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## Biblical Symbolism of the Temple

The Temple has always been a place of peace and consolation for the human mind troubled by stresses and strains of worldly cares and worries. It is a place where man learns to transcend the level of his material existence and spring upward to commune with the other-worldly Reality. The fact that generally temples were all built on hills and mountains symbolically bears witness to this truth. The very structure of the Indian temple with its spire pointing to heaven is indicative of the heavenward rising up of the human spirit in search of union with the Divine. The Ziggurat temples of ancient Mesopotamia with their terrace platforms tending to reach up to heaven, represented the sacred place of communion between man from below and God from above, who descends stepping down from his heavenly abode to the earth below through those terrace platforms to meet man. In the Bible too we find references to the Temple. There the concept of the Temple reflects the faith and ideology of the ancestors of the Hebrews as well as of the Christians. A view of the Temple from the view point of biblical man, we hope, will enrich the understanding of the symbolism of the Temple, which has always been very central in the faith and praxis of all the world-religions.

### I

#### **A Brief History of the Temple in Jewish Worship**

Before we launch our discussion on the symbolism of the Temple, it is necessary to contextualize the topic by recapitulating briefly the history of the Temple in Jewish Worship. The Temple and Temple-worship have played an important role in the life and faith of Israel. In ancient Israel, the Ark of the Covenant and the Tent of Meeting were the forerunners of the Temple. These were, in the desert period, two important cult objects of Israel connected

with the Covenant which was at the core of their faith. The Ark and the Tent signified Yahweh's *shekinah*, His tangible presence in the midst of His people.

### The Ark of the Covenant

It was a box containing the two tablets of the Law of the covenant. But it was so intimately connected with God's presence that one could say 'Where the Ark is, there Yahweh is.'<sup>1</sup> Often the Ark is referred to in connection with Yahweh's enthronement upon the Cherubim.<sup>2</sup> The Ark is, therefore, also considered the throne of Yahweh, on which He was believed to be invisibly seated. This Ark was kept in the central sanctuary of the Israelite federation.

### The Tent of Meeting

It was another forerunner of the Temple. We find the earliest account of this Tent in Ex 33:7-11, which is of Elohist tradition.<sup>3</sup> But the priestly writing has later elaborated it into the 'tabernacle' in Ex 25-30, 35-40. The Tent was, however, a shrine for receiving oracles, and the presence of God was not permanent as in the case of the Ark.<sup>4</sup> Probably at a later stage, the Ark was related to the Tent, and the sacred writers narrated how the Ark was placed inside the Tent. By the time the sanctuary at Shiloh acquired the status of central sanctuary, the Tent of Meeting indicated a more permanent and substantial structure than a mere tent, which could also be called a temple.<sup>5</sup>

But this prominence given to the shrine of Shiloh was lost when that place was destroyed and the Ark was captured by the Philistines about the year 1050 B.C. Later when David came in power, he brought the Ark to Jerusalem his capital city,<sup>6</sup> which gained prominence in the life and worship of Israel. When David wanted to build a temple for the worship of God, the word of God came to him through Nathan the prophet of that time discouraging him from

1. Cf. I Sm 4:1-7:2; 2 Sm 6.

2. Cf. I Sm 4:4; 2 Sm 6:2; 2 K 19:15; I Chr 13:6.

3. Cf. Num 11:16-17, 24, 26, 12:5, 10; Dt 31:14-15.

4. Cf. G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. I, (Edinburgh : 1962), p. 236.

5. Cf. I Sm 1:9; 3:3.

6. Cf. 2 Sm 6.

doing it, and expressing the divine preference to continue the desert custom of worship.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless David secured a site for the worship centre by purchasing the threshing-floor of Araunah, the Jebusite.<sup>8</sup>

Solomon built the Temple about the year 960 B.C.<sup>9</sup> And the Ark was placed in the Holy of Holies of that Temple. This presence of the Ark in the Temple made the Jerusalem Temple the central sanctuary of Israel. King Hezekiah closed the rural sanctuaries and cleansed the Jerusalem Temple and persuaded the people to worship at Jerusalem. But his successor Manasseh rebuilt the high places. However, the ideal of Jerusalem Temple being the only sanctuary of Israel continued. A century later, in 622 B.C., King Josiah undertook another purification of the Temple and declared a new era of covenantal relationship with Yahweh on the basis of the 'Book of the Law' found in the Temple.<sup>10</sup> Even though Josiah's reform did not last long, Jerusalem was firmly established as the centre of true Yahwism for the whole of Israel.

Temple-worship served to maintain unity in Israel. The annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem Temple strengthened Israel's feeling of oneness. The pious Jews considered the journey to Zion (Jerusalem) the chief joy of life.<sup>11</sup> Jerusalem got its importance because of its Temple, in which God dwelt.<sup>12</sup> It was on the occasions of festivals that the covenant was remembered and renewed.<sup>13</sup> Jerusalem became the symbol of unity of Israel as well as of all mankind.<sup>14</sup>

In 587 B.C. the Babylonian king Nabuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple.<sup>15</sup> The exiles in Babylon, Egypt and other foreign lands felt keenly the loss of their Jerusalem Temple.<sup>16</sup> Substitute temples

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7. Cf. 2 Sm 7:5-11.

8. Cf. 2 Sm 24:15ff.; I Chr 22:1; 2Chr 3:1.

9. Cf. I K 5-8.

10. Cf. 2 K 22:3-23:25.

11. Cf. Is 30:29; 35:10; Ps 42:1ff; 43:3f; 122:1ff; 137:6.

12. Cf. Ps 84:1-2; 137:4; I Sm 26:19; Ez 11:15; Jonah 2:4; Ps 42:2; 63:2; 65:1f. 84:10.

13. Cf. Dt 6:20-25; 26:5-11; Josh 24:2-13.

14. Cf. Is 2:2-4; Mich 4:1-3; Zech 14:16ff.

15. Cf. 2 K 25:1ff.; Jr 39:1-8; 52:4ff.

16. Cf. Ps 137:1-6.

were built at Elephantine and Leontopolis, and synagogues were erected in many places. But nothing could really substitute for their sacred and magnificent Temple of Jerusalem.

During the exile, prophets like Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah gave to the people the hope of a new Temple which would be perfect in every respect. When the Babylonian empire fell and the Persians came to power, the Temple of Jerusalem was restored under the leadership of Zerubbabel in the year 515 B.C.<sup>17</sup> But it was very inadequate in fulfilling the prophecies concerning the new Temple. Hence the people who remembered the previous Temple were disappointed at the sight of the restored Temple.<sup>18</sup> The poorly maintained priesthood and cult brought the Temple into disrepute.<sup>19</sup> At the time of Antiochus Epiphanus, in 167 B.C., the Temple was desecrated as he installed an idol in it for worship. But when the Maccabees captured Jerusalem, they cleansed the Temple and rededicated it to Yahweh on December 25, 164 B.C.<sup>20</sup> During the reign of Herod the Great, the Temple was enlarged and beautified to become one of the wonders of the world of that time. It was this Temple which was in existence at the time of Jesus. In 70 A.D., exactly as Jesus had predicted, this Temple was completely destroyed by the Roman army in the civil war between the Jews and the Roman government. Thereafter the material Temple has not yet been in any way restored, but the theology of the Temple continued to grow in the life of Israel and of the Christians.

## II

### The Temple as Sign of the Covenant

When we begin to reflect on the symbolic aspect of the Temple, the first thought that comes to our mind is that the Temple is a sign of the covenant. Just as the Ark and the Tent of Meeting reminded the ancient Israel of their covenant with Yahweh, so the very existence of the Temple brought to the minds of the later generations in Israel the fact of the covenant and the covenantal relationship between them

17. Cf. Esdras 6:15-22.

18. Cf. Ezra 3:12; I Esd 5:63-65; Jos Ant 11:80-81.

19. Cf. Mal 1:7ff; 3:3f; 8f.

20. Cf. I Mac 4:36-59.

and their God. For Israel Yahweh is a transcendent God. He is the one who is riding on the clouds.<sup>21</sup> He sends forth the winds as His messengers.<sup>22</sup> He makes the earth His footstool.<sup>23</sup> His true Temple is in heaven.<sup>24</sup> He is infinitely holy and above the world He created. No man can see or hear Him and then continue to live on earth.<sup>25</sup> But such a transcendent God comes down to His people and stays in the Temple to meet His people by virtue of the covenant He had made with them. The Temple, therefore, reminded the Israelites of the gracious covenant which God established with them, and of their obligations towards such a God.

But in course of time, this covenant symbolism of the Temple was eclipsed by the emergence of a merely ritualistic and formalistic Temple-worship in the atmosphere of material prosperity and decadence in moral life which prevailed under the monarchy. Then the people derived false satisfaction by simply performing the ritualistic sacrifices in the Temple as they were prescribed by the letter of the Law and, in fact, disregarding the obligations of the covenant in their everyday life. It was then that the prophets raised their voices against such a form of Temple worship. Through the prophet Jeremiah God said to the people who came to worship Him in the Jerusalem Temple: "Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?" (Jr 7:8-11). It was this prophetic outcry that Jesus brought to its climax when he cleansed the Temple.<sup>26</sup> Jesus made it clear that a concept of the Temple and Temple-worship devoid of its covenantal symbolism is of no use; so he said: "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and

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21. Cf. Ps 18:18; 68:5, 34; Dt 33:26; Is 19:1; 57:14; 66:15.

22. Cf. Jr 10:13; 51:16; Ps 104:4; 135:7; Jonah 1:4.

23. Cf. Is 66:1.

24. Cf. Hos 5:15; Is 18:4; 35:5; Mic 1:2f; 6:6; Dt 26:15; Jr 25:30; Hab 2:20; I<sup>s</sup> 40:22; 63:15,19; Ps 2:4.

25. Cf. Ex 3:6; 20:19; 33:20; Jdg 6:22; 13:22; Is 6:5; Dt 5:23-26.

26. Cf. My book: *Destroy This Temple*, Bangalore, 1978, pp. 14-23.

offer your gift" (Mt 5:23-24). Thus Jesus tried to revive the covenant symbolism of the Temple so as to remind the people constantly of their covenantal obligations towards God and men, and thereby lead them to reform their way of life.

### III

#### The Temple as the Symbol of God's Presence

In the Bible the Temple was understood and accepted as God's house. Israel believed that their covenantal God was sitting enthroned above the Cherubim in the dark, mysterious, innermost room of the Temple called the Holy of Holies.<sup>27</sup> Now, how to find this immanent presence of God corresponding to his transcendence was a theological problem for the Israelites. This predicament well expressed in the prayer of Solomon on the occasion of the inauguration of the Temple; "But will God dwell indeed with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! . . . And hearken thou to the supplications of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray toward this place; yea, hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place; and when thou hearest, forgive" (2 Chr 6:18, 21).

The Deuteronomistic theologians tried to explain the presence of God in the Temple as the dwelling of God's Name there.<sup>28</sup> According to them, it is a presence through the dwelling of God's Name, while His permanent abode is heaven. This presence by God's Name is used sometimes as a phenomenon interchangeable with His presence through His 'glory'.<sup>29</sup>

Gradually, this presence of God came to be expressed through an Aramaic or Mishnaic Hebrew word *shekinah*. This word is derived from the Hebrew verb *shakan* which means "dwelling" rather than "presence". This connotes the establishment of a special relationship between God and a sensible reality. Thus, God is said

27. Cf. I Sm 4:4; 2 Sm 6:2f.; 22:11; I K 8:6; 19:15; Is 37:14f.; Ps 88:11; 80:2; 99:1; Dn 3:55.

28. Cf. Dt 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23; 15:20; 16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15; 17:8, 10; 24-25 26:2; 31:11.

29. Cf. Tobit 13:11, 14.

to "dwell" in the Temple. This implies on the part of God an active presence. God is present in the Temple through His *shekinah* means that He is active there. God is present where He is active. By this understanding of God's presence in the Temple, the theological problem is more or less solved. The Temple is the place where God's Name, or Glory or *shekinah* dwells, and where He is active. In this sense He dwells in the Temple; yet his presence is not confined to the Temple; He is still free to be present elsewhere, say in the synagogues, and in Israel as a whole, in Jerusalem, in Palestine, in the souls of the just and in the Israelites engaged in the study of the Law.

#### IV

##### The Temple as the House of God

Because of the special presence of God in the Temple, the Temple is generally called in the Bible "the house of God". The phrase "house of God" occurs for the first time in Gen 28 : 10-22, in which Jacob calls the place of his mysterious dream Bethel, *bâitel*, meaning "house of God". In the Septuagint Greek version of the Bible, the Hebrew word *bâit* is translated by the Greek *oikos* when it is a reference to the Temple, while *oikia* is used when it is a reference to any ordinary house of a man.<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to note that in the OT the Greek word *oikos* is used to designate the Temple which is the house of God, as well as the palace which is the house of the earthly king. In fact, Solomon built the Temple adjacent to his palace. This is indicative of their understanding and acceptance of God's presence in the Temple. According to them, it was parallel to the presence of the king in his palace. Hence the Temple was understood as the palace, the house of God, where He dwelt as king.<sup>31</sup> This fits in quite well with the general OT theology that God is the king of Israel who dwells in the midst of His People.<sup>32</sup> Thus the Temple is truly God's "house". According to the Synoptic Gospels, while cleansing the Temple Jesus quoted Is 56:7 and designated the Temple as God's house. According to John's account, in

30. Cf. Jr 52:13 and 43:12.

31. Cf. My book: *Destroy This Temple*, p. 19f.

32. Cf. Num 23:21; Dt 33:5; I K 22:19; Is 6:5; Ex 15:18; Ps 145:11ff.

the same context Jesus called the Temple as "My Father's house" (Jn 2:16), implying that the Temple is the house of God, the king, and at the same time Jesus is the son of that king. Thus in the NT, the Temple is understood as the "house" of God the Father as well as of God the Son. In fact, in many Christian churches there is the special sacramental presence of Jesus centred on the Eucharist kept in a tabernacle.

## V

### **The Temple : A House of Prayer**

The Temple has always been understood in the Bible as a house of prayer, wide open to all who are willing to pray. So God says through Deutero-Isiah: "And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Is 56:6-7). In the NT, while speaking out a parable of two persons who "went up into the Temple to pray" (Lk 18:10), Jesus pointed out that the Temple is really a place of prayer, a place of real encounter between God and man.

When Judaism attached too much importance to the material temple and followed a hypocritical form of worship without true interiority, Jesus declared that God is truly worshipped neither in Jerusalem nor on Mount Gerizim, but "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:20-24). This implies that the material temple or the church need not be considered the only place where we can pray, and that a mere external ritualistic worship and prayer in a temple or church without interiority does not make it a true place of worship. Prayer is an encounter between God and man, which needs sincerity and openness. And man can thus face God in true prayer only when he stands united with Jesus the Truth and moved by the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

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33. Cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:26; Jn 15:5, 16.



## VI

**The Cosmic Symbolism of the Temple**

Biblical thought has already paved the way to view the Temple from the angle of its cosmic symbolism. According to the Bible, God fills the universe.<sup>34</sup> In that sense, the whole universe can be considered God's Temple. However, the Bible does not emphasize the point of the material universe being a Temple as such; instead, the whole attention is drawn to the Temple of Jerusalem and attempts are made to show the cosmic significance of that Temple.

The Temple of Solomon derived its cosmic value first from the fact that it was built employing all the riches and wisdom of Solomon, which were representative of the wealth and wisdom all over the world. The cosmic significance of the Temple of Solomon shines forth also from the fact that the pagan king Hiram and his people of Sidon and Tyre co-operated very well for the construction of the Temple. The cosmic dimension of the Temple could be seen in the very plan of the Temple, its erection on Mount Zion, and many details of its fittings and furniture. Just like the multi-storied terrace-temples in Mesopotamia called Ziggurat, the Jerusalem Temple also was a symbolic figure of the universe. The altar of the Temple which Ezekiel saw in vision might have been influenced by these Ziggurats.<sup>35</sup>

The Temple has been considered by the Jews as the centre of the world, the navel of the universe. The Temple is the highest point and also the meeting of the three parts of the universe, the sky, earth and the subterranean world. Zion, with its Temple, is the centre and summit of the universe, from which all creation issued, the waters flowed to form different streams. Thus Zion was considered to be the site of the earthly paradise.

The division of the sanctuary of the Temple into Holy of Holies, Holy place and Vestibule represent the celestial, terrestrial and subterranean worlds. The two columns which Solomon placed at the entrance of the Temple might have symbolized everything that is

34. Cf. Am 9:1-6; Is 6:3; Jr 23:23-24; Ps 24:1; 50:12; 72:19; 139:7-13; Pr. 15:3; Wis 1:7; 8:1; Eccles 43:27.

35. Cf. Ez 43:13-17.

divided into pairs, such as summer and winter, light and darkness, sun and moon etc. The interior decoration of the Holy place with its Cherubim, palms and interwoven flowers might serve to remind one of Paradise, and thus the Temple would stand for an ideal creation.<sup>36</sup>

The Jewish historian Josephus found symbolic meanings for so many details in the Temple. The portal with its single door wide open signified the sky in all its infinity and immensity.<sup>37</sup> The veil at the entrance with its scarlet colour symbolized fire, its linen thread the earth, its violet colour the air, and its purple the sea.<sup>38</sup> The seven lamps on their seven-branched lampstand symbolized the seven planets.<sup>39</sup> The twelve loaves of propitiation were considered by Josephus to be the signs of the zodiac and the months of the year.<sup>40</sup> The thirteen perfumes in the censer signified the proclamation that all things belong to God and exist for him.<sup>41</sup> This cosmic dimension of the temple reaches its climax in Jesus Christ, who is the true Temple, in whom "the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9).

## VII

### Jesus, The Perfect Temple

The physical Temple was only a symbol of the perfect messianic Temple to be realized in the person of Jesus Christ. The physical temple of Jerusalem could not contain in itself the perfect ideal of the Temple. The templeness or the Temple in its value aspect was already destroyed by the Jews with their hypocritical, insincere worship in the Temple of Jerusalem. But Jesus came to restore that true "Temple" in his own person by his suffering, death and resurrection. That is why while cleansing the Temple of Jerusalem Jesus said: "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19).

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36. Cf. Y. Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple*, (London: 1962), p. 98.

37. Cf. Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* V, 5, 4, c. 2, 08.

38. Cf. *Ibid.* c., 213.

39. Cf. *Ibid.*, c. 217.

40. Cf. *Ibid.*

41. Cf. *Ibid.*, V, 5, 5 c. 218.

All the ideals of a perfect Temple have been realized in the resurrected Jesus. That is why in the Book of Revelation the visionary says so about the new city of heaven: "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev 21:22). Jesus, with his resurrection, has become for men the true Temple.<sup>42</sup> He is the true Bethel, the house of God, where there is the full presence of God.<sup>43</sup> Because, (1) he is the divine Word become flesh,<sup>44</sup> (2) he abides in the Father and the Father abides in him,<sup>45</sup> (3) he is the meeting point between God and men, where men will realize the inner unity among God, Christ and all other men,<sup>46</sup> (4) he is the place of prayer where men can pray and obtain favours from God,<sup>47</sup> (5) in him the believers can offer a perfect sacrificial victim pleasing to God,<sup>48</sup> (6) in him man can truly worship God "in spirit and truth",<sup>49</sup> (7) he is the symbol of the covenant between God and man, (8) and he is the source of grace, the fountain of "living water".<sup>50</sup> Thus, since all the ideals of the Temple are perfectly fulfilled in Jesus, one can rightly say that Jesus is the perfect Temple.

## VIII

### **The Church—a Temple**

According to early Christian belief the Church, the community of the believers in Christ, was regarded as the Temple. Thus St. Paul reminded the Corinthians that they, together with Paul, are engaged in the work of building up God's Temple, and that they are God's temple in which God's Spirit dwells.<sup>51</sup> In his second letter he reminded them again of their status of being the temple of God: "What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God" (2 Co 6:16). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul

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42. Cf. Jn 2:19, 21.

43. Cf. Jn 1:51.

44. Cf. Jn 1:14.

45. Cf. Jn 14:10.

46. Cf. Jn 14:20.

47. Cf. Jn 14:13-14; I K 8:28ff.

48. Cf. Jn 1:29; 19:34; 20:27; I Jn 3:5; Rev 5:6.

49. Cf. Jn 4:21-24.

50. Cf. Jn 1:16; 7:37-39; Ez 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech 13:1; 14:8.

51. Cf. I Co 3:10-17.

drew the beautiful picture of the universal Church which he calls God's temple. So he wrote: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:19-22).

This Christian thought had its genesis in the OT as well as in the writings of the Qumran community. In the OT, the community of Israel has been called "the house of God".<sup>52</sup> The prophets have foretold of a renewed Jerusalem which would be God's sanctuary.<sup>53</sup> The Qumran community considered themselves to be the true Temple of God.<sup>54</sup> However, following this line of Jewish theological thought, the NT writers saw the symbolism of the Temple realized in the Church which is the continuation and the body of Christ. When they called the Church the Temple of God, they meant first of all that the Church should be holy as the Holy God abides in it. The Holy Spirit dwells in and sanctifies the Christian community. This holiness is not derived from a mechanical or physical basis, but from an ethical basis.<sup>55</sup> Secondly, unity is another mark of the Church. As there was one God and one Temple in the OT, so in the NT too there should be only one Temple, one body of Christ built up by many-members united in Christ. Thirdly, the Church as Temple implies that it is a worshipping community with a new priesthood and a new sacrifice.<sup>56</sup>

## IX

### Individual Christian—a Temple

The NT writers gradually transferred the symbolism of the Temple from the Church to the individual Christians. If the Church is a Temple, that Temple is formed by the union of different members

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52. Cf. Num 12:7; Hcs 8:1; 9:8, 15; Jr 12:7.

53. Cf. Ez 36:23ff; 37:24-28, Joel 3:17; Zech 9:8; 14:21.

54. Cf. B. Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament* (Cambridge: 1965).

55. Cf. R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple*, (Oxford: 1969) p. 183.

56. Cf. I Pt 2:9; 5:5; Rev 1:5f; 5:9f.

animated by the Holy Spirit. From this it follows that each individual member of the Church should necessarily be the Temple of God. Hence, St Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (I Co 3:16). Because of this, even the body of a Christian is sacred. So Paul wrote: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" (I Co 6:19).

Thus, through the indwelling presence of God, each individual can become a living Temple. Hence, a living human individual can more meaningfully be called a Temple than the physical edifice of a temple. This involves a shift of emphasis in spiritual life. Instead of making great efforts to experience a localized presence of God in a physical temple even neglecting one's duty, one should train oneself to encounter that God everywhere in the world, especially in the living human beings, and more especially in those who are full of suffering and struggling to live. This goes very well with the Indian thinking reflected in the *Gitanjali* of Rabindranath Tagore who sang: "Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee! He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!" (Git. XI).

It is only when one comes down to share the burden, pain, sorrow and joy of one's fellow human beings that one experiences the real presence of God, and realizes that, in fact, he himself is God's Temple. Since Jesus has accomplished the task of redemption of mankind through his suffering, death and resurrection, it is now left to each individual human being to make use of that salvation for himself by his co-operation, and realize himself as the true Temple of God. So in his Farewell discourse Jesus said: "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (Jn 14:20). It is, therefore, by a mutual indwelling that a man becomes a Temple of God. Now, this mutual indwelling is possible only if one lives fulfilling what God at each moment would demand of him. So Jesus explained this mystery: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14:23). As one who

constantly spoke of the necessity of the disciples' abiding in him as branches in the vine, Jesus said: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (Jn 15: 10). In fact, Jesus has given to his disciples only one commandment, which in a way summarises all other commandments.<sup>57</sup> He has called it a "New Commandment", which is a commandment of love after the model of Jesus own act of loving mankind: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13: 34). Now, if one fulfils this law of love, giving his fellow human beings unconditional and unlimited love, forgiveness and help as Jesus did, then he will be abiding with Jesus and he will become the Temple of God. Then it will be God's Spirit who will be active in his mind, heart and whole being, and not the evil spirit of perversion, hatred and wickedness. Thus, when God is fully active in him, he will be truly a Temple, a House of God as Jesus himself was the perfect Temple.

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57. Cf. I Jn 3:23-24.