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# Worship, the Bond Between Time/Space and Eternity

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## Worship, the Bond Between Time/Space and Eternity: A Reflection on the Essays of Kenneth Schmitz and Matthew Lamb

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### Introduction

THESE PAPERS contain the fruit of scholarship that has matured over decades, quite clearly wedding intellectual pursuits with a faith expressing itself in prayer. Only this combination of reasoning and reflection on the Word can produce theology. Kenneth Schmitz's review of philosophical insights into language and writing is necessarily focused on the world of Greece and Rome. It would be valuable to have scholars immersed in the Hebrew language and traditional Jewish culture to reflect upon the same issues. At a conference on the trivium and quadrivium in medieval Europe, Dean Arthur Hyman of Yeshiva University was asked to comment. His response was brief: "This was not the Jewish approach."

Recalling the genius and limitations of a language to convey insights into the meaning of life and its mysteries, we acknowledge the role of translation in conveying insights between people of different cultures. With the tools of modern scholarship, quite precise translations are placed at the service of philosopher and theologian, yet further discourse and dialogue will enrich the ways to serve those striving to penetrate the revealed Word. Jewish scholars immersed in the millennial traditions of their communities can make a valuable contribution to this task.

### *Preambles to Worship*

Before reflecting on the Word in worship, it may be helpful to touch on the human dilemma of misplaced relationships that thwart an authentic relationship with God, that is, the problem of idolatry.

Three major areas of the human experience involve temptations to substitute creatures (and especially self) for God at the core of our existence. These are possessions, pleasure (intellectual and sensual), and power. The antidotes to these dangers are a spirit of poverty (self-control regarding possessions), temperance, and obedience. These attitudes toward the various aspects of the created world may be acquired through mature human insight, but are greatly enhanced by the theological virtues.

Potential idols	Response	Strength provided by
Possessions	Poverty	Faith
Pleasure—intellectual or sensual	Temperance	Hope
Power	Obedience	Charity

The evangelical counsels make sense within a context of faith, orienting the community and its members to the richer experience of life as communion, now and forever, with the living God. Listening to the Word of God and to the real needs of fellow creatures, the potential leader aspires to serve the Creator and to exercise the role of viceroy and steward in regard to others.<sup>1</sup>

The theological virtues provide the strength required to be consistent in placing God at the center of daily life. Through the community experience of worship, the individual can order the details whereby one fulfils an adult vocation, open to the wider experience of cooperation with others in a mission aimed toward common goals.

The theological vision of the biblically oriented community can be described as a relationship with the one God as Creator and Judge, with neighbor, self, and the natural world.<sup>2</sup>

*Earthly Correspondence to the Heavenly Model*

Unique to the biblical heritage is the belief that God, who created human beings in the divine image and likeness, also revealed aspects of the divine Mystery, the plan whereby creation will come to its fulfillment through human cooperation.

Israel’s neighbors believed in a cyclical view of history replicating the natural pattern of the seasons. Rejecting idolatrous implications of nature

<sup>1</sup> This chart and comments are taken from my essay, “Mary’s Magnificat: Sources and Themes,” *Marian Studies* 50 (1999): 55.  
<sup>2</sup> See Asher Finkel, “Biblical, Rabbinic, and Early Christian Ethics,” in *Jewish-Christian Encounters over the Centuries: Symbiosis, Prejudice, Holocaust, Dialogue*, ed. Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 63.

worship, Moses and other prophets proclaimed a linear interpretation of creation and history, moving from Aleph to Tav (from Alpha to Omega).

This thrust of history toward the final days is balanced by the belief in a correspondence between this world and the celestial order. Moses was instructed to build the tent of meeting, the ark of the Covenant, and so on (Ex 25–29) according to the pattern (*tabnit*) that was shown to him on the Mountain (Ex 25:40, 26:30, etc.). The only other reality created after the heavenly model is the human being (Gen 1:26–28, 5:1, 9:6, Ps 8). The experience of worship in front of the Tabernacle and later in the Jerusalem Temple drew people's attention to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, introducing them in some way into communion with the heavenly court (see Is 6:1–8). This drama of worship should lead to an appreciation of every human being, created in the divine image and challenged to activate this reality through the exercise of human dignity. Essential to this vocation and mission is the challenge to imitate God (see Lev 19:2; Ex 34:6–7; 1 Jn 4:8–16). The call to develop this correspondence to the heavenly model begins with the Temple and the city of Jerusalem (“city/vision of peace” in popular etymology). Because the rabbinic pronunciation of the city is *Yerushlaim* (in the dual), the call to imitate the heavenly model is clear. The dictum “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Ps 122:6) draws attention to the essential divine dimension of peacemaking, that aspect of the human vocation that reveals people to be the sons of God. An integral aspect of developing the expression of divine charity in the human order is the act of forgiveness. Jesus drew attention to the movement from prayer into the fabric of daily life by a call to correspond to the divine Model. “Forgive us . . . as we forgive . . .” is the only petition of the Lord's Prayer that has both a commentary and a parable to illustrate its importance (Matt 6:12, 14; 18:23–35).

### **From this Age/World to the Age/World to Come**

The Hebrew term *‘olām* can mean “permanent” (for example, a permanent blemish renders a lamb unfit for sacrifice) but in certain texts the context conveys the idea of eternity (for example, Ps 41:14). Qumran documents use the plural *‘olāmum* to designate eternity. Sometime in the first century, Pharisees and Christians conveyed the ideas of time and space by using *‘olām* (and its Greek equivalent) to embrace the concept “world” as well as “time in orientation toward eternity.” This inclusiveness/ambiguity came to be conveyed by the Latin *saeculum* as well.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Anthony Tomasino, “‘olam,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 3, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 345–51.

The biblical experience of pilgrimage exemplified the realization of Israel’s teachers that time is moving toward a sacred goal.<sup>4</sup> After the establishment of Jerusalem as David’s capital and God’s chosen place for the divine Name/Presence to dwell, this city and its Temple were the focus for both pilgrimage and all prayer (Dn 6:10). At some point the Temple mount came to be associated with the place of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac (Gn 22; 2 Chr 3:1). Later legend described the place of the Temple as *omphalos mundi*, the rock underneath sealed with the divine Name as a “stopper” to keep the waters of the abyss from inundating the earth.<sup>5</sup> Standing thus over the center of the earth, the Temple, focus of Israelite worship, was linked to the creation of the world and became as well the context for Israel to experience the heavenly court.

Through spiritual preparation and a journey of a group living simply in community while enduring hardship and possible dangers, pilgrims were disposed to beg for forgiveness and to ask for direction in order to live the covenant/commandments more adequately. They would return to the ordinary responsibilities of life with a renewed sense of their service to God and neighbor. At some point before the time of Jesus, the Sacred Scriptures were proclaimed weekly in a three-year cycle, often in houses of prayer. The Pharisees aspired to teach the laity to imitate the ways of priests in the Temple. Certain practices made the home a small sanctuary so that daily life would be imbued with a realization of God’s presence. The following chart expresses the “parallels” between Temple and home with an emphasis on the dignity of the human person in God’s image.<sup>6</sup>

Place	Temple	Field-Kitchen	Home
Agents	Priest-People	Farmer-Homemaker	Husband-Wife
Focus	Altar	Table-Bed	

Emphasizing the doctrine of resurrection, the Pharisees expressed faith in the unity of the human person, body and soul sharing an eternal destiny. Death was not “shedding this mortal coil” but a temporary separation until the Day of Judgment. This respect for the human person was rooted in the creative work of God, who saw that it was good, very good (Gn 1:10, 18, 25, 31). In a discussion of the serious responsibility of judges when the penalty for a crime was death, the sages remarked: “A king stamps many coins with one seal, and they are all alike; but the King of Kings, the Holy

<sup>4</sup> See my essay “Pilgrimage: A Study of the Biblical Experience,” *Jeevadhara* 71 (1982): 358–67.  
<sup>5</sup> Daniel Sperber, “On Sealing the Abyss,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 11 (1966): 168–74.  
<sup>6</sup> See my essay “Mary and the Biblical Heritage,” *Marian Studies* 46 (1995): 32.

One blessed be He, has stamped each human being with the seal of the first man, yet not one is like his fellow" (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* IV:5).

The sabbath is understood as an anticipation of the eternal reward of the righteous, seen as an experience of rest in the divine Presence.<sup>7</sup>

The New Testament conveys a message that draws major themes from these liturgical and domestic experiences. The Sadducees ridiculed the doctrine of resurrection because they could not discern it in the Torah of Moses. Jesus responded by referring to the passage about the burning bush (Mt 22:23–33), implying that in the revelation of the divine Name and of God's relationship with the Patriarchs one can find hints of basic teachings about human destiny. Life as communion with God transcends the mystery of death.<sup>8</sup>

### Past, Present, and Future in Worship

The intersection of space and time is expressed in pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the three great feasts (Passover, Weeks, and Booths; Dt 16:1–17). The agricultural/pastoral origins of these harvest festivals were taken into the Israelite commemoration of the departure from Egypt, the giving of Covenant/Torah at Mount Sinai, and the wandering in the desert. Grateful recollection of God's mighty deeds involved a narration of the past with gestures and symbols that permitted each generation to declare to the next: "This is what the Lord did for me when I departed from Egypt" (Ex 13:8). The efficacy of prayerful commemoration is rooted in its sacrificial dimension. The *zikkāron* (from *zākar*, "he remembered") involved sacrifice of animals to be consumed in a feast, for which the Passover meal was the model. Among the symbolic foods, the lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs were reminders of past afflictions, whereas the wine pointed to future joy. The meal prolonged the thanksgiving sacrifice of the Temple and the narration (Haggadah) of the Exodus enabled people to participate in the benefits experienced by their ancestors. Historical events are time-bound, yet the divine attributes manifested in an event like the Exodus transcend time, and God's wisdom, power, and mercy touch hearts that are receptive in the contexts of worship.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See Asher Finkel, "Sabbath as the Way to Shalom in the Biblical Tradition," *Journal of Dharma* 11 (1986): 115–23.

<sup>8</sup> See my essay "Religious Experience and Interpretation: A Christian Perspective," *Journal of Dharma* 5 (1980): 82–84.

<sup>9</sup> For the application of these liturgical themes to Jesus, see my essay, "Temple and Community: Foundations for Johannine Spirituality," *Mystics of the Book*, ed. Robert A. Herrera (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 179–96.

The Last Supper, with the command of Jesus to commemorate his sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection, is recalled in the narration of key words and actions of Jesus. This *zikkāron*, adapting the language, gestures, and symbols of the Passover meal to the unique response of Jesus to the Father's will, provided the context for Christian faith in the Paschal mystery, the *exodos* (Lk 9:31) that he accomplished in Jerusalem.

For Christians, the death and resurrection of Jesus is *the* "hour," the past event through which divine blessings are mediated. The present moment in any place graced by the presence of the Son of Man is open to the heavenly court (see Jn 1:51, referring to the dream of Jacob at Beth El). The Lamb of God, whose self-giving is for the forgiveness of sin (Jn 1:29), is preparing the Church and her members for the heavenly nuptials. In each invitation for the faithful to receive Holy Communion there is an expression of our hope to participate in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. "Blessed are those who are called to his Supper" (see Rv 19:9). There is no reason for *ad libitum* invitations here!

During the course of history the Church brings each generation of the faithful to the worship that in Christ unites them with the heavenly Temple (see Is 6:3 and Rv 11:19). However, when history is consummated, and the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven as a Bride adorned for her husband (Rv 21:2), symbols such as the heavenly Temple and ark of the covenant will disappear (Rv 21:22). The fullness of communion with the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb in the Spirit bring sacramental realities to their completion, because God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For further reflection on themes of this response, see Henry Chadwick, "The Calendar: Sanctification of Time," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 66 (2001): 99–107; F. Manns, "Liturgia ebraica e liturgia cristiana a confronto: problemi di metodologia," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 116 (2002): 404–18; F. Manzi "Hic veri templi adumbratur mysterium," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 116 (2002): 129–74; A. M. Triacca, "'L'Hodie' liturgico tra tempo ed eternità: Contributo per una visuale cristiana del tempo," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 116 (2002): 376–80; and "Concezione cristiana del tempo. Il 'tempo della salvezza,'" in *Giovanni e tempo: Tra crisi, nostalgia speranza*, ed. R. Tonelli and I. M. Garcia (Rome: L.A. Salesianum, 2000), 141–76.