

church at the close of the twentieth century it has serious implications for all engaged in ministry within the church. It prompts the encouragement of the contemplative dimension as a foremost priority in any training for ministry. It gives prominence to engagement with the marginalised as a keynote ministry within the church beneficial for members in a reciprocal dynamic of transformation. It requires a re-engagement with the classical spiritual tradition and a reappropriation of the treasures therein for contemporary availability. It may cause the church to be reinvigorated by this dual engagement with its own spiritual depths in the interior lives of its members, and its own renewed tradition; and with the contemporary manifestation of the presence of God amongst the marginalised. Real reconciliation between the church and those on the urban margins will not occur until there is a valuing of the experience of God already at work there.

## Signs and Symbols of Sacred Reality in Old Testament Religion

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In this paper, I propose to deal with various sacred realities that helped the people of Israel deepen their relationship with God over the years: the Ark of the Covenant, the desert Tabernacle, the Temple, the Sabbath and other feasts, the synagogue, religious meals and creation itself.

### **The Ark of the Covenant**

Of all the sacred objects of Old Testament Religion, the one that must have ranked among the most sacred was the Ark of the Covenant. It was constructed at Sinai, according to the instructions of the Lord, from acacia wood (Ex. 25.10ff.). It was a box two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide and one and a half cubits high. It contained the two tablets of the law (1 Kings 8.9), a jar of manna and Aaron's rod (Ex. 16.33; Heb. 9.4). It was covered by a gold plate called the *kapporet* (the mercy seat) at either end of which, facing each other, there were cherubim. The Ark was not only a powerful symbol of the Sinai covenant, it was also a location of divine presence "There I will meet with you..." (Ex. 25.22).

The cultures surrounding Israel provide some insight into the cultic thought that lay behind the construction of the Ark. In the Ancient Near

East there was a custom whereby a treaty document was often placed in a container which served as the footstool for a deity. Thus the decalogue was placed in its container, the Ark, and this then became God's footstool.

### **The Tabernacle**

The ark was housed in the Tabernacle or the Tent of Meeting. This too was constructed according to divine specifications. In addition to the Ark, it contained an incense altar, a table, and a seven light lampstand. The Tabernacle became the central place of communication between God and Moses (Ex. 33.7–11; Num. 11.16–30; 12.1–16). Its late description is clearly coloured by the Jerusalem Temple of which it was considered the forerunner. This does not mean, however, that the Tabernacle was merely a projection of the Temple into Israel's nomadic past: it is reasonable to suppose that nomadic and amphictyonic premonarchic Israel had a tent shrine. The portable and mobile qualities of this shrine have led some to compare it to the *qubbah*, a pre-Islamic portable shrine of the Arab Bedouin, which was carried from place to place as the nomads moved and which was used for water divination and as a war palladium.

There are two traditions relating to God's presence in the Tabernacle. According to the Priestly tradition (Ex. 40:34ff.) the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle as soon as it was constructed and apparently continued to be present guiding the Israelites as to how long they should stay in a particular place and when they should move. According to the Elohist tradition the cloud would descend only for the duration of specific encounters (Ex. 33.7–11; Num. 11.16–30; 12.1–16).

### **The Temple**

King David brought the Ark from Kiriath-jearim to Jerusalem and intended to build a house in which it could rest: he did not consider it proper that he should reside in a house of cedar while the Ark of God dwelt in a tent. God informed him through the prophet Nathan that this house would be built by his son Solomon. It fell to David, however, to select the site, to receive the divine blueprint and to amass large quantities of materials (1 Chron. 28 & 29).

#### *Description*

The Temple built by Solomon had three main sections. The first appears to have been an open-air vestibule. The second section, the Hekal or nave, was 40 cubits long, 20 cubits wide and 30 cubits high. This was the biggest of the three main rooms and was the place where most of the cultic activity of the Temple took place. It was approached through elaborate double-hung cypress doors. Its walls were paneled in carved cedar and its floor was of cypress so that no stonework was to be seen. The furnishings of the nave included an altar of incense, ten lampstands, a table on which the bread of Presence was placed and also possibly a Menorah. The third section of the Temple, the *debir* or Holy of Holies, the

inner sanctuary was a perfect cube measuring 20 cubits. This was separated from the nave by double-hung olive wood doors and also by a large curtain, the Temple veil, of blue, purple and crimson fabrics. The Holy of Holies, like the nave, was paneled in carved cedar overlaid with much gold and the floor was of cypress covered with gold. Within the Holy of Holies two cherubim of olive wood, ten cubits in height, faced the nave. Their wings were spread: the wing span of each being ten cubits so they spanned the entire width of the inner sanctuary. When the Temple was consecrated the Ark was placed under the wings of the cherubim. In the courtyard there was an enormous basin, 5 cubits high and 10 cubits in diameter in which the priests washed. It was called "the sea" and it rested on four sets of three oxen. In addition, there were ten smaller lavers and altars for sacrifice.

The Temple of Solomon was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC. It was rebuilt and rededicated by 515. Although this second Temple was a more modest building than that built by Solomon it lasted longer, almost five centuries. It was replaced by the splendid Temple, which was built by Herod, who adhered to the dimensions of the Temple of Solomon but who extended the courtyard by constructing an enormous platform and who added much gold adornment to the external walls of the Temple. The most significant difference between the two post-exilic Temples and the earlier Temple of Solomon was the absence of the Ark. This disappeared when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 587 BC.

### **Significance of the Temple**

The Temple which Solomon built, like the temples in the Ancient Near East, was primarily an earthly dwelling place for God. It was a place where the priests served him rather than a place where worshippers assembled. It was not a very big building. Its nave, which measured about 20 x 10 yards, could have accommodated a congregation of no more than a few of hundred. When the people came to worship they were admitted only to the Temple courtyard: it was in the courtyard that the masses were expected to worship and pray. When Jesus and the apostles visited the Temple, they would not have been permitted beyond the courtyard of Israel.

The Temple was the holiest place on earth primarily because it was God's dwelling place. It not only represented heaven, it was heaven as well as being earth. Thus the psalmist says: "The Lord is in his holy Temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven" (Ps. 11.4; see also Hab. 2.20 and Jer. 8.19). The Deuteronomists, however, were unhappy with descriptions of God's literal presence in the Temple; they preferred to speak about God's name being there: "He shall build a house for my name" (2 Sam. 7.13).

Another feature that the Jerusalem Temple shared with other Ancient Near Eastern temples and that contributed to its mystique was a cosmic significance.<sup>1</sup> The site that it occupied was deemed to have been the very site from which God brought order into creation. The rock on which it was built was portrayed as the one that originally stopped and controlled the flow of the subterranean waters. The Temple furnishings and decor

accordingly reflected the belief that the Temple site was originally the site of the Garden of Eden. The walls of the *Hekal* were thus adorned with trees and flowers, the tree of life was represented there by the menorah<sup>2</sup> and the inner sanctuary had its cherubim (cf. Gen. 3.24).

Furthermore, Philo, Josephus and later sources see in the actual layout of the Temple complex a cosmic significance. The courtyard which surrounded the Temple and in which there was an enormous bronze basin, half the width of the temple and significantly called "the sea", represented the sea that surrounded the stable earth. The *Hekal* represented the earth and the Holy of Holies represented the heavens.

Mount Zion too was regarded as having cosmic significance: in the cosmologies of the Ancient Near East the place of creation was often envisaged to have been a cosmic mountain, the home of the gods. Ps. 48.1 depicts Mount Zion, where God dwells in his Temple, as such a mountain.

History too played its part in the process which led to the Temple being regarded as the holiest place on earth. The rock upon which the Holy of Holies was built was credited with various historical associations. It was from this rock that dust was scraped for the creation of Adam. It was from this point that the waters of Noah's flood gushed forth. It was on this rock that sacrifice was offered by Adam, Cain and Abel. It was here that Abraham met Melchizedek and it was also on this rock that he proposed to sacrifice Isaac. It was here that Jacob had slept when he saw the ladder that reached up to heaven.

### **Holiness Protocol**

The holiness of the inner sanctuary was highlighted in the case of the desert Tabernacle by its being separated from the rest of the enclosure by a special elaborate veil (Ex. 26.33). A similar veil separated the inner sanctuary of the Temple from its nave (2 Chron. 3.14). "Its length was forty cubits and its breadth twenty cubits; it was made by eighty-two young girls and they used to make two every year" (Mishnah, *Shekalim* 8.5). Since the Holy of Holies represented heaven and the nave represented the earth, the veil represented the boundary between heaven and earth, between the sphere of the divine and the sphere of the human. This differentiation was further highlighted in the requirement that the high priest was to wear different vestments when entering the Holy of Holies from those he wore in the *Hekal*. "The high priest dressed to represent the universe when he functioned in the *Hekal*, the earth, but when he passed through the veil into the Holy of Holies, into heaven, he wore linen garments (Lev. 16.4). The white linen garment was the dress of the angels, given to favoured human beings upon their ascent to heaven. Frequently in both the Old Testament and the later apocalypses, the 'men in white' were the angels, often the archangels".<sup>3</sup>

The holiness of the inner sanctuary is also highlighted in the gradation of furnishings and decor and especially in the gradation of courtyards in the Temple of Herod. First, there was the courtyard of the Gentiles, which was accessible to all. This was divided from the rest of the courtyards by a

balustrade with inscriptions warning Gentiles under pain of death not to proceed into the interior courts. Five steps above the court of the Gentiles was the court of the women, beyond which women were forbidden to pass. Five steps higher than this was the court of Israel which was as far as non-priestly Jewish men could go. The nearest courtyard to the Temple was the courtyard of the priests. This was accessible to all priests. The Hekal, twelve steps higher and beyond the Vestibule, was, however, accessible only to designated priests and the Holy of Holies was off limits for all except the High Priest and to him on all days of the year except the Day of Atonement.

### *Sacrifice*

The Temple cult was a sacrificial cult. The Mishnah paints a vivid picture of some aspects of this in the later years of the Temple. Before daybreak the priests are awakened. Lots are drawn to divide the early morning chores at the altar of burnt offerings. The priest whose task it is to clear the ashes washes his hands and feet in the great laver. He then climbs up to the altar carrying a silver pan for the cinders. He works in the twilight, helped by the light of the cinders. Other priests help with the removal of the ashes and with gathering any pieces of burnt offerings which had survived the night. Two new fires are lit on the altar. Lots are then cast to decide who is to slaughter, who is to sprinkle blood ... As dawn begins to break a lamb (on the Sabbath two) is taken from the lambs' compound. It is inspected by torchlight for impurities and given a drink from a golden cup. It is slaughtered at the north side of the altar. Its blood is splashed on the four sides of the altar and what remains is poured at the base. The lamb is skinned, dismembered and its entrails are washed. It is then taken by six priests to the Altar and these are followed by priests carrying offerings of fine flour, baked cakes and wine. Lots were also cast for duties inside the Temple such as clearing the altar of incense and refuelling the lamps. Incense was offered morning and evening. For incense offerings a shovelful of cinders was taken from the altar of holocausts, incense was sprinkled on them and they were placed on the altar of incense in front of the Holy of Holies. The moment of offering incense was one when all in the Temple stopped to pray (cf. Luke 1. 8–10). As the priests emerged, they blessed the people from the Temple steps. By New Testament Times there was a daily burnt offering in the evening as well as the morning: the lamb being killed at about 2.30 p.m. and offered about an hour later.

The sacrificial activity of the post-exilic Temple extended far beyond the daily morning and evening perpetual (tamid) sacrifices. During the course of the day sacrificial facilities were offered to the public by the Temple personnel. Lev. 1–7 mentions five main types of sacrifice: holocausts, cereal offerings, communion sacrifices, sin offerings and sacrifices of reparation.

## Feasts

*There are three feasts that are called pilgrimage feasts in the O. T.: Passover, Pentecost and Tents. Jews, who were able, were expected to go as pilgrims to Jerusalem to celebrate these.*

1. Passover. The feasts of unleavened bread and Passover seem to have been originally separate feasts. The former the feast of an agricultural way of life, the latter the feast of nomads. These were originally celebrated as harvest feasts in a domestic setting before undergoing three phases of development. First, they became historicized in that they became individually associated with the establishment of Israel as God's covenanted people. Secondly, in the days of Josiah, Passover like the feast of unleavened bread was designated a pilgrimage feast. Thirdly, they were joined together and celebrated as one feast.

The Mishnah (*Pesahim* 5.5-10), describes the scene in the Temple as the Passover lambs were killed. Because of the large numbers, there were three sessions. Each session began with three blows of the ram's horn. As each man came forward and killed his lamb the blood was caught by a priest in a gold or silver bowl. This bowl was then passed along the line of priests that extended from the place of slaughter to the altar. The blood, which in the earlier days of the feast was sprinkled on tent poles and later on doorposts, was now poured out at the base of the altar. The lamb was then skinned and divided according to the regulations for a communion sacrifice or peace offering. This means that the person offering the sacrifice took the part that belonged to him away for a Passover meal to be shared by his family and any guests.

2. The Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. The ritual for this feast involved the offering of two loaves of *leavened* bread in sacrifice to mark the end of the wheat harvest. The leavened bread of Pentecost provides a contrast to the unleavened bread of Passover seven weeks previously.

3. The Feast of Tents or Ingathering. This was a joyful feast during which the people from very early times came together to thank God for the fruits of the earth and especially for the olives and grapes that had just been pressed. It was during this feast that Solomon dedicated the Temple (1 King's 8.2).

The Mishnaic tractate, *Sukkah*, provides a description of the ceremonies of Sukkah. They included, intercession for abundant rain which took the form of morning processions from the fountain of Gihon with water which was poured out at the altar of holocausts and a ceremony of light which involved the lighting of the four golden candlesticks in the Courtyard of the Women. This was the setting during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem in which Jesus was to promise "rivers of living water (Jn 7.38) and in which he proclaimed that "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8.12).<sup>4</sup>

The Day of Atonement seems to have developed in the last centuries of Old Testament times. The High Priest, having washed his entire body and having dressed in linen, makes three visits to the Holy of Holies, on this the only day in the year when a mortal enters the inner sanctuary. He

enters first to offer incense, then to offer the blood of a bull for his own sins and those of his house, and finally to offer the blood of a goat, chosen by lots for the Lord, for the sins of the people. When he had finished the blood ritual, he emerged and placed his hands on the head of a second goat that was chosen for Azazel: by this act he transferred to him the sins of Israel. The goat was then taken out to the desert to the realm of Azazel (probably a desert demon). This is a feast that is consistent with the prophets' emphasis on the reality of sin and of the need for repentance. The ritual of the Day of Atonement had popular appeal. It clearly answered a perceived need. It was adapted after the destruction of the Temple and introduced into the synagogue where it is perceived as the holiest day in the year to this day.

### **The Synagogue**

In the post-exilic period the synagogue, which was an original creation of Judaism unlike the Temple which was a creation of the Ancient Near East, became a very significant factor in Jewish life and worship. It provided a meeting point between God and his people through a liturgy of the word just as the Temple had done through its sacrificial liturgy. The custom of reading first an extract from the Torah (*parashah*) and then an extract that corresponded to it in some way from the prophets (*haftarah*) followed by a homiletic commentary (*derashah*) in which the preacher applied the Word of God to the lives of his hearers was already widespread in synagogues in New Testament times (Acts 13.15; Lk. 4.16–19) and probably for some considerable time prior to that. The Benedictions which precede and follow the reading of the Torah in the current synagogue prayer book end with the words "Blessed art thou, O Lord, *noten* (giving i.e. giver) of the Torah". The use of a present participle to describe God's giving of the Torah highlights the belief that God speaks today to his people when the Torah is read. This belief is paralleled in the Catholic understanding of the Liturgy of the Word<sup>5</sup> — a belief that the first generation of Christians undoubtedly took with them from the synagogue.

### **Domestic Liturgy**

The other great meeting place between man and God in Old Testament Religion was the home. The father, in obedience to the Torah (Deut. 6.7; 11.19; 32.46f), handed the Law of God on to his children. As was also expected of him (Ex. 12.26f.; Deut. 6.20–24; Josh. 4.6f.) he explained the meaning of the Passover and of God's choice of Israel. The faith was also handed on in domestic liturgies. The most important of these was the Passover when Jewish households, in accordance with Ex. 12.3f., relived the central event of their faith history, the Exodus. The Sabbath, which is accorded such an important place in observant Jewish homes today, took on new significance during the period of the Babylonian captivity and after. It came to be celebrated by a Sabbath morning liturgy of the word in the synagogue and by an eve of Sabbath religious meal in the home. The

three main rites of the current Sabbath domestic liturgy: the lighting of the lamps, the special blessing and sharing of bread and wine (the *qiddush*) and the ceremony that marks the end of Sabbath (the *havdalah*) go back as far as the Second Temple Period.<sup>6</sup>

### Creation

Creation too turned the Israelite eye heavenwards as is evident from so many of the Psalms e.g. Ps. 19.1. This frequently led to *berakah*, the prayer of benediction, wherein the person who was praying blessed God for his gifts e.g. Ps 104.1–3.

*Berakah*, the prayer of benediction, expresses an attitude of awe, praise and appreciation to God for his gifts. The world is seen as gift, God is seen as giver and other human beings as brothers and sisters. *Berakah* is a frequent form of prayer throughout the Old and New Testaments: it is frequently, for example, on the lips of Jesus and is very prominent in the introductions to Paul's epistles. The traditional *berakah* formula is preserved in the two offertory blessings of the *Missa Normativa*: "Blessed are you Lord God of all creation ..." The *berakah* mentality is preserved in the Christian eucharistic mentality which thanks God for all of life's blessings and which sees created reality as gift from God and as something to be shared by others. There is a difference, however, between the traditional *berakah* formula and many of our Catholic blessing formulae: "a *berakah* does not have for its purpose to give a thing certain powers or qualities which it did not have before, although this is the meaning which 'bless' has acquired in the Christian tradition, where 'to bless' means 'to bless things' rather than 'to bless God for the things which he has given us.'"<sup>7</sup>

### Conclusion

Many of the elements dealt with above have echoes in New Testament thought e.g. in the Letter to the Hebrews where the author tries to understand Jesus' salvific work in terms of Temple ritual, in John's Gospel where the Jewish feasts play such a significant structural part and in the account of the Visitation where St. Luke depicts Mary as the new Ark of the Covenant: she who has within her the *shekinah*, before whom Elizabeth utters the *teruwah*, and before whom John the Baptist leaps in the womb just as David had danced before the Ark. Many of the elements of Old Testament religion that pointed its practitioners in the direction of God were also taken over by the first Christians. The length of this paper permits just a few examples. The first part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word, with its *lectio continua*, homily, petitions and doxologies, had its origin in the first century synagogues. The second part of the Mass, the liturgy of the Eucharist, had its origins at Jewish family tables where bread and wine were frequently blessed. The Christian concept of *anamnesis* corresponds to the Jewish concept of *zikkaron* through which God's great saving deeds were not only recalled but also relived through participation in ritual meals. The format of many of our prayers, our times



of prayer and the major feasts of Easter and Pentecost likewise have roots in Judaism and have parallels in synagogue worship to this day. It is therefore right and fitting that we acknowledge that one of the great influences on our sacramental system and our modes of worship has been Old Testament Religion.

- 1 The case for this has been well presented by R. Patai, *Man and Temple in Ancient Myth and Ritual* (Ktav 1967) and M. Barker, *The Gate of Heaven* (SPCK 1991).
- 2 Thus understood for example by the author of 2 Enoch 8. 3-4 and by Philo (Sic M. Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, p. 92).
- 3 M Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*, p. 113.
- 4 See R. Browne, *The Gospel of John*, Anchor Bible (Doubleday 1966), ad. loc.
- 5 *The General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, art. 33: "In the readings, which are interpreted by the homily, God speaks to his people, reveals to them the mysteries of redemption and salvation, and Christ himself, in the form of his Word, is present in the midst of the faithful".
- 6 The lighting of the lamps "is almost certainly pre-Maccabean in origin" and the other two rites (the *qiddush* and the *havdalah*) are traced by rabbinical tradition to the Men of the Great Assembly (c. fifth century B.C.) sic C. Di Sante, *Jewish Prayer: the origins of Christian Liturgy* (Paulist Press translation 1991), pp. 154 & 157.
- 7 C. Di Sante, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

## **Sacraments and Society An Anthropologist Asks, What Women Could be Doing in the Church?**

Mary Douglas

The sacraments raise controversy at every turn, no matter which one of the seven we think of. There is no end to hot debate on pastoral issues.

For example, why has Penance taken a back seat of late? Is it because we sin less? Or do we have less sense of sin? If so, why should it be so? Or are we more forgiving and therefore take it for granted that God is more forgiving? As to the Eucharist, why cannot any one receive communion, whether they are baptised Catholics or believing Christians or outright pagans? Would it not do them good, whatever their condition? Does Marriage really matter? Why does Ordination rule out Marriage? How often can the Last Sacrament be given? Why is Ordination the only gender-exclusive sacrament? I have left out Confirmation and Baptism, but we can ask why the Catholic Church