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Temple Imagery in the Epistles of Peter

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Studies of the books of the New Testament have been in process for many centuries and have been especially intense during the last two. Also, in the past several decades considerable effort has been expended in trying to reconstruct, insofar as it is possible, the rites of ancient temples and to ascertain the various features that belonged to the total complex of the temple as a conveyer of reality. The purpose of this paper is to offer some seminal suggestions and examples of how these two areas of study may intercept, or, more specifically, how temple imagery may be recognized in two writings in the New Testament, 1 and 2 Peter. Although it is common in current biblical scholarship to label these two sections of the New Testament “pseudepigraphical” (meaning that they were written by others post-dating Peter), his authorship or at least profound influence will be presupposed in this essay.¹

An in-depth study of ancient temples reveals a wide spectrum of interrelated concepts. Some scholars, such as John Lundquist, have devised formal models or typologies to bring into focus a coherent picture of the temple.² For the purposes of this paper, temple imagery will be defined as selected practices and views that found expression in sacred space of some kind, not always limited to the inside of the

temple building. Temples were sometimes regarded as artificial mountains, representing the symbolic center of the universe, the location where gods and humans could communicate.³ The earthly temple was understood to be between two other temples: one below it and the other above, forming a three-level sacred conduit.⁴ In these set-apart regions ancient peoples sought the stable direction afforded by the celestial spheres, as well as in the modes of existence in *Sheol* or *Hades*, the underworld. They were sites where important rites, including the offering of sacrifices, were enacted.⁵ Integral to many of these rites was a celebration of the creation and founding of the universe, as well as the particular locale where the rites were performed. This occurred during the period known as the new year festival. Typically, the rites took place within or near the temple precincts.⁶ The new year rites were associated with the crowning of a new king⁷ or the reaffirmation of his rule through mimetic rituals of death and resurrection. The enthronement of the king entailed such notions as adoption ("Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee"—Psalm 2:7) and its consequence, heirship.

Related to the enthronement rites, hints of which can be discerned in the Old Testament, were the initiatory rites in the mystery religions. The enthronement rites belonged to royalty exclusively (although there were in some senses counterpart rites among the priestly caste), where the mystery initiatory rites were available to a larger privileged group. Although many of the later mystery religions bypassed the obligations usually inherent in covenants (except secrecy) as their brand of gnosis (divine knowledge) was imparted to them, some of the rites of earlier days, both royal rites and those dealt to a more inclusive group (such as the congregation of Israel), required integrity to agreements

made. The entering into covenants is thus considered a part of temple imagery, even though not all covenants may have been entered into while inside a temple structure.

One element of sacred space and sacred buildings especially important in this essay is the use of consecrated stones, either for the building of altars or for building a temple. There are several places in the New Testament that make special mention of such stones, and these may very well relate to the rock with which Peter is identified in Matthew 16:18.⁸

Many of the motifs mentioned above are alluded to in 1 and 2 Peter, as should be expected if Peter is accepted as the genuine author of the two epistles, for his apostolic vocation was thoroughly immersed in the temple ethos. The foundation of this assertion lies in the recognition that Christians ascribe to him an especially solemn commission. In the pericope on the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi in Matthew (omitted in Mark and Luke, perhaps due to their sensitivity to the revealing of matters deemed by them to be particularly sacred), Peter is told that he will hold the keys of the kingdom, with the result that whatever he binds on earth will be commensurately bound, or we may say, sealed, in heaven. He is also told that the "gates of *hades*" will not overcome the "rock" with which he is identified in some way. It is noteworthy that the transfiguration occurred about a week later, and it was at this time, according to several Latter-day Saint leaders, that Jesus' promise to Peter began its fulfillment. Moses and Elijah were present, and each bestowed upon Peter the keys of the priesthood of his respective dispensation, including those of gathering and sealing.⁹ Having received these keys, Peter likely pondered his role and the implications the keys had for every person who accepted Christ, and indeed for the

cosmos insofar as it related to the three-tiered temples mentioned above. This, in some measure, he communicated in his epistles.

In the greeting in 1 Peter, the Apostle acknowledges his audience, the “elect,” as having been symbolically initiated by the “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1:2). Several verses later, he identifies the source of their redemption “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (v. 19). Sacrifice, a sacred act, took place (if it was done correctly) in sacred space, often within the precincts of a temple. When Peter likens the blood of Christ to the Paschal Lamb (which was without blemish), he calls to mind the Passover lambs sacrificed in the temple, commemorating the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. For the Jews the Exodus was the pivotal event in their salvific history. For the Christians the shedding of Christ’s blood was the pivotal event in the cosmos. Both had salvific significance.

Along with the shedding and sprinkling of animal blood at the temple, another vital feature was involved, that of covenants. Or, as Paul E. Deterding puts it, “the reference [in 1 Peter] to sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ recalls the fact that the Old Covenant was sealed by the sprinkling of blood.”¹⁰ Jesus’ atonement was the New Covenant, which superceded the Old. While not all covenants were necessarily made in the temple, their association with sacrificial blood merits claim to temple imagery in some contexts. One case in point is the record found in Exodus 24:3–8, where Moses teaches the Israelites the instructions of the Lord, and they covenant to obey all the directives. This event is followed the next day by the performance of burnt and peace offerings, and then the sprinkling of the blood of the oxen on the altar and on the

people. Deterding refers to the latter act as the sealing of the covenant.¹¹ Note the presence of an altar in the Exodus pericope.

In his instructions to the members of the church, Peter admonishes them that inasmuch "as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15-16). Commenting on this, Oscar S. Brooks avers that "much of the material adapted in the instructions of the early Christians . . . goes back through the Synagogue to the holiness code of Leviticus 17-18."¹² While the code of Leviticus was cherished in the synagogue, certainly it would have stronger affinities with a consecrated temple. Peter's quotation of Leviticus 19:2 sounds similar to Jesus' injunction to be perfect, as God is perfect (see Matthew 5:48). In 3 Nephi 12:48 Jesus is added as a model, or exemplar, to that of the Father. This correlates significantly with the proposition that Christ is the epitome of the temple, the incarnate manifestation of what it stands for. Brooks's insight is therefore most vital, as he interprets Peter's conception of the convert's relationship with his Lord: "For Christ is on the one hand the ground of his salvation and at the same time the model of his conduct."¹³ The ordinances (baptism figures predominantly in 1 Peter), the holiness code, and covenants in the temple reflect Christ's atonement. One identifies intimately with Christ by participating in the gestures of the ordinances that symbolize aspects of the Atonement: the preparation for burial and enthronement (which includes ablution and anointing), the crucifixion, death, and resurrection. These representational enactments and keeping of covenants entitled the convert to belong to the community of his temple-centered and perfect Master, the prototypal Anointed One.

The consecrated stone motif is found in 1 Peter 2:4–8, and, as scholars have noted, those verses contain temple imagery. This passage deals with the relationship between master and disciples. Jesus is the greatest living stone, as well as the chief cornerstone. Or, as Eduard Lohse states it, “the Church knows that Christ is the cornerstone on Mount Zion that supports her.”¹⁴ First Peter 2:6 quotes the first part of Isaiah 28:16, wherein the Lord says that he lays in Zion a foundation stone. Christian disciples are also “lively stones,” which together, form a “spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5).¹⁵ “This house is spiritual,” says Paul S. Minear, “because [it is] indwelt by the Holy Spirit. . . . As God builds this house out of the cornerstone and lively stones, the Spirit is at work in the construction.”¹⁶ Temples were built with stones, including a chief cornerstone.¹⁷ David Hill explains further: “The true Israel is formed of those who belong to the ‘spiritual temple’ which is built upon Christ, the living stone.”¹⁸ Jerome H. Neyrey seems to notice the same line of thinking: “Tracing down the first catchword (‘stone,’ the other being ‘chosen’), we find Jesus described as the cornerstone of a new temple (2:6), as a stone rejected by builders but still a headstone (2:7). . . . This story of Jesus is also the story of each Christian. As Jesus is the cornerstone of a new temple, so Christians are called to be ‘living stones . . . built into a spiritual house’ (2:5).”¹⁹

As “lively stones” that compose a spiritual house, members of the Christian community have a priesthood by which they offer up sacrifices (see 1 Peter 2:5). Along this line, Peter informs his audience in 1 Peter 2:9 what their identity is as Christians: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar [or purchased] people.” The people he describes here correspond in a certain way to a major characteristic of most temples: they are

set apart from the realm of the profane. Lohse compares the recipients of 1 Peter to the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls: "While the Palestinian community identifies itself as 'thy holy people,' the Christians understand themselves to be *ethnos hagion* (holy people, 2:9) that forms the new priesthood and is to perform priestly functions."²⁰ Indeed, it is the function of the priesthood to officiate or otherwise participate in cultic matters, and the royal priesthood implies that kings and queens, whose authority stems in part from rites in the temple cult, blend in with priests and priestesses.

This joint status of the royal and priestly, which often was transmitted from generation to generation, calls to mind a blessing to which the Christian aspired: to be an heir of "the grace of life" together with one's spouse (see 1 Peter 3:7). This evokes a salient feature of the new year rites: that of sacred marriage, a covenantal binding of husband and wife in tandem with their relationship to deity. A major concern with the rite of sacred marriage was fertility, the continuation of the species. On a temporal basis the begetting and bearing of children made heirship meaningful. Spiritual heirship is the reason behind adoption, which is referred to in the thanksgiving portion of 1 Peter. There the Apostle cites the action of the Father of Jesus Christ, who "hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3–4). The law of adoption is exemplified in the Old Testament where, through an oracle of Nathan, the Lord says of David, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Samuel 7:14; this oracle also speaks of the interrelationship of the Lord's house or temple with the kingly throne). It was understood that a line of inheritance would be established from David's house. Many

scholars believe that several of the Old Testament psalms were both royal and cultic, and that they were recited in the temple. One such example is Psalm 2, of which verse seven reads: "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, **Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.**" This verse wielded considerable influence as a guiding proof text in the early Church. It is quoted or paraphrased at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration; Paul alludes to it in the beginning of the most complex of his extant epistles (see Romans 1:4), and in Hebrews he quotes it outright (see 1:5; 5:5). This principle of adoption seems to have been applied to Christ by the Father, and then, by derivation, from Christ to his disciples. **Though in the Christian milieu one experiences the initial blessing of adoption through baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit, it is in the temple that the more mature or advanced ordinances pertaining to a royal priesthood and its anticipation of inheritance take place.** The sacred marriage leading couples to become "heirs together" with Jesus Christ implies that heirship is not intended to be attained singly; men and women who become one flesh under the divine sanction of marriage fill the measure of their creation by being unified or reconciled in Christ, thus becoming as a unified pair joint heirs with the primal heir of the earth.

Speaking further on this point, J. N. D. Kelly comments **that the word *inheritance* (*kleronomia*) "had rich associations for readers of the Old Testament, according to which the Jews as physical descendants of Abraham inherited the promises made to him."**²¹ The promises to Abraham were twofold: a large posterity and an inheritance in the land. Although Peter does not explicitly state it, Christian heirship likely had a significant liaison with the Abrahamic covenant, as Paul taught in Romans 8 and Galatians 3–4.²²

Peter does associate inheritance with the sprinkling of blood, possibly recognizing the Abrahamic rite of circumcision as a token of the Abrahamic covenant portending the spilling of blood in the ultimate act of atonement.

In speaking of heirship and inheritance, then, Peter is dealing with a theme that can be traced at least as far back as Solomon's temple, perhaps as far as the tabernacle or even the time of Abraham (see Abraham 2:9–11). And as the prerogatives of the Spirit had once descended only upon a select few (i.e., prophets, judges, and the kings, ideally) but in the irruption of the Christian era became available to the whole body of Christ in the form of *charismata* or spiritual gifts, so the advantages and privileges of heirship in a ruling and sacerdotal sense were at first reserved only to kings and priestly families of the era of the law of Moses, but subsequently were common possessions of the Saints in the meridian of time.

A particularly challenging passage in 1 Peter is found in 3:18–20. Peter begins by discussing the suffering Christ as the righteous or just expiatory proxy for the unrighteous or unjust populace, one who closes the gap of estrangement they have with God. He refers to Christ's fleshly death followed by his quickening by the Spirit, and then proceeds to discourse on Jesus' mission to preach to the detained spirits in *Hades* who had been disobedient at the time of Noah. These verses have vexed quite a number of scholars, and varied opinions have been expressed. Serious students of early Christian history will recognize the account as a reference to the Christianized notion of *descensus ad inferos*. This is the case, for example, for Brooks, who states that "the idea that Jesus spent the interval between his death in *Sheol* or *Hades* was a very early part of the Christian belief. It was the natural implication of Judeo-Christian theology to

assume that Christ like all departed ones had descended into *Sheol*.”²³ But in the twentieth century not all scholars make that connection. John H. Elliott, apparently with approval, quotes W. J. Dalton as saying that 1 Peter 3:19 “has nothing to do with the *descensus*.”²⁴ Most scholars discern and acknowledge the allusion but disdain it or want to deliteralize it. Wolfhart Pannenberg sees it as having kerygmatic value, but he places it in the mythological sphere, concluding that it was “not, like the crucifixion, a historical event.”²⁵ John S. Feinberg notes that extrabiblical literature preceding the inception of the Christian era (in Greco-Roman mythology), as well as intertestamental and apocryphal writings, affirms the existence of an underworld.²⁶ This would accord with the view of the three-level universe, with an earthly temple in the middle—it being the naval of the universe—and counterpart structures being above the earth and below it. After going through an exegetical exercise, Feinberg concludes that “the idea of Christ’s preaching anything to anyone is so improbable that it does not seem worthy of further consideration.”²⁷ He concludes that what the passage really means is that “Christ preach[ed] by the Holy Spirit through Noah to the people of Noah’s day.”²⁸

Some observers, beginning with Wilhelm Boussett, see the depiction of Christ going to the underworld as the tailoring of an old myth of a redeemer figure asserting his authority and subduing demons, to fit a story about Jesus.²⁹ There are similarities between the myth and the ritual dramatizations that were enacted during the new year festivals. The temple and ritual motifs may have seemed similar to myths, yet no doubt to the early Christians the *descensus* of Christ was the real event and was not perceived merely as the recasting of prevailing lore.

Curiously, some have concluded that these scriptures

describe someone other than Jesus preaching in *Hades*. On the basis of textual and other suggestions, some claim that the patriarch Enoch was originally the person who taught the disobedient spirits of Noah's time, and it has also been claimed that the deceased apostles were the preachers.³⁰ There have likewise been different views on who the spirits were to whom the message was given. The following possibilities have been submitted: the righteous spirits to whom the gospel was preached, with the happy announcement that they were to be released to heaven; nonbelievers, with the hope of converting them; and fallen angels such as those identified in Genesis 6:1–2.³¹

Traditionally 1 Peter 4:6 has been associated with 1 Peter 3:18–20. However, Martin H. Scharlemann thinks that this connection is the result of “beautifully executed somersaults.”³² He rejects combining the two on the grounds that they are separated by several verses and have different contexts. Thus: “The ‘dead’ of verse 6 are to be distinguished from ‘the spirits in prison’ of 3:19. They are the saints who have died in the Lord, having belonged to the first generation of believers under the covenant.”³³

If one takes seriously the proposition that Peter was acquainted with the cosmic function of the temple, a straightforward reading of the text makes sense: after the crucifixion Jesus' spirit (a tangible entity within its sphere) went to “paradise” to unlock the prison doors for the release of the spirits who would accept his gospel. His visit to the spirit world was intended to inaugurate the preaching of the kerygma in the bottom level of the three-part universe. Apparently those spirits who were unresponsive at the time of Noah and who had been detained for so many centuries were given some degree of relief.

Anthony Hanson notes: “The earliest Christian preachers

soon found themselves with the question: can those who have never known Christ be saved?"³⁴ The assertion that Jesus went to preach to the spirits in prison yields a positive answer to that query, which incidentally has also occurred to current scholars. Early Christians responded in the affirmative. In other words, the descent of Christ to the netherworld to open up the preaching of the gospel made universal salvation a possibility.³⁵

This comprehensive plan also figures into a cognate and similarly mystifying scripture, 1 Corinthians 15:29. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor wrote in 1981 that contemporary commentaries were acknowledging, albeit reluctantly, the "custom" of vicarious baptisms for the dead at Corinth. They felt compelled to accept this view because of "the plain wording of the text," although they preferred to reject "the existence of such a bizarre practice" on the grounds of "dogma or other reasons."³⁶ Murphy-O'Connor likewise finds the practice distasteful. He determines that *baptizomenoi* means "to destroy or perish." He reasons: "If *hoi baptizomenoi* means 'those being destroyed,' in and through their apostolic labours, it seems most natural to interpret *hoi nekroi* as a reference to these who were 'dead' in an existential sense (cf., Colossians 2:13), because it was to these that Paul and others directed their preaching."³⁷ The author continues with an elaborate exegesis. But if the passage is interpreted in a direct, unconvoluted sense within the framework of universal salvation, it is perfectly consistent with the Petrine statements regarding the preaching of the gospel to the dead; the two concepts complement each other, contributing consistently to a major theme. Another scripture that fits in this context is Ephesians 4:8–10, which refers to Christ's ascent to heaven and his descent into the lower parts of the earth.

In this is seen again an allusion to a three-structured universe (heaven, earth, and spirit or underworld).

An important Christian application of an ancient royal motif is brought out by Peter in 1 Peter 5:4, where he promises the addressed elders that if they feed the flock conscientiously, they will receive "a crown of glory," which, like inheritance, "fadeth not away" (cf., 1:4). In fact, a crown (*stephanos*) is a symbol of regal status. To be anointed and crowned a king in a palace or temple was to follow the pattern of God, the heavenly king.

2 Peter is somewhat shorter than 1 Peter, but it is no less rich in temple motifs. Peter calls attention in 2 Peter 1:4 to "exceeding great and precious promises" that potentially lead the Christians to become what the King James Version translates "partakers of the divine nature."³⁸ Several scholars in the West consider this concept (as they read it) utterly extraneous to the overall spirit and content of the New Testament. In some quarters it is looked upon with contempt; those who feel this way would prefer to see 2 Peter deleted from the canon.³⁹ On the other extreme, scholars in the Eastern Church look at the phrase as a support of their view that *theōsis* or the divinization or deification of humankind is really the ultimate object of the Christian commitment, as it relates to their ultimate destiny.⁴⁰ If being partakers of the divine nature is understood as blending in with divine *ousios*, or substance, as defined in the Nicene Creed, the Latter-day Saints will be as repelled by the notion as any Protestant or Catholic. In a thoughtful essay Al Wolters challenges the common translation, "partakers of the divine nature." He points out that *koinōnoi*, which is normally translated "partakers," is not an adjective but a noun, which can better be translated "partner," "companion," or "fellow."⁴¹ In mulling through the possible meanings of *theia physis*,

usually rendered as “divine nature,” Wolters proposes that it read “a divine being.” He concludes that the phrase in 2 Peter 1:4 is “a reference to covenantal partnership.”⁴² While Kelly notes that verse four concurs with Greek mystical philosophy and with aspirations in mystery cults,⁴³ Wolters’s construct has possibilities. It calls to mind the joint inheritance in 1 Peter as well as Galatians 3–4 and Romans 8. And, as Kelly brings out, the passage has an affinity with 1 John 1:3 and 2:29–4:1, in relation to the fellowship the children of God have with their Father.⁴⁴ The Christian, then, through covenantal partnership, becomes a candidate for salvation; that is to say, he or she becomes an heir.

After listing a catalog of recommended moral acquisitions and character traits (see 2 Peter 1:5–7), Peter advises that the Christians who obtain these “shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of [their] Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). The image of fruitfulness recalls the expectation of prosperity emanating from the temple. Here that fruitfulness is tied in with the knowledge or gnosis of Jesus Christ, to which he refers in the following verses, especially verses 16–18.

Peter urges his readers: “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things [i.e., cultivate those attributes listed in verses 5–7], ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10). The word *bebaios* (“sure”) carries the notion of firmness and assurity, and in this regard it coheres conceptually with the temple stones spoken of in 1 Peter 2:4–8. On this point Neyrey says, “As regards legal matters, *bebaios* may refer to matters with legally guaranteed security.”⁴⁵ The sureness or absolute reliability in realizing one’s election is consistent with the idea of the pole star, with which the temple in heaven is associated, in that it is an immovable and steadfast symbol. That is why ancient people felt con-

fidant that in the temple they could get their bearings on the universe. Covenants, which were sometimes temple related, had a complete sense of dependability so far as the Lord's part of the agreement was concerned. As one studies the meanings of legal and other kinds of words in Hebrew (for example, *amen*), especially as they relate to God, one recognizes a sense of reassurance and trust in a world otherwise fraught with insecurity and uncertainty. In the same vein, language expressed in the mystery religions could convey unmitigated confidence in one's outcome. (Unfortunately, faith in the mystery religions could lead sooner or later to a shattering disappointment. Peter's admonition leads to no such disillusionment.)

An intriguing, veiled reference to a temple theme is found in 2 Peter 1:14. There the Apostle says that he must soon "put off" this tabernacle, or in other words, die. (A similar image is used concerning the incarnation of Christ in John 1:14, where it says that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.") The phenomenon of separating the spirit from the body as conveyed in this language is redolent of the putting off of a garment. As Brooks has it, "'Removal,' or putting off is found . . . in the New Testament writings in reference to putting off, as one does clothing, an evil disposition in preparation for receiving exhortations and teachings, usually about worship."⁴⁶ Kelly observes that "putting off" is found also in Romans 13:12; Ephesians 4:22, 25; Colossians 3:8; and James 1:21. They are "all passages summarizing forms of conduct characteristic of the readers' pre-Christian past—and therefore seems to have been a technical term."⁴⁷ One "puts off" a garment with the intention eventually of "putting on" another, so the two acts go together. In Galatians 3:27, Paul says that those who "have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Hans Dieter Betz unveils this insight: "This concept, which has a powerful and long tradition in ancient religions, describes the Christian incorporation into the 'body of Christ' as an act of 'clothing,' whereby Christ is understood as the garment." He explains further: "This phrase presupposes the christological-soteriological concept that Christ is the heavenly garment by which the Christian is enwrapped and transformed into a new being. The language is certainly figurative, but it goes beyond the social and ethical inclusion of a religious community; it suggests an event of divine transformation."⁴⁸

Without divulging too much detail, Peter in 2 Peter 1:16–18 refers to his experience at the Transfiguration. The language here has been identified with the mystery religions. It is the contention of this paper that when terminology of the mystery religions was used, the meaning that the New Testament authors accepted was not necessarily precisely the same as those religions accepted, for early Christianity was a revealed religion and did not need to borrow its teachings from partially true but defective cults. It is plausible that the early Christian devotees used terminology familiar to them and their audiences that was suitable in conveying the Christian proclamation to be delivered. The application was placed entirely within a Christian context.

That the Transfiguration was a templelike experience is suggested by the Apostle's reference to the location as "the holy mount" (2 Peter 1:18), inasmuch as manmade temples are artificial sacred mountains. Temples and mountains were places where humans received oracles, and that certainly is what happened during the Transfiguration.⁴⁹ Moreover, in the synoptic accounts of the Transfiguration, Peter makes the enigmatic offer to build three booths, per-

haps in commemoration of the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles. Friedrich M. Borsch ties in "the association of the booths with the New Year festival and of both with the enthronement of kings."⁵⁰

What Peter (as well as James and John) saw on the mount might well be called a "Christophany," that is, an appearance of Christ in his glory. It was a crucial event in redemptive history, sacred to the point that the four accounts in the New Testament that deal with it impart only meager information. The figure of the radiant Christ, according to Neyrey, "has alternately been understood, not as fulfillment, but as a prophesy of the *parousia* (the coming of Jesus in glory)."⁵¹ He quotes a fuller statement by G. H. Boobyer: "The transfiguration prophesies the *parousia* in the sense that it is a portrayal of what Christ will be at that day, and in some degree a miniature picture of the whole second advent scene."⁵² Peter, then, while on the mount, received a foretaste of the climactic event in salvation history. Thus he is a party to firsthand information of who Christ is and what his role is in the salvation of the human race. One might say that here as well as after the resurrection, he experienced the zenith of the apocalyptic vision.

Peter tries to impress upon his audience the vividness and reality of his message, which was not dependent on "cunningly devised fables." Rather, when he "made known" to them concerning the powerful coming (*parousia*) of the Lord, it was by virtue of his being an eyewitness of his majesty (2 Peter 1:16). Two words should be discussed here. Kelly states that "the verb 'make known' (*gnoizein*) is almost technical in the New Testament for imparting a divine mystery."⁵³ Although the word for "eyewitness" (*epoptēs*) can refer to an ordinary observer, it also designates one who has been initiated into a higher grade in the mys-

tery religions.⁵⁴ This terminology related to the mysteries gives some support to the view, dealt with earlier in this paper, that it was during the transfiguration that Peter received the keys of the kingdom (Moses and Elijah appeared to bestow them upon him), the event taking place just a week after Peter was informed that he would be entrusted with important religious prerogatives related to eternal reality in the cosmos. This was an extraordinary thing for Peter; it placed a very real burden on him. It was a sacred exchange, and that probably accounts for the paucity of detail and the charges to secrecy better than the theory that is often referred to as the "messianic secret," whereby Mark (usually considered the first evangelist) claimed ignorance of Jesus' full role in his lifetime, both by himself as well as his disciples, by causing Jesus to swear the disciples to secrecy concerning his identity until the resurrection. It was not a matter of the early Church finding a creative way to attribute to the historical Jesus what he did not attribute to himself; it was a matter of keeping sacred things sacred.

One final word should be given. In an essay in a truly exhilarating book, Hugh Nibley discusses the themes in the early apocryphal writings, whose setting was largely the forty-day ministry, and whose subject matter was secret. By drawing a composite picture, Nibley makes it clear that the *descensus* was real to the Saints in Peter's day and that aspects relating to temples were prominent.⁵⁵ If we grant that Peter genuinely was present at the Transfiguration and was privy to the instructions of the forty-day ministry, it is only natural that he would have a comprehensive understanding of Christocentric salvation as it is embedded and expressed in the temple, and that he would with caution allude to selected features here and there. It is our privilege to benefit from his informed direction.

Notes

1. Norman Perrin and Dennis C. Duling, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982), 375–79, 381–84, consider the fine Greek, the consistent quotations and allusions from the Septuagint, and “the most probable date for the circumstances envisaged in 4:12–5:11 [as] the reign of the emperor Trajan, 98–117,” to be the decisive arguments against Petrine authorship. Their views on 2 Peter are even more skeptical.

2. See Truman G. Madsen, ed., *The Temple in Antiquity* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1984), 53–76.

3. This view was prevalent all over the world, as noted by Ichiro Hori, “Mountains and Their Importance for the Idea of the Other World in Japanese Folk Religion,” *History of Religions* 6 (August 1966): 3. After listing several examples, Hori states, “In each case, the mountains were believed to be the center of the world, the cosmic mountain, the pillar supporting and linking heaven and earth, or the residence of a god or gods.”

4. In this regard, too, the temple took on the same function as the sacred mountain. Hori points out: “The mountain is believed to be the world of the dead; or the meeting place of the living and the dead; or a passageway from this world to the next, from the profane to the sacred and from earth to heaven. The mountain is also believed to be the world of the spirits and the world of the deities” (*ibid.*, 22).

5. Hori observes that mountains “were the sites of religious services, in which sacrifices and prayers were offered and divine revelations and oracles received” (*ibid.*, 3).

6. The closeness of the new year rites to the temple tends to strengthen claims of temple imagery found in ancient sources, such as those considered in this paper. Geo Widengren, “King and Covenant,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 2 (January 1957): 7–8, confirmed that Solomon’s dedication of the Jerusalem temple took place during the new year festival. Similarly, E. O. James, “The Religions of Antiquity,” *Numen* 7 (1960): 141, notes the same connection at a later date: “When the temple worship was restored at Jerusalem after the Exile under the control of the high-priest, the autumnal Annual Festival at the end of the agricultural year in the seventh month (Tishri) when the rains were due to begin and the vintage was completed, preserved the salient features of the traditional New Year ritual.”

7. The act of enthroning a king, according to Frederick H. Borsch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 95, consisted in “emulating the enthronement of the king-god

in heaven. (Usually this was performed in the temple of the city-state either built like or actually set upon a mountain or hill)."

8. Sherman E. Johnson, "The Dead Sea Manual of Discipline and the Jerusalem Church of Acts," in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. Krister Stendahl (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 136, refers to the stones, cornerstones, and the rock associated with Peter as "rich Christian midrashic material." The richness is enhanced if understood within a temple context. See note 9 below.

9. See *WJS*, 9; Heber C. Kimball, *JD* 9:327; John Taylor, *JD* 21:162; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), 2:109–12.

10. Peter E. Deterding, "Exodus Motifs in First Peter," *Concordia Journal* 7 (March 1981): 60.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Oscar S. Brooks, "I Peter 3:21--The Clue to the Literary Structure of the Epistle," *Novum Testamentum* 16 (1974): 300.

13. *Ibid.*, 302.

14. Eduard Lohse, "Parenesis and Kerygma in 1 Peter," trans. John Steeley, *Perspectives on First Peter*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986), 50.

15. There is a phrase in the Isaiah verse that Peter does not quote, yet Matthew Black, "The Christological Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament," *New Testament Studies* 18 (1971–72): 11, feels it is implied by Peter: "a sure foundation" (cf. Helaman 5:12).

16. Paul S. Minear, "The House of Living Stones: A Study of 1 Peter 2:4–12," *Ecumenical Review* 34 (1982): 242.

17. As a sidelight it is worth mentioning that the officiating priest wore precious stones in his regalia.

18. David Hill, "'To Offer Spiritual Sacrifices . . .' (1 Peter 2:5): Liturgical Formulations and Christian Parenesis in 1 Peter," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 16 (1982): 59. A. R. C. Leaney, "1 Peter and the Passover: An Interpretation," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963–64): 246, also sees the stones in these verses as comprising a "spiritual temple."

19. Jerome H. Neyrey, "First Peter and Converts," *The Bible Today* 22 (January 1984): 15.

20. Lohse, "Parenesis," 48. Aside from Paul's epistles, J. C. Coppens, "The Spiritual Temple in the Pauline Letters and its Background," in *Studia Evangelica*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 6:58–59, notes that, aside from Paul's epistles, "we have to go to I Peter, II, 4–10, to find again the temple-image. This is really the only passage of the New Testament

where the image is logically constructed on the basis of a building and where the three cultic elements, the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, are mentioned together. Here therefore the cultic context and intention are evident."

21. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1969), 50.

22. An observation by David Flusser concerning inheritance is enlightening. He notes that the Dead Sea sectarians applied Psalms 37:22 (that the blessed would inherit the earth) to themselves, meaning in part that they would "inherit 'the mountain of the height of Israel', the Temple of Jerusalem" ("Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit," *Israel Exploration Journal* 10 (1960): 8).

23. Brooks, "I Peter 3:21—The Clue," 303.

24. John H. Elliott, "The Rehabilitation of an Exegetical Step-Child: 1 Peter in Recent Research," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 249.

25. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, tr. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 272. By "historical" Pannenberg may mean that which is palpably verifiable. Still, he implies that Jesus' descent was not a concrete event. Similarly, Anthony Hanson, "Salvation Proclaimed: 1 Peter 3:18–22," *Expository Times* 93 (1982): 101, is comfortable in proposing that "we must demythologize the notion of *descensus ad inferos*."

26. John S. Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology and the Intermediate State," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986): 303.

27. *Ibid.*, 328.

28. *Ibid.*, 304.

29. See Joseph Hoffman, "Confluence in Early Christian and Gnostic Literature: The *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 10 (1981): 42. Hoffman details how the myth coincides and deviates from the Christian story.

30. See Feinberg, "Ancient Mythology," 307, 320.

31. *Ibid.*; see also Hanson, "Salvation," 102.

32. Martin H. Scharlemann, "'He Descended into Hell': An Interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18–20," *Concordia Journal* 15 (1989): 313.

33. *Ibid.*, 321.

34. Hanson, "Salvation Proclaimed," 103.

35. For Hoffman, "Confluence," 48–49, this is a distinctive aspect of the Christian *descensus*.

36. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "'Baptizing for the Dead' (I Cor., XV, 29): A Corinthian Slogan?" *Revue Biblique* 88 (1981): 532.

37. *Ibid.*, 534–35.

38. Robert M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament*

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 231, sees problems in the phrase, considering it to be bad Greek grammar.

39. Those scholars who feel this way also tend to be offended by what they regard as polemic toward those perceived as apostates, as indicated in chapter 2.

40. These two views are summarized in Al Wolters, "'Partners of the Deity': A Covenantal Reading of 2 Peter 1:4," *Calvin Theological Journal* 25 (1990): 28–29.

41. *Ibid.*, 32–33.

42. *Ibid.*, 35, 41.

43. Kelly, *The Epistles*, 303.

44. *Ibid.*, 304.

45. Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Apologetic Use of the Transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16–21," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980): 515.

46. Brooks, "1 Peter 3:21—The Clue," 292.

47. Kelly, *The Epistles*, 83.

48. Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 187.

49. Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, tr. G. W. Anderson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), 299, 305, comments with interest on the idea that Justin Martyr understood that Elijah would anoint the Messiah. This notion may have been prevalent generally at the time.

50. Borsch, *Son of Man*, 385. Neyrey, "Apologetic Use," 509, believes that Peter's account is inconsistent with the picture given in the synoptic Gospels. In 2 Peter the Apostle is an eyewitness of the event, implying alertness and awareness, "whereas in the Synoptics Peter is first confused (Mark 9:6), falling asleep (Luke 9:32), frightened (Matthew 17:6–8) and then ignorant of the import of the event (Mark 9:9–10)." These synoptic descriptions of Peter do not necessarily obviate his involvement as an eyewitness. He could have been confused before and after the event, he could have been asleep during a part of the episode (as he was in the Garden of Gethsemane), and he very well could have been frightened, given the supernatural circumstances. But that does not mean that he could not have received divine knowledge and keys, the fuller significance of which could have occurred to him later.

51. Neyrey, "Apologetic Use," 510. Charles H. Talbert, "2 Peter and the Delay of the Parousia," *Vigiliae Christianae* 20 (1966): 138, likewise sees the Transfiguration as "a foreshadowing of the second advent."

52. Neyrey, "Apologetic Use," 510.

53. Kelly, *The Epistles*, 316–17.

54. *Ibid.* Kelly opts for the banal definition.

55. Hugh Nibley, “*Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum: The Forty-day Ministry of Christ—The Forgotten Heritage*,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, in *CWHN*, 4:16.