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The Temple Roots of the Liturgy

‘It is remarkable how few traces of the solemn liturgies of the High Holy Days have left in Christian worship’. ‘Christ was more associated with the synagogue type of worship than with that of the temple’¹ These two quotations from books written some forty years ago are not untypical of the approach at that time to the origins of Christian Liturgy, namely that they are to be found in the synagogue. In this paper I shall show some of the similarities between the early Christian liturgies and temple rituals

Since the New Testament interprets the death of Jesus as atonement (e.g. 1 Cor.15.3) and links the Eucharist to his death, there must have been from the start some link between Eucharist and atonement. Since the imagery of the Eucharist is sacrificial, this must have been an Atonement sacrifice in the temple, rather than just the time of fasting observed by the people. It is true that very little is known about the origin of the Christian liturgy or about temple practices, but certain areas do invite further examination. In the Letter to the Hebrews, for example, Christ is presented as the high priest offering the atonement sacrifice, and this surely should be taken as the starting point for any investigation into roots of the Christian Liturgy. In his book *The Christian Understanding of Atonement*, Dillistone made this observation: ‘From the New Testament there come hints, suggestions, even daring affirmations of a comprehensive cosmic reconciliation’. *He doubted that this came from Hebrew thought* and so suggested: ‘It was not until early Christian witnesses found themselves confronted by pagan systems in which a full theory of cosmic redemption played a prominent part that the effect of the work of Christ upon the cosmos at large began to receive serious consideration’². The pre-Christian roots of the idea of Atonement have played a very small part in Christian treatments of the

¹ Respectively E Werner *The Sacred Bridge* London New York 1959 p 11 and W. Oesterley *The Jewish Background to the Christian Liturgy* p 87

² F.W.Dillistone *The Christian Understanding of Atonement* Weleyn 1968 p. 47.

subject; a recent report by the Church of England's Doctrine Commission dealt with atonement without mentioning Leviticus³.

The Eucharist has frequently been linked to the Passover, for the very obvious reason that the Last Supper is linked to that festival⁴, and Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that 'Christ our Passover has been sacrificed' (1.Cor.5.7). But there are immediate and obvious problems trying to link the Eucharist with Passover to as we recognise it: **the Passover was the only sacrifice not offered by a priest** (m.Pesahim 5.5ff on Exod 12.6), and the essential element was that the offering was whole, (Exod 12.46), whereas the words of institution in their various forms all emphasise that the bread/body was broken⁵ Further, the cup at the Last Supper is linked to the covenant [except the Western text of Luke], and the Letter to the Hebrews links the death of Jesus to the covenant renewed on the Day of Atonement (Heb.9.11-15). Matthew's form of the words 'My blood of the covenant poured out for many for the *aphesis* of sins' (Mat.26.28) suggests the same context, since *aphesis* was the translation for *d'ror*, liberty, the characteristic of the Jubilee which was inaugurated on the Day of Atonement (Lxx Lev.25.10; Isa.61.1 also Luke 4.18). Since the great Jubilee at the end of the second temple period was associated with the appearance of Melchizedek and his atonement sacrifice (11Q Melch), we have here a possible contemporary context for the words of institution. And again, there are the words of the early liturgies, which do not use the Exodus imagery of being the Chosen people and being liberated from slavery. We find in the Didache thanksgiving for the gifts of knowledge and eternal life, and for the Sacred Name dwelling in the hearts of those who have received the spiritual food (Didache 9-10). This, as we shall see, is priestly Wisdom imagery. The hope is for the ingathering of the scattered Church into the Kingdom. Bishop Sarapion (mid 4th century Egypt) prayed that his people would become 'living', i.e. resurrected, and able to speak of the mysteries, that the spiritual food would be the medicine of life to heal every sickness. 'Make us wise by the participation of the body and the blood'.

³ *The Mystery of Salvation* 1995 pp 96ff

⁴ Although 'Palm Sunday' is clearly a Tabernacles procession, as described in m.Sukkah 4.5

⁵ B Longenecker 'The Unbroken Messiah' *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995) pp.428-441 suggests why the unbroken Passover might have been significant for John.

Let us now consider the words of Bishop Sarapion's contemporary, St Basil of Caesarea, who died 379CE. In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, he emphasised the unwritten traditions of the Church. Where, he asked, do we find in writing anything about signing with the cross (at baptism), or about turning to the east to pray. 'Which of the saints has left us in writing the words of invocation (*epiklesis*) at the offering of the bread of the Eucharist and the cup of blessing? For, as it is well known, we are not satisfied with saying the words which the Apostle and the Gospel have recorded, but, before and after these words we add other words, on the grounds that they have great strength for the mystery. And these words we have received from the unwritten teaching.' (*On the Holy Spirit* 66)

Origen had written something similar a century or so earlier, in his Homily 5 on Numbers. He compared these same Christian practices - praying towards the East, the rites of baptism and the Eucharist - to the secrets of the temple which were guarded by the priests. Commenting on Numbers 4, the instructions for transporting the tabernacle through the desert, he emphasised that the family of Kohath were only permitted to carry the sacred objects but not to see them. Only Aaron the high priest and his sons were permitted to see what was in the holy place; then they had to cover the sacred objects with veils before handing them to others, who were only permitted to carry them. The mysteries of the Church were similar, 'handed down and entrusted to us by the high priest and his sons.' Origen does not say who this high priest was; we assume it was Jesus and his disciples, but Origen could have known a continuity between the Christian mysteries and those of the temple priesthood⁶. Origen had close contact with the Jewish scholars in Caesarea and he knew at least one of what we nowadays call the Dead Sea Scrolls⁷.

The duties of the priests were defined as 'guarding all matters concerning the altar and what was within the veil' (Num..3.10; 18.7 LXX), and as early as the letter of Ignatius to the Philadelphians, we read: 'Our own high priest is greater (than the priests of old) for

⁶ Acts 6.7 Many priests joined the Church.

⁷ Eusebius *History* 6.16 'a scroll in a jar near Jericho'.

he has been entrusted with the Holy of Holies and to him alone are the secret things of God committed' (Phil.9). Clement of Alexandria used similar imagery: those who have the truth enter by drawing aside the curtain (Misc.7.17). He knew that there were 'among the Hebrews some things delivered unwritten' (Misc.5.10). Origen too spoke often of the unwritten or secret tradition (e.g. Cels.3.37; 6.6; Preface to First Princ), the mystery 'established before the ages' (On Mat.7.2)⁸.

Of the examples given by Basil, facing the east to pray and signing with a cross at baptism can be identified as customs dating back to the first temple. The Mishnah records that during Tabernacles, a procession would turn back at the eastern gate and face towards the temple saying: 'Our fathers when they were in this place turned with their backs towards the temple of the Lord and their faces towards the east and they worshipped the sun towards the east; but as for us, our eyes are turned toward the Lord' (m.Sukkah 5.4). This clearly refers to Ezekiel's account of men in the temple facing east, holding branches before their faces and worshipping the sun (Ezek. 8.16-8), presumably in a celebration akin to Tabernacles. The Therapeuts (Philo Cont.Life 27) and the Essenes (Josephus War 2.128) also worshipped towards the rising sun, and the vision in Revelation 7 describes a great multitude holding palm branches, standing before the angel who came from the sunrise with the seal of the living God. Worshipping towards the east must have been a practice which distinguished the adherents of first temple customs from those favoured by the compilers of the Mishnah.

Signing with a cross was also a custom from the first temple. When Ezekiel received his vision of the destruction of Jerusalem, he saw the six angels of destruction and a seventh, who was instructed to pass through the city and mark a letter tau on the foreheads of those who were faithful to the Lord (Ezek 9.4). In the old Hebrew alphabet, the tau is a diagonal cross, the sign which was also used when the high priest was anointed on his forehead (b. Horayoth 12a). The anointed high priest was distinguished from the one who only wore the garments of high priesthood (m.Horayoth 3.4), and, since the true anointing oil had been hidden away in the time of Josiah (b.Horayoth 12a, b Kerittoth

⁸ See my 'The Secret Tradition' Journal of Higher Criticism 2.1 1995 pp.31-67

5b), the tradition of anointing the high priest in this way must have been another first temple custom which was not observed during the second temple.

Christian customs, then, perpetuated practices which had very ancient roots but had not been current in the second temple. Presumably the Christians also perpetuated the beliefs that accompanied those practices: the belief that the gift of Wisdom was good, for example, and that it made humans like gods (i.e. gave them eternal life), just as the serpent in Eden had said. We are not looking for continuity with the actual temple practices of the first century CE (nor with its scriptures), but with a remembered, perhaps idealised, system that was much older. We are looking for the temple destroyed in the time of Josiah, rather than the second temple which was condemned in the Enoch tradition as impure and polluted (1 En.89.73).

Where had this system been preserved? The Melchizedek Text has a possible reading about people in the last days whose teachers have been kept hidden and secret (as in DJD XXIII 11Q Melch 4-5). The Damascus Document is quite clear: a remnant knew the 'hidden things in which all Israel has gone astray' and the examples given are 'his holy Sabbaths and his glorious feasts' (CD III)⁹. These are usually interpreted as a dispute about the calendar and this was certainly a part of the problem. But only a part! There could well have been disputes over the significance and manner of observing those Sabbaths and feasts: 'They shall keep the Sabbath Day according to its exact interpretation and the feasts and the Day of Fasting according to the finding of the members of the New Covenant in the land of Damascus' (CD VI). The problem concerned the Sabbath and especially the Day of Fasting i.e. the Day of Atonement.

This remnant is very similar to the group depicted in the Book of Revelation; the Damascus remnant are 'called by Name and stand at the end of days' i.e. they are the resurrected to wear the sacred Name, just like the redeemed in the holy of holies at the

⁹ LXX Amos 3.12 refers to 'those priests in Damascus' as a remnant, along with Samaria, of something destroyed. See J.Sawyer 'Those Priests in Damascus' *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* viii.1970.7 pp 123-130.

end of the Book of Revelation (Rev. 22.4)¹⁰, and also like those who participate in the Eucharist of the Didache or Sarapion. The group depicted in the Damascus Document and the Christians were guardians of the true teaching ‘they keep the commandments of God and the visions of Jesus’ (Rev.12. 17). The writers of CD had similar concerns to those of the early Christians, although, as is well known, there were also important differences. What we seem to have here is a continuity; an awareness of what is behind the Hebrew Scriptures (what I called *The Older Testament*¹¹) that passed into the New Testament and then into the Liturgies.

Basil’s third example of unwritten tradition is the *epiklesis* at the Eucharist. The later forms of this prayer, known from the time of Cyril of Jerusalem (Catecheses 23.7, died 387 CE), call on God the Father to send the Holy Spirit onto the bread and wine, but the earlier forms seem to have been different, calling for the Second Person, the Logos, to change the bread and wine. In Egypt in the middle of the fourth century, Bishop Sarapion prayed: ‘O God of truth, let thy holy Word come upon this bread (*epidemesato*, literally ‘dwell’)...¹² The Liturgy of Addai and Mari is a problem; although acknowledged as important evidence for early practice, there is no agreement on the original form of the prayers¹³. Dix’s reconstruction offers a prayer addressed to the Second person, the Lord who ‘put on our manhood’: ‘May there come O my Lord, thy Holy Spirit and rest upon this oblation of thy Servants..’. Later prayers speak of the Spirit being ‘sent’ but these examples of early practice imply that the divinity addressed ‘came’ to the bread and wine. There is some confusion in the earliest texts because they can call the Second Person either Word or Spirit, as did Philo for whom the Word and Wisdom were equivalents¹⁴. Possibly the earliest evidence of all, apart from the New

¹⁰ CD Ms B also mentions the saving power of the mark described by Ezekiel.

¹¹ My book of that name, published London 1987

¹² Cf The Acts of Thomas 27, an *epiklesis* over the anointing oil ‘Come Thou Holy Name of the Christ, with ‘come’ repeated eight times, after which the anointed see a human form and then at dawn share the bread of the Eucharist.

¹³ Compare the reconstructions in G.Dix *The Shape of the Liturgy* Black London 1945 pp.178ff and A Gelston *The Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari* Oxford 1992 pp 49ff.

¹⁴ e.g. Justin on Luke 1.31 the Spirit and the Power of God are the Word, Apol 1.33: also my *The Great Angel*, London 1992 p130.

Testament, is the Didache, which concludes with the Maranatha, praying for the Lord to come.

Given the temple and priestly context of Basil's other 'unwritten' traditions, it is likely that the *epiklesis* also originated there, in the prayers for the Lord to 'come' to the temple. The tabernacle had been built so that the Lord could 'dwell' there (Exod.25.8 Lxx 'appear) and could speak to Moses from between the cherubim on the ark (Exod 25.22). When the tabernacle was completed, the Glory of the Lord *came* to fill the tabernacle (Exod.40.34), as it also *came* to fill the newly built temple (1 Kgs 8.11). Ezekiel later saw the Glory leaving the polluted temple (Ezek.11.23). Isaiah had seen the Lord enthroned in the temple (Isa.6); and the Third Isaiah prayed that the Lord would rend the heavens and *come* down (Isa.64.1)¹⁵. Several passages in the later Merkavah texts have suggested to scholars that drawing the Lord down into the temple was a major element of the temple service. Moshe Idel concluded: 'We can seriously consider the possibility that temple service was conceived as inducing the presence of the Shekinah in the Holy of Holies'¹⁶. So where might the Maranatha prayer have originated?

The rituals performed in the Holy of Holies are still as veiled as they ever were, but we can at least place them in their original setting. The tabernacle/temple replicated the days of the creation. Moses began to erect it on the first day of the year, and each stage corresponds to one of the days of creation (Exod.40.16-33). The veil corresponded to the firmament set in place on the second day, to separate what was above from what was below. Everything beyond the veil corresponded to Day One, beyond the visible world and beyond time. This seems to have been an ancient pattern, but the Hebrew and Greek texts of Exodus are notoriously divergent, and any discussion of the affairs of the holy of holies was forbidden. The creation of the angels on Day One was as sensitive issue, as were their names, and the prohibition in the Mishnah concerned the secrets of the holy of holies which the priests had to guard: the story of the creation, the chapter of the chariot,

¹⁵ Solomon prayed for Wisdom to come to him. The later text probably preserves the original significance of this (Wisd. 8.13). She gave immortality. The older text is sanitised; Solomon went to the great high place at Gibeon and there asked for Wisdom (1 Kgs 3.6-9).

¹⁶ M. Idel *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*. New Haven and London 1988p.168

what is above, beneath, before and hereafter (m Hag 2.1). The rituals of the holy of holies were thus taking place outside time and matter, in the realm of the angels and the heavenly throne, and those who functioned in the holy of holies were more than human, being and seeing beyond time.

Psalm 110 (109), is obscure (perhaps obscured) in the Hebrew. The Greek, however, describes how the king is born as the divine son in the glory of the holy ones, i.e. in the holy of holies, and declared to be the Melchizedek priest¹⁷. The last words of David describe him as one through whom the Spirit of the Lord has spoken, a man who was anointed and raised up (qwm, *anestesan kurios*), a word that could also be translated 'resurrected' (2 Sam.23.1). This is how it must have been understood at the end of the second temple period, because the Letter to the Hebrews contrasts the Levitical priests and Melchizedek; the former have their position due to descent from Levi, but Melchizedek has been *raised up (anistatai)* with the power of indestructible life (Heb.7.15-16). The Chronicler's account of Solomon's enthronement says that he sat on the throne of the Lord as king, and the people worshipped the Lord and the king (1 Chron.29.20-23). That the Davidic monarchs had indeed become 'God and King' in the holy of holies, and that this had not been forgotten, is confirmed by Philo's extraordinary statement about Moses: he became god and king when he entered the darkness where God was (Moses I.158). In his vision, Ezekiel saw this divine and human figure enthroned, the glory of the Lord in human form (Ezek.1.26-28), and the later account of the tabernacle in Exodus 25 remembered the king on his cherub throne as the voice of the Lord above the *kapporeth*, between the cherubim (Exod.25.22).

The holy of holies was the place of the pre-created light of Day One, but in the temple this was in fact the darkness of the divine presence in the holy of holies. Texts which describe what happened before the world was created, or what happened in eternity, are describing rituals in the holy of holies, presumably the secrets from beyond the curtain which Jesus is said to have taught (e.g. Clement *Misc.*6.7; 7,17; Origen *Cels.* 3.37: 'Jesus beheld these weighty secrets and made them known to a few': Origen on Mat.7.2 '...the

¹⁷ Presumably this was the original context of Isa.9.6-7

mystery established before the ages'). Thus Psalm 110 is telling us that the divine son was 'born' in eternity. When Enoch's second parable says that the Son of Man was named before the Lord of Spirits, before the sun and signs were created, it indicates a naming ritual in the holy of holies, most likely when the human figure was given the Sacred Name (1 En.48.2-3)¹⁸. After this he was enthroned and for his people he was Immanuel, God With Us. The reference in Philippians 2 shows that the sequence of the ritual was still known at the end of the first temple period, and used to set the death of Jesus in one particular context. The Servant is exalted and given the Name because he has died. He nevertheless reigns in heaven and receives homage whilst enthroned. In other words, the one who bears the Name is resurrected, just as David had claimed in his 'last words', and just as the writer to the Hebrews claimed for Melchizedek. There is a similar pattern in Daniel 7, where the human figure goes with clouds - the clouds of incense with which the human figure entered the holy of holies - and is offered before the Ancient of Days (Dan.7.13)¹⁹. He is then enthroned and given the kingdom of eternity. A similar sequence appears in the second parable of Enoch, where the Man figure goes to the Head of Days and the blood of the Righteous One is offered (1 En.47.1)²⁰.

The Lord was enthroned on the *kapporeth* over the ark, the place of atonement. The ascent of the human figure was associated with the offering of blood, but the only blood offering made in the holy of holies itself was the offering on the Day of Atonement. What, then, happened on the Day of Atonement? This was one of the issues on which Israel had gone astray, according to the Damascus Document. It used to be said that the ritual prescribed in Leviticus 16 was a relatively late addition to the lore of the temple, but scholars are now moving towards the view that this was one of the most ancient practices²¹. Few details are given in Leviticus, although the shape of the ritual is clear enough. The high priest took blood into the holy of holies and as he emerged, he sprinkled certain parts of the temple 'to cleanse it and hallow it from all the

¹⁸ A similar sequence appears in 3 En.13-15

¹⁹ This is a possible reading of *hqbrwhy* cf Ezra 6.10,17 and B130 of Theodotion where *prosechthe* or *prosenechthe* in sacrificial sense,

²⁰ the whole sequence is that of Dan.7; there is even the textual confusion in 47.4, where one text tradition has *qareba* = offered and the other has *baseha* = come. See R.H. Charles *The Book of Enoch* 1912 p. 92

²¹ E.g. J Milgrom *Leviticus* New York 1991

uncleannesses (tum'ot) of the people of Israel' (Lev.16.19). He entered the holy place in great fear, because the Lord would appear to him over the *kapporet* (Lev.16.2). Since the temple was a microcosm of the whole creation, atonement was a ritual to cleanse and renew the creation at the beginning of the year. The Mishnah gives more detail of where the blood was sprinkled, and adds that what was left was poured out at the base of the altar (m Yoma 5.4-6). The high priest also prayed when he was in the temple, but what he said is not recorded. Only the words used outside the temple appear in the Mishnah.

Robertson Smith, in his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (delivered in 1888-89 and first published in 1894) observed: 'The worship of the second temple was an antiquarian resuscitation of forms which had lost their intimate connection with the national life and therefore had lost the greater part of their original significance',²² but according to the Jewish Encyclopaedia, atonement was 'the keystone of the sacrificial system of post exilic Israel'. In other words, the extent of our ignorance about the Day of Atonement is the extent of our ignorance about Israel's earlier religion, and what we read in the post exilic texts may not be the best source of information about the original rite. There is, for example, no certain reference to Aaron or his priests in any pre-exilic text. Even Ezekiel, who was a priest in the first temple, does not mention him. The Elephantine texts, which give a glimpse of Jewish life in Egypt in the sixth and fifth centuries, often mention priests but never Aaron, nor Levi nor the Levites²³. Any rites and duties associated with Aaron probably came from the older royal priesthood of Melchizedek. Since there have already been other indications that Basil's unwritten traditions, including the *epiklesis*, had their ultimate origin in the cult of the first temple, it is likely that any misconception about the Day of Atonement will have had serious consequences for understanding the roots of the Christian liturgy.

What was the high priest doing when he made atonement? According to Numbers 25.6ff, the family of Aaron was given the 'covenant of eternal priesthood' because Phineas had been zealous to preserve the covenant. Atonement was acting to protect the covenant of

²² W.R.Smith *Lectures on the religion of the Semites* 3rd edn London 1927 p.216.

²³ A Cowley *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century BC*. Oxford 1923 p.xxii

peace, elsewhere described as ‘the eternal covenant’ or ‘the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature’ (Gen.9.16). Isaiah described how the pollution of human sin caused the covenant to collapse (Isa.24.4-6) with heaven and earth withering away. Atonement renewed it. Aaron protected the people from the consequences of breaking the covenant by burning incense: ‘Take your censer... and make atonement for them... for wrath has gone forth from the Lord (Num.17.46 English numbering). More commonly, atonement was effected by blood: ‘I have given blood for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls...(Lev.17.11). Blood renewed the eternal covenant which had been destroyed by human sin. Since the temple was the microcosm of the creation, the temple ritual to renew the covenant also renewed the creation. Hence the famous words attributed to the high priest Simeon the Just: ‘By three things is the world sustained: by the Law, by the temple service and by deeds of loving kindness’ (m. Aboth 1.2). On the Day of Atonement the eternal covenant was renewed, and blood was sprinkled to remove the effects of sin. The blood was brought out from the holy of holies; in temple symbolism, this was new life brought from heaven to renew the earth.

But whose life? Two goats were necessary for the Day of Atonement, and the customary rendering of Leviticus 16.8 is that one goat was ‘for the Lord’ and the other goat ‘for Azazel’. This way of reading the text has caused many problems, not least why any offering was being sent to Azazel. One line in Origen’s *Contra Celsum* may provide vital evidence here. He says that the goat sent into the desert represented Azazel. If this was correct, then the sacrificed goat must have represented the Lord. The *l*^o meant ‘**as** the Lord’ not ‘**for** the Lord’, and Israel did not, after all, make an offering to Azazel. The blood which renewed the creation was new life from the Lord. Since the high priest himself represented the Lord, wearing the Sacred Name on his forehead, we have here a ritual in which the Lord was both the high priest and the victim in the act of atonement. The argument in the Letter to the Hebrews implies that the older practice of substitution had been superseded and that the annual rite was no longer necessary: ‘When Christ appeared as a high priest... he entered once for all in to the holy place, taking not the blood of goats and calves, but his own blood thus securing an eternal redemption...’ (Heb.9.11-12). The high priest had entered heaven with the blood of the great atonement,

and the origin of the Parousia expectation was that the high priest would return to complete the atonement and renewal of the creation. Hence Peter's speech in Solomon's portico: 'Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets...' (Acts 3.12-23).

The story of the Last Supper depicts Jesus renewing the Eternal Covenant. As the great high priest it was his own blood that would renew the covenant and put away sins. None of the other covenants described in the Hebrew Scriptures concerns putting away sin. Hence when the 'Last Supper' was repeated in early worship, they prayed for the return of the high priest to complete the great atonement: 'Maranatha'. As time passed and the Parousia hope faded, the significance of the original *epiklesis* changed, and what had begun as a temple ritual fulfilled in history, returned to being a ritual. The roots of the Christian Eucharistic Liturgy lie mainly in the Day of Atonement, understood as the renewal of the creation, and this, as we shall see, passed into the words of the Liturgies.

Another root of the Eucharistic Liturgies is found in the temple ritual for the Sabbath, the 'Shewbread'²⁴. Twelve loaves made from fine flour were set out in the temple every Sabbath on a table of gold, and incense was set with them²⁵. It was described as a most holy portion for the high priests (Aaron and his sons Lev.24.9), to be eaten in a holy place on the Sabbath. As with the other temple furnishings and rituals, nothing is said about meaning; we have to guess.

First, the bread was placed on a table in the temple, the only cereal offering to be taken inside. The Mishnah records that there were two tables in the porch outside the temple; 'On the table of marble they laid the Shewbread when it was brought in, and on the table of gold they laid it when it was brought out, since what is holy must be raised and not brought down' (m. Menahoth 11.7). In other words, the bread acquired holiness whilst it

²⁴ It may be significant that Jesus's first Sabbath controversy mentioned the eating of the Shewbread and who was permitted to do this Mark. 2.23-28.

was in the temple, and, since it was classed as ‘most holy’ (Lev.24.9), it would have imparted holiness to the men who consumed it²⁶. Others who even came near the holiest things were in danger of death (Num.4.19). The priests who ate the goat of the sin offering, most holy food, were thereby enabled to bear the iniquity of the congregation and thus make atonement for them (Lev.10.17). Something similar was said of Aaron when he wore the Name of the Lord on his forehead; he was empowered to bear the ‘guilt’ of the offerings²⁷ (Exod.28.38). Those who ate the Shewbread must have acquired some power.

All the cereal offerings had a special significance, although the details are now lost. They are ranked with the sin offering *hatta’th* and the guilt offering *’asam*, and mentioned first in the list, (Num.18.9; Ezek 44.29); they had to be stored and eaten in the holy chambers within the temple court (Ezek.42.13). The Shewbread, like the other cereal offerings, was described as an *’azkarah*, memorial offering, although how exactly this was understood is not clear. The text of Leviticus 24.7 implies that the incense on the table was the ‘memorial offering’, but the Targums²⁸ here describe the Shewbread as the ‘Bread of Memorial before the Lord’, suggesting that this is how it may have been understood at the end of the second temple period. The extreme holiness of the Shewbread is confirmed by the fact that when the desert tabernacle was moved, the ark and the table of Shewbread were the only items to have three covers (Num.4.5-8). The lamp, the incense altar and the other sanctuary vessels were wrapped in a blue cloth and a leather cover, but in addition to these, the ark was first covered by the veil, and the table by a scarlet covering. The bread in the temple was an eternal covenant. The regulations in Leviticus are brief and enigmatic; the bread has to be set in place each Sabbath ‘an eternal covenant’ (Lev.24.8). The Sabbath itself was described as an eternal covenant, marking the completion of the creation (Exod 31.16). The rainbow was another sign of the eternal covenant: ‘and when the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and

²⁵ LXX says salt was set with the loaves also.

²⁶ The most holy items were deemed to impart holiness e.g. the altar Exod 29.37; its vessels Exod 30.29; the cereal offering eaten in the holy place Lev.6.17-18 English numbering;

²⁷ Hence the original significance of the commandment not to bear the Name of the Lord lightly, ‘for the Lord will not hold him guiltless...’ (Exod.20.7)

²⁸ The Onkelos and Palestinian Targums agree.

remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature' (Gen.9.16). Might this have been the significance of the bread set before the Lord each Sabbath, a memorial of the eternal covenant?

The rainbow came to be seen as a sign of the divine presence; Ezekiel had described the Glory as a rainbow (Ezek.1.28) and stories were told of a rainbow appearing as the great rabbis were teaching (e.g. b.Hagigah 14b). In the later Merkavah texts, the Servant who bore the Sacred Name was wrapped in a rainbow²⁹, as had been the high priest Simeon when he emerged from the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement (b. Sira 50.7). The heavenly throne in Revelation was wreathed in a rainbow (Rev.4.3) as was the Great Angel in John's vision of the Parousia, who returned from heaven wrapped in a cloud and a rainbow, with his face shining like the sun (Rev.10.1)³⁰.

If the Shewbread was similarly a sign of the eternal covenant, the term *lehem panim*, bread of face/presence could mean rather more than just 'bread put out before the Lord'? There are several places in the Hebrew Scriptures where *panim* was used as a circumlocution for the Lord himself, as can be seen from the LXX. Thus 'My presence will go with you' (Exod.33.14) was translated 'I myself will go...*autos*' and Moses' response 'If your presence will not go with me...' became 'If you yourself do not go with me... *autos*'. 'He brought you out of Egypt with his own presence (Deut 4.37) became 'He himself led you out *autos*'. 'The Angel of his presence saved them' (Isa.63.9) became 'Not an ambassador nor an angel, but he himself saved them'.³¹ This latter is emphatic; the angel of the Presence was the Lord himself. Perhaps this is how 'Bread of Presence' should be understood; it would certainly explain the great holiness of the Shewbread and the special status of the table on which it rested³².

²⁹ Schaefer #396,398

³⁰ See my *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* Edinburgh 2000, pp. 180-182, 264

³¹ A similar emphasis is found in later Jewish texts. See J Goldin 'Not by means of an angel and not by means of a messenger' in *Religions in Antiquity. Essays in Memory of E R Goodenough* ed. J Neusner (Supplements to Numen XIV) Leiden 1970

³² T Onkelos Lev 24. Describes the Shewbread as the most sacred of the oblations.

So much information about the temple has disappeared and has to be reconstructed from allusions elsewhere. There were, for example, libation vessels kept on the Shewbread table (Exod.25.29 cf 1 Kgs 7.50), but there is no record of how these were used in the temple³³. There had been meals in the temple; the elders who saw the God of Israel on Sinai and ate and drank in safety before him is an encoded reference to this (Exod.24.11). So too, perhaps, Psalm 23: the table set before the anointed one, who would dwell in the house of the Lord forever, and the belief that the ruler in Israel would come forth from the House of bread, *beth lehem* (Mic.5.2). For the rest, we look in the shadows and and listen for echoes. In the Midrash Rabbah we find: ‘Melchizedek instructed Abraham in the laws of the priesthood, the bread alluding to the Shewbread and the wine to libations’(R.Gen XLIII.6). ‘The House of Wisdom is the tabernacle, and Wisdom’s table is Shewbread and wine (R.Lev.XI.9). ‘In this world you offer before me Shewbread and sacrifices, but in the world to come I shall prepare for you a great table’ (followed by a reference to Ps 23, R.Num.XXI.21). Another mystery is the investiture described in the Testament of Levi. Levi saw seven angels giving him the insignia of high priesthood and he described the ritual: he was anointed, washed with water and then fed ‘bread and wine, ‘the most holy things³⁴’, before eventually receiving the incense (T.Levi 8.1-10). These rituals bear some resemblance to those in Leviticus 8: washing, vesting, crowning and anointing, but there is nothing in T.Levi about smearing blood and eating the boiled flesh of the offerings. Did the Testament of Levi recall the older ritual, the Melchizedek ritual which involved the bread and wine? And if so, who had preserved this knowledge since the destruction of the first temple?³⁵

Wisdom and her house is a another recurring theme with the Shewbread This suggests it was an element in the cult of the first temple, where Melchizedek was high priest, and Wisdom was the Queen of Heaven, the patroness of the city. The importance of the

³³ V.A.Hurowitz ‘Solomon’s Golden Vessels (I Kings 7.48-50) and the Cult of the First Temple’ in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells*, Ed D.P.Wright, D.N.Freedman, A Hurvitz Winona Lake 1995, pp.151-164, suggests that the P source shows the reformed cult, and that the incorporated older lists of vessels are signs that the original cult was more anthropomorphic.

³⁴ Reading with R.H.Charles

³⁵ See also H.L.Jansen ‘The Consecration in the Eighth Chapter of the T Levi’ in *The Sacral Kingship. Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference for the History of Religions* Rome 1955 , Leiden 1959, pp.356-365.

Shewbread in that cult may account for the later silence in 'official texts' and the consistent echoes elsewhere. The offerings to the Queen had been 'cakes', libations and incense (Jer.44.18-19), and the refugees in Egypt after 586BCE, reminded Jeremiah that this cult had been abandoned with disastrous consequences for Jerusalem. Wisdom was remembered for her table. The poem in Proverbs 9 is much interpolated, but it is still clear that Wisdom offers the bread and wine of her table to those who seek the way of insight (Prov.9.5-6). Ben Sira promises the man who has Wisdom that she will meet him like a mother and welcome him like a wife, feeding him with the bread of understanding and the water of wisdom (Ben Sira 15.2-3). Wisdom herself promises that those who eat of her will long for more (Ben Sira 50.21), and we know from elsewhere that the gift of Wisdom brought eternal life (e.g. Wisdom 8.13).

Recall for a moment the Damascus Document, that a remnant had kept the true ways when Israel had gone astray over the Sabbath and the Day of Atonement. The temple ritual for the Sabbath was the renewal of the Shewbread, a high priestly ritual, and the Day of Atonement was the major high priestly ritual. There is a conspicuous silence about both of them, but such fragments as can be recovered correspond to elements in Christian ritual; to liturgies and related writings, and even, at a later period, to church architecture. This may have been a conscious imitation of the temple at a later stage, rather than an unbroken tradition from earliest times, but even this most sceptical position implies an expert knowledge not only of the temple, but of the older traditions which had been the cause of such controversy. It is more likely that the tradition came through from the time when these were still living issues, and gave rise to the original claim that Jesus was the Melchizedek high priest.

Now for a few comparisons. First, with the Shewbread, the memorial offering, associated with Wisdom and her invitation: 'Those who eat me will hunger for more', (b.Sira 24.21), and with Melchizedek the resurrected high priest. It was eaten by the high priests who wore the Sacred Name, and was their most holy food. Eusebius wrote: 'Our Saviour Jesus, the Christ of God, even now today performs through his ministers sacrifices after the manner of Melchizedek (Proof 5.3). In the Didache they gave thanks

over the bread for 'life and knowledge', and after partaking, gave thanks for the Sacred Name dwelling in their hearts, knowledge, faith and immortality (Didache 9-10). Bishop Sarapion prayed: 'Make us wise by the participation of the body and the blood'. The prothesis prayer of the Coptic Jacobites preserves the Shewbread tradition: 'Lord Jesus Christ... the living bread which came down from heaven... make thy face shine upon this bread and upon this cup which we have set upon thy priestly table. To this day the lectionary of the eastern churches prescribes Proverbs 9, Wisdom's invitation to her feast of bread and wine, as the reading for Maundy Thursday. Perhaps the words which Luke and Paul (Luke 22.19; 1 Cor.11.24) attributed to Jesus: 'Do this in remembrance of me' were originally 'Do this as my memorial offering, my *ʾazkarah*', and the bread was the new Shewbread³⁶

Second, the Day of Atonement, when the high priest, who was the Lord, entered 'heaven' carrying blood which represented the life of the Lord. It was sprinkled on the 'throne', and then brought out into the visible world to renew the eternal covenant and restore the creation. The ritual represented and anticipated the Day of the Lord, when he would judge those on earth, banish evil and establish his kingdom. A key text was Deuteronomy 32.43: the Lord emerging from heaven to judge his enemies and atone the land³⁷. The Day of Atonement is the only possible source of the 'both high priest and victim' belief associated with the Eucharist. Thus Narsai (Hom XVIIIA): 'The priest... celebrating this sacrifice, bears in himself the image of our Lord in that hour...' Origen interpreted the Eucharist as the Day of Atonement offering: 'Christ the true high priest who made atonement for you... hear him saying to you: "This is my blood which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins"' (On Leviticus 9). As early as the Letter of Barnabas, the Day of the Lord was linked to the goat offered on the Day of Atonement (Barn.7) and Justin knew that the sacrificed goat prefigured the Second Coming (Trypho 40), Cyril of Alexandria wrote: 'We must perceive the Immanuel in the slaughtered

³⁶ Mary Douglas 'The Eucharist; Its Continuity with the Bread Sacrifice of Leviticus' *Modern Theology* 15.2 (1999) pp.209-224, draws similar conclusions, using the methods of an anthropologist and on the basis of a different set of materials. Building on A Marx *Les Offrandes Vegetales dans l'Ancien Testament; du tribut au repas eschatologique*, Leiden 1994, that the cereal and animal sacrifices are parallel systems, she demonstrates first why the inner parts of the animal that were offered as the holiest portion, and 'what goes for the animal, goes for the loaf of bread', p.223.

goat... the two goats illustrate the mystery (Letter 41). Bishop Sarapion's Eucharist was the Day of Atonement; he prayed for 'the medicine of life... and not condemnation.' He prayed for angels to come and destroy the evil one and establish the Church, in other words, for the banishing of Azazel and the establishing of the Kingdom. The Liturgies of Addai and Mari, of John Chrysostom and of James all have similar themes: remission of sins, enlightenment, access to the Lord, life in the Kingdom.

A recurring theme is fear and awe, the fear which the high priest felt as he entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement. Thus Narsai (Hom XVIIIA, late fifth century): 'The dread mysteries... let everyone be in fear and dread as they are performed.. the hour of trembling and great fear.' Cyril of Jerusalem speaks of 'the most awful hour' and 'the most awful sacrifice' (Mystagogical Lectures 5.4,9). The Nestorian Liturgy speaks of 'the great fearful holy life giving divine mystery', and the priest prays in the words of Isaiah: 'Woe is me. . for mine eyes have seen the Lord of Hosts' and, like Moses before the ark he says 'I have seen the Lord face to face'. Throughout the liturgies, the imagery is of the holy of holies and the angel hosts. Just as the ancient kings had been 'born' in the glory of the holy ones, and were thus 'raised up', so too the bread and wine was raised up at the moment of consecration. Thus Narsai (Hom XVIIIA), having described the awe and stillness in the sanctuary at the moment of consecration, continued: 'The Spirit which raised him from the dead comes down now and celebrates the mysteries of the resurrection of his body'. The consecration was the resurrection: the power of the Godhead comes upon the oblation, ' and completes the mystery of our Lord's resurrection from the dead' 9 Narsai Hom XVIIIA). Thus the Lord emerging from the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement, accompanied by the angel hosts, became the procession when the bread and wine from the sanctuary. Narsai again: 'Thousands of Watchers and ministers of fire and spirit go forth' with the resurrected Lord, and the people rejoice 'when they see the Body setting forth from the midst of the altar.'

Finally, the setting of the Liturgy. The Altar in a traditional Christian church, is set apart, in an orthodox church literally beyond the veil. It must have derived from the *kapporeth*,

³⁷ The vese has a significantly shorter fom in the MT than in 4Q Deut^d or the LXX.

the place of atonement in the temple, where the Lord was enthroned. In the eastern churches, the altar is known as the throne, and in some of their traditions³⁸, drawing a curtain across the holy place is still part of the liturgy³⁹. Early sources speak of the cherubim of the altar⁴⁰ and in Ethiopian churches, there is an ark in the sanctuary. Finally, there is the preparation the bread of the Eucharist in the Orthodox tradition. The priest 'sacrifices' the loaf and then removes the central portion to mix with the wine in the chalice. An exactly similar procedure was used from the Day of Atonement sin offering according to the Letter of Barnabas .

³⁸ eg Copts. Armenians

³⁹ The temple/ church parallels are worked out in the greatest detail in Germanus of Constantinople *On the Divine Liturgy* (early eighth century).

⁴⁰ See K.E.McVey 'The Domed Church as Microcosm; the Literay Roots of an Architectural Synbol' *Dumbartn Oaks Papers* 37 (1983).