The Theme of God's Presence and the Qumran Temple Scroll

Rabbi Asher Finkel, Ph.D.
GOD AND HIS TEMPLE

Reflections on Professor Samuel Terrien's

The Elusive Presence:
Toward a New Biblical Theology

edited by
Lawrence E. Frizzell
THE THEME OF GOD'S PRESENCE AND THE QUMRAN TEMPLE SCROLL

Asher Finkel

For the past two years in connection with the Consultation on the Theology of Catastrophe chaired by Msgr. Gehrter, I offered papers on the theme of God's presence and his absence in the apocryphal and apocalyptic works, in the early rabbinic and early Christian texts with reference to Qumran, Josephus and the accounts in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History. I was particularly delighted to see in print the recent major work of Samuel Terrien, after I had the occasion to hear his paper in Walter Brueggemann's Section on the Presence of God (SBL, San Francisco, 1977). The present Consultation indeed attests to the significant contribution made by Professor Terrien to Biblical Theology.

Terrien sees the reality of God's presence as the center of biblical faith, a presence which remains elusive (the title of his book). It is the distinctiveness of the Hebraic theology of presence rather than the ideology of the covenant which provides a key to understanding the Bible. He convincingly demonstrates that the theme of presence is primary and that of covenant is secondary. For the religion of Israel, of post-exilic Judaism and early Christianity is permeated by the experience, the cultic recollection and the prophetically appropriated expectation of the presence of God among men. The author offers an analysis of the biblical literature in its religio-historical development, from the patriarchal legends on epiphanic visitations to the Mosaic theophanies, and its branching out into the prophetic vision, the psalmic communion and the sapiential reflection. He notes in particular the tension between the theogonomena of the presence through the Name and the glory, as well as the movement from the spatial to the temporal, from the physical Temple to its spiritualization.

This examination of the various theological expressions of presence conforms to an evolutionary pattern and to dialectics. However, an exploration of the post-biblical literature reveals that the writers were relating different aspects of or responses to God's presence in terms of encounter (individual or collective experiences), communion (a fellowship in God's presence during the pilgrimage celebration or at a liturgical occasion) and consciousness (different levels of reverential knowledge or affective faith). The person may enjoy a sense of God's presence through reflection or prayer. He may deepen or alter his consciousness through dramatic participation in recollected events of God's presence. He may be open to communion through preparatory discipline of pilgrimage and liturgical fellowship. Or he may relate experiences of an encounter in vision or audion. After all, the subject of investigation of this literature is the faith or attitudes of the writers and redactors of the biblical and
post-biblical periods and not the reader's. They preserved responses to God's presence in the past and reflect the experiences of the present worshipping community, which they wish to transmit as authentic expressions for the future generations. The witness of the text cannot be separated from the divine reality which Israel testified to have evoked the response.

Terrien recognizes that the post-biblical literature of the Second Temple period uses the different theologoumena of presence interchangeably with reference to God himself or his indwelling. Yet he has left unexplored the intertestamental literature, the bridge between the Jewish and the Christian Bible. He also did not pay attention to the canonical history during the intertestamental period. The canonical process reflects hermeneutical dynamics of a worshipping community, throughout the Second Temple period. For the formation of the biblical canon involves a process of theological reflection within Israel arising from the impact which certain writings continued to exert upon the community life through their religious usage. These scriptures shaped the faith and formed the consciousness of the community. They determined its social structure and human conduct in transpersonal, interpersonal and subpersonal relationships. They offered evaluation of its historical experience and the vision of hope for its future. Towards the end of the canonical process, Israel continues its hermeneutics through Targum and Midrash in order to address changing needs. This body of literature, however, is set apart from the sacred text.

A modern interpreter must confront the complete history of the growth of the Old Testament, as history of biblical literature and history of canonical texts. The dynamic development from one to the other occurs precisely in the post-exilic period. Terrien did not deal with the canonical forces at work in the formation of the tradition into Scriptures during the post-exilic period. Rather he sets up the New Testament's relation to the Old in an analogy to his description of the pre-exilic growth of the Hebraic tradition. Terrien is definitely right in viewing the presence of God as the dominant force in the formation of the Gospel literature. However, the evangelists' theology of the presence must also be judged in light of the canonical process. After all, the presence of God through Jesus was confirmed by the disciples' own response to the Sacred Scriptures of Israel as fulfillment of Torah, Prophets and Psalms (the canonical works mentioned in Lk 24:44).

The Qumran literature of the intertestamental period offers a fine example for the study of the canonical process in the life of the worshipping community as well as the resultant hermeneutics dynamically translated into faith and practice, and in the formation of a new socio-religious entity. It indeed offers a unique opportunity for the exploration of the extant literature of both the Vorgeschichte and the Geschichte of the Essene community during the Hasmonean and Herodian times. Historically these works appear prior to and during the period of early Christianity and Pharisaic Judaism. The literature of the Essene community assumes the forms of Serakhim and Pesharim, i.e., manuals of and scriptural projection on the self-exiled community in the desert and the future community in the end of time. These works depend on the authoritative text of Torah and Prophets, though reflecting a particular recensional history. These scrolls also echo the teachings of earlier religious writings and they even refer to them as books (e.g., Sefer ha-hagay in 1QS1a:6; CD 10:6; 13:2; 14:6 and Sefer Mahlagoth ha'attim, i.e., Jubilees in CD 15:3). Yet these works are distinguished from the canonical texts as books (Sefer ha-torah; Sifre hanebi'tim), which are cited authoritative and introduced as peshar.

Fortunately two key works can now be identified and studied as proto-Qumran writings: the Book of Jubilees and the Temple Scroll. They share a common understanding of the Pentateuchal legislation, the same fixed liturgical calendar of a solar year and the similar emphasis on the earthly Temple and the eternal Temple built by God in the end of time. Jubilees relates the Mosaic legislation to the narrative of the books of Genesis and Exodus, ending with the biblical account of the event and legislation of Passover. The book offers an epilogue on the significance of the Sabbath, year which is in theme and subject matter the same as the legislation on the sabbatical work in the restating week work. In particular it stresses (50:11) that only the designated sacrifice for the Sabbath can be brought in the Temple. This rule governs the first part of the Temple Scroll. The Scroll appears to be picking up where Jubilees closes. Exodus 35 juxtaposes the Sabbath legislation on the account of offerings for the construction of the Tabernacle. Jubilees completes its presentation in light of Ex 35:1-3 and the Temple Scroll opens with a rewritten account of Ex 34:10-16 leading to 35:1ff. It presents legislation on the construction of the Temple, the sacrifices and the festivals, the rules of sanctities and purities - parallelling the priestly code - and ending with the Deuteronomic laws. It is the human response to God's presence in the Temple and Jerusalem, which governs the legislation in these two works and both present the rewritten Pentateuchal material as the speech of God.

The Temple Scroll was not considered to be canonical text by the Qumran community, as Yadin assumes (Temple Scroll I, p. 300). This can be established on two grounds:

1) The clear reference to a Torah text or a Prophetic writing is separated from its midrash or its peshar in the Essene literature. However in the Temple Scroll cited as authoritative support, even when such opportunity occurs. The literary history of Qumran indicates how the community adopted the legislative interpretation of the Temple Scroll in the interrim period and its des-
tribution of the end-time. The Temple Scroll serves the community as the proper guide in the unveiling of God's intention in the Scripture.

2) The Temple Scroll is marked by the peculiarity of God speaking in the first person. This is a particular feature of midrash-torah employed by the Essene teachers, paralleling the use of pesher for prophecies as dream interpretation. For it seeks "to excavate" or "to forge" (so Cd 6:2-9) the deeper connection of God's words through conflating, juxtaposition and harmonization of the Torah texts. These are precisely the redactional methods used by the Temple Scroll writer. He employs exegesis of Bible by Bible, a form of Midrash also reflected in the canonical shaping of the biblical works themselves. Indeed, the Temple Scroll can be identified as the final Midrash Torah (40b and 40b4 in relation to Cd 14 end).

The major critical tension is not between the original event and the biblical record but between the earlier Torah tradition and the reshaped composition of the Temple Scroll. It is governed by the Kanonbewusstein (canon consciousness), which affects the process of interpretation of the accepted Scriptures upon the successive generations of the community. This Kanonbewusstein is rooted in the theology of God's presence: God's presence is to be encountered in the word and in the proper hearing and doing his intention. This consciousness is formed and maintained by the liturgical event of reading the Scriptures in a public assembly. Such is the canonical intent of the Deuteronomic work (compare 5:3-4 with 29:13-14 in light of 31:10-13), the historical setting for covenant making in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh 8-10; Apocryphal Ezra 9:36-55) and the annual ceremony at Qumran on the occasion of the first encounter with God's word at Mount Sinai (40b).

A redactional examination of the Temple Scroll reveals the intention of the writer, which is identical with the reshaping of the Pentateuchal text. To be in God's presence indeed affects the midrash torah of the Scroll.

For it reiterates in an interpolating way the Pentateuchal promise of God's indwelling in the Temple and among his people. It offers key canonical texts without distinction between God, his name and his glory. A close analysis of the rewritten Pentateuchal material, arranged along given topics, reveals three distinct sections of the Temple Scroll (Cols. 2-29; 30-51:10; 51:11-66:17). Each section is governed by the theme of God's presence, in the opening and closing statements and particular stresses. The first section closes with a key text (29:3f):

In the house where I cause My name (to dwell) upon it ... I favor them and they will become unto Me a nation and I will be present to them forever. I shall dwell with them and I will sanctify the Temple with My glory, where I will cause My glory to dwell upon it...

The Temple derives its holiness from the presence of God's glory and this presence affects a particular attitude and conduct for those who live in Jerusalem near the Temple, the practice of purity and holiness. The text continues:

...Until the day of blessing (i.e. the end of time) when I shall create the Temple to establish it for Me eternally, in accordance with the covenant made with Jacob at Beth El.

This reflects a correspondence between the heavenly sphere with the earthly realm, as indicated by Jacob's vision of the ladder (Gen 28:12). This view is rooted in a panentheistic model of God in relation to the cosmos. It maintains the eternity of God the creator who duratively exists in a metamundane realm while his creation on earth is limited spatially and temporally. God transcends his creation yet he makes his presence felt immanently. A God who acts in history also reserves the freedom to hide his face. The removal of his presence affects the course of history resulting in evil. The Essenes restrict the dualistic account of the creation in the order that human forces to the earthly history of mankind (so 1QS 3:13-4:26b). This micro-macrocosmic correlation dominates Essene thought, especially in the correspondence between the heavenly realm and the earthly Temple. This correspondence affects in particular the apocalyptic writings and it seems to be rooted in the prophetic visions of Isaiah (6:1-3) and Micahah ibn Imlah (1Kgs 22:19ff.).

One of the main concerns of the Temple Scroll is to offer instruction for the construction of the Second Temple in imitation of the divine pattern for the structure. The Tabernacle in the time of Moses was constructed in accordance with divine instructions (Ex 36:8-38:20 following 25:8-27:19; note the stress on ḥabîneth). The first Temple in the days of Solomon is said to be built in accordance with a divine blueprint (1Chr 28:11). Yet the second Temple of Zerubbabel was not constructed in accordance with Ezekiel's instruction. This prophetic vision was seen as a utopian plan following the defeat of God's enemies, the final construction of God's Temple. The author of the Temple Scroll is inspired by the Tabernacle tradition in view of Ezekiel's vision. It addresses a newly established theocratic community, which gained its independence under Simeon the Hasmonaen, after Acras was secured and Simeon was acclaimed publicly High Priest and Marshal on the 18th of Ellul, 140 B.C.E. (so 1Macc 14). Yadin has shown (Temple Scroll, I ch. 8) that the Scroll was written during the reign of Simeon's successor, John Hyrcanus (135-105 B.C.E.). The split with the community in Jerusalem occurs at the end of the reign and the Qumran literature refers to events during the rule of his son,
Alexander Jannaeus. The refusal by the established community to adhere to the midrash torah of the true teacher was seen by the Essenes as a severe religious crisis, causing the pollution of the Temple and effecting the concealment of God's presence. A similar crisis befell the earlier generation in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, namely pollution caused by the introduction of the abomination in the Temple (so Daniel). Now the Essenes came into conflict with a larger community of Pharisees and Sadducees, who are depicted as the renegade tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh respectively.13

The Essene departure to the desert as the remnant of Judea and Jerusalem and their refusal to participate in the sacrificial service did not result in a renunciation of the Temple as the abode of God's presence, as argued by B. Gérard and accepted by Terrill.14 The Essenes consciously translated the biblical paradigm of the past into the present practice and future hope for the community. They established for themselves a socio-religious structure of encampment in the desert, as in the days of Moses. This is to be maintained in the interim period prior to their restoration in Jerusalem. For they awaited a final confrontation with the enemies of God, which will result in a triumphant return to the divinely rebuilt Temple in the end of time. This particular eschatological timetable reflects the successive events of the biblical past. As in the days of Moses and the time of David and Solomon, first Amalek, the enemy of Israel, is defeated and then a Tabernacle or Temple is built. The end-time, when God's presence will be manifested publicly following the defeat of God's enemies, corresponds to the remembered time when God's presence was enjoyed collectively by the people of Israel. In the meantime, the religious crisis of God's absence from the Temple affects the biblically oriented life of the Essenes in the desert.

The Scriptural traditions of the Mosaic covenant and the Davidic covenant both determine the eschatological model of redemption and revelation. These two trajectories shape the socio-religious reality in the present time and a vision of the future community. It promotes a radical break with the dominant urban culture. The Mosaic example offers such a conscious rejection of the established forms and effects a new social organization. This was true for the interim period, the preparatory period for the final restoration of the Temple, the Davidic king and the Zadokite High Priest. God's presence in the Temple acts as a legitimator. Thus, the task of world construction by the Essenes takes the form of questioning the legitimacy of the established order, which is sustained by a theology of God's presence in the Temple. It points to the nonconformity of the microcosmic Temple with the divinely ordained construction or with the established calendar cycle from the fourth day of creation, the day of the luminaries.16

The Essenes pose a tremendous threat to the established Hasmonean order, which in turn seeks to eliminate the new priestly organization (sons of Zadok) in the desert. The new group draws a tight circle around itself and it insists that it radically separate itself from the corruption (mammon) and the pollution of the established order (the three nets of Belial, CD 4:15). Furthermore, the Essenes assume a radical, world construction paradigm of their biblical past, the Mosaic example of encampment. They maintain legitimacy in a fellowship with the angels on earth. The new community awaits a final epiphany following a physical confrontation with the opposition. Then a permanent order will be established and sanctioned by the divinely built Temple. The new order will be headed by a duumvirate of high priest and king, which will permanently resolve the tension between the two. This agenda is fully described in the Serekhim of the Qumran community, while the pesharim reflect on the historical situation of conflict with the established order in Jerusalem. The Temple Scroll offers the basic interpretative differences with the Pharisees and the Sadducees for the newly formed theocratic state. These differences in attitudes and in practice led to the physical separation from the Temple and Jerusalem by the Essenes, who gave rise to a theocratic society in the desert.

Notes

1. These papers will appear in a separate publication by the Institute of Judaico-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University, 1980.


4. The Hebrew text is edited by Y. Yadin (Jerusalem: Hekhal Ha-Sefer, 1977). Lawrence H. Schiffman questions the Qumranic origin of said work and supports his position with a linguistic analysis (SBL, Qumran Studies section 1978). The detailed comparison with the Qumran text and Jubilees, as offered by Yadin in his introduction and commentary, indicates a common tradition in contrast with the Pharisaic or proto-Mishnaic tradition. The linguistic similarities with Mishnaic Hebrew only indicates a development from classical Hebrew during the period of the Hasmonean revival of the Hebrew language.
5 See Y. Yadin, Temple Scroll, 1, p. 165. Compare CD 11:17 and Jub 50:11; Matt 12:5 suggests similar polemics against the Pharisaic interpretation.

6 The Temple Scroll offers the rewritten Pentateuchal legislation in the first person singular as God speaking. So the first chapter in Jubilees opens with a theophanic address to Moses in the first person.

7 For example on monogamy CD 5:2-4 refers to the Scripture (Deut. 17:7) and to “unveiling” of the text by Zadok, while not citing the Temple Scroll, 57:17-18. Similarly on marriage to a niece, CD 5:9-10 cites Scripture and derives the prohibition while not citing the Temple Scroll, 66:16-17.

8 Temple Scroll 45:12 forbids a blind person to enter the city because of God’s presence. So is the restriction for the community in fellowship with God’s angels (IQSa2) and in the end-time (Midrash of Last Days).


10 Compare the studies on Ezekiel by W. Zimmerli and T. Willis’ examination of the Chronicler’s exegesis of the earlier biblical works. See B. Childs, Introduction, p. 647ff.


12 Yadin noticed this particular phenomenon in the Temple Scroll, Vol. 1, p. 216; Vol. 2, p. 136, note 13-14. Yet he did not subject the composition to a redactional analysis in light of these stresses.


16 These are the basic differences with the Pharisaic tradition. The Pharisees supported an intercalated calendar, based on eye witnesses’ account and court’s decision. See A. Finkel, The Pharisees and the Teacher of Nazareth (Leiden: Brill 1974) p. 70. The Pharisees also are said to have supported the rebuilding of the Temple by Herod (Babylonian Talmud Baba Bathra 4a) and the Tannaim have preserved the blueprint of said Temple in the Mishnah Middoth.
