

# STVDIA ANTIQVA

The Student Journal for  
Ancient Studies



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THE STUDENT JOURNAL  
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From its inception, *Studia Antiqua* has sought to provide BYU students from all disciplines of ancient studies opportunities to further their academic interests. Created by the Student Society of Ancient Studies at Brigham Young University, the journal is dedicated to publishing original undergraduate and graduate research in all areas of ancient studies. It is hoped that such a publication will offer students the opportunity to improve their research and writing abilities, allow them to experience the editing and publication process, as well as prepare them for further educational pursuits by building their academic résumés. This opportunity motivates ancient studies students in their current class work by allowing them to expand their academic vision and goals.

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ברית ברית

## “Cutting a Covenant”: Making Covenants and Oaths in the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon

JAMIE ANN STECK

**T**he Lord has always made covenants with his people to bless them and help them return to him. This restoration to the presence of God is the end goal of the Plan of Happiness that Christ made possible through his Atonement. A covenant is “an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance” (Mendenhall and Herion 1:1179). In the Hebrew Old Testament, the word *bryt* (“covenant”) is almost always associated with the verb *krt* (“to cut”). These together mean “to make a covenant,” but the literal meaning of the idiom *krt bryt* suggests that some aspect of cutting is involved in making a covenant. This creates an interesting paradox, since a covenant is a binding agreement between two groups but the phrase has an underlying etymology of division. Though *bryt* in time came to refer to many kinds of oaths and covenants, certain covenants under the law of Moses reveal this connection with cutting as the rituals accompanying the covenants are performed: animal sacrifice, circumcision, and the rending of cloth. These ordinances and their corresponding

covenants made after Christ's condescension allow the believer to better see, in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon, how covenants relate to the ultimate goal of returning to the Father.

### **Animal Sacrifice**

Moses 5:5–8 states that the Lord instituted the practice of animal sacrifices primarily to represent Christ; the animal was slain to remind the people of that sacrifice which Christ, the Lamb of God, would undergo. Christ was, in essence, cut for the sins of the world. Amulek testified that the ultimate sacrifice would not be an animal sacrifice nor even a human sacrifice, but an "infinite and eternal sacrifice" (Alma 34:10). To remind his people of this, however, God instituted the law of animal sacrifice before Christ's mortal birth. Animal sacrifice was the veritable sign or token of the covenant; it was the ritual that cemented the covenant made between God and man.

Though there were differences among the rituals of animal sacrifices, whether sin offerings, burnt offerings, or peace offerings, the procedure for executing them was basically the same for each (see Bible Dictionary, "Sacrifice"). At one point in the procedure, the sacrificer, who slew his own offering, would lay his hand on the head of the animal and then cut its throat. This separation symbolized cutting away sin away from a man, of isolating and disposing of those wrongdoings that would keep him out of heaven. Since "no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom" (3 Ne. 27:19), this separation was and is necessary to return to the presence of the Father.

In Genesis one finds a particular sacrificial ritual in which the animal was cut in two and the sacrificer walked up the aisle flanked by the halves of the sacrificed animal: "And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another. . . . And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces" (Gen. 15:10, 17). This act was the ritual associated with making a covenant with

God;<sup>1</sup> the presence of the burning lamp (or “blazing torch” as it is translated in the NIV) signified the presence of the Lord.<sup>2</sup> It is this light passing between the pieces of the sacrifice that shows that God is personally involved in making covenants with his people. A commentary on this passage from *The Anchor Bible* suggests that *bryt* may have come from the Akkadian word *birit*, meaning “between” (114). This would emphasize the two-way pact which binds the two parties, God and man, together.

A fourth significance of slaying animals was not only to represent Christ’s sacrifice, man’s symbolic yielding up his sins, and the personal interest God takes in making covenants with us, but it was also a prediction of the punishment for breaking the two-way covenant bond. “And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant,” says the Lord through Jeremiah, “which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof . . . I will give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life” (Jer. 34:19–20). The punishment or consequence for breaking the covenant was the withdrawal of the Lord’s protection from Israel’s enemies. In the performance of cutting the calf in two and walking between the pieces, the ritual of cutting the sacrifice symbolizes the punishment that occurs when the oath is broken. The transgressors are cut off from the Lord’s protection and are at the mercy of their enemies.

The *New International Version Study Bible* designates the practice of slaughtering animals as a “self-maledictory oath” in which the

1. Gen. 15:18: “In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram,” giving him certain lands. The phrase “made a covenant” within the verse is *kert bryt* in Hebrew.

2. We see this same symbol when Moses saw the burning bush (Ex. 3:2), when the “Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire” (Ex. 14:24), when the Lord “descended upon [Sinai] in fire” to make covenants with Moses (Ex. 19:18), when “the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice” of Elijah before the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18: 38), when “there came a pillar of fire” to Lehi as he prayed to the Lord (1 Ne. 1:6), and when Nephi and Lehi, Helaman’s sons, were “encircled about with a pillar of fire” (Hel. 5:24).

sacrificer essentially proclaims, “May it be so done to me if I do not keep my oath and pledge” (Gen. 15:17 fn). Just as the animal is slaughtered, the sacrificer will be destroyed—left to the mercy of his enemies—if he breaks his covenant with the Lord. However, there is an even more serious punishment than being slain: it is to be cut off from the presence of the Lord forever, the more self-maledictory thought. This theme of being cut off from the presence of God is inherent in the act of slaying a sacrificial animal; in addition, the symbolism of the act is a warning that is repeated constantly throughout the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon.

### Circumcision

In Hebrew, *hml bryt* is the form used to signify circumcision, the token of the Lord’s covenant with Abraham and his seed. Through this ritual of cutting, both parties are reminded of their covenants. Genesis 17:10–11 expounds on this principle of loyalty and remembrance: “This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee. . . . And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.” In addition to the commandment given to Abraham to initiate the ritual of circumcision (from the Latin *circumcido*, to cut off or around), this verse reiterates the idea of the ‘between-ness’ that comes with a binding agreement. Those faithful Israelites who were circumcised came to symbolize those who are consecrated to the Lord—those who are bound to him. Thus, by cutting, a binding has again been wrought.

In addition, because cutting a male’s foreskin increases his fertility, circumcision represented the seed that was promised to Abraham. God covenanted with Abraham that Abraham’s posterity would be blessed, be numbered with him, and call Abraham their father (see Abr. 2:10–11 and Bible Dictionary, “Abraham, Covenant of”). Paul explicates the connection between circumcision and eternal posterity in Romans 4:11: “And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith . . . that he might

be the father of all them that believe.” Thus, the idea of being the sire of nations arose from the ritual of circumcision and was a reminder of the eternal increase for those who kept the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Bible Dictionary says that circumcision “symbolizes some aspects of separation or dedication (1) to God, to whom Israel belonged; (2) from the world, the uncircumcised with whom Israel might not mix; (3) from sin” (Bible Dictionary, “Circumcision”). If God’s people were to be part of Abraham’s seed and hence united with God, it was essential that they disassociate themselves from the carnal man. If not, they would be punished. Just as slaying an animal for a sacrifice was a self-maledictory oath, the ritual of circumcision also has a self-maledictory element associated with it. The *New International Version Study Bible* sums up the meaning of the act in saying, “If I am not loyal in faith and obedience to the Lord, may the sword of the Lord cut off me and my offspring as I have cut off my foreskin” (Gen. 17:10 fn.). In Genesis 17:14, the Lord spells out the consequences for the man who rejects the covenant of circumcision: “that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.” Though the act of cutting the foreskin lost its significance in many cultures and was corrupted by God’s covenant people (see Gen. 34), the ritual of *hml bryt* among God’s covenant people had a vital significance. A breach in the contract meant the retraction of blessings for posterity and separation from God.

### The Rending of Cloth

Clothes and garments are traditionally a symbol of power. It is this fact that gives such force to the oaths made by Moroni and his people to defend their liberty. When Moroni rent his coat and read his declaration upon it,

The people came running together with their armor girded about their loins, rending their garments in token, or as a covenant, that they would not forsake the Lord their God; or, in other words, if they should transgress the commandments

of God, or fall into transgression, and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments. Now this was the covenant which they made, and they cast their garments at the feet of Moroni, saying: We covenant with our God, that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression; yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression. (Alma 46:21–22)

Here again this ritual is seen as being, like circumcision, a sign of the covenant of loyalty and obedience that God's people made with the Lord. The oath is similarly self-maledictory, and it has the same breaking, cutting, tearing connotations as sacrifices and circumcision. If the people reject the Lord, they shall be cut off from him; the interwoven strands of the garment, representative of the binding between the Lord and the people through this covenant, will be destroyed and the people separated from God and his protection.

It is important here to note the difference between making a covenant and certain types of simile curses.<sup>3</sup> There are many instances in the Bible and a few in the Book of Mormon where someone makes an oath to someone or over something in order to curse the person, people, or place. Isaiah 29:7–8 says,

And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her munition, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision. It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty . . . so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion.

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3. For more information on simile curses and a breakdown of the types of simile curses, see "Simile Curses in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament, and the Book of Mormon," by Mark J. Morris (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993).

This and other examples serve as warnings or prophecies concerning the future of a person or people if an action is or is not performed.<sup>4</sup> Though simile curses have some implication of harm done to the person who does not perform as he has committed, the curses are not the type of self-maledictory covenants that God makes with men. The difference between them is perhaps that the people themselves are specifically covenanting with God to do or not do a particular act instead of proclaiming a curse on others for committing or not committing a particular act (i.e., obeying the commandments, entering into a peace treaty). In cutting a covenant, the individual takes full responsibility for the fulfillment of the covenant, and he or she seals this covenant, so to speak, with a physical outward ritual—sacrificing, circumcising, or rending cloth, to name a few.

With the condescension of Christ, however, elaborate outward rituals become obsolete, and the focus is turned inward to the heart. In Christ, the law of Moses is fulfilled. He personally told the Nephites how the law of Moses “hath an end in me” (3 Ne. 15:8). He was to bring with him the new law and the new covenant, which would be available to all people who keep his commandments.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers. . . . After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law

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4. Another prime example of the simile curse is found over and over in Deuteronomy 28, with verse 45 giving an explication for the curses: “Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded thee.” In the Book of Mormon, Abinadi tells King Noah that his life “shall be valued even as a garment in a hot furnace; for he shall know that I am the Lord” (Mosiah 12:3). When one of Moroni’s soldiers scalps Zarahemnah, he lays a curse over the scalp, saying, “Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth, which is he scalp of your chief, so shall ye fall to the earth except ye will deliver up your weapons of war and depart with a covenant of peace” (Alma 44:14).

in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31:31–33)

Thus remembering God and his covenants shifted from outward rituals to inward responsibility. As Mendenhall and Herion say of this new covenant, “It is a description of the complete internalization of the divine will that makes unnecessary the entire machinery of external enforcement” (1:1192). This modification from the Mosaic Law to Christ’s Higher Law contains interesting parallels with “cutting” covenants like animal sacrifice, circumcision, and the rending of cloth.

### The New Sacrifice

After Christ came, sacrifices were unnecessary because the ultimate sacrifice had already been paid by the One who would bring an eternal Atonement for mankind. “And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood . . . for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings” (3 Ne. 9:19). The new form of remembering Christ’s sacrifice would be the sacrament. The word *sacrament* originated from the Latin phrase *se sacramento obstringere*, meaning “to bind themselves with an oath” (“Covenants,” 1198). The word has since degenerated into merely having a sacred or mystic nature, but believers are really renewing a covenant every Sabbath by partaking of the sacrament. In taking the sacrament, partakers claim that they are willing to act as Christ and as a witness of him, to constantly remember him, and to keep his commandments (see Moroni 4:3; 5:2). This is the covenant that they renew every week, the oath with which they bind themselves. The *Anchor Bible* also states that “the Latin *sacramentum* at the time of the early Church referred to a soldier’s oath of loyalty to the Roman emperor” (“Covenants,” 1198), which holds interesting parallels for the emperor, the king that the subjects, in a sense, swear loyalty to each week.

The sacrament also has intrinsic implications of cutting. It is evident from 1 Corinthians 11:24–25 that the bread and water have these innate connotations of cutting:

And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance



of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, 'This cup is the new testament [covenant] in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

In promising to remember him, covenant makers bind themselves to him through that remembrance. In acting like him, they therefore symbolically cut themselves off from the world, since they cannot act like both the Savior and Satan or the natural man. This is the only way that the covenant man or woman can obtain a remission of sins (see JST Matt. 26:26, 28). Partaking of the sacrament is the new way they remember Christ's sacrifice; as the Lord says through Hosea, "For I desired mercy [Heb. charity, or loving-kindness], and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6, JST footnote included). Covenant people now have the privilege every week to demonstrate their willingness to remember how Christ was symbolically cut and to act like Christ in cutting themselves off from the world.

### The New Circumcision

As Christ has come and the old way of remembering God through sacrifices has been replaced with taking the sacrament, other rituals and signs have been replaced with more inward signs of commitment. He has fulfilled this part of the law of Moses as well; he told the Nephites when he visited them that "The law of circumcision is done away in me" (Moroni 8:8). Instead of being circumcised (though today when male babies are born it is simply an accepted procedure as a matter of cleanliness and tradition), his covenant people, under the Higher Law, are commanded to have their hearts circumcised. How much harder is this commandment! Jeremiah urges, "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart" (Jer. 4:4). From what has been discussed about *kert bryt*, this scripture might even be read, "Bind yourselves to the Lord, and take away the evils or worldly tendencies of your heart." God's people are to cut away the evil that is in their hearts so that they may not be cut off from the Lord.

The new token of circumcision, a new *hml bryt*, is what the Lord requires of his people—to have the covenants and the law

internalized. Paul in Romans 2:29 and the JST of Romans 3:1 says, "Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter. . . . What advantage then hath the Jew over the Gentile? Or what profit of circumcision, who is not a Jew from the heart?" The Lord's people today participate in the sacrament in honor of his sacrifice; thus they must be willing to make sacrifices themselves as he did so that they can return to the presence of God the Father. The Lord actually commands his people to sacrifice themselves: "And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire<sup>5</sup> and with the Holy Ghost" (3 Ne. 9:20). The following emblem poem by George Herbert illustrates beautifully how the broken heart is the sacrifice that is to be proffered to God:

### The Altar

A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant rears,  
 Made of a heart, and cemented with tears:  
 Whose parts are as they hand did frame;  
 No workman's tool hath touched the same.  
     A HEART alone  
     Is such a stone,  
     As nothing but  
     Thy power doth cut.  
     Wherefore each part  
     Of my hard heart  
     Meets in this frame,  
     To praise thy Name:  
 That, if I chance to hold my peace,  
 These stones to praise thee may not cease.  
 Oh let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,  
 And sanctify this ALTAR to be thine. (Norton 1575)

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5. It is possible to surmise that this fire relates back to the "blazing torch" or "burning lamp" symbol, representing the presence and the protection of God for his covenant people who have broken hearts and contrite spirits. As Psalm 34:18 states, he will be "nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

As the poem states, it is the individual heart that should be placed on the altar, just as Christ offered himself to the Father to make restitution for all mankind. In giving up the heart to God, the penitent and humble man or woman also gives up all sin and cuts out all that is not of God. As followers today participate in this new *hml bryt* and offer up humble and soft hearts, having had the evil cut from them, they will not be destroyed and cut off from the presence of the Father. Lehi, just before he died, gave a caveat to his children concerning the state of their hearts:

My heart hath been weighed down with sorrow from time to time, for I have feared, lest for the hardness of your hearts the Lord your God should come out in the fulness of his wrath upon you, that ye be cut off and destroyed forever. . . . And he hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence. (2 Ne. 1:17, 20)

God's covenant people are saved by Christ's sacrifice, but it is only after they make the effort to separate themselves from the world and to be more like Christ that they will be sanctified through Christ's Atonement and be worthy to return.

### **The New Rending**

It is no longer cloth that needs to be rent to make a covenant with God. From Joel it is clear that the Lord prefers his people to "rend your heart, and not your garments, and repent, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and he will turn away the evil from you" (JST Joel 2:13). From the phrase "for the remission of sins," the word 'remission' comes from the Latin *remittere*—to send back, give up, or reject. When people confess and forsake their sins, they give up their sins, cutting such ungodly acts out of their lives; Christ, in turn, is able to take away the judgments that would come to mortals because of those sins. This echoes all that has been discussed about broken hearts and a contrite spirits; hearts are broken so that those who have covenanted with God

may have access to the Atonement and hence be able to return to the presence of the Father.

The ultimate rending, however, is that of Christ himself as symbolized by a veil. Hebrews 10:19–20 says that the veil represents Christ's flesh; thus, in a very symbolic, very beautiful way, Christ was rent, cut, torn, broken for us that the covenanted might return to God the Father. This was powerfully shown when "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Matt. 27:51). In visualizing the ancient temple of Solomon, when the veil was rent those in the Holy Place, the chamber connected to the outer court, then had access to the Holy of Holies. They could then pass through the rent veil into the presence of God. The covenants now cut with God are effectual because Christ was cut, and it is through his sacrifice that the binding power of covenants is effectual, thus enabling his people to return to his presence and the presence of God the Father. Additionally, like the one who passes down the aisle flanked by the sacrificial animal, Christ is the go-between—the Mediator for those he seeks to join with the Father. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

As the Mediator, he is the uniting force, the power that binds God to men. The very paradox that surrounds *kert bryt* is the same paradox that surrounds Christ as being both the one who is cut and the one who binds. The seemingly contradictory idea is settled in realizing that it is Christ's sacrifice that allows mankind to be bound to him and to the Father in covenant relationships that will help them return to that God who gave them life.

### Oaths Today

Paul, in 1 and 2 Timothy, speaks of those in the latter days who will be "speaking lies in hypocrisy," and who will have "their conscience seared with a hot iron" as well as those who are trucebreakers, false accusers, and traitors. Promises, oaths, and covenants are broken far too often. It is hard for many today to imagine that the spoken or written agreement could be so binding and unbreakable—relationships "built upon little more than

promises reliably made and honorably kept" ("Covenants," 1179). Even wicked men and women of the past kept their oaths; when negotiations for surrender were being arranged, Zarahemnah said to Moroni,

Behold, here are our weapons of war; we will deliver them up unto you, but we will not suffer ourselves to take an oath unto you, which we know that we shall break, and also our children; but take our weapons of war, and suffer that we may depart into the wilderness; otherwise we will retain our swords, and we will perish or conquer. (Alma 44:8)

In spite of his depraved state, Zarahemnah had respect for the binding word and was willing to die rather than make an oath to his enemy that he knew he would break.

In this dispensation, mankind has been giving a warning from the Lord concerning how they are to treat oaths and covenants:

And the arm of the Lord shall be revealed; and the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people; For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant. (D&C 1:14–15)

The *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, making a sobering statement concerning current attitudes toward covenants, says, "Covenant-based relationships in the West have become almost obsolete, the fragile institution of marriage remaining the most noteworthy vestige of such relationships" ("Covenants," 1179). The binding power of the priesthood can have no effect on marriages, families, and lives if no one is willing to commit to those binding relationships completely.

In the parable of the vineyard, the wild branches of the olive trees are those which will be cut down, cut off, severed from the roots of the tree. The roots in the allegory are representative of the covenants man makes with God; the roots are what allow the branches, his people, to survive. If people are not willing to stay connected to the roots and become feral, then they will be cut off.

As Romans 11:2–22 says, “For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.”

Numbers 30:2 says, “If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.” As people today cut sacred and binding covenants with the Lord and with others, let them remember to not only symbolically cut covenants but to literally break themselves off from the world and tear the inhibiting sin from their lives. Let them remember he who was symbolically cut so that they might honorably keep their covenants and return to live with God the Father.

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## Plato in Context: The *Republic* and Allegory

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In his early work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche promoted the idea that Plato was the source of everything strait-laced in Western civilization. For Nietzsche, that meant that Plato had ruined the fun because he had repressed the Dionysian camp, casting himself prostrate before the Socratic altar. Because Nietzsche's claim was well received in his era of continental confusion and soul-searching, scholarship since has inherited the prejudiced opinion that the ancient philosopher was more than a little tainted with predilections toward the *clearly* pious and saintly Apollonian Athenian.<sup>1</sup> Hundreds of volumes written in the last century are built on the premise that Plato was as *we* say he was—that there was not much more to him than his Theory of Forms and a few other idealist propositions. Indeed, once a conclusion has been drawn, it is easy to simply insert it again and again into the primary texts. In recent years, a few scholars have spoken out against this view, highlighting the fact that Plato could not be ignorant towards the nature of Greek religion

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1. This is a rather direct reading of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, as his antagonism towards Plato is a dramatic climax that allows him to discuss his more serious topic: how to help the German spirit reunite art with the Dionysian ideal. While Nietzsche is hardly the universally worshipped scholar, his same caricature of Plato is, however, extremely widespread outside of Plato scholarship itself. Introductory courses in philosophy and, even better, classes in English and History tend to present Nietzsche's Plato. Nietzsche makes this view bluntly vivid.

and culture in his day.<sup>2</sup> Such scholars have come to admit that there was more to Plato than meets the scholastically trained eye, that he was seriously involved in the religious discussion of his era. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize that Plato was a seeker of religious truth, rather than a mechanical mathematician producing work after monotonous work with the same thesis. I argue that the religious undertones of Plato's dialogues reveal a highly synthetic dramatist caught up in a whirlwind of religious turmoil and confusion.<sup>3</sup>

### Preliminaries

To explore the topic at hand, a few of the most famous pages from Plato's most popular work, his *Republic*, will suffice. First, however, a few comments must be made for the benefit of those not intimately acquainted with the ideas and works of Plato. His most famous philosophy is what has been commonly called the Theory of Forms. This is essentially the idea that universal terms used in language have existent metaphysical counterparts. In other words, there is an actual existing entity that we call "blueness," or "justice." According to Plato's *Phaedo* and his *Republic*, these Forms exist in another sphere that is above and beyond this world of changing, shadowy images. The Forms are what impart real knowledge to man, for Ideas or Concepts like "courage" and "tallness" do not change, and only the unchangeable can communicate to man something that can be known with surety. Actual objects that have the Forms here in this world are always in a Heraclitean flux, and that which changes constantly can give only

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2. For example, see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). Also, Michael L. Morgan, "Plato and Greek Religion," in Richard Kraut, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Also, Mark L. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

3. To present an argument here to support the absolute saturation of all of Plato's dialogues would be far beyond the scope of this paper. Two important works might be consulted on the subject: Michael L. Morgan, *Platonic Piety: Philosophy and Ritual in Fourth-Century Athens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); and Mark L. McPherran, "Does Piety Pay? Socrates and Plato on Prayer and Sacrifice," in Nicolas Smith and Paul Woodruff, eds., *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). These argue by textual analysis for such a more complicated reading of Plato.



fleeting or changing knowledge. The passages to be examined in this paper actually come from the very portion of the *Republic* where Plato develops most clearly the doctrine of the Forms. The majority of scholars have taken the Theory of Forms to be the central doctrine of Plato, though it is only touched upon briefly in a handful of his writings. The current emphasis on the Theory is likely due to its having been by far the most influential idea that Plato ever put forward, especially in its role as the basis of Augustine's redefinitions of Christian doctrines in the fourth century.<sup>4</sup> While these later readings of Plato have been extremely pervasive, the context discussed below demonstrates that the Theory of Forms was not exactly what Plato wanted others to believe.

Another important piece of information that must be understood before Plato's actual text is to be considered regards the controversy over the existence of Socrates. All of Plato's works are written as dialogues, and excepting the late *Laws*, the main character, or one of the main characters, is Socrates, the Athenian philosopher who was eventually forced to drink hemlock for his teachings.<sup>5</sup> Since there were many philosophers and other writers at the time of Plato using Socrates as a main character in similar dialogues, it has been questioned whether there was a historical person of that name and nature. It has been suggested by some that Socrates was not a real person,<sup>6</sup> though most scholars allow for his existence and claim that Plato was a close adherent to Socrates' philosophy. The best arguments for the actuality of Socrates are found in Gregory Vlastos' *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Here, Vlastos uses literary evidence in Plato's corpus to

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4. Augustine recounts in his *Confessions* that he spent his early manhood seeking an understanding of the reality of evil, and this led him eventually to Platonism. When Christianity had finally stalked him long enough, he gave in to it, but he never gave up his Platonic concept of the Forms. He became the proverbial meeting place of Platonism and Christianity.

5. This fact alone ought to be enough evidence to the point that Socrates was a real person, since there are numerous accounts of the trial of Socrates at Athens. Plato's version is the famous *Apology*. Plato also dramatizes Socrates' death in the *Phaedo*. Aristophanes also wrote a play about Socrates—the *Clouds*.

6. The most influential work to this effect is Anton-Hermann Chroust *Socrates Man and Myth* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1957).

show an evolution from doctrines that only could have been those of another thinker, to ideas that are categorically Plato's. As Socrates takes the more central role in the earlier dialogues, he shows that Socrates and Plato must have been two real people.<sup>7</sup> This is of importance to the reader because the dialogue under consideration was written during Plato's "middle period," and the ideas, though they are found in the mouth of Socrates, are the concepts as understood and elucidated by Plato, likely never even conceived by Socrates himself. As reference is made to other dialogues throughout this paper, it is important to note that Plato's treatment of Greek religious and ritual practice develops from simple Socratic acceptance and adherence to Platonic exploration and mysterious discovery.<sup>8</sup>

Within this framework, a discussion of the *Republic* may commence. The work is utopian in nature, as Plato propounds the ideal concept of the state, in order to make an analogy from such a society to the true definition of the universal term "justice."<sup>9</sup> Somewhere along the way, the participants of the conversation (Socrates and the two brothers of Plato) veer down a dramatic side road that allows Socrates the opportunity to expound the famous Theory of Forms.<sup>10</sup> As the ideas concerning the Theory develop, Plato employs a series of three allegories in order to illustrate the doctrine of the Forms. These allegories are, in order of appearance, the Allegory of the Sun, the simile of the Divided Line, and the famous Allegory of the Cave. While exploring Plato's subtleties in these three allegories, especially the religious subtleties, it will become evident that the author is not a simple, straight-thinking philosopher. In fact, Plato's treatment of metaphysics in the *Republic* betrays an important lack of axiomatic

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7. Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 46. The whole chapter is of interest.

8. The terms "Socratic" and "Platonic," then, refer to the philosophies found respectively in Plato's earlier works and Plato's later works.

9. *Republic* 368d–69a. All references to Plato are found in John M. Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). All references are given in stephanus notation and are given without mention of Plato's authorship.

10. This is found at the end of Book VI and the beginning of Book VII.

approach. These allegories demonstrate that Plato was an earnest seeker of truth, not a scholar with a Socratic agenda.

### The Allegory of the Sun

As the interlocutors move through their political theory, the others stop Socrates to ask him what sort of good the perfect ruler or guardian of the state ought to be. Specifically, they questioned whether the good is "knowledge or pleasure or something else altogether."<sup>11</sup> Socrates explains that their question is too lofty in nature, and so he tells them that rather than tackling *the* Good, they could deal with its offspring. Here it is that Plato moves his characters into the exposition of the first allegory in question. Here, the first (and really the only vital) premise is presented: Socrates makes a distinction between the "visible but not intelligible," and the "intelligible but not visible."<sup>12</sup> This world, essentially, is the visible, while the world of thought and Forms is purely intelligible and not visible at all. This will become the major point of the Divided Line, but here it is only a granted premise. Plato equates the offspring of the Good with the visible in this allegory while the intelligible, or the father, is only implied by the analogy. Socrates and his companions begin to explore vision as one of the five senses, and they settle on it being special because, unlike the other four, it requires a third component: light.<sup>13</sup> The allegory follows simply from this point, for as the sun provides the light that illuminates the visible things of the world, Socrates wants to convey that the "sun" of the Forms is *the* Good, and it gives light to the intelligible realm of the Forms, allowing the mind to "see" them clearly.<sup>14</sup>

While the allegory seems very clear and straightforward, the English rendering can obscure some of Plato's implied meaning. After presenting the idea that light is the third component of vision (in addition to the object and the eye), Socrates asks, "Which of the gods in heaven would you name as the cause and

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11. *Republic* 506b.

12. *Ibid.*, 507b.

13. *Ibid.*, 507e.

14. *Ibid.*, 508c.

controller of this, the one whose light causes our sight to see in the best way and the visible things to be seen?"<sup>15</sup> The response given is the sun, but note the response is in answer to the question, "which of the gods?" The answer is Apollo, not merely the sun as the modern Westerner sees it.<sup>16</sup> Buried in the allegory is a careful reference to Apollo, a vital and important figure in Plato's Athens. Apollo had been universally recognized as the sun god of Greek religion only for several decades at this time,<sup>17</sup> and this then—recent usurpation had placed Apollo in dire opposition to Dionysus and Dionysian beliefs.<sup>18</sup> Plato's short analogy carries with it more than meets the modern eye.

Plato's own day and location was a crossroads of religious upheaval and controversy,<sup>19</sup> and standing in a central role in all of this was the stalemate between Apollonian restraint and Dionysian moral freedom. The Dionysian cult centered its activities around wine festivals, frenzy, and mantic revelation, while the Apollonian sect centered its more reserved nature around the Delphic oracle, held to be the very center of the universe in Greek terms.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Delphi holds a sacred and central role in the early dialogues, for according to the *Apology*, Socrates' main defense rested on a statement communicated by Apollo to Chaerephon through the Pythian at the Delphic temple.<sup>21</sup> His defense further rested on his attestation that he knew nothing, which was entirely in line with, and likely inspired by, the Apollonian tradition.<sup>22</sup>

15. Ibid., 508a.

16. The Greek is actually "Helios," but textual evidence suggests that Plato uses this term to refer to the god Apollo. Besides Apollo's then recent ascension to popular godhood, Plato's account ends with "Glaucón comically [saying]: By Apollo, what a daemonic superiority!" *Republic* 509c. This direct reference, combined with other nuances mentioned below, suggests that Apollo is referred to by "Helios" in this context.

17. *Greek Religion*, 149.

18. Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology* (New York: Longman Publishing Group, 1991), 210.

19. "Plato and Greek Religion," 229.

20. *Classical Mythology*, 191.

21. *Apology*, 21a.

22. *Greek Religion*, 148. Burkert explains that the phrase "know thyself" that was written on the temple at Delphi was to be understood as a divine mandate to man to recognize that they were not gods, and that the knowledge there bestowed upon them through the oracle was truth revealed from above. This plays directly into Socrates' disavowal of knowledge throughout the early dialogues, but is made more conspicuous in the *Apology*.

Plato seems to be responding to the controversy, but in very careful and couched terms so as not to cause an overly obvious uproar or unfavorable response towards philosophy.

What Plato seems to argue with the allegory, then, is as follows: Since Apollo is what gives light and allows men to see only the crass, physical, and visible things of the world, he is merely the *offspring* of the Good, which allows the mind to see the intelligible, eternal Forms. Plato points out, still locked into the explication of the offspring, that "the sun [Apollo, the god] not only provides visible things with the power to be seen but also with coming to be, growth, and nourishment."<sup>23</sup> If he is only the offspring to a much higher power and truth, then Apollo is merely the giver of life to the lower physical things, while the Good is the power of existence to the intelligible and real. Apollo is, at least in some sense, diminished by the analogy. Its purpose is visibly two-fold. It communicates the relationship of the Forms to the Good, but it also places the popularized Greek cult of restraint in a lower sphere than these more important philosophical truths.

This is, however, far from a declarative stance on the controversy between the Apollonian and Dionysian followings. It is clear from the *Phaedrus*, a Platonic dialogue roughly contemporary with the *Republic*, that Dionysian frenzy is also an analogy for the process of attaining to the higher truths of the Forms and of the Good.<sup>24</sup> Between these two statements, Plato appears to avoid taking a particular stand on religious ideals, except to say that he is above and beyond them if he has the true *gnosis*—not unlike the message of Athen's famed Eleusinian mysteries. As McPherran points out,<sup>25</sup> there was no official religion in Greece, but rather a loose set of rituals, obedience to which constituted piety. This means that Plato's obedient attitude implies adherence to both traditions, while his interpretation of their meaning may have seemed unorthodox or radical. The Allegory of the Sun gives the first glimpse of the profile of Plato as a seeker, one confused by

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23. *Republic* 509b.

24. This is essentially the argument of an entire chapter in *Platonic Piety*, 158–87.

25. *The Religion of Socrates*, 20–21

Athenian devotional oscillation and looking for something solid and universal in the resultant religious melee.

### The Divided Line

This leads directly into the discussion of the simile that follows the first allegory. Predicated on the distinction drawn at the outset of the Allegory of the Sun, Plato next builds on the nature of the relationship between the two analogues.<sup>26</sup> He openly states that the realm that is higher and “sovereign” is the realm of the Forms. This is not unlike the traditions surrounding Eleusis, which taught that though death prevailed, “there is another kind of life, and this, at all events, is good.”<sup>27</sup> Lundquist has explored the motif among ancient civilizations that the other realm is higher, or more real, than this present one: “Thus the purpose of life is to return to heaven, to the Real.”<sup>28</sup> Plato unambiguously frames the realm of the Forms as “the Real” in his reiterated distinction between visible and intelligible. All this is compacted into a simple diagram that demonstrates the transcendent nature of the Forms, hinting again at another motif of Eleusis and other mystery rites, namely, ascension.<sup>29</sup> This diagram is the Divided Line, a line divided into four parts, each more significant than the last, and each division increasingly larger and truer. The lower two sections of the divided line Socrates labels the visible, the upper two, the intelligible.<sup>30</sup> The lower section has as its two subsections images and objects, respectively, one murkier than the other. The higher section has as its two subsections thought and understanding, paralleling the lower.<sup>31</sup>

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26. *Republic* 509d. Socrates restates the distinction very clearly: “Understand, then, that, as we said, there are these two things, one sovereign of the intelligible kind and place, the other visible. . . . In any case, you have two kinds of things, visible and intelligible.”

27. *Greek Religion*, 289.

28. John M. Lundquist “What Is Reality?” in Donald W. Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1994), 627.

29. This motif is even more apparent in Diotima’s conversation with Socrates as reported in the Symposium. There, he literally ascends to the Form of Beauty through the mysterious rites of love. See note 30 below.

30. *Republic* 509d.

31. *Republic* 509d–11e.

Having laid out this picture, Plato moves along to discuss why the lower section drives one to the higher. This focus on ascent suggests that the Divided Line is a discussion of ritual.<sup>32</sup> Socrates states that in geometry and science, an analogy is drawn as a figure. Though this does not always represent the actual figure or measurement at stake, it allows the mathematician or geometer to grasp the calculations necessary to finish his project.<sup>33</sup> Plato compares this to the crass and physical nature of the lower part of the divided line. His companion, restating their entire argument, explains, "those who study the objects of [the] sciences are forced to do so by means of thought rather than sense perception."<sup>34</sup> In other words, the physical is an analogy for the spiritual, and by examining the physical world, the philosopher is driven on to the higher world of the mysterious Forms and Truths. In terms of the context of religious ritual controversy, this discussion takes on an important religious light. The divided line explains the purpose of physical or crass ritual: to teach the higher principles that transcend the actual physical work.

This proposition further complicates the symbolism of the previous allegory. Socrates is intimately connected with the Apollonian ideals in the early dialogues, which seem here to be re-defined as inferior by Plato's handling. Apparently, Plato implies by this discussion that Socrates has a sort of ritual, something crass, simple, and monotonous,<sup>35</sup> in order to drive away the uninitiated and drive the true philosopher to truth. There are important hints of this idea in this dialogue's general structure, as well as in other contemporary dialogues. The first book of the *Republic* is a classic Socratic dialogue, through which the stubborn Thrasymachus is driven, wild with rage, from the conversation, while the others have their appetites whetted by the discussion. The first part of the dialogue, then, works as an initiation ritual for

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32. Lundquist shows that ascension is a nearly universal facet of Near Eastern temple architecture and ritual structure. See John M. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 93-94.

33. *Republic* 510c-11a.

34. *Republic* 511c.

35. Ironically, these exact words describe the opinions of most first-time readers of the Socratic dialogues.

the desirous, much as the initiation rites that were performed as the opening to the Eleusinian mysteries. Similar initiation approaches appear in the *Meno*, *Symposium*, and other dialogues.<sup>36</sup> Some further evidence may be brought to this point; both McPherran and Morgan have interpreted the elenchus, the Socratic form of question-asking in a nearly monotonous and (as is often pointed out by interlocutors) obnoxious manner, as a sort of ritual.<sup>37</sup> This attitude is present in one of Plato's last works, the *Laws*, in which Socrates does not even appear. Here, as Burkert sums up, Plato's ideal city has a general system of law demanding that "none may forsake cultic service,"<sup>38</sup> or, as Morgan says, "to orient their attention and practice to the gods in appropriate ways . . . most people require a regimen of rituals and celebrations."<sup>39</sup> Simply put, in Plato's ideal city, laws require physical ritual so that the simple and unlearned might order and organize themselves in preparation for the higher mysteries that will follow, if indeed the common folk ever attain those mysteries. This deliberate purpose of ritual practice emerges in other dialogues as well.<sup>40</sup> Essentially, Socrates was for Plato the philosophical ritual, and his work would initiate one into the higher mysteries, or, as Plato models it in the later *Theaetetus*, Socrates is the midwife that delivers babies into a new world, though he cannot do any more than that.<sup>41</sup> The Apollonian ties to Socrates suggest that the Allegory of the Sun makes the same analogy to the Sun God himself.

### The Allegory of the Cave

The Allegory of the Sun and of the Divided Line provide the initiated reader with the understanding that Greek religion has

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36. The *Meno* is essentially broken into two halves, one of which is a classic "Socratic" dialogue. After that, however, Meno has proven himself worthy of the discussion that ensues. Further, all characters found at the discussion in the *Symposium* are initiated by the Dionysian wine festival speeches that proceed Socrates' great speech at the end.

37. *Platonic Piety*, "Does Piety Pay? Socrates and Plato on Prayer and Sacrifice," 99.

38. *Greek Religion*, 336.

39. "Plato and Greek Religion," 243.

40. See *Phaedo* 69a-d, and *Meno* 76e.

41. See *Theaetetus* 149a+.



some important downfalls which impel the thinker to a lower understanding than the realm of the Forms. Further, readers are given to understand that Socrates exemplifies, in himself, a sort of ritual practice, according to that lower, physical Greek religion. Finally, such physical religious practice, whether in Socrates or in cultic worship, is a process that allows one to approach the revelation of the real and the divine, embodied in what Plato calls the Good. All of these ideas are reiterated in Plato's most exalting and interesting analogy yet—the Allegory of the Cave.

The Allegory of the Cave, found in Book VII of the *Republic*, is rather simple. Socrates invites his listeners to picture a great multitude dwelling within a cave, locked into chairs and forced to look only forward at a wall of the cave. Falling onto that wall are shadows and images that are cast by real objects. These objects are carried along a path between the multitude and a great fire, located at some distance behind those in the seats. The people in the chairs grow up believing that the shadows and any sounds that reflect off the wall from behind are the truth.<sup>42</sup> Socrates then asks what the effect would be if one of those people in the chairs were to be released and should turn around and gaze upon the path, puppets, and fire. Further, what if he were to be dragged, against his will, from the cave into the actual sunlight? He asks which is the truer, and the obvious answer is that anything without the cave is the more true. Socrates also asks about the soul who is forced to return to the cave, after having adjusted over time to the real world, in order to bring other souls from their chairs to the real world. The result of such an action, Plato pointedly observes in dramatic fashion, would be the killing of the philosopher who returns.<sup>43</sup> From this discussion, Plato moves rather nonchalantly to the subject of education, for the guardians of the Republic would have traveled, metaphorically, out of the cave, and hence would be attempting to teach the enslaved cave-dwellers.

This allegory provides a wealth of interesting allusions and further synthesis of the ideas presented in the previous analogies.

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42. *Republic* 514a–15c.

43. *Republic* 515d–17a.

The allegory is a sort of corollary to the Allegory of the Sun, as it is the sun that the philosopher emerges from the earth to see. The sun is still offspring, and Apollo is again condemned to the lower portion of the divided line, but this allegory is clearly a further, more complicated explication of the above-mentioned allegories. There are, however, some interesting religious ties to caves that suggest that perhaps Apollo is better understood as dwelling there. From early times, the Greeks believed that caves were the home of the gods, such as Pan,<sup>44</sup> perhaps suggesting that Apollo would rest in this cave. This may link him with the pitiful fire that casts the shadows in the cave, rather than with the sun that crosses the sky without. The ascension from darkness to light is an obvious symbol, but in these terms it may mean that Apollo is more darkness than the light of the Good. But these allusions are matters for more careful interpretation, while some clearer allusions to Greek religious practice are available.

Morgan points out in an extensive argument that the majority of the *Republic* contains allusions to education rituals, such as the Eleusinian mysteries mentioned earlier.<sup>45</sup> According to his explanation, most of the allusions are critical of then-current Greek practices. Education, however, takes a positive turn at this allegory. The definitive ritual of education is the classic initiation rite, to which this allegory clearly alludes. It is explained that Pythagoras, a philosopher to whom Plato shows great affinities,<sup>46</sup> descended into a cave, in which he was initiated into the highest mysteries, physically symbolized by his being clothed in black wool.<sup>47</sup> Further legends about the mysterious Pythagoras claim

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44. *Greek Religion*, 24.

45. *Platonic Piety*, 100–57.

46. Pythagorean doctrines of the afterlife, soul, and mathematical realism begin to appear in Plato's *Meno*, considered by Vlastos to be one of the first dialogues written after Plato sheds his Socratic skin. After that, a great deal of the doctrine that Plato propounds was first introduced by Pythagoras, a good time before Plato was even born. The most telling moment in the dialogues that shows Plato's conviction towards Pythagoreanism is in the *Timaeus*, where Socrates himself is given a seat through the whole, in order to allow a Pythagorean philosopher from Southern Italy a chance to explain a religious creation myth.

47. *Greek Religion*, 280.

that he descended into the underworld, and then returned, in order to prove the immortality of man,<sup>48</sup> which also shows something of a direct allusion in Plato's Allegory of the Cave. The breaking of an individual's bonds within the cave is the ritual of the elenchus, as is implied by the returning philosopher who must convince others of the errors inherent in their blissful forward gaze, which further implies that philosophical initiation also takes place within the cave of mysteries. This important tie to Pythagoras highlights the later, very devoted attachment to Pythagorean doctrines in Plato's work. Here, Plato suggests that the individual must be initiated as Pythagoras was, to be able to subsequently learn the doctrines that Pythagoras taught.

As yet, this discussion does not seem to complicate the doctrines presented by the previous two analogies at all. Rather, it further clarifies and synthesizes them. The mysteries, the truths to be found in the upper portion of the Divided Line, are simply the truths that had been taught by Pythagoras and that would be taught by Plato. Apollo worship remains the physical cult of the lower part of the Divided Line, as Socrates initiates the desirous through the elenchus, so that those in the cave might break free from the chains within the cave and make the ritual ascent to the above world of Pythagorean Forms.<sup>49</sup> It is allusion to the cave initiation in this allegory, however, that makes the application of all of the philosophy propounded plainly connected with actual physical ritual. This makes it clear that initiation takes place in the lower section of the divided line, that it is the physical that leads one to the spiritual. The Allegory of the Cave basically defines all of the terms used throughout these three analogies that expound the Theory of Forms. This places the real meaning of the allegory well within the education ritual context

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48. *Greek Religion*, 299.

49. A late commentator on Heraclitus, Iamblichus, wrote: "Things seen and heard in sacred rites are introduced for the tendance of the soul in us and to keep within bounds the evils which birth has caused to grow about it, to set us free and release us from bonds. Hence Heraclitus rightly called them cures" (emphasis added). *On Mysteries*, 1.11. As in Richard D. McKirahan, *Philosophy before Socrates* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 126.

that Morgan explains in his article. From this point of the *Republic* on, the ritual of education is limited to, and clarified as, a Pythagorean initiation rite, allowing the learner to approach the mysteries as Plato understood them at the time.

With all of this understood, Plato's three allegories that pro-pound the Forms do not fall outside of the "political" agenda of the *Republic*. They no longer appear as a side note or tangent in the course of explicating a comprehensive political theory. Rather, they make up a most vital explanation of the relationship between the governing philosopher-king and his subjects, how he is to educate and teach. From this, it also follows that the *Laws* does not contradict the ideology of the *Republic*. The *Laws* is simply a systematic and direct approach to the same problem, while the *Republic* is dealing more directly with the analogue of the dialogue: Justice. This last allegory brings all of these things into one unified progression, and Plato's thesis becomes clear at last.

## Conclusion

Hence, Plato is not the frowning philosophical follower that Nietzsche and narrowly dogmatic classicists have made him out to be. He is a vitally interested, confused, and wondering philosopher of his time. He follows in the tradition of the natural philosophers before him, like Parmenides and Empedocles, who wrote their philosophical treatises as revelations from the gods and goddesses.<sup>50</sup> Plato was merely trying to understand the nature of the philosophical in terms of his naturally pious culture. Nothing in his philosophy suggests that he is rupturing the history of Greek religion, and nothing in his philosophy suggests that he is the silent, pious type that remains bowed all day at the altar. The exegesis in this essay has shown him to be an inquisitor. Plato sought to understand the implications of Pythagorean

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50. Gregory Vlastos, "Theology and Philosophy in Early Greek Thought," in Daniel W. Graham, ed., *Studies in Greek Philosophy: The Presocratics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3.

philosophy.<sup>51</sup> He sought to understand how it could be true, while he still held to the religious ritual of his day. These three allegories, placed at the very center of Plato's *Republic*, do not change the modern interpretation of the Theory of Forms, but give it the more particular religious significance that Plato likely felt it deserved. Plato remains, then, the greatest theologian of his era and locale, providing insight and invitation to his fellow initiates.

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51. Walter Burkert has made it abundantly clear that Pythagorean philosophy was all but unified. Pythagoras may have been little more than a good man to whom a great deal was attributed. However, it is clear that by Plato's time, there were groups of Pythagoreans, and traditions and legends surrounding the historical figure were already plentiful. I work on the assumption that Plato was trying to unify a great deal of vague concepts in his philosophy, as well as making hints that others would recognize, though Pythagoreanism was not universal or well organized. Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Early Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).



## The Law of the Red Heifer: A Type and Shadow of Jesus Christ

Mélbourne O'Banion

**T**he law of the red heifer, found in the book of Numbers, chapter 19, is one of the most significant and yet least understood sacrificial laws in the Old Testament. This law, which governs the purification of those who become ritually unclean by contact with a corpse, was given to the children of Israel to be a "perpetual statute unto them" (Num. 19:21), and, like all other sacrifices, to ultimately point them to the Messiah.

Jewish tradition teaches that only Moses knew the full meaning of this *chukkat*, or law, which must be obeyed even though not understood. The Midrash says of *chukim*, "Four Torah laws cannot be explained by human reason, but being divine, demand implicit obedience: to marry one's brother's widow (Deut. 25:5), not to mingle wool and linen in a garment (Deut. 22:11), to perform the rite of the scapegoat (Lev. 16:26, 34), and to perform the rite of the red cow (Num. 19)."<sup>1</sup> Even the wise and venerable King Solomon purportedly said, "All these I have comprehended," speaking of ordinances, "but as regards the section dealing with the Red Heifer, I have investigated and inquired and examined: 'I said: I will get wisdom; but it was far from me'" (see Jacob 4:14).<sup>2</sup>

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1. *Numbers Rabbah* 19:8, as quoted in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, 1149.

2. *Midrash Rabbah*, Numbers Vol. II (London: Soncino Press, 1983), 754.

Those who desire to grasp the true meaning of this commandment will know by study and also by faith that the law of the red heifer is a powerful symbol of Jesus Christ. In Christ was this law fulfilled, and only through Christ may we become clean and conquer death, just as only through the ashes of the red heifer could the children of Israel become ritually clean following contact with a corpse.

This paper will show that the law of the red heifer is a type and shadow of the atonement of Jesus Christ. The Lord's requirements for the sacrifice of the heifer will be carefully analyzed, as will the requirements that symbolize Christ and his ultimate sacrifice. The breadth and depth of symbolism that point to Christ in this law are too great to be coincidental. Like all other animal sacrifices, much is found in the sacrifice of the red heifer that corroborates with Jesus Christ's divinity and his culminating atonement for all mankind.

### Background of the Sacrifice

The Lord commanded Moses to have the children of Israel bring forth a red heifer "without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke" (Num. 19:2). The heifer was to cleanse Israel from Levitical defilement (defilement from the dead) and proved a unique sacrifice for several reasons. This sacrifice, unlike other sin offerings, was a sacrifice made once for all the children of Israel (at least as long as its ashes lasted),<sup>3</sup> was wholly burnt, and was performed outside the camp or sanctuary.

Seven days before the sacrifice, the priest chosen to perform the rite (usually the eldest son of the high priest)<sup>4</sup> remained in the

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3. From the *Mishnah Parah* we learn that there have been a total of nine red heifers burned. The first was under the supervision of Moses; the second was prepared by Ezra; two were sacrificed by Shimon Ha Tzaddik; Yochanan, the High Priest, also sacrificed two; Eliehoenai, the son of Ha-Kof supervised the seventh. Hanamel, the Egyptian, burned the eighth, and the ninth red cow was sacrificed by Ishmael, son of Piabi. Maimonides is said to have written that "the tenth red heifer will be accomplished by the king, the Messiah." See Rabbi Chaim Richman, *The Mystery of the Red Heifer: Divine Promise of Purity* (Jerusalem: Chaim Richman, 1997), 76.

4. Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), 95.



temple and was daily sprinkled with the ashes of a previously sacrificed red heifer.<sup>5</sup> On the day of the sacrifice, the priest, wearing his white priestly raiment, would lead the red heifer outside the camp to the "appointed place," or sacrificial altar, where the elders of Israel would already be waiting. The priest would then place the heifer into an opening in the pile of wood made from cedar, pine, and fig trees, whereupon the priest would bind the red heifer with its face looking to the west (toward the temple) and slay it with his right hand while catching some of its blood in his left.<sup>6</sup> He then dipped his finger into the blood and sprinkled it seven times directly toward the Most Holy Place of the temple. After this, the priest kindled the fire and placed cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet into the midst of the burning fire. A clean priest would then take up the burnt remains and deposit them outside the camp (incidentally, the priest who sacrificed the heifer became unclean because of the sacrifice).<sup>7</sup> Then, when the ashes were needed for ritual purification, some of them were placed in a vessel, mixed with spring water, and, together with hyssop, sprinkled on those unclean on the third and seventh days after their contact with the dead.<sup>8</sup>

### Functional Typology

The function of the red heifer was to atone for the greatest defilement according to Jewish law: death. According to the rabbis, the highest form of ritual impurity was contact with a corpse.<sup>9</sup> As Edersheim writes,

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5. According to the *Mishnah Parah* 3:11, the officiating priest was removed from his house to a chamber facing the temple six days before the sacrifice. This room was called the Stone Chamber, so named because all services in connection with the red heifer had to be performed in vessels made either of baked earthenware or any material that is, like stone, insusceptible to uncleanness.

6. *Mishnah Parah* 3:9.

7. The ashes were divided into three parts and stored in three different locations. One part was deposited on the rampart, one was on the Mount of Olives, and one was divided among the twenty-four courses of the priests that took the temple services in turn. See *Mishnah Parah* 3:11.

8. See Numbers 19:11–22 for a detailed description of the law of ritual impurity resulting from contact with death.

9. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 14:9–14.

From all these provisions it is evident that as death carried with it the greatest defilement, so the sin-offering for its purification was in itself and in its consequences the most marked. And its application must have been so frequently necessary in every family and circle of acquaintances that the great truths connected with it were constantly kept in view of the people. In general, the laws in regard to defilement were primarily intended as symbols of spiritual truths, and not for social, nor yet sanitary purposes, though such results would also flow from them. Sin had rendered fellowship with God impossible; sin was death, and had wrought death, and the dead body as well as the spiritually dead soul were the evidence of its sway.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, the purpose of the law of the red heifer was to purify those who had become ritually unclean through contact with death and allow them back into the presence of God, or into his temple—in other words, to take away the defilement of death that stood between God and man.

This principle of reconciling man to God is also the primary purpose of Christ's atonement. Only in and through Christ can man be made clean and again enter into the presence of God. Without the Atonement "all mankind would have been endlessly lost" (Mosiah 16:4) and "must unavoidably perish" (Alma 34:9), for "there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Ne. 2:8).

Both the priest who offers the sacrifice and the unclean person made clean illustrate the symbolic functionality between the law of the red heifer and Christ. Rabbis have deliberated for centuries concerning the irony of this sacrifice, especially since those who were once impure are made pure, while those who were pure to begin with (the priest and the attendants) become impure by participating in the ritual. They admit the reasons for this transference of ritual cleanliness are beyond their comprehension.<sup>11</sup> One

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10. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 279.

11. Richman, 9.

who sees the priest in the correct way understands the typology the priest symbolizes Christ because he takes upon himself the ritual impurities of man and thereby becomes unclean himself. As in many of the sacrifices in the Old Testament, both the sacrifice and the priest symbolize Christ.

### Location Typology

From various accounts we know that the rite of the red heifer was performed directly east of the temple on the Mount of Olives. In the *Mishnah* we read:

A causeway was made from the temple mount to the Mount of Olives, being constructed of arches above arches, each arch placed directly above each pier as a protection against a grave in the depths, whereby the priest who was to burn the cow, the cow itself and all who aided in its preparation went forth to the Mount of Olives.<sup>12</sup>

This account accords with the commandment of the Lord given to the children of Israel to sacrifice the heifer "outside the camp" (Num. 19:3). This location, referred to by some scholars as the *Miphkad*<sup>13</sup> altar, is where the red heifer was sacrificed. It is no surprise that Christ began his work of redemption on the same mount in a garden called Gethsemane. Since the Mount of Olives was directly east of the Temple Mount, this garden must have been very near the altar where the red heifer ritual was performed, especially considering that the priest needed a full view of the sanctuary through the eastern, or *Shushan*, gate.<sup>14</sup>

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12. *Mishnah Parah* 3:6.

13. Some scholars view the red heifer sacrificial altar as an extension of the altar described in Ezekiel 43:21 in which the Hebrew word *miphkad* is translated as "appointed place" in both the King James Version and in the Jerusalem Bible. See Karen Boren, *Messiah of the Winepress* (Provo, UT: Beit Parah Publishing, 2002), 52. Although there may be some relation in the names of the altars, I have not found sufficient evidence to support such a theory.

14. This gate pointed east toward the ancient Persian capital *Susa* and was said to have been lower than the other gates so that the priests sacrificing the red heifer on the Mount of Olives could look directly into the temple. See *Mishnayoth* (Gateshead, England: Judaica Press, 1983, vol. 5), *Middoth* 511, and David B. Galbraith, D. Kelly Ogden, and Andrew C. Skinner, *Jerusalem: The Eternal City* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1996), 189.

Another key parallel between the red heifer sacrifice and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the location of the altar in relation to the temple. The altar's location made it possible for the priest sacrificing the red heifer on the Mount of Olives to see directly into the giant entryway of the Holy Sanctuary, which stood sixty-six feet high and thirty-three feet wide. Inside the Holy Sanctuary hung the veil leading to the most sacred chamber, the Holy of Holies. The high priest could pass through this veil once a year on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) to symbolically enter the presence of God.

It is not coincidental that the altar existed in a location where the priest could direct his attention and actions to the only place there was access to God's presence. The red heifer represents Christ because it sacrifices its blood so that the children of Israel can enter into the Holy of Holies, or the presence of God. Jesus Christ, "neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*" (Heb. 9:12). Surely the location of the altar in relation to the Holy of Holies was designed to teach and prepare the Jews for the One who would allow all, not just the High Priest, to enter into the presence of God.

### **Element Typology**

Many of the elements used in the sacrifice of the red heifer were symbolic of Jesus Christ. The cedar wood, hyssop, scarlet wool, ashes, and blood all typify and teach of Christ and his expiation for humankind.

The sacrificial elements of cedar, hyssop, and scarlet wool all have cleansing properties and were used in other sin offerings (see Lev. 14:4). The wood of the cedar tree is renowned for its ability to preserve things from decay and corruption, just as Christ preserves us from physical decay and spiritual corruption. The herb hyssop is a well-known cleansing agent and carries with it the symbol of purification (see Ex. 12:22). As David proclaimed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:7). Like hyssop, Christ has the ability

to purge us from sin and wash us clean through the power of his atonement. The color scarlet was obtained in ancient Israel by crushing a worm from oak trees. At least two symbols relating to Christ are found in this element. The first is the color red, which reminds us of blood, the symbol of life, and also of the Atonement (see Lev. 17:11). Another tie comes from the prophetic words found in Psalm 22:6, which reads, "But I *am* a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." This verse prophesies that Christ will be treated like a worm, crushed by his people until he becomes as red as scarlet by the blood he sheds.

Although the elements of cedar, hyssop, and scarlet wool play an important part in the ritual, the ashes of the heifer become the focus of this sacrifice, for ultimately it is the ashes that cleanse the ritually unclean from defilement. The burning of the animal in its entirety—"skin, flesh, blood, and dung" (Num. 19:5)—is found in no other animal sacrifice. The Jews took this commandment so literally that after the animal was burned, they beat the ashes with rods and stone hammers to crush any fragments that did not turn to ash.<sup>15</sup>

The symbolic parallels of the ash and Christ are striking. Christ became the red heifer by taking upon himself all the sins of the world. He did not suffer for only some; he took upon himself all pain, all suffering, and all sin so that we may obtain all that the Father has. He was crushed for the sins of his people just as the ashes were. His atonement is not discriminatory, nor is it bound by time or influence, but it is available to all, just as the ashes of the red heifer were able to cleanse all from ritual impurity.

It seems inescapable that the red color of the heifer symbolized blood. The Hebrew adjective *adam*, from *parah adumah*, Hebrew for red heifer, is related to the Hebrew *dam*, the word for blood.<sup>16</sup> That the blood of the red heifer is symbolic of the blood of Christ may be illustrated in several ways.

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15. *Mishnah Parah* 3:11.

16. Baruch A. Levine, *Anchor Bible: Numbers 1–20* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 460.

In Leviticus 17:11 we read, “For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the souls.” We learn from Paul that “almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22). “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:13–14). As blood gives us mortal life, so does the blood of Christ grant us eternal life. The scriptures are replete with verses teaching this doctrine.<sup>17</sup>

Like the priest who was to sacrifice the red heifer, Christ ascended the Mount of Olives and entered the Garden of Gethsemane in white raiment.<sup>18</sup> As he knelt and prayed to his Father he became “exceedingly sorrowful” and “fell on his face” (Matt. 26:38–39) in prayerful pleading. His intense agony became too much to bear. His physical body finally revolted at the indescribable and unyielding pain and anguish he was experiencing. The suffering caused Christ to “bleed at every pore” (D&C 19:18), and “his sweat was it were great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44), possibly the condition known today in medicine as hematomidrosis. His body literally, not figuratively, shed forth blood from every pore in reaction to the pain thrust upon him.<sup>19</sup> John Taylor summed up Christ’s experience in the garden with these words:

But what is the real reason for all this suffering and bloodshed, and sacrifice? We are told without the shedding of blood is no remission of sins. This is beyond our comprehension. Jesus had to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself, the just for the

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17. See Moses 6:59–60, Heb. 13:11–12, John 6:53–54.

18. *Mishnah Parah* 4:1.

19. Some scholars think Luke was being figurative when writing, “his sweat was as it were great drops of blood.” From modern scripture we know it was literal (see Mosiah 3:7, JST Luke 22:44, and D&C 19:18).

unjust, but, previous to this grand sacrifice, these animals had to have their blood shed as types, until the great antitype should offer up himself once and for all. And as he in his own person bore the sins of all, and atoned for them by the sacrifice of himself, so there came upon him the weight and agony of ages and generations, the indescribable agony consequent upon this great sacrificial atonement wherein he bore the sins of the world, and suffered in his own person the consequences of an eternal law of God broken by man. Hence his profound grief, his indescribable anguish, his overpowering torture, all experienced in the submission to the eternal fiat of Jehovah and the requirements of an inexorable law.<sup>20</sup>

One cannot help but wonder if Isaiah had this event in mind when he wrote, "Wherefore *art thou* red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people *there was* none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment" (Isa. 63:2-3).

### Heifer Typology

Unlike most other sin offerings, the sacrificial animal in the law of the red heifer was not male, but female.<sup>21</sup> A marvelous message is manifested in this metaphor. The female sacrifice suggests that the ritual is life giving. Through women we are born and gain mortal life; through Christ we become spiritually reborn and gain eternal life.<sup>22</sup> Jesus taught the Jews this principle when he said, "I am come that they might have life. . . . I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep"

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20. John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1941), 116.

21. The Hebrew word *parah*, translated as cow or heifer, is the feminine form of *par*, the Hebrew word for bull. The biblical meaning of heifer should not be confused with its modern English meaning, which is a cow that has not yet had a calf. We know that a *parah* is older than three years, since a calf up to three years of age is an *eglah*.

22. It is interesting to note that *Yeshua*, the name of Jesus and the Hebrew noun for salvation, is a feminine word.

(John 10:10–11). Lehi clearly taught this principle to his son Jacob when he said, “There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through . . . the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh” (2 Ne. 2:8).

Just as the children of Israel could not become clean from the defilement caused by death through any other means than the ashes of the red heifer, so can we overcome death and gain eternal life only through the atonement of Christ. He is the light and life of the world—“no man cometh unto the Father, but by [him]” (John 14:6).

The heifer, like Jesus Christ, had to be perfect to be worthy of sacrifice. The heifer not only had to be “without spot, wherein is no blemish, *and* upon which never came yoke” (Num. 19:2), but its horns, hooves, and even eyelashes had to be red. If the horns and hooves were not perfectly red, they would be chopped off before the heifer was sacrificed (*Parab* 2:2). If one had ridden on the heifer, leaned on it, hung on its tail, crossed a river by its help, placed rope on its back, or put one’s cloak on it, it became invalid (*Parab* 2:3). If a mere two black or white hairs were found on the heifer, the animal became invalid (*Parab* 2:5). The heifer’s physical flawlessness was symbolic of the spiritual perfection required of Christ to atone for the sins of mankind—for he had to be spiritually without spot or blemish.

Another way the heifer symbolized Christ was that it was not compelled to leave the temple grounds and walk to the Mount of Olives. In the *Mishnah* we learn the priests had to “bring her forth, by herself.”<sup>23</sup> This foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ, for Christ, like the heifer, went voluntarily to the Mount of Olives to partake of the bitter cup that only he knew awaited him. He was not coerced to leave the Upper Room, cross the Kidron Valley, and enter into the Garden of Gethsemane. Rather, he led his disciples to the garden and voluntarily took upon himself our sins while his disciples slept. “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,

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23. *Mishnah Parab* 3:7.



yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isa. 53:7).

The book of Hebrews provides us with another profound parallel between Christ and the red heifer. In chapter ten, Paul teaches that the Mosaic Law was a "shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things" (vs. 1). The animal sacrifices can never "continually make the comers thereunto perfect" (vs. 1). For if they could, why have they not "ceased to be offered?" (vs. 2). "For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (vs. 4).

"Then said he [Jesus Christ], Lo, I come to do thy will, O God . . . By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*" (vs. 9-10). The priests stand daily in the temple sacrificing animals that will never take away sins, but Christ, "after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (vs. 12).

As Paul clearly points out, the purpose of the sacrifice of the red heifer was not to take away the Israelites' sins. The animal sacrifices had only the power to purify temporarily. Christ came and offered himself as the "one sacrifice for sins for ever" (vs. 12), thus enabling him to forgive us and allow us to be purified permanently. The sacrifice of the red heifer was given as a shadow of Christ's ultimate sacrifice; it was to point the children of Israel in the right path and help prepare them for the coming of the Messiah.

## Conclusion

Like all sacrifices in ancient Israel, the sacrifice of the red heifer is a powerful type of Christ, offering us many insights into Christ's intercession for all mankind. The function, location, and elements of the law of the red heifer all point to the Savior, teaching and testifying of his power to reconcile man to God and overcome the effects of sin and death. Because of the permanent propitiation made by Christ on our behalf, we can enter boldly "into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way,

which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. . . . [Therefore] let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:19–22). Only through the blood of our Savior, even Jesus Christ, may we overcome death, enter the presence of God, and dwell with the Lord forever.

# **The Image of the Maize God in Classic Maya Art: The Ideal Aesthetic of Gods and Royalty**

CYNTHIA RICHARDS CARROLL

**I**n a religion as well defined as the Maya, a great specificity exists as to the purpose and function of particular gods and their attributes. Although each Maya god has a specially outlined role in Maya cosmology, it would be misleading to say that each deity is so specifically defined as to exclude the possibility of occasionally sharing attributes and powers. However, when it comes to the representation of their pantheon of gods, the Maya have very definite ideas of exactly how the gods' physical attributes dictated their powers. Why each god was given the characteristics he or she displays and how these characteristics potentially bear upon the particular power and function of the god is unclear. The deity known as the Maize God stands out from this varied group of gods in that he is the only deity consistently represented in a completely anthropomorphic form. Not only is he humanized, but he is also always displayed as the ideal of perfect male beauty. Although there could be many explanations for this exception to the rule, his unique human beauty most likely reflects the desires of the rulers for whom these images were often created. Indeed, to represent the Maize God as the ideal in beauty performed a vital function in establishing the ideal of the perfect king and ruler and created a visual parallel between the purposes,

functions, and powers of the Maize God and those of the ruling class.

The relationship between the Maya and their gods is a dominant factor in determining the way the gods are represented. Like most religions, Maya cosmology attempts to explain the mysterious forces of the universe by establishing a body of higher powers which controls the inexplicable elements of nature. Unlike traditional Christian beliefs Maya cosmology makes no distinction between natural and supernatural realms. In other words, of those things defined by science, the Maya would still consider imbued with the creative efforts of the gods. All elements of the earth and the cosmos, inanimate objects included, are considered to have a soul and to contain the spirit of divinity, which is essential to the survival of all life, making Maya deities embodiments of the sacred nature of the universe. Through their power these life forces are continually renewed.<sup>1</sup> However, it would be a mistake to assume that Maya gods had distinctive anthropomorphic qualities as did the ancient gods of Greece or Rome.<sup>2</sup> Maya deities often exhibited different manifestations as a way of defining the many facets of one particular god, making them nonfinite beings. Maya deities were complex and contradictory individuals, possessing aspects that often blended together or were not visually manifested at all. Thus we see that it is difficult to define and distinguish the specific origin or nature of any one Maya god.

The quest to explore with greater clarity the definition of Maya gods has fortunately resulted in a great deal of scholarship on the Maize God's foundational importance within Classic Maya religion. Before exploring the Maize God's deepest meanings, it is necessary to begin with a cursory glance at his most prevalent role: the god of the agricultural cycle. Even in his most basic function, the Maize God always played a particularly important role in Maya cosmology. The Maize God's primary occupation

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1. Robert J. Sharer, *Daily Life in Maya Civilization* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 160.

2. Herbert Joseph Spinden, *Maya Art and Civilization* (Indian Hills, CO: The Falcon's Wing Press, 1957), 25.

was to be the protector and progenitor of the yearly maize (commonly known as Indian corn) crop upon which the Maya depended so heavily. Maize formed the basis of not only their main source of nutrition, but also an important foundation of their religion as well. The Maya recognized maize as a powerful symbol of life, creation, and, ultimately, rebirth. As demonstrated by their extensive cosmology, the Maya utilized the symbol of the maize cycle to perpetuate important aspects of their own creation. In the Maya version of the creation story recorded in the *Popol Vuh*, the process required to create the ideal progeny of the gods is carefully detailed. After failed attempts to create man out of mud, wood, and other such materials, it was determined that a last attempt to make man would be made, but this time utilizing the succulent maize dough as flesh and blood for man.<sup>3</sup> The Maya believed that it was out of maize and the blood of the gods that they were created. This communicates the potential importance of the Maize God as the original progenitor of all Maya civilization. He was not only their original creator, but he was also the sustaining force that continued to renew their bodies and souls yearly with each new crop of maize. It is not surprising then that the Maize God is particularly popular in Maya artwork starting from the late Preclassic period (600 BC–AD 250) until the present. Like all subjects, the Maize God at times waned in popularity, but references to the Maize God and his accompanying accoutrements can almost always be found regardless of the period.

Representations of the Maize God vary according to location and period, but most seem to share one common factor: a striking humanity and beauty of form. One example is detailed over the entrance to the subterranean chamber in *Palace House E*, Palenque (fig. 1). Especially striking is the facial type of the Maize God: an aristocratic sloping forehead, long graceful nose, full pursed lips, and almond-shaped eyes. Though the Maya might have had features somewhat similar to these, the Maya often

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3. Allen J. Christenson, ed., *Popol Vuh* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2000), 46–49.

enhanced these features through a process of cranial deformation. Interestingly enough, only persons of an aristocratic birth were allowed to practice the tradition of cranial deformation. Naturally this facial type would have been accepted as one of Maya leadership, not of the peasantry. Those of noble birth exaggerated the already tall, sloping foreheads of the Maya. "Heads of infants, born to certain noble families, were flattened in a press that reshaped the facial profile before the cartilage had hardened."<sup>4</sup> Creating the ideal beauty was only one of many factors that separated the nobility from the peasant class.

That is not to say that ideal facial beauty was devoid of meaning for those of the lower class. Rather, it expressed their hope for a more agricultural ideal that was expressed in the form of well-formed young maize plants, the essence of perfect breeding. In a more abstract sense, the Maize God could also embrace the ideals of the benevolent gods, life, prosperity, and fertility.<sup>5</sup> To express this idea, the Maya often portrayed the Maize God with fecund sprouts protruding from his head (fig. 2),<sup>6</sup> with a cleft in his forehead to represent the maize seed itself in the act of sprouting and growing. This image is one that has deep-seated origins in the history of the representation of the Maize God. In fact, this tradition likely began with the Olmec, from whom the Maya believed their divine ancestry to have originated.<sup>7</sup>

The Olmec civilization was at its height during the early and middle Preclassic periods (ca. 1250–400 BC). While the nature of the relationship between the two cultures is somewhat ambiguous, the powerful Olmec civilization had a definite impact on their Maya neighbors.<sup>8</sup> As is evidenced in various Maya artwork, the Olmec set an important precedent not only for Maya theology but for political structures as well. The similarities

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4. M. E. Kampen, *The Religion of the Maya* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 27.

5. Sharer, 162.

6. Spinden, 88.

7. Michael D. Coe, "Olmec and Maya: A Study in Relationships," in *The Origins of Maya Civilization*, ed. Richard E. W. Adams (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977), 187.

8. Sharer, 29.

between Maya and Olmec art and religious beliefs are of particular significance in the development of the Maize God. Though in the context of Olmec art the Maize God does not seem to have taken on his ideal human form, he is often represented as having a sprouted headdress and cleft forehead (fig. 3). While this may not support the Maya ideal of beauty, it does form an interesting comparison to images of Olmec rulers, as can be seen in *San Lorenzo Monument 1* (fig. 4). Very likely the image of a ruler, this monument expresses a more Olmec ideal of beauty. He, in common with the Olmec image of the Maize God, shares the down-turned corners of the mouth, thick lips, fleshy cheeks, and slightly slanted eyes. This fact establishes an important precedent for the role of kingship in the representation of the Maize God.<sup>9</sup> While kings were not necessarily limited to being represented as the Maize God, there seems to be a predisposition to use the Maize God as the ideal or standard of physical beauty, a standard which is solely accessible to the king and other members of the royal family. This elitism and exclusion of the lower classes from forming deeper connections to the Maize God establishes the uniquely close relationship rulers felt to the Maize God and his representations.

One of the most powerful ways of establishing this relationship between the royalty and the Maize God was to promote it through readily visible physical similarities. After the rulers established the physical ideal of the Maize God, it became requisite that the rulers identify themselves directly with these physical attributes and powers. As discussed earlier, the way in which the ruling class was viewed and depicted was rather important in establishing and maintaining social stratification. As the kings sought to perpetuate the ideal of perfect beauty and ruling power, they turned to the Maize God as the model of these ideal virtues. As a result of this close kinship, it is not uncommon to see rulers being represented in the guise of the Maize God. This was not

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9. Kent F. Reilly, "Olmec Art," from *The Olmec World: Ritual and Rulership* (Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 1995), 32.

only practiced in the representation of kings but queens as well, when they can be seen. Such is evidenced by Yaxchilan Lintel 24 (fig. 5). In this scene both husband, Itzamnah Balam, and wife, Lady K'abal Xok, are depicted in the sacred act of bloodletting (which will be further discussed later in this paper). Noticeably, both are given the features of ideal beauty, including the sloped forehead, long graceful nose, full pursed lips, and hair bound away from the face. This kind of representation could be illustrated by countless images of the same kind; the Maya had definite aesthetic ideals concerning the representation of their rulers.

Another example that is particularly poignant can be seen on *Pier C*, from *Palace House D* at Palenque, which depicts the ruler, K'inich Janab Pakal (fig. 6). Here there is substantial evidence that rulers' physical appearances had been changed for the purpose of becoming the ideal in physical beauty and perfection. To the careful observer, a detail included in the representation of Janab Pakal's face reveals that the profile rendered by the artist was likely not the king's natural nose and forehead, but, rather, a prosthetic attached to artificially flatten the nose and forehead of the king. While this might seem to have little significance, the rest of the corpus of Maya art seems to omit this detail and show only the profile of the king after it has already been changed. This rare glimpse into the conscious alteration of the king's physical appearance further establishes the apparent connection between the representations of the royal class and the features of the Maize God.

These similarities were not limited only to facial similarities, but they were also communicated by the dress and demeanor of the king. One of the most common ways to indicate a connection to the Maize God was to don clothing, jewels, or even headdresses that referred generally or specifically to his attributes. One way of accomplishing this purpose was to dress in the guise of the Maize God. Referring back to *Pier D* (fig. 6), Janab Pakal not only adopts the physical appearance of the Maize God but also wears clothing associated with the Maize God and his powers. Like many others of these images, Janab Pakal is dressed in a net skirt, an emblem



which is associated primarily with the Maize God in his frequent representations (fig. 7). While the ruler might not have worn a net skirt everyday, he certainly would have donned one when participating in ceremonies in which he re-created the world—a principle role of the Maize God. The ruling family, and particularly the king, were responsible for the renewing of the world through re-creation ceremonies in which he conducted auto-sacrifice or the sacrifice of a captive.<sup>10</sup> In this way, both the ruler and the Maize God filled similar roles. Just as it was the responsibility of the Maize God to create the earth and its inhabitants in the original creation, it was the responsibility of the king to continually renew them in the guise of the Maize God. This is another factor which influenced the physical representation of the Maize God. Not only were ceremonies responsible for commemorating the creation for historical purposes, they were also a reminder to the general public of the divine status of the chosen rulers. "These concepts reinforced the social and political order and were used by kings and the elite to maintain their power and control."<sup>11</sup> Thus it was vitally important to remind those under the king's rule of his divine abilities. As only the elite class was literate, the most effective way of accomplishing this would be through visual representations of the king as a commonly recognized deity, the Maize God.

As power was most often transferred from father to son in ruling families, it is not surprising that Maya accession monuments also feature Maize God imagery as part of the decorative program. This tradition probably stems from the connection of the Maize God's own accession story of his power to his son. The Classic Maya version of this myth begins with the Maize God's descent into the underworld where he is defeated by the lords of death. After he is decapitated and his head is placed into what would become the World Tree, he impregnates the daughter of

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10. Mary Ellen Miller and Linda Schele, "The Blood of Kings: A New Interpretation of Maya Art," *Gazette Des Beaux-Arts* 6.109 (April 1987): 131.

11. Sharer, 151.

one of the lords of death. This pregnancy results in the birth of the Hero Twins, who are known as Hun Ahaw and Yax Balam. The twins are ultimately able to return to the underworld to defeat the lords of death and resurrect their father. After he is reborn, the Maize God, or Hun Nal Yeh as he is known to the Classic Maya, is able to birth the world, thus initiating the sacred first creation.<sup>12</sup>

This story and its various elements are popular subjects for representation on ceramic vessels of the Classic period, exemplified here by the *Resurrection Plate* (fig. 8). The resurrection of the Maize God is the central decoration of the plate. In the center of the composition, the Maize God emerges from the clefted shell of a turtle, representing his transition from the underworld to the surface of the earth. He is flanked on either side by his two sons who aid him in his rebirth. As once the Maize God facilitated the creation of his sons, they now reciprocate, thus continuing the cycle of rebirth. The trio of the Maize God and his sons are a powerful symbol of the accession of power from father to sons that also alludes to the resurrection and continuance of the father's spirit through his son's birth. The connection of this story to Maya monuments that depict royal accession, can once again be seen by the net skirt worn by the king in his accession ceremony. Such an example is illustrated by the *Sanctuary Panel* from the *Temple of the Foliated Cross*, Palenque (fig. 9). This panel commemorates the accession of Kan Balam, son of Janab Pakal. On the left, Kan Balam dons the net skirt of the Maize god as he is about to receive the tokens of kingship from his deceased father, the smaller figure on the right. As an interesting parallel, the panel from the neighboring *Temple of the Cross* depicts a nearly identical subject and is dedicated to the god, GI, or the god of accession, commonly known as Hun Ahaw, the son of the Maize God and the recipient of his power (fig. 10).<sup>13</sup>

12. Miller and Schele, 131.

13. Stephen Houston and David Stuart, "Of Gods Glyphs and Kings: Divinity and Rulership among the Classic Maya," in *Antiquity* 70 (1996): 301.

The *Palace Oval Tablet* provides a rare glimpse at a different type of accession ritual (fig. 11). This tablet commemorates the accession of Janab Pakal, whose mother (lady Sak K'uk) rather than his father, was the ruler before him. Lady Sak K'uk was the only heir of her father and thus represents an exception to the norm of male rulers. Despite this, she was considered to be a divine creatrix through a clever twist of Maya mythology. As can be seen on this accession monument, she too wears the net skirt. As was established by the Maya cosmology, the only other individual who is represented as wearing a net skirt is the mother of the Maize God. By equating Lady Sak K'uk with the mother of the Maize God, the Maya are able to attribute to her the same divine power of creation that is commonly associated with her son. The fact that Janab Pakal's mother was associated with this type of deity is indicative of the Maya's need to proclaim her royalty imbued with the Maize God's divine power. This is yet another manifestation of the deep connection that exists between the representation of the Maize God and that of the royal class.

Powerful accession rituals were a popular subject for representation even in the Late Classic period. Such an example is illustrated by *Copan Stele H*, the accession monument of Waxaklahun Ubah K'awil (fig. 12). Comparable to the aforementioned monuments of accession, this stele is meant to be a record of the ceremony of the king's rise to power. In addition to wearing the aforementioned net skirt, he holds the sky band as an indicator of his status as a king with the keys to the divine power of creation, similar to the Maize God. Also on this stele are the names of the major cultural centers of the time that were invited to this momentous occasion. This stele clearly demonstrates that even to rulers in the late to terminal Classic period the Maize God, along with his specific and indefinite accoutrements, was still considered essential in communicating the aspects important to divinely appointed rulership.

Some of the deepest and most meaningful connections that can be made between the Maize God and the royal class are found in the imagery of bloodletting. This ritual is fundamentally

important in Maya theology as it is the process by which the royal class is able to continually rebirth the gods and, as a result, is able to rebirth the world. It is perhaps in this way that the connection to the Maize God holds the strongest similarity in roles and function. The practice of bloodletting was carried out only by the highest of the elite, because theirs was the only blood that contained the divine essence of the gods. The exact way in which the blood sacrifice was to rebirth the gods is complicated. At the simplest levels, the blood that is caused to flow is burned in order to release the gods, thus rebirthing them. In another way, the blood sacrifice can be seen as food for the gods. The *Popol Vuh* compares the offering of a sacrifice to the “suckling” of the gods.<sup>14</sup> As was detailed earlier, the individuals created to nourish the gods were men of maize. In essence, the flesh and blood being offered to the gods is maize. Representations that either depict or allude to this subject abound in Maya art.

Examples of such illustrations were mentioned earlier, one of these including *Yaxchilan Lintel 24* (fig. 5) in which Lady K’abal Xok is represented in the act of bloodletting; and the next lintel, *Yaxchilan Lintel 25*, demonstrates the results of her efforts (fig. 13). Lady K’abal Xok is now visited by her ancestor, who brings with him, as a gift, the implements of sacred warfare. The carving visually indicates the portal she has opened by causing the ancestor to rise from a billowing stream of smoke that is similar in form to the body of a serpent. Essentially, it is through the sacrifice of her blood that ancestors are fed and are thus able to be reborn. The act of bloodletting becomes particularly significant when it is established just how frequently the Maize God appears in such imagery. To illustrate this point, we turn to a work mentioned earlier, the *Sanctuary Panel* from the *Temple of the Foliated Cross* (fig. 9). This temple is located at the east edge of a complex of temples, associated with the birth of the sun and life itself. The

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14. Karl A. Taube, “The Maize Tamale in Classic Maya Diet, Epigraphy, and Art,” *American Antiquity* 54.1 (Jan. 1989): 38.

*Sanctuary Panel* is replete with references to life and rebirth. In the center of the composition is a cross-shaped tree which has been equated with the structural equivalent of the bloodletting motif.<sup>15</sup> On the arms of this cross are the heads of the Maize God in all their idealized beauty, complete with lush plants sprouting from their heads to indicate the fecundity of life that rises out of death. The subject of this panel also reflects the belief that out of the death of the father, Janab Pakal, rises the new life of his son, Kan Balam. From death and sacrifice, the world is regenerated and reborn.

Another monument which demonstrates this concept in an even more compelling manner is the *Sarcophagus Lid of Janab Pakal* (fig. 14). Though the imagery of this sarcophagus lid is complex, the main theme seems to focus on the life which arises from the death of Janab Pakal. Centrally located in the composition, Janab Pakal reclines in a nearly fetal position, simultaneously indicating both death and life. His body rests on the Quadripartite God, a reminder of death as being the ultimate sacrifice. Just as the foliage springs from sacrifice, we are reminded that from death, life will spring anew. From Janab Pakal's body grows a cross-shaped tree similar to that seen in the *Sanctuary Panel* from the *Temple of the Foliated Cross*. It also refers to both the sacrificial bloodletting symbol and the growth of the world tree. At the death of the king it becomes a powerful symbol of the ability of the ruler to rebirth the world. In this moment of sacrifice and rebirth, Janab Pakal is the closest to the Maize God that any ruler could ever be. As such, he is represented dressed in the net skirt and has around his neck a turtle shell pectoral, a reminder of the Maize God's own rebirth. This monument forms one of the most convincing arguments that can be found for the direct link between the images of the rulers and the characteristics attributed to the Maize God.

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15. David Stuart, "Blood Symbolism in Maya Iconography," in Elizabeth P. Benson and Gillett G. Griffin, eds., *Maya Iconography*.

Ultimately, the Maize God was a reflection of everything a ruler could ever aspire to be. While the Maize God was not completely void of meaning for those of lower classes, it was royalty that could identify more closely with his role in Maya cosmology. As far as other Maya gods and goddesses were concerned, it was not entirely uncommon for rulers to occasionally adopt a number of their features in certain representations. However, it was the Maize God whose attributes were adopted with the greatest frequency and regularity. He was the most intimate participant in the Maya's creation. It was from his divine flesh that humanity was fashioned, and it was his flesh that continued to sustain them. Crops continually renewed themselves with the help of the Maize God's own offspring. It stands to reason then that the incentive for representing the Maize God with such humanlike characteristics is that these were the characteristics the Maya themselves aspired to. His beauteous physiognomy is the projection of their ideals of a perfected version of their established aesthetic canons, as well as the embodiment of the perfect crop—life in its most perfect form. In functional Maya religion, the class of royalty formed the closest comparison to this ideal form, and only they were permitted to mimic the ideal beauty of the Maize God by altering their appearance, whether permanently or in artistic renderings. The emulation of the Maize God's perfect beauty allowed the ruling class to further establish their dominance over their subjects by the assertion of divine qualities. As is demonstrated in the artwork up to the Spanish Conquest of the Maya beginning in AD 1524, rulers not only aspired to the Maize God's beauty, but also took it upon themselves to mimic his duty of creation within their own society. This in turn establishes an inseparable bond between the image of the Maize God and the image of the rulers. As much as the ruling class is a product of the Maize God, the Maize God becomes a product of their divine blood. As was determined in the creation of man in the *Popol Vuh*, gods first created man with the knowledge that they would then be reliant on man to continue to

re-create them. Such is the case with the Maize God. In their depiction of the Maize God, the Maya respond in kind, not merely re-creating him but imbuing him with all the culture, grace, and beauty that were available to them in all the years of their great and prosperous civilization.

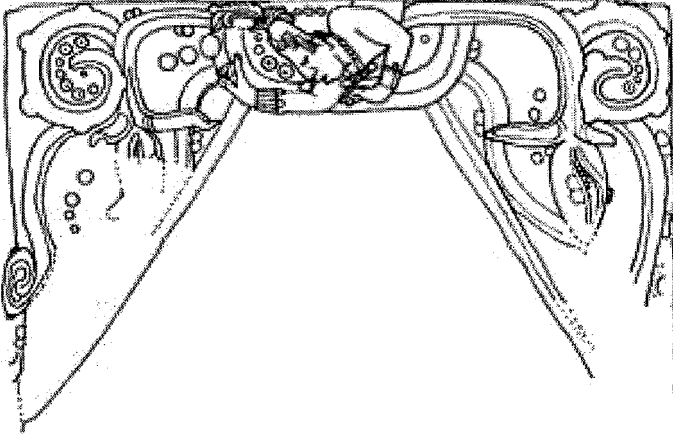


Figure 1. Subterranean Chamber, Palace House E, Palenque.  
Drawing by Linda Schele, © David Schele, courtesy Foundation for  
the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org).

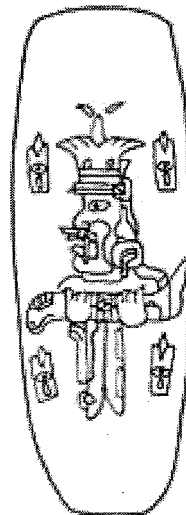


Figure 2. Jade Celt, Arroyo Pesquero.  
Drawing by Linda Schele, © David Schele, courtesy  
Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican  
Studies, [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org).

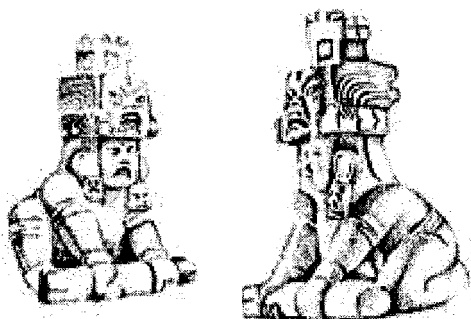


Figure 3. San Martin Pajapan Monument 1. Drawing by Linda Schele, © David Schele, courtesy Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org).

Figure 4. San Lorenzo Monument 1. Photograph courtesy JQ Jacobs, [jq@jqjacobs.net](mailto:jq@jqjacobs.net).

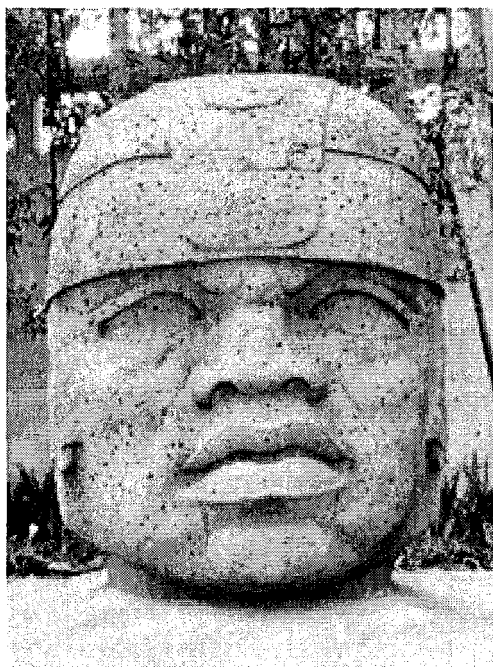






Figure 5. Yaxchilan Lintel 24.  
Photograph copyright Justin  
Kerr. File no. K2887.

Figure 6. Pier D, Palace House D,  
Palenque. (Drawing by Merle  
Greene Robertson. Image from  
David Stuart, "Blood Symbolism  
in Maya Iconography," see at-  
tached bibliography)



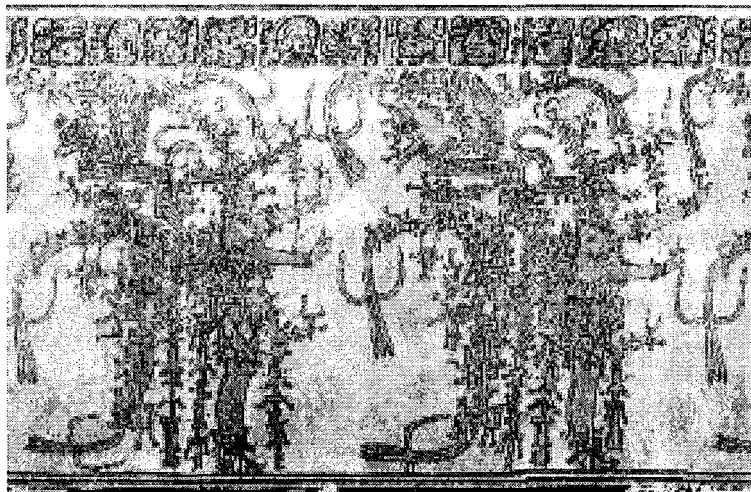


Figure 7. Buenavista Vase.  
Copyright Justin Kerr. File no. K1416.



Figure 8.  
Resurrection Plate.  
Copyright Justin Kerr.  
File no. K1892.

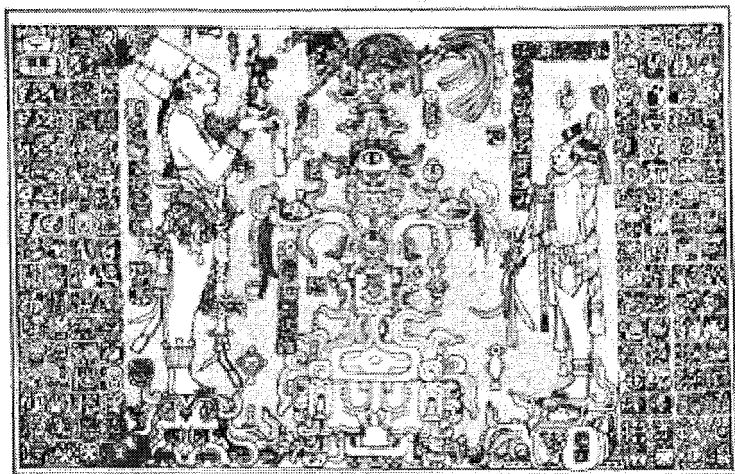


Figure 9. Sanctuary Panel, Temple of the Foliated Cross, Palenque.  
Drawing by Linda Schele, © David Schele, courtesy Foundation for the Advancement  
of Mesoamerican Studies, [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org).

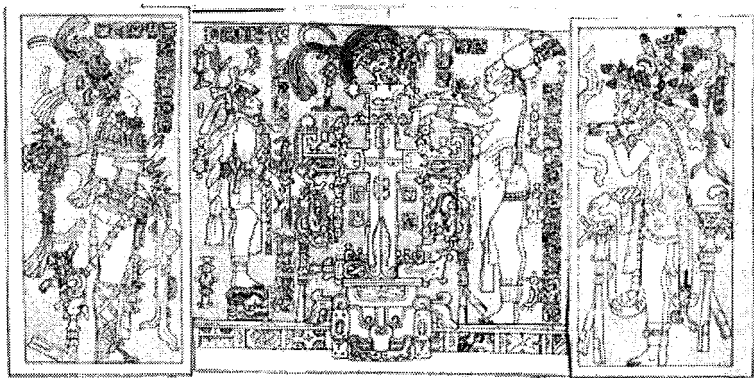


Figure 10. Sanctuary Panel, Temple of the Cross, Palenque. Drawing by Linda Schele, ©  
David Schele, courtesy Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies,  
[www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org).

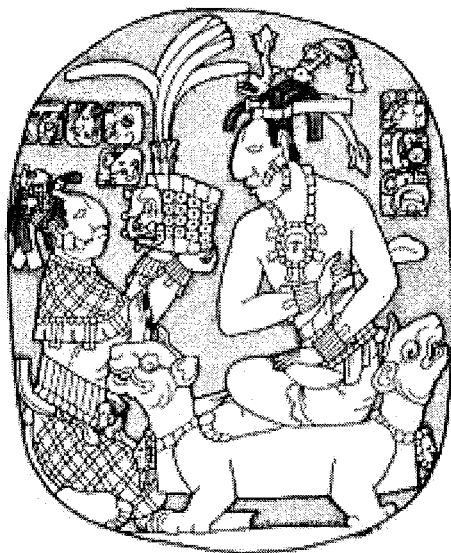


Figure 11. Palace Oval Tablet, Palenque. Drawing by Linda Schele, © David Schele, courtesy Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org).

Figure 12. Copan Stela A.  
Image courtesy of Fotomaya.com



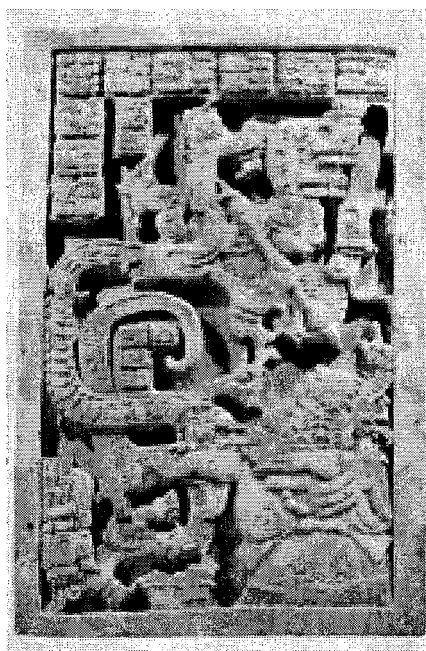


Figure 13. Yaxchilan Lintel 25  
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Figure 14. Sarcophagus Lid of  
Janab Pakal, Temple of the  
Inscriptions, Palenque. Rubbings by  
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# **St. Peter's Basilica as *Templum Dei*: Continuation of the Ancient Near Eastern Temple Tradition in the Christian Cathedral**

RACHEL ANN SEELY

**I**nscribed on the entrance of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is *Templum Vaticanum* (Temple of the Vatican). Upon entering St. Peter's, one can see many parallels between it and Solomon's Temple in both architecture and orientation. Even more striking are the similarities between the political and religious roles of St. Peter's Basilica and those of an ancient Near Eastern temple. Christians believed that Christ fulfilled the Levitical temple functions and that temple worship finally ended with the destruction of the Second Temple at Jerusalem in AD 70, but Christians never completely escaped from the idea that a temple was necessary. This is seen later through the continuation of pilgrimages to sacred sites (such as those in Jerusalem and later in Rome) and through the building of magnificent churches that would house many of the rites that once belonged to the temple.

Hugh Nibley's essay "Christian Envy of the Temple" explains that many Christians think that the physical temple, or the building itself, was replaced with a spiritual temple, or the church: "they boast that the Church possesses all the physical properties of the Temple—the oil, myrrh, the altar, the incense, hymns, priestly robes, etc., everything, in fact, but the Temple itself, for 'in the

place of the tangible Temple we behold the spiritual.' Strange, that the solid walls should vanish and all the rest remain!"<sup>1</sup> Porphyry around AD 262–63 saw the Christians as "inconsistent and irrational since they deprecated pagan worship but, he says, they 'erected great buildings' of their own, 'imitating the construction of temples.'" <sup>2</sup> St. Peter's Basilica is an example of how Christians incorporated the ancient temple tradition into their contemporary architecture and worship. To explain this phenomenon, John M. Lundquist has developed a typology of elements permeating temple traditions throughout the ancient Near East.<sup>3</sup> By applying the Lundquist temple typology to St. Peter's Basilica, we can see the relationship of Christian sacred space to the ancient temple.

### St. Peter's Basilica

Vatican Hill has not always been a sacred site for Christians. Originally it was a Roman necropolis; not until AD 150–70 did Christians begin to revere it as the burial site of Peter. The tradition that Peter's grave could be found on Vatican Hill began about one hundred years after Peter's execution in AD 64. It is unclear whether the Christian community recovered the body of Peter from the executioners because the bodies of the executed were often thrown into the Tiber River.<sup>4</sup> To mark the grave, there was a small trophy and later an aedicula (part of which remains today) built over the site.<sup>5</sup> The Christians were so exact in orienting the Aedicula that instead of building it around the existing structures, they cut into the Red Wall, so that the monument could be erected exactly over the body they believed to be Peter's. Although a shift of only fifty cm would have avoided damaging the Red Wall, the early Christians insisted that the Aedicula be located directly over

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1. Hugh Nibley, "Christian Envy of the Temple," in *When the Lights Went Out* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 61–62, 80.

2. L. Michael White, *Building God's House in the Roman World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 129, cf. 136.

3. John M. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 83–117.

4. Jocelyn Toynbee and John Ward Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter and the Vatican Excavations* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 155.

5. *Ibid.*, 153–55.



the gravesite.<sup>6</sup> Later, in concurrence with this attitude, Constantine decided to build St. Peter's Basilica on Vatican Hill, preventing an exact orientation with the Aedicula. This audacious endeavor by Constantine meant the destruction of an ancient Roman necropolis, a place where people still came to give offerings to their ancestral dead.

Although Vatican Hill did not always function as a temple-like, once Constantine built his basilica, the temple aspects began to be incorporated. According to Eusebius, Constantine's churches were equated with temples.<sup>7</sup> Innocent III's inscription on the basilica of Constantine reads,

*summa Petri sedes est h(a)ec sacra principis aedes,  
mater cunctar(um) decor et decus ecclesiar(um).  
devotus XPO qui templo servit in isto  
flores virtutis capiet fructusq(ue) salutis.*

"This sacred shrine of the Prince of the Apostles is the chief dwelling-place of Peter, the mother, the ornament, the glory of all churches. Whoso serve Christ devoutly in this temple shall receive the flower of virtue and the fruit of salvation."<sup>8</sup> In 590, Gregory of Tours recorded the impressions of the deacon Agiulf: "*sanctus vero Petrus apostolus . . . sepultus est in templo quod vocitabatur antiquitus Vaticanum*. 'St. Peter . . . is buried in the temple formerly called Vaticanum.'"<sup>9</sup> Constantine's Basilica was in a state of disrepair by the fifteenth century, and around 1450 Pope Nicholas V decided to rebuild it. Most features of Constantine's Basilica were leveled, but some were preserved and incorporated into the new structure.<sup>10</sup> The current structure of St. Peter's Basilica is the one begun by Pope Nicholas V and continued on by Bramante, Michelangelo, Bernini, and Maderno. Today St. Peter's Basilica stands as a symbol of the Catholic Church and is also a Christian

6. Ibid., 155.

7. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 10. iv. 45.

8. Toynbee and Perkins, 233.

9. *De Gloria martyrum*, xxviii, Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, lxxi, cols. 728-29 as quoted in Toynbee and Perkins, 212-13 (Latin in fn. 45).

10. Toynbee and Perkins, 224, 247.

pilgrimage destination. Now let us examine the Basilica of St. Peter's in respect to Lundquist's temple typology.

**1. The temple is built on separate, sacral set-apart space. The temple and its ritual are enshrouded in secrecy.**

The builders of St. Peter's Basilica created levels of set-apart space. The first level of separate space is the Vatican, a self-contained, albeit tiny, country set apart by massive walls. It is considered holy ground for Catholics. The second level of set-apart space in the current structure is St. Peter's square, an oval courtyard set apart by Bernini's triple row of Doric columns. One must pass through either the colonnade or the break in the colonnade before entering St. Peter's. The next level of set-apart space is the portico area. Next, one can enter the doors into the actual Basilica of St. Peter's where the space is divided into increasing levels of sacredness. Constantine's church had a veil or screen separating the transept from the apse as a part of Peter's shrine.<sup>11</sup> The current structure, which dates back to the Renaissance, still maintains this sanctuary, or holier space, right above St. Peter's tomb, which is below the Baldacchino. This is where the altar resides, and only the priests and those taking part in certain ceremonies are allowed to enter. *The Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism* describes this holier space: "The Christian sanctuary, insofar as it was a temple, recalled in some way the holy of holies, in the temple of Jerusalem."<sup>12</sup>

**2. The temple is oriented toward the four world regions, or cardinal directions, and to various celestial bodies such as the polar star.**

The orientation of St. Peter's Basilica is interesting because it has been dictated by the place where Peter's body is supposedly buried. Thus, St. Peter's is not exactly oriented in accordance to

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11. Ibid., 201.

12. Joseph Rykwert, *The Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, vol. 120, *Church Building* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1966), 7, 14.

the cardinal directions or celestial bodies. The main doors are on the east side of the building and the visitor ascends towards the west to Peter's tomb. It is appropriate that the worshipper walks west to approach Peter's grave because death is associated with the setting of the sun in the west. This also makes St. Peter's oriented in a similar way to the temple at Jerusalem, where the main doors were on the east side of the building and the holy of holies was in the western portion of the temple.

### **3. Temples, in their architectonic orientation, express the idea of a successive ascension toward heaven.**

The ascension aspect of St. Peter's is very prominent. The oblong St. Peter's square is terraced and, in order to enter the basilica, one must ascend many stairs. Once inside the basilica, the worshiper encounters many symbols of heaven, from the enormous cherubs lining the wall to the dome of heaven near the center of the church. The dome's star motif emphasizes that it represents the heavens (see Figure 1).

Under the dome is Bernini's bronze Baldacchino canopy, which sets off the main altar (see Figure 2). The altar is not only a feature associated with sacrifice but in "The Catholic Liturgy and the Mormon Temple" Marcus von Wellnitz explains "the altar also appears as throne of God, the mercy seat, covered by a royal canopy as over a king's throne from which he ruled his domain."<sup>13</sup> Bernini's large bronze Baldacchino emphasizes the throne of God in Baldacchino's relation to the royal canopy. Jocelyn Toynbee, a professor of classical archaeology at Cambridge, writes, "Men might marvel at the form and workmanship of the columns of the canopy; but the canopy itself spoke a language that was familiar to all. As an attribute of divinity it had many centuries of history behind it, at first in the ancient East and later in the Hellenistic world, whence it passed, quite early in the Empire, into the repertory of Roman imperial symbolism."<sup>14</sup> An interesting

13. Marcus von Wellnitz, "The Catholic Liturgy and the Mormon Temple," *BYU Studies* 21 (1980): 23-26.

14. Toynbee and Perkins, 211.

sidenote that ties the Baldacchino to ancient Roman temples, as Toynbee explains, is that “to provide metal for this canopy, the porch of the Pantheon was stripped of its gilded bronze tiles—whence the famous pasquinade: *quod non fecerunt barbari, fecerunt Barberini* (‘what the barbarians did not do, the Barberini did’).”<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the altar, at the end of the nave is an actual throne—the Throne of St. Peter (see Figure 3). Above the Throne of St. Peter is Bernini’s elaborate stained glass window depicting rays shooting from the sun with a dove in the center. The setting sun shines through the window, illuminating the image into a heavenly brightness. The rays and heavenly motif are continued in gilt sculpting that lifts the Throne of St. Peter into space, making it seem to float in golden light and sculpture. The combination of the rays of light, the dove, and the golden chair floating in clouds is a clear reference to encountering the throne of God. The ascension to heaven is complete at the very end of the nave with the artistic rendition of the heavenly throne.<sup>16</sup>

#### **4. Sacral, communal meals are carried out in connection with temple ritual, often during or at the conclusion of a covenantal ceremony. Temples are associated with initiation into the presence of deity.**

The Catholic liturgy is complex and replete with ceremonies that reflect temple ritual. Nibley writes, “Rome has not abolished the rites of the Temple, however, but simply taken them over, every particle of the ancient ordinances and imagery having been absorbed by the Christian sacraments.”<sup>17</sup> Sacral, communal meals can be seen in the partaking of the mass. “The mass, as part of the liturgy, becomes therefore another initiation, ‘the re-enactment of the work of our salvation under a symbolic veil,’” as Wellnitz explains. “Since the mass is indeed another initiation, the celebrants are obliged to go through a further

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15. Ibid., 238, fn. 71.

16. Ibid., 135.

17. Nibley, “Christian Envy of the Temple,” 72–73; *Serm.* 66, in *P.L.* 54. 365 fn.

cleansing ceremony before commencing the liturgy, as would be expected before initiation."<sup>18</sup>

Another example of a practice reminiscent of temple ritual and initiation into the presence of deity is the Catholic confession. Wellnitz writes, "The activity in the confession booth could be representative of a symbolic veil scene, for the candidate appears before God, who alone can forgive sins and who is represented by the priest; he meets with him in solitude for a personal examination and audience, separated only by a curtain or screen."<sup>19</sup> The architectural ascension to heaven led to the throne of God, discussed in the previous section, and is related to the initiation into the presence of deity.

The rite of the opening of the holy door at St. Peter's is tied to coming into the presence of God. Wellnitz explains this idea in writing:

The ceremonial entry into the church and to the altar in the sanctuary is also acted out in the ritual of the opening of the Holy Door, the Porta Santa at St. Peter in Rome, and other carefully selected churches. This rite is executed only every twenty-five years and represents the entry of the children of God into the presence of the Lord. . . . A prayer said by Pope Clement VIII during the rite in 1600 demonstrates clearly that the ceremony does indeed portray entry into the temple of God: 'Open unto me the gates of justice, when I am entered I will praise my Lord. I will enter, O Lord, into Thy house. I will adore Thee in Thy fear in Thy temple.'<sup>20</sup>

## 5. The temple is associated with the realm of the dead, the underworld, the afterlife, and the grave.

The Basilica of St. Peter was built to venerate the tomb of Peter; the original purpose of the building therefore was to

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18. Wellnitz, 28.

19. *Ibid.*, 29.

20. *Ibid.*, 34. See also fn. 191: Herbert Thurston, *The Holy Year of the Jubilee* (London: Sands & Co., 1900), 284, 406. This door is compared to the King's Gate or the Holy Gate or even the Golden Gate in Jerusalem.

commemorate a grave. Originally Vatican hill was a necropolis, and, although much of the necropolis was demolished when Constantine built his basilica there, a city of the dead remains beneath the current structure of St. Peter's. Prearranged tours with Vatican guides can be obtained to enter into this realm of the dead to view what remains of the pagan necropoli and the original Aedicula over the grave of Peter. Above the necropoli excavations is the basement or crypt of St. Peter's, where hundreds of popes and other Christians are buried. Tombs and monuments to the dead can be seen throughout St. Peter's. In addition to the physical association of the actual Basilica with the realm of the dead, the liturgy of St. Peter's is also associated with the afterlife in a very spiritual and literal sense. Even the porphyry baptismal font was once part of a classical sarcophagus.<sup>21</sup>

**6. The temple is the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain. The cosmic mountain represents the primordial hillock, the place that first emerged from the waters that covered the earth during the creative process.**

The cosmic mountain is not as physically apparent in St. Peter's Basilica. It is not built on a particularly high place, nor is it architecturally designed to represent a mountain, like the ancient Near Eastern ziggurat. Nevertheless, the primordial hillock is often tied to Calvary because Christ was crucified, according to tradition, on the primordial mound where his blood could cleanse the fall of Adam. This is most clearly illustrated in the Calvary at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, where the cave of Adam is located directly below the Crucifixion site. Therefore, as the worshippers follow the Stations of the Cross in St. Peter's Basilica, they are re-enacting the ascent to Calvary and, in a sense, climbing the cosmic mountain.

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21. *The Golden Book, Rome and the Vatican* (Florence, Italy: Casa Editrice Bonechi, 1999), 114.

### **7. The temple is often associated with the waters of life that flow forth from a spring within the building itself.**

While there is not a spring that comes forth from St. Peter's Basilica, there are several ways in which St. Peter's is associated with the waters of life. There are fountains in the courtyard and upon entering the Basilica the worshiper encounters large putti on the right and left holding holy water basins. Holy water is used for purification before entering the sacred space or proceeding with certain ceremonies. Also present are the waters of baptism in the font of St. Peter's. Representing the waters of life, the baptismal font is associated with rebirth.

### **8. The temple is associated with the tree of life.**

In Israelite temples, such as the Tabernacle and Solomon's temple, the symbolic tree of life was found in the candelabrum, or menorah. Professor Donald Parry writes, "The fact that the menorah was a stylized tree of life is made clear in the description produced in Exodus 25:31-40."<sup>22</sup> In Christianity the symbol of the tree of life is directly related to the cross. Thus, not only do the candelabrum and the cross both have tree of life symbolism, but they both hold life—the cross held "the light of the world" and the candelabrum holds physical light. Not only are there crosses of all sizes in the interior and on the exterior of St. Peter's, but the building itself is built in the shape of a cross. "The cross is, in early traditions, the tree of life, bringing us back into the presence of God through the Savior's atonement (see *Epistle of Barnabas* 11:1-11)," as John A. Tvedtness explains.<sup>23</sup> St. Peter's contains large candelabra that are reminiscent of menorahs but which play a smaller role than the menorah did in lighting the building because natural light pours through

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22. Donald Parry, "Garden of Eden Prototype Sanctuary," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 130.

23. John A. Tvedtness, "Temple Prayer in Ancient Times," in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: F.A.R.M.S., 1999), 85.

clerestory windows and the oculus in the dome in order to light the interior of St. Peter's. Also, in relation to the tree of life, temples are often associated with gardens, and directly behind St. Peter's Basilica are the extensive Vatican Gardens.

**9. The plan and measurements of the temple are revealed by God to the king, and the plan must be carefully carried out.**

We do not have thorough documentation regarding the inception of St. Peter's Basilica. There was a shrine on Vatican Hill from about AD 170 that inspired Constantine to erect his large basilica in the fourth century. "The earliest explicit reference to the construction of the church is probably that contained in the mosaic that once adorned the triumphal arch (the arch between nave and transept) of the old church. It showed Constantine presenting the church to Christ, accompanied by St. Peter, and bore the metrical inscription:

*quod duce te mundus surrexit in astra triumphans  
hanc Constantinus victor tibi condidit aula(m)*

"because under Thy leadership the world rose up triumphant to the skies, Constantine, himself victorious, has founded this hall in Thy honor."<sup>24</sup> This mosaic was destroyed by 1525, but this inscription from the mosaic was first recorded in the *Sylloge Einsidlense*, a collection of inscriptions compiled no later than the ninth century and preserved in the monastery of Einsiedeln. While God did not necessarily reveal the plan for St. Peter's Basilica to Constantine, it was certainly dedicated to God.

**10. The tablets of destiny (tablets of the decrees) are consulted and God's word is revealed in the temple. There is a close relationship between the temple and the law.**

The law is contained in St. Peter's Basilica in the Bible on the pulpit near the altar and in symbolic depictions of the Ten

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24. Toynbee and Perkins, 195-96.



Commandments throughout the Basilica. Also, although the Catholics do not exactly term it revelation, whenever there is an important announcement or doctrinal issue the Pope stands in front of St. Peter's, under a canopy, and proclaims it to all who are at St. Peter's square and by extension to the world (see Figure 4). Lundquist writes, "The temple creates law and makes law possible. It allows for the transformation of a chaotic universe into a cosmos."<sup>25</sup> Just as Ezra read out the law from the temple in Jerusalem, the Pope reads out the law from the portico of St. Peter's. The process of law being presented at the temple can also be seen in the Book of Mormon with Benjamin (Mosiah 1:18), Limhi (Mosiah 7:17-18), Jacob (1:17), and Christ (3 Ne. 11:1). As for Latter-day Saints, we gather around the temple in Salt Lake City (either physically or via satellite broadcasts) to hear the law, instruction, and commandments from our prophets.

### **11. The temple is a place of sacrifice.**

Sacrifice is a focus in St. Peter's as a result of the many altars found within the Basilica. Wellnitz explains that "the concept of an altar was not taken from the service in the synagogue for there was no altar there; it is an adaptation from the temple in Jerusalem, or from any temple for that matter."<sup>26</sup> This shows a profound influence of the ancient temple on Christian church architecture, for altars are found in most Christian churches. The altar not only represents the blood sacrifices of the Temple at Jerusalem and the Atonement of Christ but is also a key element in the Catholic liturgy. Wellnitz continues, "The Catholic mass evolved around the altar, which was the central place of worship and ritual in the church. It was literally the ark of the covenant where covenants and vows were made to God. . . . However, the altar is also a replacement for the altar of sacrifice in the temple court at Jerusalem. . . . It symbolizes the sacrifice of Christ and,

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25. Lundquist, "Temple, Covenant, and Law," 282-83.

26. Wellnitz, 21.

at the same time, the sacrifice of the individual participant which he is willing to make for Christ.”<sup>27</sup> The mass not only symbolizes the sacrificial death of Christ, but it actually re-enacts the sacrifice on the altar.

**12. The temple is the central organizing and unifying institution in a nation and plays a legitimizing political role in the ancient Near East. The temple is associated with abundance and prosperity.**

Constantine’s construction of the Basilica of St. Peter was certainly an attempt by the leader to legitimize his political role in Rome. Centuries later, in the Renaissance, the rebuilding of St. Peter’s was a re-legitimization of the political power of the popes. Lundquist writes that “the building or restoration of the temple legitimizes the state or the society.”<sup>28</sup> According to Nibley, “The Emperor Constantine’s plan . . . was the old ‘hierocentric’ concept of the sacral state, represented among others by the *Roma aeterna* of which Christian Rome claimed to be the revival, but also typified from time immemorial in the temples of the East, each a scale-model of the cosmos, which was thought literally to revolve around it. Constantine’s architectural projects proclaim his familiarity with the idea of a *templum mundi* as the physical center of the universe, just as clearly as his panegyrists hail him in the role of Solomon the Temple-builder.”<sup>29</sup> This shows that Constantine’s basilicas were a central, organizing, and unifying institution like ancient temples.

Additionally, St. Peter’s became a center for pilgrimage and, although the Vatican was on the other side of the Tiber from Rome proper, St. Peter’s created a new city-center for Rome. The Holy Roman Emperors took advantage of this new central

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27. Ibid., 28.

28. John M. Lundquist, “Temple, Covenant, and Law in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 272.

29. Nibley, “Christian Envy of the Temple,” 68–69 fn. 76. “Contemporaries hail him as ‘the new Bezalel or Zerunabel, who builds blessed temples of Christ,” Antiochus Monach., *Ep. Ad Eustath.*, fin., in P.G. 89. 1428.

institution by choosing to be crowned in St. Peter's Basilica. Toynbee writes about this event, "The coronation of Charlemagne in St. Peter's on Christmas Eve of the year 800 was the culminating point of a fifty-year-old collaboration between the Frankish kingdom and the Papacy. Charlemagne already controlled a large part of what had been the western Roman Empire; and by his coronation he laid claim to be the legitimate successor of the Roman emperors of Antiquity."<sup>30</sup> Although Charlemagne wanted to be the legitimate successor to the ancient Roman emperors, he did not go to the place where these ancient Roman emperors had been crowned. Rather, Charlemagne went to St. Peter's, the *templum vaticani*, in his effort to make it the new organizing and legitimizing center of society. St. Peter's and the Vatican continue today to be the organizing and unifying center for the global Catholic Church. As Nibley writes, "The temple marks the universal meeting place of all great societies. It is actually the source of everything that makes civilization."<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

There are two additional elements worth noting about St. Peter's as *templum dei*: its association with scholarship and the relation of its twisted columns to Solomon's Temple. Nibley writes that "central to all great temples was the great library. The temple is definitely a school, a very high school of intense study, as temples in the past have been."<sup>32</sup> Tied to St. Peter's is the Vatican Library, containing important manuscripts, and the Vatican Museum, containing paintings, sculptures, tapestries, and other artifacts. The Vatican is truly a great place of scholarship and learning.

The second element worth noting is the interesting history of the twisted columns that have been characteristic of St. Peter's since the Basilica of Constantine (see Figure 5). One tradition

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30. Toynbee and Perkins, 244.

31. Nibley, "A House of Glory," 32.

32. Ibid., 36.

asserts that these spiral columns were designed in imitation of the columns of Solomon's Temple. In the Basilica of Constantine the spiral columns originally upheld the canopy above St. Peter's tomb, and Toynbee believes they "were part of a set of six sent for the purpose. . . . They are of classical workmanship, dating from about the end of the second century AD, and they must almost certainly have come from some well-known building in the neighborhood of Constantinople."<sup>33</sup> Some of the original columns are still down near the tomb, but Bernini placed some in the galleries above the great angle-piers of the dome. Additionally, Bernini imitated them on a larger scale in his Baldacchino.

Toynbee posits that the twelve spiral columns of St. Peter's were the models for all subsequent spiral columns in Christian art and architecture. She writes:

Jean Fouquet had seen and drawn them in the forties of the fifteenth century; and later he reproduced them to illustrate the Temple in the Book of Hours of Etienne Chevalier and in his miniature for the 'Jewish Antiquities' of Josephus. But they would have attracted little attention outside Italy if it had not been for Raphael. When he was commissioned, in 1515, to prepare a series of cartoons for tapestries to hang in the Sistine Chapel—the cartoons that are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum—he used these columns to illustrate the scene of the Healing of the Lame man at the Beautiful Gate. The tapestries woven from these cartoons carried representations of the St. Peter's columns all over Europe, and it was these that inspired the countless corkscrew columns and colonettes that were used in European art from the mid-sixteenth century onwards.<sup>34</sup>

There is a possibility that the tradition of the twisted pillars of Solomon's Temple came from artists using the spiral columns of St. Peter's to illustrate Solomon's Temple. Or, if the

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33. Toynbee and Perkins, 247.

34. *Ibid.*, 250.

spiral column tradition is earlier than St. Peter's, perhaps the original builders used spiral columns as a reference to temple architecture.

The Lundquist temple typology is clearly illustrated in the structure and role of St. Peter's Basilica. It would be useful to make a more complete study of the development of churches and cathedrals across Europe. For example, contemporaries of the dedication of Canterbury Cathedral in England described it as more splendid than any of its kind "since the dedication of the Temple of Solomon."<sup>35</sup> Also, in 1124 Abbot Suger of France wrote that he modeled his cathedral St. Denis after both Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and the Temple of Solomon as it was described in the Bible.<sup>36</sup> It is clear that in certain ways Christians saw their Cathedrals as related to the ancient Near Eastern temples. However, remarkable as the similarities between St. Peter's Basilica and the ancient Temple at Jerusalem may be, it is important to remember Hugh Nibley's warning about the emptiness of temple worship without the proper authority. "One thing that leads us to suspect that most of the great powerhouses whose traces still remain were never anything more than pompous imitations or replicas is their sheer magnificence. . . . After the vital powers are spent, then is the time for the super-buildings, the piling of stone upon stone for monuments of staggering mass and proportion."<sup>37</sup>

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35. H. R. Luard, ed., *Annales Monastici*, IV (London: 1869), 19.

36. Lawrence Cunningham and John Reich, *Culture and Values* (Fort Worth: Harcourt, 2002), 226.

37. Hugh Nibley, "Ancient Temples: What Do They Signify?" in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 408.

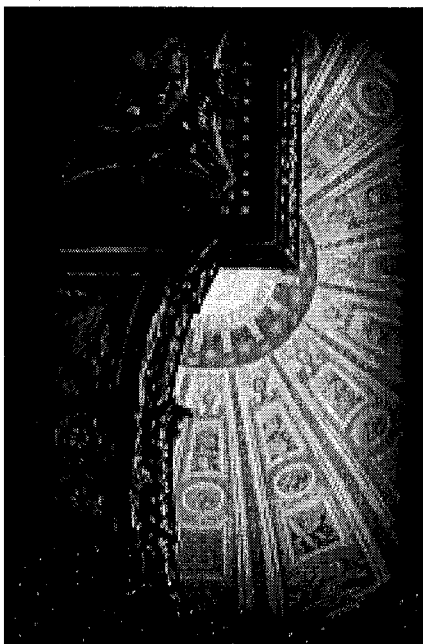


Figure 1. Star motifs on the dome.  
[www.ewtn.com/gallery/sp/sp1.htm](http://www.ewtn.com/gallery/sp/sp1.htm)

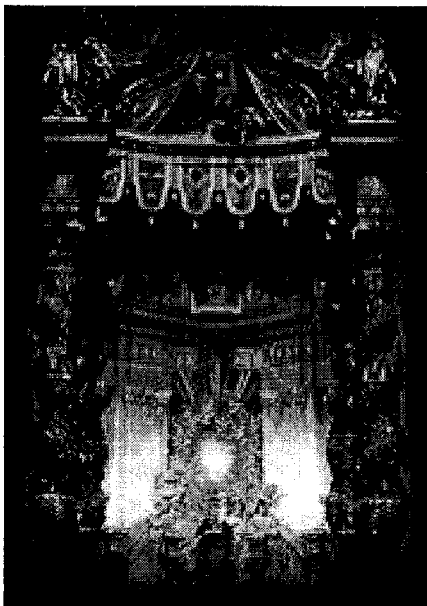


Figure 2. Bernini's Baldacchino or  
royal canopy.  
[www.ewtn.com/gallery/sp/sp1.htm](http://www.ewtn.com/gallery/sp/sp1.htm)

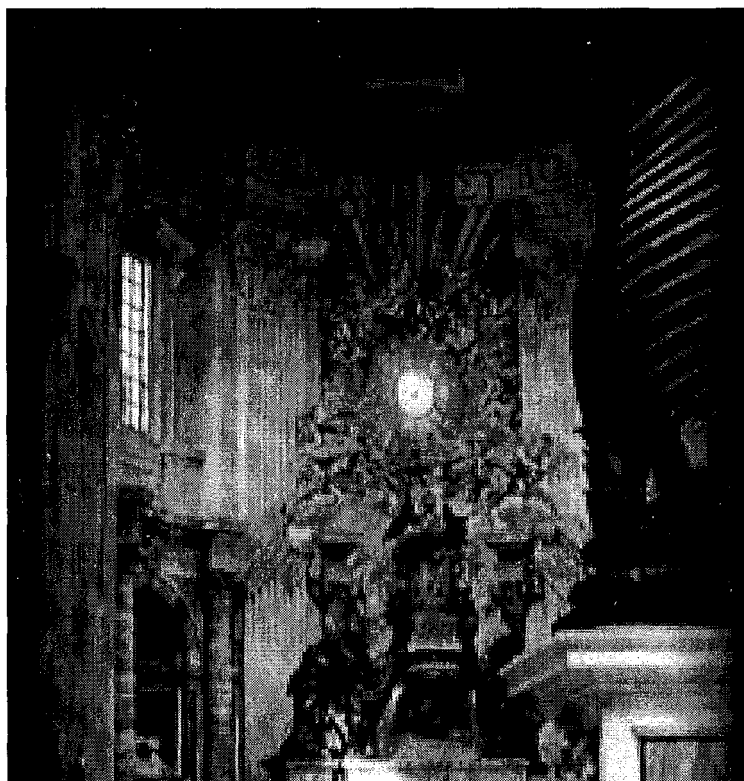


Figure 3. The Throne of St. Peter.  
[www.ewtn.com/gallery/sp/sp1.htm](http://www.ewtn.com/gallery/sp/sp1.htm)

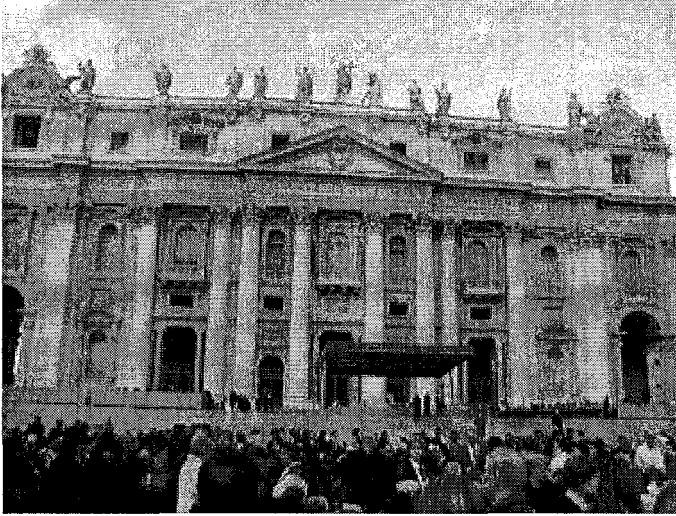


Figure 4. Porch of St. Peter's and the canopy under which the Pope stands when speaking. [www.sousacorp.com/jubilee1.htm](http://www.sousacorp.com/jubilee1.htm)

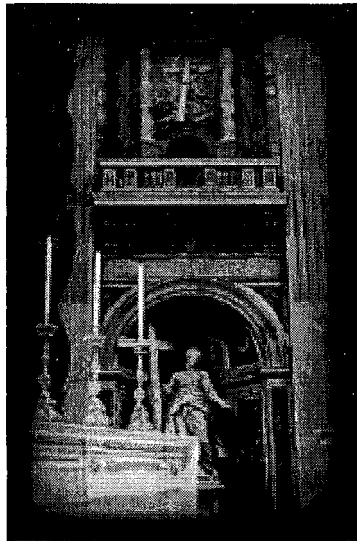


Figure 5. Two of the original marble, spiral columns can be seen in the gallery. [www.ewtn.com/gallery/sp/sp1.htm](http://www.ewtn.com/gallery/sp/sp1.htm)



# Metamorphosis: The Problem and Potential of Classical Chinese Poetry

RICH TORGERSON

Ancient poetry is a window into the soul of ancient culture. Out of necessity, most of us approach great poetry through English translations. However, giants such as the Homeric epics, the *Hyakunin Isshu* court poetry of Japan, and the Book of Poetry from ancient China are often introduced in our literature and culture classes through the myopic lens of only one translation.

With regard to the Homeric epics, Harris has suggested that “we are in the process of consigning the “real” Homer to the scrap-pile of unread documents, while we exploit the Epic Tradition in translation for those who sit in our classes, who can hear only the faint echo of a proud and mighty voice.”<sup>1</sup> Harris concludes that the power of Homer *can* be accessed, “but only if approached authentically and through the process of very hard and often frustrating study of the original Greek words.”<sup>2</sup> While I agree with this approach to classical literature to some extent, Harris has established a demanding and largely impractical standard.

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1. William Harris, Homer in a Changing Tradition: An Ancient Text Entering Its Fourth Millennium, <http://community.middlebury.edu/~harris/Humanities/homer.html> (17 November 2004), Humanities and the Liberal Arts, Introduction.

2. Ibid., Finale.

Perhaps a more practical standard for people would be to encourage an approach to great literature through the careful study of two or more quality translations.

Translation of ancient texts is not a simple artifice. The issues surrounding the conversion of classical Chinese into English are especially problematic. Even beyond the lexical and explicatory challenges, the translator must come face to face with the challenge of interpreting a language used over two thousand years ago, a time of which very little historical fact remains. To make matters worse, this historical void has been filled with a portentous amount of assumption and extrapolation. Thus it is burdensome even to contemplate accurate translation of the Book of Poetry (Classic of Poetry or *Shijing*), a text which contains portions dating from as early as the tenth century BC. Fortunately, many scholars have dedicated much of their lives to bringing portions of this priceless poetry to us.<sup>3</sup>

## Comparisons

The body of this paper will be focused on the translations of two different poems from the Book of Poetry performed by two of the most well-known and respected sinologists Arthur Waley and James Legge.<sup>4</sup> I will also discuss what these specific translations teach us about the perspective of the translator. I will suggest some alternate translations, and we will use a more sound approach to comprehending ancient poems by applying a “two or three witnesses” approach.<sup>5</sup> Let’s begin with this poem written during one of the earliest parts of China’s history, taken from a portion of the Book of Poetry Owen calls the “Temple Hymns of Zhou.”<sup>6</sup>

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3. Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 12. Owen reports, “Despite millennia of scholarship and great progress in linguistics and philology during the past four centuries, much remains uncertain in the language of the Classic of Poetry.... There are many words in these poems that we understand only roughly, which leaves the translator to rely more heavily on the interpretation of the Zhou world from which the poems come” (12).

4. See NationMaster.com, Encyclopedia: Sinologist, <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Sinologist> (17 November 2004).

5. 2 Corinthians 13:1.

6. Owen, 12.

**"Making the seasonal progress  
throughout the States"**

Now is he making a progress  
     through the States,  
 May Heaven accept him as its Son!  
 Truly are the honour and succession  
 come from it to the House of Chow.  
 To his movements All respond with  
     tremulous awe.  
 He has attracted and given rest to all  
     spiritual Beings,  
 Even to [the Spirits of] the Ho, and  
     the highest hills.  
 Truly is the king the sovereign Lord.  
 Brilliant and illustrious is the House  
     of Chow.  
 He has regulated the positions of  
     the princes;  
 He has called in shields and spears;  
  
 He has returned to their cases bows  
     and arrows.  
 I will cultivate admirable virtue,  
  
 And display it throughout these  
     great regions:  
 Truly will the king preserve the  
     appointment.<sup>7</sup>

**"He goes"**

He goes through his lands;  
  
 May high Heaven cherish him!  
 Truly the succession  
 Is with the Zhou.  
 See how they tremble before  
     him!  
 Submissive, yielding are all the  
     Spirits,  
 Likewise the rivers and high  
     hills.  
 Truly he alone is monarch  
 Bright and glorious is Zhou;  
  
 It has succeeded to the seat of  
     power.  
 "Then put away your shields  
     and axes,  
 Then case your arrows and  
     bows;  
 I have store enough of good  
     power  
 To spread over all the lands of  
     Xia."  
 And in truth, the king  
     protected them.<sup>8</sup>

As we look carefully at these two English versions, we immediately find some striking differences. Each author's choice of words is important to consider; each word important to compare and contrast. The following consists of only some of the questions these two very different translations brought to my mind. Does the original convey the lands were "his" or not? What is the association between "cherishing him" and "accepting him as its Son"? Is Heaven really an "it," or did Legge simply give his own impression here? Why doesn't Waley's translation specify that

7. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 4 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 577.

8. Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*, ed. Joseph R. Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 294.

honor and succession come from it [Heaven] to the Zhou? Is there a reason why the two men utilize both “all” and “they” with regard to those who tremble, and what does this demonstrate about their individual views of the poem? While Legge’s version seems to maintain a connection between Heaven and the House of Zhou, Waley keeps the focus on the might of the House of Zhou and its King with an almost supercilious “May High Heaven cherish him!”<sup>9</sup> Waley ensures that the reader perceives only one “he” in the poem, while Legge’s version allows for a more open interpretation. Was the former justified in his assertion?

Without further investigation, one is left to wonder whether the spirits were “attracted and given rest” or were “submissive and yielding,” or was it simply all of these combined? Did the ancient(s) write “the king” or “he alone” is the sovereign lord, or was there no designation of any kind? Waley’s use of quotation marks certainly gives a different voice to the poem, which is in need of explanation. The translators’ mutual agreement in the third to last line on the use of “I” raises the question of whether Waley attributes the entire quotation to the Duke of Zhou, as Legge does to the last few lines, or whether Waley attributes these words to someone else. The use of the word “power” in describing the triumph of the Zhou and the king’s ability to spread over the lands of Xia (China) may be interpreted differently by Westerners than James Legge’s more gentle description of a display of “virtue,” even if power and virtue are written the same in the Classical Chinese.

This shows that each of these translations has its own slant that stems from the perspective of the translator. Both men have construed the poem to mean that the mandate had gone directly from Heaven to the king, but why not consider that another intermediary could be involved? Both concur that he who was going, or progressing, throughout the land of Xia wielded incredible power and influence. Either the king’s greatness was exaggerated to the extreme, or Legge was mistaken in his statement that “Truly are the honour and succession come from it [meaning

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9. Ibid.

Heaven] to the House of Chow.”<sup>10</sup> Another possibility is that the honor came from he who was cherished and accepted by Heaven: *Hou Ji*. This seemingly random connection can be better explained as we look at our next poem, concerning Hou Ji, also from the oldest portion of the Book of Poetry:

**“Accomplished”**

O accomplished How-tsieh,  
Thou didst prove thyself the correlate  
of Heaven;  
Thou didst give grain-food to our  
multitudes;—  
The immense gift of thy goodness.  
Thou didst confer on us the wheat  
and the barley,  
Which God appointed for the  
nourishment of all;  
And without distinction of territory  
or boundary,  
The rules of social duty were diffused  
throughout these great regions.<sup>11</sup>

**“Mighty are you”**

Mighty are you Hou Ji  
Full partner in Heaven’s  
power  
That we, the thronging  
peoples, were raised up  
Is all your doing.  
You gave us wheat and barley  
  
In obedience to God’s  
command  
Not to this limit only or to  
that frontier,  
But near, far, and for ever  
throughout these lands of Xia.<sup>12</sup>

In line one “accomplished” and “mighty” seem ambivalent, but I found it surprising that neither of the translators considered the possibility of polygraphy (many graphs for the same meaning), which is so common among early Chinese texts.<sup>13</sup> Simply changing the first syllable of *Si wen* (accomplished or mighty) to its perfect homophone *Si wen* (cultured or refined) could allow a greater understanding of how *Hou Ji* was perceived by the Chinese.

Did *Hou Ji* prove himself the correlate of Heaven or not? Did he raise up the multitudes or give them grain-food? Was *Hou Ji* acting out of obedience or out of unity with God as Legge suggests? How did Legge translate, “The rules of social duty were diffused” out of the same line Waley translated, “But near, far, and for

10. Legge, 577.

11. Ibid., 580.

12. Waley, 295.

13. David Honey, “The Word behind the Graph in Classical Chinese: Three Notes on the Logographic Writing System,” *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association* 24, no. 3 (1989): 15.

ever"? Finally, was the wheat and barley diffused throughout these great regions or the lands of Xia?

In addition to these questions, when looking back at the first poem we find some intriguing connections between the two different pieces of poetry. For example, both poems start out describing someone revered, loved, or respected by the people. In Waley's translations he wrote, "Mighty are you Hou Ji, / Full partner in Heaven's power," and "He goes through his lands; / May high Heaven cherish him!"<sup>14</sup> Both translations of the final lines of our first poem assert that this luminary's goodness and protection spread throughout the lands, which seems to reflect the same message at the conclusion of our second poem. James Legge wrote, "And without distinction of territory or boundary, / The rules of social duty were diffused throughout these great regions."<sup>15</sup> And from Waley, "Not to this limit only or to that frontier, But near, far, and for ever throughout these lands of Xia."<sup>16</sup>

Obviously readers will have their own impressions and opinions, well founded or not. My point here is not to prove my impressions are right, but to emphasize the importance of searching poetry for its original meaning, which entails much more than reading a single translator's version of the original. Presentism, or judging the past based solely on our own modern perspective, is not an easy thing to overcome. Truth, in any realm, must be substantiated by two or more witnesses.

As we compare the general feeling created by the individual translators, we find that the renderings reveal some of the author's own impressions concerning the events which took place around the time of the Zhou victory. Arthur Waley likely believed that the relationship between subject and ruler at that time consisted only of that held by master and "submissive" servant. The praise of the people seems almost hollow and forced. Raw power was the ultimate cause of triumph, and cold military procedure the method.

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14. Waley, 294, 295.

15. Legge, 580.

16. Waley, 295.

To him these poems represent propaganda perpetuated by a power-hungry regime trying to substantiate its overthrow of the prior leading class.

James Legge, on the other hand, portrays the relationship between ruler and subject as more delicate, and the respect offered to a ruler as something that must be earned or proven. He believes that a ruler was one who attracted and gave rest to all spiritual Beings and whose movements inspired nothing other than awe. Legge's translation portrays a more positive outlook on the Zhou, who is commonly purported to have been commanded by Heaven to overthrow the Shang and was gratefully accepted by the people.

Despite the many questions brought to the surface by our comparison of these translations, these questions also serve as keys to unlocking answers. Take the previously mentioned example regarding the use of "power" and "virtue." One not well versed in Chinese culture, particularly in issues involving the Mandate of Heaven, would be at the mercy of their own western ideals in interpreting either of the translations. With both words, however, we can apprehend not only what is being depicted, but also the manner in which it was carried out. Careful study of the classical Chinese, alongside two or three accurate translations will enhance our comprehension. However, for those of us unable to become proficient with classical Greek, Latin, Chinese, etc., we can at least approach the original meaning of the poem by partaking of the fruits of those who have paid the price. The failure to look at more than one translation can lead to serious misunderstanding of the original meaning of a poem as well as the basic values and ideals held by the ancients.

### **The Challenges of Classical Chinese Poetry**

As in modern times, the very nature of poetry often contributes and encourages variation in interpretation. This is especially true when dealing with classical Chinese poetry. First, classical Chinese poetry was written in condensed form, typically in short four-character lines, requiring the reader to decompress the phrase

before accessing the meaning. Second, another confounding aspect of classical Chinese poetry is best described by Professor David Honey.

For the student who has had to grapple with lengthy conjugations or declensions in learning, say, a European language, Chinese may initially come as a relief—no tense, no gender, no person—apparently nothing but endless characters. However burdensome such syntactical signposts may be to learn, the student of Chinese soon comes to rue their absence, for the grammatical function of a Chinese word is never registered in the graph used to represent it and is seldom expressed in the phonological garb of the word.<sup>17</sup>

This absence of tense, gender, and person, along with the possibility that a single character can serve as a verb, noun, or adjective, can quickly make a mystery out of the message behind each character and how it interrelates with its neighbors to form complete ideas.<sup>18</sup>

Third, Professor Honey has also suggested that because Chinese characters are graphic means to represent the sounds of words, students must delve deeper into “the ways in which words function behind the graph.”<sup>19</sup> Three ways that these words are manifested in classical texts are introduced, namely polygraphy, polysemy, and polyptotons.<sup>20</sup> Honey argues that an enlightened awareness of polygraphy (many graphs for same word), polysemy (one graph for many words), and polyptotons (one graph having two grammatical functions), can facilitate translation exponentially.<sup>21</sup> Each character encountered must be analyzed within its linguistic and historical context, thus enabling dedicated students of classical Chinese to focus attention on the word being spelled, correct interpretation, and, hopefully, eventual cognizance how each word is being manipulated rhetorically and stylistically. Understanding the fact that polygraphy, polysemy, and polyptotons do occur in

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17. Honey, 15.

18. *Ibid.*, 16.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, 16–19.

21. *Ibid.*, 20.



classical Chinese texts also indicates that even the most adept translator is bound to make mistakes.

The fourth aspect that leads to variation in translation, even for capable translators of Chinese like Waley and Legge, is that classical Chinese poetry is kept distant by vast barriers of time and culture. Two foreigners coming from totally different ethno-linguistic backgrounds trying to translate two-thousand-year-old poetry into complete English sentences is much like trying to fashion grapes out of grape juice. One quickly realizes it is impossible to grasp those poems in the exact same way as those who originally produced them.

### Conclusions

When we study classical texts and multiple translations, we will naturally encounter different interpretations, with all their intriguing nuances. Watchful students will discover that when they read a poem, or any literature for that matter, they are actually bringing a whole set of personal values, experiences, and knowledge that is particular to them. They will understand the poem slightly differently than anyone else. They should also recognize that this is one of the reasons why there are so many divergent translations. This is both the problem and the potential of poetry.

In conclusion, I have uncovered some of the problems created by reading only one translation. We have seen that comparing and contrasting can begin to unravel some of the mysteries of ancient poetry as well as the opinions of the respective translators. Poetry is difficult to interpret because it is inherently open to interpretation. This is especially true with ancient writings because of the lack of linguistic, cultural, and historical clarity, hence the need to utilize a "two or three witnesses" approach in our study of ancient texts and their more recent English renditions.



# “And Behold, They Had Fallen to the Earth”: An Examination of Proskynesis in the Book of Mormon

MATTHEW L. BOWEN

**H**istorically, ritual prostrations have constituted an important part of religious activity. They are frequently accompanied by prayer and are connected with temple practices. Ancient literature attests their antiquity and universality. Egyptians of the third millennium BC practiced them,<sup>1</sup> as do Muslims today.<sup>2</sup>

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1. A wonderful example of proskynesis is found in the Egyptian daily temple liturgy of the temple at Karnak. Immediately following the chapter superscripted as “The Incantation for Seeing God, The Words Spoken” (*r n m33 nTr, Dd mdw*) is “The Incantation for Kissing the Ground, The Words Spoken” (*r n sn t3, Dd mdw*). The priest, prostrating himself and kissing the ground, chants words to match his actions: “As I kiss the earth, so shall I embrace Geb” (*sn=i t3 Htp gb*). “Ritual für den Kultus des Amon und für den Mut,” in *Hieratische Papyrus aus den Königlichen Museen zu Berlin* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1901), Pl. 3005, IV, 6–7 (in-class translation by John Gee). This example is particularly interesting because it not only associates proskynesis with seeing God (theophany) in a temple setting but also alludes to a ritual embrace of Deity. Geb was the Egyptian earth-god and crown prince of the pantheon. Thus the clause “so shall I embrace Geb” not only signifies the ritual embrace of the deity but is also a sublime metaphor for proskynesis, Geb being metonymic for the ground. Ritual prostration is also prominent in the story of the shipwrecked sailor. See Aylward M. Blackman, *Middle-Egyptian Stories* (Brussels: Fondation égyptologique reine Élisabeth, 1932–), 41–48.

2. A salām: Muslims prostrate themselves toward Mecca with their foreheads touching the ground five times a day. For some other excellent examples of ritual prostration in ancient cultures see appendix note twenty-two to Hugh Nibley’s article “Old World Ritual in the New World,” in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 504–5.

## The Significance of Proskynesis

Ritual prostrations are abundantly symbolic. "Actions speak louder than words," says one modern cliché. But indeed, this saying is the principle behind such cultic actions. Examining ritual prostration in biblical and nonbiblical sources reveals some of the symbolism. Although a large monograph could be devoted to this subject, here are three major ways prostration is symbolic:

1. Ritual prostrations are the visible demonstration of one's love for and complete submission to deity.
2. Ritual prostrations signify the presence (and power) of deity himself, a divine being (e.g., angels), or some kind of divine manifestation.
3. Ritual prostrations symbolize reverence, awe, or even fear of deity and are an acknowledgment of one's comparative smallness on a cosmic scale.

Each instance of ritual prostration found in ancient sources contains one or more of the above symbolisms.

## Proskynesis in the Bible

The Greek noun *proskynēsis*<sup>3</sup> has become the technical term for ritual prostration. It is cognate with the verb *proskyneō*, which Bauer defines as "the custom of prostrating oneself before a person and kissing his feet, the hem of his garment, the ground, etc.; the Persians did this in the presence of their deified king, and the Greeks before a divinity or something holy."<sup>4</sup> In the Greek Septuagint, *proskyneō* answers to the Hebrew verb *hištahwāh* in the Masoretic text and signifies "bow[ing] down, prostrat[ing] oneself, before a monarch or superior, in homage, etc."<sup>5</sup>

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3. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott define *proskynēsis* as "adoration, obeisance, a salām," *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 693.

4. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 716–17.

5. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 1005.

Instances of proskynesis are numerous in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament. In most cases, God is the object,<sup>6</sup> but there are many instances in which angels,<sup>7</sup> other deities,<sup>8</sup> and even humans<sup>9</sup> are revered in this way.

### Proskynesis in the Book of Mormon

Ritual prostrations play a salient role in many important Book of Mormon events, particularly in events connected with temples. And while examining instances of this cultic action certainly adds to our understanding of this ancient text, no other ancient document better illuminates the subject of proskynesis and demonstrates its symbolism. The occurrence of proskynesis within the Book of Mormon adds to its validity as a historical document. Because of this, the obligation rests upon us to deepen our understanding of ritual prostration and its occurrence within the Book of Mormon text, as well as to understand the message intended for us by its authors.

#### *Proskynesis by Nephi's Brethren*

The first instances of proskynesis occur in Nephi's account of his family's journey from Jerusalem to the New World. He records how on two occasions his brothers bow down to him following a manifestation of divine power. The first time followed a rebellion and an attempted return to Jerusalem on the part of Laman, Lemuel, and some members of Ishmael's family, after Nephi prays for the Lord's help in breaking the bands with which his brothers have bound him. Although the divine power already manifested in the loosening of Nephi's bands initially serves to make his brothers angrier, the pleas of the women in the group soon soften the hearts of the men.

And it came to pass that they were sorrowful, because of their wickedness, insomuch that they did *bow down before me*, and did

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6. Cf. 2 Chr. 7:18; 20:18; 29:28–30.

7. Cf. Judges 13:8; Rev. 22:8–9.

8. Cf. 2 Chr. 25:14, 33:3; Ezek 8:16; Dan. 3:7.

9. Cf. Gen. 42:6; 43:26–28; 48:12; 49:8.

plead with me that I would forgive them of the thing that they had done. (1 Ne. 7:20; emphasis added)

Their subsequent sorrow is accompanied by “bow[ing] down before” Nephi. Their bowing down is clearly a gesture of reverence but perhaps it is also a recognition of Nephi as a superior<sup>10</sup> and one who belongs to the divine realm.<sup>11</sup> They are certainly reverencing the divine power present in Nephi.

This manifestation of divine power and the bowing down of Nephi’s brethren might seem incidental to Nephi’s wider narrative were it not for a similar occurrence during the building of the divinely designed ship that transported the Lehitites to the New World.<sup>12</sup> The Lord commands Nephi to stretch forth his hands and shock his brethren “that they may know that I am the Lord their God” (1 Ne. 17:53). When a manifestation of divine power follows, his brothers react thus:

And now, they said: We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee, for we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us. And they *fell down before me*, and *were about to worship me*, but I would not suffer them, saying: I am thy brother, yea, even thy younger brother; wherefore, *worship the Lord thy God*, and honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee.<sup>13</sup> (1 Ne. 17:55; emphasis added)

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10. In 1 Nephi 2:22, the Lord declares to Nephi, “And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren.” This motif recurs throughout Nephi’s writings (1 Ne. 3:28–30; 15; 16:1–5, 36–38; 18:10; 2 Ne. 1:24–29; 5:1–4). Nephi saw this promise as having been fulfilled by the time the Nephites separated themselves from the rest of the Lehitites (cf. 1 Ne. 5:19).

11. Bauer, 716.

12. Interestingly, Nephi received the pattern for building the ship (1 Ne. 17:7–14) on a mountain, just as Moses received the pattern for the tabernacle atop Mt. Sinai (Ex. 25–31). Noah and the brother of Jared both built sea vessels according to divinely revealed patterns (Gen. 6:14–16; Ether 3:16–25). Presumably, Noah received his instructions on or near a mountain, if the ark was built in an elevated place. The brother of Jared received his instructions on the pristine seashore—a functional temple. Perhaps the sacred vessels themselves were viewed as temporary sacred space until each party arrived at its respective land of promise, hence the Lord’s anger when Laman and his supporters began to live riotously aboard the ship amid the ocean voyage (1 Ne. 18:9–10).

13. John’s Apocalypse contains a similar episode: “And when I had heard and seen, I *fell down to worship before the feet of the angel* which shewed me these

Nephi precludes their cultic gesture by invoking the first, second, and fifth commandments from the Decalogue. His charge to "worship the Lord thy God" coalesces the prohibitives: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3) and "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them" (Ex. 20:5; emphasis added). These are the commandments his brothers are in danger of breaking by prostrating themselves before him. Nephi appropriately counsels his brothers to direct such reverence to YHWH<sup>14</sup> alone. Nephi then cleverly adds another charge from the Decalogue: "Honour thy father and mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12), which is precisely the commandment that Laman and Lemuel have been breaking all along.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Proskynesis in the Tree of Life Visions*

Cultic prostrations figure subtly but significantly in the visions of Lehi and his son Nephi. Lehi, recounting his vision of the Tree of Life, describes two groups of people who "press forward" to the tree and partake of its fruit and then "lose their way," "[wander] off," or "[fall] away" (1 Ne. 8:23, 28). This type of language in the scriptures and in other ancient religious literature often refers to an apostasy from orthodox worship. Lehi then climactically describes the approach of a third group to the tree:

Behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they *came forth* and *fell down* and partook of the fruit of the tree. (1 Ne. 8:30; emphasis added)

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things. Then saith he unto me, see thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: *worship God*" (Rev. 22:8-9; emphasis added). John's prostration before the angel meets with a rebuke, similar to the rebuke Nephi gives his brethren. Cultic prostration is properly directed toward God alone.

14. YHWH is the transliteration of the Hebrew יהוה, often rendered Jehovah or Yahweh in English. In the King James Version of the Old Testament it was rendered LORD, following the Jewish custom of pronouncing *Adonai* (lord) in place of the divine name יהוה, because of its sacredness. Because it is spelled with four consonants, it is often called the Tetragrammaton.

15. Laman's and Lemuel's disrespect for their parents, a capital offense in the law of Moses (see Ex. 17:21; Lev. 20:9), is well chronicled in Nephi's record (see 1 Ne. 2:11; 8:17-18; 16:37; 17:22; 18:17-18).

Lehi's language is abundantly symbolic. For Lehi, the people's coming forth and falling down is cultic, as well as a display of true worship. The people of this third group are the true worshipers, and the tree of which they partake is functionally the true God, Jesus Christ.

Not long afterward, God shows Nephi the things that his father saw in the Tree of Life vision. This divine teaching takes place in the temple setting of an "exceedingly high mountain" (1 Ne. 11:1). In the process of this teaching, the angel grants Nephi a vision of the mortal ministry of Jesus:

[And] he said unto me: Look! And I looked, and I beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men; and I saw many *fall down at his feet and worship him*. (1 Ne. 11:24; emphasis added)

Nephi's vision anticipates the recognition of the Messiah's divinity among those to whom he would minister. Their prostration, in recognition of the Divine Presence and in reverence, accords with a cultic formula found throughout the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Proskynesis in the Isaiah Passages of 1 Nephi*

Images of ritual prostration also occur in the Isaiah passages quoted from the brass plates.<sup>17</sup> At least one of these passages was significant in the Nephite view of themselves and of the house of Israel as a whole. Isaiah chapter 49 foretells the gathering of Israel in the last days by the agency of the Gentiles.

And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall *bow down to thee with their face towards*

16. Matthew 2:11 and 18:26 contain the exact formula found in 1 Nephi 11:24, expressed in Greek with the verbs *piptō* + *proskyneō*. Matthew 9:18, 15:25, and 20:20 contain the formula (*pros*)*erchomai* + *proskyneō* "to come (unto Deity) and to worship" (i.e., kiss the ground in the Divine presence). Clearly, both expressions are cultic. Compare the Evangelist's other uses of the verb *proskyneō*: Matthew 2:2, 8; 28:9; and 28:17. For Matthew *proskyneō* is a motif, and Jesus is almost always the object. By making Jesus the object of proskynesis, he specifically identifies Jesus as יהוה (YHWH).

17. Note the image in an earlier verse: "Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall *worship*, because of the Lord who is faithful" (Isa. 49:7; 1 Ne. 21:7; emphasis added).



*the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.* (Isa. 49:23, 1 Ne. 21:23; emphasis added)

Isaiah's image of gentile kings and queens prostrating themselves before Israel powerfully suggests Israel's destiny as a kingdom of divine kings and queens, priests and priestesses. Jacob quotes this passage in his discourse at the coronation of Nephi<sup>18</sup> (see 2 Ne. 6:7) foretelling Zion's triumph over all her enemies:

Wherefore, they that fight against Zion and the covenant people of the Lord shall *lick up the dust of their feet*; and the people of the Lord shall not be ashamed. For the people of the Lord are they who wait for him; for they still wait for the coming of the Messiah. (2 Ne. 6:13; emphasis added)

Presenting an evocative image, Jacob's paraphrase of Isaiah is a prophecy that those who fight against the Lord's work will one day reverence the Lord's people.

#### *Proskynesis as Instructed by Nephi*

In a significant passage, Nephi explicitly commands cultic prostration as an essential act of Christian devotion. The injunction comes during his explanation of why it was necessary for his people to keep the law of Moses (see 2 Ne. 25:24):

And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, and deny him not; and Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must *bow down before him*, and *worship* him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul; and if ye do this ye shall in nowise be cast out. (2 Ne. 25:29; cf. Deut. 6:5; emphasis added)

This gesture must be undertaken, Nephi says, with all of one's might, mind, strength, and soul to be effective. In saying this,

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18. John W. Welch states: "The 'covenant speech' given by Jacob under the direction of Nephi (see 2 Nephi 6-10) [was], in my opinion, most likely delivered at the temple. They were probably proclaimed at or around the coronation of Nephi." See Donald W. Parry, *Temples of the Ancient World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co.; Provo, UT: F.A.R.M.S., 1994), 328.

Nephi makes an unmistakable allusion to the *Sb'm'a*,<sup>19</sup> a recitation of scripture that had ritual importance to the Jews anciently, as it does now: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:4–5).

In quoting this passage, Nephi substitutes "thou shalt love the Lord thy God" with "ye must bow down before [Christ] and worship [Christ]." This not only reemphasizes Nephi's view that the entire Torah anticipates the Messiah but also makes ritual prostration before Deity the ultimate visible demonstration of love for Deity.<sup>20</sup>

### *Proskynesis in the Sherem Pericope*

Prominent in the record of Jacob, the brother of Nephi, is his confrontation with Sherem. Jacob says that Sherem is a powerful orator, one with "a perfect knowledge of the language of the people" (Jacob 7:4). According to Jacob, he is also one who believed that the law of Moses did not anticipate a Messiah. Sherem challenges Jacob's messianic views and dramatically demands a sign. Jacob accommodates his request, and a manifestation of divine power follows: "And it came to pass that when I Jacob, had spoken these words, the power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he *fell to the earth*" (Jacob 7:15; emphasis added).

It is noteworthy that Jacob describes Sherem's experience in vague terms: "The power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he fell to the earth." This does not tell us exactly what Sherem saw, heard, or felt. However, it is entirely possible that Sherem did see

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19. It is called *Sb'm'a* because it is the first word in the recitation. Jastrow defines *Sb'm'a* as "the confession of faith in the morning and evening prayers" (recitation of Deut. 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num. 16:37–41). Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Press, 1996), 1599.

20. Amulek's words to the Zoramites accentuates the spiritual importance of this reverential act: "And now, my beloved brethren, I desire . . . that ye contend no more against the Holy Ghost, but that ye receive it, and take upon you the name of Christ; that ye *humble yourselves even to the dust, and worship God, in whatsoever place ye may be in, in spirit and in truth*" (Alma 34:37–38). Both Nephi's and Amulek's statements accord well with what Jesus says to the woman at the well in John 4:19–26, "the true worshipers (*hoi alēthinōi proskynēai*) shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). Note: *proskynēō* is a "hapax legomenon"; that is to say, it occurs once in the New Testament.

or hear someone since he obviously felt something. We note the incapacitating effect of theophanies and visions on Moses, John, Alma, Joseph Smith,<sup>21</sup> and Sidney Rigdon. Sherem's subsequent physical incapacitation is certainly consistent with a theophanic experience—a theophany for which he was not at all prepared spiritually.

John W. Welch observes that "the Temple would . . . have been the most arresting place for Sherem to have confronted Jacob with his accusations of blasphemy, false prophecy, and leading the people into apostasy . . . and to have submitted himself to the divine ordeal of asking for a sign from God."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the Temple is the ideal place for theophany. It is entirely possible that Sherem's "divine ordeal," or the sign he requested, was a vision of some divine being. As has been noted, prostration, as well as some measure of physical incapacitation,

21. Their collective experiences may shed some light on what happened to Sherem: Of Moses we read: "And the presence of God withdrew from Moses, that his glory was not upon Moses; and Moses was left unto himself. And as he was left unto himself, *he fell unto the earth*. And it came to pass that *it was for the space of many hours before Moses did again receive his natural strength like unto man*; and he said unto himself: Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed. But now mine own eyes have beheld God; but not my natural, but my spiritual eyes" (Moses 1:9–11; emphasis added). It is also important to note Moses' total unwillingness to prostrate himself before Satan, when Satan comes after the theophany and demands obeisance (Moses 1:12–22).

John relates his vision of the resurrected Lord: "And when I saw him, *I fell at his feet as dead*. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen" (Rev. 1:17–18). John falls at his feet perhaps out of fear or reverence, or because of the physically incapacitating effects of the presence of a divine being.

For more on Alma the Younger's theophanic experience see Mosiah 27:11–37. Note his physical incapacitation.

Joseph Smith describes his condition following his vision of the Father and the Son: "When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back. . . . *When the light had departed, I had no strength*; but soon recovering in some degree, I went home. . . . And as I leaned up to the fire-place, mother inquired what the matter was. I replied, 'Never mind, . . . I am well enough off'" (JS-H: 1:20; emphasis added).

His condition after three visitations from the angel Moroni, and preceding the fourth visitation: "I shortly after arose from my bed, and, as usual, went to the necessary labors of the day; but, in attempting to work as at other times, *I found my strength so exhausted as to render me entirely unable*" (JS-H 1:48; emphasis added).

22. John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1994), 339.

almost invariably accompanies theophany. Given these facts, it may be inferred that Sherem's falling to the earth was either a ritual gesture, the result of the physically incapacitating effects of theophany, or both.<sup>23</sup>

Before his death, Sherem requests a convocation of the people of Nephi whereat he acknowledges his error before God and the people. The logical place for this confession, as in the instance of his confrontation of Jacob, would have been the Temple.<sup>24</sup> Following Sherem's *mea culpa* and death, Jacob records the reaction of the people thus:

And when the multitude witnessed that he spake these things as he was about to give up the ghost, they were astonished exceedingly; insomuch that the power of God came down upon them, and they were overcome that *they fell to the earth*. (Jacob 7:22; emphasis added)

An outline of the Sherem pericope shows how Jacob emphasizes parallels between Sherem's sign-seeking and confession and between the manifestation of divine power that compelled Sherem to fall to the earth and the manifestation that induces the people to prostration:

- a. Sherem confronts Jacob [at the temple]
- b. Sherem denies Christ and accuses Jacob of blasphemy, false prophecy, and propagating apostasy
- c. Sherem says: "show me a sign"
- d. Sherem experiences a divine manifestation
- e. Sherem falls to the earth
  
- a. Sherem asks [Jacob] for a convocation [at the temple]
- b. Sherem confesses Christ, acknowledges his own blasphemy, false teaching, and propagating apostasy
- c. Sherem dies

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23. Significantly, Sherem never fully recovers from the divine manifestation. Where the effects were temporary for Moses, Alma, and Joseph Smith, and Sidney Rigdon—physical incapacitation for several hours or days—Sherem had to be "nourished for the space of many days" (Jacob 7:15). Ultimately, this experience results in his physical death (Jacob 7:17–20).

24. See Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon," 339.

- d. The people experience a divine manifestation
- e. The people fall to the earth (Jacob 4:6–22)

Concerning this second divine manifestation and the resultant prostration of his people, Jacob acknowledges that it was “pleasing unto me, Jacob, for I had requested it of my Father who was in heaven” (Jacob 7:22). Perhaps Jacob believed that it was necessary to submit his people to the same “divine ordeal” as Sherem, in order to thoroughly purge the people of Sherem’s teaching. The result was that all his people, like Sherem, fell to the earth in total submission to God.<sup>25</sup>

Again, Jacob does not explicitly say what the divine manifestation was. We don’t know what the people saw, heard, or felt. We know only that the “power of God came down upon them, and they were overcome that they fell to the earth” (Jacob 7:21). We can infer that it may have accompanied a theophany, for which the temple would have been, of course, the ideal location. Certainly a temple context for all of the above suggests that Sherem’s divine ordeal and prostration were more than nineteenth-century revivalist experiences, as some suggest. The aforementioned evidence is sufficient to establish the possibility that these divine manifestations were theophanies and that the subsequent prostrations were cultic in nature. Mormon’s description of events connected with King Benjamin’s address at the temple in Zarahemla makes the case even stronger.

#### *Proskynesis during King Benjamin’s Address*

Mormon records King Benjamin’s powerful address to his subjects on the occasion of his son’s coronation. John W. Welch and Terrence Szink, among others, have suggested a Feast of Tabernacles or autumn festival complex setting for the speech.<sup>26</sup>

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25. Jacob concludes the Sherem pericope with all of his people prostrate on the earth and the declaration that “the love of God was restored again among the people” (Jacob 7:23). This is a possible allusion to Nephi’s statement (2 Ne. 25:29) equating the love of God with *proskynesis*.

26. Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: F.A.R.M.S., 1998), 147–223.

One passage connected with the speech is particularly relevant to the use of ritual prostrations among the people of the Book of Mormon. In the middle of the speech, after King Benjamin's rehearsal of the angel's words concludes, Mormon inserts a description of the people's reaction:

And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered unto him by the angel of the Lord, that he cast his eyes round about on the multitude and behold *they had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them.* (Mosiah 4:1; emphasis added)

Hugh Nibley identifies the people's action as proskynesis.<sup>27</sup> Szink and Welch connect their prostration with the ritual prostrations that accompanied the pronouncement of the Divine Name, YHWH, by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement:

The response of the people to the pronouncement of the sacred name was singular. According to the Mishnah, each time the people at the temple in Jerusalem heard the sacred name they would fall prostrate on the ground. This can be compared with the reactions to King Benjamin's speech in Zarahemla. . . . It is possible that Benjamin's people would have fallen down in profound reverence and awe several times when Benjamin spoke the holy name of God, as the Israelites did on hearing the tetragram, according to the Mishnah.<sup>28</sup>

This observation is significant. It demonstrates a clear parallel between the ritual prostrations found in Israelite temple practices and those connected with Nephite temple practices. It should not be overlooked that King Benjamin gives his speech in a temple (Mosiah

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27. Hugh Nibley, "Old World Ritual in the New World," in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 304. He adds: "The proskynesis was the falling to the earth (literally, 'kissing the ground') in the presence of the king by which all the human race on the day of coronation demonstrated its submission to divine authority; it was an unflinching part of the Old World New Year's rites as of any royal audience. A flat prostration upon the earth was the proper act of obeisance in the presence of the ruler of all the universe."

28. Szink and Welch, 179.

2:1–7). Were the speech given at some other location, and were there an absence of so many other textual evidences suggestive of a sacred festival setting, it would be much easier to view the prostration of the Benjamin's people as something other than ritual.

Mormon's description of a "multitude" that had "fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them" (Mosiah 4:1) is almost the exact language that Jacob uses to describe the scene after Sherem's *mea culpa*. This description adds weight to the suggestion that Sherem's confrontation with Jacob and subsequent *mea culpa* speech took place at the Temple and that the prostrations that took place there were ritual in character.

In the next verse, Mormon proposes why the multitude prostrated themselves, that "they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth" (Mosiah 4:2). They are reverencing God because of his greatness and acknowledging the cosmic insignificance of fallen man.

#### *Proskynesis in the Account of the Lamanite Conversions*

The cycle of stories documenting the missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah, and the conversion of large numbers of Lamanites, is rife with theophanic manifestations that are accompanied by prostrations. Each is described in language that evokes earlier and similar manifestations in the Book of Mormon and other scripture. The first occurs when Lamoni believes Ammon's teaching and cries:

O Lord, have mercy; according to thy abundant mercy which thou hast had upon the people of Nephi, have upon me, and my people. And now, when he had said this, *he fell unto the earth, as if he were dead.* (Alma 18:41–42; emphasis added)

Lamoni's physical incapacitation lasted two days and two nights. He then arises, declares that he has seen his Redeemer, prophecies the Messiah's birth by a mortal, and falls prostrate again. His declaration is so moving that the queen, and then Ammon himself, both fall prostrate, "overpowered with joy" (Alma 19:14). Then the servants do likewise:

Now, when the servants of the king had seen that they had fallen, they also began to cry unto God, for *the fear of the Lord had come upon them also*. . . . And it came to pass that they did call on the name of the Lord, in all their might, even until they had all fallen to the earth, save it were one of the Lamanitish women. (Alma 19:15–16; emphasis added)

It is significant that Mormon mentions, “the fear of the Lord had come upon them also.” This is the same language that he uses to explain the proskynesis of the people while at the Zarahemla temple, suggesting a kinship in the nature of their experiences. Though the events during King Benjamin’s speech occur in a more formal setting, the divine manifestations at Lamoni’s palace must have been very similar. The falling to the earth of the people in each instance is both the result of the immense power of the Divine Presence, and a ritually significant event. In successive verses Mormon describes the scene at Lamoni’s palace, how the Lamanite people enter the palace and behold “the king, and the queen, and their servants [and Ammon] *prostrate upon the earth*” and that “they all lay there as though they were dead” (Alma 19:18; emphasis added). Mormon’s language implies that these events are to be interpreted as being partly or wholly cultic in nature.

The event that culminates in Lamoni’s father’s conversion is powerfully cultic in nature. Aaron instructs the Lamanite king to bow himself down and to supplicate the Lord for the desired blessing of eternal life:

But Aaron said unto him: If thou desirest this thing, if thou wilt *bow down before God*, yea, if thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will *bow down before God*, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest. And it came to pass that when Aaron had said these words, the king did *bow down before the Lord, upon his knees*; yea, even he did *prostrate himself upon the earth*, and cried mightily, saying: O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved



at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead. (Alma 22:16-18; emphasis added)

Thus the Lord makes himself known to Lamoni's father. The Lamanite king obtains a divine vision, a covenant relationship with God, and the promise of salvation. His conversion results in the conversion of thousands of his Lamanite subjects as well as a seismic shift in the ethnic and religious landscape leading up to the time of Christ. Mormon's depiction of the king's conversion attests the power of ritual prostration as a profound expression of one's love of God, as a reflection of one's reverence for God's grandeur, as well as an acknowledgment of one's relative smallness on the cosmic scale.

#### *Proskynesis in Connection with Prayer*

That cultic prostration often accompanied prayer among the Nephites (and later the Lamanites) is clearly demonstrated in the conversion of Lamoni's father. This fact is also elucidated in a number of passages. Previous to the covenant-making ceremony of the rending of the garments,<sup>29</sup> Moroni prostrates himself and prays:

And he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he *bowed himself to the earth*, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren. (Alma 46:13; emphasis added)

Mormon also tells how Nephi, saddened by his unrepentant people, "*bowed himself upon the tower which was in his garden*" and poured his soul out unto God in prayer (Hel. 7:10-11; emphasis added). The account of the climactic events at the Temple in Bountiful records that Jesus "bowed himself to the earth" while praying to the Father (3 Ne. 19:19, 27).

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29. See Mark J. Morrise, "Simile Curses in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament, and Book of Mormon," in *The Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2 (1981): 132.

*Proskynesis in Connection with Kingship*

At least two passages in the Book of Mormon show that the ancient Near Eastern custom of prostrating oneself before kings was common among the Lehighites in the Western Hemisphere. In many of the great civilizations of the ancient Near East, kings were considered divine and were revered as members of the pantheon. In Ancient Israel, kings were considered the surrogates of YHWH, and prototypes of the Messiah, Israel's Divine King. The manner in which the people paid homage to the earthly king anticipated the Divine King. The first instance is when Ammon is released from prison and is given audience with King Limhi. He accords Limhi the customary reverence:

And now, when Ammon saw that he was permitted to speak, he went forth and *bowed himself before the king*; and rising again said: O king, I am very thankful before God this day that I am yet alive, and am permitted to speak. (Mosiah 7:12; emphasis added)

Though in this instance, Ammon's reverential act was not an acknowledgment of the king's divinity, it acknowledged the king as the divine surrogate and acknowledged Ammon's reverence for kingship.

The second instance is even more elucidating. In the following passage, Mormon notes that the custom of prostrating oneself before the king was borrowed from Nephite culture into Lamanite culture:

But behold, as the king came out to meet him Amalickiah caused that his servants should go forth to meet the king. And they went and *bowed themselves before the king, as if to reverence him because of his greatness*. And it came to pass that the king put forth his hand to raise them, as was the custom with the Lamanites, as a token of peace, which custom they had taken from the Nephites. (Alma 47:22–23; emphasis added)

Here we find it documented that the custom of prostrating oneself before the king signified reverencing the king "because of his greatness." The king was great, at least in part, because he was

the divine surrogate. The Nephite–Lamanite custom thus typified the ritual prostration done before Israel's True King.

*Proskynesis as Practiced by the Jaredites*

As is the case in so many aspects of their society, details are somewhat scant with respect to proskynesis among the Jaredites; however, the Book of Mormon text does yield some clues regarding this practice. Two passages in the Book of Ether show that it was familiar to them. In each instance, the events depicted are set in temple settings and have temple significance. Ritual prostration is connected with the Brother of Jared's experience atop Mt. Shelem.<sup>30</sup>

And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord; and it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood; and the brother of Jared *fell down before the Lord*, for he was struck with fear. (Ether 3:6; emphasis added)

The brother of Jared's falling down at seeing the Lord's finger takes on added significance if we do not view his reaction as pure instinctive fear, but as fear coupled with ritual reverence. It is important to consider that the Nephites at the temple in Bountiful, though astounded at the sudden Christophany, *knew* how to act with ritual propriety. So did the brother of Jared. By falling down prostrate before the Lord he acknowledges not only a divine presence and power, but also reverential awe for him, and his own cosmic insignificance.

The account of the Jaredite arrival in the promised land gives us an additional brief glimpse of proskynesis among that people. Moroni gives us this account of their arrival in the Western Hemisphere:

And they did land upon the shore of the promised land. And when they had set their feet upon the shores of the promised land they *bowed themselves down* upon the face of the land, and *did*

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30. For more on the ritualism of this experience, see M. Catherine Thomas, "The Brother of Jared at the Veil," *TOTALW* (1993): 388–98.

*humble themselves before the Lord*, and did shed tears of joy before the Lord, because of the multitude of his tender mercies over them. (Ether 6:12; emphasis added)

The prostration of the Jaredites on the seashore was an acknowledgment of their awe for God and his goodness, as well as an acknowledgment their dependence on him.

*Proskynesis during the Christophany at the Temple in Bountiful*

In 3 Nephi 11, Israel's True King finally manifests himself to his people in his divine and glorified state. Significantly, these events—the most climactic, stirring, and spiritually important events of the entire Book of Mormon—take place at the Temple. And all at once, centuries of ritual become reality.

Notwithstanding the voice of the Father from heaven introducing his Beloved Son as the Son descends, the people do not immediately recognize him, “for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them” (3 Ne. 11:8). Then Jesus identifies himself as the Messiah, their Divine King:

Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup, which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning. (3 Ne. 11:10–11)

This is the moment of recognition. The people immediately prostrate themselves:

And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude *fell to the earth*; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven. (3 Ne. 11:12; emphasis added)

Their falling to the earth is not mass fainting. The people do exactly what their system of religious beliefs and rituals has stipulated for thousands of years; what holy persons have done in

the presence of God from the beginning. The God whom they have worshiped as *YHWH*, whose Spirit has been present in their temples, is now present in his own physical tabernacle. As irrefutable proof of the Divine Presence, the people are allowed to handle the tokens of his Messiahship. Having done this, the people again prostrate themselves:

And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying: Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did *fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him*. (3 Ne. 11:16–17; emphasis added)

Then to Nephi, the spiritual leader of the people, the Christ accords a singular privilege:

And it came to pass that he spake unto Nephi (for Nephi was among the multitude) and he commanded him that he should come forth. And Nephi arose and went forth, and *bowed himself before the Lord and did kiss his feet*. (3 Ne. 11:18–19; emphasis added)

There is no better description of proskynesis anywhere in literature, ancient or modern, than this. It perfectly fits Bauer's definition of the practice,<sup>31</sup> as well as the etymology of the word.<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that Nephi needed only to be told to "come forth." His gesture of kissing the Lord's feet is the highest and most transcendent visible expression of a love for Deity that any human can undertake.

Later on, as Jesus heals all the maladies among the people, others receive the same privilege as Nephi:

And they did all, both they who had been healed and they who were whole, bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and as many as could come for the multitude *did kiss his feet*,

31. "The custom of prostrating oneself before a person and kissing his feet, the hem of his garment, the ground, etc. The Persians did this in the presence of their deified king," Bauer, 16.

32. *Proskynēō* = *kynēō* (to kiss) + *pros* (before, in the presence of, etc.). Liddell and Scott, 457, 684.

*insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears.* (3 Ne. 17:10; emphasis added)

This passage is as clear as the previous one, adding the detail that the people literally “bathed his feet with their tears.” Together the two passages are the realization of everything symbolized by proskynesis. The sacred actions Nephi and his people perform are the supreme visible manifestation of human love for Deity. They signify the Deity’s presence and power—in this case, his bodily presence. These actions symbolize the Nephites reverence and awe for their Savior, Redeemer, and God, and acknowledge man’s own comparative and cosmic smallness. There cannot be another passage in ancient or modern writings that teaches us more about ritual prostrations than does Mormon’s account of the Christophany at the temple in Bountiful.

Proskynesis was an important rite of worship among the peoples of the Book of Mormon. Besides being performed in a temple setting and being connected with the most climactic and sacred events chronicled in that religious text, these ritual prostrations were the most profound expression of love for God. They signified his presence among the people, in body and in spirit. They demonstrated reverence and awe for God and were an acknowledgment of fallen man’s comparative cosmic smallness, and humanity’s dependence on him. The events at the temple in Bountiful best illustrate this symbolism and perhaps teach us more about ritual prostration than any other ancient text.

# The Heavenly Academy: A Place of Instruction, A Place of Learning

MATTHEW WAYNE MCCARTER

**D**ivine progression results from divine tutorial. Where there is a master, there is an apprentice; where there is instruction, there is advancement. We see such a relationship in Christian temple worship, both ancient and modern. The pupil comes to these holy dwellings searching for enlightenment, peace, and instruction from Deity.

The temple is a school in which to learn the eternal history and future of God and man. Alexander's translation of 3 Enoch depicts Rabbi Ishmael journeying into the heavenly household of God; the translation interprets *ye`ib`h`elema`al`b* as "heavenly academy," implying that Rabbi Ishmael witnessed a heavenly university where the secrets of God were revealed and heavenly hosts ministered to (245; see 3 Enoch 18:16). God instructed his children in the heavenly courts primordially (see Jer. 1:4–5; Jude 1:6; Abr. 3:22–28; D&C 138:56). Since he is the "same yesterday, today, and forever" (Morm. 9:9), Deity has continued to follow an ancient and eternal pattern of instructing his children. Not only does Deity instruct his children in these edifices, but he also protects them spiritually and temporally within the walls. This protection extends not only to walls made of wood and stone, but also to houses of flesh and bones. Such primordially chosen

edifices may be called “Universities of the Lord”<sup>\*</sup> and sanctuaries of the Lord.

This paper will attempt to explain the similarities between temples and the human body, focusing first on different facets of temples, including logistics of how temples are constructed, requirements to enter holy edifices, and punishments for allowing temples to become unclean. Second, this paper will discuss how the human body parallels a temple on many different levels. It is through these comparisons that the thirsty disciple will find himself drinking from a bottomless “well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

## PART I: THE TEMPLE

The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD’s throne is in heaven:  
his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. (Ps. 11:4)

### *Eternal Blueprints*

God uses a specific pattern to construct a link between himself and his children. The pattern is his eternal blueprint; the link is a bridge between heaven and earth, a holy place where one may be taught at the very feet of Deity. Matthew Brown defines a temple as “a symbolic structure that represents the ideas of centrality, solidarity, orientation, and ascension” (12). Hugh Nibley’s *Temple and Cosmos* identifies the temple as a “hierocentric point around which all things are organized” and the “holy point” of civilization (15). He further links the Latin translation *templum* to our modern word *template*, identifying the temple as “a scale model of the universe” (19). Brown echoes Nibley with the assertion that the temple is “a miniature imitation of the structure of the universe” (7).

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<sup>\*</sup> Jeffrey R. Holland and his wife Patricia T. Holland in *On Earth as It Is in Heaven* referred to the temple as the Lord’s university: “The temple is highly symbolic. It has been called the *University of the Lord*. I find myself continually learning when I attend the temple with an expansive mind. I strive to exercise, to stretch, to look for deeper meaning. I look for parallels and symbols. I look for themes and motifs just as I would in a Bach or a Mozart composition, and I look for patterns—repeated patterns” (62; italics added).



*A House of Order*

God's holy sanctuary on earth is a "copy" of the Holy Temple in heaven.<sup>1</sup> Levi records being caught up in the heavens and "the angel opened to [him] the gates of heaven, and [he] saw the holy temple, and upon a throne of glory the Most High" (T. L. 5:5). The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Children read: "Blessed art thou in the temple of thy holy glory, and to be highly sung and highly glorified forever," implying that a temple is located in the presence of God (Azar. 31). The Wisdom of Solomon declares:

Thou gavest command to build a sanctuary in thy holy mountain, And an alter in the city of thy habitation, A copy of the holy tabernacle which thou preparedst aforehand from the beginning (Wisd. of Sol. 9:8).

Truly, the Lord's house on earth reflects the perfect prototype existing in heaven: it is a house of order, not of confusion (see D&C 132:8).

God's pattern of temple building appears in many societies and cultures. Arvid Kapelrud recognizes a ten-point pattern used in temple construction in the Near East. He writes:

In the cases where a king is the actual temple builder the following elements are most often found: 1. Some indication that a temple has to be built; 2. The king visits a temple over night; 3. A god tells him what to do, indicates plans; 4. The king announces his intention to build a temple; 5. Master builder is engaged, cedars from Lebanon, building-stones, gold, silver, etc., procured for the task; 6. The temple finished according to plan; 7. Offerings and dedication, fixing of norms; 8. Assembly of the people; 9. The god comes to the new house; 10. The king is blessed and promised everlasting domination (62).

We find Kapelrud's pattern in the construction of the Tabernacle of Israel.<sup>2</sup> In modern temple building, Stephen Ricks and Michael Carter expand on Kapelrud's pattern in relation to the construction of the Latter-day Saint Temple in Kirtland (152-53).<sup>3</sup>

*Transfiguration of Holy Places*

Temples must undergo a transfiguration of sorts in order to be worthy of God's presence.\* Latter-day Saint scripture contains a revelation from Jehovah to the Prophet Joseph Smith that "the earth shall be transfigured, *even according to the pattern which was shown unto mine apostles upon the mount*" (D&C 63:21, emphasis added). Such a doctrine has been supported by noncanonized texts.†

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\* Bruce R. McConkie defined transfiguration in his work *Mormon Doctrine*: "Transfiguration is a special change in appearance and nature which is wrought upon a person or thing by the power of God. This divine transformation is from a lower to a higher state; it results in a more exalted, impressive, and glorious condition" (803).

† John A. Tvedtnes said the following about the Mount of Transfiguration: "D&C 63:21 speaks of a time 'when the earth shall be transfigured, even according to the pattern which was shown unto mine apostles upon the mount; of which account the fulness [sic] ye have not yet received.' From this it seems that the Apostles Peter, James, and John were shown the celestial world, which is what the earth is destined to become (D&C 88:25–26). Yet this information is not found in the New Testament accounts of the events that occurred atop the Mount of Transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus and his three chief apostles and the Savior was transfigured before them (Matt. 17:1–13; Mark 9:2–13; Luke 9:28–36; 2 Pet. 1:16–19; cf. John 1:14). In the Ethiopic version of the *Apocalypse of Peter* 16–17, we read that when, on the mount of transfiguration, Peter offered to construct tabernacles for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, Jesus opened the eyes of the Apostles so they could see the heavenly tabernacle and they gazed into the second heaven, where Jesus conversed with the ancient prophets. From the (Latter-day Saint) perspective, the second heaven would be the terrestrial kingdom, named after the earth, which is called *terra* in Latin. The apostle John, who had accompanied James and Peter atop the Mount of Transfiguration, later wrote of the heavenly temple and of the heavenly Jerusalem, which he saw in vision while he was on the Island of Patmos (Rev. 3:12; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5–6, 8; 16:1, 17). He also recorded that he had seen, in the same vision, the new heaven and the new earth to which the heavenly Jerusalem would descend in the last days (Rev. 21:1–3, 10). But he never indicates, in the gospel of John, that he had seen such a vision at the time of Christ's transfiguration and, unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he did not describe the transfiguration itself. The pseudepigraphic *Revelation of John* seems to conflate several New Testament accounts, including John's vision on the Island of Patmos (as recorded in the New Testament book of Revelation), the ascension of Christ, and the transfiguration of Christ. It begins by saying that "after the taking up of our Lord Jesus Christ, I John was alone upon Mount Tabor," which is the traditional site of the transfiguration. In the vision, John saw the future of the earth, including the sounding of the trumpet that will make the earth shake at the time humans will be resurrected. As in Revelation 3:12; 21:2, 10, John sees the heavenly Jerusalem coming to earth. See John A. Tvedtnes, "The Vision Atop the Mount," *Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, in 2004 by FARMS.

*Guarding the Holy Place*

Because holy transfigurations and other ordinances occurred in temples, they were often guarded to keep them from those who were unprepared or unworthy to enter them. The tabernacle of Israel, for example, was guarded on several levels. Before entering the courtyard, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies, a person passed the Levitical porters who rejected all but clean priesthood holders (see 1 Chron. 9:17–17; 2 Chron. 23:19). On the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies were embroidered blue, purple, and scarlet cherubim, the guards of the gate. These correspond with the sentinels seen by John, who guard the doors of the heavenly city, New Jerusalem (see Rev. 21:9, 10).

The temple of God is constructed to have areas of increasing sacredness. We read of Enoch's journey past the three sacred lines in heaven:

[T]he vision caused me to fly . . . into heaven. And I went in till I drew nigh to *a wall* which is built of crystals and surrounded by tongues of fire . . . and I went nigh to *a large house* which was built of crystals. . . . And I entered into that house, and it was hot as fire and cold as ice . . . fear covered me. . . . I fell upon my face. And I beheld a vision, And lo! There was *a second house*, greater than the former, and the entire portal stood open before me, and it was built of flames of fire. And in every respect it so excelled in splendor and magnificence and extent that I cannot describe to you its splendor and its extent. (1 En. 14:9–17, emphasis added)

Brown compares these “three successive enclosures” of the Heavenly Temple with the three degrees of heavenly glory (7). Furthermore, the Tabernacle of Jehovah was divided into “several zones of holiness” (61).<sup>4</sup> Edersheim's *The Temple* calls such boundaries in ancient Jewish temples “lines of sanctity,”<sup>5</sup> where children of God are separated like the wheat from the tares.

The Garden of Eden, the first holy earthly sanctuary, is referred to by Pedaya as being “barred” from unholy intruders:

Even the angels guarding the threshold of the palaces in the Merkavah literature remind us of the manner in which the path to the Garden of Eden is barred by a constantly turning sword. That the holy place is surrounded by both wall and rivers plainly expresses the merging of the concepts of the structure and of the Garden; the wall surrounding the palace is rooted in Ezekiel’s vision of the future Temple in Jerusalem (87). The rivers surrounding the Garden of Eden fulfill a function parallel to that of the wall surrounding the Temple: a periphery which protects the inside. (103, fn. 10)

Truly the Lord’s house is meant for a chosen generation who have “prove[n] them[selves] herewith, to see if they will do all things which the Lord their God [hath] commanded them” (Abr. 3:25).

### *Desecration of Ancient Temples*

Unfortunately, as not everyone obeys “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,” the Lord’s house often becomes defiled (Matt. 4:4). When God comes from the courts of heaven to visit a telestial world such as this, he comes to a house of prayer, a house of faith, a house of glory, a house of God (see D&C 109:8). He comes to his temple, a sacred place, “the Lord’s dwelling” (2 Enoch 51:4). If not kept clean, however, what was once pure can become contaminated. From the temple-like Tabernacle of Moses to the great Temple of Herod, Jehovah’s House has always been corrupted by man. Even after the cleansing of Herod’s Temple by the Lord Jesus Christ, his house was reduced to “a den of thieves” (Matt. 21:13). The Sanhedrin, apostate and cankered, occupied the temple’s holy walls and permitted moneychangers and marketers to soil the very ground that brought forth fruit necessary for salvation.<sup>6</sup> Donald

Binder makes the statement concerning criminal refuge in the temple after the death of Christ:

In antiquity, refuge was a right associated with temples. . . . Consequently, the visitor to nearly any ancient temple would encounter every manner of criminal seeking asylum within its sacred precincts. Indeed, the ancient writers would frequently lament this state of affairs. Apollonius of Tyana . . . complained that the Artemision in Ephesus had been turned into "a den of robbers." (436)

The cycle of founding temples, desecrating them, and then cleansing them has repeated itself since Adam.<sup>7</sup> Before and during the life of Christ, God's house, intended to be a living sanctuary where salvation was earned and eternal instruction given, denigrated to no more than a chamber of darkness where salvation was sold and apostasy spread. Truly the Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head (see Luke 9:58).

#### *The Destruction of Unholy Temples*

When temples become unclean, God condemns them and they are no longer fit for his presence. As Christ taught, that which has lost its value and purpose is like salt that has lost its savor and is only fit to be trampled under the foot of men (see Matt. 5:13). Hence, the house of the Jewish Fathers, the Temple of Herod—prophesied to ruins by the Giver of their law—was indeed "left . . . one stone [thrown down] upon another" (Matt. 24:1–2).<sup>8</sup> The Sanhedrin, blinded by their own pride, had forgotten the words of the psalmist, "The LORD will destroy the house of the proud" (Prov. 15:25).

#### *The Garden of Eden: Her Cleansing*

However great a curse is upon a temple from a jealous God, there is chance for redemption. For such redemption there must be a cleansing. Ezekiel compares the king of

Tyre to the first man Adam, retelling his fall and expulsion from the “garden of God,” “the holy mountain of God” (see Ezek. 28:11–16), and the holy temple of Eden.\* Donald Parry expounds,

Ezekiel employs Edenic typology, explaining that Tyre (Adam) was perfect while in the Garden of Eden, was anointed, and, for a period of time dwelt on the mountain of God. But he sinned and was thrown from the mountain, or cast from the temple, since no unclean thing was allowed in the temple. (135–36)

Thus we see Jehovah’s first cleansing of his Father’s house upon this earth, the holy garden.<sup>9</sup> It is of little wonder that Levitical priests, in times of old, were sent “into the inner part of the house of the Lord, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the Lord into the court of the house of the Lord” (2 Chron. 29:16). Even the Son of God entered his Father’s house to “cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves” (Matt. 21:12; Mark 11:19). Truly “no unclean thing . . . can dwell in his presence” (Moses 6:57).

#### *God’s House Not Always Confined to Structured Edifices*

Similar to what Jesus taught of the Sabbath day, the temple is made for man, not man for the temple. Hence, the Lord is not

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\* Martha Himmelfarb’s *The Temple and the Garden of Eden in Ezekiel* expands on Parry’s analysis, showing the cleansing of the Garden of Eden referenced the cleansing of the temple, “The Garden of Eden in Genesis describes it contains four rivers and ‘every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food’ (2:9). On either side of the stream that flows from the Temple (see Ezek. 40–48) stand trees of wonderful fruitfulness. Levenson suggests that the *‘etx rav meod’* on either bank of the stream in vs. 7 should be translated not as a collective, ‘very many trees,’ but rather as a singular, ‘a great tree.’ In the case the passage alludes to the tree of knowledge and the tree of life as well as to the fruit trees of the tradition of Genesis 2. . . . While the prophet [Ezekiel] is clearly alluding to the Garden of Eden in the passage about the stream (see Ezek. 47:7–9, 12), he never refers to it explicitly. But elsewhere in his book Ezekiel does mention the garden by name, in his lament for the king of Tyre (28:11–18) and his oracle against Pharaoh (31:1–18). Both passages use the imagery of Eden to describe the blessed state of these enemies of Israel before their fall so as to make clear the full magnitude of the fall” (65).

restricted by the materials that comprise his house. Rather, he requires the place to be worthy of his presence. The term *house* can be misinterpreted because it can lead people to think that a holy sanctuary must be within closed walls. Yet Jehovah's houses have come in various forms. When holy temples are not available for Deity, he chooses other suitable locations, transfiguring them into "temporary temples."<sup>10</sup>

*The Garden of Eden: The First House of the Lord*

The Garden of Eden, planted by the gods in order for man to dwell (see Abr. 5:8), was this globe's first sanctuary where heaven and earth intertwined.<sup>11</sup> Haviva Pedaya refers to this sacred grove as "God's primal shrine of Creation" (87) and further alludes to God's revelation to the prophet Enoch in which he describes Eden as a heavenly sanctuary: "In the portrayal . . . motifs from the Garden of Eden merge with motifs from architecture of royal palaces. One such passage describes a structure with thick, protecting walls, at the center of which stands the throne of God; however, the palace also contains rivers and cherubim, derived directly from the conceptualization of God as dwelling in the garden of Eden" (87; see 1 Enoch 14:11–12).

References suggest that the Garden of Eden was a temple of God (see Gen. 2:10; Ezek. 28:11–16; Moses 3:10). Early Latter-day Saint leaders Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, George Q. Cannon, and Heber C. Kimball declared Jackson County, Missouri, to be the location of the Garden of Eden and future site of the New Jerusalem Temple,<sup>12</sup> symbolizing a cycle from heaven to earth, and then returning to heaven.<sup>13</sup>

*The Mountain of God: A Sacred Center of Challenge*

After the fall and casting out from the Garden of Deity, man was left to repent and "improve [their] time while in this life" (Alma 34:33). What was once clean had become filthy, what was once immortal became mortal. Yet God did not leave his children comfortless. Rather, he continued to instruct them within his

houses of learning. Such holy lectures were often given on the mountains of God.\*

Sara Japhet refers to the mountain as “the sacred place . . . where God is revealed” (65). From Mt. Sinai to the mount of transfiguration, Jehovah taught man “as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Exod. 33:11). Theologically, the mountain of God is at the symbolic center of civilization. The Book of Jubilees states, “Mount Sinai [is] the centre of the desert, and Mount Zion—the centre of the navel of the earth” (Jub. 8:19). The mountain acts as a place of both challenge and achievement, a temporary temple. Not only must one climb the mountain, but one must claim the summit.†

Many of Jehovah’s appearances on mountains have been to instruct man according to the will of his Father. The brother of Jared learned the true nature of God while on Mount Shelem (see Ether 3:6–16). Moses, upon Mount Herob, conversed with the Lord face to face as one man converses with another, learning not only his name, but also the plan for freeing Moses’ imprisoned nation (see Exod. 3). Peter, James, and John, on an unnamed transfigured mount,<sup>14</sup> received their endowments, the keys of the kingdom, and viewed the mysteries of eternity.<sup>15</sup>

Truly the mountain of the Lord proves a symbolic training ground where man learns his divine nature. John Lundquist relates the following:

The difficulty of mortality, with its pitfalls and plateaus, is compared to the difficulty of climbing mountains, where the gods are to be found. Certain high points along life’s path are commemorated and memorialized, formally and ritually, at the mountain and in the temple. Life for the religious person is an arduous journey to the center, with certain high points along

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\* Ex. 3:1; Ez. 28:14.

† Joseph Smith in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* instructed that man must “climb” the rungs of the eternal ladder to claim the prize of eternal life (348). Such an idea is implemented when prophesied that Jehovah, “the Rock of Heaven” (Moses 7:53), will “cut out for himself a great mountain and fl[y] up upon it,” where he shall fight against the “innumerable multitudes of men that make war against [him]” (4 Ezra 13:5–8).



this journey commemorated ritually through rites of passage: the passage to adulthood, marriage, and introduction into the mysteries. The ultimate stage of one's journey, the ultimate rite of passage, is death. (626)

Possibly such a death opens the gate to the mountain of salvation and eternal lives where man can "walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain eternal exaltation."<sup>\*</sup> Thus saith the Lord, "there shall be greater signs in heaven above and in the earth beneath" (D&C 29:14).

*Caves: Crossroads of Eternity*

Caves, like temples, are not reserved for only comings and goings of Deity. Eusebius, the "Father of Church History," confirms that a cave under the summit of the Mount of Olives was used by the Savior to teach his disciples the mysteries of the kingdom.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, caves were used as places of refuge from evil (see 1 Macc. 1:53; 2:31; 2 Macc. 6:11; 10:6). The strongest example comes from the life of Abraham, who was left by his mother and raised by the archangel Gabriel in a cave.<sup>17</sup>

As already seen, when temples are not worthy of God's presence, he chooses other mediums in which to visit his children. The cave holds dual symbolism as a place of maternity and mortal departure.<sup>18</sup> In the meridian of time, the old world skulked in spiritual poverty. The doctrine of God had been twisted, ordinances changed, and meanings lost. The Great Sanhedrin, a council of seventy-two apostate men, had overridden the throne of the Almighty,<sup>†</sup> and had "become a law unto themselves;" as Jews perverted the glad tidings, and as Romans falsely delegated Caesar's power.

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<sup>\*</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:31-32.

<sup>†</sup> Jehovah declared to the children of Israel, "Thou shalt have no other God before me" (Ex. 20:3). Such a command suggests the image of an individual stepping between God and his worshipers. The actions and behavior of the Sanhedrin displayed this interception between the Great Giver and his receivers. The Nephite prophet Jacob referred to this behavior as "looking beyond the mark" (Jacob 4:11).

One of Jehovah's houses, the Temple of Herod, built by an evil worshiper of the flesh, was relegated to a den of thieves. Thus the words of the psalmist: "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Ps. 127:1). Such a spiritual sewer was no place for the birth of the King of Kings. The Son's glory was not to come from a man, but from a God. Therefore, destiny proclaimed the Holy Child would "[descend] below all things, in that he comprehend[eth] all things, that he might be in all and through all things." Thus the Christ was born, not in a "great and spacious building" but in a humble manger within a cave.<sup>19</sup>

#### *A Sacred Center and Its Location in Each Dispensation*

At the center of God's house we find the heart, the Holy of Holies. Here the veil between God and man is withdrawn, God's children converse with their Father face to face, and they can come to know his will.

In addition to the Holy of Holies that exists in temples, each "dispensation" also has a sacred place, where heavenly beings tutored and trained, taught doctrines, and brought salvation to humankind.<sup>20</sup> The Adamic dispensation had the Garden of Eden. Hayward claimed "the Garden of Eden as the [first] holy of holies, and the dwelling of the Lord" (89). The following from *The Book of Jubilees* supports Hayward's claim, "The Garden of Eden . . . is holier than all the earth besides, and every tree that is planted in it is holy . . . and [Noah] knew that the Garden of Eden is the holy of holies" (3:12–13; 8:19). Enoch founded the city of Zion—"the centre of the navel of the earth" (Jub. 8:19), "the mother of us all" (4 Ezra 10:7). Ezra further accounts of his vision of "Sion's" glory in the heavens: "And when I looked . . . there was a City builded, and a place showed itself of large foundations" (4 Ezra 10:27). Truly the City of God was a sacred center. Noah's day had the saving vessel of the ark, which preserved the future human race (see Heb. 11:7; 2 Pet. 2:5; Moses 7:42–3; 8:18–19, 26).

The Abrahamic dispensation received its first promises and instruction on the dusty plains to Canaan (see Gen. 12:1–6; 17:2, 21; Abr. 2:4, 6–10). Moses' dispensation had

Mount Sinai, where the children of Israel received a lesser law in preparation for the new and everlasting covenant (see Matt. 5:17–18; Luke 24:44). The Savior had the Garden of Gethsemane, where the Son of Man ransomed all humankind from death, hell, the devil, and eternal torment (see Rom. 5:11; 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:16).<sup>21</sup>

## PART II: THE HUMAN BODY AS A TEMPLE

Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost  
which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not  
your own? (1 Cor. 6:19)

### *In the Image of God, Created He Them*

As discussed above, temples on earth are patterned after the temple in heaven. Similarly, Christianity declares that the body of man was made in the image of God (see Gen. 1:26, 2:7; 5:1; Isa. 43:7; 45:12). Besides numerous canonized Christian scripture, other sources portray the divine origin of man.<sup>22</sup> Early Christian leaders' interpretation of "a holy temple" was contrary to their Judaic forefathers' interpretations. Where Jews viewed temples as a gate to an eternal realm, Christian leaders saw such temples as constricting walls "shutting them up" from the excellence of God.<sup>23</sup>

Ante-Nicene Father Clement of Alexandria commented that it was not the temple structure itself that made the early Christian Church "holy," but rather "the assemblage of the elect" within that structure. According to this view, the temple is a receptor of Deity's divinity, rather than the provider of it. He further claims the "holy soul" or "living creature" is of "high value and made sacred by that [God] which is worth all" (530).<sup>24</sup>

### *Parallels of Heavenly and Earthly Human Bodies*

One need not be a scientist to conclude that the human body is immensely complex and is beautifully designed. The creation story in Genesis depicts man being formed in the likeness and image of Deity, implying that Deity is a heavenly being and is thus

patterning man "after his own likeness and image" (see Gen. 1:27; 2:7, 21; Isa. 43:7; Matt. 19:4; Moses 3:5). The majority of the Christian world hearkens back to the words of Paul: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16; see also 3:17; 6:19). This article's claim of the human body is strengthened through reading the early Church of Christ's concept to the body. "We are one body in Christ," said Paul (Rom. 12:5), and "by one Spirit are we baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). This concept is solidified in Paul's conclusion to the Corinthians.<sup>25</sup>

*The Heart of Man: The Holy of Holies*

At the center of man's body is the most holy place: his heart. Physically, the heart is the supporter of temporal life; spiritually, it is the garden where belief is planted, faith is cultivated, and conversion is wrought (see Alma 32; Acts 28:27).<sup>26</sup> Enoch accorded that "the Great One has given to men to converse therewith and understand with the heart" (1 En. 14:2).

The condition of the heart often greatly affects the condition of the body. If the central organ is weak, so is the body. If the heart is broken, so is the person's countenance. We find this analogy with the death of Jesus Christ. James E. Talmage, in *Jesus the Christ*, declared, "The Lord Jesus died of a broken heart [while on the cross]. The psalmist sang dolorous measure according to his inspired prevision of the Lord's passion: 'Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none'" (621; see also Ps. 69:20).

The above quotation implies that man's encounters, challenges, and trials affect not only his physical heart but also his spiritual heart. Truly, man's heart can be a place of contrast; to some it is a place of stone with embittered feelings; to others it is a place of tender flesh, receiving only pure and virtuous principles. Paul noted that our bodies are temples of God and counseled us to keep the body clean that the Holy Ghost may dwell within the heart (see 1 Cor. 6:19).

*Line of Sanctity within the Body*

Within the walls of sacred flesh and bones the Holy Ghost brings all things to remembrance (see John 14:26), and engraves the truths of God upon the “fleshy table” of the soul (see 2 Cor. 3:2–3). The heart is the first place Satan attempts to encircle (see Acts 5:3; Alma 8:9; 10:25; Hel. 6:21; 16:22–23).<sup>27</sup> The heart is where God speaks in the “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12; see D&C 8:2; 9:8). It is in the pricked heart that a sinner recognizes the evil in himself and becomes a contrite soul ever repenting (see Acts 2:37; 5:33; 1 Ne. 16:2).

When God’s children feel the Holy Spirit, they often describe a “burning in the bosom” (Luke 24:30–32; Ps. 39:3; see also D&C 9:8), or a divine manifestation from God. William Hamblin cites the Holy of Holies as the general dwelling of Deity (445). This manmade holy place parallels the God-made holy heart of man, where the Holy Ghost, a God and Testator, may dwell to enlighten the mind and quicken the understanding (see 1 Sam. 14:27–29; Job 33:30; D&C 6:15, 138:29). If evil penetrates the sacred edifice of the heart, “the house of God is in grief,” and it must be cleansed (Tob. 14:5). Fortunately, unlike temples of wood and stone that are rebuilt after destruction, which will never be “like the first” (ibid.), the stony heart of man can be restored to a new heart of flesh by repentance (see Ezek. 36:26–27).

*The Cleansing of the Body*

A holy place must be fit for a God to dwell. Like the Holy of Holies within a temple, the heart within a body must be clean and worthy for Holy Ghost to dwell. In his *Commentary of John*, Origen raises the possibility of Christ’s cleansing of Herod’s Temple symbolizing the purging of the soul of the human body:

“Take these things hence.” . . . I believe that in these words he indicated also a deeper truth, and that we may regard these occurrences as a symbol . . . it may also be the case that the natural temple is the soul skilled in reason, which . . . is higher than the body . . . in which, before Jesus’ discipline [gospel] is applied to it, are found tendencies which are earthly and

senseless and danger . . . and which are driven away by Jesus and His word. (394)

It is assumed that the purging of the soul is called repentance. God constantly admonishes His children to sanctify themselves through faith, repentance, and reliance on the Atonement (see Ps. 19:12; Matt. 8:3; Luke 17:17; 2 Cor. 7:1; Jas. 4:8; 1 John. 1:7 Mosiah 2:37).

### *Transfiguration of God's Chosen*

Similar to the transfiguration of edifices inhabited by Deity, the human body must also undergo a transfiguration before entering into God's presence. Moses, though righteous, proclaimed that his mortal body was transfigured before God upon a high mountain; otherwise, he "should have withered and died in his presence" (Moses 1:11; see also 2 Cor. 3:7; Exod. 37:29). The Savior also underwent transfiguration upon a mount before his disciples, before Peter, James, and John heard the voice of the Father testify of the divinity of his Son, and were ministered to by heavenly beings (see Matt. 17: 2; Mark 9: 2–3; Luke 9:28–36). The event of transfiguration is so unique and supportive to believers that Peter and John referred to their experience upon the mount during their personal ministry (see 2 Pet. 1:16–18; John 1:14; fn. 20).

### *Guarding the Holy Body*

Similar to past discussion on ancient temples, God's tabernacle on earth, the human body, must be protected if to be inhabited by Deity. Like the Levitical porters protecting the temple, there are records of angels guarding Jacob (see Jub. 35:17). Peter and John are freed from prison by "the angel of the Lord" (Acts 5:19). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abend-nego were "delivered" from searing fire by "the Son of God" (Dan. 3:28). Clearly the words of Jehovah to the Psalmist are echoes from history, "he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways" (Ps. 91:11).<sup>28</sup>

*Desecration of the Human Body*

Despite the guarding of holy bodies, man possesses agency and is susceptible to the buffetings of Satan, resulting in corruption from within. It is of little surprise, therefore, that it is within the tabernacle of flesh and bones Satan attempts to thwart God's plan for man. Such incidences can be read in canonical works when evil spirits possess people's bodies.

The New Testament contains multiple accounts of "casting outs" of unclean spirits or demons (see Mark 1:23–27; 5:1–14; 7:24–30; Luke 8:26–36; 9:37–42; 11:14–26). Christ even rebuked his disciples for not having sufficient faith through prayer and fasting to cast out devils (see Matt. 17:19–21). Alas, Satan is not bound to only this probationary state. Alma the Younger warned his son Corianton of the devil entering into the "houses of man" after their death.

And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil. (Alma 40:13)

Thus the body must be protected from evil, enabling a "sound center" (the heart) to support life of the body.<sup>29</sup>

*The Destruction of Unholy Bodies*

The physical body must be kept sacred and clean from sin. Moses recorded that the bodies of man, heavenly tabernacles, were created in the image of God (see Gen. 1:26; Moses 2:26). Only when the body is sanctified can the Holy Ghost "quicken the inner man" (see Moses 6:61–65).

Similar to the cleansing of desecrated temples, the body of man must be cleansed in order to have a visitation from Deity.\* In Christian theology, “the natural man is an enemy to God,” and “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (Mosiah 3:19; 1 Cor. 2:14). Peter admonished the people on the day of Pentecost to “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” As with the destruction of unholy temples, defiled bodies assume the same fate. Paul made this clear when he queried, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God? . . . If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are” (1 Cor. 3:16–17).

*The Lord Looketh upon the Heart*

1 Samuel 16:7 reads, “*the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*” Such a Christian truth implies that the Lord is not concerned with social status. Canonized scripture affirms this when God calls special witnesses: he mainly desires they be penitent, obedient, and come from various backgrounds of experience (Jer. 1:7; Prov. 3:1; John 14:15; Hel. 10:4–5). These three qualities are found in those who Jesus called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Peter, James, and John (the sons of Zebedee), and Andrew were partners in a profitable fishing business (see Matt. 4:18–19). Simon called Zelotes was of the group of zealots (see Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13). Matthew was a publican, a position hated by most Jews (see Matt. 10:3). Judas Iscariot was the only one from Judea (cf. Josh. 15:25 and Luke 6:16). Philip of

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\* Further canonized accounts support this claim. Christ admonished Judas, not Iscariot, to keep his commandments (word) out of love to him, resulting in a visitation from the Father and the Son (see John 14:23). John echoed this promise in his first general epistle linking God’s presence with the presence of the Spirit of the Lord (see 1 John. 3:24). The Savior later revealed through John the metaphor of the Savior standing at the door of an individual’s soul, knocking and only entering to sup by invitation (see Rev. 3:20).



Bethsaida may have been a disciple of John the Baptist and chosen for his ability to speak Greek.<sup>30</sup> Bartholomew had been in possible contact with Jesus since boyhood, being raised from the dead by Christ the Master.<sup>31</sup> Though little is spoken in the New Testament of Judas (not Iscariot), James the son of Alphaeus, and Thomas, one can assume that all had varied backgrounds and experiences. A similar pattern is found with ancient biblical prophets. For example, Abel was a shepherd of the field (see Gen. 4:2). Moses was the adopted son of Pharaoh and one who was slow of speech (see Exod. 2:10; 4:10). Samuel was a child when called as a prophet (see 1 Sam. 3). Daniel was of possible royal decent (see Dan. 1:3). Thus it is shown how temples come in all forms and mediums, as can God's chosen.

### Conclusion: An Institutional Pattern

The heavenly pattern of God's temple and human body construction has been the means of a two-part mission: to instruct man regarding how "to bring to pass [his] immortality and eternal life" (Moses 1:39). The archetype of the Lord's University is not constrained to telestial structures of wood and stone (temples, gardens, mountains, and caves), but also is found in human bodies. The House of the Lord (temples or bodies), both in heaven and earth, is partitioned into ascending spiritual zones, where the disciple climbs the ladder of eternal progression first symbolically, then literally. Like temples, the human body is a living holy sanctuary that when clean is a divine medium in which the Holy Spirit of God can dwell. Truly, the "heavenly academy" of God is not for the underachieving student, but rather for the celestial disciple with divine aspiration.

### Notes

1. For a thorough chart comparing the earthly and heavenly temple, see Jay A. Parry and Donald W. Parry, "The Temple in Heaven: Its Description and Significance," in Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1994), 521.

2. Jehovah gave to Moses a message for his fallen children: "let them make me a sanctuary (step 1); that I may dwell among them" (step 4, Ex. 25:8). Moses had dwelt on a temporary temple (a mountain) for forty days and nights (step 2), being taught the pattern for how to construct the sacred edifice (step 3). John Tvedtnes refers to the model of temple-building as a "Heavenly Pattern" and furthermore, using the kabbalistic *Zohar* Exodus, makes the assertion: "the Holy One showed Moses each single part of it [the tabernacle] in its exact supernal form" (1–2; John A. Tvedtnes, *The Heavenly Temple* (see the 2004 Foundation of Ancient Research and Mormon Studies' issue on temple building). Valuable materials were obtained and donated to construct the holy house (step 5). The tabernacle was completed, ordinances revealed and practiced, and the chosen assembled within its courts to perform their temple duties (steps 6–8; Ex. 38). God promised to "dwell among the children of Israel, and . . . be their God" (step 9; Exod. 29:45). Finally, Moses received a promised nation and was made leader in God's stead (step 10), see Ex. 31:18; 32:15–16, 25–29). For details on the tabernacle's construction in connection with Kapelrud's model, refer to Exodus 25–31.

3. The following is from Rick and Carter's analysis of Kapelrud's pattern in constructing the Kirtland Temple. "In a revelation called the 'olive leaf . . . plucked from the Tree of Paradise,' received on December 17 and 28 of 1831, Joseph Smith was commanded by the Lord to build a temple (156–57, see D&C 88:119–20). An overnight visit to a temple by the king or builder of the new temple is found only where such sanctuaries already exist, thus . . . no specific parallel is to be found in the construction of the Kirtland Temple (157). According to Brigham Young: 'Joseph not only received revelation and commandment to build a Temple but he received a pattern also, . . . for without a pattern he could not know what was wanting, having never seen one, and not having experienced its use' (159). In an early 1833 letter to leaders of the Church in Missouri, Joseph Smith stated: 'The Lord commanded us, in Kirtland, to build a house of God, and establish a school for the Prophets[.] . . . we will obey' (161). Brigham [Young] said that the Prophet Joseph wanted him [Artemus Millet, the master builder] to go to Kirtland, Ohio, and take charge of the mason work on the temple they were going to build there (163). The builders of the Kirtland Temple used the very finest materials available in its construction (164–65, see D&C 124:26–27). The Kirtland Temple was completed in accordance with a revealed plan in the spring of 1836 (165–66, see Truman Coe, in *The Ohio Observer*, Hudson: Charles Aiken, 11 August

1836 for a description of the temple). Joseph Smith offered a dedicatory prayer before the Saints assembled in the temple and, at the conclusion, he earnestly solicited the Lord (167, see D&C 109:78–80). During and after the dedication on 27 March 1836, there were numerous supernatural occurrences in the temple at Kirtland. . . . The most important report . . . regarded the experience of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on 3 April 1836” [involving a visitation from the Savior] (168–69). After receiving the ‘fullness of the priesthood’ or the ‘sealing’ keys ‘Joseph Smith taught that one who receives the ‘fullness of the priesthood’ holds the office of a ‘king and priest of the most high God’; he is promised everlasting life with the gods, godly dominion, and the highest priesthood power” (171).

4. For a thorough explanation of the zones of holiness, see Matthew B. Brown, *The Gate of Heaven* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1999), 61–75.

5. “In general, the camp in the wilderness had really consisted of three parts—the camp of Israel, that of the Levites, and that of God—so they reckoned three corresponding divisions of the Holy City. From the gates to the Temple Mount was regarded as the camp of Israel; thence to the gate of Nicanor represented the camp of Levi; while the rest of the sanctuary was ‘camp of God.’ . . . According to another Rabbinical arrangement, different degrees of sanctity attached to different localities. The first, or lowest degree, belonged to the land of Israel, whence alone the first sheaf at the Passover, the first fruits, and the two wave-loaves at Pentecost might be bought; the next degree to walled cities in Palestine, where no leper nor dead body might remain; the third to Jerusalem itself, since, besides many prohibitions to guard its purity, it was lawful only there to partake of peace-offerings, of the first fruits, and of ‘second tithes.’ Next came successfully the Temple Mount, from which all who were in a state of Levitical uncleanness were excluded; ‘the Terrace,’ or ‘Chel,’ from which, besides Gentiles, those who had become defiled by contact with a dead body were shut out; the Court of the Women, into which those who had been polluted might not come, even if they ‘had washed,’ till after they were also Levitically fit to eat of ‘things sacred,’ that is, after sunset of the day on which they had washed; the Court of Israel, into which those who might not enter who, though delivered from their uncleanness, had not yet brought the offerings for their purification; the Court of the Priests, ordinarily accessible only to the latter; the space between the altar and the Temple itself, from which even priests were excluded if their bearing showed that they did not realize the solemnity of the place; the Temple, into which the priests

might only enter after washing their hands and feet; and, lastly, the Most Holy Place, into which the high-priest alone was allowed to go, and that only once a year," Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1908), 62–63.

6. The apostasy of the Great Sanhedrin (composed of scribes, elders, Rabbis, and chief priests) is demonstrated by numerous scriptural citations. Christ addressed the scribes and Pharisees as "hypocrites, . . . [that] draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:7–9). Christ further declared, "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, *ye* blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! *Ye* fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty" (Matt. 23:13–18). Clearly such labels of character were righteously sealed at the conspiring, arrest, and death of Jesus (John 5:18; 7:25). Bruce R. McConkie's *The Mortal Messiah*, vol. 4, makes the following commentary: "At the time the Great Sanhedrin, in its apostate and fallen state, chose to seek out and sit in judgment on that God who himself had called their predecessors, the tribunal was composed of seventy-one persons. Their traditional meeting place had been in one of the temple chambers—the *Lishkath haGazit* (*Lishcat Haggazit*) or Chamber of Hewn Stones—but now it was common for them to meet in the merchandising booths of the sons of Annas (164–65).

7. Enoch records Satan, "the evil spirit of the lower places," "conceiv[ing] though against Adam, in such form he entered and seduced Eve" while in the Garden of Eden, the first temple of God (2 En. 31:4, 6). Before the coming of the Son of Man, "Antiochus, after he had smitten Egypt . . . went up against Jerusalem with a great army. And in [his] arrogance he entered into the sanctuary" . . . and "took the hidden treasures which he found" (see 1 Macc. 1:20–24). After its recapture, Judas and his brethren cleansed and re-dedicated the Holy

Place (see 1 Macc. 4:36–37). The temple later sustained the attack of Heliodrus, but was delivered by the power of God. We read, “When [Heliodrus] and his guards had got as far as the forum of the treasury [of the temple] the Sovereign of spirits and of all authority prepared a great apparition, so that all who resumed to enter were stricken with dismay at the power of God and fainted with sheer terror” (2 Macc. 3:23–24). We later read of Maccabaeus’ cleansing of the inner courts: “Maccabaeus and his followers, under the leadership of the Lord, recaptured the temple [in Jerusalem]. . . . After cleansing the sanctuary . . . they fell prostrate before the Lord with entreaties that they might never again incur such disasters” (2 Macc. 10:1, 3–4).

8. Clearly the destruction of the Judaic Temple was not a new experience neither for the Jews or the Christians during Christ’s ministry. We find other accounts of their destruction in other apocryphal and pseudopigraphic texts (see P. Sol 2:1–15; Sib. 5:398–402).

9. The cleansing of the Garden of Eden was the first cleansing of God’s sanctuary on this earth. There does exist one recording of a previous cleansing after a rebellion. Lucifer, the corrupter of clean, contaminated the heavenly courts above with his lies and pride, being cast out with one-third of the heavenly hosts (see Isa. 14:12–15; Jude 1:6; Rev. 12:4). Latter-day Saint President Joseph Fielding Smith’s *Answers to Gospel Questions*, vol. 5, remarks, “The kingdom of God must exist in absolute unity. Every law must be obeyed, and no member of the Church can have a place there unless he is in full accord. *There came a rebellion once with disastrous results, and there had to be a cleansing*” (26, italics added). More than a century earlier, Latter-day Saint Church historian and member of the Seventy B. H. Roberts commented on the cleansing of the inner vessel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 2: “Whatever may be the overruled results to the body, religious, rebellion, and apostasy spell condemnation and the destruction of spiritual life for the individuals overtaken by such calamities. But so long as human nature is what it now is—weak and sinful—just so long as out of that intractable material the Church of Christ has the mission to prepare men for the Father’s kingdom, just so long will there be occasional calamitous periods in the history of the Church such as was the year 1837 at Kirtland. But what after all are such periods but *times of purification, of cleansing*? During the previous years of success in the ministry, there had been gathered into the Church all classes of men. As in former dispensations of the gospel, so in this last dispensation; the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net cast into the sea that gathers of every kind of fish; and

when it is full, they draw it to shore, and sit down, and gather the good into vessels, and cast the bad away. The first step in the process of correcting human nature is to discover its defects. It may not always follow that when the defects are made known they will be corrected. But it is true that no correction will be made until the necessity of correction is manifest, until the defects are pointed out. Hence God has said: If men will come unto me, I will show unto them their weaknesses" (xxxii; italics added).

10. The concept of temporary temples was discussed by Bruce R. McConkie in *The Mortal Messiah*, vol. 1: "Whenever the Great Jehovah visits his people, he comes . . . to his temple. If he has occasion to come when he has no house on earth, his visit is made on a mountain, in a grove, in a wilderness area, or at some location apart from the tumults and contentions of carnal men; and in that event the place of his appearance becomes a temporary temple, a site used by him in place of the house his people would normally have prepared" (98).

11. For a detailed study of the Garden of Eden as the world's first holy sanctuary, see Brown, *The Gate of Heaven*, 27–29.

12. Ibid., 47–48, fn. 26.

13. The following words of Brigham Young from *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 17, supports the noted claim, "When the earth was framed and brought into existence and man was placed upon it, it was near the throne of our Father in heaven. And when man fell—though that was designed in the economy, there was nothing about it mysterious or unknown to the Gods, they understood it all, it was all planned—but when man fell, the earth fell into space, and took up its abode in this planetary system, and the sun became our light. When the Lord said—'Let there be light,' there was light, for the earth was brought near the sun that it might reflect upon it so as to give us light by day, and the moon to give us light by night. This is the glory the earth came from, and when it is glorified it will return again unto the presence of the Father, and it will dwell there, and these intelligent beings that I am looking at, if they live worthy of it, will dwell upon this earth" (143). Besides Brigham Young, the Latter-day Saint Apostle Elder Orson Hyde, the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the Prophet John Taylor also made references to the Garden of Eden being once physically near the throne of God. See *Journal of Discourses* 1:129–30, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 181, and *The Vision* by Nells B. Lundwall, 146, respectively.

14. Early Christian Fathers Origen, St. Cyril or Jerusalem, St. Proculus, Patriarch of Constantinople, Agathangelus, and Arnobius

the Younger claim that the Mount of Transfiguration was Mount Thabor. For their exact references, see Barnabas Meistermann, "Transfiguration," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 15 Robert Appleton Company, 1912, (cited 4 December 2003). Available from World Wide Web: (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15019a.htm>).

15. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* states the following concerning the Mount of Transfiguration: "Our Lord 'was transfigured before' Peter, James, and John, while on the mount, 'and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light' (Matt. 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; 2 Pet. 1:16-19). Luke describes this event by saying, 'As he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening' (Luke 9:28-36). It was on this occasion that Peter, James, and John, also, 'were transfigured before' Christ, received from him and from Moses and Elias the keys of the kingdom (Smith, *Teachings*, 158), and saw in vision the transfiguration of the earth in the millennial day (D&C 63:20-21; Smith, *Teachings*, 13)" (803). Latter-day Saint Prophet Joseph Fielding Smith in *Church History and Modern Revelation*, vol. 4, expanded the events that transpired on the mount: "The first complete endowments in this dispensation were given in Nauvoo, May 4, 1842. These of course could not be given in the Temple, and were given elsewhere. In the time of poverty and when necessity requires the giving of blessings which belong to the House of the Lord, and there is no such house, they may be given in the wilderness, on a mountain or some other spot, consecrated to that purpose. The Savior had to give an endowment to Peter, James and John, on the Mount of Transfiguration. The Saints of that dispensation had to be baptized for the dead and give other ordinances for the dead in the wilderness, for the temple in Jerusalem was closed to them and had been desecrated, therefore the wilderness, mountain tops and rivers, had to be utilized for the temple work for their dead in that dispensation" (138).

16. "In the fourth century the emperor Constantine built churches on the three holiest sites in Christendom: the locations of the Nativity, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. Concerning the third of these churches, which was called anciently the Eleona, Eusebius, the 'Father of Church History' and an orthodox theologian, writes: 'The mother of the emperor raised a stately structure on the Mount of Olives also, in memory of his ascent to heaven who is the Saviour of mankind, erecting a sacred church and temple on the very summit of the mount. And indeed authentic history informs us that in this very cave the Saviour imparted his secret revelations to his disciples.'" Taken from Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 101.

17. See *The Story of Abraham Our Father from What Happened to Him with Nimrod*, in *Jewish Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, ed. John A. Tvedtnes (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 165–66.

18. Regarding birth, the inner-cave tunnels are symbolic of bodily organs; the main opening being the womb. Zwi Werblowsky states, “The literature on caves as wombs is immense” and further cites Seidel’s research of a grotto called *tainai* on Mount Fuji, ‘Bent double in the dark and narrow interior, I wriggled through sections called ‘Small Intestine,’ ‘Large Intestine’ and ‘Five Viscera.’ My feet got soaked in a pond of ‘Spermatic Liquid,’ I ducked under ‘Nipple’ stalactites and felt truly reborn after squeezing through a ‘Birth Canal’ that was narrow indeed (16).” Regarding death, there is little surprise that the greatest life this world has ever known, whose work is “one eternal round” (1 Ne. 10:19), chose to exit the world the same way he entered. About a stone’s cast outside Jerusalem’s walls, in a garden called Arimathaea, there remains an eroded stone wall with a small cave hewn out of the side. It was here that the Redeemer of us all broke the bands of death, came off conqueror, and “became the first fruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20). The using of caves for tombs was not uncommon for the time. Alfred Edersheim’s *Jesus the Messiah* noted that “hewn-out” tombs located in gardens were common among all classes of Jewish culture (429), and that Joseph’s giving up of his own “final bed” was an act of supreme veneration (621). Quite possibly, caves may act as a crossroad between mortality and immortality.

19. Origen’s *Contra Celsum* commented on the Savior’s birthplace as follows: “If anyone wants further proof to convince him that Jesus was born in Bethlehem besides the prophecy of Micah and after the history recorded in the gospels by Jesus’ disciples, he may observe that, in agreement with the story in the gospel about his birth, the cave at Bethlehem is shown where he was born and the manger in the cave where he was wrapped in swaddling-clothes. What is shown there is famous in these parts even among people alien to the faith, since it was in this cave that the Jesus who is worshipped and admired by Christians was born” (47–48). See also Frederic W. Farrar, *Life of Christ*, popular ed. (London: Cassell & Company, 1890), 3. Many scholars look at this “sacred cove” as a mere place of desperation and convenience used by the chosen couple. However, what father would not be involved in his son’s business, including where he comes into the world? Like the gardens of Eden and Gethsemane, and the Tomb of Arimathaea, this sacred unnamed cave where the Son of God first appeared in mortal form, was appointed before the foundations of the world. Early Latter-day Saint leader George



Q. Cannon declared: "God in His providence chooses the noblest of His instruments in His own way. Who would have selected such a birth as the Savior's? Who would have selected a stable as the birthplace of that divine Being? Yet this was where He was born. Nowadays to hear of a man being born in a stable conveys such an idea of extreme poverty and worthlessness that every man born in such a place would shrink from communicating it to his fellow man for fear he would be despised on that account. Yet these were the surroundings which our Father in heaven selected for His Son." See Brian H. Stuy, ed., *Collected Discourses*, vol. 4 (Burbank and Woodland Hills: B.H.S. Publishing, 1987–1992), 200.

20. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* defines the term dispensation as follows: "Gospel dispensations are those periods of time during which the Lord reveals or dispenses the doctrines of the gospel to men so that reliance need not be placed on past ages for this saving knowledge. . . . When we speak of the great gospel dispensations, we generally have in mind those given to Adam, Enoch (see Moses 6; 7), Noah (see Moses 8), Abraham (see Abr. 2:6–11; Gal. 3:6–8, 18) Moses (see D&C 84:17–28); the apostles in the meridian of time (see Matt. 16:18–19; 18:18; D&C 27:12–13; 128:20), and to Joseph Smith and his associates (see D&C 112:14–32). . . . But there have also been many other gospel dispensations in the course of the Lord's dealings with his children. It is very evident that John the Baptist (see Luke 7:24–30; John 1:19–37; D&C 84:26–28), the Jaredites (see Ether 1:41–43; 3:6–16), the Nephites (see 1 Ne. 2:2–4), Lehi and Nephi who lived at the time of the coming of the Savior (see Hel. 10:3–17; 11:19–23; 3 Ne. 7:15–19; 9:15–22; 11:7–40), and the Ten Tribes whom Christ visited after his resurrection (see 3 Ne. 16:1–4) all had dispensations of the gospel (see Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 1:160–64). We know that Esaias, Gad, Jeremy, Elihu, Caleb, and Jethro all lived between Abraham and Moses, and all enjoyed the fullness of the blessings of the gospel (see D&C 84:6–13). [To whom] they ministered to and whether [or not] they had dispensations of the gospel are truths yet to be revealed. Paul speaks of having a dispensation of the gospel (see 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25), but apparently this is only in the sense that present-day apostles have received one, in that the Lord has given them revelation of His mind and will, and in that they hold the keys of the dispensation in which they live" (see D&C 112:14–32).

21. In Latter-day Saint history, we come to a small "sacred grove" of trees in upstate New York, where the Prophet Joseph Smith experienced the First Vision, where God the Father and Jesus Christ once again ministered unto their disciple Joseph Smith, issuing in "the

dispensation of the fullness of times" (see JS-H 1:16–19; D&C 27:13). Such an experience of visions to call a prophet is found in numerous religious revivals. For a detailed study of visions and religious movements, see Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 264–81.

22. E. A. Wallis Budge translated the following dialogue between God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son referring to the creation of man, "He took the clay from the hand of the angel, and made Adam according to Our image and likeness, and He left him lying for forty days and forty nights without putting breath into him. And He heaved sighs over him daily, saying, 'If I put breath into this [man], he must suffer many pains.' And I said unto My Father, 'Put breath into him; I will be an advocate for him.' And My Father said unto Me, 'If I put breath into him, My beloved Son, Thou wilt be obliged to go down into the world, and to suffer many pains for him before Thou shalt have redeemed him, and made him to come back to his primal state.' And I said unto My Father, 'Put breath into him; I will be his advocate, and I will go down into the world, and will fulfil [*sic*] Thy command'" (Discourse on Abbatôn by Timothy, Archbishop of Alexandria, in *Coptic Martyrdoms etc. in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, ed. and trans. E. A. Wallis Budge [New York: AMS Press, 1914], 482. Timothy, archbishop of Alexandria, died in AD 385. Brackets are included in Budge's English translation).

23. Clement of Alexandria declared: "For is it not the case that rightly and truly we do not circumscribe in any place that which cannot be circumscribed; nor do we shut up in temples made with hands that which contains all things? . . . Now the images and temples constructed by mechanics are made of inert matter; so that they too are inert, and material, and profane; and if you perfect the art, they partake of mechanical coarseness. Works of art cannot then be sacred and divine" (530).

24. For further discussion on the early Christian Church's denouncing of temples, see Arnobius, "Arnobius against the Heathen," Book 6, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 507.

25. Paul proclaimed the following regarding the Church as a living organism: "For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of

them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, *where* were the body? But now *are they* many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness" (1 Cor. 12:14–23).

26. We guard that which is most precious to us. A husband guards his wife with his life; a mother her children; a curmudgeon his opinion; a miser his wealth. Thus saith the Lord, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt. 6:21)." Nibley expounded on this concept, comparing modern treasure troves with ancient temple-design, "In our day, as in various other times in history, the sanctity and the authority of the temple have been preempted in the religion of mammon. For example, our banks are designed after the manner of ancient temples, with imposing fronts, ceremonial gates and courts, the onyx, the marble, the bronze—all are the substances of ancient temples. The sacred hush that prevails, the air of propriety, decorum, and dedication; the pious inscriptions on Zion's Bank's walls are quotations from Brigham Young (the one man who really had it in for business). The massive vault door, through which only the initiated may pass, gleams chastely in immaculate metal. The symbol makes the reality of all that is safe and secure—that is, the Holy of Holies. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (33–34)." Man naturally guards his home, protecting it from "disturbers of the peace." Little wonder Father in Heaven, when he orders man to build his house, requires the insides remain sanctified, protected from the filth and destroyers of the world. To avoid such contamination, heavenly sentinels have been given dominion and stewardship over its protection.

27. George Q. Cannon observed: "Satan is laboring with all his might to lead men and women to these conclusions, binding them in chains of darkness and leading them down to everlasting destruction. . . . I know that Satan is almost capable of deceiving the very elect. I believe that Satan can make himself appear to those who cannot discern, as an angel of light; and if he has that power, he has power also to deceive men and women in the flesh by performing mighty works. Was not this done in the days of Moses? Was not Pharaoh's heart hardened by the works of the magicians? He did not believe that Moses and Aaron were servants of God, but that they had a little more skill perhaps than his

magicians had. So it is now. Satan is capable of deceiving the people.” Taken from Stuy, *Collected Discourses* vol. 3, 415–16.

28. Latter-day Saint Prophet Joseph Smith in *History of the Church*, vol. 6, related a dream where he saw his “guardian angel along with [him]” (461).

29. Like all great civilizations, their fall came from the “center”; it was the keystone. True there are many factors that play a role, yet when the core wavers, so do its appendages like a rock thrown into a calm pond. In many instances, a civilization deteriorates from within. Is it any different with the human body? Moroni explained to Pahoran “that God has said that the *inward vessel shall be cleansed first*, and then the outer vessel be cleansed also” (Alma 60:23; italics added). To quote the poet William Butler Yeats’s “Second Coming,” “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (351). The center of both soul and city must be maintained and protected. We see such ambition with Gidgiddoni, who said, “The Lord forbid; for if we should go up against them the Lord would deliver us into their hands; therefore we will prepare ourselves in the center of our lands, and we will gather all our armies together, and we will not go against them, but we will wait till they shall come against us; therefore as the Lord liveth, if we do this he will deliver them into our hands” (3 Ne. 3:21). Little surprise God commands to “pray always lest that wicked one have power *in you, and remove you out of your place*” (D&C 93:49; italics added). Such a heavenly charge has echoed down to our dispensation since the time of Adam.

30. JoAnn Ford Watson, “Philip,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 311.

31. Alexander Roberts, and James Donaldson, *The Infancy of the Saviour*, in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951); 410–11.

**Jean Bottéro. *Mesopotamia:  
Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*  
Chicago: University of  
Chicago Press, 1992**

REVIEWED BY ADAM G. ANDERSON

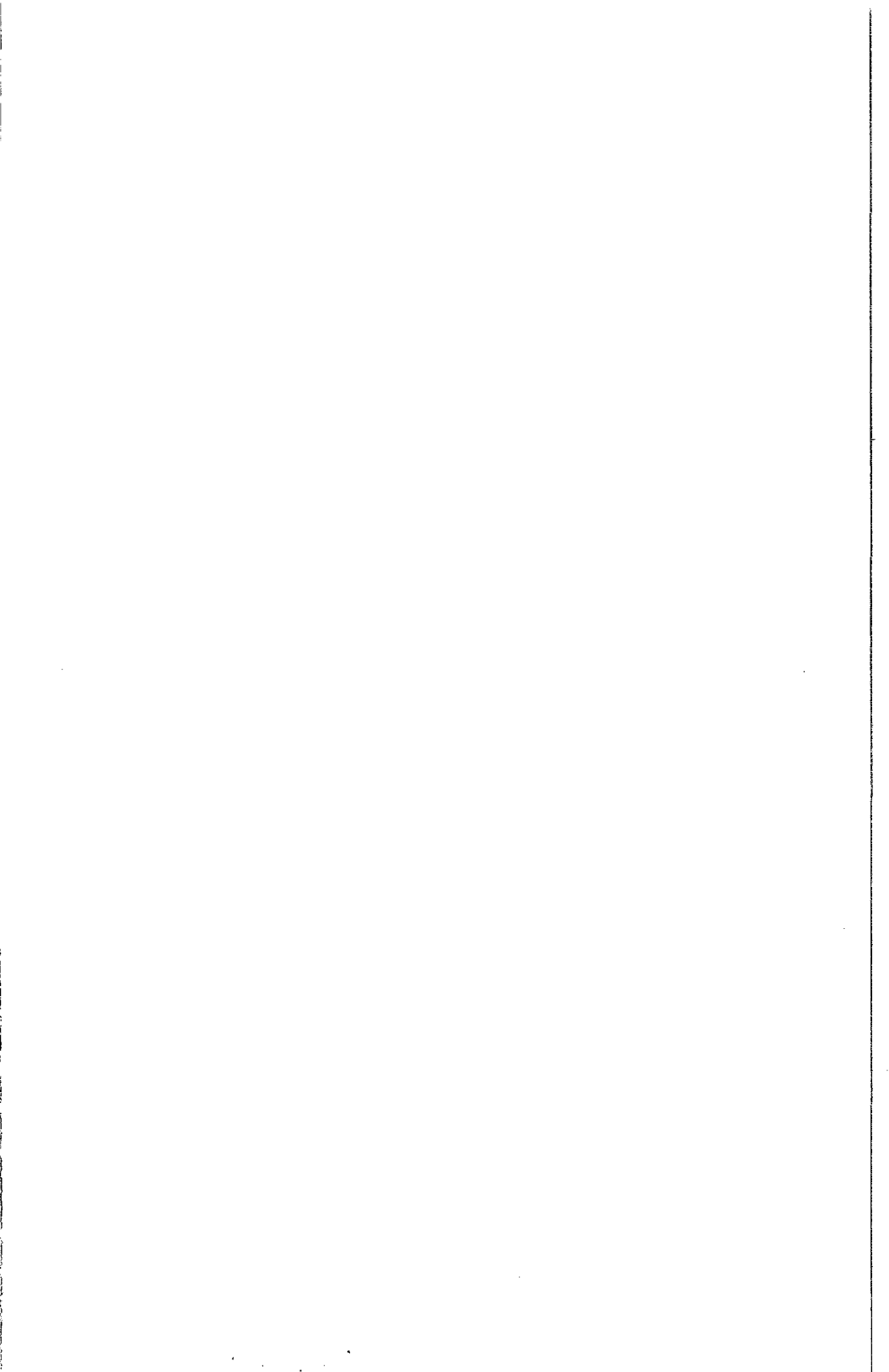
**T**he historical origins of the ancient world are ambiguous at best. As any historian will admit, the further back into history one goes, the more questions one will encounter, many of which have no apparent answers. For example: Where does the history of man begin? Who does it start with? How far back do the records and writings of man go? Without the LDS scripture (which provides many of these answers) we are left to the echoes of the great empires which lived and died over four thousand years ago. For many people, these remnants of ancient history are shrouded in a veil of mystery and darkness. Jean Bottéro's *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* sheds light on the dark and obscure beginnings of known world history.

*Mesopotamia* is a masterful work written by one of the world's top Assyriologists to the broad audience of anyone interested in the ancient world and its historical beginnings. Unlike the countless works of dry and humorless historians, Bottéro's witty and eloquent narrative is sure to captivate even those least interested in the ancient Near East. On this journey into the dusty antique world of Mesopotamia, Bottéro provides a fresh perspective into the Mesopotamians' influence on the origins of science, religion, and writing. Bringing the reader in contact with some of

the earliest known civilizations, Bottéro beautifully illustrates the colorful daily life of the people of Mesopotamia, complete with vivid and sometimes comical depictions of their rituals, religious beliefs, forms of kingship, inventions, and discoveries.

Bottéro's humor shines through in his essays as well, many of which were delivered as lectures to an audience. These interactive essays were then revised and expanded to include intriguing discoveries of this ancient civilization between two rivers. *Mesopotamia* explores discoveries covering a wide range of topics, such as the inquisitive field of Assyriology; the relevance, religion, and culture of Mesopotamia; the birth of writing and science; and a new look at the Code of Hammurabi.

Bottéro's candid style gives *Mesopotamia* an enjoyably personable tone. Bottéro manages to take his work both seriously and with a sense of humor, understanding that at times it is as applicable to his readers as resurrecting dinosaurs. But if properly understood and applied, *Mesopotamia* is wonderfully informative and insightful. As Bottéro himself put it, his intent in writing this ancient history is "to discover step by step the ways of seeing, of sensing, and of living, and the unpredictable thoughts and hearts, of our oldest recognizable ancestors" (3).



"Cutting a Covenant": Making Covenants  
and Oaths in the Old Testament and  
the Book of Mormon

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The Heavenly Academy: A Place of Instruction,  
A Place of Learning

### Book Review

*Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*  
by Jean Bottéro