.  
In that day the mountains will drip new wine,  
    and the hills will flow with milk;  
    all the ravines of Judah will run with water.  
A fountain will flow out of the LORD’s house  
    and will water the valley of acacias.” (Joel 3:17–18)

In saying that the prophesying of the infant church is a fulfillment of the prophet Joel, Peter is saying that God from his heavenly temple has poured out the renewal and a radical expansion of the temple’s prophetic ministry, and God is accomplishing the renewing of the nation in the life of the ecclesial temple. James says much the same thing at the council of Jerusalem. Citing Amos 9:11–12, he concurs that Gentiles should now be accepted within the church precisely because the prophets pointed to a day when “I will rebuild the tabernacle of David” so that Israel may possess “all the nations that bear my name” (Acts 15:16–18). In consonance with the prophets, all nations would be drawn to the renewed temple, and now the Spirit who draws all nations to the renewed temple has manifested himself in this multilingual holy place.

That Pentecost points to the reconciliation of all nations is not an imaginative leap for many churches. However, when the narrative of Pentecost is lifted from the narrative of the temple, the story becomes an unrepeatable tale about origins. Conversely, when the church sees itself as the renewed temple in essence—utterly connected with the heavenly mystery which always creates reconciling space—then Pentecost becomes a story about the continuing, reconciling essence of the temple. Racial integration ceases to be an admirable sideline which occasionally takes place in the history of the church. The temple’s unifying agency—its structural integration of young and old, men and women of

all nations—becomes the very essence of the temple’s identity and practices of welcoming and community unification.

### ***Repository of Gifts***

Paul spiritualizes the temple’s function as a repository of gifts while still locating the use of spiritual gifts within the wider narrative of temple creationism. In Eph 4:7 he cites Ps 68:18 which describes God’s victory and ascent to Zion. Therein, God stores the spoils of war in the temple treasury to minister to the poor. In verses 9–10 Paul interprets Christ’s descent to earth and the grave and subsequent ascent to the heavenly temple as just such a divine victory which has produced the spiritual gifts of missionary apostleship, evangelism, pastoral caregiving, and teaching which all prepare the church for “works of service” (Eph 4:12). These gifts have been deposited within the temple of the church in order to unify and thoroughly integrate the body. Note that Paul’s word “gave” (*edoken*) in Eph 4:11 is the exact same form of the verb used in the LXX of Exod 35:34 when God “gave” Bezalel and Oholiab the ability of teaching others in order to build the tabernacle. Note also that a form of Paul’s word “to build up” (*oikodomein*) is used in 1 Chr 26:27 which reads, “Some of the plunder taken in battle they dedicated for the ‘building up’ of the temple of the LORD.” Given this passage in the Chronicler’s context directly sounds the same kind of narrative as Ps 68, it is likely that God’s giving of gifts to build the temple is behind Paul’s usage in Eph 4.

This spiritualizing of the treasury metaphor also happens in Acts 3:6–10 when Peter in a contest with the existing temple establishment tells the man who had long sat unhealed and begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you.” However, Barnabas in the next chapter concretely brings his

gift to the true temple laying his monetary contribution at the Apostles' feet (Acts 4:11). Perrin argues that the church's theology of the temple treasury emerges from Jesus's words to the rich man, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Mark 10:21). Perrin shows that Jesus's instruction itself has its roots in the widespread conviction that almsgiving "lays up treasure" in the temple so that these riches would rescue generous people from disaster.<sup>104</sup> The act of giving stores riches in the *thesaurus* ('*ocar* in Hebrew), a treasure storehouse only located in the temple. Jesus teaches that sacrificial giving involves a "present participation in the heavenly temple" which is protected from decay (Matt 6:19).<sup>105</sup> The Pastorals retain this image in that when the rich are generous their gifts "lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age" (1 Tim 6:19).

In a variety of ways, then, the metaphor of the temple treasury assures the church that it possesses in Christ enormous spiritual and financial resources for mission, and it provides lasting motivation for participating in acts of generosity which solidify the church as a temple sign of generous unity in the wider community.

### ***Hiding Place***

In previous sections we have noted that the temple contains secret hiding places of covenantal protection. Yet this thesis continues to include the related image of the temple offering the shade of the temple's protective, covenantal canopy (Pss 31:20; 36:7; 91:1; 125:1). A quite plausible reading of Acts 5:15 is that when "people brought the sick

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104. Perrin, *Jesus*, 122.

105. Perrin, *Jesus*, 124.

into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by," the people were looking for the shadow of the eschatological temple to place its canopy over them. A clear indication that the metaphor still functioned in the early church is found in Rev 7:15–16.

They are before the throne of God  
and serve him day and night in his temple;  
and he who sits on the throne  
will spread his tent over them.  
Never again will they hunger;  
never again will they thirst.  
The sun will not beat upon them,  
nor any scorching heat.

This image is emphasized in this project in that it continues to be suggestive of any number of sheltering ministries in which the church may serve to protect people from the elements and serve as a refuge from violent social threats.

### **Summary of Theological Foundations**

Israel's temple provides a visual theology of ongoing re-creation rendered in sacred, thematic architecture. Israel's temple establishes the narrative arc into which God chooses to act, and Jesus's incarnation purposefully renews the temple's localized presence and mission. Through Jesus's death and resurrection, Christ builds the church into the renewed temple, a mysterious presence which connects heaven and earth ushering in a new age of God's vivifying agency in ongoing creation.

In the conclusion of her book *The Gate of Heaven*, Margaret Barker writes, "The recovery and understanding of myth can never be an exact discipline."<sup>106</sup> Thus, this project depends on a broad form of theologizing which reads all of Scripture between the

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106. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 180.

preface of Eden and the final reunification of heaven and earth. In Revelation chapters 21–22 the church witnesses one final time the eschatological temple encompass the entire heavenly Jerusalem, and one last time the heavenly structure is measured. The glorious gifts of the nations are brought within a structural repository whose gates are thrown forever open. The countenance of Christ and protective power of the divine name covers all. The temple compound disappears along with all forms of the chaotic Sea which no longer need restraint. The protective barrier between sacred and profane space is no more because the whole cosmos is forever sacralized by the temple's cultivating functions. Vivifying light beams upon a world-wide sacred garden irrigated by streams of living water beside which is a multinational tree which heals all nations. All relationships—all things heaven and earth—are made one.

However, for the church who has come to terms with its temple identity, this is not merely how the story will someday end. Eschatological vision does not merely predict the future triumph of the temple's creative purposes throughout the world. Rather, the church as the temple mysteriously holds this future within itself as a participatory sign of heaven and the future that it is already bringing. The church's present life is but a chapter in the ongoing narrative of the world's re-creation. Thus, the church's self-understanding as the temple of God acts as a spiritual and imaginative source for the church's practices of community renewal.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

#### Literature on Missional Ecclesiology

Recommending the recovery of temple ecclesiology and reclaiming a system of missional images makes additional sense because this thesis assumes the consensus in a



body of literature which emphasizes the importance of “missional ecclesiology.”<sup>107</sup> Such missional thinkers believe Christendom is in various stages of collapse and that modern church structures, which were erected to serve as a chaplaincy to individual church members living within a wider Christian culture, are now inadequate for ministry in the post-modern and post-Christian cultural situation. The “missional” church understands itself as being collectively, rather than individually, sent as a guest into the wider community. Within this frame of reference, the church functions as an alternative community and a collective sign participating in God’s re-creation of all things including nature, space, economy, and social structures as well as the people who inhabit them.

Missional communities practice collective discernment depending on the leading of the Holy Spirit, paying special attention to the stranger and the wider neighborhood context in which a congregation is situated. As such, they develop practices that are exercised within and in conjunction with the wider culture. These practices may be learned by mimesis. This intervention attempts to illustrate such missional practices by referencing congregational examples, including our own congregational examples, from the reservoir of literature on missional ecclesiology as well as by studying examples of missional practice by various other agencies in the Indianapolis area.

#### Doshi and McGregor and the Use of Appreciative Inquiry

Doshi and McGregor, however, point out how work done out of “indirect motivations”—emotional pressure or sense of obligation, economic pressure, or habitual

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107. See Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); See Lois Y. Barrett et al., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

inertia—drain organizations of energy.<sup>108</sup> Energy for mission that is not connected to people’s sense of play, purpose, and potential is unsustainable.

This intervention attempts to access the group members’ sense of purpose through the process of “appreciative inquiry.” This particular theory comes to the church through the discipline of organizational development, but Mark Branson illustrates how the church, like all “human social systems, move[s] toward positive images.”<sup>109</sup> Always a collaborative process, appreciative inquiry in the life of the church assumes that Christians as temples of the Holy Spirit (as well as collectively an expression of the eschatological temple) are repositories of the “generative and creative images” which may be discovered through the exploration of “memories, hopes and conversations.” These images “can be held up, valued, and used as a basis for moving toward the future.”<sup>110</sup>

Thus, the collaborative process of appreciative inquiry chooses to inquire into positive memories and images which are carried from the past with gratitude. Questions are further asked regarding what is life-giving about group members’ memories, whereupon this group of appreciative inquirers locates common themes in these varied stories and life-giving memories. Those themes then enable group members to create “shared images for a preferred future.”<sup>111</sup> While going through a process which probes

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108. Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGregor, *Primed to Perform: How to Build the Highest Performing Cultures Through the Science of Total Motivation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 13.

109. Inagrace T. Dietterich, foreword to *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*, by Mark Lau Branson (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), xi.

110. Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 38.

111. Branson, *Memories*, 28.

inner images held in gratitude may suggest new missional practices for our congregation, it is just as likely that members may come to value existing missional practices and find ways to make these practices “improved carriers of meaning.”<sup>112</sup>

Nevertheless, this intervention holds up a set of canonical images of the temple as normative for the church’s mission. If these outward images are not to remain alien, obligatory, and ultimately demotivating, Doshi and McGregor would insist they must be brought into dynamic correlation with meaningful images located deep within the inward temple which drive group members’ passion and sense of purpose. Thus, a further theory about how such inward and outer images may be correlated is much to be desired.

#### Paradigmatic Images

Working within the field of religious studies, Garrett Green combines Thomas Kuhn’s theory about shifts in scientific paradigms with insights from Gestalt psychology in order to suggest that Christian conversion is a transformation of the imagination made possible through the use of new paradigmatic images.<sup>113</sup> If the old ecclesial blueprint now seems less illuminating than it once did at Speedway, then it is necessary to provide another controlling image. Perhaps a blueprint of sacred space indwelled by God where heaven and earth are united and from which re-creative waters flow can be compelling. Such an image may assist members in integrating more of Scripture and their experiences.

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112. Branson, *Memories*, 41.

113. Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 61–80.

## Hans Gadamer and the Concept of Play

To this end this intervention incorporates periods of “play.” These activities are not construed as periods of mere relaxation or subjective self-expression. The games or assignments have their own goals—in this case relating group members’ sense of meaning to temple function. *Play*, then, is a process which takes place in the interplay of the participants’ imagination and the rules of the game.<sup>114</sup> Thus, what I’m suggesting is consonant with Hans Gadamer’s understanding that play has a structure which plays the player where the player’s own self-understanding is disclosed and placed in dialogue with the game’s own trajectories.<sup>115</sup>

## Janzen’s Theory of Resonance

With regard to this correlating of internal and external imagery, I’m most directly indebted to the “hermeneutic of resonance” developed by J. Gerald Janzen.<sup>116</sup> Janzen’s immediate interest is in the way we construe intertextual resonances within the biblical tradition. Yet, Janzen suggests that a key to understanding intertextual resonance may be in understanding what has been called “universal hermeneutics.”<sup>117</sup> For instance, John of Patmos’s experience of the Son of Man within the heavenly temple may repeat Daniel’s imagery (Richard Hays might say they “echo” his words), because such repeated patterns actually reflect as well as structure widespread existential experience.<sup>118</sup>

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114. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 109.

115. Gadamer, *Truth*, 101–69.

116. Janzen, “Toward,” 241–99.

117. Janzen, “Toward,” 270.

118. Janzen, “Toward,” 270.

Janzen's theory of resonance is rooted in the poetics and literary criticism of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. For Coleridge all of nature is profoundly alive with an "intellectual breeze," which may strike the human mind as somehow familiar in harmony with inner experience.<sup>119</sup> This is so, because "all the organs of the [human] spirit are framed for a correspondent world of spirit."<sup>120</sup> Janzen correlates Coleridge with more contemporary thinkers such as Alfred North Whitehead, Rupert Sheldrake, and Hans Loewald, who each in their own way suggest that the world displays "a mental as well as physical pole" which corresponds to inner human experience.<sup>121</sup> It is in perceiving this harmony—this resonance between the external world of images and what has been inwardly experienced—that the imagination is freed to see the world as alive in newly integrated ways. It is for this reason this project thesis attempts to draw attention to commonalities between the internal images which arise during periods of structured play and the external canonical temple images being studied. I believe that "resounding" energy and creativity is potentially unleashed in the process of their correlation.

### **Summary of the Use of Theological and Theoretical Frameworks**

Thus, this thesis attempts to reclaim a temple theology and its attendant missional imagery as a way of addressing what the field of missional ecclesiology sees as a crisis of ecclesial imagination. Acquiring such a canonical system of symbols at a paradigmatic level is one challenge. Inquiring into the participants' existing inner imagery, which currently stores participants' sense of passion and purpose, enables this intervention to

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119. Samuel Taylor Coleridge. "The Eolian Harp," in *Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge*, ed. Donald A. Stauffern (New York: Random House, 1951), 44.

120. Janzen, "Toward," 242.

121. Janzen, "Toward," 267.

draw on theories of resonance in an effort to connect these inward and canonical images. It is hoped that this correlation may aid in the recovery of the temple's symbolic system and cultivate energy for and discernment of missional practices of community renewal.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This project thesis required a form of inductive analysis called “qualitative research” and more specifically a form “participatory action research” wherein I formed a group of participatory learners encouraging them to make evaluative and design decisions throughout the process of constructing a small-group discussion guide which will facilitate congregational discernment of missional practices.<sup>1</sup> As the group’s pastor I acted as their “facilitator, collaborator, and learning resource” as together we engaged in a problem solving action—that of producing a small-group discussion guide which may aid Speedway Church of Christ in the discernment of missional practices which sustain community renewal.<sup>2</sup> As with all such action research, the “distinction between research and action [became] quite blurred” as I attempted to reflexively study my own action within the group process.<sup>3</sup> This chapter briefly describes the process of forming the discussion guide which serves as the primary artifact of this project. It includes a narrative description of participants, the adjustments made to the intervention due to

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1. Sensing lists five characteristics of such research. They are “elicits understanding and meaning, the researcher acts as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the use of fieldwork, and inductive orientation to analysis, and findings that are richly descriptive.” It is, thus, a way of studying the way humans “make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals . . . and so forth.” Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 57; Sensing says, “DMin projects are a type of participatory action research that introduces an intervention in order to provide ministerial leadership for the transformation of the organization.” Sensing, 58.

2. Sensing, *Qualitative*, 59.

3. Sensing, *Qualitative*, 60.

COVID restrictions as well as other factors, an account of the project sessions, the formation of the discussion guide, and my data collection, analysis, and evaluation methods.

### **Description of Participants**

During 2019 I identified seven participants for this project, but due to delays in beginning the intervention, participant circumstances changed. One person came to the first session but decided that his rapidly declining mobility would make attendance impossible. Two other persons' work and college schedules no longer allowed them to participate.

Still another person, participant L, took a second full-time job just as the project began. At the time I did not know that this new job was also a second job in addition to an old one that she would be retaining. While she did communicate that her participation might be modestly affected, she and I hoped that she would be able to effectively participate on Zoom. Thus, for pastoral reasons I consented to allow her to remain part of the group and attend remotely during "some sessions." While I feel confident that I had communicated high expectations of the participants, in retrospect, I believe there was a breakdown in communication with neither one of us wishing to disappoint the other. Her participation was more significantly hindered by her double work schedule than I had anticipated. While she made up an early absence, she became increasingly tired from working two jobs. She was occasionally late to sessions and had to leave other sessions early. She consistently had a grandchild interrupting even her remote participation and did not turn in some of the modest written assignments. By the time I discovered that she was actually working two jobs and her participation was likely an understandable burden,



the intervention was nearing its close, and thus, I suspect neither she nor I wanted to disparage the significant effort she had hitherto made to contribute to the project in order to broach the subject of her resigning. While her schedule would have permitted her to attend our final evaluation gathering, she did not attend. This last decision ensured a deficiency of data with regard to her participation and the effectiveness of the intervention. For this reason participant L will not prominently appear in the narrative of this intervention.

Anticipating two of these participant losses, I asked a newer member to join us at the last minute, and she readily agreed. Thus, six participants were chosen by “purposive sampling.”<sup>4</sup> I had selected these participants for their bright, imaginative nature and their ability to be expressive in group processes. Additionally, these participants were chosen because of their influence in encouraging a wide cross-section of the church to attend small groups in which the participants might subsequently be equipped to lead using the resulting discussion guide.

Aside from their cognitive skills and potential for leading small groups, participants were also purposively selected because they reflect the congregation’s diversity in age, race, gender, and biblical awareness. Participant S is a retired sixty-five-year-old White male who serves as a pastoral leader at Speedway. He holds a master’s degree and was the former warden of the Indiana Women’s Prison. He was deeply formed in Scripture within a different ecclesial setting before coming to Speedway a decade ago. Participant A is a forty-five-year-old White male who also serves as a pastoral leader at Speedway. He holds an associate’s degree, has refined literary

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4. Sensing, *Qualitative*, 83.

sensibilities, and knows the Scripture very well. Participant J is a twenty-six-year-old White male. He is recently baptized and recently married. He is a high school graduate with good reading and writing skills. While his knowledge of the Old Testament is limited, he is highly motivated and has quickly gained a general appreciation of the contours of the Bible. Participant L is a Black female with two young adult daughters. She has some college experience and has a minimal amount of scriptural awareness, but regrettably her participation in the group was more limited than either of us had hoped. Participant R is a bright twenty-five-year-old Hispanic woman who leads the Speedway congregation's before- and after-school program. R has no college experience but has received a number of child-care accreditations, and she has a solid, general biblical awareness—particularly in Spanish. Participant M is a single White mother of a high-school-age daughter who has just recently returned to an active faith. She placed her membership at Speedway within the last eighteen months. She has a college degree. She is motivated and possesses exceptional leadership skills, but her childhood church experience failed to form the biblical awareness necessary to locate many biblical citations or contextually understand their significance within the wider biblical narrative. While I was recruiting her to be a part of the group, I explained that both her level of biblical training and her ability to be a different kind of voice were viewed as assets in assessing the project's accessibility and its relevance to a wide audience.

### **Adjustments to the Project Sessions**

Beginning on September 1, 2020, I led twelve successive weekly group sessions of approximately ninety minutes in length with the goal of producing a ten- to thirteen-week small-group discussion guide. This guide was to include a blueprint and visual

representations of the Speedway congregation's mission as a community-renewing temple of God in hopes that this would aid the discernment of practices which sustain community renewal. In order to simplify the narrative of how each group session contributed to the production of this artifact, it will be useful to provide at the outset a series of explanations on how the design of the intervention was adjusted before and during group sessions. There were changes in the group's location, its seating arrangement, the time and setting of writing assignments, my own note-taking procedures, how participants chose to communicate electronically, the timing and the way we could evaluate the work of our conceptual artist, and a variety of scheduling changes that affected the order in which topics were addressed.

Group sessions were intended to be held at various missional settings throughout the city of Indianapolis. These settings were to include other churches as well as offices of various parachurch and community ministries. However, COVID restrictions necessitated that we meet with various community leaders and ministry professionals remotely via Zoom in the congregation's sanctuary. Rather than meeting around a common table, participants were socially distanced into four different tables facing the Zoom projection screens and my own small table in the front of the sanctuary. Meeting the community ministry leaders remotely reduced travel time, enabled participant L to believe she could continue with the intervention, and made logistics easier; however, the intervention lost the intentionally desired field-trip element. Participants lost a sense of how community ministries interact with people and places. The socially distant spacing of the seating focused attention on me as the presenter as well as the remote presenters on the screen and made conversations between participants significantly less natural.

Project sessions were to be conducted according to formal, written lesson plans which included a description of materials, participant objectives, activities, and my methods of evaluation. The project sessions were to proceed in three phases. First there was to be a time of heuristic play that attempted to uncover participants' inner image systems which convey their own sense of purpose. The second phase of group sessions involved studying temple theology in an effort to recover a sense of the temple's purpose. The last segment of group sessions was intended to evaluate the contextual potential of different missional practices in light of the previous sets of purposive images.

Thus, the three-phase project sessions proceeded with the following set of educational objectives: First, participants were to identify meaningful inner images associated with their own sense of play. Second, they were to describe elements of temple theology in an attempt to recover the temple's world of purpose. Third, participants were to integrate these two sets of images, appreciatively illustrating ways in which they have experienced the wider church living out particular aspects of the temple's vocation under consideration. Participants then were to use the previously considered imagery in evaluating the missional potential of at least two missional practices. These practices were often described by local practitioners of community ministry in the Indianapolis area. After such meetings with outside practitioners of community ministry, the group participants used the aforementioned sets of missional images to evaluate the potential of similar types of community ministry in Speedway Church of Christ's own context.

All four of these objectives required participants to complete a sentence or a paragraph in their learning journal. However, the first group session required numerous forms of orientation that I had not fully anticipated. Explaining consent forms, explaining

the process of note-taking, and discussing the overall task of collectively developing and evaluating a small-group discussion guide took up to thirty-five minutes. Then, I found that it was also necessary to rehearse the overarching history of the tabernacle and temple with some members of this group. It also became necessary to have a conversation with respect to why my concern about community involvement was taking us into a study of temple creationism at all. Participant S said, “I thought this study was about our involvement with the community, but you are talking about this stuff about the temple.”

My response was that studying the purpose of the temple could potentially help us find more energy and purpose for our particular kind of community involvement. This, in turn, led to a clarifying discussion about the difference between missional and attractional thinking in churches. As one might expect, this took up a considerable amount of otherwise planned instructional time.

After the first group session was over, I was able to address the purpose of the study with participant S more fully. I said that our congregational lack of energy for our current missional endeavors shows a lack of overall missional energy. I expressed my belief that one of the reasons for our congregation’s missional inactivity is that it is deemed an unnecessary sideline. The church still thinks of its purpose as attracting individuals or nuclear families to church with the purpose of equipping them to function as better individuals in the world and in eternity. I explained that the church does not think of collectively being sent into the world as the world’s guests to transform all creation. The intervention is prompting us to again ask, what is the mission of the church? I said that the intervention’s response to that question would be to suggest that the church should function missionally like the temple, because the church has become

the temple. This was not altogether clear at the time, but participant S said that it began to address the issue a “little bit.”

As a consequence of the way the first lesson unfolded, it was necessary that some reflections about participants’ inner images (periods of play) as well as some evaluations of potential ministry practices would have to be made into written “homework” assignments in order save instructional time. In the latter stages of the study, participants referred to these written reflections in assisting me in selecting, combining, and revising the best ideas for discussion prompts, illustrative stories, and illustrative practices which now constitute many components of the discussion guide.

Another change involved my note-taking. I had intended to take notes of my own observations about participants during the group sessions, and throughout the intervention I had note paper available on my table. Each sheet was divided into three columns in order to record my observations. The first column was for observations about participants’ cognitive mastery of the biblical ideas being provided. The second column was dedicated to evidence that meaningful inner imagery was being uncovered during times of writing or play. Additionally, particular attention was given to whether those images were being integrated or identified with the temple themes being discussed. The final column was dedicated to observations about whether participants could use both their inner images and temple imagery in evaluating the potential of specific missional practices.

However, the first session revealed the impossibility of taking notes during sessions. Often, there was not time for me to recount my observations and reflections beyond placing the name of a participant in one of the columns. I audio-taped the

sessions, and once it became clear that I would be dependent upon the audio tape, I asked participant A to also tape sessions so that I would always have a back-up recording. After each session I would return to my home office and reflect on the completed session in detail. I produced “Evaluating Notes” that were typically 2–5 pages in length evaluating three objectives: first, participant cognitive mastery of biblical material; second, whether or not participants were uncovering meaningful inner images; and third, as the study progressed, I reflected on whether or not participants used their own sense of meaningful imagery and temple imagery to evaluate the potential of missional practices and the content of the guide.

Another change involved the way participants chose to communicate with me and one another in between sessions. While I had intended to use a common Google document, it was decided that they would simply communicate by email.

Plans for the way the group engaged the conceptual artist also changed. My original plan was for a local artist to meet with me extensively before the intervention began. He would produce a number of sketches which would illustrate or capture the essence of the material. Participants would then meet with him in the foyer (where the art would hang) at the group’s final group session on November 17. Participants would choose from among the concepts presented, and the artist would then execute a single piece which might variously be used to adorn the discussion guide and hang in the foyer in the spring. However, the leads I had on two such local artists did not materialize.

We were already a month into the intervention, when I was introduced to Avery Silliman, a fine arts student at Abilene Christian University. On October 3, Avery and I had a lengthy conversation introducing ourselves. I explained my project, the

architectural rendering of missional functions, and the budget I had for a conceptual artist. Once both of us agreed to working together, I suggested that Avery view some three-dimensional videos about the temple on the internet, and I asked her to gather some of the kinds of art that she had done so that we could assess which among her styles we thought would best render temple theology.

On October 10 Avery met on Zoom with me and participants S and R. We enjoyed Avery showing us a PowerPoint presentation featuring thirty pieces of Avery's work. We identified a couple of styles which we thought would work best. I was particularly interested in her charcoal sketches that she renders with a sufficient degree of abstraction or impressionism that the eye naturally begins to look through and beyond the image to fill out one's conception of it. In retrospect I realize I was settling on a kind of iconography, which coaches the viewer to look through and beyond the media, as the best way to proceed. I thought that this fit the transcendent subject matter best, but I continued to leave veritably all artistic decisions to Avery's discretion. Throughout this process I was amazed at how quickly Avery seemed to understand the way I was reflecting about how theological content and art should interface. I felt that Avery understood me with rapidity.

The challenge coming out of this October 10 meeting was to decide if we were looking at Avery doing one work of art that combined all of the missional imagery or whether it was best to do seven smaller pieces that were more simply illustrative of temple functions. Avery decided that several smaller pieces would be more manageable. As she and I continued to talk, and particularly after I began sharing sample chapters of the discussion guide with her, Avery suggested that the guide would benefit from graphic



representations of the missional functions in addition to the other artwork. Thus, on November 10 at the group's second to last meeting, Avery again met with us during the group session on Zoom and presented prototypes of the black graphic images which now signify all seven missional images in the guide. She also did an impressive sketch of a hiding place or canopy which was a prototype of the work that now adorns the opening page of chapter 12. It was clear by this time that we would focus on illustrating the guide, and if these pieces also worked for display in the church building so much the better. Group members were pleased with the progress.

Weeks later, I requested that Avery provide us with some sketches which could function as simple placeholders in the guide so that I could get the group's feedback on the guide's layout while we awaited the finished pieces. I was blown away by the quality of the sketches she produced. They were far more than the simple placeholders I was requesting. By March Avery completed seven finished pieces to go along with the graphics which now visually structure the guide.

Avery was not the only outside presenter who required us to meet on dates that I had not planned. Pastors Aaron Elliot and Ken Johnson asked to move their presentation about interracial mission to October 13 so they could take their families on Fall Break. This meant that the planned discussion of the temple's structural unification of all things took place a week earlier, and therefore, the order in which sessions were planned was rearranged.

## Description of the Project Sessions

### Session 1

Three days before the sessions began, participants were invited to speak with Father David Wey of Saints Constantine and Elena's Romanian Orthodox Church. I explained that we were studying the church as a temple, and I asked Father David if he would explain how the Orthodox Church building was a miniature of the cosmos. Father David described ascending the cosmic mountain as one moved further into the sacred space. All participants were fascinated by the experience and asked wide-ranging questions about the iconography.<sup>5</sup>

I debriefed participants in the church parking lot, explaining that the concept of sacred space and visual theology was something we would focus on in the coming weeks. I also referenced the video that participants had watched about Solomon's Temple.<sup>6</sup> I explained that we would be looking at how space could be arranged so as to be visually revelatory. Everyone expressed thankfulness at what for them was a unique experience.

Session 1 began with my noting attendance. During the intervention the only participant to miss sessions or to attend consistently via Zoom was participant L. Participant S attended session 5 via Zoom. Otherwise, attendance was perfect throughout the intervention. As in all subsequent sessions, I began the group with prayer, and typically took breaks in between different group activities.

In session 1 I plunged into the orientation process described above. I handed each participant a journal in which to do all their short writing assignments. Accompanying the

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5. Participant J was unable to be present.

6. Daniel Smith and Heather Ruth Pack, "Solomon's Temple Explained" (video), July 19, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xt6lQAe8ues>.

journal was a handout entitled *Keeping Track of My Learning*. This handout asked participants to record not only things that they learned but to note the things that actually helped them learn. I instructed them to record learning about themselves, the Bible, and the group process. I told them that upon completion of the church's small-group study guide I intended to conduct a "group interview" in which I would ask all participants how their vision of the nature and mission of the church had developed.

After orientation our time of play involved writing about our images of a safe place. I began summarizing and highlighting the kinds of images which convey a sense of safety to each of the participants. I asked participants to keep that list of images in mind as we proceeded.

I distributed handouts 1–4. Given the length of our orienting conversations, we were only able to cover handout 1, *The Temple and the Interpenetration of Heaven and Earth*. This provides a canonical overview of the way that the temple is a palpable sign of God's presence on earth and a means of ascent into the heavenly realms so that worshipers are surrounded or hidden within God or Christ.

As our time expired I explained that we would probably be doing some writing outside of our sessions in order to help make up some time. I asked participants to look over the other handouts before our next session.

## Session 2

During session 2 I handed out companion sketches to handouts 1 and 2. The first of the companion sketches served as a needed review of handout 1. These were the forerunners of the graphics on pages 17–18 of the primary artifact or discussion guide. Participants asked clarifying questions.

Handout 2, *The Temple as a Map of the Primordial, Ideal or Eschatological World*, covered the concept of the temple being a microcosm of an idealized form of the universe. Two conceptual sketches were then handed out to further illuminate the material in handout 2. One was a cosmological depiction of the temple as a microcosm of the earth from which Christina Ellett subsequently developed the graphic on page 20 of the discussion guide. I also provided a sketch which depicted the interpenetrating relations of the heavenly temple, Eden, and Zion's temple. Participants again asked numerous clarifying questions about the temple attempting to move creation back toward an Edenic or idealized plan contained in the heavens.

After a break we discussed handout 3, *The Temple's Mission in Ongoing Creation*. This was an overview of the various ways that the temple functioned as an agent of ongoing creation. This opened the door for handout 4, *The Temple's Architectural and Missional Metaphors*, which introduced the missional metaphors of the temple. I asked participants to imagine seeing the sacred space of the temple as they read Ps 36:7–9. I reminded participants of the video we had watched before the first session and connected each metaphor with an architectural feature of the temple. We then very briefly surveyed the use of that metaphor throughout the canon, and I explained that we would keep revisiting these missional functions of the temple as the intervention continued.

### Session 3

The third session began with a review of handout 4. Participants were able to collectively produce the list of all seven missional metaphors, and they were readily able to imagine a variety of ministries that each of the metaphors suggested to them. This was

heartening. I quickly moved to handout 5, a series of Johannine texts which demonstrate that Jesus is the renewed temple.

This session was pivotal in how I began envisioning the guide. Participant questions and engagement suggested that they were beginning to see where all of this temple talk was headed. While discovering Jesus as the temple was counterintuitive, participants began to grasp the nature of the intervention as a whole. This led me to believe that our guide would be made to seem less alien if it began with the early chapters of John which introduce temple Christology. In this way the whole exercise in understanding Israelite temple cosmology in chapters 2 and 3 of the current guide would be seen as a way of interpreting Jesus. I developed the idea of calling the first chapter of the guide a prologue which corresponded to the prologue and early chapters of John.

At the same time I perceived that participants were intellectually tired. Participant R expressed that this was “all very good, but it was a lot.” Even with asking participants to do some writing outside of class sessions, our group was having difficulty catching up to the originally planned instructional pace.

This made the decision to begin the small-group study guide with Jesus all the more attractive. Beginning with the first chapters of John would allow me to break up the Johannine material into a more digestible first chapter which would establish Jesus’s temple vocation. The second chapter, now “Discussion 4: The Temple and Jesus’s Mission,” would illustrate Jesus’s ministerial embodiment of the temple’s missional metaphors. I further decided to cover John 17 in the chapter on temple ecclesiology. This meant significantly reducing the number of New Testament texts which I had planned on covering in discussing the church as temple.

All of this meant that the planned “ten- to thirteen-week” discussion guide would definitely be thirteen weeks long. It also meant that something had to be done to promote instructional speed. The guide would have to prepare participants for discussion before group meetings. Concise preparatory readings would also give facilitators something to refer to in helping future congregational participants understand more difficult concepts. Having future congregational participants engage group discussion questions before meetings could enhance the pace and productivity of discussion taking a lot of responsibility off future discussion leaders.

The work that had been done thus far put me in a position of readiness to create a mock-up version of what would become chapter 5 of the discussion guide. This sample chapter would not only contain the material the group needed to cover in the next project session, but it would also give participants an idea of how their writing was likely to be used in the guide. While I did not realize it at the time, I was preparing for what would become the intervention’s breakthrough session.

#### Session 4

Session 4 began by talking for twenty minutes with Mike and Joe Bowling of the Englewood Community Development Corporation via Zoom. I wanted the Bowlings to discuss their congregational commitment to creation care and promotion of solar energy. In addition, the Bowlings not only emphasized their commitment to the “reconciliation of all things,” but they also gave a theological vision for job creation.

Englewood established the Jefferson Electric Company. It provides congregants and seekers with good paying jobs while doing a significant portion of the solar installation on the east side of Indianapolis. Participants asked a number of questions of

the Bowlings including how much resistance there was in their setting to understanding creation care as an important mission of the church.

At the conclusion of this Zoom conversation, we took a brief break and returned to review the story of the temple's living water. We reviewed the correspondence of the Gihon in Eden and the Gihon in 1 Kings. We looked at passages in Ezekiel and Zechariah which looked forward to the renewal of the temple's living water for all creation. We then reviewed how the image of living water had been taken up in the Gospel of John the previous week. Because this was largely review, this conversation did not last more than ten to fifteen minutes. We then discussed how Englewood's work embodies the mission of renewing all creation. The very short conversation centered around how alien this would sound to our membership and how perceiving the church-temple as an agent of ongoing creation has profound consequences for the church's community practices.

During a session of play, participants M and R agreed to simply stare at one another at close proximity for two minutes. Observers were to attend to their body language and other attempts to communicate while also reflecting on the significance of the exercise. Then, I read 2 Cor 3:7–8 and 18 juxtaposing the image of the church being transformed by staring into the face of Christ with the uncomfortable exercise M and R went through staring at one another. I asked participants to write about the risks and rewards of connection and to consider the extent to which the church really is staring into the projected light of heaven. Is the church a participatory sign of heaven and the creation that is coming? If so, how, and how has the church served as such a sign in one's life?

After this short writing assignment, I handed out the very rough mock-up of what would become chapter 5 in the discussion guide. It contained readings from Mark 12:1–

12, John 17, and Eph 2:6–22. I was surprised at how quickly participants grasped the import of these texts in pointing to the church as the temple and the embodiment of the temple mysteries which we had thus far worked to comprehend. We were emerging from the intervention's primary conceptual hurdles! Thus, we were catching up to the lesson plans, and from this point forward group instruction and discussion proceeded at a more leisurely pace.

After a short break we joined another Zoom conversation with Joe Shultz, a ministry leader with Bethany Christian Services. Joe described Bethany's work in certifying foster parents and those who can assist foster parents with their children. I asked Joe to describe a time when churches worked with Bethany in supporting foster parents and to describe the process of the necessary training for church members to be able to help foster parents with the care of their children. Joe also took the opportunity to explain that Bethany also works with expectant mothers showing them a range of ministries available to them. Moreover, Bethany assists in locating immigrants and providing transitional assistance to those from foreign countries who are settling in the Indianapolis area.

Afterwards, my group participants variously discussed how these different community ministries appealed to them. Participant R shared her story of illegally coming to the United States when she was a child. The idea of helping immigrants resonated with her. Participant J admitted to being intrigued with the notion of doing things that amounted to job creation at Englewood and Jefferson Electric.

As the group was ending, I asked participants to understand that the mock-up version of chapter 5 I had given them was up for discussion. I explained that the three



periods of our group could roughly correspond to three sections in each chapter of the guide. I explained that I imagined their participant writing assignments and playful experiences would make up the discussion prompts. I asked people to consider the advisability of additional readings and send me an email about what they thought of the paragraph from Qumran. The response was positive, so I included it in the “For Further Reading” section of chapter 5. Participants suggested that we develop a rating system for evaluating different ministries. Later that week, participant A expressed thanks for the mock-up version of the discussion guide saying, “I really think I know what we are doing now.”

#### Session 5

Session 5 took place largely as planned. During our play period participants viewed a video. Then I introduced a work of art on the overhead. The intention of the exercise was to encourage participants to reflect on their own psychological process of discovery and then to get in touch with their own memories of such experiences so that these experiences could be correlated with the image of the temple’s illuminating ministry. A full description of these visual exercises and participant responses was eventually used as a writing prompt on pages 62 and 63 of the discussion guide.

The Bible study portion of this session attempted to correlate these images and experiences with the illuminating ministry of the temple’s light. We surveyed Pss 36:8–9, 43:1–4, and 50:2 as well a reminder of Isa 2:3 as it had been discussed in relation to John 12. We also traced the temple metaphor of light through places like Eph 5:8 and 1 Pet 2:9. We closed with the last chapters of Revelation and the insistence that Jesus is the temple light which transforms the whole creation.

During the final segment we evaluated how our current missional practices with the before- and after-school care ministry were functioning. I prefaced my introduction of participant R with the following sentence: “Again, the cash value of this temple language is that it can infuse the church’s missional teaching ministries with cosmic significance and an individual sense of purpose.” I then asked participant R to talk about what motivates her to be a child development worker. R shared how she was internalizing and owning the temple identity as she ministered to children and their parents. Participants widely engaged a conversation about how to better connect with sources of energy for their own ministries as well as how to evaluate the potential in practices intended to connect congregants with community students and their parents.

In response to the participant request from the previous session, I developed an evaluation scale ranging from 1 to 10 that we tried out on some of R’s practices. Participant A, to everyone’s agreement, suggested that the evaluation scale should be simplified to a range of 1 to 5 with clearer indications about what it means for group members to place numeric values on the potentiality of mission practices. In subsequent meetings participants helped craft language that was honest and yet respectful of all ministry proposals. It was necessary to retain concern about a practice’s theological appropriateness without losing sight of the fact that the evaluation scales should also be measuring whether a practice appealed to participants’ inner sense of purpose or collective sense of its potential in our setting. The final scale, which participants adopted for evaluating the potential of community ministries, is as follows: 1—sounds exhausting; 2—wish I liked the idea; 3—modest potential; 4—significant potential; and 5—generates energy.

## Session 6

In session 6 participants walked into the sanctuary to see three potted *Aloe vera* plants. Ron Greiner, head of Mission Indy, remotely greeted them on the projector screen. Mission Indy is a group that takes high school- and college-age students into neighborhoods in Indianapolis to serve in churches that are doing community projects.

After praying and introducing Ron, I explained that I would need him to judge a contest between the men and the women. The winning team would take the *Aloe vera* plants home. Teams were to briefly list as many different kinds of “healing” as they could imagine and craft a story that illustrated that many-sided kind of healing. Ron was careful not to alienate the men but chose the women as those who told the winning story. A modified version of their vignette now serves as a writing prompt on page 71 in chapter 8’s “Exploring Your Symbolic World” section of the current discussion guide.

After participants wrote about healing, Ron began describing his work in discipling young Christians in practices of community involvement. Often Ron’s groups clean out abandoned housing, do landscaping work, or visit people who also need various kinds of work done. Students study the importance of loving and knowing neighbors in addition to creation care. The group participants asked Ron questions about his sources of funding and about how much resistance there is to a theology of ongoing creation among participants. Ron emphasized that the process of selecting service projects involved listening to what local communities and community organizations needed.

The Bible study session surveyed the use of the temple garden or vineyard figure throughout Scripture. Starting with the garden’s fertility symbols on the temple, we traced the meaning of sacred national trees and thus the significance of Jesus’s ritual

condemnation of the fig tree in Mark 11. From there we moved through the following passages: the “I am the vine” discourse in John 15; the significance of Jesus’s resurrection appearance as a “gardener” in John 20:15; Paul’s use of the metaphor of integrating the nations into the now pan-national tree of Israel’s temple in Rom 11; the importance of the church being a temple garden or field in 1 Cor 3:9; the temple significance of being “rooted” in “dimensions” of heavenly temple in Eph 3:14–19; and of course, Rev 22:1–5 where the temple trees are on a mission to heal all nations.

The final and somewhat truncated part of the session was used to talk about our various levels of energy for the diverse kinds of work Ron Greiner does in light of both our own images of what healing is and the image of the healing temple garden.

#### Session 7

At the beginning of session 7, we enjoyed an extended Zoom meeting with co-pastors Ken Johnson and Aaron Elliot, who discussed practices necessary for White and Black Christians to be the church together. These men described their experience of founding a new congregation on Indianapolis’s north side with racial integration being built into the church’s founding missional vision. This conversation, which highlighted the importance of hospitality, intentionality, and clarifying questions, served as our time of heuristic play. Significant aspects of this conversation are preserved on pages 91–93 of the discussion guide, which serve as a telling record of how the group evaluated missional practices in light of the temple’s ministry of unifying all things.

After a break the theological portion of this meeting reviewed the way Isa 2 and John 12 draw on temple theology in demonstrating how Christ’s being lifted up draws all kinds of people to himself. We briefly revisited our exegesis of Eph 2 where the church

has been built into a pan-national heavenly temple in which there are no dividing walls. However, the largest segment of instructional time was devoted to the interpretation of the Pentecost story in Acts 2 in light of a theology of temple renewal which draws all races and tongues together into a pan-national holy place. That material appears in some detail on pages 89–91 of the discussion guide.

The evaluative portion of the session featured a significant conversation not just about the energy level of a number of missional practices described by Pastors Elliot and Johnson, but about the overall importance of “intentionality.” Based on the way participants were evaluating these practices, I asked them to finish their evaluation of numerous ministries of racial reconciliation by providing written email answers to the following questions:

1. What does Pentecost have to do with the temple’s ministry of structurally unifying creation?
2. Does the Pentecost story—considered as a renewal of the temple—help you think differently about your interracial relationships?
3. What interracial practices recommended by Elliot and Johnson appeal to you or hold the most potential for Speedway and why?

#### Session 8

At the beginning of session 8, participants took turns playing a digital version of “whack-a-mole” on an Android tablet. Participants were asked to journal about how one measures success in life, reflecting on the problems of futility and lasting value that this game seemed to bring to consciousness. The written reflection of participant L was particularly useful in illustrating the temple’s capacity to restrain chaos and how meaningful ministry does not always involve completing a task but may also include continually maintaining some bounds on the way ongoing problems are handled.

Segments of her reflection comprise part of the writing prompt on page 80 of the discussion guide.

The second part of the group session attempted to connect these images of continuously dealing with problems that do not seem to go away with the temple's ritual constraint of the Sea. The survey of the image of the temple constraining the Sea is reflected in the material which appears on pages 29–30 and 81–82 of the discussion guide. The liveliest discussion among participants centered around the concept of priestly performative speech, which speaks creative order into existence. The discussion of Pss 148–150 highlighted the importance of Sunday worship as a way of restraining chaotic forces not just within worshipers' hearts but in the wider community as well.

During the evaluative portion of this session, there was significant energy surrounding the topic of how worship could be fashioned in a way that helps worshipers see the community value in our intercessions for the world. Related to this was the increased interest expressed by participant A in crafting portions of our Sunday service to help support the church's engagement in missional ventures. There was particular interest in thinking about the end of Speedway's services and the way we craft a missional sending. While participants saw the connection between making peace in the middle of reactionary and clashing cultural forces, they did not see significant contextual potential in adapting some form of a victim/offender reconciliation program.

#### Session 9

During session 9 participants met with Marcie Luhigo, who ministers at Horizon House, one of the most successful ministries in Indianapolis in settling formerly homeless people and supporting them through the process of acquiring jobs that allow them to stay

in homes. Some preliminary conversations between myself and Marcie determined that Speedway's houses were not a good fit for Horizon House. However, Marcie made an inspiring presentation about how churches have interfaced with her ministry in other ways. During a break time participant R and M decided that they would both lead a clothing drive in support of Horizon House during the holidays.

After that break I asked participants to briefly reflect on a time when they felt supported either financially or otherwise. What was done? How might the church function similarly today?

Discussing Marcie's work along with the answers to this prompt led us into the temple's benevolent function as a treasury or storehouse of blessing for supporting the wider community. The survey of this missional function included a treatment of all the texts that appear in the second section of chapter 11 of the discussion guide on pages 98–99: The discussion included conversation about Jesus's teaching about heavenly treasure, Paul's understanding of how the treasury functioned amidst God's victory in Ps 68, and how assumptions about the temple treasury undergird the narrative of Acts chapter 3.

At this point in the intervention, the Bible study was taking place by reading and reflecting together from mock-up versions of each chapter of the guide. Therefore, not only were participants writing to create prompts for the first sections of each chapter and brainstorming about sample missional practices, they were evaluating the diction and the appropriateness of the amount of biblical material being covered. The participants did not indicate that any of the material should be relegated to a "For Further Reading" section. The concept of the temple treasury seemed to place ministries like the Speedway

congregation's Common Fund Ministry (a collective congregational bank for interest-free lending) in greater theological context for participants.

### Session 10

Session 10 began by watching a video of a game called "Protect the President." I asked participants how this game enacted a different form of hiding than, for instance, a card game of Old Maid. I asked them to consider what was being protected in a game of King of the Mountain or Red Rover. I asked participants to think about different kinds of shelters, huts, and houses, even asking them to expand their thinking to include financial shelters, tax shelters, etc. All of this was intended to elicit internal images of protection. I wanted them to think about what motivates hiding and under what conditions hiding happens.

After writing and discussing this briefly, I surveyed the various ways the hiding place, the hedge of protection, or the canopy or shadow of the temple afforded a ministry of protection. The series of biblical texts which I chose to highlight in the study were largely chosen to illuminate Jesus's temple ministries in John 10 and 14. Only participants S and A realized that I was revising traditional readings of these texts. Participants R, J, and M accepted the readings as entirely plausible in light of their previous theological discoveries.

At this point in the intervention, the group's task was as much about aiding me in designing the discussion guide as it was about learning new biblical material. Both the participants and I worried about the amount of material I had brought to this particular session. What would become the Bible lesson in discussion 12 of the guide was trimmed by placing my exegesis of the *beseter* into a "For Further Reading" section and by



moving a more cursory treatment of Rev 7:15–16 and Acts 5:15–16 into the preview section of the lesson. Including a preview of each lesson was my idea. Participants found review paragraphs or summary paragraphs helpful. Thus, while I feared adding a preview to each chapter for discussion would add to the guide’s length, I thought previewing what would then be reviewed offered future readers an opportunity for gaining greater clarity from the outset.

Along with participants S, A, I thought it would be a good idea to evaluate Sarah Daniel’s Unconditional Ministries in addition to our own efforts to provide shelter at Alton. The lengthier section evaluating more missional practices in the current discussion guide is probably a consequence of how much our intervention group resonated with this particular metaphor.

#### Session 11

During this session participants met with Avery Silliman on Zoom. This segment of our session has been described above.

After meeting with Avery participants began discussing the appearance of a few mock-up chapters of the guide which I had thus far been able to produce in simple Word documents. I placed boxes or placeholders marking where I thought art would be included. Participant M told me that while the conceptual material was itself modestly difficult, the appearance of the pages made the learning task seem ever so much more daunting. I pledged to use Avery’s preliminary art and work on a real draft of chapter 12 of the guide. The following week during session 12, she praised the improvement.

Participant A suggested a glossary of terms. I was initially opposed to this idea. However, I asked him if he would start compiling a list as we scanned the mock-up

documents. In the end I decided against a glossary. However, most of the terms participant A placed in his proposed glossary I was able to replace with more widely used language.

Before we departed I asked if the participants felt like they could at least help lead a small group using this material. I specifically then asked if a discussion facilitator's manual would be advisable. Participants R, J, and M all thought so. S and A were less enthusiastic but amenable to this suggestion.

### Session 12

During the last session, after opening with prayer, I asked participants to scan their journals for their strongest two journal entries or most valuable writing. When they located these, I asked them to snap pictures of those journal entries and send them to me. After the group session I used their self-assessment of their writing to help select material for the remaining prompts in the guide. Since I thought participants might be more engaged in sections where their ideas were prominently displayed, I also used their self-assessments in assigning participants to help me with particular portions of the guide. As soon as the proofs for chapters 1–4 of the guide were ready, I asked participant S for his input, and I asked participant A to go over chapters 4–6. I asked participants R and M to help me improve chapters 7–9, and participant J readily sent his suggestions for chapters 10–12, some version of which all participants already possessed from the last meeting. In light of these numerous conversations with participants, I was able to send a more finely honed draft of the discussion guide to the group, asking participants to evaluate it for its overall effectiveness.

The second thing we did in the last session was to go over the first draft of the facilitator’s manual. The primary difficulty with the manual was that participant M, who occasionally writes leaders’ manuals, wanted far more structure than I could possibly hope to produce. At the same time participant S worried that any manual would strip leaders of their discretion. This tension was the primary issue I addressed in my second draft of the facilitator’s manual. When I suggested that this manual be included in either an introduction or appendix to the discussion guide, the intervention participants insisted that future group participants should not be subjected to this material. It should be a separate document. One participant said, “A patient does not want to know about the surgeon’s tools and techniques the night before their operation.” Participants also scanned the facilitator’s manual for diction and layout concerns.

As the group closed I summed up all of the sessions with a reading of Rev 21:1–22:6. I noted that participants’ body language suggested that they understood the imagery was a review of our course of study. Afterwards, I asked participants how the combined imagery of the temple now speaks to them individually, and after a short conversation, we departed.

### **Data Collection**

I “triangulated” insider (group members) and outsider (Mike Bowling and Chris Smith, leaders at Englewood Christian Church) evaluations with my own (facilitator) assessment of the artifact in attempting to gain a “thick description” of the intervention.<sup>7</sup>

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7. Sensing, *Qualitative*, 74. “Triangulation is ‘cross-checking’ the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of individual accounts by gathering data from a number of informants and a number of sources and subsequently comparing and contrasting one account with another.” Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1998), 6, as cited in Sensing, 72.

Participants were encouraged to take notes, and at the end of the group process, upon completion of the small-group study guide, I conducted a “group interview” where I asked participants (insiders) how their vision of the nature and mission of the church had developed.<sup>8</sup> I asked them to appreciatively recount a time in the study when they acquired a new or helpful vision of the congregation’s missional future. Were there times during the group conversation or writing of the guide when they connected their existing church service to a sense of purpose? Were there times when the Bible’s temple imagery gave them a sense of purposeful significance within their church work? Finally, I asked does the artifact guide the discernment of congregational practices which for us will help sustain community renewal?

As the facilitator I took attendance and assessed whether participants were able to fully engage the intervention process. This involved the difficult decision to largely leave participant L out of much of the project narrative. This decision was necessitated when participant L chose not to attend the final evaluation meeting.

Also, as facilitator I took minimal field notes that were quickly expanded by listening to audio-tape recordings from each session. I focused first on my perceptions about participants’ cognitive acquisition of dimensions of temple theology under consideration. In addition to checking for cognitive acquisition, I recorded my perceptions on whether temple language influenced the way participants made meaning. Did participants correlate temple imagery with their own inner symbolic system and stored memories with which they make meaning? Then, particularly as the intervention progressed, I was able to measure the extent to which participants used some combination

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8. For a description of the concept of a group interview see Sensing, *Qualitative*, 120.

of their own inner and biblical temple imagery in evaluating the potential in missional practices.

I then collected outside assessments of the study guide. I asked Chris Smith and Mike Bowling as outsiders to look over the intervention's artifact and to write a short review on ways this instrument may facilitate theological or missional reflection that may assist in discerning and sustaining energy for community renewal.

### **Data Analysis**

After the conclusion of the intervention, I evaluated the artifact in light of the same three criteria: first, whether there had been acquisition of the dimensions of temple theology covered in group sessions; second, whether the theological imagery "resonated" with participants' own inner sense of purpose; and third, whether the artifact diagrams a real place of potential for clarifying the congregation's sense of missional practice.

I merged my own analysis with that provided by the participant insiders at the group interview and by the outsiders' written evaluations, attempting to account for any "slippage" which appeared between them. There was considerable "coincidence" between my own assessment and those of the insider participants and outside evaluators.<sup>9</sup> However, with one of the outside evaluations the biggest place of possible slippage had to do with the artifact's accessibility. Another incongruity between my initial assessment and that of the insiders was that they reported valuable learning about the importance of the church's collective life through the intervention. They also learned by doing ministry projects that were either their own spontaneous ideas in relation to the intervention or part of their continuing involvement in the life of the congregation. In either case participant

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9. Sensing, *Qualitative*, 200. Sensing uses the term "slippage" to refer to incongruities in data.

evaluations emphasized that the significance of temple categories dawned on them as they were engaging in some form of community ministry. These two unexpected patterns of insider responses became important “codes,” which I had not fully anticipated.<sup>10</sup>

I used “coding”—identifying themes in data sets—as a means of correlating the three different sources of data. The unexpected importance of participants both learning about collective identity and learning by actually doing ministry became unanticipated codes. As the intervention progressed, I was also able to develop eight codes for the kinds of spatial images participants shared when they were talking about meaningful memories. As a result, one of the interesting surprises of the intervention was the degree to which there was almost exacting resonance between these sets of images and the seven images of the temple, which are highlighted in the artifact.

Of course, many of the codes I used were fully anticipated. They came from the dimensions of the temple theology discussed, and they suggest a story of what I consider a successful intervention as we shall see in the next chapter.

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10. Sensing, *Qualitative*, 202.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Given that the purpose of this project was to draft a blueprint for discussion that would guide the discernment of missional practices, it was necessary to test the guide's viability as a way of discovering God's energy and wisdom for sustaining practices of community renewal. The intervention was evaluated from three angles. The three methods I used to triangulate the data are:

1. A facilitator evaluation developed through my field notes and added to at the conclusion of each session through the use of audio-tape recording;
2. Insider evaluations completed by the participants in a concluding group interview; and
3. Written outsider evaluations of the artifact itself.

In this chapter I describe the results of this evaluative process.

#### **Facilitator Evaluation**

Throughout the intervention I took notes derived from group sessions. These notes evaluated the intervention in three primary ways. First, I tested the intelligibility of temple theology. Were participants able to cognitively grasp temple cosmology and the metaphorical ways the temple expresses its mission? Second, I probed to see if participants could uncover their own spatial metaphors and how these inner metaphors structure their own ways of making meaning. Along with this I was looking for any signs of energy or indications that participants were able to correlate their inner imagery with the temple imagery we were studying. Third, I was looking for the cognitive ability to

evaluate the potential in various missional practices using both the inner and biblical imagery under consideration. Here, I was particularly looking for signs of energy for congregational mission.

### The Intelligibility of the Guide

This intervention addresses a perceived crisis in the church's missional imagination. It is thereby seeking to facilitate new acts of imagination. Consequently, it is necessary to evaluate whether participants may acquire the conceptual skills necessary for the adaptive, imaginative changes envisioned in the guide.

Participants S and A immediately began to digest temple cosmology, and they displayed a considerable amount of energy around studying the Bible in light of temple themes on their own. In the second session participant S asked, "If Eden is a pattern of the heavenly temple and it expresses heaven's creative will, then why is there a serpent in the garden?" While this question may have complicated matters for some members of the group, S could not have asked this question without first processing the material. He ended up reflecting on his own about the way the heavenly temple is also in need of being cleansed in Rev 12.

The concept of the temple being a heavenly map of idealized creation which interpenetrates the earth on Zion and in Jesus Christ was not new to participant A. Yet, after session 3 he wrote me an email telling me that the study was "fascinating." He had begun his own reading into these matters and eventually preached a sermon in January 2021 interpreting an entirely different text using the categories covered in the early lessons of the intervention.



My primary concern at the outset of the intervention was the conceptual difficulty of conveying the perichoretic mystery of how the temple unites heaven and earth. All participants at some point in our collaborative work voiced appreciation for the sketches I provided participants illustrating the interpenetration of heavenly and earthly temples. They all affirmed that the visual aids contributed substantially to their grasp of temple cosmology. This affirmation was accentuated when Christina Ellett's graphic rendition of these sketches was added to the guide. Participants emphasized that illustrations such as those on pages 18–20 of the guide helped them process abstract aspects of temple cosmology. Participant R began to make use of this theological currency. Speaking of her own ministry, she said that it “has an impact here and in heaven as well.”

As early as the third session, it was clear that participant M also understood what she described as “the connectivity” of the heavenly and earthly temples, but she could not yet articulate that the temple's ongoing work was to shape creation. She had not at that point grasped that the earthly temple was worshipfully shaping the world into the heavenly temple's image. It required focusing on the missional functions of the temple in order for this ongoing creative agency of the temple to become relatively clearer to her.

However, even after discussing the ongoing missional functions of the temple, participant S admitted that the concept of “ongoing creation”—the continuous shaping of the world according to God's purposes—remained a difficult concept for him. Ongoing creation generated dissonance with his previous concept of primordially finished creation of matter *ex nihilo*.

Particularly when considering the church's worshipful role in structuring ongoing creation, participants found it difficult to, as participant R put it, “own their own identity”

as agents of new creation in Jesus Christ. Participant J, however, found the concept of ongoing creation energizing. He asked me to stay after our third group session for what amounted to a twenty-minute conversation in the parking lot. Participant J expressed that he thought this study was giving him a “wider view of salvation.” He said that he was recognizing that God’s plan was to save and re-create the whole world whereas his previous view of salvation had focused too exclusively on individual forgiveness. Initiating a twenty-minute conversation after a ninety-minute study and a full work day was a significant sign of energy. The conversation also demonstrated a significant grasp of the concept of continuing creation as a conceptual building block for understanding temple creationism.

Another conceptual hurdle involved Jesus having a body that is a temple. Thinking of a person or a group of persons comprising a priestly house or temple can be conceptually difficult. Participant R, upon rereading John 2:17–21, asked, “So is this saying that Jesus is the temple?” I gave an affirmative response explaining that John 1:14 would have us understand that “he is where the heavenly glory of the temple resides on earth.” R’s body language seemed to express acceptance and satisfaction. R was able to get over the conceptual hurdle of Jesus as a person—not a building—being the temple. This episode suggests that participant R did not have enough interpretive history with the texts of John to have much to unlearn, nor was it necessary for her to broadly reinterpret the Christian faith in light of such a discovery. This temple Christology is on its way to becoming a part of whatever theological syntheses she is first developing in her young adulthood. Likewise, participant A shrieked aloud with excitement at the discovery in John 12:41 that John believes Jesus is the glory Isaiah encountered in the temple in Isa 6.

Here again, the discovery was confirming participant A's existing understanding of the faith, and it generated demonstrable signs of energy.

Participant S, while not in denial of the texts that explicitly provide a temple Christology, wanted a "[clearer] definition of the glory of God." Of course, the divine glory resists precise human definition and appears as an impenetrable cloud. Along with this discomfort with mystery, he admitted, "You read the Bible so much more metaphorically and mythologically than I do." Participant S's discomfort with mythological language was the primary reason I deemed it necessary to include the optional reading section on the importance of metaphor on pages 23–24 of the guide.

For these and perhaps other reasons, the content of the study routinely elicited body language from participant S that showed signs of possible dissonance or anxiety. Participant S discerned hermeneutical consequences associated with this kind of Bible study. While S remained open and eventually came to describe himself as "comfortable" with most of the material of the study, the temple's interpenetration of heaven and earth overtly deconstructs Participant S's early Bible training which downplayed the ongoing role of God in the functioning of nature.

Thus, much of the difficulty of this intervention's material is related to the dissonance it creates with long-standing and often unrecognized theological and social commitments. My own discovery of temple ecclesiology required painstaking reinterpretations of texts. However, participants A, R, J, and M readily accepted my interpretation of the parable of the tenants as well as my reading of John 17 as a form of ecclesial temple investiture. After completing the guide I realized that participants (except for S) did not find it difficult to accept that Jesus had taken the ministry of the

temple away from the priests and bestowed the priestly temple ministry on the church. Similarly, nothing more was necessary in John 17 than to note that Jesus had shared his temple glory with his followers. While I was initially worried that participants asked no questions about my extended treatment of these texts, I belatedly realized that they had grasped the main point, which for them was not controversial.

In summary, the intervention and its resulting temple blueprint for discussion present numerous cognitive challenges. The way the earthly and heavenly temple interpenetrate is difficult, but group members found this concept to be visually accessible with the use of graphic illustration. The narrative of ongoing creation challenges those who still think of creation as being about the existence of matter rather than the shaping of the world for God's purposes. Yet, focusing on Jesus's ministry and studying metaphors for the temple's ongoing creation-shaping mission brought greater clarity on this point for most participants. Thinking of a person or a group of persons comprising a priestly house or temple presents a high but not insurmountable metaphorical hurdle. If not every participant is able to explain how Jesus's body is also a temple, most participants became adept at believing that Jesus "embodies" temple functions so that the currency of the temple language is still usable.

Most importantly, as early as the third session participants collectively produced from memory the seven images of temple mission which the artifact highlights. Without any coaching they were readily able to use temple metaphors to begin imagining kinds of ministry. Within ten to twenty seconds all participants were able to analyze symbolic trajectories of meaning carried by metaphors of temple function. Participant J identified light with being transparent and "spotlighted," while participants R and M identified light

with cognitive and spiritual discovery and, thus, with teaching ministries. Participant A identified the temple garden with creation care, cleaning, pruning, and healing ministries. Participant A also personally resonated with the metaphor of a hiding place, identifying it with ministries that provide temporary protection in helping people through dangers—whether that be a literal shelter in terms of housing ministry or other kinds of hospitality, protections, and support. Participant S emphasized the temple treasury as something that provided a special power in “giving gifts.” Participants J and A described this metaphor as pointing to the church’s “literal sharing of wealth,” but more broadly, participant J understood that this could point to sharing the “abundance and provision of God.” Whether or not participants fully comprehend some of the more abstract dimensions of temple cosmology, it is evident that the essential metaphorical system may still function as a heuristic tool for thinking about mission. This much is widely, if not easily, accessible.

#### The Guide’s Value in Accessing Inner Structures of Meaning

The design of the small-group discussion guide is informed by a modified form of self-determination theory outlined by Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGregor. This theory suggests that any organization’s energy level for adaptive work primarily depends on a work-culture’s capacity to help people connect that work to a sense of play, purpose, and potential. The guide also seeks to use journaling in order to uncover participants’ inner imagery which structures their own ways of construing such meaning. Then, drawing on J. Gerald Janzen’s use of Samuel Coleridge, this intervention theorizes that it is in perceiving a resonance between the external biblical world of images and one’s inner

images that energy and imagination are unleashed to see missional practices as full of playful and meaningful potential.

For this reason, in measuring the guide's efficacy, it is necessary to ask if it aids participants in uncovering their own inner imagery which structures their own sense of play, purpose, and potential. Were participants able to correlate this inner imagery with temple imagery so that the temple language will retain meaningful currency? Put more broadly, does the study guide help participants search for meaning in new missional practices or infuse new meaning in old missional practices? Are there areas of demonstrable energy in participants which suggest that the waters of the temple are connecting to an inner wellspring of meaning?

Not all participants initially responded well to the prompts now contained in the "Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World" section of the guide. Participant S, for instance, was in physical discomfort through September and October. He finished in-group writing assignments far more quickly than other participants and exhibited body language that I interpreted to express something between boredom and irritation. However, after three or four weeks, I further explained to him the purpose of the exercises. I assured him that I did not want him to share anything he did not want to make public, and as he began to see the very practical uses others were making of the exercises, he showed greater tolerance for, if not more benefit from, the periods of play and the playful writing prompts.

The material in the guide aided in uncovering participants' inner spatial imagery. For instance, on page 16 the guide asks for inner images which suggest a sense of safe

space. This was the first prompt given during the intervention which produced the guide, and it resulted in a description of participant images of personal safety.

Participant A described a small enclosure draped in blankets around his childhood bunk. Participant Z, before he made the decision not to participate in the intervention, recounted a hiding place behind Cataract Falls, Indiana. Participant R described family intimacy and connection at a family gathering. Participant J depicted being elevated on a tree stand on a mountain where he can see the fixed stars underneath the night sky. I described children (cousins) playing under the shade of a catalpa tree in my grandparents yard during a family picnic while I am in my grandfather's study watching this scene from within the house as the sun is setting. Participant M described a scene on a West Virginia mountain where the repeated images involved elevation, nature, and family abundance. Participant L expressed her desire to be any place away from her rowdy grandchildren by herself. S said that for him "space or place had nothing to do with it." He then described any place where he is "away from people and with God." Safety was "being away from dangerous people where you can get hurt."

I noted that the group collectively mentioned the following inner images for safety, and I coded them in the following way.

1. being on a mountain or even elevated in a tree stand upon a mountain
2. images of stars or the sun which we might call heavenly lights
3. running water or cataract
4. trees and nature
5. family connection
6. secluded, hidden, draped and/or shadowed space

7. food or abundance
8. distance from rowdy or threatening people

It was strategically effective to elicit these kinds of inner images before introducing the temple's missional metaphors, because all of the temple's missional images were being expressed from within by participants before they even began the study of the temple. The above categories of inner images for safe place resonated with temple images of ascending the cosmic mountain, heavenly light, living water, sacred garden, unifying agency, hiding place, the repository of gifts, and the restraint of the Sea. It is not difficult for participants to discover in temple language places of resonance with their symbolic systems already operating within themselves. The correlation between these sets of images continued to greater or lesser degrees for all five of the most active participants, particularly during sessions 4–9.

One episode might illustrate how this was achieved. The night the group was studying the temple's ministry of light, I asked the participants to engage in a period of play now described on pages 62–63 of the discussion guide. Participants then wrote about their psychological experiences of discovery. Participant J shared an experience that had happened two years ago. He was driving home after working overtime and he suddenly woke up from a nap six miles from where his last memory of being awake was located. This frightened him. He knew he was going to have to quit letting work get in the way of pursuing a relationship with the Lord. On awakening he shared that he said to himself, "Holy crap! I have to make a change." Later as we revisited the temple theology of Ephesians and read 5:14—"Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." I pointed out the similarity of the image here and the story J had shared. This



opened the possibility for J to think that his awakening on the road was quite possibly a manifestation of Jesus's temple ministry as the light of the world.

Reconstruing this important life-event in light of temple imagery was a powerful experience for J. He told me that the exercises were accessing his inner sense of purpose, and they had contributed to him beginning to consider a career change that might align more with his emerging kingdom values.

#### The Guide's Value in Evaluating Missional Practices

The fundamental goal of the study was to help participants recover the temple's symbolic system in discerning energy for and potential in various missional practices. Thus, it is necessary to ask whether participants were able to use temple imagery in assessing the contextual appropriateness of missional practices. First, I measured this by attending to participation and in-group language usage. Second, I evaluated short responses to written questions about the usefulness of temple language. Third, I looked for individual and collective signs of energy around missional concerns. Lastly, I assessed whether there is any evidence that the discernment process now embodied in the guide is apt to lead a group or congregation into contextually suitable forms of community engagement.

The language of all participants in our group sessions demonstrated that all participants were eventually able to use temple imagery in evaluating missional practices. One conversation between participants R and J during session 5 about the progress of temple light illustrates this. R said, "I can see that I am light to my children [at Enriched Before and After Care]. I talk with them. Praying with them helps them to calm down. I am changing the way they and their parents see the world. . . . When parents learn that the

church is praying for their child they were surprised and really impressed with this. They smiled.”

Participant J responded, “Our church has a lot of resources for such a small congregation. Sometimes we are not seeing ourselves as the temple light. We have exhaustion. . . . We have resources but are not using them. How do we get the whole flock involved rather than just a few? How do we get everyone energized?”

R answered, “We have to have a sense of ownership. This was the same thing I was praying about today. When you own the light, then it becomes part of you.” She went on to describe not so much a greater insight but greater energy and meaning around her present work. “When we shine like this, we, too, start to see what our work is doing.”

Participant J, noting that participant R was sharing freely even though she is usually very quiet, said, “R energizes me more than an old preacher that drones on and on.” He then began speculating that the way to spread energy for mission was simply to share. “All this sharing of vegetables from gardens and sharing of extra clothing between members right now, . . . it breaks down a dividing wall.”

This exchange reveals that both R and J used the temple imagery as their own means of expression. To some extent they used it to express their own sense of identity and ownership for mission, and they used the language in assessing the effectiveness of everyday congregational as well as missional practices—all three of the things for which I was testing.

This was true during the next session about the temple’s unifying agency. Participants understood the connection between the heavenly temple being fully integrated without dividing walls of hostility (Eph 2) and ecclesial practices of racial

reconciliation. The tongues of Pentecost suggested to participants practices such as listening just to understand others as opposed to convincing others or building consensus. Group members could perceive the connection between the temple's structural unity and including Spanish elements into church services or learning to host ethnically diverse people in homes, among other ideas. Therefore, the theological language was usable for all participants in that they all could see a connection between ministries of racial reconciliation and the temple's unifying agency. This was also true for the other missional metaphors.

However, when asked what difference interpreting the Pentecost story as a renewal of the temple might make in participants' interracial relationships, participant M wrote, "I am not sure [it] would help me think differently, but it supports how I already think." Thus, while M could interpret temple language and see some of its unifying ethical dimensions, her functional theological ethics remained unchanged. Her kind disposition toward all races remained rooted in other images and narratives. That the church is a mysterious sign of God's future integration of all things or that the church participates in a heavenly unifying mystery that melts hearts and reconciles enemies was not yet an identity that shaped her perceptions of why interracial relations were to be intentionally pursued as a central mission of the church. Participant S, likewise, indicated that reinterpreting Acts 2 in light of a theology of temple renewal probably had not changed him. "I do not think [temple theology] will change me much in this particular area [of pursuing diverse kinds of relationships]."

This suggests that these participants were likely still thinking in terms of the moral correctness of a practice rather than exploring new meaning within the same

ethical practice. However, it is also likely that these participants understand the temple's symbolic system like someone first trying to use a foreign language. While the new theological language was interesting, they continued to think about ethical issues using more familiar significations systems. Temple theology still functioned as an unfamiliar lens which generally confirmed what they knew more surely on other grounds.

However, participants like A and J went further. After session 6 participant A admitted that he did not know how to process all the implications of this new way of seeing the story of Pentecost—"yet." However, participant A understood that changing the underlying Christian story would likely change the way he thought about ministry in many ways. Participant A was captured by the notion that "Peter was a foundation upon which the church is built into a multilingual house-church at the direction of the Holy Spirit with Jesus as the unifying capstone." For participant A the church is "a new, transnational holy space." He then mused about if, when, and how he could include "different cultural styles and practices in his worship leading in our church services."

Participant J was not as focused on particular ministerial practices as he was on finding the intensity of purpose necessary to sustain reconciling ministry. For Participant J the speaking in different tongues on Pentecost was evidence of the "transcendent nature" of Christ's death. J wrote, "We all worship under the same house of Christ . . . God excludes none, as he has wrapped all of us into his resurrection." J expressed temple language in his own vernacular and put it to motivational use. "It's hard to identify with someone foreign to you without thinking about God's continual grace. . . . When scars run deeper than the intentions of a community [i.e., church] to . . . band-aid over a problem, the efforts at reconciliation are never enduring." Participant J believes the

necessary endurance for ministries of racial reconciliation must be sustained by the kind of theological vision J developed through this project. Participants A and J and to a considerable extent participant R all became fluent in temple imagery so that this symbolic system itself generated unique insight and energy for mission.

Session 7 focused on the temple as a repository of gifts. During this session the group talked to Marcie Luhigo, a leader at Horizon House which is an Indianapolis ministry that helps homeless people to both find and stay in good homes. After that discussion participant M suggested to participant R that they could do a clothing drive for Horizon House during the holidays. Participant R collected clothing and donations from the community families participating in the congregational ministry of Enriched Before and After Care. Participant M then combined these gifts with those which came from the church and delivered a substantial load of lightly-used and new clothing to Horizon House. This spontaneous desire to give gifts to Horizon House represented a significant sign of energy for community ministry. In addition to this energy for giving gifts, I also noted that group members began to evaluate Speedway's Common Fund Ministry (a common pool of capital that is used for 0% interest loans for participating members) in a more theological light.

Understanding Speedway's interest in housing, Marcie Luhigo suggested that I might visit Sarah Daniel and Heather Sewell who head up Unconditional Ministries, a ministry dedicated to helping women who have been involved in the sex industry find the necessary assistance to leave the industry. Sarah and Heather's ministry is now described as a potential ministry to be evaluated in terms of the temple's hiding places on page 109 of the discussion guide.

At my first independent meeting with Sarah and Heather, I suggested that Speedway's community development ministry and Unconditional might be able to work together. I told Sarah that I believed women participating in Unconditional's ministry would benefit greatly by living in close proximity to one another and by being surrounded by other supportive neighbors of faith. By late January as this intervention's group was finishing its work, Heather voiced an interest in moving into the Alton project herself in order to serve as a mentor to all those who subsequently would be referred to the housing redevelopment project.

Participant S, who as a leader of the Speedway congregation had been on the verge of wanting to abandon our housing and community development efforts, realized that the Speedway church could find outside community partners who could offer us ways to find mutually beneficial referrals for our housing. He emphasized that Unconditional had experience loving people that our congregation had never thought about trying to love. He became excited about our being mentored by outside community groups in the furtherance of common work.

Participant A and J also became excited about a partnership with Unconditional. This energy was still palpable as Sarah and Heather talked to these group members and other women in the Speedway congregation one Wednesday night at the beginning of 2021. Thus, Speedway and Unconditional entered into a trial partnership where members at Speedway will help mentor women leaving the sex industry. While these events were not part of the planned intervention itself, they demonstrate that by following the method of discernment imagined in the guide, Christian congregations may recognize missional

partnerships and discover in the practices of outside groups ways to renew energy for and sustain congregational involvement in community renewal.

### **Participant or Insider Assessment**

Throughout the construction of the discussion guide, each member of the group cautioned me about accessible diction, the amount of textual material to be covered, and overall document accessibility, which participant M, in particular, helped me realize often has more to do with page layout than anything else.

At the conclusion of the intervention, five group participants referred to their notes and gathered for a group interview. They agreed that the blueprint for discussion worked for them even though they were exposed to more material within the nine weeks than the guide requires in twelve. While they had some reservations about every church member being willing to expend the effort necessary to master the guide's material or even embrace a life of missional discipleship, they believed that it can be a fruitful instrument when facilitators help participants overcome emotional, spiritual, and conceptual hurdles.

During the final group interview, participants were asked to appreciatively recount a time in the study when they acquired a new or helpful vision of the congregation's missional future. Participant S replied by describing his ability to progressively associate the work the congregation is doing at the Alton development with the missional image of the temple's hiding place. "I didn't do this at first," he said, "but everyone needs a hiding place, and that is what we are providing." S said that the temple's structural metaphors appealed to him more than the agricultural metaphors, and it was actually doing work at the community development project that helped him see the

significance of this language. The decision to partner with Unconditional Ministries, as well as the specific ministry efforts, was no longer merely a strategic planning decision in S's thinking; it was the church actually being called in its mission to collaborate with outside groups in becoming a protective canopy or shelter in the world. The intervention had given S a theological language for missional involvement. As a result, he now has a new paradigmatic image for the church and its mission.

Like participant S, participants R and M both recounted stories about how actually doing ministry was what made the study seem meaningful. It was their decision to do the clothing drive over the holidays that was instrumental in helping them feel hopeful about the congregation's future. Much like with S, it was realizing that the guide was prompting them to "actually be doing something" which ultimately helped the intervention "[become] more real," R said. M described the moment when she delivered all of the clothing to Horizon House and saw the ministry's interaction with the wider community that she realized the intervention's theology was leading them to real relationships "outside of ourselves."

Participant A described the sense of confidence he began to feel even amidst all of the setbacks of church ministry. The image of the ecclesial temple containing chaos or constraining the Sea helped him realize that all of the perceived threats to the church's well-being (e.g., COVID, member reactivity, racial tension, the decay of the church's buildings and lots) were actually not that threatening. In fact, the church's worship was infused with power to actually exercise God's protective control over what was otherwise uncontrollable. A asserted that even though the church has "passed through" so much chaos, in the end it has thrived and "kept it all together."



Participant J pointed to his experience with a little paragraph that became a “For Further Reading” note on page 49 of the guide. The paragraph is from the community of Qumran in which that community expresses their perceived identity as the temple. J said that this community’s collective sense of identity and mission jarred him. That collective identity, J said, was what he began to realize was important. His isolated and individual concerns were beginning to give way to a sense of collective teamwork. He felt this closeness and commonness of purpose developing in the intervention group itself. In a similar fashion J recounted that our discussion of a community garden where the church collectively grew food for the Alton neighborhood really excited and challenged him, because he had just purchased his own home and started his first private garden. The juxtaposition of these two different ideals convicted him of some of his individualism.

This was a consistent and unanticipated theme. Participant S said he had moved beyond mere talk of a “personal relationship with God” to emphasizing the “*we* (emphasis his) aspect of God.” Participant A said that the study had emphasized for him the image of the collective temple where the church is built into a collective house. He said, “There is no temple of one” in that sense.

Second, participants were asked if there were times during the group conversation or writing of the guide that they connected their existing church service to a sense of life-purpose? Participant S did not have a particular episode to recount, but he explained that he had needed a way to actually become comfortable with the decision to give himself to forms of community service.

This [the intervention’s study] also has helped me feel approval with the remaining years of my life. I am not comfortable talking with people, and this project has helped me understand my volunteer work both here at church and elsewhere as a valid witness. . . . My early Bible training emphasized converting

people intellectually, but I have never been comfortable with that intellectual pounding. . . . This has given me the okay to do volunteer work—maybe that starts a conversation about Jesus.

Participant M explained that it was during the development of the discussion facilitator’s manual that she began to see herself as a person who might lead different people in church discussion. She felt as though her life was about trying to bring people together around common cause, and it was then that she had felt honored to have been invited to be part of this intervention. To be perceived as someone around whom a church group might coalesce was moving for her. The image from Acts 2 of “all languages and people connecting in one house” suggested to her numerous people “walking with her arm in arm, going to a safe place.” M said this with tears, confessing that for years she had tried in vain to connect with a church like she had been a part of in her youth—a Baptist church in West Virginia. Her inclusion at the Speedway congregation had made this COVID year very meaningful, something beyond “just hanging out with my daughter and my Dad.”

This is a wonderful example of how inner passions have been connected to textual imagery. The second through fourth questions that I asked participants at the final group interview were about purpose, passion, and meaningful work, and they evoked many of the same kinds of answers from participants. Participant R recounted the moment (previously described) when she began owning her identity and the importance of her work with children as someone who is truly the light of the world in Jesus. Participant J also described a moment when he began mulling over his sense of purpose in a conversation with Joe Shultz of Bethany Christian Services. It was then that J began reassessing his career path in light of his understanding of temple’s missional imagery.

Participant A admitted that much of the project's theology he had been studying for some time, but the guide did ask him to consider

who am I really—fully down deep. . . . I know I am not in touch with my emotions, but this has challenged me to be more so. I've been sharing the temple imagery with [my wife] and asking her, "Where does your heart go to?" I mean, "What do you [speaking of both her and himself] need? The healing garden? protection from chaos? to the light? the hiding place?" I'm trying to connect the image of God's source with my heart.

Finally, I asked group participants if the discussion/blueprint/guide aided the discernment of this congregation's practices which will help us sustain community involvement and renewal. Participant J said that as a new Christian he really appreciated the overview of the Bible the guide had given him. "It was like a 10,000-foot overview" not just of the Bible but of the broad sweep of his own life. J indicated that he is now letting the sweeping narrative of the Bible inform his career plans rather than let career dictate how and if he serves in the kingdom. "I probably would have gotten to that point—may have gotten to that point—fifteen years down the road, but instead, it's happening now."

Participant S acknowledged that the intervention had helped the group make connections, do a clothing drive, and identify a partnership with Unconditional Ministries, but he voiced his pessimism about the congregation as a whole accepting the demands of missional discipleship especially in terms of the sacrifice and time commitments that this guide sometimes envisions. He did not know if the congregation could overcome that perceived roadblock in order to pursue finding energy for mission.

Participant R responded somewhat affirmatively to S. She found taking the initiative to make community connections was hard for her and admitted that participant

S could have been talking about her, because she acknowledged that she could be “a little bit selfish with her time.” However, the study had left her saying to herself, “Yes, what you are doing [ministering to children in the church’s before- and after-school care] is hard, but it is good for the Lord,” R said. Then she continued. “For me it takes so . . . much . . . energy . . . to be with people. I find joy when I am doing it and after I have done it. I will say ‘that was very nice.’” Yet, before she does something social she reported that she says to herself, “I don’t know about this.” R then said, “The guide assures me that I can step out of my comfort zone and take initiative in things like inviting people over to my home.”

Then R said something that really confirms the effectiveness of the study guide’s material for her. She said that when she is hesitant, being selfish with her time, or not wanting connection with outsiders, she tells herself, “Look inside the temple. What do you really want to do within Him?” This is a clear example of how a young Christian has adopted Pauline participation language, situated it within its original setting in temple theology and put it to work in her own devotional life in an attempt to find the courage and energy for mission. The project succeeds!

### **Outside Evaluations**

I asked two ministry colleagues who work at Englewood Christian Church, which is well known for its missional outlook and community engagement, to briefly offer their assessments of the discussion guide. I asked them to consider ways this instrument may facilitate theological or missional reflection or may assist in discerning and sustaining energy for community renewal.

Chris Smith, author of *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus* and *How the Body of Christ Talks: Recovering the Practice of Conversation in the Church*, offered this overall assessment:

I love the structure of the guide, and the way that the facets of the temple come together to create a robust image of the mission of God’s people. The figures showing the architecture of the temple were especially helpful in giving me imagination for the narrative . . . put forward. This image, of course, is deeply rooted in Scripture—both Old and New Testaments—and intimately connected throughout the biblical story with the people of God.

The “of course” in Chris’s assessment may account for much of the slippage between his assessment of this instrument and my own. Chris and his community of faith, Englewood Christian Church, have long accepted the basic contours of the biblical metanarrative I am proposing. The fact that he can so quickly grant that the basic narrative I am telling is rooted in Scripture, while refreshing to me personally, is at variance with my own congregational context where basic concepts such as “ongoing creation” are not received as a matter of course among either traditional or untrained new members. While Chris is thinking mainly of how to create widely accessible conversations about how to participate in God’s ongoing creation of the world, my own context requires an intervention that is capable of facilitating a new imaginative and theological synthesis among influential members so there can be more energy around partnering with God in re-creating the earth. Many in my congregation still live on an earth that they assume will be eschatologically discarded or abandoned.

Chris suggests that I consider a wider variety of ministry options to be evaluated in the last section of each chapter. This coincides with my own previous assessment of the instrument. While the existing sample missional ministries widened the participants’ view of the range of community ministries available, I realize that the sampling was

restricted by the limits of my own imagination and to ones deemed plausible within my own congregational context.

However, Chris's major concern about the guide is its readability "among those who are not familiar with [my] vocabulary or theological background." While I continue to comb the guide attempting to make the wording more accessible, I do not think that the accessibility problem is primarily one of diction.

For instance, at Chris's suggestion I put what I consider one of the most difficult pages of the guide (page 20) through an online consensus readability calculator through the website readabilityformulas.com. *The Linsear Write Formula*, which simply measures the number of syllables in words, scored the guide at a reading level of 15.9, and *Gunning Fog* scored the reading level at 14.4. Both of these scores bear out Chris's concern and might suggest that the guide would require something close to an undergraduate education for it to be profitably read. In many places I imported text from parts of this thesis into the discussion guide. However, *The Coleman-Liau Index*, which measures the number of characters, scored the same section of text at a tenth-grade reading level. *The SMOG Index* rated it at 10.8 or at that of a junior in high school. *The Automated Readability Index* and *Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level* were in the middle. Both of these tools rated page 20 between a 12.8 and 12.9—a basically acceptable reading level for the average high school graduate or entering college freshman.

I subsequently ran sample texts from sections of the guide entitled "Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World" and "Imagining Ministries with Potential." These presented no concerns about readability. Likewise, completely random sampling of the exegetical sections of the guide (e.g., *Recovering the Temple's World of Purpose*)

typically produced reading scores that all fell between ninth- and twelfth-grade reading levels.

In the end I believe that what Chris is saying is that the form of reflection and discernment coached by this guide requires a modest degree of biblical literacy. I am comfortable with this. The study is intended to aid in mature Christian reflection. It is not a tool for basic catechesis. I speculate that Chris's real concern is that the guide requires participants to be capable of imagining a different theological and conceptual world. Chris acknowledges that "as a general rule you use sentences of different lengths, and rarely if ever use a super-long sentence. So I think the biggest challenge to readability would be the vocabulary and concepts that might require a deeper educational background than you realize."

I think the project's difficulty is in fact related to the irreducible difficulty of the intervention's "concepts." The main accessibility problem is not one that better diction can solve. For instance, I consistently use the word "interpenetration" in the place of "perichoresis" to describe both the mysterious earthly presence of the heavenly temple and the current mysterious ascent of the earthly priesthood into the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. Likewise, I have scuttled words and phrases like "realized eschatology" or "proleptic" and have used phrases such as "participating in God's future" to describe the temple being a mysterious sign wherein the future glory of creation is already palpably but imperfectly present. In so doing I am acknowledging that the church quite widely does not trade in these theological categories and has no readily usable language for itself being a participatory sign of the coming age. The effort of this intervention, then, is to place these theological concepts back into the metanarrative of the temple—from which I

believe they came—in hopes that they can gain greater popular currency. However, I cannot avoid the very difficult concepts that the intervention seeks to recover.

Again, I feel the primary slippage between Chris's and my assessment of the accessibility problem results from differences in context. I see the guide as being aimed at a theological crisis of imagination among influential church members who already do regularly participate in intensive mid-week studies. However, the missional identity for which I'm arguing is something Chris's church setting has long assumed. His legitimate concern is that the material become more accessible for those who might not be biblically formed leaders but still need to be included in processes of missional discernment.

I am thankful for the other outside assessment provided by Mike Bowling, minister at the Englewood Christian Church. I am not only excited that Mike is planning to pilot the guide's use at Englewood but also wishes to see it widely published. I am still more delighted that he also concurs about the recovery of temple language being vital for the development of missional ecclesiology. He writes that the guide points to "the dynamic, lived reality of the church as the continuing presence of Christ and God's renewed temple presence in the world." He was particularly impressed with the "expansive missiological implications detailed in lessons six through twelve."

Mike does not seem to share Chris's level of concern about the guide's accessibility. Mike deems the guide "accessible, visually appealing" and offering "a depth of theology attractive to those who believe church members are capable of complex ways of both understanding and living out faithfulness" Here, Mike may be correct in suggesting that the guide embodies something of my confidence in high levels of congregational reflection.



While Mike does share Chris's and my own opinion that "the exercises at the end of each lesson may not fit every context," I am less certain with Mike that this particular blueprint for discussion would be a "real gift to any church." I am not convinced of its suitability for all settings as I will address below.

### **Facilitator's Summary Assessment**

The discussion guide has some intentional limitations. The theological recovery envisioned requires participants to possess some biblical awareness as well as patience for acts of theological imagination. The guide also requires a facilitator who is able to help participants overcome conceptual hurdles. While the intervention that produced the discussion guide suggests that the guide's basic structural symbolism is likely to be widely available to motivated participants, various elements of the study may be difficult to comprehend, and they are not intended for those who should otherwise be undergoing basic biblical catechesis. The guide is well-suited for church leadership groups, deacon boards, ministry leaders, small groups who have well-developed habits of Bible study, or those portions of a congregation that already engage in prayerful, collective discernment.

Equally important to note, the guide will perhaps cause too much dissonance in church settings where a transition to missional ecclesiology is not yet on the horizon. The guide is providing a missional theology of ongoing re-creation which challenges some prevalent views of Jesus, the Bible, salvation, and the church's identity. This study is aimed at contexts where at least some current ecclesial practices are already being called into question. Additionally, this study is aimed congregations where there is an emerging group of members who are searching for a renewed theological vision for the church's sending into the wider community. These congregations may already be coping with the

experience of liminality, so they may find that this guide helps participants come to areas of greater missional clarity. However, congregational systems that currently have no containment reservoir for more stress may not want to consider using this guide.

The guide, as it currently exists, contains a number of weaknesses. I believe the most glaring but likely the easiest weakness to address is the limited variety of community ministries that it offers as heuristic examples of ministry in the Evaluating Ministries with Potential section. This is, in part, the result of the guide being produced for use in one specific congregational context, but it is also the result of my own insufficiently developed missional imagination. Evaluating a wider array of missional practices might enhance the guide's efficacy and transferability, and in some church settings it may be appropriate to provide more evaluative exercises which simply evaluate how existing missional practices are currently being carried out.<sup>1</sup>

A related weakness is that the guide currently provides no opportunity for a group to collectively engage in a missional practice. The insider participant evaluations point to the importance of discovering the significance of theological language while being engaged in missional activity. The guide needs to incorporate more of this learning-by-doing dimension. During the intervention participants' learning-by-doing experiences were more serendipitous than actually structured into the lesson plans. This suggests that one very effective way of "playfully exploring one's symbolic world" would be to provide a series of service opportunities from which all group members could collectively

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1. Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 215. The concept of "applicability" or "generalizability" in the qualitative research literature has a number of suggested "substitute words" such as "transferability." This describes a study's trustworthiness in other contextual settings.

choose. This could be followed by a written reflection in one of the devotional prompts preceding a chapter of Bible study.

Another weakness of the guide is its readability. While the guide cannot avoid the difficult theological concepts it is seeking to recover, it may need still further editing for more accessible diction. Likewise, additional supporting exegetical material may be placed in additional For Further Reading sections where it may continue to help overcome some participants' resistance without excessively burdening other readers.

While the essential symbols for understanding temple mission constitute a widely accessible set of symbols, occasionally some participants only used the temple's symbolic system as a way of confirming how they already evaluate ministry practices on different grounds. This suggests that the guide's missional language will likely encounter some resistance in gaining widespread currency.

Undeterred by this challenge, however, the intervention did succeed in placing long-marginalized biblical themes into the participants' reflection. Any missional theology must recover the gospel of ongoing creation. Concern for social systems and abandoned places will not be sustained without a soteriology which includes the remaking of "all things." Thus, if churches do not typically think of themselves as the place where heaven and earth mysteriously meet and understand themselves as a sign of the transcendent power of ongoing creation, then this guide offers a biblical mechanism for that recovery. If churches typically do not think of themselves as proleptic signs of the coming age, then the guide offers some semblance of hope that this vital language can be reclaimed at a more popular level.

The guide addresses the significant challenges to adopting an ancient image system by effectively facilitating greater internal resonance with temple language. While no instrument will necessarily help participants gain access to their inner selves nor automatically forge a sense of safety about sharing inner imagery, much of the material in the guide generally succeeded in uncovering something of the trial group's inner symbolic systems. Participants were then able to correlate this imagery with temple imagery. Multiple participants began using temple categories in their devotional life and in describing their missional identity, and this change of language was accompanied by signs of developing group identity and new or renewed energy for community ministry projects.

Temple language is primarily a visual and architectural language, and all the intervention's participants insisted that the guide effectively integrated prose with graphic and artistic means of communication. The participants' verbal comprehension of temple mysteries typically followed graphic comprehension. This was true among all participants—no matter how little participants felt they ordinarily resonated with the visual arts. The extent to which the guide's art contributes to a nonverbal, aesthetic, or intuitive understanding of temple mysteries seems difficult to measure. However, I do not want to underestimate the perceptible energy participants exhibited while discussing the graphic and artistic parts of the discussion blueprint.

Finally, by following the method of discernment imagined in the guide, participants S, A, J, R, and M all encouraged the church to adopt suitable missional partnerships with outside groups. The process of envisioning community ministry as practiced by outsiders helped participants succeed in encouraging the church to forge

ministry partnerships to aid in sustaining the congregation's involvement in practices of community renewal.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The previous chapter described the intervention of this project thesis as successful. Despite some deliberate limitations and manageable weaknesses, the intervention demonstrated a viable way of trying to recover paradigmatic images that sustain a distinctively missional ecclesiology. The intervention's primary artifact, a discussion guide titled *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, attempts to do this by effectively using the fine and graphic arts along with extended theological reflection. The intervention that produced the guide was able to appreciatively uncover participant's inner symbolic systems facilitating greater resonance between these inner images and the images associated with the temple's mission in ongoing creation. The intervention helped participants to "own" their identity as the temple, find more energy and meaningful assurance in their missional work, and discern workable ministry partnerships that sustain more effective community involvement.

In this final chapter I will briefly discuss the trustworthiness of these findings, summarize the professional insights I feel that I have gained, and assess the intervention's contextual and wider ecclesial significance. Finally, I will suggest directions for theological and pastoral research, concluding with a few personal remarks.

## Trustworthiness<sup>1</sup>

The methodology of assessment used in this project is not appreciably different than that widely taught in various departments of education in many academic institutions. Verbal and occasional written mastery of clearly-defined objectives was observed and measured. While there were some variations in mastery of some aspects of temple theology, participants were widely and readily able to use elements of the temple's symbolic system in envisioning missional practices that participate in the ongoing creation of the earth and its relations. The general credibility of these results is enhanced by my use of triangulation with outsider assessments and a participant interview process.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, my positive summary assessments, contained at the end of chapter 4, received a considerable amount of additional reflective confirmation from the intervention's participants.<sup>3</sup>

Admittedly, Participant L's life circumstances did not allow her to fully finish the intervention, and this fact presents the primary difficulty in assessing the intervention's trustworthiness in her case. It should also be recognized that the intervention was designed to gather participants who possessed the skills necessary to be potential discussion facilitators and then could lead groups in using the discussion guide. As such, they do not reflect a random sample of any congregation as a whole. There is an additional methodological problem in that as of yet no group has actually used the

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1. The "umbrella term" within the field of qualitative research refers to the several ways readers may come to trust study conclusions. Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 214.

2. "Credibility" refers to whether a reader can "trust" the study's findings. Sensing, *Qualitative*, 214.

3. Reflective confirmation refers to the "researcher [allowing] insiders to confirm the findings she has assembled as an initial analysis." Sensing, *Qualitative*, 221.

discussion guide itself. My assessments of the guide assume that it will function similarly to the way its component materials functioned in the intervention which produced the guide.

The intervention's dependability is affirmed by participants being willing to lead future small groups using the material.<sup>4</sup> While the discussion guide itself is not designed to be repeatedly used, its one-time use can facilitate acquiring potentially lasting paradigmatic images for understanding missional involvement. It introduces what I hope will be habits of missional discernment and continuing methods for establishing ongoing missional partnerships with outside organizations.

Outside assessments of the guide suggest that the guide is trustworthy and has transferability to other contexts where a missional ecclesiology is at least on the horizon. Initial outside reactions to the discussion guide have been quite favorable, and I have been asked to pilot the guide's use among ministry leaders at the Englewood Christian Church. I anticipate leading a group at Englewood using the discussion guide in the summer of 2021. Additionally, Englewood has been selected by the Center for Congregations and the Lilly Endowment to coach numerous Indianapolis congregations in discerning their missional vocation, and the leaders at Englewood have voiced some initial interest in adapting my material for that purpose. I intend to use the feedback I receive both in piloting the study at Englewood and in launching it congregation-wide at Speedway to adapt the guide as needed and determine its overall transferability and potential for wider distribution.

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4. "Dependability" refers to that dimension of credibility which is associated with a study's replicability or stability over time. "Does it produce similar results under constant conditions?" Sensing, *Qualitative*, 219.



The congregational significance or impact of the intervention may be made more sustainable by launching the small groups envisioned by the intervention.<sup>5</sup> During the period of time that the Speedway congregation is studying the guide in small groups, the church may also consider:

1. accompanying the launch of the groups with a sermon series that offers a temple Christology and paradigmatic images for envisioning the church's missional practices;
2. holding one or more worship services on the location of our missional projects;
3. praying for our ministry leaders who are most involved in leading community works in Sunday assembly;
4. telling the story of how our missional partnership with Unconditional Ministries came into being and thus illustrating the kinds of missional discernment being coached in the guide;
5. enlisting the intervention's participants to provide public testimony during worship about the way the intervention changed their conception of missional work; and
6. displaying each of the intervention's icons of the temple's mission during worship services by ritually and prayerfully hanging them in the foyer over successive weeks as part of a formal dismissal.

### **Personal Significance**

The intervention exceeded my expectations in every respect except for the burden it seemed to place on participant L. This probably was a result of our friendship being quite new. While at the beginning of the project I explained that given the change in her work situation, she should not feel any obligation to participate. I believe it would have been wise in the early sessions to have repeatedly said something like "if the workload of

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5. Here I am using the term specifically to mean useful for "contributing to theory, informing policy . . . or problem solving in [this project's form of] action research" in reference to congregational significance. Sustainability refers to the possibility of extending an intervention's impact by establishing follow-up procedures which lodge meaningful changes in organizations. Sensing, *Qualitative*, 226–7.

this study ever gets to be burdensome, then please don't hesitate to say it's just too much with the new job. I'm glad to have you in the study, but I will understand if you decide that this is too much." This might have freed participant L to feel freer about ending her participation if she felt like doing so, and I would have felt freer to check in with her later in the intervention without fear of disparaging the significance of what she had tried to accomplish up to that point. As it was, I felt immobilized with pastoral uncertainty. The irony was that I suspected I had a participant serving out of a sense of obligation in a study ostensibly about trying to find energy by avoiding precisely these kinds of "indirect motivations."<sup>6</sup>

Participant M would have thrived in almost any study simply because I believed in her leadership potential and saw her in a place of burgeoning influence in our congregation. M understood, of course, that the blessing of the material was, in her words, "helping us to get out of ourselves," but she had been out of active participation in any church for too long for distinctions between attractional and missional church to be as meaningful as just having the group believe in her. This again reminds me that missional life is being open and expectant while investing deeply in people from whom the world has divested.

The study emphasized for me the importance of combining experiential doing with reflection. I have a long-standing quarrel with the way many pastoral theologians unintentionally allow "experience"—surreptitiously understood through the lens of the social sciences or the language of business leadership—to remove theology from its preeminent place in norming the discourses and practices of the church. Nevertheless, I

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6. Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGregor, *Primed to Perform: How to Build the Highest Performing Cultures Through the Science of Total Motivation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015). 9–15.

was struck by the way participants came to grasp the value of theological signs by actually doing or experiencing community ministry. While theology must inform practice and experience, there is a feedback loop wherein ministerial practice gives meaning to theological discourse. Participants repeatedly reported that the gestalt or the newly integrated sense of the significance of the theological language I was hoping for was experienced in this way. I have to come to terms with the fact that theological discourse may most often norm and inform practices in arrears.

Perhaps most importantly, I was struck by the power of combining appreciative inquiry with Janzen's theory of resonance. This intervention has confirmed my suspicion that energy and meaning arise when an external sign resounds existing tones stored in deep memories. In this intervention the concept might better be called a theory of "resemblance," because the visual imagery of the temple's Gihon Spring draws a semblance of images already stored somewhere in the inner wellspring of our being. The discovery that these images resemble one another or, from the temple point of view, participate in one another is a deeply moving experience that makes the acquisition of new metaphorical systems significantly more likely. Using appreciative inquiry to uncover inner meaningful images and asking my conversation partners if they can see any correlation between particular images contained in biblical revelation will always be one of the tools that I take to ministerial job sites.

### **Theological and Ecclesial Significance for Ongoing Reflection and Research**

Aside from my own professional growth, this project has had some implications for my congregation and for the wider church as well. The congregation's two other pastoral leaders, participants S and A, are already starting to consider emphasizing temple

images as paradigmatic signs for understanding most ecclesial practices. At a recent report from our mission team in Malawi, Speedway's leaders noted in a new way that the Namikango Mission is called a "mission" and that it is providing jobs by starting agricultural businesses, teaching the wider community agricultural practices, working with the government in providing a maternity clinic, and a host of other "community" services. These practices were congruent with our system of icons—healing garden, hiding place, and temple treasury. Especially as Speedway's leadership begins considering the appropriate timetable to launch our small groups who will use *The Temple and the Church's Mission* discussion guide, the congregational leaders are beginning to tout the seven icons of temple functions as new patterns of ecclesial practice.

The intervention has coached an important, and I hope regular, congregational practice—that of communicating with outside practitioners of community ministry. The intervention group found a meaningful and important ministry partner with Unconditional Ministries through the process of talking to outsiders and considering what they are doing. The significance of this has not been lost on Speedway's pastoral leaders. I intend to periodically use Wednesday night Bible study time to stage conversations with outside churches and other civic, charitable, or parachurch organizations just as an exercise in stretching the imaginations of our members and getting to know our neighbors.

As our own missional work finds outside partners like Unconditional, the speed of a work like the Alton housing ministry may increase, and it will likely be necessary to streamline decision-making processes for that ministry. Church leaders will not be able to check and obtain widespread congregational approval for doing every real estate

transaction without losing purchase after purchase. Giving those who are regularly involved in the ministry guidelines within which they can make a wider variety of decisions will probably become necessary.

Beyond the guide's congregational significance, I believe this project thesis has far-reaching theological implications. Locating the historical Jesus within the history of temple reform movements and recognizing that John's Christology of glory is rooted in his conviction that Jesus is the renewal of God's tabernacling presence within Israel calls into question the methods of those scholars who contend the Johannine Jesus is a much later invention of particular Christian communities. However, if in fact the language John uses to describe Jesus is that of temple renewal movements that were present long before and during the age of Jesus, then it becomes plausible that Jesus's Christological significance lies in his historical acts of temple-creationism in and for the world. The significance of Jesus, while always interpreted in light any community's ongoing needs, is not primarily to be found in someone's retrospective interest in forms of inner religious consciousness. Jesus is to be found in his historic acts re-creating the whole order of creation.

This thesis insists that the mission of the church is fundamentally about the ecclesial temple's re-creation of the world. However, participating in God's continuing acts of creation is not the same as merely practicing a form of social work. The power and efficacy of the church's community work must flow from both a heavenly and inner wellspring so that the renewal of the community will spring forth from the divine energy unleashed amidst renewed devotional practice.

Thus, temple ecclesiology can open the church to the possibility of more fully experiencing its identity as the mysterious locus where heaven and earth meet. The church can then see itself as a participatory sign of new creation, owning its identity as an icon of the coming age. Seeing itself as God's agent for the ongoing creation and unification of all things, the temple's iconic functions, revealed first in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ, act as spiritual and imaginative sources for the church's own practices of community renewal. While the language of Jesus's incarnational body is consistently put to edifying use in the Bible, the language of the temple consistently has creational and missional implications. While the temple continues to strengthen and structure the church's internal life, temple language consistently does this with an eye toward mission and the re-creation of the wider world. Recovery of a missional identity may in fact depend on the recovery of this or similar theological language.

In my congregational setting this theological recovery is long overdue. My congregation inherited an attractional ecclesiology that lifted the use of the word "pattern" or "blueprint" (*tabnit* or *typos*) out of its theological context in expressing the interpenetrating mystery of the heavenly and earthly temple. As such, the functional image of the church came to be ritually expressed in "the pattern"—a form of liturgical and organizational austerity which reinforced an insular cultural egalitarianism. I look back on my early ministerial attempts to deconstruct this ecclesial pattern as pastorally misguided. Another blueprint was first needed to replace it. Amidst the complex web of matters that have needed to be addressed in my congregation, there has been this persistent need for a new controlling narrative, a new paradigmatic image which can be ritually reinforced with concrete and distinctly missional practices. This intervention

attempts to reinterpret the very texts from which the old pattern was derived, relocate them in a temple theology, and from that extrapolate seven iconic, visual images which give us new heavenly patterns of open-ended, missional-church practice.

This intervention highlights the importance of visual imagery, because the language for theological mystery was and is visual. Perhaps the chief difficulty of this intervention is that it attempts to recover the meaning of dramatic ritual and architecture (i.e., visual languages) by lexical means. If the participants in this study are any indication, then the recovery of the language of temple mystery will likely involve the introduction of forms of visual and graphic arts which serve as an orientation to this signification system. This intervention adopted its own form of missional iconography. However, as congregants begin to understand that images carry their own theological weight, leaders will have to prepare congregations to have difficult and very new kinds of discussions about what norms ought to regulate the introduction of visual media. I do not know how to even begin that discussion.

Indeed, the intervention raises other broadly theological and contextually practical questions which warrant further research. The recovery of a robust temple Christology will raise questions about how the interpenetration of the heavenly and earthly temple relates to the perichoretic union of Father and Son. More broadly, it is important to question how temple theology informs our Trinitarian understandings of God.

Just as pressing is the need to ask how temple theology informs Pauline “in Christ” or participation language outside of Eph 2 where the connection to temple renewal is quite explicit. An accounting of how the language of temple renewal more broadly affects earlier Pauline participation language would, for instance, potentially

interface with concerns about collective moral transformation in churches. Moreover, it would likely be related to the way in which Michael Gorman emphasizes that mission overflows from the church's participatory union in Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, a contextually variable but nonetheless vital question arises when considering how congregational worship should support concrete missional practices. This goes beyond communicating about missional endeavors and celebrating missional achievements in worship services. It even goes beyond crafting parts of the regular liturgy to emphasize Christ's collective commissioning of the church for missional endeavor. The intervention raises the question of how worship and community service might on occasion be fully integrated.

Especially in light of the time pressures of this current age, convincing Sunday-morning-only members to engage in missional practices with outsiders can be a challenge. Yet, as the intervention suggests, if many members will only catch the meaning of missional discourse by doing things in the wider space of the community, it may be useful to simply combine regular Sunday forms of worship with forms of community service in and with the world. This may be a means of deepening relationships with marginal members even as the church gets to know its neighbors.

Of course, on occasion the church is the guest of other community partners, and the church will have to find ways to respectfully worship within the structures set up by hosts. However, when the church itself is functioning more as a ministry partner in such worshipful/community service events, then it will be important to raise questions about how to best begin conversations with members of the wider community in this

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7. See Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).



worshipful-work setting, how to involve all members in some form of meaningful labor, how singing and communal feasting should be practiced, how often such events ought to be held, and how said events ought to be debriefed. These are just some of the important questions which will require much further pastoral reflection.

### **Concluding Personal Remarks**

I end on a personal note. While this project thesis addresses a real crisis of congregational imagination and a three-generational reticence to engage the wider community, what seems most meaningful to me at the conclusion of this project are those learning moments when I witnessed an “a ha!” on participants’ faces. While I think I have learned some things about ministerial practice during the intervention, what is more important to me is that I have again experienced the joy of sharing theological discoveries and teaching the faith to people I love.

I guess I will always be a teacher at heart. What could compare to watching a group of participants bond with one another and the newest member of the group tear up with the joy of belonging? What privilege could be greater than hearing a twenty-six-year-old participant saying that our time together caused him to let his faith dictate his career rather than vice versa? How do you measure one of your best friends in the world saying that the study gave him additional meaning in his retirement? What happens when your other best friend tells you that his anxiety is giving way because he has gotten to a place where he can rest with all that is going wrong in his life? How do you measure the blessing of listening to the youngest member of the group process nearly everything that you have been trying to convey, explain how she has put that acquired language to devotional use, and then encourage us to own our transcendent identity in Christ?

Such things are greater gifts than any doctoral program can give. While the congregational benefits of the project are already accruing and may compound annually, I cannot imagine anything being more valuable than sharing that precious time with my participants as they reflected on the meaning of their joint experience together at our last evaluation meeting. Yes, in that hour I was confident that this group could serve as leaders of other groups using the manual we had made, but none of that seems to matter as much as knowing that I have been in the presence of fellow building blocks of God's heavenly house—those who have truly become powerful signs of the coming age.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Exemption Letter

**ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**  
*Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World*  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103  
325-674-2885



July 17, 2020

Kent Ellett  
Department of Bible  
Abilene Christian University

Dear Kent,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Theological Practices for Sustaining Community Renewal at Speedway Church of Christ",

(IRB# 20-095 ) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects as:

- Non-research, and
- Non-human research

Based on:

The study is not designed for generalizable knowledge/local quality improvement.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

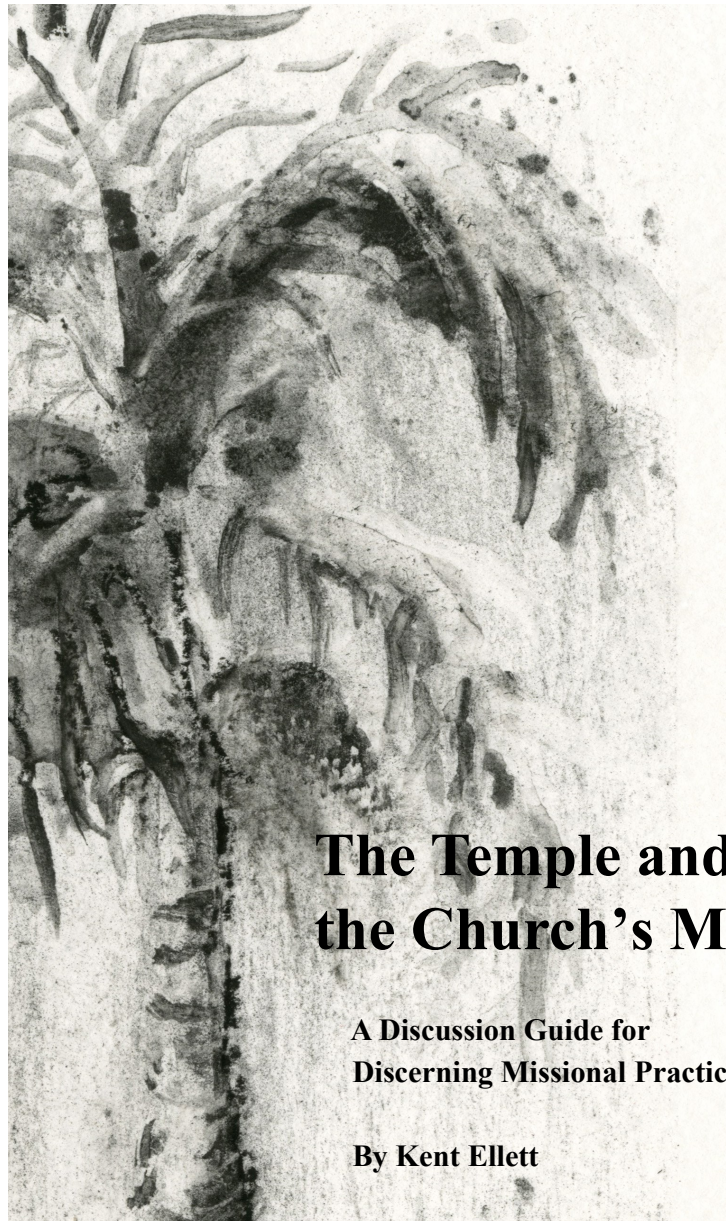
Sincerely,

*Megan Roth*

Megan Roth, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX B

The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Guide for Discerning Missional Practices



**The Temple and  
the Church's Mission**

**A Discussion Guide for  
Discerning Missional Practices**

**By Kent Ellett**



# The Temple and the Church's Mission

## *Discussion Guide*

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## Acknowledgments

The formal theological research which informs this guide began in earnest during a short 2014 sabbatical facilitated by my hosts at the Tyndale Library at the University of Cambridge. They encouraged me in the writing of a short paper entitled, *Pauline Temple Imagery and Congregational Self-Understanding*. That material subsequently became the subject of a Doctoral Practice-Thesis at Abilene Christian University. During that time Professor Cliff Barbarick offered me much needed affirmation as I plowed sometimes unfamiliar theological ground.

In turn a group of congregational participants helped me shape this study into this usable congregational tool for missional discernment. For administrative and research reasons their identities here remain anonymous, yet they are known in the heavens for the ways they tirelessly surprised and challenged me to think differently about how temple language bears upon our shared congregational context. Additional thanks goes to Dr. Carson Reed whose patient assistance has always been valuable—none more than his connecting me with Avery Silliman, whose art now adorns many pages of this blueprint for discussion. Within a very short time Avery theologically and visually grasped the essence of temple Christology and its importance for the missional imagination.

These days I'm increasingly thankful for the numerous people, now living and dead, whom I ever carry with me in my ministry. None, however, have had such an obvious impact on this project as Professor J. Gerald Janzen. His unequaled blend of wide-ranging attentiveness, exegetical daring, philosophical acuity, and poetic sensitivity are exceeded only by his gracious friendship expressed to me during the twenty years since his so-called retirement. Time and again I have come to conclusions only to realize that Gerry has long been leading me to such discoveries which seem to percolate up from the ground of our being. I cannot help but express what I admit feels like a filial aspiration that this project make some faithful use of his work.

My grandfather, Quentin Ellett, would now be 102, but his hunger for theological reflection, always written large on his countenance, remains for me an unveiled sign of the powers of the coming age. While I hope someday to exhibit something of my mother's compassion and retain some remnant of my Father's tenacious discipline, it was in my grandfather that I first saw that glorious interpenetration of heaven and earth which Jesus, the temple, makes possible.

Finally, I dedicate this to my wife, Amy, without whose encouragement and sacrifice I could not have even begun this project. Without her patience and unfailing love my life and ministry would simply not be possible.

Kent Ellett,  
March 1, 2021

## Preview of This Guide

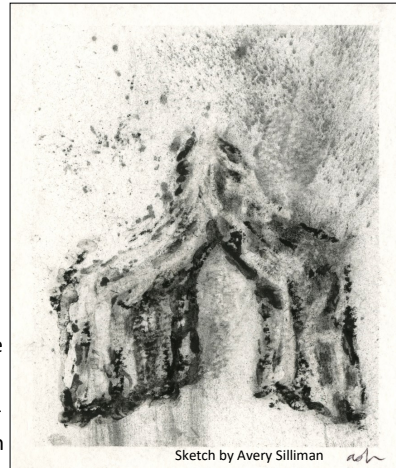
*The Temple and the Church's Mission* is intended for small groups (4-8 people) who want to be challenged. Small groups may use this study in discerning the “missional” practices of their unique, missional small group. In other cases, leadership groups, ministry leaders, or deacon boards may be meeting as part of a congregational process of evaluating the potential in various “missional” practices in the life of the church.

“Mission” is not just a way of talking about a congregation’s agenda. Mission involves being collectively sent as guests and servants into all the world. So, it is right that many people may approach this study with excitement about ministering with the wider community. Yet, if the church sometimes seems stuck— just occasionally inviting individuals to church rather than regularly engaging the wider community— this has not been for a lack of missional strategies. The issue may be one of theological imagination. This study is about recovering a particular view of Jesus in hopes that it will shape our vision for ministry in and with the world. In John 20:21 the resurrected Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” The shape of the church’s mission, then, depends on an important question: “How or why did the Father send Jesus into the world?”

This study is largely about how the Gospel of John answers this question. And so the prologue to this study is found in the Prologue of John. John 1:14 says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” Readers of English may rightfully hear in the word “dwelling” echoes of God’s dwelling being his heavenly temple or throne room. Thus, the NIV’s translation does poetically point to two mysteries in the incarnation which today sometimes seem counter-intuitive. First, the eternal and heavenly Word becomes an historical person. Second, the sacred space where God uniquely dwells is manifested in that personal dwelling being “among us.” Yet, the Greek word for “made his dwelling” (*eskenosen*) quite literally means “he pitched his tent” among us. This creates a more resounding echo of the tabernacle in the ears of English-speaking readers, and it unites both mysteries: the heavenly tabernacle is that space out of which

God speaks the world into form, and the earthly tabernacle is that space where God uniquely and mysteriously dwells on earth. This is the importance of the next sentence: “We have seen his glory.” John does not mean that Jesus was famous and luminescent. John is saying that Jesus’ glory is a renewal of God’s temple-glory which surrounded the Holy Mountain, lead and protected Israel in the wilderness, and filled the tabernacle and temple in Israel’s early history. Thus, John interprets Jesus’s incarnation—the Father’s sending of Jesus into the world—as the visible reintroduction of that temple--glory into Israel.

The first chapter of this guide, then, traces the way the early chapters of John introduce Jesus as the renewed Temple. It begins the process of walking with today’s church to within the hearing distance of Jesus’s declaration that he (and his “body” of followers) is the body of the renewed temple. The only interpretation of Christ’s death and resurrection which Jesus, himself, gives is that he is rebuilding the temple of Israel’s



God. "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days..." John makes it clear: "the temple he had spoken of was his body." (John 2:19-22)

The significance of this assertion is very difficult for modern people to hear. Understanding Jesus's Temple mission requires revisiting the mission of the temple in the life of Israel. The second discussion lesson, then, is about understanding Israel's temple world-view. This chapter attempts to outline the first two of three important convictions about the temple: First, the temple is a participatory shadow or pattern of the heavenly temple. Second, the temple is a pattern or image of ideal creation the way God would design it. Third, as a sign of ideal creation, the temple is a place where the future of God is already strangely present. The temple is a worshipful means of moving creation toward its ultimate desired ends.

Chapter 3 focuses on the imagery which expresses what the temple does. How the temple signifies heaven, provides a place for Divine presence in Israel, sustaining creation and expanding God's realm of sanctity, is all expressed in the architecture of the temple, itself. The luminaries in the temple participate in God's source of light—his illumination or life-giving power. The temple is the mysterious source of God's living water which not only fills pools beneath the temple Mount but expansively flows to renew all creation. The temple courts are a Garden of Delight (harkening back to Eden) wherein the sacred trees and vegetation provide fertility, justice, and healing to the world. The garden is protected from chaotic waters because the ceiling of the temple holds the waters of the firmament at bay. The bronze Sea ritually contains the chaotic forces of the deep as the temple "cultivates" sacred creation from those illicitly mixed (unclean) forms of disorder. These horticultural metaphors for mission are also supplemented by images of the temple's structural functions. The capstone of the temple uses a discarded stone and makes it the unifying stone which ties all creation together. The temple embodies God's unifying agency which draws all things in heaven and earth together. The temple includes a treasury or repository of gifts for community benevolence, and it contains many dwelling places where the vulnerable may hide in the protective shelter or shadow of the Divine wings.



While not intended to be exhaustive, this list of images embedded in the temple's architecture becomes the lens through which Jesus' and the church's missional sending may be viewed. The early church understood that the problem with the Herodian temple was that it was sinfully corrupt—spiritually dead. As when the ark was captured, the problem was that "The glory [associated with the Holy places] had departed." Jerusalem's House had been "left...desolate." (Matthew 23:38) While Paul was certainly concerned about individuals "falling short" of the moral glory of God, the context of Romans 3:23 and the dictionary meaning of the Greek word typically translated as "fall short" strongly suggest that Paul is saying that the fundamental human problem is that all nations "**lack**" the temple-glory of God. He, thus, continues in Romans 3 through 5 to demonstrate that Jesus's sacrifice was a means of renewing the glory of the Temple's sacrificial system. Jesus is now the representative Adam or High Priest for all mankind in a renewed temple for all nations.

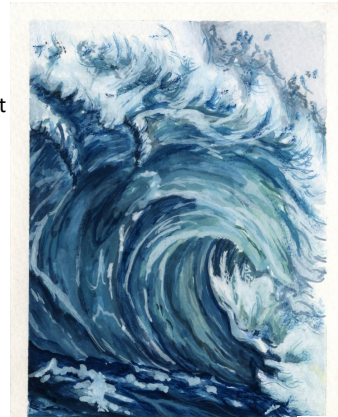
Chapter 4 then reads the work and ministry of Jesus as renewing the ministry of a defunct temple. He ministers as the renewed and true light of the world, the fount of living water, the vine, and the one who

commands the Sea to be still. He is the gate of the temple compound that keeps the sheep safe, the one who when he is lifted up in sacrifice, like Zion's Holy Hill, draws all nations to himself. Jesus, like the House of God that Solomon dedicated, forever bears the Divine Name. He is "glorified" like the temple of Solomon, he is the source of heavenly riches—the one who prepares his Father's house for a place of mutual indwelling with many rooms in which his people may safely dwell.

Having understood Jesus's ministry as a renewal of the temple's function, Chapter 5 provides three explanations for how the church comes to view itself as the continuation of the renewed temple in Jesus Christ. Briefly treating the Parable of the Tenants, the discussion turns to Jesus's prayer of consecration over the church in John 17. There Jesus says, "I have given them the (temple) glory that you gave me." (John 17:22) This glory allows the church to be an agent of unity as it is drawn into the glory of the Divine life. Paul's vision of the church as the renewed temple in Ephesians 2:16-22 is similar. The church is raised in Christ to be built into a new heavenly temple without any dividing ethnic walls. Thus, the church's inter-racial character on earth is a sign of the heavenly temple which in Christ is drawing all things in heaven and earth toward their ultimate integration.

Chapters 6-12 then take up the temple's different architectural metaphors for the church's mission. The focus of these sessions is on developing a temple imagination that uses temple metaphors and a temple understanding of Jesus's life to reimagine the church's purpose in recreating the world. The entire study takes on the form of a temple pattern or blueprint which sees the church's missional practices as a shadow or pattern of heavenly missional realities. Participants are asked to correlate their own inner sense of meaning as temples of the Holy Spirit with biblical temple imagery. Participants then use that imagery in evaluating the playful sense of purpose and potential which they sense in various missional practices that sustain efforts of community renewal.

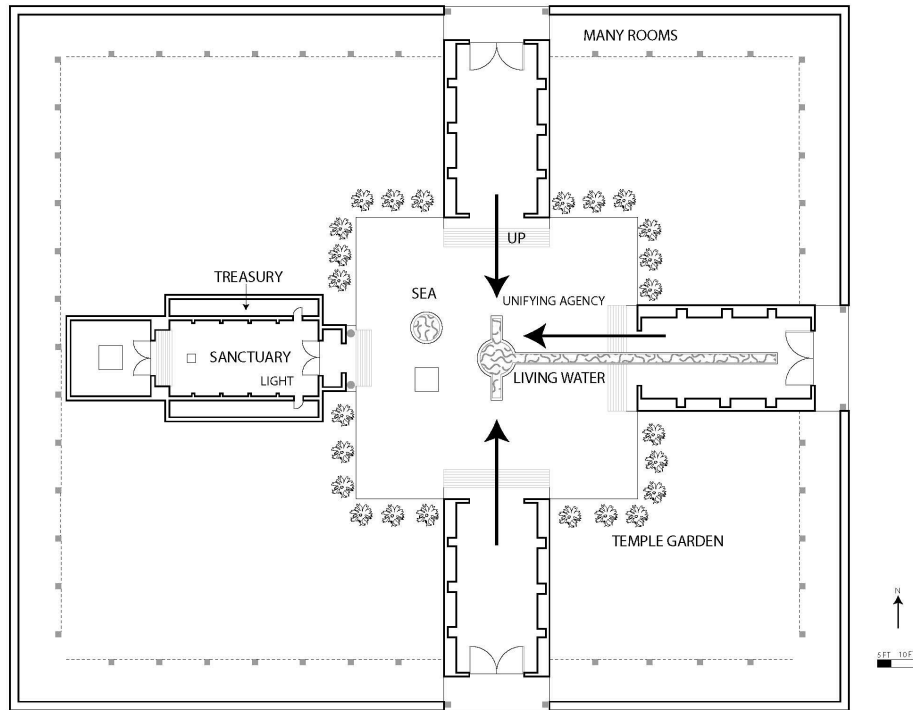
While the prevailing image of church may remain the mystic body of Christ, if the church can also reclaim a sense of its vocation as the temple which ministers in the wider Kingdom and the world, then this will be a theological recovery that potentially may unleash Divine energy and imagination for the church's missional life in and with the world.



"The Sea" by Avery Silliman

# The Church's Blueprint of the Heavenly Temple

*We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. Hebrews 8:1-2*



Blueprint: here and throughout by Christina Ellett

## For Further (Optional) Reading

### An Explanatory Note:

This blueprint of the heavenly Temple is intended to facilitate an act of holy imagination. It is not claiming any inspiration to represent how high and wide and deep are the dimensions of Christ's love. While Paul did pray that such a visionary experience would be increasingly common in the church, (Ephesians 3:18) this workbook's blueprint is merely a visual way of collectively imagining the functions of the Temple. The Temple blueprint is a way of seeing into the sources of God's energy for mission.

Likewise, the quotations from numerous poets, songwriters, and theologians at the beginning of most chapters are intended as a means of reconnecting to the energetic sources of our mission. Whether it be Robert Frost's "pasture spring," Wolfram Pannenberg's experience of celestial light, Elizabeth Browning's "common bush" crammed with heaven, or Coleridge's mysterious "intellectual breeze," these writers all sense that something Transcendent is "deeply interfused" in the world. For them, certain forms of imagery serve as portals into an experience of the Sublime. Instances of this are cited here because their imagery for these portals is exactly what one would expect to see if Zion's Hill in Jesus Christ really is shining light, percolating living water, irrigating gardens and blowing in the wind. The inclusion of these quotations betray a suspicion that temple imagery may correspond to a widely held—more universally held—set of inner images which many people already use to make meaning.

## Discussion 1

### Prologue: Jesus the Renewed Temple

*There was a time when meadow grove and stream,  
The earth and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Appareled in celestial light,  
The glory and freshness of a dream.*

**William Wordsworth**

***I am the Light of the World...***

**Jesus**

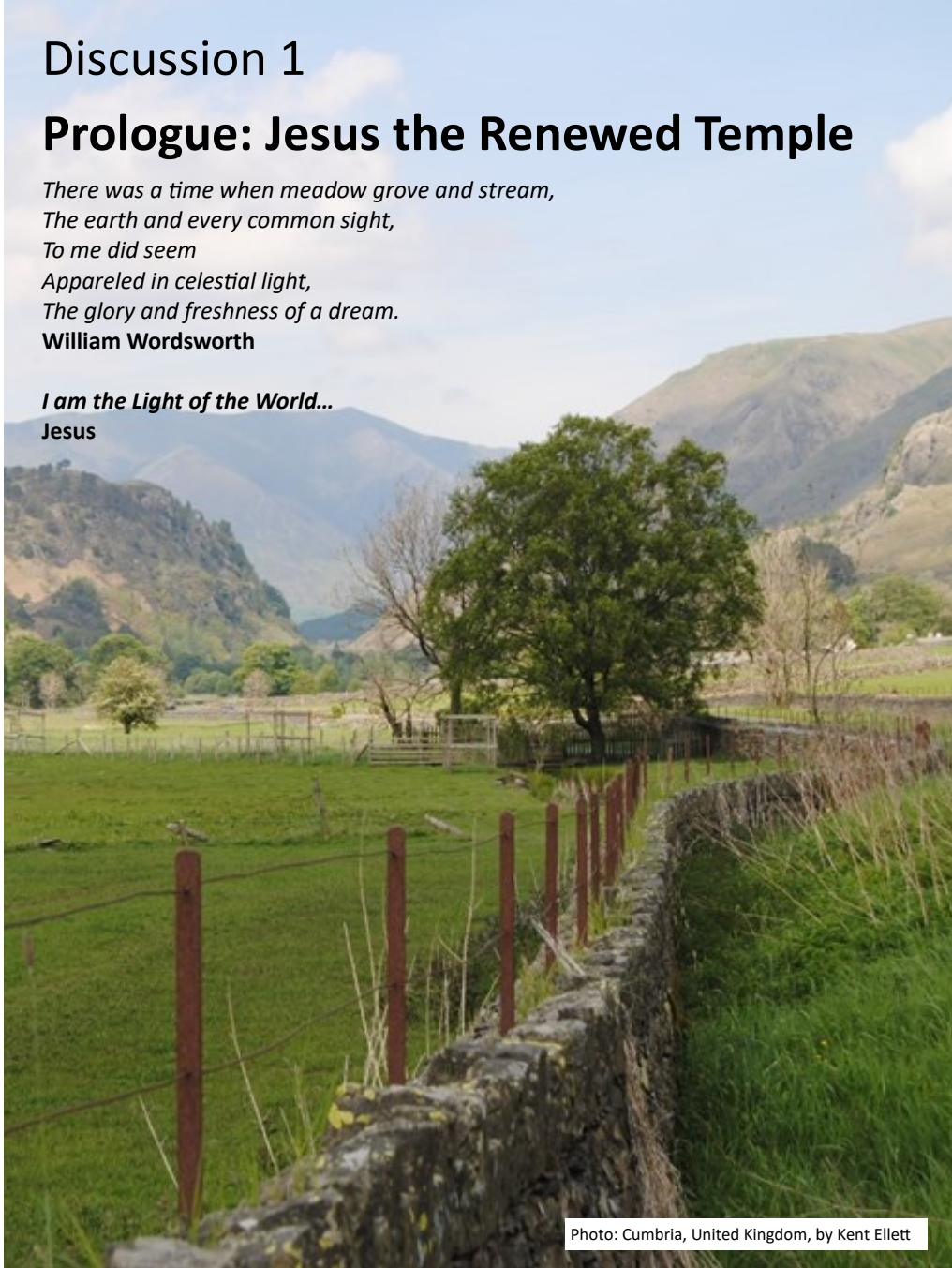


Photo: Cumbria, United Kingdom, by Kent Ellett

## Preview

This chapter is about the way the early chapters of John introduce Jesus as the renewed Temple. The only interpretation of Christ's death and resurrection which Jesus, himself, gives is that he is rebuilding the temple of Israel's God. "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days..." (John 2:19-22)

## I. Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World

Ken's first memory was being bathed in light during sunset when he was 18 months old. Throughout his childhood, he often could feel so small when confronted with the power that is behind and within creation. Standing on the frontal range in Colorado, he was filled with awe at the first sight of the snow-capped peaks 60 miles away. He would sit spell-bound by the spring beneath his childhood home staring at spring violets growing out of decaying matter.



Watercolor by G. Boyce, 1976 Author's collection.

In his twenties, Ken was moved by worship services where he was surrounded by harmonic voices that ushered him into an experience of collective holiness and Divine energy within a gathering of disciples.

Later, atop Mars Hill in Athens or walking on Hadrian's Wall in England or reading a theologian who resolved a problem, Ken came to feel that things which helped him draw his past and present together in a meaningful story which brought on an experience of awe and devotion. It was the experience of seeing things that he had only dreamed of before that acted as a catalyst for sensing the Mystery at the heart of all things.

Journal about the places and the experiences that fill you with wonder. What prompted your first or early experiences of the Transcendent? What brings you to a sense of awe?

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If you could help others experience what you felt in those moments, where would you take them? What would you and other church members be doing?

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## II. Reclaiming the Temple's World of Purpose

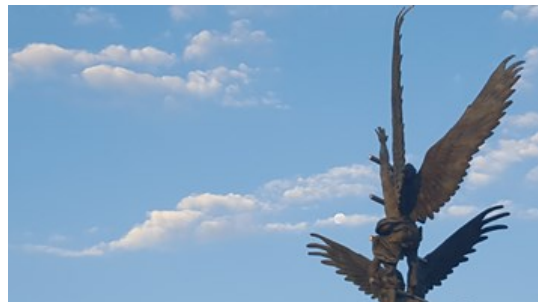
### Jesus the Temple

The Prologue to the Gospel of John insists that Jesus is the new temple. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and pitched his tabernacle among us." (my translation) John's subsequent assertion: "We have seen his glory" does not merely mean that Jesus was famous and luminescent. Jesus's glory is a renewal of God's glory which surrounded the Holy Mountain, the pillar and cloud which lead and protected Israel, and filled the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple. John believes that it was Jesus' own glory which Isaiah had seen filling the Temple and commissioning Isaiah's ministry. (John 12:41) It was this glory that had descended. Thus, John interprets Jesus's incarnation—the Father's sending of Jesus into the world as the Divine glory of the heavenly temple returning into Israel's midst.

This may be an unfamiliar way for today's church to see Jesus, but historically speaking, this is what Israel expected. The theologian Nicholas Perrin has shown that John's exalted view of Jesus as the temple was not a late development of the church. The notion that new persons and movements would come to renew the glory of Israel's temple was common in Israel in the centuries both before and after Jesus' life.

Israel expected temple renewal because the prophets looked forward to a time when Yahweh would return to Zion, and fill the temple with the glory which had never filled the second Temple and successive structures in Jerusalem. John emphasizes that Jesus is renewing the temple in a tradition that had often renewed the temple in form as well as holiness. Jesus followers "remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." (John 2:17) Jesus' zeal in cleansing the temple is seen as replicating Davidic zeal in renewing the tabernacle by replacing its structural form with that of a temple. Jesus' zeal is part of a history of such passionate movements for temple renewal where new forms of the temple fulfill the functions of the previous structure while also extending the mission and transcending the theological vision of the previous expression. The true temple was never limited to a tent or set of blocks. The heavenly temple had manifested itself in Eden and had been renewed on Moriah, Bethel, on Sinai's cosmic Mountain, in the tabernacle, in Solomon's temple and to much lesser degrees in the successive structures on Zion. The true Temple was always where the Divine glory is. For John, it unequivocally is in Jesus.

As such, Jesus is the temple light through which prophetic vision has been restored to Israel. John 1:51 is the climax of the story of the calling of Phillip and Nathaniel where Jesus promises Nathaniel greater vision than the one which had already moved him to faith. In the encounter Jesus virtually replicates the Greek version of Genesis 28:12 telling Nathaniel, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." As we shall later see, this Bethel experience is a form of temple experience. Jesus, in providing Nathaniel with a vision, is demonstrating himself to be the renewal of the true "House of God," the true "Gate of heaven" where heavenly and earthly connective ladders are again possible.



Photograph: Jacob's Ladder, Abilene Christian University. By Kent Ellett 2014

In John's next chapter, the sign of the final wedding banquet which Jesus performed in Cana is said to have "revealed his glory." (John 2:11) This glory is canonically tied to the glory which filled the tabernacle and temple, and the meaning of *doxa* (glory) is governed by its previous use in John 1:14 where the glory of the tabernacle is made flesh and visible among the believing community. In John 2:19-21 this temple view of Jesus is made very explicit. John's Jesus claims to be the Temple of God. He does this within the Herodian compound, after ceremonially cleansing it and referring to it as his "Father's House." (John 2:16) Then Jesus forever tells us exactly what his death and resurrection is about: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days..." Christ's death and resurrection are about renewing the temple.

As central as such teaching is, in many churches such passages receive at best an uncomprehending gloss. This may be because today Christians think of God as being everywhere rather than specially present in a special place. But the incarnation does not require us to graduate from a "primitive theology" that makes particular space sacred. To the contrary, the incarnation demands that God's presence be capable of perfect, specialized localization in Jesus of Nazareth. Paul later envisions outsiders coming into the temple of God's presence—in the middle of a loving group of prophets in Corinth-- where the Divine presence is so uniquely manifest that the visitor might exclaim, "God is really among you." (1 Corinthians 14:25)

Within this worldview, Jesus' act of renewing the deputized earthly place in which God may choose to manifest God's special presence does not seem odd. That God chooses to do so in the person of Jesus of Nazareth rather than in another building built "by human hands" (2 Corinthians 5:1) is also not unprecedented in light of the fact that Israel's God is described as such a dwelling, hiding place or a sanctuary. (Isaiah 8:14) In fact, the royal and priestly "house" of God" is a formalized double entendre referring simultaneously to both the dynasty of priest Kings and the temple itself. Nathan's response to David's initial intention to build a shrine for God revolves around this repeated play on the word "house." "David will not build a house (a temple) but God will build a house (dynasty) for David." (2 Sam 7: 11) Thereafter, "house" carries with it this double resonance. It is not difficult to see how the Priest-King might stand for the whole temple, especially since Jesus in the Parable of the Tenants is portrayed as establishing a renewed priestly set of tenants or "house." (Matthew 21:41-43) Within this conceptual world the idea of the renewed Temple becoming a person or a community of persons, even considering the elasticity of poetic language, is not a stretch.

But John fears the reason Jesus' opposition cannot see the shape of the temple's change in Jesus is that, in the scholar Jon Levenson's words, "they had already lost "the sense of the delicacy of relationship between higher and lower Jerusalem." Jesus' detractors miss the significance of God's glory dwelling within the temple of Jesus' body because the dead structures of the Herodian complex had long ceased to point them to the mysterious glory of the heavenly temple. In response to their demand for a sign of Christ's priestly authority to renew their dead temple, Jesus answers:

"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

"The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body." (John 2:17-22)

This is the first of a series of John's asides which introduces an inability in Jesus' companions to see the earthly and heavenly interpenetration of the Temple. This dullness which cannot see past the physical

sign of the mystery in which the sign participates, then, is first introduced as the result of a defunct Temple theology that has been flattened and demystified. The subsequent inability to grasp the nature of being born again from above, (John 3:4) the refusal to come into the light, (John 3:19-21) the inability to recognize water which permanently alleviates thirst, (John 4:15) the lack of taste for bread from heaven, (John 6:31-58) or ears to hear the voice of God in the hiding place of Psalm 81's thunder (John 12:29) are all inability to see symbols of temple function as participatory signs of a transcendent, heavenly reality.

In John 4:20-24, this issue arises in terms of the proper site of the temple. Mount Gerizim in Samaria and Mount Zion in Jerusalem both look forward to the renewal of their respective regional cults. Without denying Jerusalem's unique vocation, Jesus relativizes the question of locale and raises the greater question of the capacity for perceiving the spiritual interpenetration of heavenly and earthly reality when it is spiritually manifest in truth-- face to face-- with the woman at the well! In each case, then, from the Sadducees in the temple... to Nicodemus at night... to the Woman at Jacob's well, the participatory temple-signs of the end-time creation have lost their ability to point beyond themselves, and therefore when the heavenly temple phenomenon is "spiritually" and "truly" present, Jesus' conversation partners cannot perceive it.

In summary, Jesus is the new temple. In his death and resurrection, he renewed the temple of God and its mission to the world. While today our views of sacred space may make this a difficult idea, many of Jesus's companions did not know how to read the signs of his temple glory either. They had lost a sense of the relationship between higher and lower Jerusalem. They had lost a sense of the temple's true purpose in Israel. Recovering that understanding is the subject of the next lesson.

#### **Comprehension Questions:**

What is the main idea of this lesson?

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What do you find conceptually challenging about this idea?

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What is the significance of John 1:14 for this idea?

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What is the significance of the story in 1:51 for this idea?

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What is the significance of John 2:16-22 for this idea?

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What is the significance of John 12:41 for this idea?

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**Correlation Question:** Given your answers to the questions about what acts as a catalyst for your experience of awe, do you notice any similarities to the symbols that Jesus used to reveal his transcendent glory? What relation does your experiences of the Transcendent have to the experiences of light, of water that forever quenches thirst, the experience of birth, wind, wine and parties that do not get old?

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### III. Imagining Ministries with Potential

After thinking about your experiences of awe and your experience of Jesus' glory in this reading, in the blanks below rate how much potential you feel that each of these missional practices has for becoming signs of transcendent glory.

**1** *sounds exhausting*   **2** *wish I liked the idea*   **3** *modest potential*   **4** *significant potential*   **5** *generates energy*

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ Mowing yards for neighbors in the Alton neighborhood. Accepting help from neighbors who wish to join building projects at Alton with the understanding that everyone is working for free?
- b) \_\_\_\_\_ Church asks members of the community and other organizations to point them to those who need extra unemployment help. The church then joins these neighbors in giving their stimulus checks to those who most need it.

In light of your own experience of what inspires you and in light of the Biblical imagery studied thus far, explain your rating of these ministries.

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**Questions after Group Prayer and Discernment**

What ministries have you experienced (either as a servant or a recipient) which seemed to you to be a sign that something out of the ordinary was going on? Given the catalysts for your own experience of the transcendent as well as the group's reflection on the correlation question, can you imagine forms of ministry among your small group or congregation that have the potential to be a sign of Christ's presence?

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**Part 1**  
**The Temple and Missional Theology**

An abstract painting titled "Creation" by Kent Ellett, featuring a vibrant, textured composition of warm and cool colors including yellows, oranges, reds, pinks, purples, and blues, suggesting a landscape or a celestial scene.

## Discussion 2

# The Temple and Israel's World

*Come thou fount of every blessing  
Tune my heart to sing thy grace  
Streams of mercy never ceasing  
Call for songs of loudest praise  
Teach me some melodious sonnet  
Sung by flaming tongues above  
I'll praise the mount; I'm fixed upon it  
Mount of thy redeeming love.*

Robert Robinson 1758

Background: "Creation," 2014 by Kent Ellett





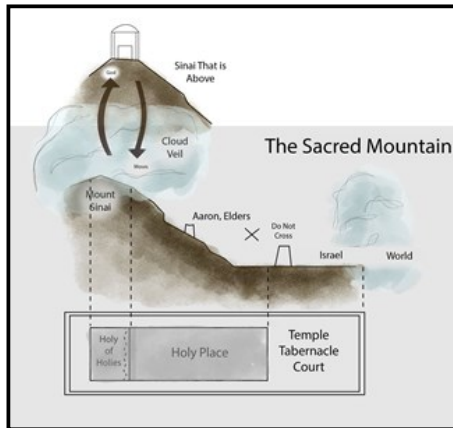
## II. Reclaiming the Temple's World of Purpose

### Dwelling with God in a Three-Dimensional Map

#### 1. The Temple is a Participatory Sign of Heaven

While Israel understood that there was no place one could run from God's over-arching presence, (Psalm 139:7-8) Israel also knew that God's special presence was to be found in the temple. The temple is a sign of God's covenantal presence within Israel. In Exodus 25:8-9 God says, "have them make a sanctuary for me, so that I may dwell among them." (my translation) Thus, the Psalmist affirms, "YHWH is in his sacred temple..." (Psalm 11:4) But the second half of that couplet goes further: "YHWH's throne is in the heavens." God's special kind of presence simultaneously dwells in the heavenly temple as well as the earthly one.

In fact, in Exodus 25:40 Moses is told to make the earthly tabernacle according to the architectural pattern or blueprint of the heavenly temple which Moses sees atop Mount Sinai. Thus, while Moses ascends Sinai and is surrounded by a cloud of glory on earth, it is likely that Moses within the cloud is mysteriously transported to see the Cosmic (heavenly) Mountain, and he is there shown the shape and pattern of heavenly reality. This understanding is consistent with Near-Eastern tradition; this experience is replicated in the prophets, in the Book of Enoch's heavenly ascent, and, of course, in John of Patmos' ascent into the heavenly temple renewed in Jesus Christ. Thus, Moses' experience atop the Holy Mountain is a pattern of the Cosmic Mountain.



Graphic: by Christina Ellett, 2020.

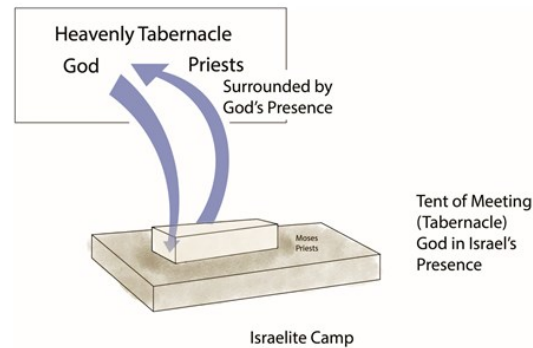
The tabernacle thus exhibits the tripartite structure of the Sinai experience.

The exactitude of the architectural pattern for the tabernacle seems to have more to do with being precise about the content of visual theology than about precision with regard to architectural elements per se. And the theology of the temple emphasizes that the earthly blueprint not only depicts but participates in heavenly reality. The scholar Jon Levenson writes, "the earthly and the heavenly [Temples] are not closed to each other, but open, and interpenetrating on Zion." The Temple, where the ark resides, embodies the

W. Ross Blackburn argues that the Tabernacle reflects the three zones of the Sinai experience. The cloud of glory that fills the tabernacle is the one that had enveloped Sinai. Only Moses is permitted to ascend to that top zone of the mountain, veiled in a cloud of glory and Divine presence. This zone is imaged in the Holy of Holies. A second zone extends upward from the border of the mountain (Sinai) where Aaron, his sons, and the seventy elders are permitted after covenant sacrifice. This corresponds to the priestly areas of the tabernacle. A third zone at the foot of the mountain contained an altar for burnt offerings and was guarded by a border to prevent the common Israelite from ascending the mountain.... This corresponds to the gathering area or courts of the tabernacle.

footstool of the God's throne which extends into the heavens but had descended on Sinai and later Zion. (Psalm 132:7).

So, the scholar J. Gerald Janzen insists that the tabernacle means that "Mount Sinai and the burning bush will travel with the people." The meeting place with God's presence is carried within Israel's midst. After God's glory refills the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34 signaling the restoration of the nation after the golden calf incident, the tabernacle and its priestly functions make it possible for Israel to fulfill its vocation to the nations. "You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:6) The tabernacle is emphatically missional, for it is the manifestation of God's glory in the middle of Israel which makes Israel's priestly declaration of God's glory among the nations believable. (1 Chronicles 16:24, Psalm 9:11, 96:3, and Isaiah 66:19)



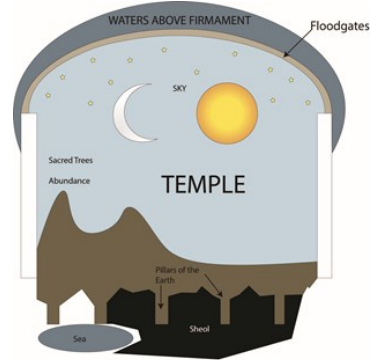
Yet, for Janzen, the tabernacle is not just a palpable sign of Divine presence in Israel, for "as often as Israel's priests enter the Tent, they are in God's midst." Subsequent history only amplified this conviction that God not only was present in Israel but Israel was encompassed by God. Psalm 125 is a song of ascent in which the worshipper is ascending more than mere real estate. Ascending the temple Mount on pilgrimage is a moral and spiritual transformation—it is an ascent up the Cosmic Mountain into an experience of the "unshakable" center of the cosmos. There, God is not only in Israel, but also Israel is surrounded by God. "Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken, but enduring forever. As the Mountains surround Jerusalem so the Lord surrounds his people now and forever." (Psalm 125:1-2)

The significance of these convictions can hardly be exaggerated. Janzen points out the dual belief—that God dwells in his people on earth and that his people through their priestly representatives dwell in and with God on his transcendent Mountain—has crucial New Testament parallels. The temple's participation in and patterning of heavenly reality is what is behind the use of the word *typos* (pattern) in Hebrews 8:5 where the earthly temple is a sign of the Heavenly one. Thus, the fact that the earthly Zion is structured to usher the worshipper into an experience of heavenly reality is the likely theological background for construing the church's present ascendance into heavenly Zion in Hebrews 12:22. This aspect of temple theology also provides the likely structure for understanding Paul's idea of participating in a "Jerusalem that is above" wherein the church participates in the heavenly, vivifying grace of the Spirit (Galatians 4:25-26)

The temple, then, is a sign of God's glorious presence in Israel. But it also is a means of Israel, through its priests, of ascending into the heavenly temple. Thus, God also surrounds his people. The people are both indwelled by and hidden within God's heavenly glory. This palpable presence drives Israel's mission of declaring God's glory among the nations. (1 Chron 16:24, Psalm 9:11, 96:3, and Isaiah 66:19)

## 2. The Temple is a Cosmological Map of Ideal Creation

If this first dimension of Israelite temple understanding is suggested by Psalm 78:69- “He [God] built his sanctuary like the heavens,” then the second theological premise important for this discussion is anticipated by the second half of that same couplet: “He established it [the sanctuary] forever like the earth.” Near Eastern Temple faith sees the temple as a visual map of all creation. Levenson writes, “the temple is the epitome of the world, a concentrated form of its essence, a miniature of the cosmos.” This is explained visually. The temple’s ceiling represents floodgates which prevent chaotic waters above the firmament from flooding the earth. The sun, moon and stars, the earth, the sea, and *sheol* (the grave) are three-dimensionally patterned. The priest stepping into this space both ritually and bodily represents human life before God.



Graphic: by Christina Ellett, 2020

The design and horticultural decorations of the temple described in 1 Kings 7 are familiar to archeologists from the excavation of other Near Eastern temples. And the thematic content is equally familiar to most readers of Genesis in that it reminds them of the Garden of Eden where the life-giving power and the very presence of God is made known. Eden, as a temple compound, is elevated, which explains why the living streams of the temple flow missionally outward. This temple-garden is replete with lush vegetation (as later depicted in various ways on the temple) and a Near Eastern sacred tree in the temple compound which participates in the creative life of God. Adam, like Near-Eastern priest-kings, and like later Levitical servants, was to “till and keep” the sacred compound just as the priestly cult “cultivates” and extends the tabernacle compound’s fruitful power. (Gen 2:15, Numbers 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6) The garden has a barrier against outer chaos and desert just as the temple is a gated compound. The garden is guarded by two cherubim—not unlike the cherubim guarding the entrance to the Holy of Holies or in flanking the mercy seat on earth as they also flank the heavenly temple throne. The entrance to Eden, like that of the tabernacle, faces East. Eden, like the Tabernacle, has a repository of gold and onyx stone within it, and onyx, far more than gold, is associated exclusively with the construction of the tabernacle. The Gihon of Genesis 2:13 is the temple spring in the Jerusalem of 1 Kings. By the time of the writing of Genesis, these Edenic elements had long been embedded into the architecture of Israel’s tabernacle and temple as a pattern of Eden just as Eden had, itself, been a pattern of the Paradise above. All of this suggests that in Zion Israel saw the heavenly Cosmic Mountain which had first “given rise” to the primal paradise.

The earthly temple, then, in its undefiled state imaged God’s heavenly and ultimate ideal for creation. The story of Adam, the representative priest-king, being exiled from the temple where God walks—being banished from its garden which has been defiled by violating boundaries in the “cultivation” of the compound—becomes the prototypical motif through which much of the rest of the story of creation is read. The problem with the world is that it groans under the defiled priesthood of Adam and the loss of its recreative temple function. It is therefore a grace of temple renewal that God in Exodus brings Israel again “to himself,” (Exodus 19:4) making Israel a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” God does this in part by the

building of a newly functioning sanctuary made according to the pattern of Eden—made in the pattern of the heavenly temple—made in the pattern of ideal creation. The tabernacle functions at the center of Israel’s priestly mission as a sign of ideal creation, extending God’s creative wisdom and influence over all the earth.

Stepping into the temple brought priestly representatives of the people into something of the idealized form of creation that was possible before the Adamic priesthood defiled the temple compound. Life within the renewed courts of God was a mysterious step into God’s glorious future for creation. Again, it is useful to anticipate the significance of such a point to which we must return later. The fact that the temple participates in and signifies God’s future and heavenly ideal for all creation has ongoing significance for understanding the New Testament’s “realized eschatology” wherein believers are said to presently experience eternal life, or wherein the church in Jesus Christ is already the first-fruits of a new creation. Such beliefs arise out of a Jewish milieu permeated by convictions about the way the temple functioned as a present and mysterious sign of God’s future creation.

**Comprehension Questions:**

What are the two main ideas of this lesson?

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List 5-7 reasons ways that Solomon’s Temple hearkened back to the first earthly Temple called Eden or Paradise:

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**Correlation Question:**

When you described your safe place what “signs” were there of God’s presence? Did your sense of safety have anything to do with the palpable presence of God? How was that expressed? How do your images of the safe space or of well-being compare to the Edenic imagery of the temple? Compare your images to the Temple’s images for life as it should be.

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### III. Imagining Ministries with Potential

In light of your images for safe social space and in light of God's concern for having a place for covenantal presence, rate how much potential you feel that each of these missional practices has for you in your setting.

1 *sounds exhausting* 2 *wish I liked the idea* 3 *modest potential* 4 *significant potential* 5 *generates energy*

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ A small group meeting in a neighborhood invited members of the neighborhood to help their small group think about what they should do in that community. They asked what the neighborhood was good at doing and how they could help. As a result they canceled their planned block party and decided to go to Joe's huge 4th of July party.
  
- b) \_\_\_\_\_ A small group decided that they were going to devote a full month of meetings to discuss issues of race among the members. Members promised to listen not for agreement or consensus but to listen for the purposes of understanding each other.
  
- c) \_\_\_\_\_ A church enclave in one neighborhood decided to have its monthly pitch-in dinner at Mikes Bar and Grill during the annual neighborhood association picnic. Members painted faces and helped neighborhood people clean up afterward.

Explain your rating in terms of your own images of what constitutes safe space and in terms of the mission of the Temple of being a sign or and a conveyor of God's covenantal presence.

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#### Questions after Group Prayer and Discernment

Does it matter whether you are thinking about whether a space is safe for you or for others? Did your perspective on safe space change during this discussion of creating and signifying covenantal space? To what do you attribute the change in your perspective?

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## For Further (optional) Reading

### Returning to the Blueprint: Recovering the Power of Metaphor in Missional Reflection

Some people have a hard time believing that there is a temple in the sky. But a temple faith does not really mean there are cut stones suspended in the stratosphere. The Bible's language about the temple is pointing to something that is ultimately real but which is often called "transcendent." These invisible realities transcend our ability to fully understand them. But the writer to the Hebrews says we are walking around in a land of shadows that are actually cast by these spiritual realities. The earthly temple worship and its architecture is a "copy and shadow of the heavenly things." Hebrews 8:5 says that this is the very reason Moses was to, "make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." The concept, then, is that the earthly temple is a shadow or an architectural blueprint of the heavenly powers that shape creation.

Architects get paid all the time precisely because the figurative images they draw successfully signify unseen buildings. Nobody gets hung up on the fact that a blueprint couldn't possibly be a building because architectural lines on a page are not buildings, and, therefore, the building must be utterly beyond the metaphorical signs which describe it. This is silly. When a person learns how to read blueprints he learns to read the blueprint in terms of its similarity to the things being figuratively depicted. Biblical blueprints accurately teach a form of spiritual discernment. For that reason, Abraham was able to look "for a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God." With Father Abraham, we peer into holy mystery by paying attention to the metaphorical language that is a true map of the invisible heavens. The visible temple architecture is a precise metaphorical shadow that is deliberately cast by the transcendent mysteries themselves.

But this way of metaphorical speaking is still difficult for very many people. It's hard to trust Bible metaphors when you really don't trust metaphors at all. As an English teacher, I often encountered students who were frustrated by figurative language. They would ask, "why doesn't the author just get to his point? If he wants to say something, why doesn't he just say it?" But notice that someone who asks this kind of question is figuratively comparing arriving at the significance of an intellectual pursuit to drawing two line segments at an increasing angle so that they intersect or get to the geometric "point" more quickly. My students were complaining about metaphor while unknowingly using metaphors! In time these same students "came" to "grasp" that every sentence any of us utter is "littered" with metaphors because they are usually the quickest and most vivid way to "get to" or "make" an abstract "point." There is no language—certainly no theology—without metaphorical images.

Like my students, many Christians pray "Our Father in heaven" and do not notice that this is a metaphor about God's parental love and the place of his residence. Most Christians can talk of approaching God's "throne of Grace" without thinking if they really believe God is sitting on a throne in his holy temple in the sky. Familiar metaphors are so familiar that most people don't notice them. But when confronted with the idea that Eden is a blueprint or shadow image of the heavenly temple garden, and the tree of life in Genesis is but a pattern of the one coming down out of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22, Bible readers may realize such symbols are in fact metaphors. Living water...How could that be actually real? Being built into a "spiritual house in the Lord?" Really? Our "lives are hidden with Christ in God?" God has "seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ?" When many people encounter this language they have an overwhelming sense that this is very figurative language, and it can be disconcerting.

In such moments when Christians discover that something is a metaphor, they face a very real temptation. They may be tempted to assume that if something is metaphorical then it is not real. The shadows or images of heavenly reality are dismissed as emotional exaggeration or enthusiastic overstatement. In other words, the temple metaphors are treated as inaccurate human guesses or projections. Biblical metaphors which have fallen into disuse because they don't fit our current world view get regularly ignored and the transcendent mysteries of the faith get treated as unnecessary decoration, or, worse, put into some more manageable kind of prose.

The temptation, then, is to cast aside the pattern God gave Israel and the church. The "pattern" is then no longer a series of very real shadows that are truly cast by the ultimate spiritual dynamics of heaven. The pattern and the blueprint for the church becomes a mere matter of acceptable prosaic or fully understandable procedures. This guts the faith of its mysterious power and the mystic energy which so powerfully works in those who actually trust the metaphors. Thinking the metaphor is inadequate, they do not study the shape of the shadow so they never truly sense the shape of heaven or the "form of God." (John 5:37)

The Bible's temple metaphors are God's ordained portals into the heavenly dynamics which drive mission. Jesus said, "the Kingdom of Heaven is like"...one earthly metaphor after another. Thus, he has made his parables not just moral lessons for the church, but portals that have come to us from heaven. Through them, the church truly sees into the heavenly Kingdom. Biblical metaphors comprise the only canonically sanctioned language we will ever have for talking about the integration of heaven and earth. Rather than a misguided attempt at de-mythologizing biblical metaphor, this study is attempting to re-acquaint ourselves with the story of the temple and its architectural images which are faithful shadow-like blueprints of God's missional power. As a shadow originates from the shape which casts it, so temple metaphors contain heavenly vision for our ministry in and with the world. By recovering the temple's poetic world—developing a poetic sensitivity to the images of God's temple in Jesus Christ-- we may rediscover God's missional blueprint for regaining Divine energy for practices of community renewal.

An abstract painting with a textured, layered appearance. The colors are primarily dark, muted tones like greys, blues, and purples, with vibrant streaks of yellow, orange, and red. The brushstrokes are visible and expressive, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall composition is dense and complex, with various shades and textures overlapping.

## Discussion 3

# The Temple and Israel's Mission

*The sun was setting, and, though I had experienced many sunsets before, there was a moment when there was no difference between myself and the light surrounding me. This is not easy to describe. It may be the kind of experience that young people at the age of sixteen have otherwise (I don't claim uniqueness to that experience), but it made me think. It opened me to the mystery of reality.*

**Wolfhart Pannenberg** (about returning home 1944)

***The Mighty One, God, the Lord,  
speaks and summons the earth  
from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets.  
From Zion, perfect in beauty,  
God shines forth.***

**Psalm 50:1-2**

Background: From "Creation, 2014," by Kent Ellett



## Preview

In participating in God's future stored in the heavens, the earthly temple and its cult act as an agent of new and ongoing creation drawing the world toward God's glorious, final ideal. By participating in heavenly reality, by signifying God's ideal world, and by drawing the world toward God's ends, Israel's temple embodied Israel's distinctive mission to all creation.

In this lesson, we explore the temple's missional agency in ongoing creation in three interrelated ways. First, the temple cult and its worship restrain forces of chaos. The temple's prayers and rituals participate in God's sanctifying influence over the land. Second, the functioning of the cult involves expanding the range of the temple's holiness wherein the temple's sacred space advances. Israel is, thus, a priestly nation making the whole world sacred. Third, the Temple's role in expanding holy creation may be understood through the central theological images embedded in Israel's temple architecture. Seven of the temple's missional images are introduced in this lesson, and they will play a pivotal role in the remainder of our discussions.

## I. Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World

Before you enter into this study pray with your palms up, symbolizing your willingness to receive whatever God wants to provide in this week's discussion. Pray that you will be able to contribute to group conversation from that deep place within you that is united with Christ in the Spirit... Then read the following:

Ian Shelburne, a missionary who spent many years in Uganda, tells the story of when his mission team kept meeting Christians who were afraid of a local witch doctor named Gideon. This Shaman practiced healing arts, but also made locals afraid of his curses. Ian's missionary team began praying for Gideon. Local believers also joined in prayer and over time Gideon lost much of his influence, opening a door for the gospel.

Tell one story about a time that you feel confident that God answered a prayer that was really important to you. What was the concern? Who prayed with you? What happened? OR, Tell one story about a time that you received a dramatic answer to a prayer. Again, what was at stake? who was with you? What happened? What would your group's prayer ministry look like if it deeply believed in the riches of Christ's "glorious inheritance in the saints and his incomparably great power for us who believe?" (Ephesians 3:19) How does prayer advance the mission of God?

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## II. Reclaiming the Temple's World of Purpose

The Bible scholar Jon Levenson in his book, *Sinai and Zion*, says that the Israelite priest in all his duties at the temple is imaging God's creative work of ongoing creation while "making distinctions, assigning things their proper category and assessing their fitness..." The Temple worship contributes to the healthy ordering of creation and the control over the chaotic sea (Psalm 46; Job 38:11) by ritually enacting the distinction between the holy and the common. Between the temple and ordinary reality lies "a barrier of holiness, a palpable energy... which resists the intermingling of the two modes of reality." The temple stores the deep in its vaults (Psalm 33:4-7). Maintaining the division between clean and unclean then is an act of ongoing creation.

Sacrificial offering and priestly cleansing are about restoring ritual purity after accidental or illicit intermingling of sacred ordered creation with mixed-up or unclean creation. The observance of the religious festivals "draw future generations to the events of the Exodus by participating in Israel and the world's deliverance through God's ongoing acts of dividing chaotic waters. Sabbath-keeping also enacts the possibility of actually entering God's rest (Ps 95:11) wherein creation is properly ordered and chaos held at bay. Liturgical pilgrimage, adjudication of cases, and other temple rites also, in their own way, order society around the holy center of Divine presence and the creative Speech which divides and orders chaotic waters. Levenson concludes that the creative ordering of the world at the temple becomes "something that humanity can not only witness and celebrate, but something in which it can also take part."

The Anglican scholar Gerald Janzen draws attention to how priestly speech at the temple "exemplifies what J. L Austin calls "performative speech." Performative words do not simply refer to something. They actually accomplish what they say. For instance, the locution "I love you," does not merely inform but is a performance of its message. God's speech act—"let there be light"—in Genesis 1:3 is, therefore, the primordial example of a speech act with its own creational force dividing light and darkness and structuring them into their appropriate cycles. The Divine speech act is performative in that accomplishes what it says.

Worshipful speech performed in the temple—no less than the temple itself—participates in its heavenly counterpart. The priest images God by rehearsing God's performative speech which is packed with creational power. Janzen focuses on the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24-26 as a preeminent example of how priestly speech performs the blessing which it invokes. Uttered within the mysterious union of earthly and heavenly Zion, the blessing mediates what has been hidden since the violation of the covenant—namely the utter peace of the favor of the Divine countenance.

The temple's missional role can also be seen in what Evangelical Scholar G. K. Beal describes as "the expanding purpose of temples. Adam's high priestly ministry was to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with people and the liveliness of the temple compound. The priestly vocation to be an expansive blessing continues in the altar-making of Noah and the patriarchs, and perhaps most notably Jacob's experience in Genesis 28:12-15 which, despite its familiarity, requires citation here:

"He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will

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be blessed through you and your offspring.”

Jacob’s conclusion is that “this is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” The phrases “house of God,” the “gate of heaven,” the “ladder to heaven” all suggest that Bethel is a prototypical temple that gives Jacob mystical access to heaven. Yet, what is of particular importance here is not that Bethel is in fact a form of temple in which God, significantly, announces his Name, but that the priestly blessing which emanates from the House of God is a form of performative speech. The blessing received has creative power to multiply Israel, spreading the nation out so that all the families of the earth would be blessed through those who arise through this performative blessing uttered to the ancestor.

Levenson describes the creational power of the temple’s ritual; Janzen emphasizes the temple’s liturgical authority to speak new realities into existence, and Beal notes how the Temple participates in Eden’s great commission to fill the earth. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to surveying the temple’s own architectural language for this expansive mission. While not intended to be exhaustive, the following list of missional images embedded in the temple’s architecture is broadly representative of the Temple’s role in on-going creation.



Graphics: by Avery Silliman

### Living Water

The temple is a source of the water of life. Nobody would miss the ritual uses of water--the water basin, and water rituals in the temple. It was this life-giving water that sprung forth to water the whole face of the ground in Genesis 2. These waters created Eden, and subsequently, the four living streams in the Paradise of God flow missionally outward from the raised temple compound. Temples throughout the ancient world were in fact regularly built over wells and springs. The Gihon in Jerusalem is in that sense typical, and the waters of the coming Temple, extend the life-giving and healing water of God from the temple’s threshold. (Ezekiel 47:1; Zechariah 14:8) This missional function was so central to Zion’s identity that when Israel boasted of the temple hill—Zion—it was sung, "All my fountains are in you." (Psalm 87:7)



### Light

In Psalm 36:9 the Psalmist links the temple fountain with another metaphor that cultivates mission: “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.” Expressions like “the light of God’s presence” have today lost their resonance with God’s *kabod*, his *doxa*, or glory which fills the temple. Likewise, churchgoers seldom think of temple lampstands, because light has come to be a largely secular metaphor for insight. But for Israel, it was out of the temple that God first uttered, “let there be light. The temple structured all the heavenly lights. (Psalm 19) Psalm 4:6 knows that it is the light of God’s countenance in the temple’s functioning that projects light into human eyes and is in this sense

the very essence of being alive. “Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death...” The Divine presence, instruction, life-giving wisdom, and beauty are all conveyed from Zion. “From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth.” (Psalm 50:2)



### Temple Garden

The temple’s careful arrangement of the heavenly lights, then, bestows a revelatory Word—a wise and life-giving light to the earth. It is this heavenly light mixed with living water that also maintains the special character of a third missional image of cultivation, that of the temple garden. Ancient temples widely retained the mythos of a temple garden and agricultural fertility even when the actual architecture of a temple did not continue to emphasize large gardens. The wall decorations and pillars in Solomon’s temple simulate flowering plants and trees which, as we have seen, both echo Eden and proleptically participate in the future healing and abundance which the renewing power of the temple will bring. (1 Kings 6:29; 7:15-24, and 2 Kings 25:17)

The command to Adam to tend (*shamar*) the Garden of Delight, echoes or anticipates the use of the verb *shamar* in Numbers 3:7-8; 8:26, and 18:5-6 where it describes the priestly liturgical duties associated with the tabernacle. The priestly metaphor for tending garden explains the relationship between the words cultivation and cultic. The priests, then, cultivate the life-giving sources of God’s grace available through the temple mystery. The “fertility” of the priestly work has a fruitful and healing influence on the whole land.

This symbolic system is used to reinforce the authority of truly anointed kings and priestly establishments. However, when existing powers are deemed to be defiled, the language of political regime change or divine judgment on malfunctioning temple cults necessarily involves the severing of the nourishing connection between the structured heavenly bodies and the temple garden. The sun is darkened the moon turned to blood or the temple’s map of the sky (the ceiling) is turned back like a scroll or garment (Psalm 102:25-7 and Revelation 6:12-14) as a way of describing the severing of Divine sanction on a ruling authority and its cultivated influence over the land. Likewise, politically revolutionary language involves the cursing, cutting down or the transplantation of national trees. (Ezekiel 17:3, 22-24; 31:1-14) The language of political restoration takes on the metaphor of a branch or shoot growing from the previous stump of the national tree and royal line. (Isaiah 4:2)

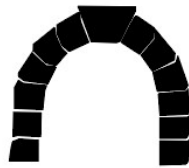


### Ritually Containing the Sea

Any worshipper at the temple would notice the large basin of water called the Sea. Definitive interpretation of the detailed design of the basin is likely to prove elusive, but at a foundational theological level, it is possible to affirm that the temple cult through its large basin is containing the chaotic waters. Chaos is being neutralized in the temple cult. Levenson insists that the temple ministry is not about the immediate “banishment of evil, but about its control. It describes a process of separation and distinction in which otherwise resurgent “dark forces are... overcome by placement in a structure in which they are bounded by new realities created by Divine speech.”

Thus, Temple worship is the prime mover of the drama of ongoing history and creation. Through participation in the heavenly Mystery, the Temple is dividing the chaotic waters, verbally placing them behind the temple floodgates and in its vaults. God divides the waters in the Exodus; Christ commands the storm, bestriding Galilee, and ultimately recreates a world without any chaotic Sea. (Revelation 21:1) Israel, Christ, and the church are missionally tied to the temple's ongoing battle with the disintegrative forces of the Deep lodged in creation and in society.

### Structural Unification



In addition to “cultivational metaphors, the temple uses structural language. One structural mission of the temple is to create unity in creation. This ministry may be visually rendered using the capstone of Psalm 118:22. The opening hymn of this song is used in contexts that celebrate the rebuilding of the temple. (Jeremiah 33:11 and Ezra 3:11) Thus, the rescue of the afflicted singer of the Psalm (assumedly the King of Israel) is compared to being a rejected person—someone excluded from the safety and life of the temple. But in Psalm 118 Yahweh saved the distressed person by building him into the essence of the temple in a very strategic and unifying way. “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” A capstone ties different architectural loads together into an eye-pleasing architectural unity. In using the rejected building material as the central stone of the temple, God has integrated the rejected and the marginal and used that Stone in making a Gate so that the righteous may enter and be completely integrated into the life-giving ministry of God.

Psalm 48 also celebrates the structural beauty of God's holy mountain. (Psalm 48:2) Its beauty lies in the way it architecture connects heavenly loftiness with the joy of the land. All of creation is structurally and architecturally connected around a visual center. Most importantly, the temple connects God and the city. God is “in her citadels.” (v 3) It is the mere vision of Zion which causes enemies to flee. (v 5) Zion's integrated defenses, then, are not the result of military engineering alone—they visually depict the Transcendent. Heavenly security is expressed in a way that is palpable. What was previously only heard, Israel comes to “see” in Jerusalem. (v 8) Within the temple God's worshipper is overwhelmed with a consuming sense of intimate and unending love, and yet the praise heard within the sanctuary reaches and connects to the ends of the earth. (v 9) Levenson writes:

the theology of creation [is] rendered in glyptic craftsmanship. In the temple, God relates simultaneously to the entire cosmos...it is the point in relation to which all space attains individualization and meaning. The center sustains the world, as the umbilical cord sustains the embryo, or as the seed sustains the seedling, except that the world does not outgrow its center...”

Psalm 133:1-3 calls special attention to the temple's unifying phenomenon within a series of psalms which celebrate a festal procession that ascends the comic mountain into such a mysterious experience of all things being integrated. “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.”

Developing a similar theme Isaiah 2:2 envisions the final, glorious renewal of Jerusalem, and here again

the unifying power of the temple is central to accomplishing God's purposes in reconciling or integrating all nations.

the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established  
as chief among the mountains;  
it will be raised above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.

The image of the capstone as the center around which all things are connected, the palpable sense of unity between brothers, and the lifting up of the temple in order to draw all nations to God's self are all also ministries of Christ, and they continue to play a central role in the Church's ministry in unifying creation.

### Repository of Gifts

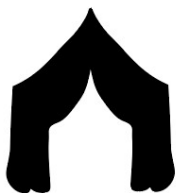


As the nations will stream to Zion's hill, they also bring gifts. The temple always functions as a repository of such gifts. Psalm 76 begins celebrating that God, going out from the Temple, "breaks the flashing arrows" of Israel's enemies, and the Psalm ends with an encouragement to the neighboring lands to bring gifts. (Psalm 76:13)

These gifts were added to Israel's own resources. The tabernacle was to be made from gifts given for its construction. (Exodus 25:1-8) Israel shows its repentance after the golden calf incident by stripping off their ornaments and contributing freely to the construction of the tabernacle. (Exodus 35:21-29) Additional gifts were given for the performance of cultic work. (Numbers 7:3-5) In Joshua 6:19 a treasury accompanies the tabernacle, and during the monarchy the treasury of the temple was supplemented by those of the adjoining royal palace. (2 Kings 24:13) All of this suggests that God mysteriously inhabits the free gifts of his people, infusing their generosity with a mysterious missional power.

Missional thinking today emphasizes that the kingdoms of the world often possess gifts to contribute to the church and temple which acts missionally to do benevolence in the wider culture. The temple establishment's refusal to address such issues of economic opportunity in the wider kingdom became a sure sign of the temple's defilement. God insists: "It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses." (Isaiah 3:14-15)

### Shadow, Canopy, Hiding Place



Such benevolent storing of heavenly resources is only one aspect of a wider canopy of covenantal protection under which God protects his people. "Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house..." (Ps 36:7-8)

Ex 14:19-20 provides the likely narrative background for understanding this Temple function. Exodus records, "the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved

from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel.”

The cloud of God’s protective presence here takes an architectural form of a pillar because it comes down from the heavenly temple. This is the cloud that later surrounds the tabernacle (Ex 33:9) with similar protective effects. (Numbers 12:5-10) Subsequently, the temple acts as a symbol of God’s covenantal, protective presence surrounding the faithful with the “unshakable” presence of God. (125:1) The faithful thus affirm in Psalm 27:5:

For in the day of trouble  
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;  
he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle  
and set me high upon a rock. (see also Psalm 91:1, 31:20)

**Summary**

The temple’s ritual and its worshipful speech are all part of the temple’s expanding mission to structure the whole world. Through the temple, God renews the earth with life-giving streams, provides wisdom, illumination, and justice from the center of creation, filling the earth with healing and fertility, structurally uniting all nations, storing riches for mutual thriving, and creating a place of safety where the Divine presence may be enjoyed and extended throughout the cosmos. By preparing a tabernacle for God’s special presence in the world, Israel came to embody its priestly mission to the nations in cultivating and structuring all creation. (Exodus 25:8; 19:6)

**Comprehension Questions:**

What do Jon Levenson, Gerald Janzen, and G.K Beale contribute to our understanding of the temple’s power?

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List seven metaphorical ways the Temple helps shape creation. What kind of ministries do you associate with each of these metaphors?

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**Correlation Question**

How would you relate your experiences of ministering to the wider community in prayer with the theology about what the temple accomplishes in Israel? What is the same? What is different?

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**III. Imagining Ministries with Potential**

Rate how much potential you feel that the missional practice below has for you in your setting.

**1** *sounds exhausting*   **2** *wish I liked the idea*   **3** *modest potential*   **4** *significant potential*   **5** *generates energy*

a) \_\_\_\_\_ Ian Shelburne’s practice and the Uganda Mission Team’s practice described in section I. Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World.

Explain your rating in terms of your own inner sense of fun and purpose and also evaluate how well that practice jives with the missional imagery we are learning from our study of the Temple.

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**Questions After Group Prayer and Discernment**

Which image of Temple ministry most appeals to your group and why? Were there ways that the missional prayer practice of the Ugandan Mission team challenged the way you look at worship? How does the missional imagery of the Temple encourage or challenge your group or congregation’s conception of worship?

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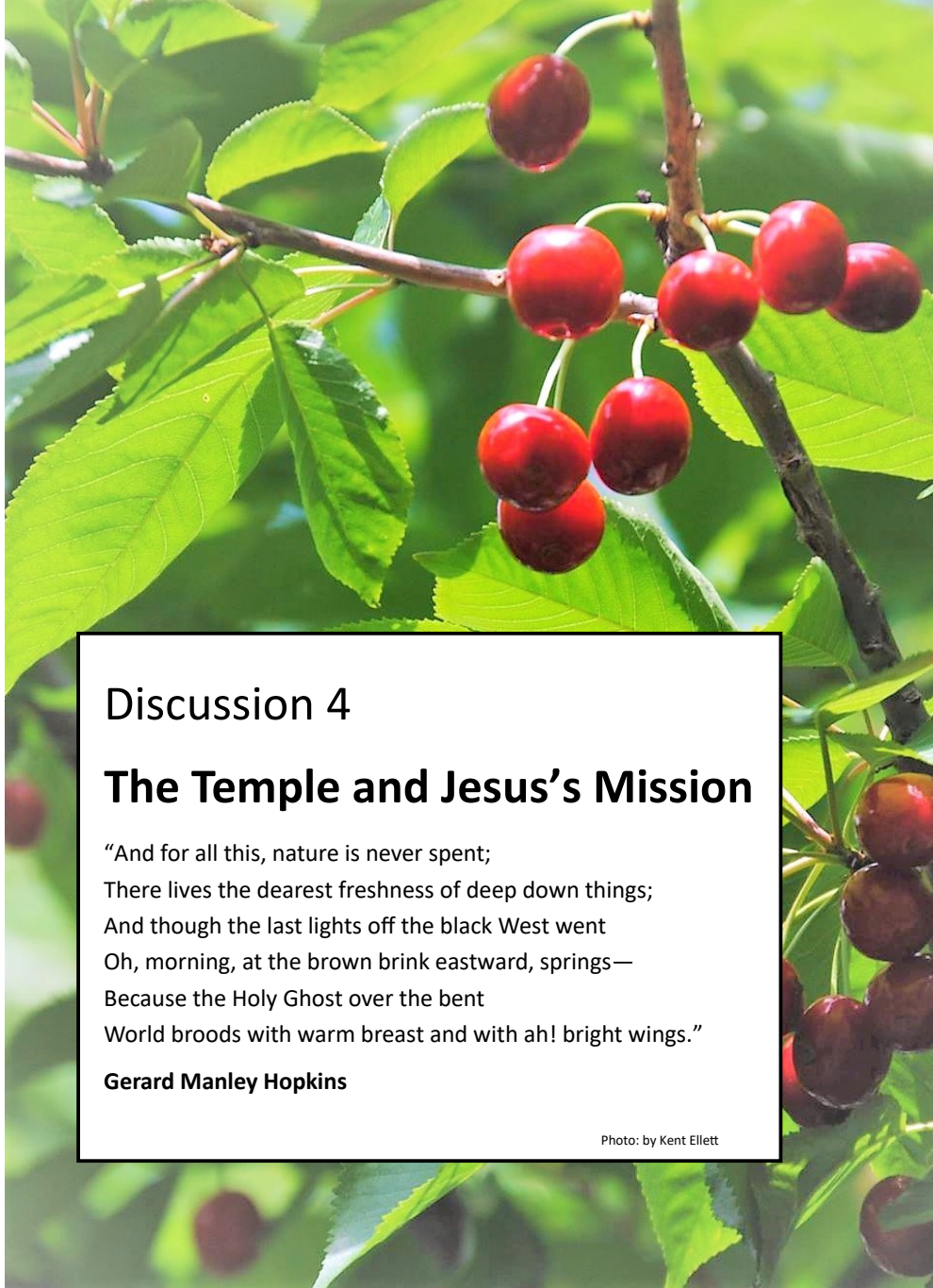
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## Discussion 4

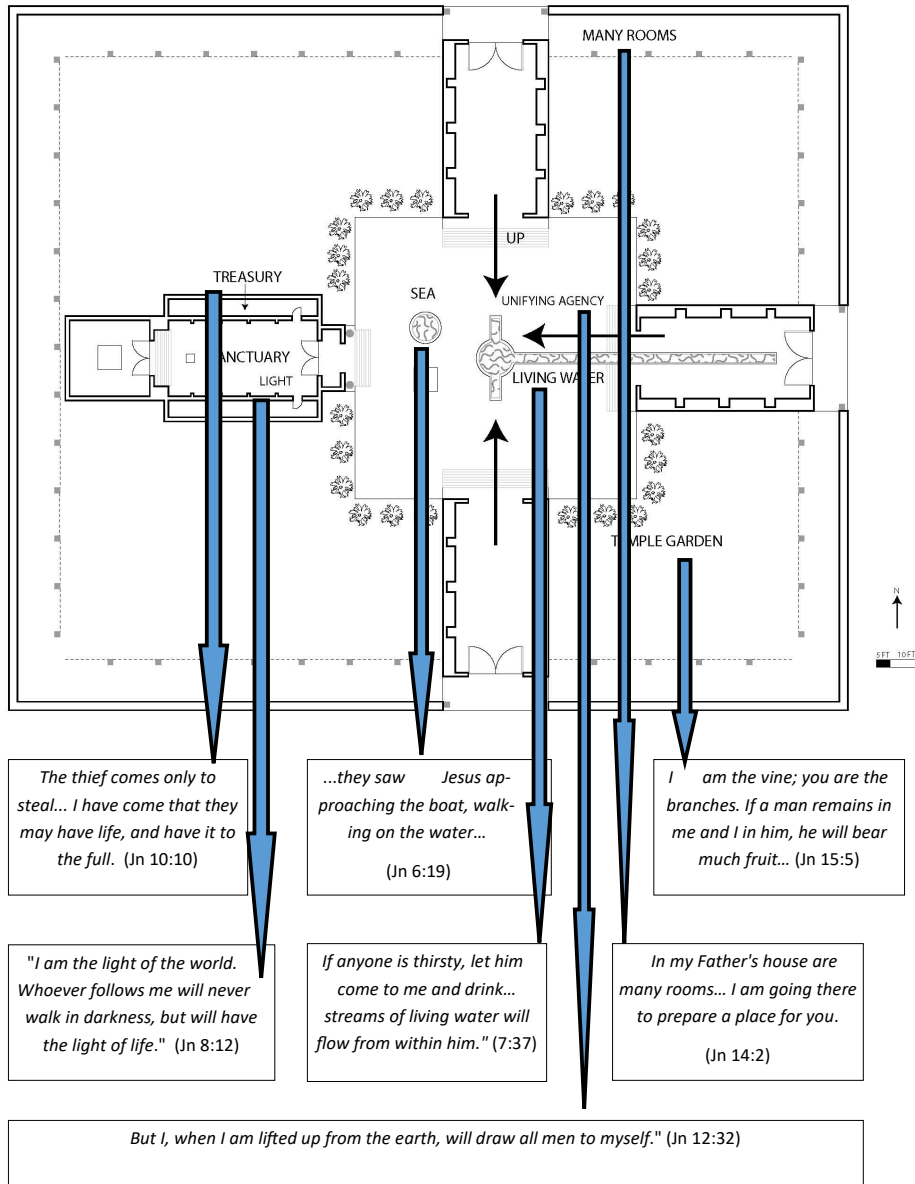
### **The Temple and Jesus's Mission**

"And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness of deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."

**Gerard Manley Hopkins**

Photo: by Kent Ellett

**Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ...But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. John 2:19-22**



## Preview

This lesson now returns to the Gospel of John in order to show how Jesus' ministry, death, and lifting up fit within the larger story of the temple as the Gospel's basic, underlying story. Jesus embodies the end-time temple of promise, functioning not only as a blueprint of heaven, but acting as a participatory sign and a missional agent of coming new creation. As the blueprint on the previous page begins to illustrate, Jesus's ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension embody the Temple's missional imagery in drawing all nations and creation to himself.

## I. Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World

Spend some time reading and re-reading John 2:19-22 printed on the blueprint on the previous page. With each successive reading experiment by emphasizing different words. Picture in your holy imagination what Jesus looks like. What do the others look like? What is in the background? Where are you standing? What do you hear as Jesus speaks? Who does Jesus sound like? ...Then spend some time praying and asking God to give you access to those inner riches which are most important for your life's mission and your discussion groups' collective reflection.

When you envision Jesus who and what do you see? Who or what does Jesus look like in your mind's eye? When you feel very close to Jesus, how do you envision him?

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## II. Reclaiming the Temple's World of Purpose

Jesus's mission was to renew the mission of Israel's temple. As such he renews the way the temple functions as the blueprint or sign of heaven interpenetrating the earth. He also acts as a participatory sign and a missional agent of new creation.

### A Participatory Pattern of Heaven

Jesus says, "When [someone] looks at me, he sees the one who sent me." And also to his disciple he says: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?" (John 12:45,14:9-10) The mutual penetration of Father and Son in these passages is consonant with the interpenetration of earthly and heavenly temples. This interpretation of the mutual indwelling of Father and Son is bolstered by the numerous texts which describe the mutually interpenetrating temple "glory." "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has

been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself.” (13:31-32) This mutual glory has interpenetrating earthly and heavenly dimensions. Jesus prays, “I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.” (17:4-5) The associations with the interpenetration of heaven and earth and the use of the word glory are highly significant. Since John beheld in Jesus that Glory which filled the Tabernacle (1:14), John likely believes the earthly temple in Jesus is more an exact pattern of heavenly glory than Zion had been. One “greater than [that] temple” is present. (Matthew 12:6)

### **A Participatory Sign of Ideal Creation**

Likewise, Jesus as the temple acts as a physical sign that participates in the future of creation. The life of the coming age is something which may presently be possessed. In John 5:24 Jesus speaks of walking “from death to life.” This may have become a dead metaphor by the time Jesus uses it, but such usage may be rooted in the practice of temple pilgrimage—walking from earthly into heavenly reality.

In the context of the Feast of Dedication Jesus is in the temple complex where he expresses himself in terms of a protective enclosure for the sheep to whom he presently gives eternal life. He images new creation in that he is a present source of an eternal kind of life and protection. (John 10:22-28) Jesus is the Gate to the safe eternal pasture-- the Gate into that lively compound where all sheep are protected from wolves and (like Samuel in the tabernacle?) they can hear the voice of Divine revelation.

At Passover Jesus multiplies the bread of heaven. In John 6:54 Jesus offers himself in terms of a renewed form of temple-fellowship offering, the eating of which results in the present experience of the “life of the [coming] age.” (*echei zoen aionion*, my translation)

At the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus is the water of the looked-for feast. (Zechariah 14:8) Thus, Jesus, like the Jewish temple in all its appointed feasts, bears the glory of future creation.

### **Missional Agent of Ongoing Creation**

By extension, Jesus, like the temple of old, is also the missional agency of ongoing creation. Jesus’ mission is rooted in the missional sending of God. (John 1:14; 7:29) Likewise, Jesus comes speaking of new birth from above. (*genneithei anothen* John 3:3,7)

This creative missional agency of Jesus, the temple, can perhaps be seen most clearly by attending to the image of the Temple’s living water. In John 4 Jesus offers the woman at the well an end-time spring which insures a person against further thirst. Then, in John 7 at the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus claims to be the real object or source to which the ritual water being used at the temple Feast points. This ritual water was poured in anticipation of the final Feast of Tabernacles when Zechariah envisioned living water flowing from the renewed temple.

Jesus identifies drinking from his own fount with that eternal reality. John explains that such drinking from Christ, in turn, causes the believer, himself, to have a “belly from which comes a sudden flow of recreative water.” (*koilias autou rhousousin houdatos zontos*) The *koilia* may refer to Christ’s belly as well as to believers’, and even if the temple water’s overflow is intended to be flowing only from believers’ emotive center, it is likely that the fountain originally came from Christ’s own *koilia*. (7: 31-39) This is important because the picture of living water flowing from the belly of Christ perfectly fits the preserved images of numerous Near-Eastern Kings where their temples’ ritual water overflows from their belly or breast.

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Jesus's claim, then, is not of a novel kind; the imagery is very ancient, and the revolutionary consequences of claiming to be the priest-king of the temple and the source of heavenly life would have been understood.

The Johannine irony of this ritual is that when water does once more ritually pour from Christ's belly in John 19:34, it is from a cross that does cleanse and renew the world. The story of the cross is thus set within the frame of the story of the temple. The cross is the renewal of the temple's sacrificial system. The water pouring forth from his side is a reappearance of God's recreative temple waters.



Rendering of the living water of King Gudea of Lagash, who was shone a dream of a plan for the sanctuary of Ningirsu. 2020. By Kent Ellett

### The Temple's Rededication and Glorification

Beginning in John 12:28-32 Jesus says:

*Father, glorify your name!"*

*Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."*

*The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.*

*Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."*

It is possible to interpret this scene as a form of temple dedication where the Divine glory breaks out of heaven and glorifies Jesus the temple. If John's understanding of Jesus is primarily one of Jesus as the temple of God, then the preceding verse in John 12:23—"the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified," will likely suggest the hour in which God's glory demonstrably invests the tabernacle just like it did at the end of Exodus or the temple in 1 Kings. (Exodus 40: 34-35, 1 Kings 8-9)

Such an interpretation of John 12:28ff is supported in four ways. First, the setting of this passage involves the pilgrimage and ascent up the holy temple Mountain at Passover. While the exact location of this narrative cannot be located, the temple destination of the pilgrimage and of those worshipping at the feast cannot be in doubt. Numerous commentators have noted that the images here mirror Mark's account of the Mount of Transfiguration, which is, again, a noted ascent up the Cosmic Mountain during which Jesus is surrounded with heavenly glory.

Second, Jesus' prayer concerning the Divine Name echoes Solomon's prayer prayed at his temple's dedication. Solomon repeatedly petitions that the temple be a resting place for the "Name." (1 Kings 8:16,18,19, 20) Solomon trusts in the Divine promise that "my name shall be there," (1 Kings 8:29) and, significantly for the reading of John, (where Jesus repeatedly bears the Divine Name) God answers not only by filling the temple with Glory but by verbally responding in 1 Kings 9:3, "I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever."

That the whole scene of John 12 is thus, a kind of dedicatory prayer for glory to visibly fill the temple is further supported by Jesus' assertion that, "now the prince of the world will be "driven out." (*ekbleithesetai*) Forms of *ekballo* are used in four other places in John—all of them similar to John 2:15 where Jesus "drives out" the moneychangers from the temple. In each case *ekballo* describes those being cast outside of covenantal boundaries—twice describing someone being cast out of the temple. It is more than plausible that Jesus is saying that the Prince of the World is being cast out of the true heavenly temple and its courts as a kind of temple cleansing. This is an idea with which John of Patmos seems familiar. (Revelation 12:8)

Finally, the drawing power Jesus exhibits by virtue of his being “lifted up” (*hupsoo*) re-sounds themes about the temple’s unifying agency. As the Light of Zion expands it also draws all nations to itself. The Bible Scholar Paul Hoskins places the lifting up of Jesus (his death and glorification) within the framework of temple theology. He notes the Greek version of Isaiah often equates *hupsoo* and “glory”, and Isaiah 2:2, a prophecy of the temple’s exaltation, is the likely background for Jesus’ use of *hupsoo* in John 12.

*In the last days  
the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established  
as chief among the mountains;  
it will be raised (hupsoo) above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.*

Jesus’ passion and glorification draw all things together and constitute the final restoration of Jerusalem’s temple and its agency in unifying the nations of the world to God’s self. This is the likely reason that John goes out of his way to mention that Greeks have come to Zion to see Jesus at this moment. (John 12:20) The double entendre of Jesus’ being lifted up on the humiliating cross and simultaneously exalted is to be understood both in terms of Christ’s renewal of the temple’s sacrificial altar and the temple’s exalted capacity to be visibly exalted above all hills, drawing all nations and nature to God’s self.

As one would expect, there seems to be a heavenly dimension of this rededication of the temple. In John 14:1-2 Jesus anticipates his ascension and the heavenly preparation of a place in the heavenly temple (note the same use of “Father’s house” as in John 2:16) where believers may dwell. The use of “rooms” (*monai*) suggests that in Jesus’ ascension he prepares multiple dwelling places within the House of God where many people may mysteriously participate in heavenly reality.

G. K Beale argues that the plural “dwelling places” (*monai*) reflect the Jewish expectation that all holy ones would have a dwelling in the future temple, and it is such dwelling places within heavenly reality that Jesus promises to open for believers. Psalm 90:1 draws on this conceptual world where God himself is said to be a dwelling place (*ma'on*). Thus, it is likely that Jesus in John 14 promises to go to further prepare such places of mutual dwelling, which we introduced as “hiding places.” Such a mutual dwelling with the heavenly and the Divine while on earth functions as a sign of future creation, and Jesus, likewise, promises to come back again so that communion and shared presence is forever assured.

The mutual indwelling in the temple’s compartments—the *monai*—is similar to the language of mutual indwelling in the image of the sacred vine. This vine is being tended by the high priestly gardener in the temple garden in his ritual effort to make all creation fruitful. (John 15:1-3) “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man should “dwell” (*menon*) in me and I in him he will bear much fruit.” (15:4) It is no coincidence that Jesus appears after his death on the third day (on which the temple was to be rebuilt) as a gardener in a garden, and numerous commentators hear the resounding imagery of temple and creation renewal as Christ appears to Mary in risen glory as a “cultivator” of the garden into which his followers are ingrafted.

To summarize, John’s Gospel presents Jesus’s incarnation as the advent of the renewed temple. Jesus, like Israel’s temple, images the Heavenly Father, embodying heavenly realities. He signifies God’s future vision for the world. In his passion and exaltation, the temple is rededicated and glorified as the missional agent of ongoing creation, drawing all nations to himself.

**Jesus’ Ministry and Missional Temple Metaphors**

All of this is expressed using the metaphorical system and temple cosmology already surveyed. Jesus’s ministry is described in temple terms. The temple’s cultivational metaphors are quite prominent in John’s exposition of the Divine temple glory. Jesus offers an eternal spring that insures a person against further thirst. Jesus engages in healing that surpasses that of the current stirring of the Herodian temple waters. (chapters 5 and 9) Jesus is that “light” and “life” of the temple which comes resisting the power of darkness. He is the “light of the world” that “opens men’s eyes.” (John 9:5, 17-32) Jesus is the Vine that makes the branches fruitful. He is that presence that hovers over the chaotic waves of Galilee’s deep-- ensuring safe passage. (6:16-24) Jesus in his death renews the sacrificial system with the outpouring of blood and living water.

Structurally speaking, Jesus is that unifying hill that, when lifted up above all others, draws all men to himself. Jesus unites his followers by sharing his glory, and in his resurrection he breathes the presence of the Holy Spirit into the renewed temple with one act of performative speech. (John 20:22) Jesus feeds the multitudes in the wilderness with the storehouse of heavenly resources--the bread from on high. He is the source of abundant life. (John 6) Jesus is the visionary “ladder” or the “gate” of Heaven’s protective compound. ( John 1:51, and 10:9) As such he provides in his ascension a “dwelling place” (John 14:1) of covenantal presence in his father’s house in which people may dwell participating in Christ’s own glory as a sign of God’s rule to the nations.

**Comprehension Questions**

In Israel, the temple functioned as a place for Divine presence which patterned heavenly reality, imaged God’s ideal world, and ritually drew creation toward God’s creative ideal. Talk about ways that Jesus’ life and ministry renew these temple functions.

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List some reasons why biblical interpreters interpret John 12 as the moment when the new Temple is dedicated and glorified.

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This guide draws special attention to seven missional metaphors which express the purpose of the temple. How does Jesus exhibit 1) Living Water 2) Light 3) Temple Garden 4) Constraining the Deep 5) Unifying Agency 6) Feasting and Distributing Gifts 7) Shadow or Hiding or Dwelling Place

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### III. Imagining Ministries with Potential

Rate (in the blanks below) how much potential you feel that each of these missional practices has for you in your setting. **1** sounds exhausting **2** wish I liked the idea **3** modest potential **4** significant potential **5** generates energy

a) \_\_\_\_\_ A youth group raised money and then built the local elementary school a teachers' workroom. Their parents supervised school children while congregational parents threw an appreciation dinner for the faculty that same spring.

b) \_\_\_\_\_ A caroling group gathered at the Dallara Automobile factory and sang sacred music during the Light the Lights on Main event. The same group sang church music at a local nursing home one night a month.

Explain your rating in terms of your own inner sense of what is a meaningful rendering of Jesus' ministry. Does this ministry look like Jesus to you? Evaluate these practices also in light of the glory you perceive in Jesus, the renewed temple. What new ideas do these practices suggest to you?

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#### For Further (optional) Reading:

Israelite religion did not develop in an historical vacuum. While Israelite faith in its totality is unique, it is composed of elements and cosmological assumptions that were common to Israel's surrounding environment. Israel's architectural symbolism at its own temple was in fact executed by the Phoenician King Hiram. (1 Kings 7: 23-26)

Thus, the notion present in Exodus 25:40, namely that the tabernacle is an architectural model (*tabnit* in Hebrew or *tupos* in the LXX) of a heavenly temple, has roots stretching back as far as the Sumerian King Gudea of Lagash, who was shone a dream of a plan for the sanctuary of Ningirsu. The watercolor on page 38 is a rendition of a statue of Gudea, who as a King was considered a "Shepherd." King-Shepherd Gudea built a temple for his god—an enclosure for the King's sheep. The statue of the King (who, as High priest, imaged the god in the temple) has a container of living water that flows from his body. These streams of living water enliven the kingdom.

This may be very helpful background for understanding how Jesus's words at the Feast of Tabernacles would have been interpreted. "If anyone is thirsty let him come to me a drink" was a royal and priestly invitation where the life-giving benefits of the Royal temple were made available. Likewise, this may help us understand the way a sheep-pen has temple overtones at the Feast of Dedication. Jesus did not invent this imagery. Rather, he and his teaching embody thousands of years of Near Eastern temple assumptions.



## Discussion 5

# The Temple's Renewal in the Church

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.*

**1 Corinthians 3:16-17**

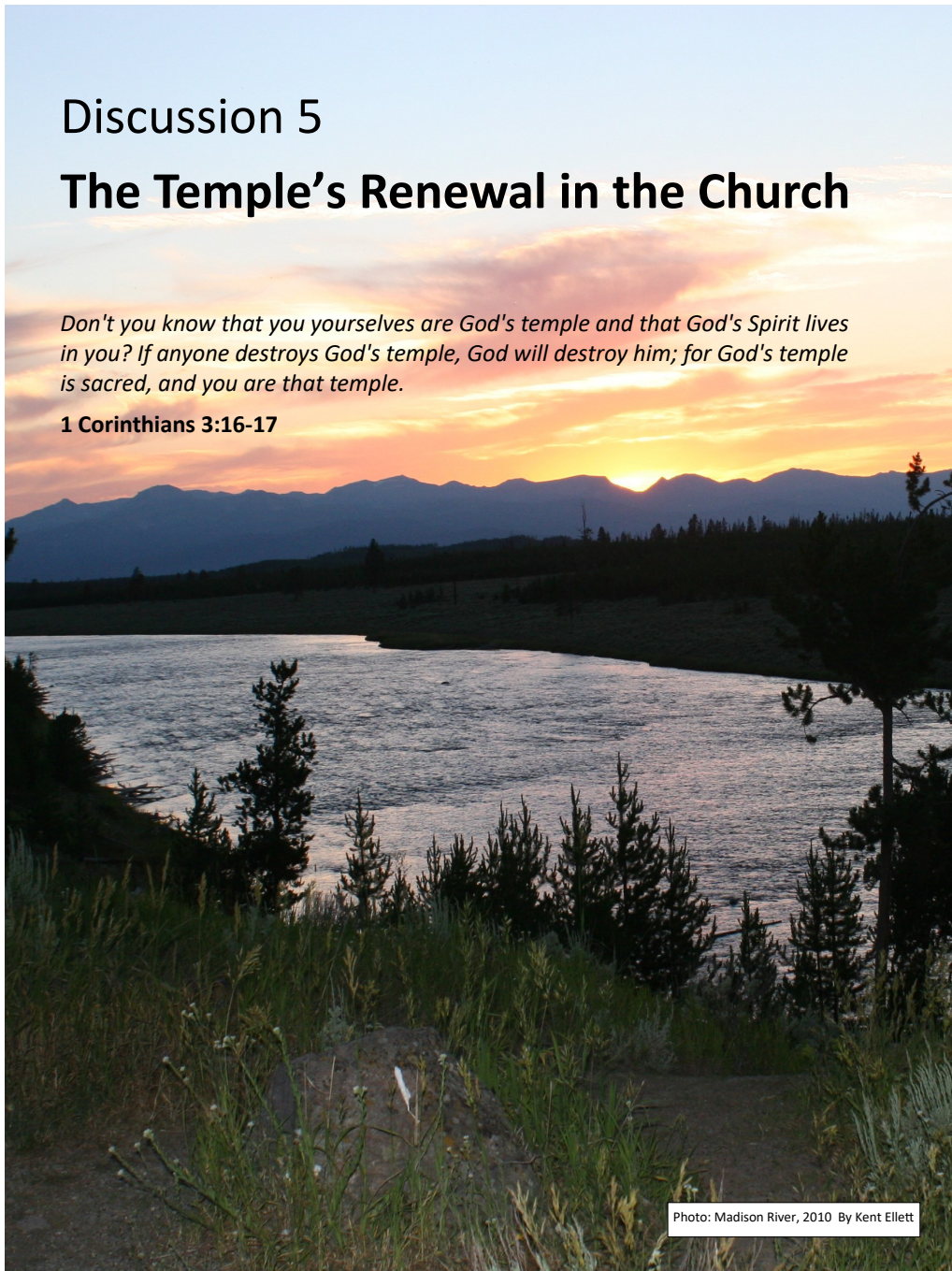
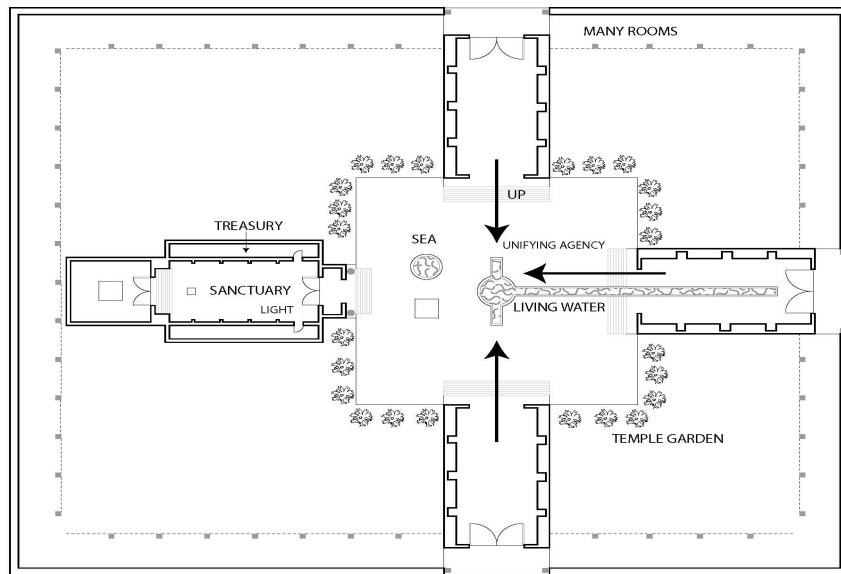


Photo: Madison River, 2010 By Kent Ellett

***And we, with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory...2 Corinthians 3:18***



***“The church is an icon of the heavenly assembly.”*** Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* IV 8.66

## Preview

1 Peter 2:4-5 says, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” In 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul says to the church: “we are the temple of God.” But wait! Have we not just seen that the early church believed that Jesus was the embodiment of temple reality? Was it not Jesus who, according to John, was a sign of God’s heavenly glory on earth—who in his incarnation was the tabernacle which again pitched its tent and made visible the glory of God’s presence within Israel? Jesus identifies himself as the temple-- the light of the world, the living water, the true vine, the gate and compound that protected God’s sheep, who would be lifted up, like Zion, drawing all men to himself. He is the preparer of little rooms within God’s House wherein intimate connection may be experienced. How did the early church transition from proclaiming Jesus as the temple to becoming the temple of God itself?

This lesson attempts to answer that question in three ways. First, it looks at the temple background necessary for understanding Jesus’ parable of the tenants. It then interprets John 17 as Jesus’ temple dedication prayer uttered over his disciples and the church. Jesus’ assertion, “I have given them the glory that you gave me” is John’s way of expressing how Jesus bestows the temple’s earthly vocation on the church. Then, finally, this lesson looks at Pauline “in Christ” language in Ephesians as a way of seeing the church as the temple of God which unifies creation.

## I. Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World

Prayerfully read 2 Corinthians 3:7-8,18. Concentrate on the words. Let them fill your imagination.

*Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? ...And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Have you ever played a sport or a game when suddenly you “were in the zone?” Have there been times when you made shot after shot in basketball because you “had a hot hand?” Have you ever started an art project that just turned out wonderful—so wonderful that you look back and are amazed that you did it? Have you watched artists stumble onto an absolute masterpiece or athletes suddenly perform under pressure at astonishingly high levels—even for them? Recount a story or two, and spend some time reflecting on what the phenomenon of being “hot” or “being in the zone” suggests. What do you think is going on? How would you relate such experiences to the church being a mysterious sign reflecting Christ’s heavenly glory which will fill the coming age?

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To what extent are you a visible and mysterious sign of heaven? To what extent is this church a sign of heaven and the coming age? Why do you think Paul thought Christian experience within the heavenly Temple was more lasting and more glorious than Moses’s own ascent up the cosmic mountain?

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What kinds of testimonies does your congregation or small group tell? What are the strong areas of your collective witness? Where do you see God active in the lives of your group members or close congregational friends?

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## II. Reclaiming the Church's Identity as the Temple of God

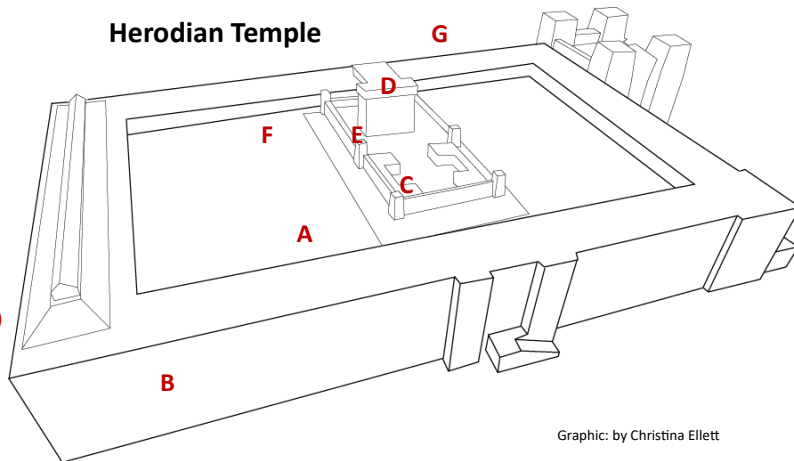
### Mark 12: The Church as the New "Vineyard" Workers

Jesus told the parable of the tenants to explain that his followers would be given the vineyard of the Lord, by which he meant the temple and its ministry. He told this story in Mark 12:1-12 during the week of his passion in the Herodian temple compound in Jerusalem. Jesus, always fond of "street theater," used the ancient motif of the temple compound being a ritual garden or vineyard. The whole architecture of the Temple is the indispensable stage backdrop for understanding his story.

*He then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. (A) He put a wall around it, (B) dug a pit for the winepress (C) and built a watch-tower. (D) Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers (priests, henceforth Tenants) (E) and went away on a journey. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of*

*the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' (F, Jesus) "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. (G, Golgotha?) "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Haven't you read this scripture: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"*

The last three verses leave little doubt that Jesus believes he is placing in the new temple the stone of the temple whom the priest/tenants or builders of the Herodian establishment had rejected. The true High Priest as an expert mason would lay into the temple the previously rejected stone—the new tenants—Jesus' followers. The crowd actually makes this point in Matthew's version (Matthew 21:40-41) Thus, Jesus believes his death would renew the temple, take it away from its current tenant cultivators, (the priests) and bestow its ongoing ministry to his followers who would fruitfully embody the temple's true mission.



### John 17: Jesus's Dedicatory Prayer

In John 17 the church inherits Jesus' temple vocation through Christ's own prayer consecrating believers as sharers in his temple-glory. This has already been anticipated throughout the Gospel. At the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus claims to be the source of the temple's living water, but promises that drinking of his fount makes it possible for believers themselves to overflow with such streams of living water. (7:38-39) John says that this is a reference to the giving of the Holy Spirit whom the resurrected Jesus confers upon his followers by an act of priestly blessing or creative, performative speech. Jesus breaths on the disciples bestowing the Spirit, saying, "as the Father had sent me I am sending you." (John 20:21)

If Jesus was sent by the Father to tabernacle among Israel so that the Divine glory might be seen, (John 1:14) then this means the church has received Christ's own similar sending to accomplish the redemption of the world. Jesus says, "My prayer is ...[that] all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one..." (John 17:20-22) Just as Jesus bestows living water on the church, he also confers the light of the temple's glory and its unifying agency which unites believers even as Father and Son are one. Participating in this unifying glory is said to be the reason that the world will believe Jesus' followers' message. This is precisely what we would expect given that the temple glory is that which draws all nations to Israel, and it was that agency that made Israel's mission to the nations believable. (1 Chron 16:24, Psalm 9:11; 96:3 and Isaiah 66:18-19)

***"I have given them  
the glory that you  
gave me,  
that they may be  
one as we are one..."***

John 17, then, may be viewed as a prayer for the church's own consecration and integration into the Divine life. Jesus begins this prayer, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son" which echoes and extends Jesus' prayer of John 12:27-28: "it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Glorify your name." It has already been argued that Jesus' prayer in John 12 is asking for heavenly glory to envelop and fill Jesus, the Renewed Temple. The statement, then, of John 17:22: "I have given them the glory that you gave me," also appears to be nothing less than Jesus' investing his glory in the new church-temple.

This interpretation can be supported in numerous ways, but the culminating reason the church is the temple is found in the culminating sentence (v 26) of Jesus' consecrating prayer: "that I myself may be in them." Thus, Christ is within the church every bit as much as Christ has already prayed that the church see Christ's glory in heaven and be

enveloped within the Triune life. (17:24) All this is consonant with the way that the tabernacle of presence is within Israel and yet God still surrounds Israel. It is also perhaps this very interpenetrating dynamic which Paul is describing when he says all races and classes of people have been joined because Christ both encompasses and indwells them all-- "Christ is all—and in all." (Col 3:11) Thus, we now turn to how Paul also perceives the church as the Temple in Jesus Christ.

## Ephesians 2: The Church Built into the Heavenly Temple

It is necessary to quote Ephesians 2:6-22 at length.

*And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

*11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)— 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

*19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Here church members are called fellow-citizens (*sumpolitai*) of God's "house." (*oikeioi tou theou*) They are seen as a structural temple as well as a dynastic and priestly family. The whole building, (*oikodomei*) or the entire temple complex, grows and is built together so as to support the holy shrine or temple, (*naos*) itself. Finally, the temple is the dwelling-place (*katoikteirion*) of God. In various ways, then, Paul draws a picture of the church as the temple.

The church became a dwelling place of God as a direct consequence (*ara* in verse 19) of Christ's reconciling work done on the cross. (2:16) Thus, in this passage, the cross is Jesus's act of remaking the temple. What has changed in the temple? The "dividing wall of hostility," which most commentators identify as the partition between the court of the nations and the more holy precincts of the Jerusalem Temple, is taken down in Jesus' renewed temple. In Christ himself, a new priesthood of one Humanity (v15) is formed which represents and integrates both Jews and the nations. The temple, by bestowing the same Spirit upon all races, makes access to the Father come through a common temple access point. (2:18)

Yet, the question then arises, "where is this remade and ethnically integrated temple?" Certainly, the Jerusalem complex was not physically renovated without a court of the Gentiles. Paul, thoroughly Jewish, expects that YHWH's throne is in the heavens. "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne!" Paul somehow sees that the dividing wall between Israel and the nations has been taken down in the heavenly temple. Israel's separate priestly vocation has given way to a heavenly sanctuary which is now fully integrated. Christ's death ushers in the reconstruction of an heavenly temple wherein Jew and Greek are together—enveloped by Christ in heaven as much as they are indwelt by Christ on earth.

**Summary:**

While Mark’s Jesus bestows the priestly ministry of the temple on his followers, and John’s Jesus prayerfully shares the glory of Temple with his followers, Paul speaks of being raised with and in Christ into a heavenly temple. When the church unites all races and overcomes ethnic divisions it is functioning as a glorious sign of the heavenly temple and the way it already points to the age to come. All races are one in Christ (*en Christo*) because they have all been built in Christ into a renewed temple in which God lives by his spirit and that functions as a sign of the integrated heavenly temple and the age to come.

**Comprehension Question:** List three ways the early church conceived of itself as receiving the identity and vocation of the Temple. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Correlation Question:** Compare or contrast your experiences of how the church points to God’s mysterious work and the way the early church considered itself as an earthly sign of the heavenly temple.

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**III. Imagining Ministries with Potential**

In light of your inner sense of calling explored in section how much potential you feel that each of these missional practices has for you in embodying the Temple realities in your setting.

**1** *sounds exhausting*   **2** *wish I liked the idea*   **3** *modest potential*   **4** *significant potential*   **5** *generates energy*

a) \_\_\_\_\_ Bob and Cindy Jones worked with the City of Indianapolis in order to make their neighborhood the recognized 500 View Neighborhood. Some of us take pride that our church enclave on Alton Street began a neighborhood association that gathers neighbors and conducts block parties and supports local businesses.

b) \_\_\_\_\_ Brenda Carlisle, Bob and Cindy Jones, and other Alton residents also started a community crime watch which meets with local police every month to discuss security issues in the 500 View neighborhood.

Evaluate these ministry practices in light of the image of the church being a sign of the world’s future glory and in light of your own sense of what works as a sign of God’s mysterious presence and power to bring people together. Do these practices have the potential to energize you? Why? Why not?

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**Questions after Group Prayer and Discernment:**

After group discussion, can you identify anything that happened to your feelings about the appropriateness of the church being involved with founding community organizations and binding neighbors together for protective purposes? How do you account for the change?

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**For Further (optional) Reading:**

**Qumran and the Renewed Temple**

Sometimes people think it strange that the church sees itself as a temple because the church is surely more than a sacred building. In fact, many parts of the church have been taught that people are the church and that the church has nothing to do with sacred space. However, Jesus lived in a time when people thought of whole cultures as participating and being a part of a Temple. Qumran, the community of Jews who most likely wrote the Dead Sea scrolls, believed that they were the new Temple because the Herodian priests were too corrupt to be God’s true servants. They write of themselves saying that they are and will be a...

“truly established, an eternal planting, a temple for Israel, and mystery!—a holy of holies for Aaron; true witnesses to justice, chosen by God’s will to atone for the land to recompense the wicked their due. They will be said to be ‘the tested wall, the precious cornerstone’ whose foundations shall neither be shaken nor swayed, a fortress...all of them knowing the Covenant of Justice and thereby offering a sweet savor. They shall be a blameless and true house in Israel, upholding the covenant of eternal statutes. They shall be an acceptable sacrifice, atoning for the land and ringing in the verdict against evil so that perversity ceases to exist.” (1QS 8.4-10 in Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*)

So, the Qumran community, very much like the later church, here self-consciously sees itself as transitioning into the renewed temple, itself. Qumran’s temple identity drove its sense of missional purpose in shaping society and creation. The community sees itself as instrumental in the dawning of the new age. As such the entire Qumran community is viewed through the lens of temple imagery. They are a temple garden—an eternal planting, the mysterious sign of Divine presence in the Holy of Holies, an unshakable protective compound holding forth the light of God’s statutes, which banishes evil and atones for the land in ongoing creation. The temple is thus thought to be renewed in the persons of the community in a way that anticipates the later Christology and ecclesiology of the church.



## **For Even Further (Optional) Reading:**

### **The Temple and the Divine Name**

*"Father, protect them by the power of your name —the name you gave me —so that they may be one as we are one."* John 17:11

Raymond Brown in his commentary on John cites Proverbs 18:10 as background for the above passage. In Proverbs "the name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and are safe." That the name is in Proverbs a place into which someone may run, is very suggestive of our interpretation of John here. Psalm 61:3-4: "For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings." Such passages depicting the protective power of the Name as a protective tower are related to Temple theology in light of 1 Kings 8:16-20. There, in the Solomonic temple dedication prayer, the temple is said to be a resting place for the Divine Name. In 1 Kings 9:3 God answers Solomon, "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever." Solomon's prayer, likewise, stands in relation to Moses's prayer —also at the tent of meeting—when he asks to see God's glory. (Exodus 33:18, 40:34-35) This is the very glory Christ wishes to offer his disciples in John 17:24. God responds to this request for glory by promising that God's "Name" will pass in front of Moses. Thus, the temple associations with the church receiving glory and the protective power of the Divine name (See also John 16:24) seem increasingly likely.

**Part 2**  
**The Architecture of the Church's Mission**

## Discussion 6

### Living Water for All Creation

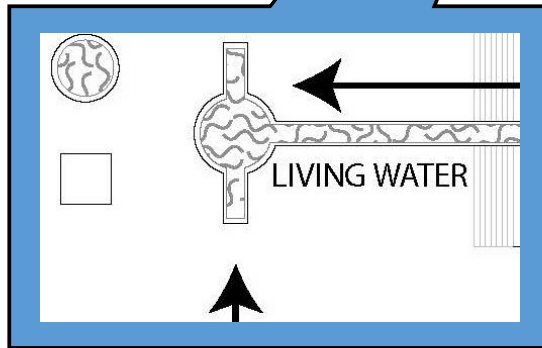
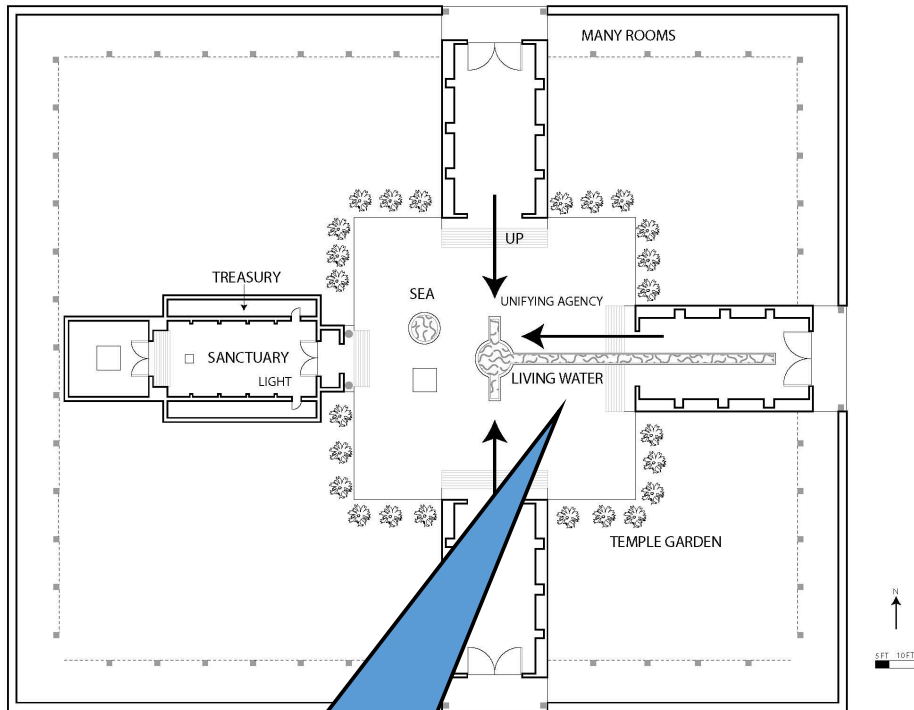
I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;  
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away  
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):  
I sha'n't be gone long.—You come too.

**Robert Frost, The Pasture**



Sketch: by Avery Silliman

*ash*



*I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.*

Revelation 21:2, 22:1-2

### For Further (Optional) Reading:

#### Lines above Tintern Abbey, 1798

William Wordsworth writes of the landscape above Tintern Abbey on the Wye River:

*"feelings of unremembered pleasure...  
An eye made quiet by the power of harmony,  
and the deep power of joy [with which]  
We see into the life of things."*

*The hills:*

*"Disturb me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused  
Whose dwelling is in the light of setting suns."*

#### Lines Above Jack's Defeat Creek, 2014

*I had never been above Tintern Abbey  
When I first walked the banks of Jack's Defeat  
Or stirred the Spring  
beneath the House  
on an abandoned Way  
that connects  
old towns and me  
with hundreds of generations  
of Indians  
and cattle in the field  
and the voice in the wind--  
flowing through the mind  
interpenetrating  
a 6 year-old, knee-deep in mud  
Happy-stuck in the mystery  
of the Hickory grove,  
of the cool caves,  
the call of the whippoorwill,  
the music in a grandfather's laugh--  
haunted by the omniscience in an aunt's wink.  
I've since been above Tintern Abbey  
But, before I ever left the County  
I'd seen Jerusalem.*



Photo: Tintern Abbey from the Devil's Pulpit 2014 by Kent Ellett

### Preview

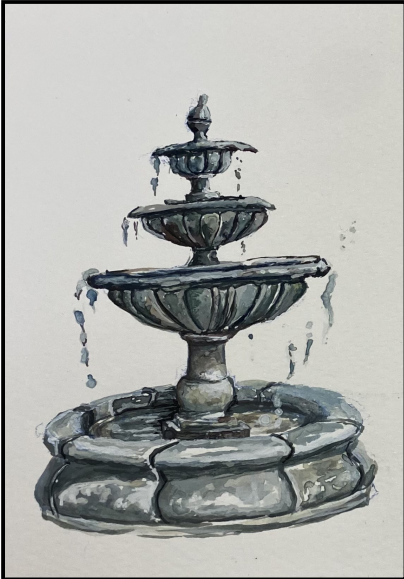
This and subsequent lessons focus on the church's mission. If the church is the renewed temple of Israel's God then any congregation's mission to the world can be understood by looking at the temple metaphors that first expressed the temple's mission in Israel and in the life, passion and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Over the next seven lessons, we will reflect on numerous metaphorical ways the church functioned as a sign and agent of God's coming reign in the world.

The temple's missional imagery often appears as a web of metaphors that are simultaneously experienced like one would visually experience the different aspects of sacred space in the temple compound. Psalm 36:7-9 is illustrative.

*How priceless is your unfailing love!  
Both high and low among men find refuge in the  
shadow of your wings.  
They feast on the abundance of your house  
you give them drink from your river of delights.  
For with you is the fountain of life;  
in your light we see light.*

The temple is a hiding place or a refuge for the vulnerable. It is a place for a worshipful and sacrificial feast; it is a repository of financial abundance; it is a fountain of life, and a source of illuminating light—all in one.

This lesson begins by focusing on the fountain of life. It starts with the history of the Gihon Spring which hearkens back to Eden. It pays particular attention to Jesus’s promise that streams of living water would flow from the church, and the discussion leads ultimately to the stream of the New Jerusalem which re-makes all creation at the climax of history. Encompassing the entire Bible, then, the image of living water calls the church to own its identity in Jesus Christ as a fertile, life-giving, healing, irrigating stream for the world.



Painting: *Living Water*, and graphics (below) by Avery Silliman

### I. Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World

Frost’s poem on the first page of this lesson invites us to pay attention to the gentle refreshing power inherent in a pasture spring. Frost invites us to walk with him into his Vermont pasture and clear the leaves out of his spring so that we can see the ripple of life that flows up from the ground of our being. Spend some time accepting Frost’s and Jesus’s invitation: “If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink.”

Recount a fun memory that involves the proximity of water. Why do you think you remember that story?

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Describe a moment involving the proximity of water that you would characterize as “restorative.” Perhaps there are ways that you drink in refreshment. How would the church facilitate that kind of rejuvenation in its ministry and life \_\_\_\_\_

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### II. Reclaiming the Temple’s World of Purpose



**Living Water** Readings: John 4:1-42, 5:1-15, 7:1-39, 9:1-41

This lesson begins with the Gihon spring which flowed from the temple mountain. This feature of the temple actually predates Solomon’s temple structure, and just as the temple is built upon the threshing floor of Araunah, (2 Sam 24:16) building the temple in the place of the Gihon spring associates the temple with very ancient

sources of fertility. In 1 Kings 1:34 Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint Solomon King at the Gihon. Hezekiah redirected the stream. So the stream is intimately connected to the sacred history of the nation.

Additionally, the Gihon was one of the headwaters of the river which flowed out of Eden to give life to the Garden. As such it is a shadow or imprint of the heavenly streams in the heavenly temple which bring life to all things. Thus, water from the temple is the true living water from God. Psalm 87:6-7 celebrates that, "The Lord will write in the register of the peoples: 'This one was born in Zion.' As they make music they will sing, 'All my fountains are in you.' " True fertility and blessing come from seeking the Name of the LORD and drinking from his fountains in his sacred precincts.

However, Isaiah records that Israel rejected the "gently flowing waters of Shiloah." This seems to be a reference to the pool from the temple spring. The result of this rejection of God's ministry is that the temple's floodgates do not hold back the chaotic and deathly Assyrian waters which sweep across Israel and Judah during the time of exile. (Isaiah 8:6)

Thus, after the destruction of Solomon's temple, renewing the ministry of vivifying waters becomes a major biblical concern. Ezekiel envisions that streams will flow outward from beneath the threshold of the renewed temple to expand, enlivening the desert, fructifying the land, providing vegetation with leaves for healing and fruit for sustenance every month. The Temple mysteriously irrigates plants which Paul might say bear fruit instantly each month--both "in season and out of season." (Ezekiel 47:1)

This simple faith in the presence of God manifesting itself in the Temple is what is behind the continuing belief in the healing powers of the temple pools in Jesus's day. The pool near the Sheep gate called Bethesda was thought to bring healing in John 5. The same could be said of the pool of Siloam in John 9. In both instances the healing powers of the Herodian Temple fail. By contrast, they are renewed and eclipsed by the ministry of Jesus, the new temple, for it is Jesus who commands a man to take up his mat and walk, and enables a man born blind to see. The healing functions of the temple are now being manifested and renewed in the new temple of Christ's body.

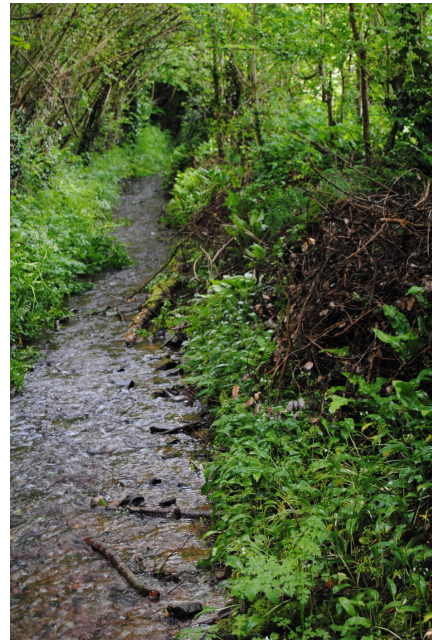


Photo by Kent Ellett

Nowhere is this theme more pronounced than in John 7 at the Feast of Tabernacles. Zechariah had envisioned a day when nations who had previously attacked Jerusalem would celebrate the final feast of Tabernacles. On that day living water would again flow from Jerusalem to irrigate all creation in Eden—like fashion. (Zechariah 14:8, 16) Thereafter, the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles involved water rituals where water was poured out at the temple anticipating the day when living water would again flow from the temple at the final and glorious Feast of Tabernacles. It was at the last and greatest day of this Feast when Jesus

appears to have interrupted the festivities saying,

*"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. (John 7:37-39)*

Jesus, thus, claims to be renewing the temple function of Living water in himself. Drinking from Christ in turn causes the believer to have a "belly from which comes a sudden flow of recreative water." (*koilias autou rhousousin houdatos zontos*) The *koilia* may refer to Christ's belly as well as to believers', and even if the temple water's overflow is intended to be flowing only from believers' emotive center, it is likely that the fountain originally came from Christ's own *koilia*. This is important because the picture of living water flowing from the belly of Christ perfectly fits the preserved images of numerous Near-Eastern Kings where their Temple's ritual water overflows from their belly or breast. Jesus' claim, then, is not of a novel kind; the imagery is very ancient, and the revolutionary consequences of claiming to be the priest-king of the Temple and the source of heavenly water would have been understood. The Johannine irony of this ritual is that when water does once more ritually pour from Christ's belly in John 19:34, it is from a cruciform altar that does cleanse and renews the world. The story of the cross is thus set within the frame of the story of the Temple and its eschatological renewal of the sacrificial system and its recreative waters.



Rendition of Gudea by Kent Ellett

John's Jesus associates the life-giving ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church with living water of the Temple. While there is no space here to explore the multitude of ways that the Spirit makes interpersonal transformations, it is important to note that the Spirit's ministry involves living water's care for the whole of creation. For, ultimately, as the New Jerusalem—the city of God—the bride of Christ—descends at the consummation of history, "the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, will flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb" to water the new earth. In the meantime the church shares God's life-giving, restorative, healing agency with all creation.

**Comprehension Question:** How may Temple theology inform our reading of Jesus' offer to the woman at the well in John 4? How does it orient us to the healing story at the pool of Bethesda in John 5? The feast of Tabernacles in John 7? The restoration of sight in John 9? And the ultimate purposes of God for all creation in Revelation 22?

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**Correlation Question:** Do any of the healings or offers to drink living water in John 4-9 seem similar to the kinds of restoration you talked about in section 1? Do you imagine restoration in the same way as John?

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### III. Imagining Ministries with Potential

Rate in the blanks below how much potential you feel that each of these missional practices has in expressing your own inner sense of purpose as well as the Bible's vision of living water renewing creation.

**1** *sounds exhausting*   **2** *wish I liked the idea*   **3** *modest potential*   **4** *significant potential*   **5** *generates energy*

a) \_\_\_\_\_ Joe Bowling works with the Englewood Community Development Corporation. This CDC has been rehabbing houses for the better part of 25 years. In recent decades they have started a company—Jefferson Electric. This company was able to hire and train workers from the church's neighborhood. In recent years Jefferson has specialized in the installation of solar energy, and members of the Englewood CDC have served on various community and city boards promoting clean energy. The church and CDC at Englewood have worked to make apartment buildings, businesses and the church buildings themselves run largely off of solar energy. While the Englewood church and CDC is comprised of members who are conservative theologically, they insist that creation care, and a fruitful economy are vital to the church's witness.

b) \_\_\_\_\_ Joe Shultz works with Bethany Christian services. Bethany works with the Foster care agencies and supports domestic adoption. Bethany trains and equips foster parents, and in the past churches have provided people who have 1) become foster parents 2) became interim foster-care givers, and 3) these licensed interim foster care givers hosted events at churches for foster children wherein foster parents were given breaks away from children.

c) \_\_\_\_\_ Exodus Refugee specializes in settling refugee families in the Indianapolis and central Indiana area. They provide interim housing, job and cultural information, and various kinds of support as immigrant families try to adjust to midwestern culture. Churches might partner with them in providing interim housing and other forms of assistance.

d) \_\_\_\_\_ The Sunday night youth group participates in city-wide picnics and parades in the summer distributing free waters which say "Grace is Free."

Explain your rating of each of these ministry ideas in terms of your own inner sense of how restorative ministry happens. Also, use the biblical imagery of living water to evaluate how much potential such ministry ideas have in your setting. Explain.

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**Questions after Group Prayer and Discernment**

Did your energy level for certain ministry ideas increase or decrease after collective prayer and discussion? Explain.

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Discussion 7

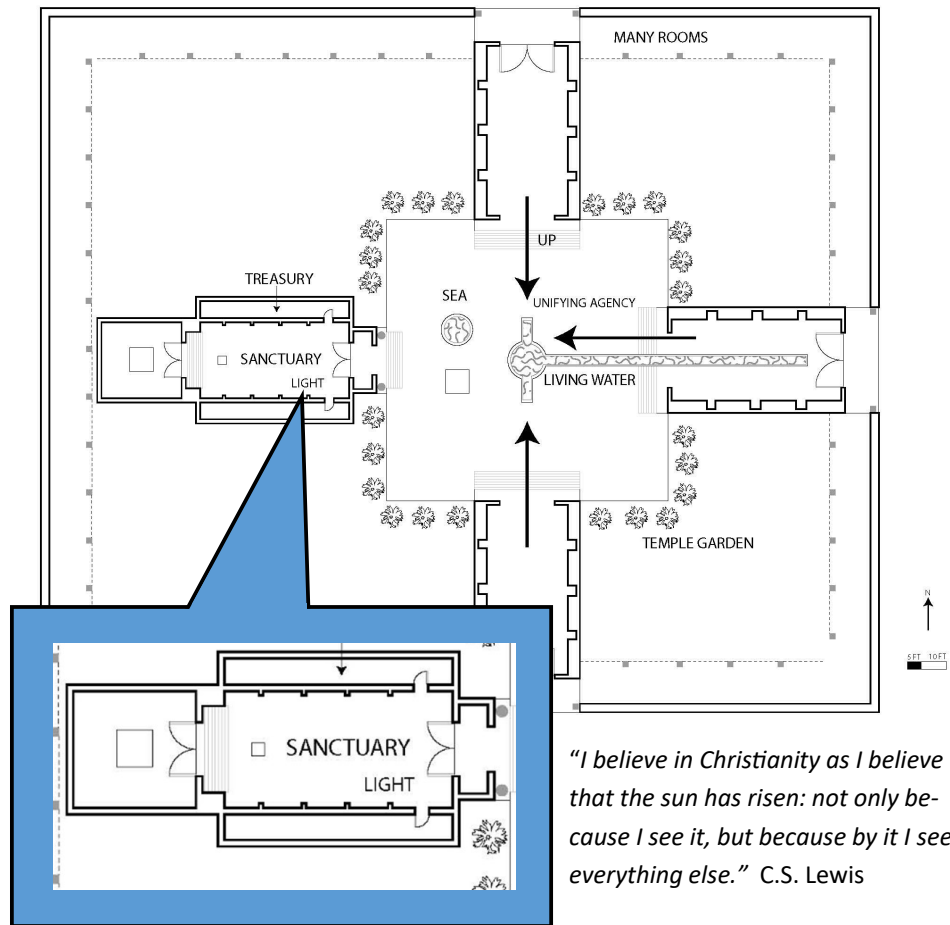
**Glory: The Progress of Light**



*Heavenly Sunlight, heavenly sunlight  
Flooding my soul with glory Divine  
Henry J. Zelle*

Painting of Temple Light by Avery Silliman

***From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth. Psalm 50:2***



*"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." C.S. Lewis*

***"the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light"***

### **Preview**

In Discussion 3, *The Temple and Israel's Mission*, we noted that the Book of Exodus ends in climax: "The cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." Thus, God's palpable glory in the forms of heavenly pillar or cloud lead Israel on its exodus through the Wilderness and makes it possible for Israel to accomplish its mission to declare God's glory among the nations. (1 Chronicles 16:24) Even while in exile Isaiah 66:19-20 promises Israel's survivors that a divine sign is to be with them so that they "will proclaim my glory among the nations." The glory of this God would "bring back all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem." Thus, the tabernacle or temple always played an

important role in Israel's priestly vocation to the world. (Exodus 19:6) Quite simply, "From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth. (Isaiah 50:2) With transcendent clarity worshippers ascending the cosmic Jerusalem would affirm with Psalm 36:9 "in your light we see light." God's light revealed at Zion gave life and light to worshipper's eyes so that they might see the beauty and wisdom of God's instruction.

Then, subsequently, in Discussion 4, *The Temple and Jesus's Mission* we saw that Christ's incarnation constituted God's predicted return to Zion. Jesus renewed in his own Body the Temple of God. God once again Tabernacled among Israel, and the Temple's glory was once again seen in Jesus. It is in this theological context that Jesus says that he is "the light of the World."

It is also within this theological world that we are likely supposed to hear Jesus's assurance to his emerging band of followers that they, too, are "the light of the world, a city on a hill that cannot be hidden." This lesson very briefly reviews the mission of the temple in Zion and in Jesus Christ. It focuses on three representative scriptures (Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 2, and 2 Corinthians 3) which express how the church, built into the heavenly Temple in Jesus Christ, exhibits the Temple's mysterious light to the world.

## I. Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World

Spend some extra time clearing your mind of every thought. Announce your intention to just be present to God. Express your desire to hear from no other Spirit other than the Spirit of Jesus. Rest your mind-- be utterly still-- knowing with the Spirit deep within you that the LORD is near. As you begin speaking with the Lord you may find it useful to use Clara H. Scott's song: "Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready my God, Thy will to see, Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit Divine!"

The artist Bev Doolittle is known for her paintings of the American West. She uses what has been called "a camouflage technique." In the painting "*The Forest Has Eyes*" the painting initially appears to be merely one of a rocky, pine-forested landscape. But after a little bit of looking multiple faces can be discerned among the rocks and trees and waterfalls of the landscape.

Using the painting, six people were asked to play a game testing who could find the most faces in the painting in 40 seconds. They then were asked to reflect on the experience of trying to find as many people as possible embedded in the landscape. **If the reader would enjoy playing along, a quick internet search will pull up the painting.** Readers could then compare their experiences to those expressed by the six people below:

Rita said that the key for helping her discovering the people in the painting was knowing, "there is supposed to be more out there than meets the eye. When someone asks you to find people in a landscape painting you know you are supposed to remain open." She said that it was important that I knew the rules of the game were rigged so that I would expect and look for discovery.

Lynne agreed, adding that "you have to expect a new integration, and accept a surprise." A person ends up looking for new structures for how the painting is really put together.

Myla said it was important for her to "blink." In other words, she did not want to see the image the way she was seeing it, so she would intentionally turn off all stimuli long enough to open her eyes and let the sensory experience hit her brain



## II. Reclaiming the Temple's World of Purpose



The temple contains lampstands. And the opening visions of the Book of Revelation envision churches in Asia Minor being represented by or embodying temple lamps. The church as the renewed temple embodies the light of God's presence and wisdom. But the ministry of the temple more generally taught and embodied God's teachings and justice.

Let's begin a study of this missional metaphor by thinking about how it worked even when Israel envisioned itself in exile and the temple wasn't functioning. Isaiah 51 is a fitting starting place. Once we remember that the temple Mount is a worldly shadow cast by the heavenly temple and that Jerusalem's temple courts were also gardens that were made according to the pattern of heavenly Eden, then we are in a position to hear Isaiah 51:3-4 as a promise that God would restore the functions of the temple.

The Lord will surely comfort Zion  
and will look with compassion on all her ruins;  
he will make her deserts like Eden,  
her wastelands like the garden of the Lord.  
Joy and gladness will be found in her,  
thanksgiving and the sound of singing.  
"Listen to me, my people;  
hear me, my nation:  
The law will go out from me;  
my justice will become a light to the nations.

Here Zion's temple ruins are promised to become a place of administration of God's justice, a garden of Eden generating fertility, a place of worship that expands the teaching and justice of God so that it ultimately becomes a "light to the nations." The temple's light is associated closely with the temple's teaching and judicial functions. Teaching bears fruit in creating just relations in the world. The temple illumines the nations.

It is important to notice that temple light has both an expansive quality that projects light into the world, but that light, like a warm fire in the winter, draws people to itself. Psalm 43:3 prays, "Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell." Light is sent forth to guide and help people awaken to new ways of seeing the world, but that light always draws people—indeed all nations— to the place where God most manifestly dwells. It is in the lifting up of Zion that all nations are gathered and it is in the lifting up of Jesus that all men are drawn to Christ's self. (Isaiah 2 and John 12)

The ecclesial (Church) temple now also should function in similar fashion. The central theological claim of Ephesians is that Jesus in his death and resurrection has built the church into the heavenly temple in Christ Jesus. In tearing down the dividing walls between Israel and the nations in the heavenly temple—God has created a pan-national temple in Jesus Christ. We have discussed this theological claim particularly in relation to the Temple's structurally unifying agency. All things on earth and in heaven are being reintegrated by means of Christ's priestly headship. But all the temple's powers of recreation are operative in those who by

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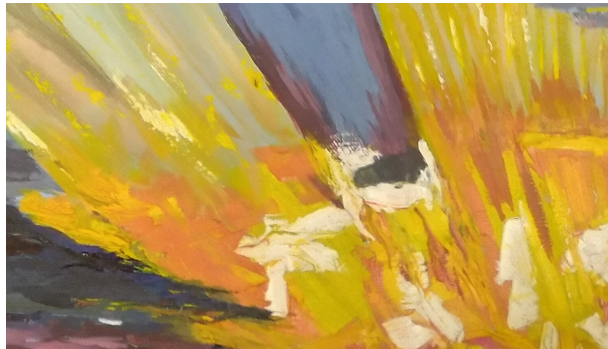
faith have been seated with Christ in the heavenly temple in the Lord. By Ephesians chapter 5 Paul turns to the temple function of light. "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (Ephesians 5:8, 14)

In places like these, the church is encouraged to develop its powers of discernment and to embody the mysterious light that has the power to expose darkness and to really awaken people from a form of unknowing sleep. The church in its patterns of speech, its love, its worshipful life, and in its deferential family relations teaches the world about new spiritual possibilities in Christ.

Very similarly, the temple language of 1 Peter calls the church to worship and exemplary lives among the pagans so that they would come to see good worlds and glorify God. "You, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood... a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."(1 Peter 2:5,9)

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul attempts to awaken the church to its glorious power for ministry in Jesus Christ. To this end, he engages in an extended reflection on Moses's ascent up the cosmic Mountain when he ascended Sinai in Exodus 34. As we have discussed in the early chapters, the tabernacle was designed to replicate or convey a pattern of Moses's Sinai experience. Thus, when Moses later entered the tabernacle and encountered the glory which he had previously experienced on Sinai, Moses ascended the cosmic Mountain to meet with God. We have studied how thereafter the people of Israel, represented by their priests, as-

ascended into the heavens when the priests entered the tabernacle so that God is present in earthly Israel and Israel is enveloped by God in the heavens. In the encounter with the Divine glory, Moses's countenance was mysteriously lit up. Paul notes that the phenomenon of Moses's countenance was something that faded over time and it was veiled from the people. The glory was hidden behind the veil of the tabernacle as well as behind Moses's face covering at Sinai.



From "creation" 2014 by Kent Ellett

Then the Apostle does something stunning: when he turns to speak of the glory of the church's ministry he places Christ in the position of God from the previous story, and he places the church in the place of Moses. 2 Cor 3:18 says, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." Paul is saying that the church as priests in the renewed temple through the Spirit ascends the cosmic mountain and is transformed by the Divine glory in a way that is unveiled and ever-increasing. As priests of the perfectly renewed temple, the church truly ascends the cosmic mountain and is transformed into icons of Christ by an unveiled and ever-deepening mystical exchange.

The primordial creative Word that first gave shape to the heavenly tabernacle (and the world )which said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has now "made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the



knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” The recreative ministry of sharing the gospel carries with it nothing short of the recreative power of God, itself.

When the church truly owns this identity and vocation as priests of the New temple, it cannot keep from sharing the gospel of Christ and doing works of justice in one kind of missionary endeavor after another. Persistence and endurance in the face of the church’s own weaknesses and in the face of opposition is at least one way this mystery is made manifest. The church just doesn’t quit. Thus, “we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed...”

**Comprehension Question:** Which language about the ministry of temple light do you prefer and why? Isaiah’s language of “justice becoming a light to the nations?” Or is it the language of Psalm 43:3 and 2 Corinthians 3:18—“bring me to your holy mountain?” Or that of Ephesians 5-- Light “waking a sleeper that he might rise from the dead?” Peter’s concept of “living stones declaring the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light?” Or is it 2 Corinthians 4 —the church being spoken into a new existence—Let light shine out of darkness? Why are you more comfortable with one form of speech over another? What accounts for your likes?

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**Correlation Question:** Make an effort to use the biblical light to explain what was happening to you as you made new discoveries and came to see the world in a different way in the previous section. Theologically speaking, what do you think was happening when something shed new light on your life?

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### III. Imagining Ministries with Potential

The cash value of this temple language is that it can infuse the church’s missional teaching ministries with cosmic significance and an individual sense of purpose. Given your responses in section I and your understanding of the temple imagery studied in section II, rate how much potential you feel that each of these missional practices has for embodying the light of the Temple in your setting.

1 sounds exhausting 2 wish I liked the idea 3 modest potential 4 significant potential 5 generates energy

a) \_\_\_\_\_ Rosa Ortiz runs a before and after-school program called *Enriched After School Program*. Rosa and her helpers care for and teach children, providing weekly biblical instruction, reading assistance, reading times, homework help, recreational opportunities, health and wellness sessions, foreign language and ASL lessons, art lessons, and other forms of enrichment. Rosa says that she feels she is ministering God’s light not just to the children in the program but to their parents. “I model ways of handling problems and change the way they see the world. One of the most powerful things that I do is just pray for students. Over and again it seems to calm them down. Rosa says I was praying recently that I just accept my own sense of ownership of God’s mission. I am not called to do light-like things: I am called to really trust that I am the light of the world. When you in faith own that, it becomes part of you.”

b) \_\_\_\_\_ People regularly volunteer at *Enriched* by reading stories, telling bible stories, sharing hobbies, teaching art, language etc. Those who volunteer often meet and visit with parents and strike up conversations with community families about the challenges they face raising children.

c) \_\_\_\_\_ church members take a picture of a student at *Enriched*. That picture also has a list of the child’s hobbies and interests. Church members agree to write the student and pray for them and their parents over the course of a semester.

Is it possible for you to explain the reason for your energy level for the kinds of community ministry options presented above? How do each of them fit with your own personal images of awakening or discovery? How do they conform to Biblical imagery?

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What other ideas for collective church witness does the imagery of being light suggest to you? Do Rosa's practices suggest other ways of making relationships and partnering with others to be justice and awakening light to and with others in the wider community?

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**Questions after Group Prayer and Discernment**

Did your energy level for any ministry option rise or fall after communal prayer and discussion? Do you attribute that change to the leading of the Holy Spirit or to some other factor? How excited do you get about other people's excitement? To what degree are your interests just about being in relationships with passionate others? How important to you is it that ministry be tailored to your interests? Or are your interests shaped by your close associations?

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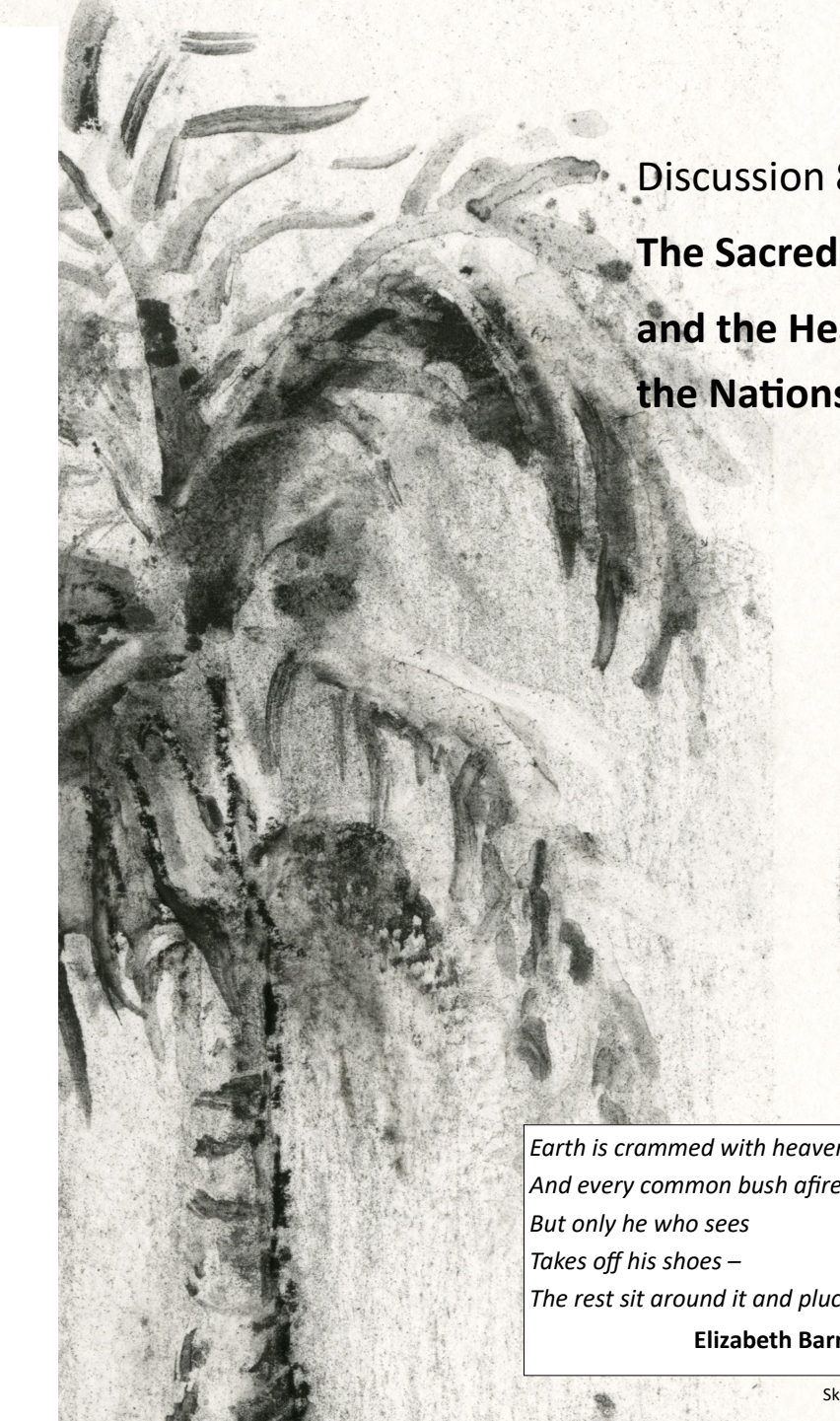
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Discussion 8

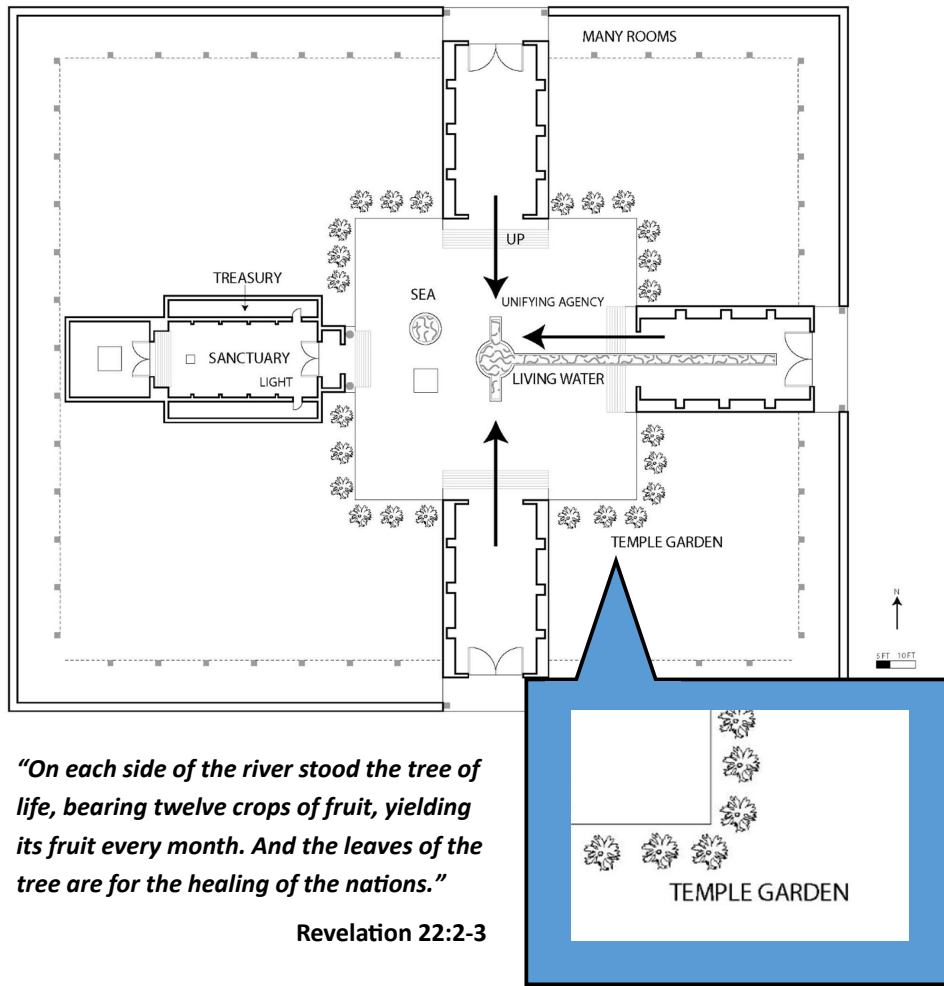
**The Sacred Garden  
and the Healing of  
the Nations**

*Earth is crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees  
Takes off his shoes –  
The rest sit around it and pluck blackberries.*

**Elizabeth Barrett Browning**

Sketch by Avery Silliman

***"For you are God's Field, God's house..." 1 Corinthians 3:9***



***"On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."***

**Revelation 22:2-3**

*"When you're in the presence of the giant sequoias, you can't help but recognize that you are a part of something that is way beyond whatever it is you envision this world to be. You can't stand there all alone without understanding that there is a power in the world that is far greater than you'll ever express...and that you are connected to that power—it penetrates all of us, and where one understands that, it improves your relationship with your fellow man because he has the same access. He's your brother."*

**George Hartzog, head of the National Park Service 1964-72**

## Preview

George Hartzog's experience of transcendent power in nature and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's famous lines reflecting on Moses' experience atop Mount Sinai both insist that earth is "crammed with heaven." Creation unmistakably witnesses to what we have been describing as the interpenetration of heaven and earth. The idealized version of creation mapped out in heaven permeates the world and points the observant toward this throbbing mystery. We may praise Browning's poetic sensibility to this, and we may share something of her disappointment that so many people remain insensible to it. They pick blackberries without noticing the Transcendent which not only is crammed into the world but envelops it.

One wonders, however, how Browning might write about pokeberries. They're poisonous. A person can kill himself trying to eat the wrong kind of wild mushrooms. There may be a sense in which "every common bush is afire with God," but some bushes--various forms of ivy, for instance--primarily burn by giving others terrifying rashes.

Perhaps it is for such reasons that the Bible distinguishes between sacred and common bushes. And it is a holy, special bush that Moses sees on the sacred Mountain. It involves a fire that needs no combustible fuel source. It burns not by consuming another source but through the power of its self--originating life. It truly is a rather special national bush of Israel that can be put through the fire of exile and not be burned up.

In this discussion, we turn our attention to the especially sacred trees in the garden of God. The Tree of Life in Eden was a shadow-pattern of Revelation's Tree of Life in the heavenly Paradise which is intended for the healing of creation. In between the bookends of this story about the temple's sacred garden--between Genesis and Revelation-- we will visit how Jesus renewed the sacred garden in himself and grafted the church into the temple's sacred garden, bringing healing and abundant fruit to all the world.

## I. Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World

Before having fun with the following exercise, think of a place where you might go to regain your energy. Think of a place that helps provide solace, simplicity and clarity as you seek direction. Imaginatively place yourself there, and then invite Christ to heal and inspire healing. Speak to God and direct your attention to him from your most inward place. "Praise the Lord, O my soul." Ps 104:35

Laugh with these three bright ladies who constructed this tall tale about the ways they think of healing.

Indy car driver Rocky Racer suffered a number of injuries after his near-fatal accident in the 2030 Indy 500. Rushed to the trauma ward, he was in a coma for weeks after the accident, and so the occupational therapists needed to work with him for an extended period. Ongoing physical therapy proved to be as painful as it was effective. 18 months after the accident he began driving again, but he seemed to have lost something of his mental edge. He went to a sport's psychologist in order to regain his confidence, but as time went on, it became clear that his career was likely over.

The loss of identity (no longer a competitive driver) was actually harder to cope with than the physical stiffness which remained. Rocky began to drink heavily; he developed diabetes and moderate hypertension-- conditions that marriage counseling did not help. His wife, a dietician and osteopath who simply refused to give up on the marriage, encouraged her husband to take an integrated approach to his healing and recovery. Exercise, diet, reconnecting with family-- long neglected during Rocky's racing years-- and some regular participation in a 12-step group were all part of Rocky's rocky recovery plan. In the end, he and his wife found healing getting close to nature, moving to a small farm in Tennessee and growing peaches.

What kinds of stock stories do you tell about how people are healed? How would you add to the story of Rocky Racer?

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How do those stock stories intersect with your personal experience of healing?

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What kind of ministries have helped in your own healing process? How have you fruitfully helped other people heal? What do those kinds of healing look like in a congregation like yours?

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## II. Reclaiming the Temple's World of Purpose



### A Garden of Healing and Abundance

The architecture of Near Eastern temples retained the mythos of a temple garden even when the temple areas became highly urban. The inner walls of the Jerusalem Temple were adorned with palm trees and open flowers which pattern the Heavenly Eden or Paradise of God, and the external façade of the temple included plantings with fertility symbols on and above the capitals. (capitals are the decorative top part of columns. 1 Kings 6:29; 1 Kings 7:15-22) Temple courtyards are, thus, considered ritual gardens, fields or vineyards. On the holy hill of the compound was a kingdom tree (or trees) which Near-Eastern priest-kings would tend as a symbol of all their duties in the priestly cult. The fate of national morality and agriculture and over-all fertility depended on the ritual purity of the Kings—they needed to tend the Kingdom tree faithfully.

As we have seen, this architecture and mythical framework is assumed in Israel. So, when Judah is about to be exiled, Isaiah sings a lament about the fruitless national vineyard of the Lord. God promises to take away the protective hedge around Judah's temple compound, and Zion will not be cultivated so that briars and thorns choke out the fertility of the sacred space. (Isaiah 5:1-7) The exile is seen as temple unfaithfulness. Because the temple garden represents the nation—the nation suffers the fate of its place of infertile

religious observance. Likewise, the restoration of the nation would involve the renewal of the temple and the fertility of the trees watered by the Temple. (Ezekiel 47:12)

Jesus' parables are not free-standing agricultural metaphors; the imagery for the parables of the sower and the tenants, for example, comes directly from the lament over the infertility of the national garden in Isaiah 5. It is this temple world-view that can make sense out of Jesus' judgment on the tree on the side of the temple mount in Mark 11. He is judging the old temple garden which he is renewing in himself.

Understanding the narrative of the Temple and the need to renew the Temple's cultivation of abundant life also provides the necessary background for grasping the significance of Jesus's teaching in John 15:1. There Jesus insists, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." Father and Son in their interpenetrating life are renewing the national planting in the courts of God. Critical for understanding the identity of the church, Jesus says that his followers are branches of the vine that gives life and abundance.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:5-8)

Of course, Jesus' teaching makes good sense even if he were merely plucking an agricultural metaphor out of thin air, but close attention to the intertextual resonances in John makes it convincing that Jesus is talking about his renewing the temple garden in himself. The repeated use of the verb to remain or abide (*meno*) in John 15 echoes the use of that word in John 14:1 where Jesus promises to prepare many rooms or dwelling or abiding places (*monei*) in the heavenly temple. The reference to the vine and the Divine gardener in 15:1 also anticipates the next use of "gardener" in John 20:15.

It is, thus, likely no coincidence that when the resurrected Jesus appears to Mary she takes him to be a "gardener." This is one of many examples of Johannine irony or double entendre, for, at the climactic moment when Jesus utters Mary's name, she knows she is being personally addressed by the Divine. The deep feeling experienced when Jesus had previously called her by name gushes forth from her recesses so that she now perceives Jesus as no ordinary gardener. Here is the Second Adam, Gardener of the heavenly temple. Thus, with her own name re-sounding on the Divine tongue, her unmistakable memories of when she had been cultivated by Divine Love resurface, and she recognizes the heavenly Cultivator of life—the Gardener—her teacher—with whom she is speaking.

Such interpretations can't be proved when we only look at only one text by itself. It is necessary is to hear the poetic resonances between texts and to acknowledge the wider metaphorical system in which the poetic images have meaning. What is being affirmed in John 15 is that the church is abiding in and participating in Heaven's mysterious power to create abundant life and fruitfulness.

Paul, too, uses the image of the church being within the Kingdom tree when he insists that Gentiles have been "grafted into" the sacred tree of the heavenly temple. (Romans 11:17-18) Just as the dividing wall of hostility between nations has been structurally removed so that all nations are built into the heavenly temple in Christ, so also all nations have been grafted into Israel's Kingdom tree. In another context, Paul insists that his whole mission team—as God's fellow workers—are cultivating the church at Corinth as "God's field,



God's house." (1 Corinthians 3:9) For Paul the temple always maintains both agrarian and structural missions, and that is why he prays that the church be both "rooted and established" in Christ so that it may know how wide and high and deep (temple dimensions. See Zechariah 2:2) is Christ's love. (Ephesians 3:14-19)

Perhaps the most well-known of the temple garden images occurs in Revelation 22:1-5 where John describes the New Jerusalem—the church and all those gathered within the Heavenly Jerusalem coming down to encompass the whole world. "On both sides of the river stood the tree of Life...yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." As the temple makes the whole world holy, there ceases to be a temple because the temple's mission to spread its fertility and healing to all creation is complete. There is no distinction between sacred and profane space, for all that is profane, infertile, sick, diseased, or dying is healed by the temple's recreative power. The whole world has become the temple's healing garden of God. The whole world now embodies what the temple has mapped all along.

The church integrated into Jesus, the Vine, thus, functions as a healing garden for all nations. It participates in the fruitful and abundant life that is intended to bear witness to and offer fruitful, healing abundance in the world.

**Comprehension Question:** Take a stab at this one. In Isaiah 5:7 the Prophet says, "The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight." Paul insists that his mission team--as God's fellow workers--are cultivating the Corinthians as "God's field, God's house." (1 Corinthians 3:9) How are these Biblical writers depicting servants of the Kingdom? How does Temple theology shed light on these verses?

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**Correlation Questions:** Spend some time imagining yourself as offshoots or branches of Jesus the vine. Have you ever been integrated into or felt plugged into something in a similar way? When and how? Is there any sense in which you have experienced yourself as pruned or fertilized in a ministry?

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C. Austin Miles imagined himself as Mary encountering Jesus the Gardener on the first day of resurrection. "I come to the garden alone," he writes. He imagines himself with all of Mary's hurts and fears. Then Miles writes, "And the voice I hear falling on my ear the son of God discloses." Has anyone ever spoken to you in a way that provided healing or an assurance of Christ's presence? What happened?

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### III. Imagining Ministries with Potential

Rate how much potential you feel that each of these missional practices has in embodying the mystery of the temple garden in your setting.

**1** *sounds exhausting*   **2** *wish I liked the idea*   **3** *modest potential*   **4** *significant potential*   **5** *generates energy*

a) \_\_\_\_\_ A nurse in one congregation suggested that her congregation work with a local hospital's natal care unit. In their state families who lose babies after 20 weeks of pregnancy must bury the child. This often comes as a surprise expense on top of other expenses. The nurse suggested an emergency fund to help such families. (in this setting it was on average six families per year) She suggested offering a variety of care packages. She suggested that the congregation offer a free memorial service, funeral dinner and have church members to prayerfully send cards on important anniversaries of the death of the baby afterward.

b) \_\_\_\_\_ Ron Greiner leads Mission Indy, a non-profit that works with churches and community organizations in serving the community. Churches typically lend youth groups who go through an intensive week of study while helping other churches and community organizations do community work. Ron insists the key to this work is to listen to what his ministry partners say their needs are. The projects students from outlying churches do take their shape from community organizations who often need lots cleaned up, elderly people's houses worked on, etc. Much of what the students do is related to creation care—trash removal, planting flowers, pulling briars, painting, etc.

c) \_\_\_\_\_ One church member decided that she wanted to do something about her families problems with diabetes. She made contacts with a local osteopath, a hospital dietician, and a local physical trainer asking them to talk to her preschool program. She also scheduled retreat days where the public (especially parents from the preschool and members of her congregation) came to a retreat day where there were games, free screenings, information stations about local resources, cooking demonstrations, short presentations about holistic health, as well as free fitness and training sessions

Explain your ratings in light of your reflections about your inner images of healing in section I. and the Biblical images of abundance and healing in section II. Do these potential practices spark ideas for other practices of community renewal in our setting?

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**Reflections After Group Prayer and Discernment**

How do the images of the temple garden affect the group's understanding of the nature of the church and its mission?

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Did you're your energy level or sense of a particular ministry proposal's potential rise or fall after group engagement? Did you interpret that change as the leading of the Spirit in the group's midst or to some other factor? Explain.

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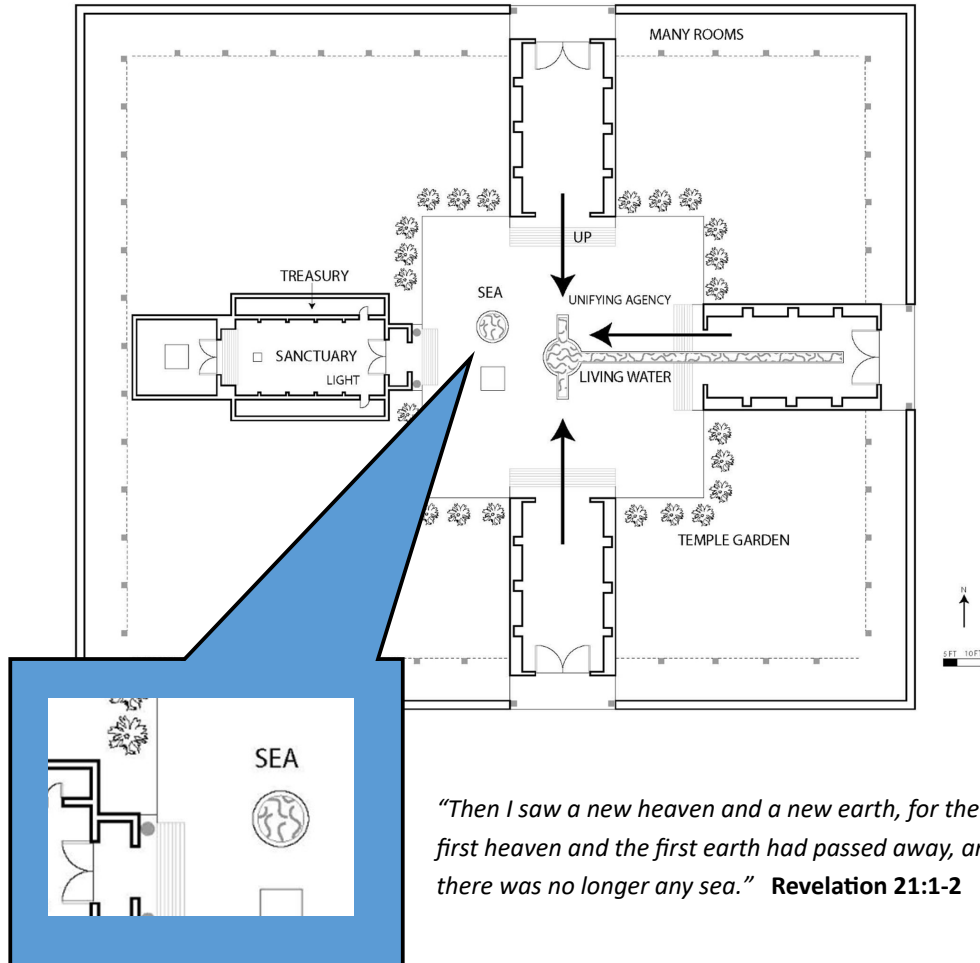
Discussion 9

**Cult and Creation:  
Worship that Matters to the World**



Painting of the Constrained Sea by Avery Silliman

*“The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth.”* Revelation 8:4-5



*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.”* Revelation 21:1-2

*“The prayers of the saints and the fire of God move the whole course of the world. They are the most potent disturbing, revolutionary and terrifying powers that the world knows—all history moves at the impulse of prayer.”*

**T.F. Torrence**

## Preview

The temple's ministry of constraining the sea as well as Christ's mission in silencing the chaotic waters is conferred upon the church. While the language for the ministry of the church is at times different than the language of the Levitical cult, the church through its temple worship still retains the same capacity to bless others, to intercede, diffuse conflict, and plunge evil into the sea. The church, built into Jesus Christ, still speaks alternative realities into existence for the good of the wider community.

Because the church has come to Jesus, the "Living Stone" of the temple, the church is in contact with the source of spiritual power which enables Christian witness to succeed. The church is comprised of living stones built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood in Jesus. Christ is still a "stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall," and being built into his mysterious house, the church is able to "declare the praises of him who called [people] out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:4-9) This temple worship is not merely for building up the church. The church's edifying liturgy is both a sign of and a tool that God uses to transform the world.

This lesson is focused on the temple containing the sea. It is about how the church's prayer and worship help sustain the church and the wider community. Taking the promise of Jesus in Mark 11 seriously, the church can grow in owning its capacity to engage in priestly performative speech which really heals the sick, reconciles belligerent parties, contains the spiraling and reactive consequences of evil, calling down judgment and blessing from on high.

## I. Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World

Melva Ann was not expected to live after her auto accident, but after her congregational Elders anointed her with oil and the church prayed for her healing she amazed doctors by walking out of the hospital in days. Stories such as this have not always been told in some churches. Because prayer is mysterious, and the church often experiences great disappointment in prayer, some church cultures simply do not expect to experience the reality of the spiritual world with any degree of immediacy. Then, when church members do, they often come to their ministers seeking reassurance that they are not crazy. Some of the more dramatic experiences, tend to come as special graces of comfort in the middle of trauma or loss. Other experiences seem to happen in the middle of spiritual battles or when someone is struggling with accepting a call to some form of service. When, where, or why people more palpably encounter the spiritual world remains a mystery, but this lesson seeks to assure the church that the church's spiritual resources to "overcome the world" are most real.

Another reason these stories of the church dramatically changing communities do not surface is that sometimes the church isn't experiencing dramatic missional breakthroughs. There may be all kinds of reasons for this, but one of them may be that something dramatic is not necessary. Lynne says that her ministry as a mother is more often like playing a weary and frustrating game of Whack-a-mole where she keeps whacking the heads of moles as they perpetually surface in the yard of her life. Ministry is often patiently listening and praying with her two daughters individually when they are in conflict time and again.



## II. Reclaiming the Temple's World of Purpose



### Containing Chaos: The Church's Worshipful Structuring of the World

In Mark 11, as Jesus ascends the Hill of Zion towards the temple courts, Peter notices that the fig tree, which Jesus had previously cursed, has withered. If this tree were just a random ecological specimen, Jesus' judgment would surely have been capricious. No arborist would destroy a tree for failing to bear fruit when fruit was out of season. Of course, the key to understanding Jesus' ritual judgment on the tree is to understand that the tree is not of the generic sort. The tree is serving a ritual and representative function in Israel. Throughout the ancient Near East Royal and priestly leaders were to worshipfully cultivate national trees within their respective Temple compounds so as to maintain their nation's fertility. (see Psalm 104:16, Ezekiel 31:8) Thus, Jesus is cursing a fruitless tree which represents the National temple and its malfunctioning cult. Jesus' expectation of perpetual fruitfulness stems from the prophets who insisted that when the temple would be renewed the sacred trees on the slopes of Zion would be irrigated by living water flowing from the temple Mount. The trees...

"will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing." (Ezekiel 47:12)

Thus, just as Jesus overturns the temple treasury tables because they fail to invest in the poor, Jesus' judgment on the tree stems from the fact that the national temple garden and its cult is failing the test of ecological fruitfulness, healing, and renewal. What is perpetually in view in the later chapters of Mark is this disfunction of all aspects of Zion's Hill.

Thus, when Jesus responds to Peter's observation about the fig tree he says, "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him." (Mark 11:23)

Jesus is again not talking about the future church's prayer being able to bulldoze any idiosyncratic hill, but he is talking specifically about neutralizing Zion's corrupt hill. He is talking about his disciples' prayer being capable of casting the entire corrupt priestly establishment into the very chaotic sea which it is supposed to contain. As Jesus cast the legion of demons within the Gadarene swine into the sea, the church may restrain evil. In mentioning the "sea," Jesus is not worried about transporting rock into the valley of Galilee. He is insisting that if the Herodian temple does not ritually cleanse and contain the forces of chaos traditionally depicted in the bronze S-E-A, then the church as the renewed temple in Jesus Christ would be empowered to prayerfully cast creation into God's purifying containment system. The power of priestly performative speech—is being renewed in the church's prayerful power to command and restrain evil.



Sacred Tree, Assyrian Gallery, British Museum. by Kent Ellett



This very significant continuity between the Old Testament temple liturgy and the worship of the church is perhaps most easily seen with regard to the church's song service. The theology of song offered at the climax of the church's first hymnal—the Psalms—contradicts the notion that the church's Sunday prayers and worship are not doing practical good in the community. Temple theology insists that the most important thing that the Temple does is facilitate prayer and worship. The "performative speech acts" in the climactic Psalms are acts that actually enact the thing verbalized in the world.

Psalm 148 is a temple liturgy that celebrates the authority of Israel, mystically present in Zion, to convene all heaven and earth, with a gracious power that can exhort heavenly beings. Singing the Psalm convenes the earth and sea—exhorting young and old to join in the concerted harmony found in the Temple's praise of Israel's God. Special attention should be paid to verse 14. "[God] has raised up for his people a horn (of authority), the praise of all his saints." Eric Zenger writes, "That horn includes the authority of worshippers to praise in such a way that creates community, advances harmony, leads to the perfection of creation and history." All this is "a special task given to Israel."

Psalm 149:6 Extends the idea further: the cause of justice is advanced in song:

"May the praise of God be in their (Israel's worshippers) mouths be as a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints."

Zenger comments: "thus Psalm 149 presents a summary of the theology of Zion, but now with a focus on the children of Zion" and their worshipful power for accomplishing royal justice. Psalm 150 also exercises liturgical authority in singing what we have called performative speech. The song commands all creation to align itself in praise of the cosmic center. The Psalter, thus, ends with a final act of the Temple's performative blessing which creates harmony and order in the universe: "let all breath praise the Lord."

The Apostle James roots the church's effectiveness in prayer in the phenomenon present in Elijah's life where he seems to have been able to turn on and off the floodgates of the Temple stopping and bringing rain. While James' concern is primarily about intercessory prayer within the life of Christian congregations, the fact that most churches habitually collect prayer requests from members of the community suggests that at least at one point these groups believed that the church's intercessions healed and helped the wider community. (James 5:13-19)

Nowhere is this concern about the ecclesial Temple's worship (and its ongoing shaping of creation) more prominent than in the book of Revelation. Jesus' earthly renewal of the Temple's system of sacrificial offering on Golgotha mirrors the offering made within the cosmic temple. (Hebrews 9:24-26) As John's ascent into the heavenly Temple is complete, he witnesses the celebration over the renewal of the heavenly sacrificial system. The Lamb by his self-offering has made it possible for the previously sealed heavenly reading to begin to take place. Then, as the heavenly Temple service progresses, it becomes clear that earthly worship reaches heaven and that heavenly liturgy reaches earth. Revelation 8:4-5 will have to serve as a brief illustration of this interpenetration of the earthly and heavenly Temple worship: "The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth."

Here, earthly worship ascends as incense to participate in the heavenly Temple’s liturgical action which ministers saving, fiery judgment upon the earth. The church-Temple mirrors and participates in the heavenly cosmic map toward which heaven’s worship moves all things. It is for this reason that T.F Torrence commented on Revelation 8 as follows:

“The prayers of the saints and the fire of God move the whole course of the world. They are the most potent, disturbing, revolutionary, and terrifying powers that the world knows—all history moves at the impulse of prayer.”

**Comprehension Question:** Mark 11, Psalm 148-150, and Revelation 8 all point to the power of prayer to shape the world and the church’s mission in recreation. Explain what each of these passages has to do with the narrative of the God’s temple.

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**Correlation Question:** How do you relate your before mentioned memories of prayer and worship with texts like Mark 11, the climactic Psalms, James 5 or Revelation 8? \_\_\_\_\_

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### III. Imagining Ministries with Potential

In light of your experiences in prayer and in light of the Temple’s imagery of constraining the Sea, rate how much potential you feel that each of these missional practices has for you in your setting.

**1** sounds exhausting **2** wish I liked the idea **3** modest potential **4** significant potential **5** generates energy

Rating: \_\_\_\_\_ A Mennonite Church in Boulder Colorado began a Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) because it believes crime is primarily a violation of people and trust within a community, not just a violation of the law. VORP recognizes that wrongdoing and conflict can provide an opportunity to accept accountability and repair harm. VORP provides an invitation and process for achieving justice by reconciling and restoring community relationships. With the assistance of a trained mediator, the victim is able to tell the offender about the crime’s physical, emotional, and financial impact; to receive answers to lingering



### Questions after Group Prayer and Discernment

Did your energy level or sense of a ministry's potential rise or fall after group engagement? Did your enthusiasm rise or fall in accordance with the reactions of group members? How so? Did you interpret that change as the leading of the Spirit in the group's midst or to some other factor? Explain.

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### For Further (optional) Reading:

During the Reformation fight over whether the Lord's Supper was an actual participation in the Body of Christ, John Calvin developed the doctrine that communion was indeed a participation in the actual body of Christ. However, unlike Catholic and to some extent Lutheran doctrines which relied on philosophical concepts to explain how a communion wafer might change into or be together with the substance of Christ's body, Calvin argued in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that the sign of the bread spiritually transported the believer into the heavens where Christ's body was. It was thus, there, in the heavenly sanctuary where the believer mystically shared in the presence of Christ and was a participant in his body.

This, of course, resounded certain Old Testament and intertestamental themes which emphasized how the pilgrimage up Jerusalem's hill could usher a believer into a transcendent ascent up the cosmic mountain so as to be surrounded by the actual presence and power of God. However, the doctrine was not well developed, and its purpose was largely dogmatic in that it provided a way to affirm that the bread of communion did lead to real communion in the resurrected body of Christ without resorting to theories that seemed rather fanciful to many in the Reformed tradition.

But understanding holy communion as a means of spiritual ascent had enormous spiritual and devotional potential which was later developed by Robert Richardson. In the most important book on Sacramental theology in the history of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Richardson offers invitations to come to the Table which articulate the view that God, in his heavenly temple, blesses the world, communing with his people in Christ. Jesus' body—the church—comprises the renewed temple—that place where heaven and earth meet—so that the assembled congregation forms a sanctuary or tabernacle of God's presence. This earthly sanctuary, however, has its origin and counterpart in the heavens. So, while it is true that these communion meditations were offered in an earthly chapel, the real sanctuary into which believers are ushered by communing in the temple-body of Christ, is in the heavens, "unmade by human hands."

Richardson's devotions point to and are experienced in the "unseen world." In short, Richardson believes Christians at the Lord's Table are called up into a heavenly experience of union with Christ. "It is here," (in the heavens) Richardson writes again and again, that the mysterious transformation of Christian life takes place. Citing Psalm 50:2, "*From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth,*" Richardson develops the temple faith that the church in holy communion is filled with transcendent and moral light within the heavenly sanctuary.

For Richardson, Holy Communion becomes a portal into the Heavenly temple's engine for mission. To commune in the sanctuary is to be bathed in the missional light of the temple. "It is from the mount of his holiness, from Zion the joy of earth, that he sends forth the light of life." "How aggressive is light!" Richardson exclaims. It "exposes secret machinations," "opens prison doors, breaks the chain of the captive, and replaces the silence and the desolation of death with song." It is the Light of heavenly Zion that "puts to flight the hosts of darkness." It ends "unkind dissensions," "concentrates resources," and it is here within these sacred precincts [of the heavenly temple] that we realize that divine spiritual unity...and eternal ties which bind us to each other."

Such sacramental theology is emphatically missional. It points always to the source of energy and power for mission. Thus, conceived, Eucharistic liturgy is intended to ground the church in the temple's missional energy, commissioning communicants to be the "light of the world" from the "City on the hill." While, this excursus might be equally fitting in the previous chapter about light as a temple metaphor, it is placed in this chapter because it emphasizes how the church's worship has a missional function and missional consequences for resisting evil and bringing creation together. Having communed with the risen Savior in his "sacred precincts," Richardson, commissions his fellow communicants to leave with missional confidence: "Thus, it is from the heights of Zion we must go forth...in compact (unified) array, aggressive, invincible and victorious, to scatter the legions of darkness and fill the earth with the glory of the Lord."

Discussion 10

**The Temple's Structural Unification of All Things**

Reading: Acts 2:1-21



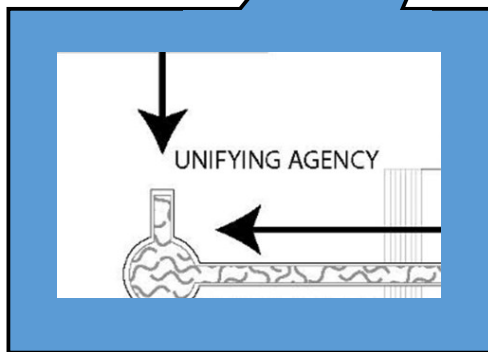
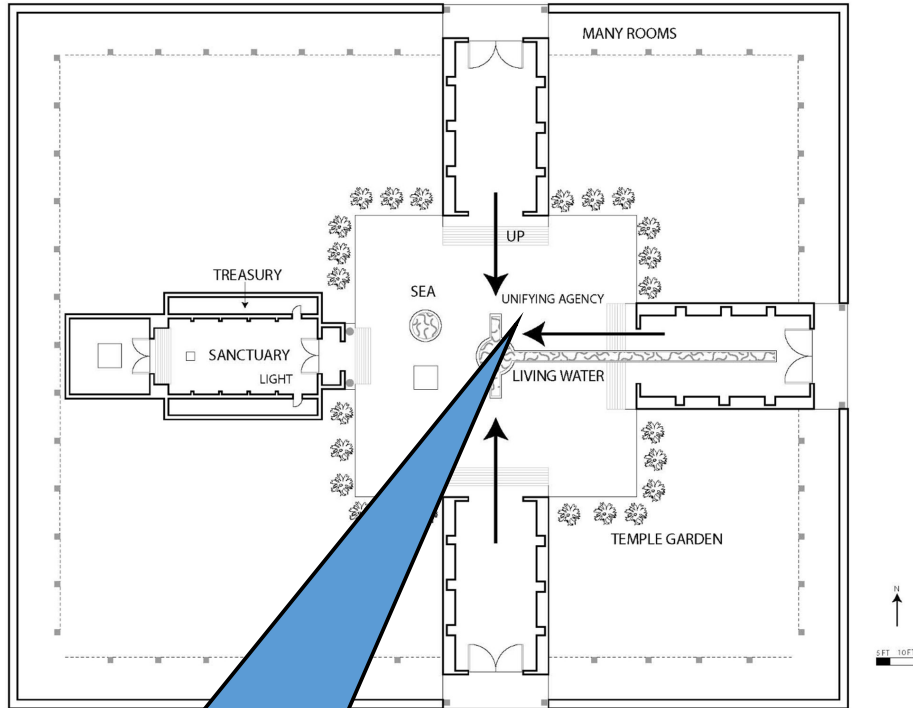
*"Thou hast a voice, great mountain, to repeal large codes of fraud and woe..."*  
Percy B. Shelley

*"to bring all things in heaven and on earth together"*  
Ephesians 1:9-10

Painting by Avery Silliman

Eph 2:22

*And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*



*"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:"* John 17:22-23

*"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them."*

Revelation 21:3



## II. Reclaiming the Temple's World of Purpose



### **The Renewed Temple and Unification of All People in Acts 2**

In Genesis 11, people were trying to build an idolatrous temple, and their languages were made incomprehensible to one another. Pentecost by contrast points to the unification of all peoples as Christ builds the church into the renewed temple of the true God. Here's what happened.

*They were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:2-4)*

The intensity of the sound in the upper room, the image of fire, and the descent from heaven are all three images widely interpreted as echoes of the Sinai experience which the tabernacle was built to replicate. (Exodus 19:16-20) The phenomenon of the sound which "filled the entire house" is reminiscent of the moments when the glory of God "filled" the tabernacle and temple. (Exodus 40:34, 1 Kings 8:10) Additionally, the image of tongues of fire occurs in the fifth chapter of Isaiah where The Divine "tongue of fire" licks and consumes the disobedient stubble of the temple-Vineyard. (Isaiah 5:24) In Isaiah 30:28-30 as Jews ascend the mountain of the Lord in a sacred festival, they hear the voice of God as a "tongue of consuming fire" that judges and renews. Likewise, when the prophet Enoch ascends the cosmic mountain he finds the heavenly temple is built of "tongues of fire." The Jewish sect at Qumran believed that the Urim and Thummim (ritual tools of discernment worn in the High Priest's breastplate) projected "tongues of fire," when God provided prophetic answers in the midst of his cloud of glory. All of this suggests that the language of Acts 2 is language that had always been associated with the judgment of and renewal of Israel's temple. The church is being introduced as the renewed temple which now unites all language groups.

To the cumulative weight of this, one may add Peter's citation of the prophet Joel as a lens for understanding what is happening at Pentecost. The problem in Israel in Joel's day, as Joel understands it, is the defilement of the land due to the suspension of temple offerings. (Joel 1:12-13) The solution offered in Joel is for the priests to call a sacred assembly before the temple and to minister before the people. (Joel 1:14; 2:15) In repentance, they should collectively pray for the renewal of the nation. The prophesied answer the Lord will give on his "Day" will restore the productivity of the land, and renew the temple's effectiveness.

Peter explains that Jesus' disciples mysteriously speaking for God in the language of all cultures is in fact a dimension of the temple renewal which Joel had predicted. Acts 2:17-21 from Joel 2:28-32 reads:

"In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.  
18 Even on my servants, both men and women,

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I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.  
I will show wonders in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire and billows of smoke.  
The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood  
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.  
And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'



Thus, this particular section of Joel which Peter quotes concerning the “*pouring out God’s spirit on all people*” has to do with God’s foretold renewal of the temple’s ministry. In the Old Testament, the Spirit is poured out on priests who serve in the temple or on Kings or prophets who serve in conjunction with the temple. The pouring out of the Spirit on all men and women, young and old, represents, then, a massive renewal of the temple and an expansion of its life-giving priestly ministry.

That heavenly bodies are darkened and or are changed is language for regime change which is made possible by changes in the way the renewed heavenly temple orchestrates such principalities and powers from the heavens. The result of this new infusion of prophetic ministry and regime change in the nations is that those who call upon the Divine Name (see previous discussion about the Temple bearing the Divine Name in 1 Kings 8:16-20) will be saved. “*For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance.*” (Joel 2:32) The conclusion is that because of the judgment and renewal of the temple’s prophetic ministry on the Day of the Lord, the temple’s function in providing a place for ostensible presence will be renewed, and the land will be healed by the Temple’s function.

Then you will know that I, the Lord your God,  
dwell in Zion, my holy hill Jerusalem will be holy;  
never again will foreigners invade her.  
'In that day the mountains will drip new wine,  
and the hills will flow with milk;  
all the ravines of Judah will run with water.  
A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house  
and will water the valley of acacias. (Joel 3:17-18)

In saying that the prophesying of the infant church is a fulfillment of the prophet Joel, Peter is saying that God from his heavenly temple has poured out the renewal and a radical expansion of the temple’s prophetic ministry, and God is accomplishing the renewing of the nation in the life of the earthly temple—now the church. The fruitfulness of living water will flow to all creation as a result of God uniting all peoples in the renewed temple’s expanded priestly ministry.

James extends this idea at the council of Jerusalem. Citing Amos 9:11-12, James says that it is not only different kinds of ethnic Jews but also Gentiles who should now be accepted within the church precisely because the prophets pointed to a day when, “*I will rebuild the tabernacle of David*” so that Israel may possess

all the nations that bear my name.” (Acts 15:16-18) Consonant with the prophets, then, all nations were to be drawn to the renewed temple, and now the Spirit who draws all nations to the renewed temple has manifested himself in this multi-lingual holy place—the church of Jesus.

That Pentecost points to the reconciliation of all nations is not an imaginative leap for many churches. However, when the events of Pentecost are lifted from the story of the temple, Pentecost becomes an unrepeatable tale about origins. However, when the church sees itself as the renewed temple in essence—always an expression of the renewed temple of Pentecost, then Pentecost becomes a story about the continuing, reconciling essence of the temple. Racial integration ceases to be an admirable sideline which occasionally takes place in the history of the church. The temple’s unifying agency—its structural integration of young and old, men and women of all nations-- becomes the very essence of the temple’s identity along with attendant practices of reconciliation, welcoming, and community unification. A basic function of the church as the renewed temple is to be reconciling all nations together in Jesus Christ.

**Comprehension Questions:** explain why the symbols of the upper room point to the renewal of the temple and its ministry. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Explain why the citations of Joel and Amos 9 in the Book of Acts point to the time when the temple would be renewed in its ministry to all flesh and all nations?

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**Correlation Question:** How do your internal images and stories which surfaced while exploring your own symbolic world in section I. intersect, coincide or differ from the temple imagery being discussed in this section.

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### III. Imagining Ministries with Potential

Pastor Aaron Elliot has worked in starting inter-racial (Black and White) congregations in Indianapolis where inter-racial ministry and reconciliation are an essential part of congregational DNA. He believes that successfully integrated congregations practice a number of things that make inter-racial congregations possible. Two of the most significant practices are highlighted here. First, he insists that before there can be any sustained reconciling work, the church must be intentional about being present to one another. People from different backgrounds must be intentional about getting to know one another as people. It is important to recognize that most people self-segregate all the time, and they will continue to do so unless churches and

individuals make conscious and deliberate choices to get to know people who are different. Intentionality, as Elliot describes it, is being intentional about knowing an individual as that individual. People are not representatives of groups, and they do not wish to be used as part of wider social agenda—even when it is a good one. In inter-racial congregations, this means getting to know other members in one another’s homes, breaking bread together, and intentionally planning regular times to reach out and invest in cross-cultural relationships.

It is best to start with relationships where there is already some relationship or common ground. An acquaintance at work, or someone you can get to know through a mutual friend. Rita came to the United States from El Salvador when she was 12 years old. She felt convicted by pastor Elliot’s challenge to be intentional about connecting with different people. Rita is married to someone of Mexican descent, and she feels hesitant to host her in-laws because of the significant cultural differences between El Salvadorian and Mexican culture. There are also significant differences between generations of immigrants on both sides of the family. Younger generations typically speak English 90% of the time, and a host of other issues come into play when she considers hosting family events. Rita decided that one form of missional practice for her is simply to be intentional about having the difficult conversations which could set the ground rules for extended visiting among different parts of her family.

Being intentional does not require big thinking. Little things can be powerful if we do them to intentionally include someone. Providing a translator for a Spanish prayer in assembly is an intentional Pentecostal act. Saying, “Hola!” to Spanish-speaking people can be an intentional act of mission. Ken began doing so about a year ago, and one Hispanic lady began laughing at him. He did not know whether or not the laughter indicated that he had done something wrong, particularly when she started trying to teach him further Spanish words. Only later did Ken realize that the woman’s laughter was really a form of joy—she was thrilled that someone different wanted to honor her by trying to talk to her.

One time in Chiapas, Mexico I asked an attendant at the hotel desk, “*donde esta la basura?*” The attendant looked at me like I was incomprehensible. I knew that every trash can I had seen throughout the country had been labeled “*basura*” so I had no idea where the communication had gone wrong. Finally, the attendant figured it out. To the utter amusement of my Anglo friends, in fluent English, the attendant said, “Oh, you mean the trash can.” It turns out that *basura* means refuse or garbage-- not a paper basket. The point is that acts of intentional inclusion will almost always reveal how little we know about one another, but when our deliberate intention is to get to know others, these failed efforts are almost always received as endearing. The key to intentional mission, Pastor Aaron says is the conscious decision to start learning. Such acts can be powerful signs of the Kingdom.

Pastor Aaron also emphasizes the missional practice of listening to others in order to understand. Most listening is done in order to come to some mutual agreement. It is meant to help form consensus or to forge some agreement for collective policy. But Pastor Aaron emphasizes that loving others in their difference, and listening to them simply in order to value how they think is a revolutionary practice in itself. Listening for this purpose of only understanding the other often breaks the power struggles which attend other forms of listening.

Aaron tells the story of how a Kenyan youth pastor invited youth from Wisconsin to join his Kenyan youth group on a mission tour together. Together, these American and Kenyan youth walked into a Tanzanian village in order to talk about Jesus. The leader of the village knew that the clans within his village were basically at war with one another, constantly feuding. When he saw the American and Kenyan kids laughing and effortlessly playing together he began to wonder how such different people could come together while

his own village could not. He said,

“We want to know about your God and this Jesus you talk about.”

Pastor Aaron says this reminds him of how Jesus says to the Father, “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.” In bestowing the glory of the temple upon the church Jesus mystically unites brothers and sisters of all nations. This functions as a mysterious sign which makes evangelism possible. As Jesus prayed, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

Pastor Aaron believes when a congregation makes the decision to just listen to one another in order to understand, it will learn how to ask clarifying questions like, “What do you mean by such and such?” He says this form of listening in order to understand has such enormous potential because it “will usher in the presence of God in mission and evangelism and discipleship that I think will be extraordinary.”

In light of the challenges to reconciliation in your own heart and in light of the Temple’s unifying agency, evaluate how much potential you feel that each of these missional practices has for you in your setting.

**1** *sounds exhausting* **2** *wish I liked the idea* **3** *modest potential* **4** *significant potential* **5** *generates energy*

a) \_\_\_\_\_ This congregation has a history of hosting events where a variety of denominations and clergy come and celebrate during the Lenten season, reflecting on the meaning of Christian faith. This could be done around the season of Pentecost and focus on the wider church’s reconciling ministries in the area.

b) \_\_\_\_\_ The congregation could sponsor a joint mission trip with another church and replicate the strategy of the Kenyan-American mission in Tanzania.

c) \_\_\_\_\_ The congregation internally could use an intergenerational model for Bible study to practice listening to understand generational differences. If there were continued interest in the topic we could approach the ministerial association and seek to assemble a panel of researchers, demographers, educators, to talk about generational differences and host small-group conversations about the material in the library.

d) \_\_\_\_\_ This Summer the Wednesday night group hosted a month-long series of meetings in which black and white members came together and discussed the issue of race in Indianapolis. The goal of that conversation was not agreement, but understanding. The church could slowly widen such conversations throughout the congregation and then expand these “listening to understand” conversations with other churches or organizations of predominantly different ethnicity.

e) \_\_\_\_\_ The Congregation could issue members a challenge to be intentional about listening to another person with the goal of simply understanding. Members could challenge themselves to have a visit with another person who is different in some way. A prayer team could gather over those who want to challenge themselves in this way. And members could then report to the prayer team about how this growth step is forming them.

f) \_\_\_\_\_ The congregation could adopt the use of a bi-lingual song during service. The words (usually a praise tune) alternate between English and Spanish.

g) \_\_\_\_\_ The congregation could explore the possibility of using the Alton houses as potential housing with the Exodus Refugee of Indianapolis. Church members might also consider a range of volunteer opportunities with this organization which helps settle immigrants in Indiana.

f) \_\_\_\_\_ Speedway has a large concentration of Southeast Asian and Burmese Christians. The congregation might invite some of these families (and particularly the younger generations) who speak fluid English, to speak about their story.

Spend some time reflecting on the ministry practices which you find most appealing. Use your own memories about what is meaningful and the temple's unifying agency as lenses for why these practices appeal to you.

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### Questions After Group Prayer and Discernment

How do the images of the temple's unifying agency affect the group's understanding of the nature of the church and its mission?

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Did you're your energy level or sense of a particular ministry proposal's potential rise or fall after group engagement? Did you interpret that change as the leading of the Spirit in the group's midst or to some other factor? Explain.

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## For Further (Optional) Reading:

### The Capstone as a Symbol of Temple's Unifying Agency

The basic meaning of the capstone derives from the way this stone becomes the crucial unifying construction element that ties together separate sides of a span as in a Roman archway. Even if we conceive of the "capstone" more as a foundation stone, the missional idea remains similar: such an architectural element structurally unites the entire building so that individual architectural elements bear loads together.

The metaphor lives in Israel's temple theology in that often marginalized parts of society are given dignity and restored to their integrated place within Israel. God's chosen leadership—often opposed or rejected in various ways—is by an act of Providence exalted to prominence of place in the temple's architecture and cult. The temple is renewed. And thus, the royal and priestly leadership, who represent the whole nation at the temple, ritually unite the whole nation in a renewed justice for all. The central example of this is Psalm 118:22-26:

"The stone the builders rejected/ has become the capstone; the Lord has done this,/ and it is marvelous in our eyes/ This is the day the Lord has made;/let us rejoice and be glad in it./ O Lord, save us;/O Lord, grant us success./Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord./ From the house of the Lord we bless you."

This Psalm is read in the Church in light of the temple authorities' rejection of Christ, Jesus' judgment and renewal of the earthly temple, and in terms of his integrating his often rejected followers into central leadership positions in the church—temple. Thus, Matt 21:42-44:

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you [the priests] and given to a people who will produce its fruit."

The church then witnesses to the way Jesus, the temple, brings the needy back into an integrated and dignified place within the Kingdom. Thus Acts 4:9-12:

If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone." Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

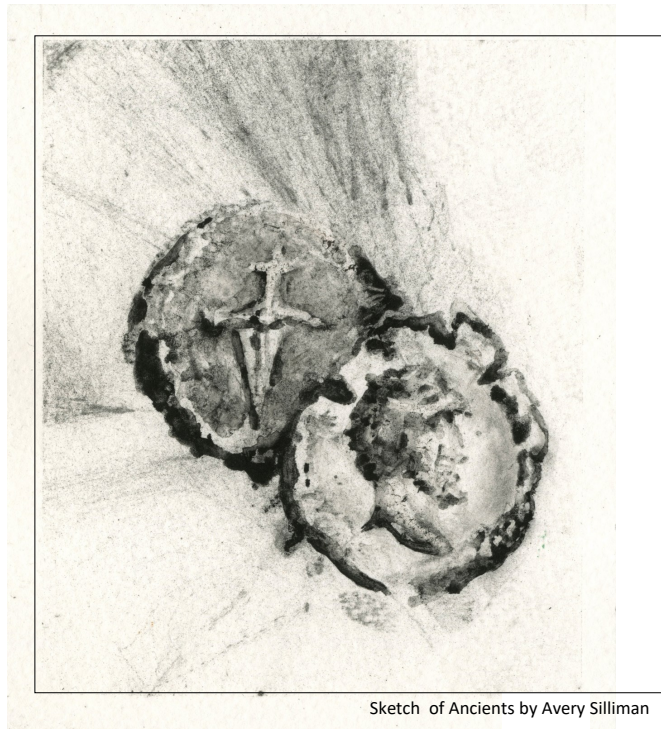
The metaphor retained its currency in Peter's churches as they envisioned themselves the renewed temple establishment in Jesus in 1 Peter 2:4-5. "As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood..."

Thus, the capstone image of the temple integrating marginalized and disrespected elements of society into prominent social space remains a source of the church's imaginative power for thinking about its function as an instrument in integrating society and creation.

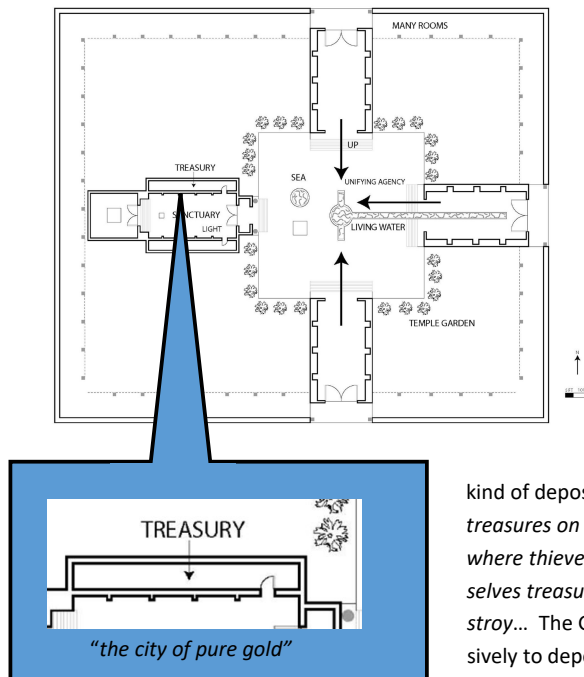
## Discussion 11

### **The Treasury: Gifts for the Common Good**

Readings: Acts 3:1-10; Ephesians 4:7-13



*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ... Ephesians 3:16-18*



## Preview

Jesus said, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Mark 10:21) Like other Jews of his day, Jesus believed that by making benevolent contributions to the Jerusalem temple, givers would amass heavenly riches in the heavenly temple. These transcendent riches would not only help the poor but would bless the almsgiver.

Additionally, it was believed that these heavenly bank deposits were permanently protected by the temple's own

kind of deposit insurance. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy... The Greek words for "storing riches" refer exclusively to deposits made in the temple-storehouse, the *thesaurus*. Thus, sacrificial giving involves a participation in the heavenly temple, which actually protects our philan-

thropic work from theft or decay. (Matthew 6:19)

Paul extends this image of the Church being a temple treasury storing heavenly gifts even as it is giving away earthly gifts when he tells Timothy to command the rich to be generous. Paul says that those who give generously, "lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age." (1 Timothy 6:19) Generous giving to the church's *thesaurus* (which blesses the world) enables people to experience and be a sign of God's ideal future. The church as the *thesaurus* stands with one foot planted in the glorious age to come.

So, this lesson is about how the Church may still function as a mysterious sign—as a repository of heavenly, protected, and end-time gifts. The church, as the renewed place where heaven and earth meet in Jesus Christ, really does contain Divine resources for blessing the world. It is hoped that by reflecting on its identity as a treasury of profound gifts, the church may be able to discern and value missional practices which signify the blessings, riches, and permanence of the coming age.

## I. Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World

Before plunging into Bible study this week take the quiet time necessary to let important memories resurface. Pray that God's glorious riches would strengthen you and enable you to grasp the dimensions and richness of God's treasury of love. Don't strain. Just thankfully receive images of how God's richness has been expressed to and through you.





temple as just such a Divine victory. That victory has again produced spoils and resources—the spiritual gifts of missionary apostleship, evangelism, pastoral care-giving, and teaching which all prepare the church for “works of service.” (Ephesians 4:12) These gifts have been deposited within the temple of the church in order to unify and thoroughly integrate the body for its mission.

Paul’s understanding of spiritual gifts, then, is rooted in his temple theology. Paul’s word “gave” (*edoken*) in Ephesians 4:11 is the form of the verb used in the Greek Old Testament of Exodus 35:34 when God “gave” Bezalel and Oholiab the ability to teach others in order to “build” the tabernacle. Note also that a form of Paul’s word “to build up” in Ephesians 4:12 (*oikodomein*) is used in 1 Chronicles 26:27 which says, “Some of the plunder taken in battle [was] dedicated for the ‘building up’ of the temple of the Lord.”

All of this leads in the same direction: Paul believes that Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension have won a cosmic victory over the enemies of God and that Christ has used the plunder of such a victory to rebuild the heavenly temple. He has filled that temple with spiritual gifts. Thus, the church, regardless of its earthly bank account, really does have access to heavenly resources. Just as in Ephesians 2 where Christ’s death and resurrection have built a temple that integrates all nations without a wall of ethnic division, Ephesians 3 and 4 are about the rebuilding of the heavenly temple’s treasury in a way that spiritual gifts are distributed to the church for building up the temple’s ministry to all creation. Paul prays:

“that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...” (Ephesians 3:16-18)

Paul’s prayer is that out of the heavenly temple’s “riches of glory” the church may be strengthened to discern and experience the power of how the heavenly temple dwells in the earthly temple of believers. He wants the church “rooted” in the heavenly Temple garden, and “structurally established” on the heavenly Temple’s unifying foundation, collectively grasping something of the enormity of all the dimensions of the heavenly temple’s love.



Paul didn’t just invent this idea of the church as a treasury. From the very outset, the church saw itself as a repository of heavenly gifts. After the church is consecrated as the temple in Act 2, Peter begins ministering in the Herodian temple area in ways that show that the church functioned as a richer and more “beautiful” form of pooled community resources than the corrupt temple establishment. It is not a mere coincidence that Luke records that the miracle Peter performs in Acts 3:1-10 takes place beside the temple Gate Beautiful near Solomon’s Colonnade. The miracle shows that the Ecclesial (Church) temple, which now bears the presence and Name of Jesus Christ, is the true gateway to the beautiful life. The beggar, who was looking to be a beneficiary of mere almsgiving at the old temple, is told to look into the faces of those who are participatory signs of God. Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you.” The man is commanded to walk. His resulting liturgical dance is the appropriate response to the bestowal of the renewed temple’s glorious riches.

However, In the next chapter of Acts Luke refuses to completely spiritualize the concept of the church as a treasury. Luke notes that Barnabas brings a large donation and places the money at the Apostles’ feet. (Acts 4:35) It is startling that Barnabas is not making gifts at the Herodian compound, but that blessings are being sought by giving gifts to the renewed temple—the church. Such gifts serve to sustain the church in its ministry to the Jews of many nations then present in Jerusalem, and the beneficiaries of these gifts soon will redistribute true wealth throughout the nations.

**Comprehension Question:**

List the various kinds of Temple gifts or resources that were available in the early church.

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**Correlation Question:** How do your internal images and stories which surfaced while exploring your own symbolic world intersect, coincide or differ from the temple imagery being discussed in this section.

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**III. Treasuring Ministries with Potential**

Perhaps without knowing it, the Speedway Church embodies the ministry of the temple treasury in that our financial resources do bless the wider world. Our annual donations to *KIVA* provide interest-free loans to small businesses in remote areas of the globe. Closer to home, the church’s *Common Fund* loans members money at no interest. At the current rate of capital accumulation, within five years the *Common Fund* will be able to provide loans sizable enough to finance used cars and help ensure the Speedway membership (and those to whom we may allow to participate) need not fall prey to the usury of the check cashing businesses or credit card companies. Speedway’s *Alton Alternative* ministry is the practice of renting the church’s houses at a discounted rate in order to help people get on track.

Rate in the paragraph below how much potential you feel that each of the above ministry practices has in your setting.

**1** sounds exhausting **2** wish I liked the idea **3** modest potential **4** significant potential **5** generates energy

Does this study change how you think about some of our existing practices? If so, how? Explain why you feel the way you do.

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Pastor Ken Johnson, a former chaplain for the Indianapolis Colts, loves it when his Bible studies meet in pubs and bars. Studying Scripture over a drink and enjoying fellowship together, he says, gains him an opportunity to say to others in those locations, “We’re just being the church.”

This practice is, of course, missional in that it sends the church into the world to pray and reflect in the world’s own setting. But an interesting opportunity may present itself when such small groups ask the

owners of local establishments if their group can pray for the business they are frequenting. In this age of COVID, small business establishments—especially those hit hard by the absence of race traffic and tourism, are hurting. Might a congregation imagine that their prayerful resources might bless local businesses? Could multiple small groups collectively frequent local places, supporting them financially, and in the process ask managers and owners how to pray for their business? What might God do in response to concerted prayer for local businesses, and how might that effectively witness with to those local establishments? Might the businesses join in prayer for the church? How would the image of the temple treasury impact the energy level for this kind of practice in our missional setting?

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Rate your own energy for concerted efforts to be close to and pray for local businesses. Explain why you feel the way you do.

**1** sounds exhausting **2** wish I liked the idea **3** modest potential **4** significant potential **5** generates excitement

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### Questions After Group Prayer and Discernment

How does the image of the temple treasury influence the way the group collectively thinks about appropriate practices for enriching the world? \_\_\_\_\_

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Did your energy level or sense of a ministry's potential rise or fall after group engagement? Did your enthusiasm rise or fall in accordance with the reactions of group members? How so?

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Did you interpret that change as the leading of the Spirit in the group's midst or to some other factor? Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

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Based on the way the group gauged the potential of sample ministries, are there ways to infuse current practices with new meaning? Be as specific as possible.

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Are there current practices which need to be honored, celebrated and then put on hold? Be specific.

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Are there new ideas that seem to capture the sense of play, purpose, and potential given the group's collective treasury of gifts?

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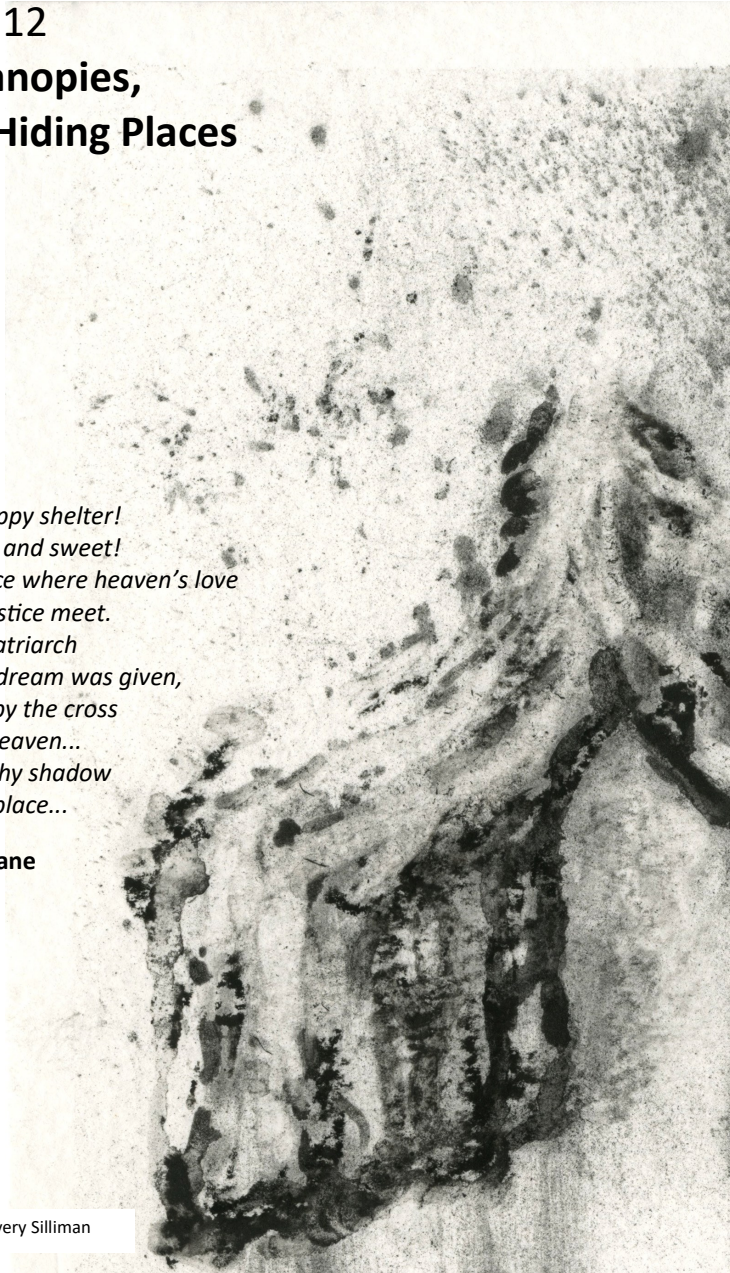
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Discussion 12  
**Hedges, Canopies,  
Shadows, Hiding Places**

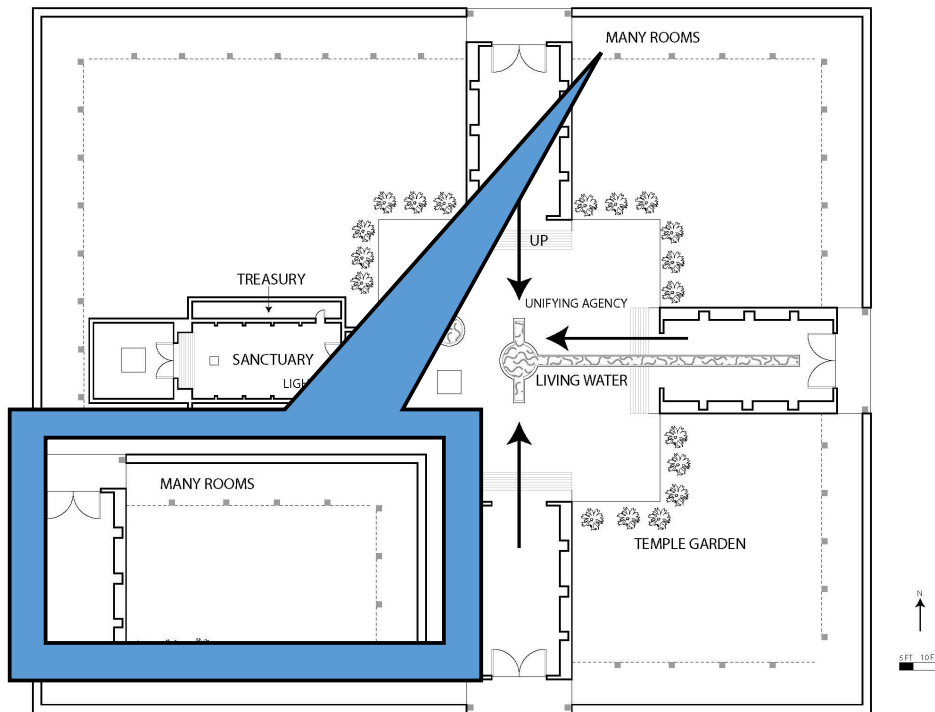
*Oh, safe and happy shelter!  
Oh, refuge tried and sweet!  
Oh, trysting place where heaven's love  
And heaven's justice meet.  
As to the holy patriarch  
That wondrous dream was given,  
So is my Savior by the cross  
A ladder up to heaven...  
I take, O cross, thy shadow  
For my abiding place...*

**Elizabeth Clephane**

Sketch of Canopy by Avery Silliman



*“In my Father’s House there are many dwelling places...”*



## Preview

In Acts 5:15-16 when “people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by,” they were likely looking for the renewed temple to place its canopy or shadow of protection over them. The early church retained the temple’s missional function of providing a protective canopy over Christ’s followers and all such community seekers. John the Revelator insists, “He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The Sun will not beat upon them nor any scorching heat.” (Revelation 7:15-16)

The heavenly tabernacle still casts a protective shadow of God’s presence and protection over the church. Just as John expresses Jesus’ ongoing protective work in temple terms, so, too, have believers throughout much of the church’s history. Temple metaphors have energized the church’s devotion and informed the church’s understanding of Jesus’ work. Elisabeth Clephane envisions the crucified Jesus as a “shelter, a refuge,” a safe and secret meeting (trysting) place, a “shadow” and an “abiding place.” Many, like Clephane, have cherished the many ways this temple image functions in the Christian missional imagination.

This lesson explores this important temple function of hiding and “covering over a multitude” of things as a way to discern and recover energy for the temple’s practice of placing a protective covering over others.





## II. Reclaiming The Temple's World of Purpose



### A Protective Enclosure, Canopy, Shadow, Hiding or Dwelling Place

Readings: John 10:1-29, John 12:28-29, John 14:1-2

As we have seen, the temple is located within a protective enclosure that protects the temple's mysterious holy creation of specialized order. By contrast, the outer world is all mixed up. The wall or hedge around the temple compound represents a forcefield of protective power over the righteous throughout the land. For instance, in the book of Job, Satan—the heavenly temple's prosecutor— accuses Job of serving God only because God bestows the temple's protective blessing around Job and his family. "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household?" (Job 1:10)

Isaiah describes Judah's impending destruction and Babylonian exile in exactly the same terms—except that Isaiah says God is removing the barrier around the Temple complex: "Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled." The Divine protection of the nation is symbolically removed by destroying the walls preserving the holiness of the ritual compound.

Micah, naturally, then, promises to restore the Jews to the promised land by restoring the hedge around the temple enclosure. However, Micah uses a slightly different image. He insists that God will restore Israel's sheep to a pen with the King who leads their liberation or "going out." The King leads the Sheep through the gate of the sheep pen or temple enclosure. (Micah 2:12-13)

This is the temple background for understanding Jesus' teaching at the Feast of the Temple's Dedication in John chapter 10:1-29. There Jesus stands guard at the Gate of the temple enclosure— like Micah's Shepherd— protecting the entrance to the sheepfold which staves off wolves, or thieves. By these "wolves," Jesus has in mind the false temple priests who act as hirelings, devoid of sacrificial love for the sheep (Israel).

Within the ritual compound, the sheep become familiar with the protective voice of the Good Shepherd who "goes before" (10:4) them. This is reminiscent of how God's protective pillar of fire led Israel to freedom through the wilderness. It is likely no coincidence that Jesus is walking along the temple's pillars and protective boundary in the shadow of Solomon's Colonnade when he affirms that "no one can snatch the sheep out of my Father's hand." As Solomon's Colonnade architecturally expressed both the temple's metaphors of protective hedge and canopy—providing many dwelling places—Jesus here emphasizes his ministry as the true protective Gateway, the true hiding place of the sheep. Of course, neither is it a coincidence that truly foundational protective shepherds and leaders of the church are "reputed to be pillars." (Galatians 2:9)



Photo by Kent Ellett

Solomon's Colonnade acts as both a protective hedge and a refreshing canopy which casts a shadow over

those who are in hunger, thirst, or distress because of sun-scorching forms of oppression. This covering is an important architectural expression of the temple's ministry of protection to which we now turn our attention.

The Hebrew word *beseter* comes from a verb, to cover or to hide. It suggests a hiding place as when a hunted rabbit runs into "cover." So in 1 Samuel 19:2 David tells Jonathon to hide in the secret place or find cover from his Father Saul's men. This image plays an important role in Israel's temple worldview in that God himself lives beyond the cover of a cloud in the heavenly *beseter*—the ultimate hiding place. In Ps 18:11-13 we read:

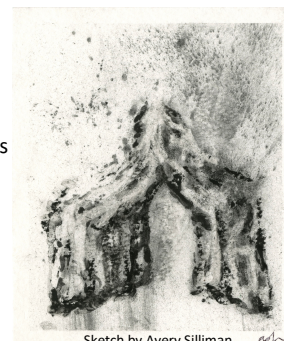
"He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him — the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. "

Likewise, note Psalm 81:7: "In your distress you called and I rescued you, I answered you out of a thundercloud." The NIV here hides the concept of the heavenly temple *beseter*. The Hebrew more literally reads, "I answered you from the *beseter*—the hiding place... of the thundercloud." This is almost certainly the appropriate background for hearing why some people hear the Divine voice when it answers Jesus prayer to invest or glorify the temple which bears the Divine Name in John 12. With resounding assurance to Jesus' listeners, the Father answers, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify [the Divine Name] again. (John 12:28-29) Those who merely dismiss the phenomenon as a clap of thunder again miss the intimate and mysterious interpenetration of the earthly and Heavenly temple.

All of this is important for our discussion of the earthly temple's function because Zion's *beseter* images the heavenly temple by offering the earth a canopy of protection that participates in the heavenly hiding place of the Divine protective presence. Psalm 27:5 reads: "For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the *beseter* of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock." One wonders about John 8:59: "they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself" (in the Temple compound) slipping away. Was Jesus availing himself of the true *beseter* of the temple? Was he reliving the experience of Psalm 31:20: "In the *beseter* of [God's] presence you hide them from the intrigues of men; in your dwelling you keep them safe from accusing tongues?"

Psalm 32:7 affirms that God himself is a *beseter*. "You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance." The prayers and worship of the temple surround God's people with a sphere of safety which the temple liturgy (by the grace of God) creates. Thus, the longing of the Psalmist in Psalm 61:4: "I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the *beseter* of your wings." The temple, then, ministers a canopy or shadow-like hiding place of protection from the elements, invasion, from the plots of internal enemies, accusations, as well as a wide variety of troubles.

The passages above are couplets that pair *beseter*—a covered or hiding place— with a *cok* or *cukkah* or a small dwelling place, or a sacred tent where God himself dwells. I believe it is precisely this image of a shared "room" that Jesus is talking about when he assures his disciples that in his "Father's house there are many rooms." (John 14:1-2) The plural dwelling places (*monei*) reflects the Jewish expectation that all holy



Sketch by Avery Silliman

ones would have a dwelling in the messianic temple, and it is such dwelling places within heavenly reality that Jesus promises to open for believers. Psalm 90:1 draws on this conceptual world where God himself is said to be a dwelling place (*ma'on*). Thus, it is likely that Jesus in John 14 promises to go to further prepare such places of mutual heavenly dwelling so that the church-temple functions as a sign of heavenly places of true safety where our "hearts" need "not be troubled."

The metaphor of a protective hedge/enclosure, canopy or shadow, or rooms/hiding/dwelling places suggest meaningful ways for the church to imagine its mission. Peter believes the church's prayerful ministry to the world of sinners can "cover over or hide" a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8-9) But there are numerous ways in which we may envision the temple's mission to hide and protect the vulnerable.

**Comprehension Question:**

List at least three architectural images of God's protective presence and briefly discuss the kinds of things from which the temple hides people. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Correlation Question:**

How do your internal images and stories which surfaced while exploring your own symbolic world intersect, coincide or differ from the temple imagery being discussed in this section.

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**III. Imagining Ministries with Potential**

Rate the energy and potential for our congregation's embodying the wider church's calling to be a hiding place that surrounds, covers, and protects those in various forms of trouble. Explain why this kind of ministry would appeal to you and why you think it would be a fit (or not) in this place:

*1 sounds exhausting 2 wish I liked the idea 3 modest potential 4 significant potential 5 generates excitement*

a)\_\_\_\_\_ The Alton Alternative emerged from a series of conversations which took place at Speedway between 2008 and 2012. Our congregation has envisioned the enclave of houses at Alton in a variety of ways, but always the effort to reclaim dangerous and dilapidated houses for that neighborhood was seen as a way of sheltering people who needed a fresh start in life.

Rating:\_\_\_\_\_ Why:\_\_\_\_\_

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b) \_\_\_\_\_ *Thrifty Threads* is a resale store that both employs people in need and raises money for *The Julian Center*, an organization that shelters women who suffer from domestic violence. Many victims of abuse do not have emotional support, safe places for their children, economic prospects or the time to develop a plan for leaving an abusive situation. A shelter or hiding places or hedges of protection in such circumstances involves providing things like physical protection, spiritual protection, practical guidance, emotional support, as well as transitional, financial, and logistical resources in order to make a new start.

Rating: \_\_\_\_\_ Why: \_\_\_\_\_

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c) \_\_\_\_\_ Coming from what she characterizes as a “judgmental” Conservative White Evangelical background, Sarah Daniels came to grow discouraged in her faith. However, she came to be re-energized when she began to see the hand of God at work in the lives of women who wanted to get out of a world where they were being trafficked in the sex industry. Sarah started *Unconditional*, a ministry associated with the Indy Metro Church, which provides support groups, children’s supplies, job transition support, financial goals assistance, connections to resources, and unconditional friendship. Sarah’s ministry is involved in the lives of 163 women in Indianapolis who either have or who want to be free from working in dance clubs. There are many difficulties in leaving such a sometimes financially lucrative life. Along with various forms of social and spiritual support, women in the ministry must learn how to live on less while they develop new financial plans for themselves and their children. In 2021, *Unconditional* is launching a program called *The Bridge*, which provides housing at low cost for those who have exited the sex industry, have had one year since their last eviction, been sober for at least six months, and who commit to meeting with mentors. *The Bridge* will help women develop an emergency financial fund, and support system and network, and move toward owning their own business and purchasing their own home. The leaders at Speedway are considering using the Alton houses as a support for this ministry.

Rating: \_\_\_\_\_ Why: \_\_\_\_\_

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Listen to a few of the reasons Speedway members have found their way to this congregation.

1) “I came to the congregation after a period of religious abuse...I was promised simply a place to rest and grieve—a place of safety while I healed...” 2) “Having suffered in legalism of various kinds and experienced the trauma of church division, I was struck by the grace-centered but still deeply reflective, biblical approach here.” 3) “Having been embroiled in church conflict with self-serving leaderships, I was struck by the presence of love for all. Particularly, I appreciated the love and attention shown to a young person with a disability.” 4) “I came with strong feelings of worthlessness and even suicide. I discovered that there was a place for even me to make a meaningful contribution. That renewed my hope. I feel as though I was shocked by prayer back into life.” 5) “I received acceptance and encouragement, friendship and important counsel through a painful time of divorce.” 6) “I came here and had to break free from the kind of church that was controlling and insistent on little rules. But at the same their preacher was involved in infidelity with members...”

Given our membership’s history with legalism and abusive leadership systems, might we imagine small groups that meet for short durations (quarterly?) as support systems for those in the community who have

been victims of abusive religious systems? Such a ministry might be actively promoted in the community and among other non-profits. The groups would provide sociological information about the characteristics of religious abuse, typical traumatic consequences of religious abuse, and provide support groups that could also provide theological and interpersonal resources for experiencing Christianity in a grace-centered and healing way.

Rating: \_\_\_\_\_ Why: \_\_\_\_\_

Does the temple function of placing a shadow or hedge of protection over others bring a new perspective or meaning to any of our current church practices? Does it give you a different perspective about the meaning of any of your efforts? Who are we protecting and how? What do your friends need protected from? What kinds of missional shade should we cast in the community? What practices seem to hold potential for us at this time and place?

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**For Further (Optional) Reading**

In the Greek Old Testament, *beseter* is often translated by the word group associated with *kruptos*. So Psalm 27:5 reads, “*Ekrupse me en skyne*—hide me in the tabernacle... hide me (*akrupupho*) in the hiding spot of his tent. So, too, in the New Testament *kruptos* and its cognates take over the meaning of *beseter*. *Kruptos* is the inner hiding place of the soul—that inner temple of Romans:2: 29. “No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly.” (*in to krupto...* in one’s secret place) Jesus’ words in Mathew 6:6-7 also depend on the temple concept of the *beseter*: “when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. (literally Jesus says pray to your father who is in the secret place. (*en to kruphaio*) Then Jesus speaks of the Father seeing what is done on earth in secret. God sees into the inner hiding place of the prayerful where nobody else sees. In that secret place of the soul-- in the private prayer closet-- Jesus says God will reward the praying person.

In this context, Jesus is teaching that the temple’s *beseter* is a place in heaven and also within the person of prayer which protects us from fear and shame about what everybody else thinks. The pagans pray and make a big show because they are interested in the opinions of others. How are we protected from the scorn and praise of the crowd? We go into our secret place (both in our closet and in our soul) and meet the God who is also living in the secret place both in us and in heaven. The “secret place” is a mysterious place of Divine presence which shelters people from cultures of scorn and shame.

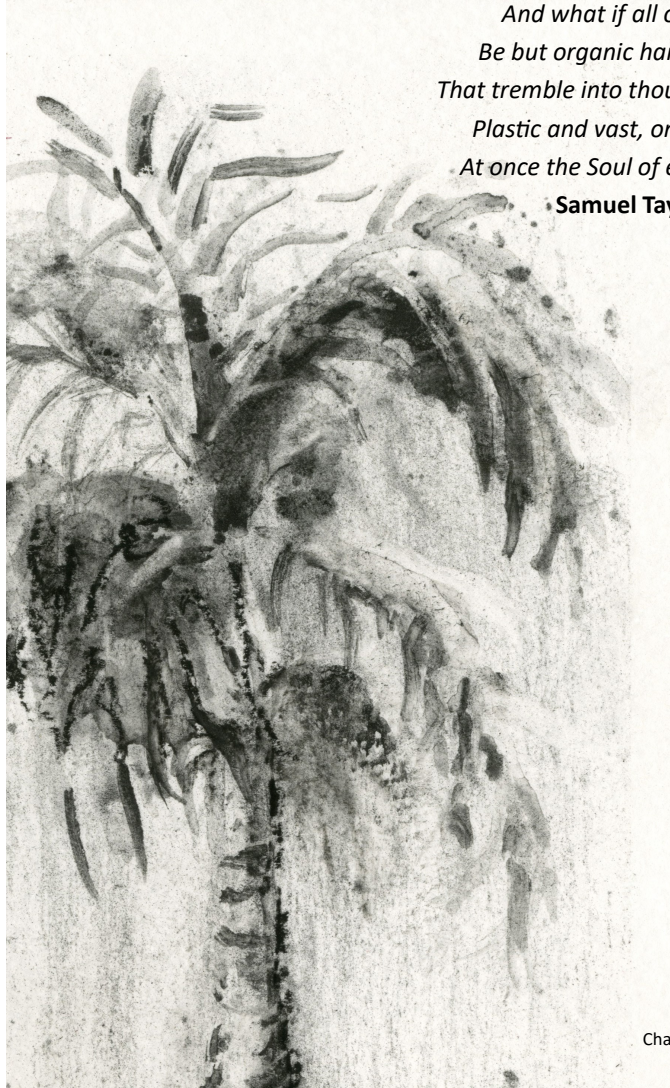
It is quite plausible that it is this concept of the temple hiding place which Paul has in mind when he uses a form of *krupto* in Colossians 3:2-3. He again suggests that through prayerful meditation the church can experience itself as hidden in heaven. “Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden (*kekruptai*) with Christ in God.” In Colossians, Paul believes Christians are protected from the kind of legalistic religious eclecticism confronting the Colossians, and Christians are protected from a host of personal and interpersonal sins which need to be taken off and covered with the new clothing of the resurrection.

## Epilogue

### The Temple and Missional Imagination

*And what if all of animated nature  
Be but organic harps diversely framed,  
That tremble into thought, as o're them sweeps  
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze  
At once the Soul of each, and the God of all?*

• Samuel Taylor Coleridge



Charcoal Drawing by Avery Silliman

This study has been about listening to your group's life stories and passions. It has been about discerning the Spirit's leading. It has been about finding some of your group's passions for God's mission in and with the wider community. At a basic level, it has been an attempt to stir your group or congregation's imagination for what Christ's mission may be in your unique context.

Admittedly, stirring our collective imagination is no small task. In fact, one of the greatest challenges facing the North American Church is a crisis of theological imagination. We have not always known what to do with Jesus' interpretation of his death and resurrection as a form of temple rebuilding. In fact, the church has often separated the doctrine of salvation from the whole idea of temple creationism. This means that church leaderships have often focused on the inner spiritual work within individuals rather than doing this in the context of remaking communities as they are willed to be in heaven.

A generation ago congregations typically maintained some neighborhood presence, even if that presence was thought to be only ancillary to the church's primary mission in saving individual souls. Today, churches in urban and suburban areas tend to be regional churches, and the connection to specific neighborhoods has often become relatively inconsequential. However, the lack of energy for collective involvement in the life of neighborhoods, local schools, local job creation, housing, benevolence, or creation-care is not just a matter of congregations no longer belonging to a certain neighborhood. The problem has roots in the church's habits and in its theological self-understanding.

For many churches, the focal image for the church is still shaped by reference to passages such as Ezekiel 43:10, Exodus 25:40, Hebrews 8:5 and Philippians 3:17 where the paradigmatic church "pattern" has to do with the church--temple patterning the spiritual realities of the heavenly temple. However, where temple theology is essentially non-existent, the church is not understood as an earthly embodiment of heavenly reality or participating in the temple's re-creative function in the world. Without a robust temple ecclesiology the church's "pattern or blueprint" becomes a mere procedural manual for a religious organization that serves individuals with a specialized type of care. By contrast, restoring the discourse of the temple suggests that the heavenly pattern for the church's mission is an open-ended set of metaphors that speak of heaven's mysterious ongoing work in recreating the world.

This kind of theological recovery can never be an exact discipline. The necessary hermeneutical shift depends on a kind of broad poetic resonance between inner images and numerous Biblical ones. It is not possible to prove beyond any doubt that the glory which John's churches saw in John 1:14 was the glory of the new tabernacle if that text is just considered in isolation. Such an interpretation only becomes possible when readers become generally aware of the ways many texts come to have meaning together. Thus, this study depends upon inter-textual resonance and a broad form of theologizing which reads all of scripture as the story of the temple between the preface of Eden and the final reunification of heaven and earth.

This requires us to locate Jesus within the history of temple renewal movements. John's Gospel depicts Jesus as the temple of God, construing the incarnation, ministry, death, and the lifting up of Jesus within the larger story of the Temple as the main underlying narrative.

This understanding of Jesus is expressed in the missional imagery present in Near-Eastern and Jewish temple architecture. God's Temple in Israel acted as a means of connecting heaven and earth, renewing all

of society--indeed cultivating, structuring, and unifying all of creation. Thus, understanding the multifaceted ways the temple functioned as the locus and agency of community renewal in Israel's history places the church in a position to appreciate the ways Jesus cultivates and structurally unifies all of creation.

This view of Jesus is in turn central for the church's own self-understanding in that the early church saw itself as embodying Christ's missional glory as the temple of God. Having become the renewed temple through her union in and with Jesus Christ, the temple's cultivational and structural functions (revealed first in Israel and in Jesus Christ) unite the world and act as spiritual and imaginative sources for the church's own practices of community renewal.

In Revelation chapters 21-22, the church one final time witnesses the temple encompass the entire heavenly Jerusalem. One last time the heavenly structure is measured. The glorious gifts of the nations are brought within a structural repository whose gates are thrown forever open. The countenance of Christ and the protective power of the Divine Name covers all. The temple compound disappears along with all forms of the chaotic Sea which no longer need restraint. The protective barrier between sacred and profane space is no more because the whole cosmos is forever sacralized by the temple's cultivating functions. There is vivifying light. Streams of living water irrigate the whole world—now a sacred garden in which there is a multinational tree which heals all nations. All of this descends to earth. It comes out of heaven from God. All relationships—all things, heaven and earth, are made one.

But for the church, which has come to terms with its temple identity, this is not merely how the story of the earth will someday reflect new dimensions of glory. The Christian vision of the goal of creation does not merely predict the future triumph of the temple's creative purposes throughout the world. Rather, the church as the temple mysteriously holds this future within itself as a participatory sign of heaven and the future which heaven is already bringing. The church's present life is but a chapter in the ongoing narrative of the world's recreation. Thus, the church's understands itself as a bearer of living water, as the light of the world, as a healing garden, a center for controlling chaos, a mystery that unites all things, as God's repository of benevolence and as a hiding place for the vulnerable. In all these ways the temple in Jesus Christ acts as a spiritual and imaginative source for the church's ongoing practices of community renewal.



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## APPENDIX C

### The Temple and the Church's Mission: Discussion Facilitator's Manual

#### **Introduction**

Congratulations on being asked to serve as discussion facilitator in the study of *The Temple and the Church's Mission*! Read the preview on page 4 of the discussion guide to get an overview of what this study is about. This facilitator's guide is intended as a general orientation to the task of group leading.

There are inevitably two pitfalls with leader manuals such as this. First, in enumerating the anticipated challenges of leadership, leader manuals occasionally discourage leaders by describing the complexities of leadership before ministry can even begin. If you begin to feel this way, take a deep breath (literally) and know that you were asked to serve because the church has confidence in you. Receive God's word to Moses when he asked, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" God says to you even as he said to Moses, "I will be with you" (Exod 3:11–12). One always should accept the call to service with confidence in the grace of Christ which works powerfully even in our greatest weaknesses. Pray and trust that the Holy Spirit will make this experience rewarding for everyone.

Second, a perennial danger of facilitator manuals is that for people with a lot of leadership experience, they seem to some degree unnecessary. Some experienced people play chess intuitively. They don't like to read manuals about what to do in specific situations. Likewise, some group leaders are comfortable making on-the-spot decisions, which group dynamics inevitably demands. If manuals seem overly constricting, simply know that the church trusts your discernment and dependence on the Holy Spirit. Feel free to improvise as necessary with this caveat: *The Temple and the Church's Mission* is structured on cognitive theories, which are useful. Even the best chess players can benefit from reading a book on the structure of chess openings. Of course, at its heart *The Temple and the Church's Mission* is still a Bible study, but this manual will be quite useful in thinking through the unique learning process this study envisions.

Of course, the flip side of this same difficulty is that there are leaders who would prefer a much more detailed manual that anticipates all contingencies and suggests courses of action to leaders in those contingencies. These people like to play chess within the structures and contingencies planned in books. If you are a person who feels this way, you may take comfort in that the discussion questions are all provided in the participant's workbook. The structure and order of these discussion questions have been carefully planned, and since all of your group participants should come prepared to discuss them, there will not likely be uncomfortable silence at the outset of discussion. Therefore, rest easily in the Lord as we turn to the tasks of group leadership.

## **Some Challenges and Opportunities in Facilitating Discussion**

*The Temple and the Church's Mission* is intended for small groups of 4–8 people. In some cases groups may use the study in attempting to discern the missional practices of their unique and semi-autonomous small group. In other cases various small groups may be meeting as part of a congregation-wide process of discernment. Yet, in any setting the group facilitator must keep the study's purpose in mind. This discussion guide is intended to assist leadership teams or other small groups in discerning and finding God's energy for missional practices. Missional practices are those actions which send the church into the wider community to work with and for other elements of the wider community.

Maintaining this focus will likely present a challenge. Most church members are habituated into thinking about the church's internal life. This is not bad. It would be futile to think of collective mission in the community apart from a healthy body. However, the aim of this discussion is to move the church from thinking of itself exclusively as a body to thinking of the church as the mysterious temple ministering to and with the wider kingdom of God. The temple in Israel and in Jesus Christ functions to bless the community, the land, and eventually to envelop the whole world. Facilitators will likely need to gently help the church focus on its mission to and with the wider community.

This temple blueprint for mission is theological. Evangelical churches often resist being deeply involved in renewing communities, because many models of church-community engagement are devoid of relational commitment and gospel proclamation, looking like government programs which take their cues from the social sciences. Without disparaging the contributions of these disciplines, this discussion manual is presenting a distinctly theological paradigm for relational and evangelistic engagement in and with the world.

The church's involvement in social and economic issues (i.e., its concern for the land and the wellbeing of all life) is inseparable from participation in a spiritual wellspring, a mystical source of penetrating light. The church in Jesus Christ is rooted in an eternal healing garden; it is structured so as to spiritually restrain chaos, uniting disintegrated relationships, making palpably lasting investments in the marginalized, and hiding the vulnerable. These are the distinctively missional functions of God's temple explored in this study.

Facilitators should anticipate that for many group participants envisioning the church as the temple of God will be plowing very ancient but currently very unfamiliar ground. Reframing the story of the Bible in terms of temple creationism can be like the experience of *déjà vu*—"coming home to a place we have never been before." It will resound familiar Scriptures in ways that they have seldom been heard in recent generations. Reframing Jesus's saving work as rebuilding Israel's temple for all nations may require a theological revolution which will evoke emotional as well as intellectual challenges.

This small-group blueprint is also different in that it is offering visual or architectural theology. The art in the manual is not just for decoration. The imagery is carrying theological weight. For visual learners this may come as a breath of fresh air, reinvigorating desire for Bible study. However, more linear thinkers may find that advancing theology through myth, poetic language, and visual means feels disorienting.

Thus, both the content and the style of this study may contribute to some members' cognitive dissonance.

This will likely have to be processed during group discussion, but additional conceptual help for those who are “not art and poetry people” is provided in the For Further (Optional) Reading sections at the end of some of the chapters. Reassure those who are uncomfortable with the metaphorical content.

To the degree the theology itself becomes threatening to some group members, facilitators should acknowledge these feelings, emphasizing ways in which members' traditional understandings of Christian faith remain helpful and true. Temple creationism, for instance, should never be pitted against the notion of individual forgiveness. The temple's ministry continuously reconciles individuals to the community and to God. It is only that our “personal relationship with God” is also part of a much bigger plan—that of re-creating the world and reintegrating all things on heaven and earth through the priestly headship of Jesus. To the extent facilitators can explore new theological worlds with a playful sense of assurance, they can inspire a much more lighthearted atmosphere of exploration with group members.

Particularly in the early sessions, facilitators will have to spend significant amounts of time solidifying the building blocks of a distinctively temple-worldview in order to do the important work of theologically evaluating the church's missional practices. This is the reason that the early chapters focus on comprehending the biblical material, giving only secondary attention to missional practices. Especially during these early lessons leaders may need to emphasize that theology is important, because it has pragmatic cash-value for the church's practices of community renewal.

Participant workbook blanks need to be filled-in before group meetings. The manual is designed to prepare members for collective discussion and prayerful discernment. As such, the workbook questions will function as the group discussion questions. Group discussion is, thus, centered on matters that members should have already given considerable thought.

If this proves unworkable during some of the more conceptually difficult lessons, then it may be advisable to spend a full meeting discussing the biblical content in the Reclaiming The Temple's World of Purpose section. Discussing the Imagining Ministries with Potential section may be delayed until a following group meeting (see sample meeting below). Facilitators and church leaders should anticipate groups inevitably moving through the material at slightly different paces.

### **Getting Familiar with the Blueprint for Discussion**

As ambitious and exciting as the theological content may be, these challenges are not as daunting as those inner hurdles all of us have to cross in becoming faithful missionaries. These spiritual obstacles to Christ-like mission may only be overcome by grace. So, facilitators need to prayerfully prepare themselves for group meetings. Facilitators should emphasize to group members that the prayerful and meditative exercises at the beginning of each lesson are central to preparing for the group. Spend time praying for guidance throughout group discussions; pray especially that the deep, holy place of grace within each member would attend to and speak into the deep, inner wellspring within all listeners. The assumption at the heart of this study is that our

sometimes minimal energy for missional work stems from a crisis of ecclesial and missional imagination that will not be renewed without prayerful openness.

Still, the exercises contained in the Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World section are not only rooted in convictions about the value of prayers of self-examination; these self-reflective exercises are trying to help illustrate what kinds of ministry members are likely to sustain. To that end, the structure of this guide is informed by a social theory developed by Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGregor. Doshi and McGregor argue that the highest performing cultures are inspired by intrinsic motivations. People experience energy for work when that work connects with their sense of play, their often unconscious sense of life-purpose, and the perceived amount of potential their work holds for themselves and others. When people do not think their work is fun—when they work only for money, praise, a sense of obligation, a fear of disappointing someone, or out of sheer habit, energy for work will be low. However, when work coincides with a person's sense of play, purpose, and potential, then energy for that work is unleashed.

While this seems rather intuitive, facilitators will likely find that both they and their group members do not always have conscious access to why certain things seem fun or boring. Much of the time, people are somewhat unconscious of what (if anything) infuses them with a sense of meaning. Too often, most of us do not think of potential beyond paying the bills, avoiding conflict, or coping with immediate problems. When people live in perpetual states of exhaustion, they will have trouble mustering the energy and the courage to explore their own sometimes painful story.

Early on in the group process, facilitators should acknowledge this difficulty while explaining that some people, who have deeply engaged the prompts in the Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World section, have discovered a few of the reasons why they are tired. They have even been motivated to find different careers and ministry options that are more fun, purposeful, and hopeful.

In order to encourage members in this inner work, the facilitator will likely have to display some level of vulnerability, sharing elements of her life story which contribute to the way she makes meaning. To the degree the facilitator has fun with her own reflections, being able to laugh at herself and tell revealing stories about herself, then the process can be made less threatening. Groups may also wish to revisit their interpersonal covenants about protecting confidences and maintaining safe, holy, interpersonal space.

The Reclaiming the Temple's World of Purpose section is more like a traditional Bible study. In the early sections of the guide, more attention will be placed on such biblical comprehension. As time goes by the facilitator will develop a feel for the group's comprehension level, and in the later lessons it is hoped that a single comprehension question will be sufficient to check members' grasp of the biblical material. It may be useful at this point to open discussion up for further clarifying questions, but it will be necessary for group leaders to make a judgment about whether the kinds of clarification being sought will substantially affect members' ability to use the basic temple ideas in evaluating the potential in various practices of community ministry. Remember, the purpose of this study is to discern and find God's energy for missional practices. Especially late in the study, a substantial amount of time should be reserved for Section III, which is about imagining and evaluating missional practices.

A critical point in the group process will be the moment the group begins sharing their answer to the Correlation Question: "How do your internal images and stories which

help you make meaning intersect, coincide, or differ from the temple imagery being discussed?” Theological imagery will be exponentially more important to group members if that imagery helps interpret, resound, or even revise group members’ prior symbolic systems of meaning. Theological imagery is said to “resonate” with people precisely because it in some way “resounds” familiar personal stories which carry a person’s sense of play, purpose, and potential. A facilitator cannot make temple theology resonate with people and their inner symbolic system. That is a job for God. The facilitator’s job is to hold individual images and stories shared from the Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World section directly beside the image systems studied from the Reclaiming the Temple’s World of Purpose section. The facilitator will need to celebrate and draw attention to the potential value of those moments when these two image systems are compared, contrasted, and correlated. However, whether the story forges a deeper resonance between the heavenly temple (as described in the Bible) and a group member’s inner temple (where individual meaning is made) is strictly a matter for the Holy Spirit.

Having playfully attempted to access both internal and biblical images of purpose, facilitators ask group members to reflect on inner images and temple images as they evaluate local potential in various forms of missional practice. This is the content contained in the Imagining Ministries with Potential section. Through recalling one’s inner sense of fun together with the temple’s purposeful functions, group members are asked to exercise their practical wisdom about the local potential various practices may have.

The final aspect of Part III, the Questions After Group Prayer and Discernment section serves as a review. Yet, it also solves an important conceptual problem. Group members will want to know if they should evaluate their own personal potential involvement in a community ministry or if they are evaluating whether a ministerial practice holds potential for their group or a congregation as a whole. These are interrelated but nevertheless different questions. The answer to this query is that members should evaluate their own suitability for certain kinds of community ministry in the Imagining Ministries with Potential section. Their answers may include church-wide considerations at that time, but the collective question about whether a ministry is a fit for the small group or congregation can be best and most fully addressed in this section after groups have prayed and engaged in this discussion.

### **Summary**

While the discussion facilitator’s job may seem challenging, when it is taken up with prayerful confidence in the grace of God, facilitators should anticipate relational blessings as well as insights into their own sense of play, purpose, and potential. As facilitators use the blueprint for discussion they are expected to:

1. focus discussion on missional rather than merely insular or edifying practices,
2. provide a prayerfully prepared sense of assurance about old understandings even while helping group members incorporate new theological insights,
3. playfully and vulnerably demonstrate the purpose and potential of introspective exercises, and
4. facilitate the correlation of meaningful inner images with the matrix of temple symbols which assist in discerning potential practices of missional renewal.



## Group Activities

While certain discussions have unique aspects, a typical hour-long group meeting might look like the following sample meeting session:

### Sample Meeting Session

1. Previous week's Questions After Group Prayer and Discernment..... 5 minutes
2. Prayer inviting God into the meeting and process of discernment..... 2 minutes
3. Discussing answers from Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World.... 10 minutes
4. Review of the biblical material using the Comprehension Question ..... 10 minutes
5. Correlation Question..... 5 minutes
6. Prayer for discernment..... 3 minutes
7. Sharing reactions to Imagining Ministries with Potential section..... 25 minutes

However, some early group sessions will require more discussion of the biblical content. In these cases the time allotments for items #4 and #7 above will be likely be inverted. During other lessons groups may decide whether it is permissible to go slightly over time discussing these biblical ideas. However, when there needs to be extensive discussion of the biblical content, group sessions might break down into two sessions looking something like this:

### First Session

1. Prayer..... 5 Minutes
2. Discussing answers from Playfully Exploring Your Symbolic World.... 15 minutes
3. Reviewing the biblical material paragraph by paragraph..... 35 minutes
4. Prayer..... 5 minutes

### Second Session

1. Comprehension and Correlation Questions..... 15 minutes
2. Prayer..... 5 minutes
3. Discussion of Imagining Ministries with Potential ..... 25 minutes
4. Answering Questions After Group Prayer and Discernment ..... 15 minutes

## APPENDIX D

### Outside Written Evaluations of the Primary Artifact

#### **Review of *The Temple and the Church's Mission* by Chris Smith**

Overall, this is a helpful resource, and I hope that the following feedback can help make it even better.

I love the structure of the guide, and the way that the facets of the Temple come together to create a robust image of the mission of God's people. The figures showing the architecture of the Temple were especially helpful in giving me imagination for the narrative that you put forward. This image, of course, is deeply rooted in Scripture—both Old and New Testaments—and intimately connected throughout the biblical story with the people of God. The image of the Temple and the structure it provides for this guide made a lot of sense to me, but it is an image that requires a fair bit of biblical literacy, and might prove challenging for newer Christians or Christians who, for whatever other reasons, have less familiarity with the scriptural story. I think the basic overall structure can and should be preserved but may require a round of editing with special attention to how it might be received by those with limited biblical literacy.

In a similar vein, my first impression of a lot of the expository content was that it didn't seem especially accessible to general church members. It sounds like you've tried this guide out with at least some of your church members, but they might be more inclined than other Christians to be familiar with your vocabulary and theological background. You might try running some chunks of your prose through a Flesch Reading Ease calculator. (I think there is one built into Microsoft Word, but there are also ones available for free use online, like this one). As a general rule, it seems like you use sentences of a variety of lengths, and rarely if ever use a super-long sentence. So, I think the biggest challenge to readability would be the vocabulary and concepts that might require a deeper educational background than you realize.

I also wonder if some of the allusions you use along the way might not connect with participants? I love poetry, for instance, but I know that I am a rarity in that regard, and that typically in today's world, those who have acquired a taste for poetry have done so with a significant bit of education, which many church members might not have. Are there allusions or illustrations from contemporary life or popular culture that might make the points you want to make and be more familiar to church members? (This, of course, can be tricky, because allusions that connect with one congregation might not connect with another congregation of a different geographic or demographic composition).

The Comprehension questions seemed especially inaccessible, staying primarily in the realm of abstract concepts. In contrast, I thought the Correlation questions were exquisite, getting participants to reflect on the passage they just read and make some real

connections with their personal and/or church life. I wonder perhaps about doing away with the Comprehension vs. Correlation distinction and simply having a single set of reflection questions (or you might settle on some way of describing them other than reflection) that would incorporate elements of both comprehension and correlation. Do participants need to know that they are doing comprehension and correlation—is that a distinction that is helpful for participants? It’s certainly helpful for you as the creator of these materials and maybe for facilitators, but I’m not convinced that will be helpful for the average participant. (To be clear, I think it will be helpful for them to engage the material for both comprehension and correlation, but perhaps that distinction doesn’t have to be so clearly emphasized in the structure of the guide as it is now.)

I appreciate what you are trying to do in the “Imagining Ministries with Potential” section but wish that there were more scenarios listed (5–10 perhaps) in each of these sections and also representing a broader array of possibilities. If God is indeed reconciling all things in Christ (Col 1:19–20) and calling us into that work, then that should stretch our imagination for the ways we could work faithfully together to bear witness to God’s reconciling work.

***The Temple and the Church’s Mission* by Kent Ellett**  
**A Brief Review from Michael Bowling**

Over forty-plus years of pastoral work in both urban and rural settings, I have become acutely aware of the inadequacy of formation/discipleship materials produced by academics for local congregations. However, when those with excellent academic training also possess deep pastoral experience, the resulting “product” is a valuable gift; such is the case with Kent Ellett’s *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*.

This study guide is accessible, visually appealing, and offers a depth of theology attractive to those who believe church members are capable of complex ways of both understanding and living out faithfulness to the way of Jesus. Ellett is careful to display God’s call to congregations in being the Body of Christ in their place as an incarnational presence.

The use of Temple imagery in anticipation of Jesus’s ministry displayed in the Gospel of John seeded the imagination of the first-century church, and it can seed the imagination for the twenty-first century church. Ellett does a great job utilizing the history of thinking down that path without being unnecessarily difficult. The first five lessons lay solid theological groundwork for the “practiced” theology imagined in lessons six through twelve. This division in the guide is not unlike the outline of Ephesians where the first three chapters lay a foundation for the instructions found in the last three chapters.

I became very excited with the expansive missiological implications detailed in lessons six through twelve. Many of our churches are deeply concerned about issues like creation care, war and peace, wealth and poverty, and pursuit of “the common good.” Church members participating in a study of this kind would find much to consider related to contemporary topics like these. Perhaps the greatest benefit of this study guide in a culture increasingly suspicious of the relevancy of the Bible in today’s world is the way it handles Scripture as the central narrative for God’s mission in the world.

I see this study as a real gift to any church, and I am already making plans with the author to pilot its use at our church (Englewood Christian Church). Our fervent hope is that it is eventually published and made available more broadly. The exercises at the end of each lesson may not fit every context, but they provide an excellent example for how the inherent theology might be embodied in a local congregation's community context. The inclusion of these suggested exercises demonstrate a desire to move beyond sterile theological opining to the dynamic lived reality of the church as the continuing presence of Christ and God's renewed Temple presence in the world.

Our church is grateful for the possibilities of this project, and hope projects of this quality will be a more intentional consideration of the academic community in the future. I would welcome more detailed conversation concerning this guide.

Michael Bowling, Pastor  
Englewood Christian Church

## BRIEF VITA

Kent Ellett was born February 25, 1965, in Bloomington, Indiana. He is a graduate of Indiana University and Christian Theological Seminary. He has ministered in various churches in Indiana and Texas but has served the Speedway Church of Christ in Indianapolis, Indiana for the last twenty-nine years.