

# TEMPLE CHRISTOLOGY IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN<sup>1</sup>

Mark S. Kinzer

Ann Arbor, Michigan

© Mark S. Kinzer

The Gospel of John is without question the most Temple-centered of the canonical Gospels. Much of the action in the first half of the book occurs in or around the Temple, and the discourses liberally employ imagery drawn from the feasts of Israel and their associated Temple rites. John depicts Jesus as the one in whom Israel's worship reaches its appointed goal.

John's cultic concern has as its focal point a portrayal of Jesus as the Temple of God. This is not one among many cultic images in John, but instead serves as the integrating center of his cultic Christology. When given its rightful prominence, John's Temple Christology sheds light on other Johannine themes, such as the depiction of Jesus as incarnate Wisdom, who bears the divine Name and Glory, and offers those who come to him a vision of the invisible God. This Christology also may help locate the Johannine tradition within the wider Jewish world of the first-century.

## Key Texts in Johannine Temple Christology<sup>2</sup>

The prologue of the Gospel announces the theme of Temple Christology (or, in this case, Tabernacle Christology) from the book's outset. The enfleshment of the Logos is his way of "dwelling" or "tabernacling" in this world, so as to make visible the divine "Glory" (1:14). This "Glory," the *Kavod/Doxa* of the Priestly tradition (and the *Shekhinah* of Rabbinic tradition), may also be echoed by the "true light" of verses 4-5, 7-9.<sup>3</sup>

The theme is picked up again at the end of chapter 1, as Jesus promises Nathaniel that he will see heaven opened and angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is found in the 1998 Seminar Papers (Part One) of the Society of Biblical Literature (447-64)

<sup>2</sup> Many of the texts that follow are assembled and analyzed in J. McCaffrey, *The House With Many Rooms: The Temple Theme of Jn. 14,2-3* (Analecta Biblica 114; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988) 222-45.

<sup>3</sup> On John 1:14 and the Tabernacle, see E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London, Faber and Faber, 1947) 147-48, and R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, Vols. 1 and 2* (New York: Doubleday, 1966, 1970) 1.32-34. C. R. Koester (*The Dwelling of God* [Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989] 105-6) argues against seeing an allusion to the *Shekhinah* in John 1:14, but his case is unconvincing. It is likely that John 1:14 draws upon a targumic tradition reflected in the targum on Isaiah 6, which renders verse 5 as "my eyes have seen the glory of the *Shekhinah* of the eternal king, the LORD of hosts." See C. A. Evans, *Word and Glory* (JSNT Supplement Series 89; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 133-4.

The Son of Man is here presented as the new Beth-El of Jacob's dream, who links earth and heaven. This text likely presumes the tradition preserved in Rabbinic circles which identifies Beth-El with the Temple mount in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

Chapter 2 tells of Jesus' visit to the Temple at Passover and of his ejection of the merchants and moneychangers from its courts. In this scene Jesus refers to the Temple as "my Father's house" (τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρὸς μου). The evangelist then cites Psalm 69:19, altering the tense of the verb in order to make clear that Jesus' zeal for the Temple will be the proximate cause of his death.<sup>5</sup> Asked by the authorities for a sign to justify his action, Jesus speaks in a veiled manner of his death and resurrection by referring to his body as "this Temple" (2:20). The ironic connection between the death of Jesus and the destruction of the Temple will appear again at the end of the first half of the Gospel (11:48-50).

On his return trip to Galilee, Jesus offers a Samaritan woman "living water" (4:10, 14), a Johannine symbol for the Holy Spirit (7:37-39). He then contrasts worship in this Spirit with the Temple worship of Jerusalem and Gerizim (4:20-24), implying that a new and different kind of Temple is being established.<sup>6</sup> In these five verses the word "worship" appears ten times, leaving no doubt as to the primary theme of the unit.

Chapters 7-10 provide John's most sustained reflection on Jesus as the new Temple. Chapters 7-8 tell of disputes between Jesus and his critics in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles, and portray Jesus as fulfilling key themes of that feast -- he gives "living water" (7:37-39) and is himself "the light of the world" (8:12). The story of the healing of the blind man in Chapter 9, which apparently also has Tabernacles as its setting, is a dramatic enactment of Jesus' claim to be the light of the world (9:5). It also continues the living water symbolism, for the healing occurs as the man washes in the pool of Siloam (the starting point for the procession of the water-drawing ceremony during the Feast of Tabernacles).

These images of light and water are closely tied, not only to the Feast of Tabernacles, but also to the Temple itself. The Temple was illuminated through the nights of the Feast, recalling the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud which led Israel in the wilderness

---

<sup>4</sup> On the various interpretations of this verse, see Brown, 1.90-91. The view that Jesus is here seen as a new Beth-El is argued by I. Fritsch, "'... videbitis ... angelos Dei ascendentes et descendentes super Filium hominis' (Io. 1, 51)," *Verbum Domini* 37 (1959), 3-11. Koester thinks that the connection is weak (105-6). However, it is strengthened substantially when the traditional identification of Beth-El and the Jerusalem Temple mount is taken into account. On this identification, see *Pesiq. R.* 39.2, and M. Aberbach and B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (Denver: Ktav, 1982) 171, note 14. O. Cullmann points out that the Samaritans made a similar interpretive move, identifying Beth-El with their own holy site, Gerizim (*The Johannine Circle* [London: SCM, 1976] 111, note 14).

<sup>5</sup> Brown, 1.124.

<sup>6</sup> Hoskyns sees a link between John 4:20-24 and 1:51 (245). C. H. Dodd (*The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953] 317) and Brown (1.180) note the connection to John 2:13-22.

and which also was identified with the *Kavod/Doxa/Shekhinah* that rested upon the Tabernacle and the Temple. The water of the Spirit which flows from Jesus' heart is presented as a fulfillment of scripture (7:38), and the biblical background for this assertion is probably to be found in the water that flows from the Temple in the Messianic age (Ezek 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8).<sup>7</sup>

In the following chapter Jesus' discourse on the sheepfold concludes with words from the crowd (10:21) which allude back to the healing of the blind man. The scene then shifts suddenly to the Feast of Dedication -- a Feast which in its origins was closely associated with Tabernacles (2 Macc 1:9, 10:6).<sup>8</sup> Jesus is on the Temple mount during the feast which commemorates that Temple's rededication following its contamination by idolatrous worship, and, after words that hearken back to the previous discourse on the sheepfold, he speaks of himself as the one "consecrated and sent into the world" (10:36). He is thus the new and true Temple, consecrated by God himself.<sup>9</sup> His claims to unity with God (10:30) are not to be equated with the blasphemous megalomania of Antiochus, which defiled the house of God, but with the authentic expression of the Divine Presence in the consecrated Temple.<sup>10</sup>

The key texts for Temple Christology in John are found primarily in the prologue and "The Book of Signs" (Jn 1-12). The second half of John does contain one text that some scholars have interpreted as expressing this Christology: "In my Father's house (ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου) are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (14:2).<sup>11</sup> The phrase ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου is almost

---

<sup>7</sup> "Zech xiv 8 had predicted that living waters would flow out of Jerusalem, and Ezek xlvii 1 had seen a river flow from the rock underneath the Temple. But now Jesus says that these rivers of living water will flow from his own body, that body which is the new Temple (ii 21)... (Brown, 1.327). See also Dodd, 349; R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 303; F. J. Maloney, *Signs and Shadows* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 87; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary 36: John* (Waco: Word, 1987) 41. In discussing the miraculous catch of fish described in John 21:1-11, J. H. Charlesworth cites the work of J. A. Emerton and P. Ackroyd that "suggests that the number 153 is a gematriya for En-ge-di and En-eglaim which bring to memory...Ezekiel's vision of waters pouring out of the Temple (*The Beloved Disciple* [Valley Forge: Trinity, 1995] 36, note 31).

<sup>8</sup> The close relationship between the feasts of Tabernacles and Dedication, and the way this relationship allows John to shift from scenes occurring at one to a scene occurring at the other, is recognized by Hoskyns, 385, and Brown, 1.388-9.

<sup>9</sup> See Moloney, 148-50, 206-7; Hoskyns, 385; Brown, 1.411; Beasley-Murray, 177.

<sup>10</sup> "Jesus, who stands before 'the Jews' in the portico of Solomon in the Temple, points to himself and claims that he is the visible presence of God among them...The claims of the prologue are being acted out in the story of Jesus: 'The Word became flesh and dwelled among us...'...The setting of these words of Jesus within the feast of Dedication determines the reader's understanding that the union between God and the Temple which was seen as God's presence to his people, is perfected in Jesus because of his oneness with the Father...'The Jews' take up stones against Jesus (v. 31), repeating the profanations of Antiochus and his representatives. They are attempting to rid Israel of the visible presence of God in their midst" (Moloney, 147-8).

<sup>11</sup> That this verse should be understood in terms of Temple Christology is the central thesis of McCaffrey.

identical to that used by Jesus in referring to the Temple in John 2:16 (τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρὸς μου). Brown draws the following conclusion:

Thus there would be some precedent for reinterpreting “many dwelling places in my Father’s house” parabolically as possibilities for permanent union with the Father in and through Jesus...without any stress that the union is in heaven – his body is his Father’s house; and wherever the glorified Jesus is, there is the Father.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore John 14:2 may be understood as a refracting of the type of Temple imagery found in Revelation 3:12 or 7:15 through the lens of the evangelist’s Christocentric realized eschatology.

### **Relationship to Other Johannine Themes**

John's Temple Christology serves as a primary vehicle for integrating the book's affirmations about Jesus and Israel's worship. How does this cultic Christology relate to other major Johannine themes? First, it is closely linked to Wisdom Christology. As is generally acknowledged, the figure of personified Wisdom as portrayed in such works as Proverbs, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon is a major component in the formation of John's high Christology. In Sirach 24 Wisdom states that her throne was "in a pillar of cloud" (24:4; see Wis 10:17), and that she sought "a resting place" in all the earth (24:7; see Ps 132:8, 14).

τότε ἐνετείλατό μοι ὁ κτίστης ἀπάντων,  
καὶ ὁ κτίσας με κατέπαυσε τὴν σκηνὴν μου  
καὶ εἶπεν· ἐν Ἰακώβ κατασκήνωσον  
καὶ ἐν Ἰσραὴλ κατακληρονομήθητι.  
πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἔκτισέ με,  
καὶ ἕως αἰῶνος οὐ μὴ ἐκλίπω.  
ἐν σκηνῇ ἁγίᾳ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐλειτούργησα  
καὶ οὕτως ἐν Σιών ἐστηρίχθην·  
ἐν πόλει ἠγαπημένη ὁμοίως με κατέπαυσε,  
καὶ ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἡ ἐξουσία μου·  
καὶ ἐρρίζωσα ἐν λαῷ δεδοξασμένῳ,  
ἐν μερίδι Κυρίου κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ.

Then the Creator of all things gave me a command,  
and my Creator chose the place for my tent.  
He said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob,  
and in Israel receive your inheritance.'  
Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me,  
and for all the ages I shall not cease to be.  
In the holy tent I ministered before him,  
and so I was established in Zion.  
Thus in the beloved city he gave me a resting place,  
and in Jerusalem was my domain.  
I took root in an honored people,  
in the portion of the Lord, his heritage.<sup>13</sup>

In later verses Sirach will depict Wisdom as having her earthly embodiment in the Torah. However, in these verses she is clearly portrayed as the *Kavod* or the *Shem*, the divine presence in the Jerusalem temple (see Ps 132,<sup>14</sup> which is echoed in Sir 24:8-12).<sup>15</sup> This provides the background for John 1:14, which presents the humanity of Jesus as the fleshly tent of the Logos.

A second Johannine theme that relates both to Temple Christology and Wisdom Christology is John's view of Jesus as the bearer of the divine Name and Glory. That Jesus is the recipient of the Name is implicit in the "I Am" sayings which characterize the Johannine discourses, and is made explicit in the intercessory prayer of John 17 (verses 6, 11, 26).<sup>16</sup> Jesus is also the custodian of the divine Glory, which in John 17 is identified

---

<sup>12</sup> 2.627.

<sup>13</sup> Sirach 24:8-12 (RSV).

<sup>14</sup> LXX Psalm 131.13-14:

ὅτι ἐξελέξατο Κύριος τὴν Σιών,  
ἠρετίσατο αὐτὴν εἰς κατοικίαν ἑαυτῶ·  
αὕτη ἡ κατάπαυσίς μου εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος,  
ᾧδε κατοικήσω, ὅτι ἠρετισάμην αὐτήν·

<sup>15</sup>In Sirach 24:2 and 4 Wisdom is also described in language usually reserved for angels ("In the assembly of the Most High she will open her mouth, and in the presence of his host she will glory... I dwelt in high places, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud."). Philo speaks of the Logos in a similar way. Both Sirach and Philo may be drawing upon traditions that equated the Angel of the Lord with the *Kavod/Shem/Shekhinah* which resided in the Temple and possessed a human form. If such views were extant, it is likely that John 12:41 also draws upon them. On the existence of such traditions during the Second Temple period, see J. Fossum, "The Magharians: A Pre-Christian Jewish Sect and its Significance for the Study of Gnosticism and Christianity," *Henocho* IX:3 (1987) 303-44.

<sup>16</sup> See Brown, 1.533-38.

with the Name (note the parallelism of verses 22 and 11). As seen above, *Shem* and *Kavod* are cultic terms for the Divine Presence that rested on the Tabernacle/Temple.<sup>17</sup>

A third theme in John connected to Temple Christology concerns the vision of God. According to John, Jesus is the only one who has seen God directly (1:18; 6:46). However, Jesus bears within himself the Divine Glory, and those who see and acknowledge him are seeing the invisible Father (1:18; 12:45; 14:7-9). His ultimate aim for his disciples, as expressed in his intercessory prayer, is "that they may be with me where I am, to behold my Glory which you have given me in your love for me before the foundation of the world" (17:24). This is the vision of "the Glory of God" which is given to those who believe in Jesus (11:40).

In the Hebrew Bible "seeing God" is cultic terminology referring to Temple worship (e.g., Pss 27:4, 63:2, 84:7).<sup>18</sup> That such cultic connections are also implicit in John is supported by John 12:41, which states that "Isaiah said this because he saw his Glory and spoke of him." This is an allusion to Isaiah's Temple vision (Isa 6) in which the prophet is transported from the earthly to the heavenly Temple and beholds YHWH seated on his exalted throne.<sup>19</sup> According to John, the "YHWH" of Isaiah's vision was none other than the pre-incarnate Logos.<sup>20</sup> Thus, before "the Word became flesh and tabernacled" in this world and allowed those who believed to "see his Glory" (1:14), he was enthroned in the heavenly Temple and imparted a vision of God to a chosen prophet who sought him in his earthly Temple. John may be implying here that the Logos was enthroned both in the heavenly Temple and in the Jerusalem Temple, which constituted a point of intersection between earth and heaven. After the incarnation, the humanity of Jesus serves as the earthly Temple, and mediates the vision of God to human beings.

A fourth element in John related to Temple Christology is its way of speaking about "heaven." "Heaven" in John is primarily the place of Jesus' origin and destination (of the twenty times the word appears, fourteen times it is preceded by ε)κ, "from"). It is the place which is "above," as contrasted with "the earth" (3:12, 31) or "the world" (8:23),

---

<sup>17</sup> "For John, Jesus replaces the Tabernacle and the Temple, and so is now the place where God has put His name" (Brown, 2.754).

<sup>18</sup> See J. D. Levenson, "The Jerusalem Temple in Devotional and Visionary Experience," *Jewish Spirituality From the Bible Through the Middle Ages* (ed. A. Green; New York: Crossroad, 1996) 43-46.

<sup>19</sup> The importance of "seeing God" in John, and its association with Isaiah 6, are often produced as evidence that John's Gospel reflects apocalyptic visionary trends in Judaism (C. Rowland, "John 1.51, Jewish Apocalyptic and Targumic Tradition," *NTS* 30 [1984] 498-507) or early Merkavah mysticism (P. Borgen, "God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel," *The Interpretation of John* [ed. J. Ashton; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986] 67-78 [article originally published in 1968]). I am not disputing this view, but instead claiming that visionary apocalypticism and merkavah mysticism themselves originate in a priestly milieu, and that the Gospel of John, like the Qumran literature, supports such a thesis. See S. L. Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> Bultmann, 452-3, note 4; Moloney, 196-7; Brown, 1.486-7; Beasley-Murray, 217; Evans, 133.

which is "below." In earlier scholarship this spatial dualism was seen as a sign of John's Hellenistic background. Recent scholarship has recognized that a similar dualism existed in first century Judaism in the land of Israel. However, it should be noted that this Jewish dualism was mainly cultic in nature: the heavenly priesthood, worship, and temple were seen as archetypes corresponding to their earthly counterparts in Jerusalem (or in a sectarian community).<sup>21</sup>

In one Johannine text Jesus tells his disciples that they will "see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (1:51). As already noted, this verse should be seen as an example of Temple Christology. It also indicates the function of John's Temple Christology: as the Temple linked earth and heaven, so Jesus is now the true and perfect link between earth and heaven. As the Temple offered a vision of God, so now Jesus offers the true and perfect vision of God.

Because he comes from heaven, Jesus is able to reveal heavenly things. However, his mission in John is not to tell about the glorious furnishings, customs, and personages of the heavenly court, but to impart a spiritual vision and mystical knowledge of his Father, who is the substance of all heavenly reality. Such vision and knowledge comes through being "born from above" (3:3). Just as Jesus knows about heavenly things because he comes from heaven and possesses a heavenly nature, so his disciples come to know heavenly things through receiving a new heavenly birth. It is noteworthy that the chapter which probes these matters is the center of a chiastic structure, bordered on one side by the cleansing of the Temple and on the other by the dialogue with the Samaritan woman - both of which portray Jesus as the new and true Temple.<sup>22</sup> It may also be significant that this chapter includes the well-known textual variant which locates the Son of Man as "in heaven" (3:13). As the cosmic link between earth and heaven, the Temple is located

---

<sup>21</sup> See J. Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis* (Salzburg: Otto Muller, 1964) 95-148, and J. D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985) 111-42. "Dualism" may not be the best term to describe this conjunction and correlation of heavenly and earthly spheres, for it implies a radical distancing of the two spheres which was not characteristic of the period except perhaps in certain apocalyptic or philosophical circles.

<sup>22</sup> Brown offers an insightful outline of 2:1 – 4:54, which is largely embodied in what follows, but he does not highlight the chiastic structure of the unit:

- A1 First sign at Cana (2:1-12)
  - B1 Cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem (2:13-25)
    - C Discourse with Nicodemus; the Baptist's Final Witness (3:1-36)
  - B2 Discourse with the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well (4:1-45)
- A2 Second Sign at Cana (4:46-54)

simultaneously in both spheres.<sup>23</sup> If one accepts the variant reading, then John asserts the same of Jesus.

John 3:13 also speaks of Jesus' ascent to heaven: "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man." John claims for Jesus a unique position among the prophets, seers, and mystics of Israel.<sup>24</sup> Apocalyptic, hekhalot, and midrashic texts describe the heavenly ascent of hallowed figures of the past such as Enoch and Moses. This ascent usually entails a journey through the halls of the heavenly Temple. In denying the reality of any heavenly ascent other than that of Jesus, John also implicitly transfers the imagery of the traditional ascent to Jesus' resurrection and ascension (viewed in John as essentially one event). The entry of Jesus into the heavenly Temple is not described by John's Gospel, but we have no reason to doubt that the book presumes something similar to what is found in the Johannine Apocalypse, the Letter to the Hebrews, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*. As John 3:13 and 17:5 both affirm, this is but a return to a former position of "Glory" that he had with God "before the world was made."

The ascent of Jesus is therefore placed within the context of his descent, a theme that is significant in John, especially in chapter 6 (6:33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58). While the primary focus of John 3:13 is a contrast between Jesus and other heavenly travelers, it is possible that the verse also draws upon ideas reflected in later Rabbinic texts concerning the descent and ascent of the *Shekhinah* (*Gen. Rab. 19:7; Abot. R. Nat. 34*) The *Shekhinah* first descends to dwell in the Garden of Eden, but then is driven back to heaven by human sin. It returns again to dwell in the Tabernacle and Temple, only to be driven away once again by Israel's sin. As already noted, in the Gospel of John the death of Jesus is presented as the destruction of "the Temple of his body," resulting from his zeal for his "Father's house" and the enmity of Israel's leaders (2:16-21), and leading ultimately to that which those leaders sought at all costs to avoid – the desolation of the Jerusalem Temple (11:47-53). Thus, the true *Shekhinah* returns to the heavenly Temple,

---

<sup>23</sup> Commenting on Isaiah 6, Levenson states that "The earthly Temple is thus the vehicle that conveys the prophet into the supernal Temple, the real Temple, the Temple of YHWH and his retinue, and not merely the artifacts that suggest them. This Temple is an institution common to the heavenly and the terrestrial realms; they share it...In short, what we see on earth in Jerusalem is simply the earthly manifestation of the heavenly Temple, which is beyond localization" (*Sinai and Zion*, 123, 140). If the main point of this article is valid, we should be able to use the Temple theologies existing in the first-century Jewish world in interpreting the meaning of John's Christology. Jesus' position as the one "from/of heaven" yet "on earth" would be a case in point.

<sup>24</sup> Brown observes that "This verse is another way of stating what is found elsewhere in John, namely, that only Jesus has seen God" (1.145). If we look at this verse in light of John 12:41, which describes Isaiah's heavenly ascent as a vision of the pre-incarnate Logos, we can concur with Brown, and go further still. Not only is Jesus uniquely capable of seeing God; it is also true that others who had apparently ascended to heaven and received such a vision had in fact gazed upon *him*.

but though this return is occasioned by Israel's sin its purpose is not withdrawal but a second descent – that of the Spirit -- which will bring the first descent to fruition.

This brings us to the fifth theme that should be viewed in relationship to John's Temple Christology -- namely, its Pneumatology. Being "born of water and the Spirit" is equivalent in John to being "born from above" (3:3, 5). The connection here between water and Spirit is noteworthy. The focus in the immediate context is on the Spirit (3:6, 8). However, the verses directly following this monologue have as their concern baptism and purification (3:22-26). Water and spirit are linked elsewhere in John (4:7-15, 23-24; 7:38-39). John the Baptist describes Jesus as "He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (1:33). It is also possible that the wine of 2:1-11, which began as water in stone containers used for rites of purification, is intended to be a symbol for the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:13; Eph 5:18). These texts suggest that John sees the Spirit as having a purifying function (Ps 51:10, Ezek 36:25-26; 1QS 3:6-9, 4:20-22). Since the book demonstrates a clear understanding of the relationship between Temple worship and rites of purification (11:55; 18:28), it is likely that John sees the gift of the Spirit as that which brings true purification and allows one to worship in the true Temple. This could explain further why John 3 serves as the center of the chiasm formed by John 2:1 - 4:54, and why the sign at Cana introduces the entire unit.

Thus, for John the Spirit is associated with baptism, and both are further associated with purification. Just as John has greater concern for the Temple and its rites than do the Synoptics, so it also highlights in a unique fashion the priestly concerns of purification (13:8-11; 15:3) and sanctification (10:36; 17:17, 19). Only John among the Gospels informs us that the first disciples of Jesus were formerly part of the baptist movement (1:35-42); only John tells us that Jesus and his disciples themselves baptized (3:22; 4:1-2); only John describes baptism as *kaqarismo/j*, "purification" (3:25-6). John seems to share the view of the Qumranites that purification by the Spirit is mediated by bodily purification with water.<sup>25</sup>

### **Relationship to Other Contemporary Temple Traditions**

Like other Temple traditions of the time, John's Gospel promotes a visionary and mystical brand of Judaism, and roots the visionary and mystical knowledge it promotes in a type of Temple worship which is only indirectly tied to the Temple in Jerusalem.

---

<sup>25</sup> Charlesworth suggests that the reluctance of the Beloved Disciple to enter Jesus' tomb in John 20:5 derives from his fear of contracting corpse impurity. "The...Beloved Disciple...follows the Jewish regulations for purification, and thus serves as the ideal disciple for those Johannine Christians who wish to continue observing Jewish rules and customs" (283; see also 70-71).

However, whereas John focuses on the person of Jesus as the new Temple, other related traditions are oriented to the heavenly Temple, the eschatological Temple, and/or a particular community as earthly Temple.

Unlike *Jubilees*, the *Testament of Levi*, the *Qumran Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, the Apocalypse of John, and the later hekhalot literature, the Gospel of John shows little explicit interest in the heavenly Temple or the angelic liturgy. This is an important difference between the Gospel and the Apocalypse, which are (with the Letter to the Hebrews) the most Temple-centered documents in the New Testament. This can be attributed at least in part to the Christological and incarnational emphasis of the book. The point of its message is that God made himself known in this world in the person of Jesus, and can now be encountered and worshipped through him. Jesus is not merely a mediator, but is himself the personal embodiment of the One he represents; he is not merely a revealer, but is himself the substance of revelation.<sup>26</sup> Rather than offering a method of ascending to heaven, John instead proclaims that heaven has descended to earth.<sup>27</sup> On this point, though, the message of the Apocalypse has affinities with the Gospel, for its story ends where the Gospel begins: with the New Jerusalem “coming down out of heaven (katabaiζnousan ε)k tou= ou)ranou=) from God” (Revelation 21:2). In the Gospel the final eschatology of the Apocalypse becomes Christocentric realized eschatology.

However, it is at least possible that the Jesus-centered mysticism of the Gospel of John was intended to function as a doorway to the kind of visionary and corporate experience of heavenly worship presumed by the Apocalypse of John. John 1:51 is one of the few clues which might point in such a direction. Another is John 12:39-41, which speaks of the pre-incarnate Logos as the object of Isaiah’s heavenly Temple vision (Isa 6:1-8). That vision includes mention of the Seraphim and their three-fold sanctification of YHWH, which occupies a privileged position in Jewish liturgical and mystical traditions.<sup>28</sup> If many Catholic (and some Protestant) exegetes are correct in finding ecclesial and sacramental teaching in John, transmitted in symbolic form in order to portray the person, words, and deeds of Jesus as the origin and model of the corporate life of his future followers, then it might also be the case that Jesus as the one who sees heavenly things is intended by John to serve as a similar model. If it is allowable to read something of the Johannine letters into the background of the Gospel, might it be possible to perform a similar operation with the Apocalypse?

---

<sup>26</sup> See Bultmann, 63-72, 83.

<sup>27</sup> See Rowland, 505-6.

<sup>28</sup> If John 1:14 draws upon a targum of Isaiah 6, then we have further support for the importance of this text in Johannine thought. At the beginning of the book John 1:14 enunciates the Gospel’s central theme, and then John 12:39-41 concludes the first half of the book by returning to that theme. See McCaffrey, 239.

Like the Gospel of John, other contemporary documents (4Q Florilegium, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, 1 Peter) are oriented to an earthly and human substitute for the Jerusalem Temple. However, these texts speak not of the community's founder, but of the community itself as the Temple. Nowhere in John is such a claim made.<sup>29</sup> However, there is much in the Gospel that implies such a view. As the Father sent the Son, so the Son sends his disciples (17:18; 20:21). As the Father worked in and through the Son, so the Son (by means of the Spirit-Paraclete) will work in and through his disciples (5:19; 16:12-15). As the Father gave his Name and Glory to the Son, so the Son has entrusted his Name and Glory to his disciples (17:11-12; 22-23). The glorified Son of Man leaves this world to return to his Father, but he leaves his disciples in this world to represent him. This seems to imply that the earthly Temple is now the company of the followers of Jesus, who are united to him as branches to the vine. The focus of the Gospel is Christology; however, part of its purpose is ecclesiology -- to root the communal life of the later followers of Jesus in the person, words, and deeds of their Master.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Johannine Witness and the Temple**

What does John's Temple Christology tell us about the disciple whose witness ultimately stands behind the book, and perhaps about his closest associates and followers who transmitted and developed his teaching? It certainly reveals a mind filled with priestly concerns and images. The founding witness of the Johannine tradition was probably a priest, and the temple, its feasts and rites, and its city were central to his thinking.

In stark contrast to the synoptic Gospels, the vast majority of John occurs in Jerusalem or its environs.<sup>31</sup> Only 118 verses are set in Galilee, and 71 of those are found in John 6. Much of Jesus' teaching, especially in chapters 7-10, takes place in the temple (7:14, 28; 8:20, 59; 10:23) and during a feast. The "other disciple" of John 18:15-16, who is probably to be identified with the "beloved disciple" whose witness stands behind the Gospel, was "known to the high priest" and is able to gain access to his court.<sup>32</sup> The book

---

<sup>29</sup> Beasley-Murray, 42.

<sup>30</sup> Cullmann sees a relationship between John's symbolic emphasis of the sacraments and the book's Temple Christology: "The interest...in baptism and the eucharist may be connected with the same idea of the abolition of the temple through Christ. Christian worship now concentrates on these as the place where Christ is present" (44-45).

<sup>31</sup> Dodd, 453; Cullmann, 67; Hengel, 124-25.

<sup>32</sup> Charlesworth argues vigorously that the "other disciple" of John 18:15-16 is not the Beloved Disciple (336-59). He attempts to revive the theory propounded by J. A. Abbott early in the twentieth century that the "other disciple" is Judas. However, as Brown notes (2.822), there is nothing in the text which would lead one to conclude that the evangelist is speaking of Judas. The alleged problem with seeing the Beloved Disciple in John 18:15-16 is the fact that he would have been in danger of arrest, as was Peter. This

also demonstrates an awareness and knowledge of purification procedures which were of special importance as preparation for temple worship, in particular during a feast (2:1-12; 11:55; 18:28). These facts support the view that the primary Johannine witness either lived in Jerusalem or spent a great deal of time there, and was himself a priest.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, there is much in John that leads one to presume a non-Sadducean priestly background for its primary witness. Parallels with the ideology of the sectarian writings from the Dead Sea Scrolls and with the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* point decisively in this direction. So does the fact that only John informs us that some of the first disciples of Jesus -- one of whom is provocatively unnamed (1:35-40) -- were originally disciples of John the Baptist. According to Luke, the Baptist was a priest. According to the Gospel of John, the baptism of John is to be understood as a kind of purification (3:25) -- in other words, as an act having some connection to Levitical rites. This makes John the Baptist a representative of priestly, sectarian Judaism, whose ideology must have had much in common with the priestly sectarians we know from the scrolls.

However, there is one important difference between the priestly perspective of the Gospel of John and that of the Dead Sea Scrolls: John does not call into question the fundamental legitimacy of the Jerusalem Temple and its priesthood.<sup>34</sup> With the coming of Jesus, his death and resurrection, and the sending of the Spirit, the Jerusalem Temple

---

objection carries less weight if one holds that the Beloved Disciple is not one of the twelve. As a person of social stature, he may also have believed that he would enjoy immunity. It is certainly significant that the Beloved Disciple is the only male follower of Jesus who risks being with him at the cross (19:26-27, 35).

<sup>33</sup> Hengel offers further arguments for the view that the Beloved Disciple was a priest and an aristocrat: (1) The name "John," associated with the Gospel from the second century, was especially common in priestly circles (109-10); (2) Polycrates, born about 125, describes the evangelist as a priest (125-26); (3) "Whereas the stress on 'scribes (and Pharisees)' in Matthew is presumably connected with the fact that, like Paul, the author had had a Pharisaic, scribal education, in John the formula 'high priests and Pharisees' may refer to a priestly view of the leading forces in Judaism..." (118); (4) "The relatively few people who have dealings with Jesus...belong to the upper class..." (124-25). Since Hengel thinks that the same figure lies behind both the Gospel and the Apocalypse, he is able to add a fifth consideration: (5) "Insignificant provincials were not banished to islands; even among Roman citizens that was reserved for members of the upper class...For John to be banished to Patmos indicates that he had a high social status..." (126).

<sup>34</sup> This point is usually missed by scholars, who by and large have accepted a position similar to that enunciated by Cullmann: "Whereas in Qumran, opposition to the temple is not in principle directed against the temple as such but only against the temple worship as carried out at that time in Jerusalem by a godless priesthood...Stephen's speech rejects any particular localization of the divine presence apart from the portable sanctuary of the tabernacle. *This is even more the case with the Gospel of John*, which argues for neither Gerizim nor the temple in Jerusalem, but for worship in spirit and in truth" (53; emphasis mine). Cullmann misinterprets John 4:23, which should be seen as a proclamation of eschatological fulfillment ("The hour is coming, and now is...") in *the Spirit* rather than as a rejection of externals in favor of worship "in spirit." Beasley-Murray has recognized the weakness of the view that John is "anti-Temple" in an unqualified sense: "That the action in the temple can be characterized as 'zeal for your house' suggests a positive attitude to the temple, and not one of total rejection (contrary to a frequently held opinion)" (39). A positive attitude is likewise signaled by the phrase "my Father's house" (2:16).

and its priesthood are in their essential functions superseded. But this is not attributed to the failure of the priesthood (as in the scrolls). It is instead a further act of divine grace, bringing to fulfillment that which the Temple and priesthood represent. This does not negate the evidence for a sectarian, priestly background to the Gospel, but does imply that this background is not to be found in the radical schismatic sect revealed in the scrolls.

If the witness behind the Gospel of John had such a priestly, non-Sadducean background, and also had personal experience of Temple worship as one of its functionaries, it is also possible that his Temple Christology reflects an attempt to understand the person, words, and deeds of Jesus within the framework of an existing priestly mysticism. Johannine realized eschatology may have its roots in the priestly experience of Temple (or community) worship as the restoration of Paradise, communion with the powers of heaven, and foretaste of the world to come. Johannine high Christology may have its roots in a longed-for vision of the human form of the *Kavod*, perhaps conceived of as an angelic mediator of the Divine Presence. Given present data, one cannot draw definitive conclusions; however, the evidence is suggestive.

Students of John sometimes treat the book's priestly categories as convenient metaphors employed to illustrate ideas that were conceived independent of those categories. I am proposing a different model for looking at this aspect of Johannine thought – that its priestly mysticism provided its author(s) with a framework for developing new perspectives on the person, words, and work of Jesus, and for deepening the spiritual experience of their Messianic community. Looked at in this light, the Gospel of John may tell us as much about first-century Jewish Temple mysticism as it does about the first-century Jesus movement.