

Convincing Evangelicals That They Too Can Become God

Perichoretic Salvation: The Believer's Union with Christ as a Third Type of Perichoresis, by James D. Gifford, Jr. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011. Print.

Talk of deification is gradually making a comeback in the West, at least in academic circles. Harnack's thesis that the teaching was a pagan import that corrupted the purity of the gospel has been gradually overturned, and it has become increasingly clear that virtually every major pre-Enlightenment teacher of the Christian church subscribed to the truth that God became man to make man God. Catholic scholarship has been one of the quickest to take it up again, and mainline Protestant institutions have likewise been swift to find it in the wellsprings of their own traditions and to bring it back into the theological mix. Evangelicals have long been the holdouts, and the publication of James D. Gifford, Jr.'s *Perichoretic Salvation: The Believer's Union with Christ as a Third Type of Perichoresis* (a revision of his Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary dissertation) is one of the latest and most substantial attempts to nudge an evangelical reappropriation a small step forward. Gifford attempts this through a reexamination of the Greek patristic concept of *perichoresis*, which he defines as "mutual indwelling and active participation" (2). The primary utility of *perichoresis* lies in its ability to capture the unity of two (or more) distinct things in a way that avoids both total separation and loss of distinction in the unity. This word was first used by Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390) to describe the union of the divine and human natures in Christ; it was later used by John of Damascus (675-749) to describe the oneness of the three of the Divine Trinity, and Gifford proposes that its application to soteriology might finally convince his Evangelical peers that their concerns are simply misplaced. The typical Evangelical conception of salvation keeps God and man so far apart that any talk of man becoming God raises the concern that the humanity of the believer or the immutability of God will somehow be jeopardized in the union. Gifford believes that grounding theosis in perichoretic union will mitigate these concerns and finally make possible an Evangelical conception of salvation more profound than just a judicial pronouncement (8).

Perichoretic Potential

The Greek word *perichoresis* has a long history in Chris-

tian theology. As Gifford suggests, the closest equivalent in the English language is probably *coinherence* (20). While the English word primarily denotes mutual indwelling, the Greek word implies an active, rather than merely static, indwelling, and so Gifford suggests that the notion comprises two basic ideas: "mutual indwelling and active participation" (2).¹

For Gifford, the usefulness of the concept of perichoresis lies in its ability to maintain both the reality of unity and the real distinction of the things in that unity (163). Though the term itself does not appear in the New Testament, the Christian church gradually employed the concept in various contexts to guard certain of the divine mysteries from error. To speak of two (or more) things mutually indwelling and actively participating in one another guards the genuineness of the union while still maintaining the distinction of the two (or more) things in that unity. Two (or more) things cannot mutually indwell and actively participate in one another if those things are no longer distinct in the unity.

As Gifford writes, *perichoresis* was first used to characterize the union of the divine and human in the one person of Christ, guarding against the Nestorian teaching, which sought to separate them, and against the Eutychian teaching, which suggested that the human nature of Jesus was overwhelmed by the divine nature such that He ceased to be human (167). To speak of the incarnation as a perichoretic union thus does considerable conceptual work both to describe the nature of the union and to guard against the dangerous and tempting alternatives, which overemphasize either unity or diversity.

As Gifford goes on to say, the concept soon made its way into theological reflection on another of the great divine mysteries—that of the Divine Trinity (17-18). John of Damascus extended the concept of perichoresis to describe not only the relationship between the human and the divine in Christ but also the mutual indwelling and active participation of the three of the Divine Trinity, again safeguarding against two trinitarian errors. While tritheism holds that the three of the Divine Trinity are three separate Gods, modalism holds that the three are simply three modes of operation within the one God (167). As in the case of Christology, so too here, to speak of the three of the Godhead in terms of perichoretic unity safeguards the reality of the unity and the real distinction that exists in the unity.

It is precisely this balance that draws Gifford to the notion of perichoresis and to the possibility of its further extension to describe yet another divine mystery—that of the believer’s salvation in Christ (28). Similar to what has been done in the case of Christology and of trinitarian theology, Gifford proposes that the concept of perichoresis is able to safeguard the reality of the believer’s salvation from a forensic fiction on the one hand and from an annihilating absorption on the other (167). According to the former, there is no real change in the being of the believer, either at the moment of salvation or in the ongoing experience of salvation. Salvation is simply a declaration by God that the believer is righteous based upon the accomplished work of Christ. According to the latter, salvation unites man to God so closely that he either enters into the incommunicable Godhead itself or vanishes into the infinite ocean of the divine essence, losing all individual distinction and ceasing to be human.

No doubt, these two options are extreme, but they seem to be the only ones on the table in many Evangelical circles, and it is this camp that Gifford is primarily addressing. It is as if the Creator-creature distinction has been so deeply embedded in the Evangelical imagination that the only conceivable alternatives to a salvation in which God and man are entirely separate are absolute identity with God or the total annihilation of the human person. Gifford is convinced that such need not be the case, and he proposes that an extension of the notion of perichoresis into the realm of soteriology is what is needed to allay these concerns (8). Such is a noble project indeed, and hopefully his Evangelical readers will agree.

Analogical Qualifications

Before we explore the ways in which Gifford makes his case, it is important to note a few qualifications that he makes. Gifford repeatedly reminds his reader that the perichoresis he is proposing is categorically distinct from that of the trinitarian and Christological varieties. As the title of Gifford’s book states, “perichoretic salvation” is a “third type” of perichoresis, which Gifford suggests is analogous, rather than identical, to the more traditional Christological and trinitarian “types” (3). But it is important to note that by calling soteriological perichoresis “analogous,” he does not thereby mean that it is in any way less real than the other two types. Indeed, the fact that he calls it a third type, rather than a second type, means that even the trinitarian and Christological varieties are analogous to one another. The first type of

perichoresis (at least in order of historical application) is that of two natures of a different kind united in a single person. The second type is that of three hypostases in a single essence. The Son thus eternally exists in the perichoretic unity of the divine essence with the Father and the Spirit. In the incarnation the Son brought human nature into perichoretic union with Himself, but the Trinity did not thereby morph into a Quaternity. Saying that Christological perichoresis is analogous to trinitarian perichoresis is not to say that it is simply metaphorical or unreal in any sense. It is to say that the two kinds of perichoresis are of distinct kinds.

Similarly, when Gifford stresses that the soteriological perichoresis that he is promoting is analogous to the other two, he is not saying that it is in any way less real than the other two. He constantly contends that this third type of perichoresis entails a real change in the being of the believer. His primary concern in delineating the analogical nature of this third type of perichoresis is to avoid misunderstanding. With regard to trinitarian perichoresis, he wants to guard against any thought that the believer becomes an additional hypostasis in the Divine Trinity.

Despite the reality of the believer’s mutually indwelling and actively participating in the Triune God, the Divine Trinity remains precisely that—a Trinity. Similarly, with regard to Christological perichoresis, Gifford wants to guard against any thought that the believer becomes another incarnation of the Divine Trinity. The believer is genuinely incorporated into the person of the incarnate Son, but the uniqueness of the incarnation remains for all eternity.

Soteriological perichoresis is thus just as real as trinitarian and Christological perichoresis, and for Gifford, the beauty of his proposed extension of the concept of perichoresis is that it makes possible an account of salvation that flows out of the very being of God: “Salvation would flow smoothly and logically from the being of the triune God, to the incarnation of the Son, through the Spirit to humanity” (6). God Himself is perichoretic in His very being. In incarnation He brought humanity into that perichoresis in the person of the Son, and by their incorporation into Christ, that very perichoresis is extended to all the believers. For Gifford, the distinction between the kinds of perichoresis does not entail three separate communions or fellowships; it simply delineates the character of each type and the way in which the humanity of Christ and the myriad of believers are drawn into the eternal fellowship of the Divine Trinity in the economy of God (122-123).

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Assault on Metaphor

In the second chapter of his book, Gifford presents the biblical evidence for his proposed third type of perichoresis. He sets out to demonstrate that the New Testament describes the relationship between Christ and the believer in perichoretic terms. To do so, Gifford must show that the authors of the New Testament speak of the believer being in Christ, of Christ being in the believer, of the believer participating in Christ, and of Christ participating in the believer. The former pair is obviously the easier of the two. John and Paul each clearly speak both of Christ dwelling in the believer and of the believer dwelling in Christ. It would be difficult to imagine more explicit language than John 14:20 or the numerous “in Christ” and “Christ in” passages in Paul’s Epistles.

What Gifford calls active participation requires more exegetical work. What he seems to mean by *active participation* is that the two (or more) things in perichoretic union are not simply statically related. Instead, there exists a dynamic inseparability in their living and acting. There seems to be some inconsistency in the way that Gifford distinguishes the believer’s active participation in Christ from Christ’s active participation in the believer, but in general, he thinks that the believer actively participates in the accomplishments and in the being of Christ. Gifford suggests Paul’s “in Christ” language denotes mutual indwelling, while Paul’s “with Christ” denotes active participation, and here Gifford has in mind primarily the various places in Paul’s Epistles where the believer is said to have died, to have been buried, to have risen, and to have ascended with Christ (62-65).

In the perichoretic union, all that Christ has done becomes the history and experience of the believer. When Gifford turns to Christ’s active participation in the believer, he points to Christ’s being the true vine in John 15 as the life and life supply of the believers, who are His branches (48). Whereas Christ comes to indwell the believer at the moment of salvation, it takes a whole lifetime for the indwelling Christ to transform the believer into His own image through His active participation in the living of the believer (69). While Gifford could have been more clear about what exactly he means by *active participation*, his basic point is sound—the vast majority of New Testament descriptions of the believer’s experience of salvation entail not merely a juridical change of status but an intimate relationship between the believer and Christ both in life and in living.

Despite the unambiguousness of the biblical text, Gifford is clear that the job of convincing evangelicals is not yet done. He seeks to demonstrate not only that the

New Testament speaks of salvation in perichoretic terms but also that it really means what it says. After pointing to the clearly perichoretic language of John 17, Gifford explains that the real question is whether or not this language is “merely symbolic” (35). Gifford certainly does not think that it is, but the fact of the matter is that an unfortunately large portion of the reception history of the New Testament, at least in modern times, has simply dismissed this kind of language as metaphorical, hortatory, kerygmatic, poetic, spiritual, or mystical, all of which are used and understood to mean something less than real.

The language, it is assumed, inspires its reader to moral imitation of Jesus or describes an existential commitment to a Jesusly mode of life, but it does not imply any real change within the believer. It is therefore not sufficient for Gifford to point to the biblical text; he must also push against the settled ways of reading these texts. He must constantly insist that the believer’s participation in Christ “goes far beyond the symbolic” (63) and that partaking of the divine nature in 2 Peter 1:4 “goes deeper than only moral qualities” (75). In large part, Gifford does so by presenting the views of an impressive number of reputable biblical scholars who are not convinced by the standard deflationary readings.² In addition, the third chapter presents an equally impressive list of contemporary theologians who have drawn upon the realism of the biblical language in their own constructive accounts of salvation in Christ. Not all of them use the perichoretic language that Gifford is proposing (though many do), but they all share in common an insistence that this language speaks of a genuine reality in the life, being, and experience of the believer. While these scholars often struggle with contemporary categories and labels, Gifford suggests that the concept and language of perichoresis is precisely what they are grasping for (76).

Sonship or Adoption?

This push against metaphor is perhaps most clearly seen when Gifford turns to the troublesome word *adoption*, the favorite English translation of Paul’s Greek *huiothesia*. As any reader of this journal will know, Paul uses the word in a way that implies something much more profound than a legal procedure, the primary connotation of *adoption*.³ Gifford agrees, and though he regrettably retains the language of adoption in the end, he expresses concern over its inadequacy to capture the profundity of the believer’s salvation in Christ. For Gifford, the problem with *adoption* is that it implies that the believers are sons of God in a “less than real’ or ‘less than biological’” sense (165). He repeatedly insists that by virtue of their incorporation into Christ, the believers participate in His sonship to the fullest degree possible (154).

Gifford ultimately maintains the language of adoption because he understands that some distinction needs to be made between the sonship of Christ and the sonship of the believer. Soteriological perichoresis needs to be distinguished from Christological perichoresis so that the uniqueness of the incarnation is maintained (153). Traditionally, this distinction has been made in many ways. One way is to say that Jesus is the Son of God by *nature* and that the believers are the sons of God by *adoption*. Another is to say that Jesus is the Son of God by *nature* and that the believers are the sons of God by *grace*. In general, the two ways of making the distinction are identical for the church fathers, and while the second is perhaps less misrepresentative, it is still problematic in that it depends on the reader's prior understanding of grace and still seems to imply that the believers are pretend rather than real sons.

For many of the early teachers of the Christian church, this was simply not the case. For them, grace is not merely unmerited favor but a partaking of the divine nature. The non-naturality of the believer's sonship is thus not a less-than-natural sonship but a more-than-natural sonship. Whereas the Son's sonship is possessed by Him by virtue of His very nature, the sonship of the believers is something that transcends their nature and requires grace, a partaking of the divine nature. The church fathers thus spoke of the sonship of the believers as "adoptive" not because they considered it a merely legal fiction but because they understood that the sonship of the believers had its source not in their own nature but in a participation in the divine nature. The times have changed; grace has been largely reduced in understanding to unmerited favor, and adoption is hardly conceived of in any terms other than juridical. Given this inadequacy, it seems that such language should be retired in favor of something more appropriate to the divine revelation. If Paul could speak of the believers as genuine sons of God without bringing in confusion regarding the uniqueness of the sonship of the only Begotten, why should we be so worried about speaking of the believers as genuine sons of God, begotten in His divine life and with His divine nature?

Despite the fact that Gifford might have pushed more forcefully against the use of the word *adoption*, even what he has done in this regard has great merit, and his book as a whole has considerable value. Aware of the issues in his own Evangelical camp, he has set forth a careful proposal, one that will hopefully move the discussion a much needed step forward. In the book's final chapter, Gifford

suggests that further research is needed to explore the Spirit's role in perichoretic salvation and the ecclesial dimensions of perichoretic salvation. May Gifford and many more take on this research proposal with all seriousness.

by Mitchell Kennard

Notes

¹For a more thorough account of the Greek notion than can be given here, see Kerry S. Robichaux's series of articles on incorporation, beginning with "The Johannine Jesus as Bridge and Model for the Incorporation of the Believers into the Divine Trinity (1)" in *Affirmation & Critique*, 9.1 (2004): 38-51.

²Gifford quotes, on pages 43 through 44, from an article published in this journal: Ron Kangas' "In My Father's House: The Unleavened Truth of John 14" in *Affirmation & Critique*, 5.2 (2000): 22-36.

³See, for instance, Roger Good's "Children of God Becoming Deified Sons" in *Affirmation & Critique*, 7.2 (2002): 91-94.

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An Incomplete Recovery of the Understanding of the Triune God

"Union and Communion with the Triune God," by Fred Sanders. *Modern Reformation* 23.6 (2014): 36-42. Print.

In an issue of *Modern Reformation* devoted to the Trinity, the article entitled "Union and Communion with the Triune God" (hereafter "Union") seeks to present practical applications of the doctrine of the Trinity to the Christian walk. Written from a premise that "truth should be practical," "Union" reiterates the Reformation theology that it is grounded on and offers "two resources that help us see what is practical about the doctrine of the Trinity" (38). The short article points out that the first resource related to the practicality of the doctrine of the Trinity is "the connection between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self" (38). The second resource is listed as "the biblical dynamic of union and communion" (39). However, "Union's" attempt to expound the practicability of the biblical teaching of the Trinity falls short of the New Testament revelation precisely due to

its emphasis on doctrine rather than on the biblical balance between the objective truth and the subjective experience of the Triune God. “Union’s” overemphasis on doctrine leads to a profound neglect of the crucial factor that makes all practical experience of the Triune God possible—the regenerated human spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Following a series of articles that highlight different aspects associated with trinitarian doctrine, including its basic tenets, scriptural evidence, common heresies, and historical debates, the task to relate and apply the teaching to daily Christian existence and conduct falls to “Union.” At the outset, “Union” acknowledges that the doctrine of the Trinity does not easily avail itself to practical application, since “the doctrine itself states nothing about who we are, how we exist, or how we should behave” (38). “Union” says that the doctrine is instead “one about who God is, how God exists, and how God behaves” (38). Nevertheless, “Union” asserts that Reformation theology of the Trinity provides “practical knowledge of God and self” (38):

The connection between knowing God and knowing the self shows that we cannot have accurate knowledge of God without simultaneously knowing ourselves to be different from God: dependent on him, infinitely less than God, rebellious against him. Conversely, we cannot have accurate knowledge of ourselves without becoming aware of God’s exaltedness over us. (38)

To uphold this so-called “dialectic” (39), “Union” affirms that believers need a “specific” and “thorough” knowledge of the Trinity (38). In particular, it points to the “long and detailed” thirteenth chapter of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as indication that knowing God equals knowing Him as Father, Son, and Spirit: “knowledge of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the capstone of Calvin’s treatise on knowing God” (39). Continuing to nurture the notion that knowing God corresponds to self-knowledge, “Union” speaks of Lewis Bayly’s *The Practice of Piety: Directing a Christian How to Walk That He May Please God* as a good example of literature that shows that a “great deal of Trinitarian theology [is] necessary and helpful” in order to have a God-pleasing walk and that with “accurate knowledge” of God in His essential being, one is on the path to “accurate self-knowledge” (39). However, without further expounding on this thought or providing any example, “Union” proceeds to the second provision that Reformation theology affords in understanding the application of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Judging by its title and the relative length of the remainder of the article, the emphasis of “Union” is clearly on arguing that the “dynamic of union and communion shows

how the Trinitarian depth of Christian existence supports and funds the daily conduct of our Christian lives” (42). “Union” defines the term *union* as “the fundamental truth of what God has accomplished for our salvation in Christ and applied to us by the Holy Spirit” and the term *communion* as including “all of our Spirit-empowered responses, actions, habits, and disciplines of maintaining fellowship and communication with God” (41). “Union” regards the former as something foundational and unwavering in our Christian experience of the Trinity, for it is an operation of the Trinity in His salvation. “Union” deems the latter, the individual believer’s communion with God, as something that can either rise or fall, increase or diminish, and be cultivated or neglected, depending on the believer’s spiritual discipline and development (40). In contrast, our union with God is based on our salvation relationship with the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and thereby perfect and unwavering, as is the nature of the trinitarian God who accomplished it.

“Union” further asserts that from a believer’s union with God “arise specific acts of communion, or experiences of fellowship, with God” (39). The sort of communion that “Union” describes is the communication of God that flows in a triune way unto us. In short, “Union” describes our fellowship with God as “from the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit” (41). Following this, “Union” speaks of our “threefold communion” being based on our union with the Trinity as having “far-reaching implications for our understanding of salvation, for our worship together, and for our personal prayer” (41). “Union” argues that these three aspects of our Christian living are best understood trinitarily. Hence, with respect to salvation, we are not merely “getting saved” but rather are being “adopted by the Father through the only-begotten Son and receiving the Spirit of adoption” (41).

Likewise, according to “Union,” our worship and prayer would benefit much from an increasing awareness that they are “directed to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit” (41). Finally, “Union” assures the reader that although our knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity may be deficient, this does not impact our communion, which is derived from the reality of our union with the Trinity, not from our understanding. Additionally, “Union” claims that “a believer’s understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is enabled by faithful participation in the life of God in Christ” (42). Our weak understanding of this doctrine should motivate us to “seek fresh awareness and renewed experiences of communion with God the Father (his love and electing), God the Son (his grace and truth as our mediator), and God the Holy Spirit (his indwelling and formation)” (42); these, “Union” indicates, are the riches that we have in Christ.

The Limits of Doctrinal Knowledge and the Wealth of Subjective Experience of the Triune God

The article's major shortcoming in trying to find practical applications to the doctrine of the Trinity is its adherence to this correct doctrine as doctrine only, that is, its inability to move beyond a formulaic understanding of a fundamental truth. In seeking practical applications and implications of a prescribed theology, "Union" neglects significant aspects of the divine revelation. In particular, it nowhere points to the subjective truths of the believer's experience of the Triune God that are emphasized in the New Testament. This neglect undermines its desire to make truth practical, because it overlooks the purpose that issues from God being triune in the first place—the desire and capacity to organically dispense Himself as the divine life into His chosen people in their subjective experience and enjoyment of Him for the carrying out of His eternal purpose (Eph. 3:8-9; 1:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:4).

The pursuit of the experiential knowledge of God should be the primary undertaking and lifelong endeavor of every believer (Eph. 1:17; Col. 2:2; 2 Pet. 1:3). Our knowledge of God must not be limited to mere mental apprehension of God as a theological construct; it should expand and deepen into the full knowledge of God, which mainly includes knowing Him subjectively, that is, in our experience and as our enjoyment. While it is commendable that "Union" seeks to present the practicality of a teaching so central to the Christian faith and to the core of scriptural revelation, its observance of the Trinity as "doctrine" and "formula" causes it to fall far short of the experience of the Triune God as revealed in the Bible. On the contrary, the revelation of the Triune God both in His immanent being and in His operative economy is intimately applicable through the dispensing of Himself, as the Father in the Son through the Spirit, into the believers (2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 3:14-17). The Triune God's dispensing in His economy is the characteristic operation of the Trinity in the apostles' teaching.

We cannot easily know God if we remain in the realm of doctrine and, more importantly, do not have an understanding of why God revealed as triune. We may consider the Bible as the "autobiography of the Triune God," an expression that not only denotes its authorship but also conveys its main subject (Lee, *Christian Life* 18-19). As such, all Scripture reveals the accomplishments, attainments, will, intentions, ways, and goal of the God who is one yet three in His intrinsic being as well as in His divine

economy. If we truly want to know God, our seeking must stem from the revelation of the Triune God in His Word, and we must enter into a subjective experience, that is, an experiential knowledge, of the Father, Son, and Spirit. This is clearly seen in Paul's conclusion to 2 Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (13:14). Christians often use this verse as a benediction, but its implications for our understanding of the Triune God's relation to our Christian existence and living are far deeper than the mere repetition of a concluding phrase. In a corresponding note to this verse, Witness Lee says,

The grace of the Lord is the Lord Himself as life to us for our enjoyment (John 1:17 and note 1; 1 Cor. 15:10 and note 1), the love of God is God Himself (1 John 4:8, 16) as the source of the grace of the Lord, and the fellowship of the Spirit is the Spirit Himself as the transmission of the grace of the Lord with the love of God for our participation. These are not three separate matters but three aspects of one thing, just as the Lord, God, and the Holy Spirit are not three separate Gods but three "hypostases... of the one same undivided and indivisible" God (Philip Schaff)...

The love of God is the source, since God is the origin; the grace of the Lord is the course of the love of God, since the Lord is the expression of God; and the fellowship of the Spirit is the impartation of the grace of the Lord with the love of God, since the Spirit is the transmission of the Lord with God, for our experience and enjoyment of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with Their divine virtues...

This verse is strong proof that the trinity of the Godhead is not for the doctrinal understanding of systematic theology but for the dispensing of God Himself in His trinity into His chosen and redeemed people. In the Bible the Trinity is never revealed merely as a doctrine. It is always revealed or mentioned in regard to the relationship of God with His creatures, especially with man, who was created by Him, and more particularly with His chosen and redeemed people. (Recovery Version, note 1)

When God's revelation of Himself and His economy becomes a vision in us, we will begin to truly see ourselves. "Union," in conformity with Calvin's teachings, places the knowledge of God at the starting point. Job, by his own experience, would disagree: "I had heard

Our knowledge of God must not be limited to mere mental apprehension of God as a theological construct; it should deepen into the full knowledge of God.

of You by the hearing of the ear, / But now my eye has seen You; / Therefore I abhor myself, and I repent / In dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6). Nevertheless, Job progressed from a “doctrinal” understanding to an experiential seeing, and so should every Christian. Who we are in our nature and condition will be transparently evident under the shining vision of the Triune God.

The Crucial “Biblical Dynamic” of the Spirit with Our Spirit

The most glaring omission in “Union’s” effort to make the truth of the Trinity practical is the key factor in our knowledge of and our union and communion with the Triune God—the divine Spirit indwelling, operating, and moving in our regenerated human spirit. The true “biblical dynamic” (38) underlying our union and communion with the Triune God is the Spirit with our human spirit (Rom. 8:16). Without our human spirit, which was created by God to contact, receive, and contain Him, there can be no knowledge or experience of God, who is Spirit (John 4:24). There are only trace inferences to this thought in “Union.” For example, it says, “Our union with Christ the incarnate Son reconciles us with his Father and *fills us with his Spirit*” (40, emphasis added).

Nevertheless, the underemphasis of the Spirit and the overwhelming absence of references to the human spirit in a treatise that strives to present the practical application of the teaching of the Trinity expose the failure of doctrine to appropriate the breadth and depth of the divine revelation concerning the Trinity. Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him. Concerning the word *spirit* in this verse, Witness Lee says, “The spirit here must be our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. Such a spirit is given to us by God that we may have wisdom and revelation to know Him and His economy” (Recovery Version, note 3).

Because the human spirit corresponds to the divine Spirit, it is the spiritual organ that makes our full knowledge of and our union and communion with God possible. In more basic terms, the human spirit is our organ to experience the Triune God and to make our understanding of Him practical. Thus, our realization of salvation, our worship, and our personal prayer occur in our spirit that is indwelt by and mingled with the Spirit. The Bible is abundantly clear concerning our spirit as an essential factor in salvation, worship, and prayer. John 3:6 says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” “Regeneration is accomplished in the human spirit by the Holy Spirit of God with God’s life, the uncreated eternal life” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 6, note 2). Romans 8:16 says, “The

Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.” Through believing, we are saved by being born of the Spirit in our spirit. As believers, we have been regenerated with the divine life, making us children of God.

At this juncture it is helpful to point out a potential pitfall in our understanding of the Greek word frequently translated as “adoption” in many Bible translations (vv. 15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). “Union” repeats the usage of *adoption* to describe our relationship with the Trinity in our salvation. The pitfall of translating the Greek word as “adoption” rather than “sonship” is its potential to undermine a proper understanding of the organic union that we have with the Triune God, which involves a union of our spirit with the divine Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Although *adoption* in relation to the believers denotes a judicial procedure of being set in a position as a son of God, it does not convey the organic process through which we are born as genuine sons of God through our receiving of His divine life and nature. Believers are not merely legally adopted children of God but are organically born of Him by His Spirit regenerating our spirit.

Furthermore, there is a biblical basis for the involvement, even the requirement, of the human spirit in both worship and prayer. John 4:24 says, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness.” We worship God, that is, the complete Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—with our spirit. In the context of this verse, to worship God is to exercise our spirit to contact God, who is Spirit, and to drink of Him as the living water (v. 14). Personal prayers require and occur in our spirit. Ephesians 6:18 speaks of “praying at every time in spirit,” which refers to our regenerated spirit indwelt and mingled with the Spirit of God. In 1 Corinthians 14:14-15 Paul puts it more succinctly, saying, “My spirit prays,” and “I will pray with the spirit.” All these verses indicate that genuine prayer necessarily involves the participation of our human spirit to contact the indwelling Triune God in our spirit. This is a deeper and richer experience than one by which, as “Union” suggests, we become “increasingly aware that all Christian prayer is directed to the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit” (41).

Conclusion

“Union” is a genuine effort to help believers apply a teaching concerning the God they know. However, its overreliance on doctrine mars its intentions and undermines the full scriptural revelation of the riches of the Divine Trinity in our Christian experience. Instead of limiting its “practical” application of our understanding of the Trinity to the confines of doctrine, “Union” should

have availed itself of the full scope of the biblical revelation of the Triune God, especially the apostles' teaching in New Testament, which contains a wealth of truth concerning the Triune God, who is triune in His immanent being and divine economy for our experience and enjoyment. This doctrinal myopia may in large part be the cause of the article's failure to present the crucial role of the God-created human spirit as an organ to contain the Triune God, as the locus of our union and communion with the Triune God, and as the source of all our practical experience and enjoyment of the Triune God.

by Kin Leong Seong

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Biblical Revelation or Human Speculation?

50 Things You Need to Know about Heaven, by John F. Hart. Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2014. Print.

In *50 Things You Need to Know about Heaven* (hereafter *50 Things*), John F. Hart, professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute, presents fifty questions and answers intended to serve as a guide to what the Bible says about heaven (11). By exploring fifty points concerning heaven, *50 Things* aims to help its readers move away from concepts about heaven that have been acquired from unreliable sources to a biblically based understanding (11). Regrettably, many of the responses in it are speculative in nature, conforming to a reading of the Scriptures that *50 Things* does not recognize as being unscriptural or as being based on a misinterpretation of Scripture. Consequently, *50 Things*, like all the unreliable sources that it seeks to turn people away from, only further distracts believers from God's purpose.

Speculation concerning Heaven

The fifty questions and responses presented in *50 Things*

can be loosely categorized as addressing four topics: qualifications for entering into heaven, a definition of heaven, existence in heaven, and a living in view of heaven. Regarding the qualifications for heaven, *50 Things* covers questions such as: "Who goes to heaven?" "How good must a person be to get to heaven?" and "How can I be sure I'm going to heaven?" (13, 16, 119). It states that "there is one condition to get to heaven, and one condition only: to believe in Jesus as the one who can forgive your rebellion against God and take you to heaven when you die" (14). It also speculates, based on 2 Samuel 12:22-23, Matthew 19:14, and Luke 1:15, that those who are incapable of faith, such as aborted babies and those who suffer severe mental disabilities, will also go to heaven when they die (115-117).

In the second topic, which supplies a definition of *heaven*, *50 Things* responds to questions including: "Is heaven the same now as it will be in eternity?" "What did Jesus mean by 'mansions' in heaven?" and "Where is heaven?" (24, 29, 45). *50 Things* states that "the Bible speaks of three 'heavens'" (45): the first, referring to the atmosphere where birds fly; the second, to outer space; and the third, to "a place of great happiness in the very presence of God" (45). *50 Things* explains that the third heaven, which it equates with the Paradise spoken of in Luke 23:43, is a place where believers go immediately after they die, but even this is not a final dwelling place but an intermediate, temporary heaven (20-21, 24-25, 36, 45-47). It asserts that the "final 'heaven'" where the believers will spend eternity is the new earth (25, 36); that is, it is on a physical earth with a physical "new Jerusalem, the central city on the new earth" (64, 30).

According to *50 Things*, the Father's house mentioned in John 14:2 is heaven, where God resides; the "final living quarters" for the believers will be "in the new Jerusalem...on the new earth" (30). "The new Jerusalem is already in existence in heaven. When eternity begins, the new Jerusalem will come down out of heaven to be permanently joined to the new earth as the center of all activity" (66). *50 Things* describes the New Jerusalem based on the dimensions in Revelation 21 and concludes that "there will be *plenty* of room for *plenty* of people in the new Jerusalem" (68).

The third category of questions and responses, which addresses matters related to existence in heaven, is the longest of the four categories. In this group, *50 Things* considers items ranging from what heaven will look like

Many of the responses in it are speculative in nature, conforming to a reading of the Scriptures that *50 Things* does not recognize as being unscriptural.

to whether or not the believers will eat and drink in heaven. It maintains that the intermediate heaven and the final heaven, the new earth, are places “so astounding that our words may not be capable of describing them adequately” (43-44). It suggests that in heaven the believers will have a resurrected, physical, yet spiritual, body, like that of Jesus in resurrection, and that they will live together with angels, worshipping God together with them not only in formal ways but also with every activity that they do in their sinless bodies (78-80, 82).

Regarding the resurrected body of the believers, *50 Things* argues, based on God’s creation of Adam and Eve, that each one’s resurrected body will be “fully developed but youthful and ageless” such that “children who have come to faith in Christ but have died before adulthood will be full grown in their resurrected bodies,” and “those who have died at an old age will be resurrected into a premier adult body” (87). Concerning the activity of the believers in heaven, *50 Things* suggests that “for all eternity, heaven will be a continuing experience of new adventures that will bring us into community and unbroken friendships with others” and that each person—artist, musician, scientist, teacher, or programmer—will continue as before, only in “eternal discovery and learning” so that there is neither difficulty in working nor boredom but only glory to God (39-40, 54-55, 78).

The final category of questions and responses covers questions that pertain to death, resurrection, the judgment seat of Christ, heavenly crowns, living in hope of heaven, preparing for eternity in heaven, and presenting heaven to children. *50 Things* explains that for those who die in unbelief “nothing in the Bible encourages us to think that a person has a second chance to reverse their eternal destiny after death” (24). However, regarding the believers, it states, based on Luke 23:43, 2 Corinthians 5:8, and Hebrews 12:22-23, that after passing through death, believers are taken immediately into the intermediate heaven, which it equates with Paradise and the third heaven (19-21, 110, 126). It affirms that whereas the judgment of the great white throne is probably for unbelievers, each believer will be brought to the judgment seat of Christ, where the quality of his or her life and works will be weighed to determine whether that one’s life is worthy to receive a commendation from the Lord (124-127). It asserts that “Christians who are found to be faithful at the judgment seat of Christ...will be rewarded with crowns that will never wither or perish” and that “these crowns are symbolic of the commendation and reward the trustworthy followers of Christ will receive” (130-131). However, those who have lived in ways that do not honor the Lord will have actions and words that will be burned up and left unrewarded (127). *50 Things* concludes with a question: “What can I do to prepare for eternity in heaven?” (135). It first states that the believers

should give generously to poor believers and to ministries that spread the message of Jesus and, second, that the believers should yield themselves to God in complete submission (136-137).

Presenting Speculative Thought and Errant Teaching as Scriptural Truth

Even though *50 Things* claims to be a “guide to what the Bible says about heaven” (11), what it presents is more speculation and errant teaching than biblical truth. When addressing the question regarding whether Christians go to heaven immediately after they die, *50 Things* argues based on the Lord’s word to the thief in Luke 23:43, “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise,” that Christians go to heaven, albeit an intermediate one, immediately after death and will be transferred to a final heaven when eternity begins (19-20, 25).

The Paradise referenced in Luke 23:43 is not the third heaven or even an intermediate heaven; it is a place in the lower parts of the earth, the place where the Lord descended following His crucifixion (Eph. 4:9-10; Rom. 10:7). Paradise is in the lower parts of the earth, contrary to the errant teaching that it is the third heaven. According to the Scriptures, all men, both the lost and the saved, go to Hades when they die (Job 24:19; Luke 16:22-26). In the New Testament Lazarus and the rich man were both in Hades after they died. In Hades there is a section of comfort, Paradise, and a section of torment. The disembodied spirits and souls of the believers are in the section of comfort, whereas the disembodied spirits and souls of the lost are in the section of torment. In the account in Luke 16 Lazarus was in the pleasant section, while the rich man was in the section of torment.

According to God’s original creation, God created a body for man as his covering (Gen. 2:7). When man fell, sin entered into him, bringing in death (Rom. 5:12). Through death man’s spirit and soul are separated from his body, causing him to be naked (2 Cor. 5:3). Thus, upon death man is in an incomplete, abnormal, and even shameful state and cannot enter into the presence of God (cf. Exo. 28:42-43; 20:26). As a result, man’s spirit and soul are kept in Hades until the resurrection, when God will clothe the believers with a resurrected and glorified body (1 Cor. 15:35, 42-44, 52-53; 1 Thes. 4:16; John 5:28-29).

In another case *50 Things* states that “the Bible teaches that the death of Jesus on the cross covers the sins of everyone who believes in him and everyone who is incapable of faith,” such as aborted babies and those who suffer from severe mental disability (115). Although *50 Things* may feel compelled to make such a statement in order to comfort those who have lost loved ones in that category, there is no teaching in the Bible suggesting that

the death of Jesus covers the sins of everyone who is incapable of faith. What the Bible does reveal is that God is righteous, and because He is such, our realization of His righteous disposition regarding every human situation should remove any ground for sorrow in our being (Psa. 89:14; Rom. 3:4, 21-26). *50 Things'* blanket assertion concerning how God deals with every human life untouched by faith goes deep into the realm of speculation.

Errantly Teaching That the Father's House and the New Jerusalem Are Physical

When addressing the meaning of "mansions" (29) in heaven, *50 Things* emphasizes that the Father's house and its many "rooms" are physical (30). Moreover, after acknowledging that in the New Testament, Jesus is the temple and that the New Jerusalem has no temple, because God and the Lamb are its temple, *50 Things* emphasizes that the New Jerusalem is a physical city (66-69).

According to the history of God's revelation and move in the Bible, God's desire is to dwell in man, not in the heavens or on the earth (2 Sam. 7:5-7, 12-13). Beginning with His placement of man before the tree of life in Eden so that man could receive Him as food (Gen. 2:8-9), through the vision of Bethel given to Jacob (28:17); the vision of the burning thornbush seen by Moses (Exo. 3:4); the vision and building of the tabernacle with Moses and Israel (chs. 25—30; chs. 35—40); the revelation of God's building with David and Samuel (2 Sam. 7:12-14); the building of the temple with Solomon (2 Chron. 3:1—7:10; 1 Kings 6—8); the coming of the Lord Jesus as the real tabernacle and temple (John 1:1, 14; 2:19); the enlargement of Christ, with His Body, as the temple (vv. 20-21); and the consummation of this enlarged Christ to be the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-10), God's thought has ever been to build Himself into man and for man to dwell in Him (Psa. 90:1; John 14:20, 23; 15:4-9; 17:21, 23; Col. 1:27; 2:6).

In Acts 7:47-49 Stephen explained that the temple, as the peak of God's building in the Old Testament, was not God's intended house, for Jehovah declared, "Heaven is My throne, / And the earth the footstool for My feet. / Where then is the house that you will build for Me / And where is the place of My rest?" (Isa. 66:1). Jehovah answered His own question, saying in the next verse, "But to this kind of man will I look, to him who is poor / And of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."

Furthermore, John's Gospel, specifically the first four chapters, reveals that in the New Testament, God's house, the temple, is no longer a dwelling built by hands, but it is the resurrected Christ with His regenerated and transformed believers constituted with God. John 1:14 introduces the incarnated Jesus as the real tabernacle; 2:19-21 reveals that through His death and resurrection the individual Jesus as the temple of God became the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12) with all His believers as His members to be the enlarged temple of God; and 4:24 affirms that the location of worship is no longer a physical place but the regenerated human spirit of the believers. For this reason the apostle Paul speaks of the believers' bodies being members of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:15, 19); of the believers growing into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21); of the believers being built together into a dwelling place of

God in spirit (v. 22); of Christ making His home in the believers' hearts (3:17); and of the Body of Christ, which is God's building and the church of the living God, as the house of God (1:22-23; 4:12; 1 Tim. 3:15).

The apostle Peter also tells the believers that they are being built up as a spiritual

house (1 Pet. 2:5). This house of God, the church, is signified by the New Jerusalem, the fully glorified bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:1, 9, 11). This indicates that the New Jerusalem is not a physical city in which the believers will dwell but the believers themselves being indwelt by God and dwelling in God. In other words, from the scriptural perspective, the teaching promoted by *50 Things* that both the Father's house and the New Jerusalem are physical structures or places in which the believers will dwell is not supported by the Bible; rather, it runs contrary to it.

Distracting the Believers from God's Goal in Salvation

50 Things repeatedly presents heaven as the goal of God's salvation and even as God's salvation, stating the following: "God looks at the world as two groups: those who believe in Jesus as their only hope for heaven and those who do not" (14), "Forgiving our sins is certainly part of God's plan to get us to heaven" (17), and, "Justification and eternal life come as one package. The one who has eternal life and justification will one day live with Jesus and God forever on the new earth" (18). However, the Bible never speaks of heaven as the goal of salvation. The only verses that *50 Things* is able to co-opt in support of this claim are John 3:16 and 36 and John 5:24, which speak only of receiving and say nothing about going to

When addressing the meaning of "mansions" in heaven, *50 Things* regrettably emphasizes that the Father's house and its many "rooms" are physical.

heaven (15, 19). According to the revelation in the Holy Scriptures, salvation and eternal life are strictly related to Christ as life entering into the believers, operating within them, and spreading into every part of their being in order to transform and conform them to His glorious image and build them together as one entity in Himself to be His Body and bride for His expression and satisfaction and to be the house of God for His rest (1 John 5:11-12; John 3:16; 5:24; Col. 1:27; 3:3-4; Phil. 2:12-13; Rom. 8:9-10, 6, 11, 29-30; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; 2 Thes. 2:13-14; Eph. 4:12, 15-16; Col. 2:19; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:21-22). To present any other kind salvation is to announce a different gospel, which distracts and defrauds the believers of their prize (Gal. 1:6-7).

Conclusion

As a work intended to guide its readers into what the Bible says about heaven, the objective of *50 Things* is to present biblical facts related to heaven in a way that liberates its readers from traditional, religious, and natural concepts of heaven. Regrettably, *50 Things* reads speculative concepts into the Bible more than it presents any liberating truth in the Word. Consequently, the work is a distraction to the believers, ironically chronicling a list of concepts that would be best for believers to avoid in order to not be immersed in its speculations.

by Joel Oladele

Becoming God's Dwelling Place

God Dwells among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth, by G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014. Print.

It is refreshing to find a contemporary Christian book whose central thesis identifies and expounds on the heart of God's purpose in the Bible—the dwelling place of God. *God Dwells among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (hereafter *Dwells*) by G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim strikes a symphonic chord on the line of God's building that runs throughout the biblical revelation.

The preface of *Dwells* indicates that its substance and basic thesis are “distilled from G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*” (*Dwells* 7) (hereafter *Temple*). In *Temple*

Beale tried to sketch the development of the temple idea through each of the various distinct redemptive-historical epochs (Eden/Noahic/Patriarchal/Israel [Mount Sinai→wilderness tabernacle→Jerusalem temple]/inaugurated latter days/consummated latter days) in order to see how they related to and built on one another. (*Dwells* 8)

Unlike *Temple*, which spans the biblical theology of God's dwelling place from Genesis to Revelation with extensive argumentation from both the biblical text and its literary, historical, and cultural contexts, *Dwells* restricts itself to a Scripture-sourced exegetical and hermeneutical style suited to a broader, targeted audience. Beale provides the source of *Temple's* central thesis, a thesis that is carried over to *Dwells*:

Why does John see ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ in Revelation 21:1 and yet in 21:2-3, 10—22:3 he sees a city that is garden-like, in the shape of a temple? Why does John not see a full panorama of the new heavens and earth?...Also, how does this vision relate to Christians and their role in fulfilling the mission of the church?

My beginning point is a brief answer to the above question about why John equates the new creation with an arboreal city-temple in his last vision of the book...

...My thesis is that the Old Testament tabernacle and temples were symbolically designed to point to the cosmic eschatological reality that God's tabernacling presence, formerly limited to the holy of holies, was to be extended throughout the whole earth. Against this background, the Revelation 21 vision is best understood as picturing the final end-time temple that will fill the entire cosmos.

In attempting to substantiate this thesis...I will argue that the Garden of Eden was the first archetypal temple, and that it was the model for all subsequent temples. Such an understanding of Eden will enhance the notion that the Old Testament tabernacle and temples were symbolic microcosms of the whole creation. As microcosmic symbolic structures they were designed to point to a worldwide eschatological temple that perfectly reflects God's glory. It is this universally expanded eschatological temple that is pictured in Revelation's last vision. (*Temple* 23, 25-26)

Eden as the First Temple with Adam Called to Be the First Priest

Dwells begins with Genesis 1 and 2, pointing out that Eden is the first temple, since it was a place of God's presence, of God's worship, where satisfaction in God could be found. *Dwells* traces through the Bible how the tree of life in Genesis 2:9 and the river in 2:10-14 are symbols of the abundance of life. *Dwells* points out that

these two symbols are mentioned in the context of the eschatological temple in Ezekiel 47, where the river of life flows from the presence of God in the Holy of Holies to the Holy Place and then to the outer court, and where the tree of life grows on the banks of the river to feed the nations. These symbols reappear in the New Jerusalem in Revelation 22, where there is a river flowing and the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (vv. 1-2). Based on these associations *Dwells* provides a diagram consisting of three concentric circles correlating the Holy of Holies with Eden as the innermost circle, the Holy Place with the garden as the middle band, and the outer court with the outer world as the outer band (22). *Dwells* concludes the description of Eden as the temple by applying these correlations to the New Testament believers:

The life-giving waters that flowed in Eden now flow in and through those who believe in Jesus, becoming “a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:13-14). Just as the river “flowed out of Eden” to the lands of the later surrounding nations of Assyria and Cush (Gen 2:10), so those who believe in Jesus not only drink of living waters, but a spring of living water overflows into the nations around them (Jn. 7:37-39). (27-28)

God’s Original Mission— to Fill the Earth with the Image of God and to Subdue the Serpent

Dwells considers Genesis 1:26-28 a call for Adam and Eve to multiply and fill the earth with the image of God: “Adam was created in the image of the triune God to indicate his presence and rule over the earth. As God’s image, Adam and Eve were to reign with God as kings and representatives of God” (30). Although this image was distorted by the entrance of sin, Jesus came to fulfill the aspect of God’s original mission to subdue the earth and have dominion: “While the first Adam failed to subdue the serpent, the second Adam subdued the serpent” (32).

Altar, Tabernacle, and Temple— the Continuation of God’s Mission with the Patriarchs and the Nation of Israel

Dwells proceeds to show that the original commission given in Genesis 1:26-28 was continued with the patriarchs after the fall. Due to sin, the earth was filled not with the image of God but with the wickedness of

humanity. In Genesis 9:1 and 7 “the commission to Adam is passed down to Noah in the context of a new creation” (40). After the flood the unabated spread of sin continued. God thus passed down His commission to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which each received in the context of the building of small sanctuaries.

In these patriarchal commissions, (1) God appears to them..., and (2) they pitch a *tent* (literally a “tabernacle” in the LXX) (3) on a mountain and (4) build “altars” to worship God (5) at “Bethel”—the “house of God.” (43)

Dwells then explains how this commission continued with their descendants, the children of Israel. The tabernacle and the temple with their tripartite structures, on one hand, reflect the tripartite structure of Eden but, on the other hand, make provision for the problem of sin, “since this problem must be overcome to fulfill our mission” (52).

The priests in the Holy Place reflect the blessings of [God’s] presence to others as they represent the rest of Israel, tend the lampstand of witness, gather at the table of bread and pray at the altar of incense...

However, sinful Israel and sinful humanity can only stand in the presence of God through the altar of burnt offering and basin for washing in the outer court...As this tabernacle expands, more and more of sinful humanity would find access to the special revelatory presence of a holy God. (63)

Although the children of Israel later suffered the destruction of the temple and were carried away, God’s original purpose was not thwarted. Rather, the application of its scope was expanded upon their return from captivity:

God’s presence continues to move with the tabernacle, but this presence seems to be confined to one locale with the building of the temple. However, this temple is destroyed, and its rebuilding after the Babylonian exile points forward to an even greater end-time temple, whose glory is not confined to any one locale but fills the whole earth. This is the original purpose of God’s sanctuary in Eden, and this is fulfilled in the glorious picture of Revelation 21–22. (49)

Jesus as the New Temple and the Church as the Expanded Temple

The stage is thus set for the New Testament, in which Jesus is the new temple, and the church is the expanded temple:

It is refreshing to find a contemporary Christian book whose central thesis identifies the heart of God’s purpose in the Bible—the dwelling place of God.

The prophecies and promises for God's people to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, expanding the sanctuary of Eden, are neither fulfilled in the line of Abraham in the Old Testament nor in Israel's temple. How will these promises be realized and our mission fulfilled? We must turn to the work of Jesus, the second Adam and new Israel, to answer this question. (77)

According to *Dwells*, "the locus of God's presence shifts from the Jerusalem temple to the person of Jesus so that he is the continuation of the true temple" (83). *Dwells* says that the reference to Jesus in John 2:19 ("Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up") and verse 21 ("The temple of His body") is a development of 1:14: "Just as the glory of God filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35), so the glory of God now tabernacles in Jesus" (82). In John 1:51 "Jesus identifies himself with the temple stairway of Genesis 28 and claims that he, not the Jerusalem temple, is the primary link between heaven and earth" (83). Jesus is the continuation of the temple because He teaches that

true worship would not occur at the Jerusalem temple, but would be directed toward the Father (and, by implication, through the Messiah) in the sphere of the coming eschatological Spirit of Jesus (Jn 4:21-26). The Spirit creates a link with heaven through trust in Christ, and this trust brings them into the sphere of the true temple consisting of Christ and his Spirit. Worship in the true temple would no longer be geographically located in Jerusalem but in Christ. (83)

The synoptic Gospels also reinforce this change from Israel's old temple to Jesus. Jesus' resurrected body is a temple made without hands (Mark 14:58). According to 15:38, when Jesus was crucified, the veil of the temple was split into two. Hence, "Jesus' death and resurrection are a destruction and raising up of the temple" (84). Based on Hebrews 10:19-22, *Dwells* says,

While Jesus' death destroyed the temple curtain, it opened up a "new and living way through the curtain." Furthermore, the embroidery on the temple veil represented the starry heavens of the old cosmos. Consequently, the tearing of the curtain suggests symbolically the tearing and the beginning of the destruction of the old world, as the presence of God breaks out from the Holy of Holies and begins to create a new world. Through the sacrifice of his body, we can enter through the new and living way of Jesus into the very presence of God. (84)

According to *Dwells*, the old temple and even the old cosmos began to be destroyed in the death of Jesus, and "his resurrection was the beginning of a new temple and new cosmos, a new creation" (93). In this new creation God's

presence expands out of Israel's temple to bless the nations. This is seen, for example in the Gentile centurion's confession at the cross: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54), which, according to *Dwells*, is suggestive of the gospel extending to the Gentiles (93). *Dwells* links the command in the Gospels to go to the nations with God's original purpose in Genesis 1 by drawing connections between the great commission given by Jesus to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 and "the son of man/Adam" in Daniel 7:13-14 as well as "the temple-building commission of 2 Chronicles 36:23" (94-95):

The 2 Chronicles passage has three things in common with Matthew 28:18-20: (1) both Cyrus and Jesus assert authority over all the earth, (2) the commission to "go," and (3) the assurance of the divine presence to fulfill the commission. Jesus escalates Cyrus's commission since he has authority over "heaven" as well as "earth," and his own presence will accompany his people. In addition, Jesus' commission is not aimed at old Jerusalem but "nations" throughout the whole earth. Furthermore, if the temple construction of 2 Chronicles is in mind in Matthew 28:18-20, then this is an implicit commission for the disciples to fulfill the Genesis 1:26-28 mandate by building the new temple with worshipers throughout the earth. (96)

The Expansion and Growth of the Temple until Christ Returns

The Gospels indicate that Jesus is the temple. In Acts and the Epistles this temple expanded with the birth of the church. According to *Dwells*, Paul's question, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16), is even more shocking than Jesus' statement in John 2:19. "Since Christians are now the body of Jesus Christ, Old Testament prophecies of the temple are fulfilled in the church" (99).

The temple is not simply a metaphor for the church, but the church commenced as an actual temple at Pentecost (Acts 2), and it is the initial phase of the building of the final temple that will appear at the end of the age in fulfillment of Old Testament temple prophecies...

...The former architectural temple was only an imperfect anticipation of the genuine and "true tent" (Heb 8:2) in Christ, just as a photograph is an imperfect image of a genuine person. A photograph may be adequate when the person is absent, but it serves as no replacement when that person is present. (100, 103)

Using Paul's statement that the church grows into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21), *Dwells* asks rhetorically, "Buildings are naturally static, but living

organisms grow. So how can a building grow?” (104). On the one hand, *Dwells* considers this growth to be an increase in the number of believers:

The temple begins to expand as its boundaries include Gentiles from around the world. The temple will continue to expand to include more and more people until God’s presence will pervade the entire earth at the end of the age. (106-107)

On the other hand, *Dwells* relates growth to the word of God, suffering, and the flowing out of the resurrection life of Christ, which comes from the Spirit and from spending time in God’s presence. *Dwells* states, based on Ephesians 4:15-16, that “our growth into maturity in Christ is only possible by constant and ongoing exposure to the word of God through one another” (105). The means of growth is the word of God, and the context of growth is often suffering (109). However, *Dwells* clarifies,

Suffering is not an automatic lever to release the life of Christ in us, but suffering is the occasion that we look for Christ’s life to flow in us (2 Cor 4:10, 11)...When we are afflicted, we realize the inadequacy of our resources and look to Christ so that his life is released in us. This life flows not only in us but through us to bless others. “Death is at work in us, but life [is at work] in you” (2 Cor 4:12). This life comes from the Spirit who assures us that we will rise again with Jesus and come into his presence (2 Cor 4:13-14), guaranteeing the resurrection life to come. (109)

Concerning coming into the presence of Jesus, *Dwells* says,

In the busyness of our modern lives, we spend little time with Jesus and wonder why we have so little power...As we stand “beholding the glory of the Lord,” then we who are in the temple are “being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18). This “image” is the image (*eikōn*) of God originally given to Adam and Eve (Gen 1:26-27), which God is restoring in the lives of believers becoming “conformed to the image of his son” (Rom 8:29) in the context of worship in the temple (2 Cor 3:18). Powerful witness comes from ongoing and sustained time in the presence of God. (133-134)

Practically, being in the presence of God is to pray: “The temple was to be a locus of prayer..., so the church must be a locus of prayer for all the nations” (134). *Dwells* relates the growth and witness in this age to the figure

of the lampstand, seen both in the Old Testament buildings and in Revelation: “The church’s role as an arboreal lampstand of witness begins at the commencement of the church age and is consummated when Christ returns” (128).

The New Jerusalem—Mission Accomplished

Dwells concludes its overview of God’s building, which began in the first two chapters of the Bible, with “the consummate picture of this vision” (136) in the final two chapters:

In Revelation 21–22, we see a picture of our mission accomplished. God fulfills his original purposes for the cosmos as spelled out in Genesis 1–2, since the dwelling place of God, originally limited to Eden, has expanded to fill the entire new heavens and earth. (135)

In this context *Dwells* also correlates the golden material and cubical structure of the Holy Holies in the Old Testament temple with the consummate holy city:

In Revelation 21, the place of God’s presence in the Holy of

Holies has expanded to fill the whole earth. The city is paved with gold (Rev 21:18) just like the Holy of Holies of Israel’s temple (1 Kings 6:20-22; 2 Chron 3:4-8), and the whole city is a cube (Rev 21:16), just as the Holy of Holies was a cube (1 Kings 6:20), since the Holy of Holies has now expanded to fill the entire new creation. As a result, the three sections of Israel’s old temple (Holy of Holies, the Holy Place and the outer courtyard) are no longer found in the temple in Revelation 21, because God’s special revelatory presence has expanded out of the Holy of Holies to cover the heavens and the earth. (139)

According to *Dwells*, the people in the new creation are high priests, bearing the Lord’s name, “because they have become consummately identified and are in union with Jesus, the High Priest” (140). *Dwells* discreetly argues against the concept that the New Jerusalem (as the cosmic fulfillment of God’s dwelling place) is a physical construct:

To expect the restoration of a physical temple after the inaugurated new creation in Christ “would be to offer new reason for confidence in the flesh, to build again the wall of partition and to destroy the unity of the people of God.” (140, quoting E. P. Clowney, “The Final Temple,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 (1972)

As a concluding summary, *Dwells* reiterates that God’s

Dwells discreetly argues against the concept that the New Jerusalem (as the cosmic fulfillment of God’s dwelling place) is a physical construct.

dwelling place is actually a person, Christ, who has been enlarged to include God's transformed people:

We have observed that God's unique presence in the structural temple in the Old Testament is focused in the new covenant age on the God-man, Christ, the true temple. As a result of Christ's resurrection, the Spirit continued building the end-time temple with the living stones of God's people and extended the temple into the new age. This building process will culminate in the eternal new heavens and earth as a paradisaical city-temple. Or, more briefly, the temple of God has been transformed into God, his people and the rest of the eternal new creation as the temple. How should this reality affect our lives? (156)

"Why Didn't I Ever See This Before?"

Prior to its final chapter—a practical call to sacrifice for the spread of the gospel, to hide the word of God in our hearts, and to serve God as praying priests in His temple—*Dwells* acknowledges that many Christians may not have seen that the purpose of God in Eden was for "his dwelling place to fill the entire heavens and earth" (147):

Some readers at times may have wondered, "Why didn't I ever see this before?"...The context of the Bible provides lenses to help us see the richly textured interconnectedness of Scripture...

...For some, though, the concept of creation as the first temple (and Eden as a smaller temple therein) in Genesis 1-3 and the entire cosmos as a temple in Revelation 21:1-22:5 in particular may seem surprising. Why is that? A number of blinders can obstruct our vision of this glorious reality in Scripture. Specifically, differences in cosmology, biblical unity, history/typology and understanding "literal" fulfillment may prevent us from seeing things that are present in Scripture. (147-148)

Dwells insightfully identifies and connects the temple, the dwelling place of God, and the manifestations of the buildings of God in type and in reality as central biblical themes. Furthermore, *Dwells* presents an overview of God's purpose—to build and expand His dwelling place—not as a mere theological construct but as a vision that requires a practical response. According to *Dwells*, this response involves faithfulness to God's word, the exercise of prayer and worship, sacrificial witness for the gospel, and appreciation for the growth and flow of life that accompanies suffering. *Dwells* neglects to mention that this suffering often comes from religious ones who have not seen this vision (cf. Phil. 3:5-6).

The overarching theme and many of the details presented by *Dwells* echo those found in the decades-earlier writings

of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee (albeit neither author is referenced in *Dwells*). For example, in *The Glorious Church* Watchman Nee notes the correspondence between the opening chapters of Genesis and the final chapters of Revelation, especially as it relates to the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose:

Although there is a long distance between them, the last two chapters of Revelation correspond with the first three chapters of Genesis. God created the heaven and the earth in Genesis, and the new heaven and the new earth are in the last two chapters of Revelation. In both Genesis and Revelation there is the tree of life. In Genesis there is a river flowing out from Eden, and in Revelation there is a river of living water flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In Genesis there is gold, pearl (bdellium), and a kind of precious stone (onyx), and in Revelation there is gold, pearl, and all kinds of precious stones. In Genesis 2 Eve was Adam's wife. In Revelation 21 the Lamb also has a wife. The Lamb's wife is the New Jerusalem, and God's eternal purpose is fulfilled in this woman. (99)

Similarly, the significance and application of God's dwelling place is a recurring theme in Witness Lee's more than fifty years of ministry. As early as the 1950s he began to connect God's dwelling place to God's purpose, stating, "The two paradises in Genesis and Revelation are both dwelling places for man. They show us the purpose and reason why God prepared them for man" (Lee, *Mature* 36). Lee then indicates that for God's glorious expression, the New Jerusalem is "the dwelling place of God and all the saints, and it is also the issue of God's work in man throughout the ages. This city is a man of glory" (38-39).

Lee continued this theme in the 1960s, noting the connection between Eden and the Holy of Holies: "Before the fall, there was no separation between God and man in the garden of Eden; man could live in God's presence to enjoy God and even eat God as the tree of life. The Holy of Holies is like the garden of Eden in this regard" (*Priesthood* 139). Lee also spoke of the congruity between the symbols found in the first two chapters of the Bible and the final two chapters:

There are four corresponding items seen both at the beginning and at the end of the Scriptures: a bride, the tree of life, a flowing river, and three precious materials—gold, pearl, and precious stones. There is a distinct resemblance and a definite correlation. ("Vision" 178)

Lee reinforces this correspondence as it applies to God's dwelling place by explicitly stating that the entire Bible could be considered a building construction manual:

Genesis 1 and 2 are like the blueprint in the beginning of a manual of building instructions. Revelation 21 and 22

are like a photograph of the finished structure inserted at the end of the manual...The Scriptures are such an instruction book regarding God's building. (178)

Lee identifies Adam as the first priest in the Bible: "The first priest was the first person, Adam...Although Adam had no need to offer any kind of sacrifice, we must realize that before the fall he was in the presence of God all the time" ("Priesthood" 427-428). Lee also summarizes the stages of God's building, beginning with the Old Testament patriarchal tent and consummating in the New Jerusalem as the ultimate tabernacle of God:

First there was a little tent with an altar; then there was the tabernacle with the bronze altar, and after this the temple with a larger altar. Finally, we observed the scene in Ezekiel's vision. Now we have seen the order in the New Testament: Christ came to be the tabernacle, and His intention was that He as the tabernacle would be enlarged. It is for this purpose that He is life to us, and it is for this purpose that He has given the church many gifted persons with their gifts. Finally, all the members with their functions and services are for this one purpose. This is the meaning of the entire Scriptures. Eventually, in the fullness of time the New Jerusalem will come as the ultimate manifestation of God's building. ("Vision" 317)

When the veils and "blindness" concerning the central line of God's building as His dwelling place are removed from the hearts of God's people, entire new vistas will come into view. In the light of seeing the divine purpose to have

an eternal mutual habitation of God and man, all the major biblical truths, such as the Trinity, God, the person and work of Christ, the Spirit, the church, the believers, the kingdom, and the New Jerusalem, come into clear focus. Similarly, the subsidiary themes, which often and unnecessarily divide believers, assume their rightful place and context. As Witness Lee says, "If we have seen such a vision, we will be caught by it. Whatever we are, whatever we do, and wherever we go, we will be completely for this vision; we will be fully for God's building. We will take God's goal as our goal" (317).

by James Fite

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When the veils concerning the central line of God's building as His dwelling place are removed from the hearts of God's people, entire new vistas will come into view.

Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there." (Gen. 2:12)

gold: The flow of the river issued in three precious materials: gold, bdellium, and onyx. These materials typify the Triune God as the basic elements of the structure of God's eternal building. Gold typifies God the Father with His divine nature, which man may partake of through God's calling (2 Pet. 1:3-4), as the base of God's eternal building; bdellium, a pearl-like material produced from the resin of a tree, typifies the produce of God the Son in His redeeming and life-releasing death (John 19:34) and His life-dispensing resurrection (John 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:3), as the entry into God's eternal building (cf. Rev. 21:21 and note 1, par. 1); and onyx, a precious stone, typifies the produce of God the Spirit with His transforming work (2 Cor. 3:18) for the building up of God's eternal building. The New Jerusalem is constructed of these three categories of materials—gold, pearl, and precious stones (Rev. 21:11, 18-21)...

The flowing of the divine life in man brings the divine nature into man (2 Pet. 1:4), regenerates man (1 Pet. 1:3), and transforms man into the glorious image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Thus, man, who was created of dust (v. 7), becomes transformed precious materials for God's building, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem.