

OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST. THE CHURCH AS THE NEW TEMPLE.

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Fr Alexander Schmemmann Memorial Lecture

St Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, New York, January 28th 2012.

I am greatly honored that you have invited me to give this lecture in memory of Fr Alexander Schmemmann.

I was raised in the Protestant tradition and have for many years been studying the temple in Jerusalem, trying to recover the world view and the beliefs that it expressed. It was not until 1999 that I was first present at an Orthodox liturgy, and I had expected it to be very strange. In fact it was rather familiar. What I saw was the liturgy of the temple, much as I had imagined it from my scholarly reconstructions. Not exactly, of course, but the movements, the general 'feel' of the service. But I was watching from outside, so to speak.

When I began to read the work of Fr Alexander, I was able to glimpse, in small way, what the liturgy meant from the inside, and reading his *Journals*, I caught something of the Orthodox world view. I managed to find again a couple of sentences in his 1965 book *Sacraments and Orthodoxy* which link closely to what I have prepared for today. 'The liturgy of the Eucharist is... the journey of the Church into the dimension of the Kingdom... 'Dimension'... seems the best way to indicate the manner of our sacramental entrance into the risen life of Christ', p.29.

It has been a pleasure to compile this lecture to honour the memory of Fr Alexander, reconstructing something of the temple- world that has shaped so much of our Christian worship and world view, the journey into the dimension of the Kingdom.

This afternoon we shall be walking along one of the old trails that lead from Solomon's temple to the Church. Our trail will be the Great High Priest. Parts of the trail are still clear, parts are broken and we shall need some tracking skills to locate the old path; and parts have completely gone. There we shall need to look around until we find the trail again and can resume the journey. But there is no doubt that this trail and many others lead directly from the old Temple to the Church.

The writer of Hebrews described Jesus as a great high priest¹, and assumed, in his exposition, that the temple - its worship and its furnishings - had foreshadowed the work of Jesus, and was therefore the best framework within which to describe the person and work of our LORD.²

First, let us look at the temple itself. It is important to distinguish between the first temple, built by Solomon and destroyed by the Babylonians in 597 BCE, and the temple that was rebuilt about 70 years later when the exiles returned from Babylon. The restored temple was much simpler than the

¹ Heb.4.14.

² Heb.9.

original, and the memory persisted that the second temple had been less glorious than the first. There were many reasons for this, not least that Jerusalem was no longer the capital city of an independent state, and so had to operate within the constraints of its overlords.

For our purposes, the most important differences between the first and second temples were the items that were *not restored*. The furnishings of the temple symbolised its teachings, and the missing items were a sign that certain teachings and rituals were missing from the second temple. People said the missing items would all be restored in the time of the Messiah.

One of the missing items was the anointing oil, and so there was no anointed Messiah figure in the second temple. There was no anointed high priest, and, of course, there were no more anointed kings. It was a very different temple, and people knew it was incomplete because the oil was missing.

In the first temple there had been priest-kings who were anointed and then known as ‘Melchizedek’ priests. In Genesis, we read how Abraham met Melchizedek, the priest-king of Jerusalem who offered him bread and wine³; and in Psalm 110 [109] the king in Jerusalem is said to be an eternal priest like Melchizedek. In the second temple it seems there were no more Melchizedek priests. Among the Dead Sea scrolls a document was found that looked forward to the return of Melchizedek⁴. Unfortunately, this document is badly damaged, but enough has survived to show that Melchizedek was expected to return at a particular time. A new Melchizedek priest would appear, to fulfil various prophecies and redeem his people.

Melchizedek is a key figure in our exploration. The word means ‘Righteous King’, or ‘King of Righteousness’, but was probably a title rather than a name. Most often it was written as two words, Melchi-Zedek - ‘King of Righteousness’ – and it was a title of the ancient priest-kings in Jerusalem. ‘Righteousness’ was a temple-term that described bringing the whole of creation and human society back to its God-given state of peace, *shalom*. The writer of Hebrews called Melchizedek the King of righteousness, the king of peace.⁵ It is likely that all the ancient priest-kings in Jerusalem had been Melchizedek priests, whose role was to uphold righteousness.

From the Dead Sea scrolls Melchizedek text, we can see there are several places where the New Testament presents Jesus as the long-expected Melchizedek. Hebrews says he was Melchizedek, and contrasted his priesthood with the other temple priesthood, the family of Aaron, as we shall see⁶. Jesus began his public ministry at exactly the time Melchizedek was expected to return, and when he spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth, he chose to read Isaiah 61⁷, one of the Melchizedek prophecies. Jesus said it was being fulfilled. He was Melchizedek, the great high priest.

³ Gen.14.17-24.

⁴ *The Melchizedek Text*, 11QMelch.

⁵ Heb.7.2.

⁶ Heb.7.1-28.

⁷ Luke 4.18-9.

But Melchizedek had been the royal high priest in the original temple, not the restored temple that was so diminished in its furnishings and its teachings. The actual temple in the time of Jesus was this diminished temple, and yet people still remembered what the temple had been and what it should be. *This means 'what its teachings should be'*. One of the most remarkable aspects of Christian origins is that the early Church knew these teachings and developed them into what we now call Christianity. Jesus had fulfilled the prophecies, the true temple was being restored, and they called him Melchizedek.

Scholars sometimes wonder how Christianity developed so quickly into such a sophisticated theological system, especially as the first disciples are often portrayed as uneducated fishermen from Galilee. The answer to that question is very clear in the New Testament, if it is read with eyes accustomed to the world of the original temple. When St Peter wrote to the scattered Jewish communities in Asia Minor who had become Christians, he said: 'Like living stones, be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ'⁸ The Christian community was the temple of the Messiah, the original temple restored, and it was a living temple.

The fact that we call Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, which means the Anointed One, shows that Christians live and think in a world where the lost anointing oil and everything it stood for has been restored. *The perfumed anointing oil was fundamental to the original temple world.* Tradition remembered that it represented oil from the tree of life,⁹ and the tree of life was the ancient symbol of the Holy Wisdom. One of the wise teachers of Israel had said: 'Wisdom is a tree of life for those who hold on to her.'¹⁰

The oil from the tree of life opened one's spiritual eyes. When the high priest was anointed, the oil was put on his eyelids.¹¹ It changed the way everything was seen. In fact, the oil transformed and heightened all the senses. The anointed ones saw and heard differently, and so they thought differently. The anointed mind was transformed, and this became the characteristic temple world view. Isaiah said the anointed one received the Spirit of the LORD, the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and the fear of the LORD.¹² When the priests of the original temple abandoned Wisdom, Isaiah said their punishment would be to see and not see, to hear and not hear, and so they would no longer understand.¹³ These events were remembered as the loss of the holy oil, and this was encoded in the story of the garden of Eden.

When Adam was set in the garden of Eden, he was permitted to eat from every tree except one, which means that the fruit of the tree of life was intended to nourish him. But he was persuaded to eat from the forbidden tree, and then found he no longer had access to the tree of life. He had lost contact with Wisdom and her anointing oil and everything they represented. The story told in the

⁸ 1 Pet.2.5.

⁹ E.g. *Clementine Recognitions* 1.46.

¹⁰ Prov.3.18.

¹¹ Babylonian Talmud *Horayoth* 12a.

¹² Isa.11.2.

¹³ Isa.6.9-10;also *1 Enoch* 93.8.

Hebrew scriptures reflects the situation in the second temple, when the scribes were collecting and preserving whatever had survived the destruction of the original temple.

As they retold the ancient stories, the scribes were reflecting on their own situation. Why had everything gone so wrong? How had they lost their beautiful temple, which they remembered as the garden of Eden? It was, they said, because Adam had rejected Wisdom and so lost everything that her oil conferred. We do not know for certain what they meant by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, except that the LORD had forbidden it, and once its fruit had been tasted, Adam cut himself off from the source of Wisdom.

In the Church all this was restored. The name 'Christians', first used in Antioch¹⁴ meant more than just 'followers of the Christ, the anointed one.' Since Christians were also anointed at their baptism, the name means something like 'little anointed ones', and so we are all little Melchizedeks, little royal high priests. This is what St Peter said to those Christians in Asia Minor: 'You are a royal priesthood'.¹⁵

When the risen LORD spoke in a vision to St John, he promised that the faithful would once again eat from the tree of life, that they would have the right to the tree of life.¹⁶ The Christians were the restored royal priesthood. Their home was true temple restored, and so they returned to the garden of Eden which was the Church.

There is a lovely story in a 3rd century CE Syriac text which tells how Adam took three things with him when he left Eden: gold, frankincense and myrrh, which were the symbols of the original temple. These were buried with him in a cave when he died, and when the magi came seeking the infant Jesus, they took those same treasures from the cave to offer to the new Adam.¹⁷ Symbolism from the original temple runs all through early Christian texts: the New Testament and many other stories.

So let us explore the true temple which is our spiritual home. This was the original temple, where Melchizedek priests had served God Most High in Jerusalem. The building represented the whole creation, visible and invisible. It was quite small. The Hebrew text of 1 Kings says it was 60 cubits long, 20 wide and 30 high, with a porch at the front that was 10 cubits deep¹⁸. If we reckon a cubit to be roughly half a yard, that means the building was 30 yards long and 10 yards wide. The Greek text here has slightly different measurements, and says that the temple was 25 cubits high, not 30,¹⁹ but the overall picture is the same.

¹⁴ Acts 11.26.

¹⁵ 1 Pet.2.9.

¹⁶ Rev.2.7; 22.14.

¹⁷ *Testament of Adam* 3.6; there is a similar story in Syriac *Book of the Cave of Treasures*.

¹⁸ 1 Kgs 6.2.

¹⁹ The verse numbers also differ. 3 Kms 6.2-3 in some numberings.

The details of Solomon's temple have to be supplemented in some cases with details of the tabernacle that Moses erected at the foot of Sinai. This is because the temple was built as a larger, permanent version of the tabernacle. When the second-temple scribes were compiling the Hebrew scriptures, memories of the original temple coloured those of the tabernacle and vice-versa. As a general rule, one picture can help to fill out the other, except for the measurements. The proportions, however, were the same for both structures.

The temple was divided into two areas by a huge curtain, the veil of the temple. Beyond the veil was the holy of holies, which in Solomon's temple was a 20 cubit [10 yard] cube-shaped room, completely lined with gold. In it were two giant cherubim that spread their wings over the throne where the Melchizedek priest-king used to sit. The ark of the covenant was kept there, and so too was a small golden pitcher that held the perfumed anointing oil.²⁰ The symbolism in the psalms suggests that there was a fountain or spring in the holy of holies, and the temple visionaries described living water flowing from the throne.²¹ The reality in the original temple had probably been the Gihon spring, which gushed up - its name means gusher - into the temple itself. This implies, of course, that the original temple cannot have been on the Temple Mount, but that is another story!

When the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, or maybe a short while before their invasion, the oil, the ark and the cherubim disappeared from the temple; but in the time of the Messiah and the true temple, it was said, they would return, along with the seven branched lampstand, the Spirit and the fire. The Spirit and the fire returned at Pentecost, and, if you read the Book of Revelation with temple-trained eyes, [opened eyes] you will find all the other missing items restored too. St John saw the true temple restored, and *this is the earliest picture we have of Christian worship*. This vision shaped even the simplest worship on earth, because the Christians were a part of it.

Let us look in more detail now at the temple building and what it symbolised. The outer part, corresponding to the nave of a western church, was twice as long as the holy of holies: 40 cubits [20 yards], whereas the holy of holies was 20 cubits [10 yards]. These were the temple proportions - 2:1 - and these can be found in many later church buildings, because they were modelled on the temple.

The outer part of the temple was called the holy place; the inner part was called the holy of holies, sometimes translated 'the most holy place'. Now 'most holy' in temple-talk meant more than 'very holy'. It meant actively holy, infectiously holy. Anything 'most holy' conferred holiness, but only the anointing oil - kept in the holy of holies - could confer 'most holiness' on a person or on a sacred object. The LORD told Moses how to blend the perfumed oil, and then he told him to anoint the furnishings and the high priests of the tabernacle 'that they may be most holy, and whatever touches them will become holy'.²² Anyone entering the holy of holies became holy, a holy one, and that meant an angel. The holy of holies was the visible sign of the Source of holiness at the centre. 'Let

²⁰ Tosefta *Kippurim* 2.15.

²¹ Ezek.47; Zech.14.8; Rev.22.1.

²² Exod.30.29.

them make me a holy place' said the LORD to Moses at Sinai, 'that I may dwell in their midst'. The Greek text here has 'that I may be seen in their midst', but the meaning is clear.²³

Temple thought has God at the centre, in the holy of holies, which was the place of the cherub-throne. The holy of holies represented the state where God reigned, and Jesus called it the Kingdom of God. We shall see in a moment that the holy of holies symbolised the state of unity that Jesus asked for his disciples in his high priestly prayer: 'that they may all be one, even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee'²⁴.

When he spoke to the Pharisees, Jesus reminded them of temple teaching: the Kingdom was not something that would happen as a historical event in the future. It was always in their midst. 'Behold the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you'.²⁵ St John in his vision saw the Kingdom as the heavenly city, replacing the corrupt city of his own time. He described it as a huge golden cube, measured by angels²⁶. What he saw was a huge holy of holies, the Kingdom, and in it he saw the throne.

In the outer part of the temple was the golden table for bread, wine and incense.²⁷ The table is mentioned in the tabernacle at Sinai²⁸ and in Solomon's temple,²⁹ but nowhere in the Old Testament is there any detail about what the table and its offerings represented. Twelve huge loaves were set out with frankincense, and the Greek text says there was salt.³⁰ The high priests [and by the time of Jesus, the other priests too] had to put fresh loaves into the temple each Sabbath, and then eat the ones they brought out. This was described as their 'most holy' food, which means it imparted holiness, and it was also an eternal covenant.³¹ The bread of the presence - 'shewbread' in some older Bibles - did not mean 'set out in the presence'. It meant that the bread was, in some way, a presence. But whose presence did the high priests consume to nourish their holiness? The meaning of the temple furnishings and rituals was known only to the high priests, but some of them, such as Josephus, revealed enough to enable us to detect allusions elsewhere.

We should like to know more about that golden table for bread, wine and incense, especially as the bread and wine were associated with Melchizedek, the ancient priest-king. He had offered bread and wine to Abraham. When the Hebrew scriptures were compiled during the time of the second temple, the scribes had to use whatever had survived the destruction in 597 BCE, supplemented by memory. So much had been lost, although the Dead Sea scrolls enable us to fill in some of the missing details.

²³ Exod.25.8.

²⁴ John 17. 21.

²⁵ Luke 17.21.

²⁶ Rev.21.9-21.

²⁷ 1 Kgs 7.48; 3 Kms 7.34/48

²⁸ Exod 25.23-30;

²⁹ 1 Kgs 7.48.

³⁰ Lev.24.5-9.

³¹ Lev.24.9.

Since the community that used the scrolls was flourishing in the time of Jesus, someone was preserving memories of the original temple.

Malachi, the last of the Twelve Prophets, warned that the bread in the restored temple was not pure, but there are no details. He prophesied a time when there would again be a pure cereal offering in every place³² and the early Christians understood this as a prophecy of the Eucharist. In the mid 2nd century, for example, St Justin explained to his Jewish neighbour Trypho that the Eucharist was the new bread of the presence, fulfilling Malachi's prophecy.³³

So much that we should like to know about the original temple was not recorded in the texts that became Scripture. People did remember the older ways, however, and so some information is found in the Targums, the Aramaic translations of scripture with supplementary explanations, made when congregations no longer understood the old Hebrew texts. Other information is found in the Dead Sea scrolls, which include some wonderful hymns about the angel-priests and their songs of praise around the heavenly throne in the holy of holies.

In the second temple, the actual holy of holies was empty, but people remembered that it had once been filled with angels around the throne. In his visions, St John saw the ancient holy of holies restored, and, remember, this is the earliest picture we have of Christian worship. The writer of Hebrews also thought in terms of the original temple, describing the ark of the covenant in place behind the veil of the temple, even though the ark had disappeared from the temple some 600 years before Hebrews was written.³⁴

The temple represented the creation. The tabernacle was erected at the foot of Sinai on the first day of the new year: 'the first day of the first month'.³⁵ According to Jewish tradition, the six days of creation described in Genesis 1 were represented by the structure of the temple/ tabernacle and its furnishings. Both expressed how the Creator related to the creation and to human beings.³⁶

On the second day of creation, for example, the firmament was made to separate heaven from earth, and on the second day Moses had the veil of the tabernacle set up to separate the holy of holies from the rest of the tent. The area outside the veil represented the visible world that was created on the other four days. The land and its vegetation were created on the third day, and were represented by the table for plant offerings - bread, wine and incense, the third stage of erecting the tabernacle. The lights of heaven were created on the fourth day and they were represented by the seven branched lampstand that was set in place at the fourth stage of erecting the tabernacle.

³² Mal.1.11.

³³ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 41.

³⁴ Heb.9.4.

³⁵ Exod.40.2.

³⁶ A summary in L Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol.2. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1913, p.51.

I have deliberately not mentioned the first day of creation, because there is no ‘first day’ of creation in the text of Genesis. Both the Hebrew and the Greek say ‘Day One’, not ‘the first day’. The origin of creation was not within time but was outside time. It was not a case of first, then second, then third and so on. The origin of creation was outside time, and the text marked this by saying Day One, instead of ‘first day’.

Day One was represented by the holy of holies, the golden cube that housed the cherub throne of God. Whatever was within the veil was outside time and outside matter, since the outer area represented the world of time and matter. Within the veil, a state beyond time and matter, there could be no division, and so Day One was said to represent the divine Unity underlying all creation and from which all creation proceeds. It was also the state of the light before creation, the light of the divine presence. In temple-talk, this was the Kingdom. Some temple mystics were enabled to see through the veil to the light and unity beyond. The Transfiguration is the best-known account of such an experience. St John said that seeing and entering the Kingdom was for those who had been born from above.³⁷

On the sixth day of erecting the tabernacle, Moses purified the high priests to serve in the tabernacle, and on the sixth day in Genesis, Adam was created. The comparison shows that Adam was created to be the high priest of creation. He was created to be the presence of the LORD. When the high priest was anointed, the oil was put on his eyelids to open his eyes, but also on his forehead in the shape of a cross. This was the sign of the name of the LORD.³⁸ The Christians also had this mark, given at baptism. In the Book of Revelation, St John tells how he saw a multitude whom the angel would mark on their foreheads, and then he saw them standing before the throne in heaven, which means they were in the holy of holies. They all had the name, that is, the cross, on their foreheads³⁹, and so they were all high priests.

The prescription in Exodus for the vestments of the high priest is very significant. The translations we now use do not accurately reflect how the text was understood in the time of Jesus. The first part is accurate: the high priest wore on his forehead a plate of pure gold, bearing the sacred Name. Most translations then have: ‘engrave it like the engraving of a seal “Holy to the LORD”’, implying that the high priest was holy to the LORD. In the time of Jesus, however, they said the line meant ‘engrave it like a holy seal belonging to the LORD’. The high priest wore on the golden plate, a golden seal, on which were the four Hebrew letters of the sacred Name.⁴⁰

The high priest wearing the holy seal did not merely show that he had been dedicated to the LORD; it showed that he actually was the presence of the LORD in the temple, representing the LORD of Hosts, and the priests were the angels. This much of the older temple was retained. A Gentile visitor to Jerusalem in the 3rd century BC, looking down into the temple from an adjacent hill, saw the crowd

³⁷ John 3.3-6.

³⁸ Ezek.9.4.

³⁹ Rev.7.2-3; 14.1; 22.4.

⁴⁰ Exod. 28.36.

in the temple courtyard fall to their knees before the high priest because they acknowledged he was the presence of the LORD ⁴¹.

Now let us see how this understanding of high-priesthood can illuminate the Genesis story of Adam. He was created as the Image. He was set in the garden of Eden to till it and to keep it. That is the usual English translation ⁴², but the writer of Genesis chose his words carefully and did not in fact describe Adam as a gardener. Jewish interpreters in the time of Jesus did not think of Adam as a gardener. The Hebrew word translated 'to till' also means 'to serve a liturgy', and the Hebrew word translated 'to keep' means to preserve the teachings. The role of high-priestly role of Adam *and of every human being* was to lead the worship of creation and to preserve right teachings about how we should live in the world.

Think again about that picture of the earliest Christian worship in the Book of Revelation. The host of heaven around the throne, later joined by every creature on earth, praises the LORD who created all things and by whose will they continue to exist. The earliest Christian worship praised the Creator for the creation ⁴³ This had been traditional temple teaching; recall the canticle that we call the Benedicite, the Song of the three young men in the furnace. 'All you works of the LORD, bless the LORD, praise him and magnify him for ever.' The liturgies and teaching of the temple sustained the creation. Simon the Just, high priest about 280 BCE – the one whom that Gentile visitor saw in the temple courtyard - used to teach 'The world is sustained by three things: by the Law, by the temple service, and by deeds of loving kindness'. ⁴⁴

Creation care, has for too long been neglected in Christian teaching. Some have been wary, thinking of pagan and new-age associations, but creation care is fundamental to the temple world view and so was fundamental to the original Christian teaching. *Today we could well contrast the temple world view, based on the holy oil, and the prevailing world view, based on a very different kind of oil. There could not be a more striking contrast.*

The high priest was the only person allowed to enter the holy of holies. As he went beyond the veil, he entered heaven. When he emerged he was coming down from heaven. His role was to link heaven and earth.

Outside the holy of holies he wore a coloured vestment woven in the same way as the temple veil. *Both fabrics represented matter.* The high priest in the temple and outside in its courts represented the presence of the LORD clothed in matter, Incarnation. Just before Jesus was born, Herod was refurbishing the temple, and a new veil was made. Mary was one of the temple weavers, and the story is told that she was making the new veil while she was pregnant. The symbolism was not lost

⁴¹ Hecataeus, quoted in Diodorus of Sicily XL.3.5-6. As a Gentile, he would not have been allowed into the temple, but it was possible to look down into the temple courts from the adjacent garrison, as reported in the *Letter of Aristeas* 100.

⁴² Gen.2.15.

⁴³ Rev.4.11.

⁴⁴ Mishnah *Pirke Aboth* 1.2.

on the early Christians, and so the Annunciation ikon shows her spinning the red wool for the new veil.

There are some problems about how high priest was consecrated. The high priest of the family of Aaron was consecrated with a ritual of oil and blood⁴⁵, but the ritual for a Melchizedek priest was different. It is described in Psalm 110 (109) but unfortunately the Hebrew text is damaged. The Greek is clearer, although that too may have been translated from a damaged text. A man from the house of David went into the holy of holies where he was anointed and declared to be Melchizedek. The Greek text is 'I have begotten you', and so the Melchizedek high priest had the title 'Son of God'. The other Hebrew words seem to say that one of his titles was the Morning Star - a title used by Jesus himself at the end of the Book of Revelation: 'I Jesus... am the root and offspring of David, the Bright Morning Star'.⁴⁶

The psalm says that the Melchizedek high priest was 'born' as the divine Son by means of the dew, a temple term for the perfumed anointing oil. This birth in the holy of holies was how the original temple understood resurrection, the moment when a human being moved from mortal life to eternal life, even though continuing to live in a mortal body. In the New Testament, it is texts about temple resurrection in the holy of holies that are quoted of Jesus's resurrection.⁴⁷

The writer of Hebrews emphasised that the Melchizedek high priest was resurrected, but the Aaronite high priest was not. The high priests of the family of Aaron inherited their role through the *death* of their predecessors, but the Melchizedek high priest was resurrected, and his role came through eternal *life*.⁴⁸

Nicodemus represented the second temple teachers who had lost so much of the original temple. He did not understand what Jesus meant when he said: 'Unless one is born anew [*anōthen* also means 'from above'] - he cannot see the Kingdom of God... he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.'⁴⁹

In the holy of holies, the anointed priest-king sat on the throne of the LORD, and his people worshipped him. That is how the Chronicler described the coronation of Solomon.⁵⁰ It was temple convention to describe the human who had become divine with a double title: he was 'the LORD and the king'. The process is not explained, simply stated: this was the mystery of the holy of holies, the divine Unity. St John used the same language, when he saw the throne of God-and-the-Lamb, and the people worshipped him, not *them*.⁵¹

There is an account of the temple anointing in a Slavonic text known as the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*. This describes how a human was transformed in the holy of holies. The Enoch traditions are deposits of temple material, almost certainly from the original temple, but surviving now in many

⁴⁵ Lev.8.

⁴⁶ Rev.22.16.

⁴⁷ See my book *The Risen LORD*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996, pp.1-26.

⁴⁸ Heb.7.11-18.

⁴⁹ John 3.3.

⁵⁰ 1 Chron.29.20-23.

⁵¹ Rev.22.3. There are many examples of this in Revelation.

different collections. The name Enoch just means ‘the initiated one’, and he was a representative high priest figure. There are some fragments of Enoch material among the Dead Sea scrolls, dated to the 3rd century BCE, and some Enoch texts were considered Scripture in the early Church.

Nobody knows for certain the origin of this Slavonic text, the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*. The oldest known copy was made in the 14th century AD. It could have been translated from much older materials, or it could have been composed at any time before that. Either way, it shows how Psalm 110 (109) was understood by someone at that time in old Russia. Enoch entered heaven and stood before the throne. There the LORD commanded the archangel Michael to remove Enoch’s earthly clothing, to anoint him with perfumed oil, and to vest him in the clothes of the LORD’s glory. In temple reality, this was the garment of fine white linen worn in the holy of holies. This was the equivalent of Jesus’s shining white garment that the disciples saw at the Transfiguration. Enoch described the oil as like sweet dew, perfumed with myrrh.⁵² This was the temple oil, the dew of Psalm 110 (109).

Then, said Enoch, ‘I looked at myself and I had become like one of his glorious ones’. Enoch had become an angel. He was an angel high priest, wearing the robes of divine glory. He was born from above, resurrected. The anointed one, the Messiah, the divine Son, *was by definition resurrected*. The Easter miracle confirmed who Jesus was, and the Transfiguration prepared the disciples for what was to come.

It is often said that being the Messiah and being the Son of God were separate until they were joined in the person of Jesus. Traditional temple teaching, however, was that the Messiah was the Son of God. Consider the words of the high priest at Jesus’ trial. ‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’⁵³ For him they were equivalent titles. Jesus himself reminded his Jewish critics of this when they accused him of blasphemy, claiming to be the son of God. Jesus said: ‘Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, “You are blaspheming” because I said “I am the Son of God”’.⁵⁴ This is clearly the consecration of the Melchizedek high priest in the holy of holies. Anointed and begotten in heaven as the divine Son, and then sent out again into the world.

But all this had gone sadly wrong by the time of Jesus. The high priests had been notoriously corrupt for many years. Faithful Jews said that the old proverb ‘the years of the wicked are short’⁵⁵ applied to the them, and the Wicked Priest was a prominent figure in the Dead Sea scrolls. This was not just one high priest; it was the name given to all the Jerusalem high priests at that time. One of the Dead Sea scrolls says they were trapped the three nets of evil: fornication, love of money and profaning the temple.⁵⁶

⁵² 2 Enoch 22.

⁵³ Mark 14.61.

⁵⁴ John 10.36.

⁵⁵ Prov.10.27; Babylonian Talmud *Yoma* 9.a

⁵⁶ *Damascus Document* IV.

It would have been dangerous for the early Christians to claim Jesus as the great, that is, the true, high priest, but Jesus claimed this for himself, as we have seen.

There was a fashion, some years ago, for New Testament scholars to say that all the claims about Jesus were fabricated by the early Christian community, and that Jesus himself would have been surprised at what they made of him. There is good evidence in the gospels that Jesus did see himself as the great high priest, and that his ministry was shaped by that ideal.

One task that only the high priest could perform was the blood-offering ritual on the day of atonement. He had to take the blood of a goat into the holy of holies, and when he emerged, he had to sprinkle the blood around the temple. This was the symbolic purification of the temple - 'to cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleanness of the people'⁵⁷ and it was called 'making atonement'. Details of this sprinkling ritual have survived. One is that the high priest had to 'sprinkle the blood as though wielding a whip.'⁵⁸

Jesus cleansed the temple. The synoptic gospels have this at the beginning of holy week, but St John set it symbolically at the start of Jesus' ministry. Jesus cleansed the temple, said St John, with a whip of cords.⁵⁹ This is a clear reference to the day of atonement, and a sign that Jesus was fully aware of his role as the true high priest and that his ministry was to cleanse and restore the temple. The temple authorities also recognised what he was doing. St Mark records: 'The chief priests and scribes heard it and sought a way to destroy him; for they feared him, because all the multitude was astonished as his teaching '⁶⁰

This invites us to look closely at other symbolic actions in Jesus's ministry, in the light of the role of the high priest.

The greatest of Jesus's symbolic acts was at the Last Supper, when he took bread and wine from the table and made of them something entirely new. There would have been many other items on a Passover table - if it was a Passover table: bitter herbs, roasted lamb, salt water and the mixture of nuts and fruit. Jesus took just wine and bread.

Many details of temple ritual are lost, but we know that the goat sacrificed on the day of atonement represented the LORD. Again, the prescription in Leviticus is usually translated differently from the way people understood it in the time of Jesus. The ritual required two goats, 'one for Azazel and one for the LORD.'⁶¹ This translation implies that the people had to make an offering to Azazel, the chief of the fallen angels, which is very unlikely. But the Hebrew here can [and does] mean something different. It means that the two goats *represented* Azazel and the LORD: 'one *as* Azazel and one *as*

⁵⁷ Lev.16.19.

⁵⁸ Mishnah *Yoma* 5.4.

⁵⁹ John 2.15.

⁶⁰ Mark 11.18.

⁶¹ Lev.16.8.

the LORD.’ That is how Origen, the great Christian biblical scholar, understood the words, and he had contact with Jewish scholars in Caesarea in the early third century.⁶²

The goat representing the evil one was banished to the desert - the scapegoat - but the one representing the LORD was sacrificed and its blood used to make atonement, to cleanse the temple. This ancient ritual symbolised the LORD cleansing and reconsecrating the temple. In addition, blood represented life, not death, in temple ritual, and so the ritual that only the high priest could perform was the LORD giving his own life to cleanse and reconsecrate the temple. The temple, as we have seen, represented the whole creation.

This was how the high priests renewed the eternal covenant, the most fundamental and yet most neglected of all the covenants described in the Old Testament. The eternal covenant was entrusted to the high priests. Much has been written about the covenant with Noah, with Abraham, with David, and above all about the covenant made at Sinai through Moses. But the greatest covenant, renewed and upheld by temple rituals, was the eternal covenant, the covenant of peace, and this is rarely even mentioned. Renewing this covenant at the beginning of each year was the most important duty of the high priest.

The eternal covenant was not a promise or an agreement as were the other Old Testament covenants. It was imagined as the system of bonds that held the creation in being. The Hebrew words for covenant, creation and binding are closely related⁶³. Sin was, by definition, anything that broke those bonds, whether done deliberately or in ignorance, and so one of the duties of a priest was to protect the covenant by giving right teaching. The priest was an angel [a messenger, the same word in Hebrew] of the LORD, and so a priest who neglected his teaching or gave false teaching was a fallen angel.⁶⁴

Isaiah was one of many prophets who had a vision of the covenant collapsing. He saw the heavens and the earth wilting under the weight of pollution [he does use that word!], because people had transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the eternal covenant. Therefore a curse was devouring the earth.⁶⁵

Since the temple represented the creation, any sin against the creation was deemed to pollute the temple, and so when the high priest cleansed and consecrated the temple at new year, he was cleansing the whole creation, including human society, from the effects of human sin. The eternal covenant was renewed. by taking away the effects of human sin.

In Hebrew, however, ‘new’ and ‘renew’ are the same word.⁶⁶ In renewing the covenant, the high priest was making it new.

⁶² Celsus 6.43.

⁶³ Covenant is *b^erît*, bind is [*bārāh*] and create is *bārā*’.

⁶⁴ Mal.2.5-8.

⁶⁵ Isa.24.4-6.

⁶⁶ Renew, [*hādaš*]; new, *hādāš*.

The greatest of Jesus's symbolic actions was at the Last Supper. The two things he took from the table - the bread and the wine, symbolised the role of the high priest: the bread of the presence that nourished his holiness, a sign of the eternal covenant; and blood from the day of atonement that renewed the eternal covenant. The synoptic gospels say that Jesus took bread and wine from a Passover table, but performing this symbolic action at Passover time has often distracted attention away from the high priestly symbolism of his actions. The high priest was not involved in the Passover sacrifice. Passover was the only temple sacrifice *not* offered by a priest; in the time of Jesus, the lambs were killed in the temple courtyard by the heads of families.⁶⁷ Passover symbolism is unlikely to have been the complete meaning of Jesus's high priestly actions.

First Jesus took bread, which he said was himself.⁶⁸ The earliest Christians understood that this bread was the bread of the presence, eaten by the priests each Sabbath as their most holy food.

Then he took the wine and said: 'This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for the putting away of sins'. This is how St Matthew records the words.⁶⁹ Which covenant was this? The covenant with Noah, with Abraham, with David and at Sinai were not for the putting away of sins. The removal/putting away of sins had been the purpose of the day of atonement, when the blood that represented the life of the LORD cleansed and reconsecrated the temple and the whole creation.

And then Jesus told the disciples to drink the wine as his blood. Now to drink blood, even symbolically, seems a very unJewish commandment, and so sceptics have said that Jesus cannot have said this. Temple regulations, however, show that drinking some blood was the priests' role on the day of atonement.

St Barnabas, a temple Levite who was St Paul's companion on his first missionary journey,⁷⁰ left details in his Epistle of a temple practice on the day of atonement which explains the blood-drinking. The priests who assisted with the sacrifice had to eat the central portion of the sacrificed animal – some of the entrails, offal and fat.⁷¹ In all other cases, the 'LORD's portion', as it was called, was burned, but on the day of atonement, said to St Barnabas, it was eaten raw and unwashed that is, with the blood. It was mixed with sour wine,⁷² and this is why all the gospels say Jesus drank some vinegar as he was dying. He was showing that he was the true day of atonement sacrifice, the high priest offering himself, not an animal substitute as had been the temple custom. The central portion of the sacrifice was removed and mixed with sour wine and eaten by the priests as part of the renewal of the eternal covenant.

The writer of Hebrews, who described Jesus as a great high priest explained this too. He said that the temple - furnishings and rituals - had foreshadowed what was to come. He emphasised that Jesus fulfilled what the day of atonement had foreshadowed: 'taking not the blood of goats and calves, but

⁶⁷ Mishnah *Pesahim* 5.6.

⁶⁸ Matt.26.26.

⁶⁹ Matt. 26.28.

⁷⁰ Acts 4.36; 13.2.

⁷¹ Lev.4.8-10.

⁷² *Letter of Barnabas* 7.

his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.’ Therefore Jesus was the mediator of a new covenant.⁷³

Jesus’s symbolic actions at the Last Supper were those of the great high priest.

When Constantine had a great church built at the site of Jesus’s tomb, it was a conscious replacement for the temple. The proportions [not the actual design] of the new church were those of the temple⁷⁴ and it was consecrated in 335 CE on the date when Solomon consecrated the original temple.⁷⁵ Eusebius said the holy of holies was the cave tomb.⁷⁶

Now there was no place for a tomb in temple symbolism. The holy of holies had been the place of the ark and the throne with its flanking cherubim and seraphim, the place whence living water flowed. It was the golden place of divine light, the place where the human entered and was resurrected as the divine Son.

Not long after this great church had been built to mark the site of the resurrection, the symbolism of the tomb as the holy of holies was used in the divine liturgy. It may have been used before that - I do not know of any evidence - but Constantine’s new church could have been the inspiration. The tomb of Christ was the holy of holies in the new temple, the life-giving place, fairer than Paradise, more splendid than any king’s throne room, the fountain of new life.

The Church was beyond any doubt the new temple. It was proclaimed as such from the beginning, and Christian theology developed from temple theology. Christians are the anointed ones of the restored temple, and our covenant is the eternal covenant entrusted to the ancient temple priesthood, renewed by our great High Priest.

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⁷³ Heb.9.11-15.

⁷⁴ See J Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, 3rd Edn Warminster 1999, p. 62.

⁷⁵ *It.Egeriae* 48.1; 1 Kgs/3 Kms 8.2, 62.

⁷⁶ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.28.