

Tabernacle types & technicalities or, The role of ritual & rites of passage in transmitting authority ... And also in illustrating the invisible

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

— 1 TIMOTHY 4:14

Analysis

A. (8:1-36) Consecration of the priesthood

[8:1,2] Hurried, casual or disorderly worship had no place in ancient Hebrew religious life, whatever might have been the case in the cultic rites of other Near Eastern nations. The worship of the God of Sinai was a very serious matter ... [Harrison 92]

The High Priest's dress

[8:6] Harrison points out [95] that washing of nomadic peoples was far more perfunctory than, say, in Egypt, where priests bathed their entire bodies 3 times daily!

[8:7-9] This dress of the high priest represented him, in the first place, as the appointed minister of the tabernacle. The number of pieces, twice four, like the four of the common priests' attire, answered to the four which was represented in the ground plan of the tabernacle, quadrangular both in its form as a whole and in its several parts, the Holy of Holies being a perfect cube; four being in Scripture constantly the number which symbolises the universe, as created by God and bearing witness to Him. So also the garments of the high priest marked him as the minister of the tabernacle by their colours, also four in number, and the same as those of the latter, namely, blue, purple, scarlet, and white. But the official robes of the high priest marked him, in the second place, as the servant of the God of the tabernacle, whose livery he wore. For these colours, various modifications of light, all thus had a symbolic reference to the God of light, who made the universe of which the Mosaic tabernacle was a type. Of these, the blue, the colour of the overarching heaven, has been in many lands and religions naturally regarded as the colour symbolising God, as the God of the heaven, bowing to the earth in condescending love and self-revelation. [Kellogg 192]



RONALD K. HARRISON

Taught OT at Wycliffe (U of T) and taught that "the worship of the God of Sinai was a very serious matter"

[8:9] The typical meaning seems to be this ; our High Priest atones and intercedes and reconciles, yet does all to the glory of Jehovah's holiness. The manifestation of the Divine character appears in the high priest – love to man, and tender mercies, combined with rich displays of righteousness and holiness. There is not one frown, not one look of terror in the high priest, though there is purest holiness. The deep love and compassion of his soul make that holiness appear most attractive. [Bonar 163]

The High Priest's anointing

[8:10,11] The notion that even vessels, and in fact inanimate things in general, can be endowed with divine and spiritual powers, was very widely spread in antiquity. We meet with it in the anointing of memorial stones (Genesis 28:17; Genesis 35:14), and it occurs again in the instructions concerning the expiation of the sanctuary on the annual day of atonement (ch. 16).

It contains more truth than some modern views of the universe, which refuse to admit that any influence is exerted by the divine Spirit except upon animated beings, and thus leave a hopeless abyss between spirit and matter. [Keil ii 337]

[8:11] The altar, as a place of special sanctity, the place where God had covenanted to meet with Israel, was anointed seven times. For the number seven, compounded of three, the signet number of the Godhead, and four, the constant symbol of the creaturely, is thus by eminence the sacred number, the number, in particular, which is the sign and reminder of the covenant of redemption; and so here it is with special meaning that the altar, as being the place where God had specially covenanted to meet with Israel as reconciled through the blood of atonement, should receive a sevenfold anointing. [Kellogg 202]

[8:12] It was to foreshow that Jesus was to have the fulness of the Holy Spirit poured upon him. And in as much as this oil was composed of myrrh, cinnamon, calamus, and cassia (Exod. xxx. 25), the variety of the Holy Spirit's gifts and grace was shown. In that Psalm, the unity of brethren — many persons yet one soul and mind — is compared to the oil composed of such varied ingredients as cassia, myrrh, cinnamon, and calamus, and yet forming one sweet fragrant oil. But besides this point of comparison there is another, viz., the abundance of the oil "that ran down upon the beard of Aaron, that went down to the skirts of his garments" — or, "to the collar of his robe." The unity of brethren is not a bare, scanty love, but is overflowing feeling, full and abundant affection. [Bonar 166]

The priesthood installed

[8:23,24] A multitude of questions here arises: Why only one side of the priests was consecrated, as if their left side remained polluted? Why consecration was not also imparted to their eyes, and especially to their mouth, which was to be the organ of the Holy Spirit? But this warning must be always borne in mind, that we should be soberly wise in those points, the certain knowledge of which cannot be elicited from Scripture; for our curiosity is not only frivolous, but also perverse and injurious, when we desire to know more than God has revealed. The conjecture, however, is probable, that the whole body was consecrated in the right side. [Calvin iii 423]

[8:23,24] Before sprinkling the blood upon the altar, Moses put some of it upon the tip of the right ear, upon the right thumb, and upon the great toe of the right foot of

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Aaron and his sons. Thus he touched the extreme points, which represented the whole, of the ear, hand, and foot on the right, or more important and principal side: the ear, because the priest was always to hearken to the word and commandment of God; the hand, because he was to discharge the priestly functions properly; and the foot, because he was to walk correctly in the sanctuary. [Keil ii 340]

[8:23-27] By this type, the whole person is visibly dedicated to the Lord. Every power and faculty is consecrated. The Lord touches with blood his right ear, right hand, right foot, as if to say, "I claim from thee the exercise of every faculty and property of body and soul, to be used in my service." From head to foot he is marked by blood, and set apart. He is to hear for God; and at the slightest whisper of the Divine voice to stretch out that right hand for immediate activity, and move with that foot in the Lord's ways. ... As Moses spread his hands over them, and next waved them from north to south, east to west, he signified their acknowledgment that they were the Lord's in every feeling of their souls, and every faculty of their minds, and every power of their bodies. Thus each man presented the fatness of his soul, the strength of his body, and the riches of his substance to God. [Bonar 171,174]



B. On the cosmic symbolism of the Tabernacle

Not to review other opinions on this matter, the various expressions used constrain us to regard the tabernacle as typifying the universe itself, measured and appointed in all its parts by infinite wisdom, as the abode of Him who "filleth immensity with His presence," the place of the Divine manifestation, and the abode of His holiness. In the outer court, where the victims were offered, we have this world of sense in which we live, in which our Lord was offered in the sight of all; in the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies, the unseen and heavenly worlds, through the former of which our Lord is represented as having passed (Heb. iv. 14, ix. 11) that He might appear with His blood in the true Holiest, where God in the innermost shrine of His glory "covereth Himself with light as with a garment." For this cosmical dwelling-place of the Most High God has been defiled by sin, which, as it were, has profaned the whole sanctuary; for we read (Col. i. 20), that not only "things upon the earth," but also "things in the heavens," are to be "reconciled" through Christ, even "through the blood of His cross"; and, still more explicitly, to the same effect (Heb. ix. 23), that as the typical "copies of the things in the heavens" needed to be cleansed with the blood of bullocks and of goats, so "it was necessary that ... the heavenly things themselves should be cleansed with better sacrifices than these." And so, at this present time, Christ, as the High Priest of this cosmical tabernacle, "not made with hands," having

offered His great sacrifice for sins for ever, is now engaged in carrying out His work of cleansing the people of God, and the earthly and the heavenly sanctuary, to the uttermost completion. [Kellogg 188]

[8:33-36] Perhaps we might take another view of the general arrangement of these Courts. May we not say that there is something here to remind us of each person of the Godhead? In yonder Holy of Holies behind the veil, in light inaccessible, is the symbol of the Father. Then, at yonder gate, meeting the view of every inquirer, is the Altar of Sacrifice, the symbol of the Son, who said, "Lo, I come." And between, stands the laver of pure water, the symbol of the Holy Ghost. The whole might be called Ephesians 2:18, written in sacred hieroglyphics. "Through Him we have both access through one Spirit unto the Father." [Bonar 151]

C. (9:1-24) The priests begin their work

[9:1,2] Up to this point the sacrifices had been offered by Moses, but now the work is assigned to those who had been chosen and dedicated for it. [Harrison 103]

The significance of the sequence of offerings

[9:18-21] Failure to observe Jewish priorities in worship, Harrison warns us [107] – namely the confession and removal of sin and guilt before fellowship and communion – led early Gentile converts in Corinth into serious sin.

[9:7-21] The significance of this order will readily appear if we consider the distinctive meaning of each of these offerings. The sin-offering had for its central thought, expiation of sin by the shedding of blood; the burnt-offering, the full surrender of the person symbolised by the victim, to God; the meal-offering, in like manner, the consecration of the fruit of his labours; the peace-offering, sustenance of life from God's table, and fellowship in peace and joy with God and with one another. And the great lesson for us now from this model tabernacle service is this: that this order is determined by a law of the spiritual life. [Kellogg 222]

[9:8-24] This section presents what appears to have been the normal pattern of Israelite sacrificial worship, in which the ritual of the sin offering quite naturally precedes the burnt offering, and indicates the way in which God desires the worshippers to approach Him. ... Implicit obedience, not individualism or innovation, was what God required of the worshipper. [Harrison 105,106]

[9:21] In a word, the law of the order of the offerings teaches, symbolically and typically, exactly what, in Rom. vi. and vii., the Apostle Paul teaches dogmatically, namely, that the order of grace is first justification, then sanctification; but both by the same crucified Christ, our propitiation, our righteousness, and our life: in whom we come to have fellowship in all good and blessing with the Father. [Kellogg 230]

Full blessing awaits our appreciation of the lesson of the offerings

[9:22] Kidner [116] notes that the Lord Himself blessed the disciples as our High Priest, but only after His fulfilling the burnt, sin and peace offerings (Luke 24:50ff).

[9:24] Is it a wonder that, if such be our experience, we lack that blessed, joyful fellowship with the Lord, of which some tell us? Is it not rather the chief wonder that we should wonder at the lack, when yet we are not ready to consecrate all, body,

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soul, and spirit, with all our works, unto the Lord? Let us then remember the law of the offerings upon this point. No Israelite could have the blessed feast of the peace-offering, except, first, the burnt-offering and the meal-offering, symbolising full consecration, were smoking on the altar. But this full consecration seems to many so exceeding hard – nay, we may say more, to many it is utterly impossible. A consecration of some things, especially those for which they care little, this they can hear of; but a consecration of all, that the whole may be consumed upon the altar before and unto God, this they cannot think of. Which means – can we escape the conclusion? – that the love of God does not yet rule supreme. [Kellogg 225]

[9:24] These things are a parable, and not a hard one. For the burnt-offering with its meal-offering symbolised full consecration of the person and the works to the Lord. Remembering this, we see that the order is not arbitrary. For, in the nature of the case, full consecration to God must precede fellowship with God; he who would know what it is to have God give Himself to him, must first be ready to give himself to God. And that God should enter into loving fellowship with any one who is holding back from loving self-surrender is not to be expected. This is not merely an Old Testament law, still less merely a fanciful deduction from the Mosaic symbolism; everywhere in the New Testament is the thought pressed upon us, no longer indeed in symbol, but in plainest language. It is taught by precept in some of the most familiar words of the great Teacher. There is promise, for example, of constant supply of sufficient food and raiment, fellowship with God in temporal things; but only on condition that "we seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness," shall "all these things be added unto us" (Matt. vi. 33). There is a promise of "a hundred-fold in this life, and in the world to come, eternal life;" but it is prefaced by the condition of surrender of father, mother, brethren, sisters, of houses and lands, for the Lord's sake (Matt. xix. 29). Not, indeed, that the actual parting with these is enjoined in every case; but, certainly, it is intended that we shall hold all at the Lord's disposal, possessing, but "as though we possessed not;" – this is the least that we can take out of these words. [Kellogg 223-224]