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# The Church as a Theophanic Community

Daniel Levis

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THE CHURCH AS A THEOPHANIC COMMUNITY

A Thesis

Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Theology

By

Daniel Levis

May, 2015

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Daniel Levis

2015

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THE CHURCH AS A THEOPHANIC COMMUNITY

By

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Approved April 10, 2015

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## ABSTRACT

### THE CHURCH AS A THEOPHANIC COMMUNITY

By

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May, 2015

Thesis supervised by Sebastian Madathummuriyil.

The Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium*, holds multiple images of the Church in tension and was greatly informed by two ecclesiological models: The Church as Sacrament and eucharistic ecclesiology. This thesis explores the Church as a community of theophany as a model that is not only in harmony with *Lumen Gentium*, but finds a helpful cohesion of its images. An early New Testament and patristic christology understood Jesus to be the ultimate theophany of God. The Church, as the body of Christ shares and perpetuates this embodied theophany into the world. Luke's Pentecost narrative has been read as the descent of the eschatological Temple in which the theophanic Spirit dwells. The Church is thus constituted by the theophany of the Holy Spirit. It is suggested, therefore, that the Church as a theophanic community is a synthesis of the Church's christological and pneumatological constitution.

## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my wife, Charlotte. Your long-suffering love and support made this thesis possible. Thank you for your theological insights. “Love one another.”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Appreciation is extended to all my professors whose passion for theology and teaching has been inspiring during my studies. A special thanks goes to Fr. Sebastian for all of his patience and insights in class and while guiding this thesis. I would like to thank Dr. Maureen O'Brien who has been a great encouragement during this process. Fr. Radu also has my gratitude for his willingness to read this project.

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## General Introduction

“Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation” (*Dei Verbum*, Section 24)<sup>1</sup>

A renewal in patristic and biblical studies pre-dated the Second Vatican Council.

Inheriting this movement, the Council both demonstrated and signaled that theology should be nourished by Sacred Scripture and patristic studies. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, exhibited both. It articulated the mystery of the Church using a collection of rich biblical images. Additionally, in its explication of the role of the laity and the bishop, it reached back to an early patristic understanding. As the Council’s prime document on Church, it exhibited and called for a biblical and patristic renewal of ecclesiology.

This thesis is an exercise in the Council’s request. The biblical concept of theophany spans the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is a phenomenon of the mystery of God’s presence to God’s people. When *Lumen Gentium* echoes Scripture by calling the Church the house of God or the temple where the Spirit dwells<sup>2</sup> it understands that the Church is in some way the place or community in which God dwells. The vision of the Church as theophany was not fully developed by the Council. This thesis attempts to explore this biblical/patristic concept in relationship to the Church.

Two images will be developed in theophanic ways. The first is the Church as the Body of Christ. This image is found in the New Testament. The first letter of Paul to the Corinthians offers the Body of Christ as a theological remedy for the divisions in the church in Corinth.

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<sup>1</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* [Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation], Vatican Website, November 18, 1965, Section 24, accessed March 30, 2015, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html)

<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], Vatican Website, November 21, 1964, section 6, accessed March 30, 2015, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

Because through baptism we are made members of Christ's body, divisions are nothing less than a dividing of Christ. Paul makes a significant affirmation that has since captured the Christian imagination: the Church is the Body of Christ (1Cor. 12). While the Body of Christ imagery has been developed in many ways, one way that it has not been developed is in theophanic language. An early Christian interpretation of Jesus is that he was the manifestation of God's glorious presence to God's people. It has been shown that the Gospel of John, some Pauline writings, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and Anastasius the Sinaite interpreted Jesus theophanically. Because John insists that in the body of Jesus the disciples saw the Glory of the Lord (John 1:14), it follows that the Church as the Body of Christ shares in that theophany.

The second image will be the Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This image was used in some ways in the New Testament letters (1Cor. 3:16, 6:19; Eph. 2:21; 1Pet. 2:5). However, many scholars see the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as recorded by Luke in Acts 2 as the establishment of the Temple of the Holy Spirit where God's presence dwells. Interpreted this way, the Church as constituted by the Holy Spirit is the Temple where the theophanic Spirit dwells. Here it will be shown that the Body and Temple images find a cohesion. Because Jesus' body is the Temple and the Church is the Body of Christ, the Church is also the bodily Temple of God's presence.

The main argument of this thesis is that the Church understood as theophany further enriches the biblical images of the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and finds a cohesion between the two. Through the incarnation, human embodiedness becomes the physical mediator of theophany enabling the Church to embody the theophany of Christ. It will be shown that the Church as theophany is in harmony not only with the vision of the Lumen Gentium, but also two of the major models that inform the document: The Church as Sacrament and

eucharistic ecclesiology. It is suggested, therefore, that the Church as a theophanic community is a synthesis of the Church's christological and pneumatological constitution.

The methodology will be to first start with a brief study of theophany. Chapter One will sketch the major components of theophany and theophany narratives. It will be argued that contrary to some perspectives, theophany is a completely physically mediated experience of the divine. This will be central to our embodied approach to ecclesiology. Chapter Two will summarize the early christological approach that interpreted Jesus as the ultimate theophany through which God is made present in the world. Chapter Three will follow two significant models of the Church in *Lumen Gentium*. Both the Church as Sacrament and eucharistic ecclesiology inform the model of the Church as Theophany. It will be argued that the incarnation marked a shift in that Christ's body mediates theophany. The Church as the earthly prolongation of Christ's body is able to embody theophany in the world. At the same time it will be shown that the Church is the recipient of the eucharistic and theophanic body of Christ in order to become the theophanic body of Christ. Chapter Four will explore the constitution of the Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Lucan Pentecost narrative will be read in light of the establishment of the eschatological Temple of the Holy Spirit. Using *Lumen Gentium* as a model of holding many images in tension, it will be suggested that the Church is at once the Body of Christ and the embodied Temple of the Spirit. This means that the Church is constituted physically by theophany. The final chapter will suggest areas for further study.

Methodologically this thesis will continue to be in touch with *Lumen Gentium*. The goal is to synthesize biblical theology, patristic insight, and the ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium*. In the end, the hope is to sketch the preliminary concept of the Church as a theophanic community.

This means that the Church is at once the theophany of Christ's presence in the world through the Holy Spirit, and the recipient of the theophany of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

## **Chapter 1: Components of Theophany**

“So it was that on the third day in the morning, there were thunderings and lightnings and a dark cloud on Mount Sinai; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, and all the people in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.” (Ex. 19:16-17)

### **Towards a Definition of Theophany**

If one were to list all of the words used to describe the experience of God in the Old Testament, one would be struck by the variety and vividness of images. The passage from the Sinai event gives a sense that descriptions are reaching beyond their capabilities. In a span of two chapters (19-20), the text uses the following words: thunder, lightning, cloud, pillar of cloud, fire, smoke, thick darkness, and trumpet sounds. This extraordinary event caused such fear and trembling among the people, that they pleaded with Moses to be the intermediary between themselves and God. The people stood far off while, “Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was” (Ex. 20:21).

Of course, not all theophanies were so visually suggestive. In some cases the experience lacked intense images and what appeared is “an angel of the Lord.” Elijah was awoken by the touch of “an angel of the Lord” through whom he conversed with the Lord (1Kings 19:1-18). In other cases the individual simply sees a man. Abraham’s visitation by the three visitors would be surprisingly ordinary if not for the divine message delivered to him (Gen. 18:1-16). Sometimes the visual element is almost completely absent. Samuel only heard the Lord calling for him at night (1Sam. 3:1-9). In the Old Testament, the human/divine encounter takes on a variety of descriptive features. Taken as a whole, theophany narratives lack a literary unity. The common thread is the divine/human encounter.

If we are to speak coherently about theophany, we must have some parameters as to its definition. Theophany comes from the Greek word, φαίνω, which means, “to appear.” As the examples above show, there are divine/human encounters in which God is made uniquely, tangibly, and visibly present. On the other hand, some encounters with God take for granted the divine imminence and only describes the conversation between God and the human. For example, throughout the narrative of the contest with Pharaoh, the Lord frequently speaks to Moses (Ex. 6:1, 7:1, 8:1, etc.). These conversations are sandwiched between the theophany of the burning bush (Ex. 3) and the appearance of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire (Ex. 13:22). There is something ordinary about the conversations between God and Moses in the plagues narrative. These divine/human conversations occur frequently throughout the Old Testament. We would have gotten nowhere to posit that each interaction between God and a human is a theophany.

While not all words from God to humans can constitute theophany, in what is generally accepted as theophany, the audible is coupled with the visual. Moses sees the burning bush, and hears the voice of God (Ex. 3:1-4). The people experience the wondrous displays of nature on Sinai and receive the covenant (Ex. 19-20). Prophets see God enthroned in the heavenly temple, and accept the word of the Lord (Isa. 6:1-13, Jer. 1:4-19, Ezek. 1:3-3:15). The visual and audible dimensions are combined in an integral way. In theophany, God appears and God speaks.

Some scholars emphasize the words of God over the appearance of God. It is as if God appears *in order* to speak. Samuel Terrien says in his book, *The Elusive Presence*, “On the one hand, a ‘theophany’ insists on the visibility of the natural phenomena which accompany the divine appearances, but this visibility is subordinated to their *hieroi logoi*.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout his book

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publisher, 1978), 70.

he insists that the “ear prevails over the eye.”<sup>4</sup> Terrien notices something that George Savran points out in his book *Encountering the Divine*. Narratives of the encounters often begin with a visible manifestation. Once God is revealed, and the individual’s fears are allayed, the divine message is presented. According to Savran, the verbal communication becomes more important than the physical manifestation.<sup>5</sup>

The narratives often make the shift from the visual to the audible, but not necessarily to the subordination of the former. Moses’ call by God on Mount Horeb (Ex. 3) begins with the description of the burning bush (vv. 1-5). Once the divine is revealed as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the text does not mention the bush again. That the burning bush has less importance once God speaks is an interpretive assumption. It is after all, from the bush that God speaks (Ex. 3:4). The Sinai theophany is another example of the permanence of the visual, even when the text changes focus to the verbal message. In 19:16-21 God is seen descending on the mountain with all the visual elements described above. Verse 22 transitions to the message of God which includes the Ten Commandments. The message carries through 20:18 when “all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking...” (Ex. 20:18). This fluctuation between the visual and the verbal and back again characterizes the lengthy account of Sinai. This illustrates that in theophany, the message does not necessarily replace the visual. The two interconnect to manifest the presence of God.

In this study, theophany will be defined as an appearance of God’s presence to a human (or group of humans) in which some spacial-temporal manifestation is made tangible, and in which the human (or group) understands a message from God. In some cases the message will

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<sup>4</sup> Terrien. *The Elusive Presence*, 131.

<sup>5</sup>George Savran, *Encountering the Divine* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 12. Johannes Lindblom makes the same assertion. See Johanne Lindblom, “Theophanies in Holy Places in Hebrew Religion,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32, (1961), 106. p 91-106

take precedence over the spacial-temporal manifestation. This is the case with Samuel in the Temple who heard the voice of God (1Sam. 3:1-21). The pericope is almost entirely a verbal exchange between the Lord and Samuel until verse 10 when "...the Lord came, and stood and called as before." Only a brief mention is made of the Lord's physical location. In other cases the visual dominates even to the point where an audible message is absent. Exodus 13:21 only records that, "God led them, by day in a pillar of cloud to show them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire." This is not a detailed account, and it only marks one moment of the desert wandering which was full of words from God. The text shows that God was spacially-temporally leading His people even when they did not receive words from God. In some way, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire spoke an inaudible message of God's guiding presence.

### **Components of Theophany**

George Savran examines four components that constitute a theophany narrative. While these components are common, they do not necessarily apply to all experiences, but they do speak to the theological purpose of theophany. Others have drawn out different components of these narratives,<sup>6</sup> but their overwhelming similarities enable us to use Savran's categories as an outline for further reflection.

#### *Setting the Scene*

The first component is setting the scene. This usually takes the form of the individual being drawn away from the community. Savran highlights that Jacob, Samuel, Moses, and Elijah were all drawn out from other people.<sup>7</sup> He argues that this is essential for casting the experience as set apart from everyday life. This isolation increases the sense of mystery and the holiness of

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<sup>6</sup> Paul House discusses categorizations that are based on Moses' call in Exodus 3. Habel's division of Divine confrontation, introductory word, commission, objection, reassurance, sign is compared to Kutsch's commission, objection, rejoinder, and sign. Paul House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1998), 96.

<sup>7</sup> Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 27-43.



the encounter. This is also made clear in the injunctions of the Sinai theophany. Not only were the people drawn out from Egypt, they also found themselves in the desert preparing to meet the Lord by abstaining from the normalcy of life like sexual activity (Ex. 19:10-15).<sup>8</sup> Setting the scene shows the uniqueness of the encounter with God.

*Visual Representation: The Physically Mediated Experience*

The second component is the visual representation of the divine.<sup>9</sup> As was noted above, the physical appearance of the divine takes on many forms. Some narratives, like Ezekiel's call (Ez. 1), feature a detailed description of the vision. Others mention only the "angel of the Lord" or a brief reference to the Lord standing, or appearing (Gen. 16:1-14, Josh. 5:13-15, etc.). The presence or lack of appearance is used to suite the narrative needs of each particular text.

Savran explains that the visual element is a way to initiate an encounter with the human. He suggests that when a character first experiences the divine, the visual elements are primarily emphasized.<sup>10</sup> In Moses' experience at the burning bush, the visual elements precede the verbal message (Ex. 3:2). Moses' future encounters with God do not always begin with a visual element (Ex. 33). Savran shows that the visual elements catch the attention of the character or the group of people. From that initial vision, God speaks words of revelation.<sup>11</sup> Of course, not all subsequent experiences lack visual elements. After the burning bush, Moses has the same experience as the people on Sinai. Further, the people who had the initial visual experience of Sinai continued to have visual experiences (Ex. 33:10). Savran highlights how the visual initiates the encounter. However, his subordination of the visual to the audible is, as already mentioned, his own, and not necessarily the emphasis of theophany.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 64.

Taken as a whole, the variety of theophanic description shows that the vision is incapable of capturing the numinous. From the anthropomorphic image of God as a king on a chariot throne to the glorification of natural phenomena, the way God is manifested is diverse. Still, some modes of appearance act as a reoccurring motif. One example is that God's presence is repeatedly depicted by fire (Ex. 3:2, 13:22, 19:18, Lev. 10:2, Ezek. 1:4). However, even though this recurs frequently as a visual experience of the divine, it does not always happen, and it cannot be made normative. The closest mode of presence that finds a normative expression is located in Israelite worship. The Tent of Meetings and later, the Temple, was the spacial-temporal location of God's presence with the people. The Ark of the Covenant was placed inside these structures and functioned as a container and the throne of God.<sup>12</sup> Divine command gave the specific instructions for the building of all three structures which were modeled after heavenly realities (Ex. 25:9-22, 1Ch. 28). Isaiah and Ezekiel experienced the heavenly realities after which the Ark and the Temple were modeled (Is. 6, Ezek. 1). The biblical texts give the sense that God really is enthroned in the heavenly Temple, and the experience of God in the earthly Temple mirrors that reality.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, while the multiplicity of images experienced in theophany suggests that the visual only partially reveals God, the Ark and the Temple normalize a particular manifestation of God as a king enthroned.

This normalization of an image should not give the impression that the cultic institution had succeeded in grasping a physical appearance of the divine—or that the cult ever intended to. It is significant that there only existed a visual representation of the throne on which God sat, and the Temple from which God ruled. A physical sculpture of Godself is notably absent. Some have

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<sup>12</sup> That the ark was a container and a throne is a complicated issue that has enjoyed quite a bit of debate. Samuel Terrien navigates the complexities of the issue well. Terrien, *Elusive Presence*, 162-175.

<sup>13</sup> See John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2003), 570.

attributed absence to the aniconic tendencies of Hebrew religion.<sup>14</sup> The structures and their permanence led to the abiding mental image of God as king without solidifying God's physical form. Quite the opposite, in one instance in the Tent of Meeting, the physical form of God was that of a pillar of cloud which stood at the entrance to the Tent (Ex. 13:22). In the Temple, a physical form was the thick/heavy kabod of the Lord (2 Chron. 7:2). The Ark and the Temple at once make normative the mental image of God truly enthroned in the heavenly Temple and the inability to fully capture God's presence in one form.

The distance between God and the form of theophany is made even more clear in the theology of God's presence in the Temple. Roland de Vaux captures this theology well as he examines the dedication of Solomon's Temple. De Vaux shows that in Solomon's prayer of dedication in 1 Kings 8, God was thought to reside in the Temple and in heaven.<sup>15</sup> When construction was completed, a cloud which is associated in the same verse with the glory of the Lord, filled the Temple so fully that no one could enter (1 Kings 8:10-11). Hebrew manuscripts include the observation of Solomon in 8:12-13 (NRSV):

“The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness.  
I have built you an exalted house,  
a place for you to dwell in forever.”

Solomon's words represent the common understanding that God truly resided with the people by dwelling in the Lord's house among them. De Vaux says that the redactor of the book knew that this could give the sense that God is permanently bound to the material structure of the Temple. Thus, we find in Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 8:27) the question, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I

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<sup>14</sup> For example: Carey Walsh, “Where Did God Go? Theophanic Shift in Exodus,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 43, no. 3 (2013): 119. 115-123. And R.E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*. trans. John McHugh (Michigan: Dove Booksellers, 1997), 326.

have built!”<sup>16</sup> To temper the religious certainty, the later “Name theology” suggested that God’s presence was in heaven while God’s Name resided in the Temple.<sup>17</sup> Still, the prayer of dedication shows that the earthly Temple is the location of God’s presence with the people, but certainly not exclusively nor exhaustively. There is a distance even between the manifestation of God’s *kabod* in the Temple and God’s full presence in heaven.

In these comments on the visual elements of theophany, we have tried to show among other things that the theophanic experience is a completely mediated experience between God and humanity. The inability to capture God’s appearance by any one physical form, and the distance between God and the form contribute to this idea. Furthermore, something that has not been developed is the notion of the audible message of God as a mediated experience. Savran and Terrien have both treated the message of theophany as almost a “pure” experience that supersedes the physical manifestation. In their view, the message gives clarity to the physical encounter, and the message is the unmediated heart of theophany. Contrary to this position, it will be shown that even the words of theophany are a mediated experience.

Postmodern thought has contributed to the understanding that language is symbolic and entrenched in a cycle of meaning. The symbols of language take on meaning only from a system within a community.<sup>18</sup> With this understanding, it becomes clear that the message of God in theophany is mediated through words of a human system of meaning. There are no pure words exchanged between Moses and God—only words that are embodied in a human contextual system. This is the first way that the message of theophany is a mediated experience—through the mediation of human language.

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<sup>16</sup> De Vaux. *Ancient Israel*, 327.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Greer, *Mapping Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press Academic, 2003), 143-144.

The second way the message of theophany is mediated is through the physical mediation of sound. We know today that sound is the result of an object in vibration. The object vibrates, causing air particles around the object to vibrate. Vibration causes a pattern of rarefaction and compression in the air particles that creates a wave of disturbance. When the wave reaches the human ear, the ear drum vibrates according to the wave of particle vibration.<sup>19</sup> Because of the physics of sound, we know that the human experience of hearing involves a source, the vibration of air particles, the vibration of the eardrum, and eventually neurons firing in the brain. The experience of hearing the message of God is dependent upon physical elements of the human experience. Hearing the word of God is as physically mediated as the visual elements. Theophany, therefore, is a visual and audible revelation of God that is completely mediated through physical human embodiedness. This will become important when we consider the theophany of the incarnation and the Church.

### *Human Response*

The third component of theophany in Savran's analysis is the human response.<sup>20</sup> Variety marks this component, although he draws out some common responses. Using the work of Rudolf Otto, he first examines "*mysterium fascinans et tremendum*." In this response, the human is overcome by the unapproachable otherness of the divine. At the same time, the human is entranced and desires further closeness.<sup>21</sup> Savran gives the example of the people at the foot of Sinai who were at once afraid by the appearance of God, but their implicit fascination required restrictions so that they would not approach the mountain.<sup>22</sup> This first response is one of fear and fascination where the character realizes his/her unworthiness in approaching God. Patrick Miller

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<sup>19</sup> Information from Charles Speaks, *Introduction to Sound*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (San Diego: Singular Publishing Group, Inc., 1999), 1-13.

<sup>20</sup> Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 86.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

points out that this reaction makes sense considering that the Hebrew religion considered that which is holy to be powerful.<sup>23</sup> To which Walsh adds that the danger of potency speaks to the limitations of the human, rather than to divine vengeance.<sup>24</sup>

The second response is that of self-doubt. This can be exemplified by Moses' protests to God's call at the burning bush.<sup>25</sup> His response is marked by doubt of his own abilities. Savran pointed out that there is usually a "response to the response" in which God attempts to allay the fears, and give consolation.<sup>26</sup> This self-doubt can be a sudden awareness of sinfulness before the divine, or inability to perform the task. It is an abundantly human response to which God responds with care. Importantly, theophany involves the human response.

### *Externalization*

The last component of theophany narratives is the externalization. Savran began with the protagonist separating from the community. Externalization is the return of the protagonist to the community, only the protagonist is transformed.<sup>27</sup> This is the component that brings the realities of theophany into the community and the world. It could be seen by Jacob's vow to make a temple (Gen. 28:22) or the beginning of a prophetic ministry.<sup>28</sup> Externalization is at once evidence of the theophanic encounter and detachment from the experience of the divine.<sup>29</sup> Walsh says that God's dynamic presence assumes a proceeding out in "discipleship."<sup>30</sup>

Savran speaks of externalization as the crystallization of theophany into something that can be passed on.<sup>31</sup> One example that he gives is Moses' face from Exodus 34:29-35. Here,

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<sup>23</sup> Patrick Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 133.

<sup>24</sup> Walsh, "Where did God Go?" 116.

<sup>25</sup> Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 88.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>30</sup> Walsh, "Where did God Go?" 120.

<sup>31</sup> Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 145.

Moses experienced the fiery presence of God on top of the mountain. He brought back to the people not only the tablets of the Law, but also a reflection of the fiery glory of God. Thus this passage holds in tension a mediation of the words of God and the visual aspect of theophany for the community.<sup>32</sup> What was a private theophany was externalized to be transmitted to the people.

Externalization continues out even beyond the community. The Sinai event was experienced by the people of Israel and it was through the event that they received the covenant to make them “a royal priesthood and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). The theophany and the covenant was for the people of Israel, but it was through them that “all of the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 26:24). Therefore, while theophany is sometimes experienced only by the individual or by the group, each theophany stretches beyond the original audience to the next sphere of influence. Eventually, all individual and group theophanies come to include all the nations as the benefactors.

One further aspect of the externalization of theophany is the promise for continued presence. An integral aspect of Moses’ commissioning is that God would remain with him. Moses does not perform the mighty deeds. God who is with him performs the deeds (3:18-22). Similarly, Jeremiah’s call was marked with the awareness that he would encounter opposition. The Lord said, “They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you,” (Jer. 1:19). Theophanies often conclude with a promise of the continued presence of God. Even though God promised to be present, the mode of presence changes. The initial encounter is continued but not in a theophanic way. This is part of the process of externalization.

#### *Community Composed of Theophany*

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 147.

Savran's analysis has acted as a helpful framework to understand the components of theophany. There is one final component that was not mentioned in Savran's work which should be examined before we leave this brief analysis. Theophany is central to Israelite community composition. To say it another way, theophany constitutes the identity of the people of God.<sup>33</sup>

Arguably the most central theophany of the Old Testament is the Sinai encounter through which God made a covenant with his people. William Boadt is not far off by calling the covenant the central event of the Pentateuch.<sup>34</sup> The covenant made on Sinai frames much of the narrative of the Old Testament, it is preached upon by the prophets, and it finds a place of honor in the psalms. Using language of covenant making, Exodus 19:4-6 says,

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be a special people to Me above all the nations; for all the earth is mine. You shall be to Me a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

Israelite identity as the people of God is caught up in these words of covenant making. They are only the people of God insofar as God chose them, and made a gracious covenant with them.

Without the covenant, they were like any other people on the earth.

Significantly, the covenant was given in the context of theophany. Through an exchange between God and the people through Moses, God gave the words of the covenant, and the people affirmed, "All the Lord said, we will do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7b). The people knew God was with them through the wondrous manifestation of His presence, and they caught a glimpse of the intimacy shared with Moses through his radiant face. Theophany gave them assurance that God was with them to covenant with them. Even further, the theophany of Sinai was a taste of the intimacy between God and his special possession. So real was the covenant that God dwelt

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Mann, *Divine Presence and Guidance in Israelite Traditions* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1977), 233-240.

<sup>34</sup> William Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 173.



with the people. “And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God” (Ex. 29:46 NRSV).

As long as God dwelt with the people theophanically, they had assurance of the covenant. Conversely, as long as the people obeyed the covenant, God would dwell with them. This is what makes Jeremiah’s prophetic word against the Temple so potent. He said, “Do not entrust yourselves to lying words, for they will not profit you when you say, ‘It is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord’” (Jer. 7:3). The message of the Lord was that they cannot depend on God’s residing in the Temple only to ignore the ethical demands of the covenant. God’s presence and obedience to the covenant are dependent upon each other. Without the covenant, God would not dwell with his people, and the people would no longer be a special possession. Theophany is constitutive of the very identity of the people of Israel.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has defined theophany as an appearance of God’s presence to a human (or group of humans) in which some spacial-temporal manifestation is made tangible, and in which the human (or group) understands a message from God. George Savran’s efforts at defining the characteristics of theophany narratives have given a rounded view of the significant components of theophany. It involves setting the scene, the visual representation of the divine and the divine message, the human response, and externalization. This chapter has insisted on the mutuality between the tangible manifestation and the audible word of God. In doing so, it has been shown that theophany is a completely mediated experience between God and a human. It happens precisely on the level of human embodiedness. Lastly, we have shown that theophany constitutes the very identity of the people of God. In the following section we will turn toward a christology that understands Jesus as the ultimate theophany in the world.

## Chapter 2: Christ as Theophany--Christological Exegesis

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

Before the christology of Nicea with its interest in describing the substance of Christ, there was an earlier christology. This high christology was developed in some cases polemically as a defense of Christianity and in other cases it followed the trend of first century apocalyptic literature. A theophanic christology interpreted the Christ event in two related ways. Bogdan Bucur has argued for the term “rewritten bible” against the more prevalent use of “allegory” or “typology.”<sup>1</sup> This use of the Old Testament reads Christ as the one present in the theophanies in Israel’s past. In this way, theophanic christology argues that Christ is YHWH active in the life of Israel. We will call this a “hindsight” theophanic christology. Second, Christ was sometimes seen as the manifestation of the Glory of the LORD. The New Testament writers and a strand of patristic tradition interpreted events from the life of Christ using theophanic language. In the person of Jesus, God was seen to be dwelling with his people in the present. We will call this a “present” theophanic christology. The writers of the New Testament and some patristics interpret Christ as theophany in both a “present” and “hindsight” way. This chapter will examine the two approaches to this christology.

### Hindsight Theophanic Christology

*1Corinthians 10:1-11: Christ Followed the Israelites*

Anthony Hanson, in his book *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* argues that the New Testament bears witness to this hindsight christology. By arguing for the “real presence”

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Bogdan Bucur, "The Mountain of the Lord: Sinai, Zion, and Eden in Byzantine Hymnographic Exegesis," in *Symbola Caelestis: Le Symbolisme Liturgique et Paraliturgique dans le Monde Chrétien*. Eds. B. Lourié & A. Orlov (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2009), 129-172.

interpretation, he hopes that New Testament exegesis can make more careful use of typology.<sup>2</sup>

The first passage that Hanson draws upon is 1Corinthians 10:1-11. The first five verses recall the great acts of God's saving presence among his people in Exodus 13 and 14. To quote Paul's words at length:

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:1-5).

Hanson points out that finding a link between Moses and Christ is quite natural given that Christians would easily see the parallel between "baptized into Moses" and "baptized into Christ." That parallel is not drawn by Paul in this passage. Instead, Christ is present elsewhere: "The rock was Christ." If the rock was Christ, says Hanson, then Moses is not a type of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

This passage from Paul's letter sets Christ as the rock from which the Israelites drank in the wilderness (Exodus 17). However, the text also says that the rock followed them. According to Hanson, Paul is making a parallel between the pillar of cloud that followed the Israelites and the rock that sustained them. With the parallel, Hanson suggests that Paul saw the pillar of cloud as the preexistent Christ. Further in 1Corinthians 10, this hindsight Christology is even clearer:

Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.' We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents (1 Cor. 10:5-9).

Here Paul again perceives Christ active in the wilderness narratives. What happened to the Israelites happened as an example for the early Christian community. In Exodus 17, when

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London: The Camelot Press, 1965), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Hason, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, 11.

the people contended with Moses about water, Moses asked, “Why do you tempt the Lord (v 2)?” Hanson shows that this is strikingly similar to Paul’s admonition that, “We must not put Christ to the test.”<sup>4</sup> Though the words tempt (πειράζω) and test (ἐκπειράζω) are different, the shared root cannot be missed. For Hanson, Paul showed the church in Corinth that the Israelites put Christ to the test in the wilderness, and they should not repeat that mistake. The κύριος that was put to the test in Exodus 17 was none other than Christ. As Paul says, “We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did [...]” (1 Cor. 10:9).

*John 12:37-43: Isaiah Beheld Christ in the Temple*

The Gospel of John is another fruitful source to find hindsight christology. One example is the following text from John 12 which suggests that Isaiah beheld Christ’s glory:

Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

“Lord, who has believed our message,  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said,

“He has blinded their eyes  
and hardened their heart,  
so that they might not look with their eyes,  
and understand with their heart and turn—  
and I would heal them.”

Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him. Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God (John 12:37-43).”

The quote from Isaiah comes from directly after Isaiah’s heavenly vision. In that vision Isaiah said, “I saw the κύριος sitting on a throne, high and lifted up. The house was full of His glory (Is. 1:1).” Isaiah was caught up to glimpse the heavenly throne on which God sits. In reference to the quotes from the vision John said, “Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him.” Moody Smith interprets this to mean that Isaiah saw the glory of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 24.

preexistent Christ in the Temple.<sup>5</sup> Raymond Brown suggests that John may have had in mind the later Jewish theological concept of the localized presence of God, shekinah. In this view, Isaiah saw the shekinah which is assumed by John to be Christ.<sup>6</sup> John is not vague about Isaiah's vision, for he even says that he saw Christ's glory (v 41). In Isaiah's vision it was the glory of the κύριος that filled the temple. John interprets the glory as belonging to Christ. Hanson makes the case even stronger by observing a link between Isaiah's proclamation that, "I saw the King, the Lord of hosts (Is. 6:5)," and the context of John's affirmation that Isaiah beheld Christ. Earlier in John 12, Jesus entered Jerusalem greeted by the people who shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!"<sup>7</sup> According to John, the King that Isaiah saw with his eyes in the heavenly temple was the same King that the crowds praised entering Jerusalem. In this way, John 12 which is a hindsight christophany also sees the King of the Temple currently manifested in Jesus (a present theophany).

#### *Transfiguration: Patristic Exegesis of Theophany*

The transfiguration of Christ has entertained the Christian imagination from the beginning leaving a rich history of interpretation. Bogdan Bucur cites the work of John Anthony McGuckin who categorized early patristic exegesis of the transfiguration into three categories: christological (highlighting Christ's divinity), soteriological (emphasizing the human being glorified), and eschatological (a foretaste of the future resurrection glory).<sup>8</sup> Bucur in an article entitled, "Matt 17:1-9 as a Vision of a Vision: A Neglected Strand of the Transfiguration Account," outlines a neglected strand of interpretation. He points out that Matthew is the only

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<sup>5</sup> Moody Smith, *John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 244. See also Hanson, *Christ in the Old Testament*, 107.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Brown, *John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 487.

<sup>7</sup> Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, 108.

<sup>8</sup> Bogdan Bucur, "Matt 17:1-9 as a Vision of a Vision: A Neglected Strand of the Transfiguration Account," *Journal of the New Testament Society of South Africa* 44, no. 1 (2010): 34.

account that refers to the experience as a vision. He asks, “A vision of what?”<sup>9</sup> Bucur weaves together patristic witness that connects the mount of Transfiguration, Mount Tabor, and Mount Sinai. With this interpretation, Tabor fulfills the expectations of the theophany of Sinai.

His starting point is looking at a quote from Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus comments upon the transfiguration and also a passage from Exodus 33. In this passage, Moses asks of God, “Reveal yourself to me” (Ex. 33:18). God responds, “I will pass before you in My glory, and I will proclaim My name, the Lord, before you” (v. 19). But He adds, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see My face and live” (v. 20). The Lord proceeds to place Moses in a cleft in the rock so that as He processes by, Moses will see God’s back, “but My face shall not be seen” (v. 23). Within this story, Bucur points out, Irenaeus observed a promise, (“I will pass before you in My glory”) that was not completely fulfilled (“but My face shall not be seen”). Thus Irenaeus said:

[Exodus 33:20-22] signifies two things, namely that it is impossible for man to see God, and that man will see Him in latter times on the summit of rock, thanks to God’s wisdom: that is in His coming as man. And it is for this reason that he conferred with him face to face on the top of the mountain [at Transfiguration], while Elijah was also present (as the Gospel relates), thus fulfilling in the end the ancient promise.<sup>10</sup>

God promised Moses a vision of God’s glory, which was never fulfilled during Moses’ lifetime. Irenaeus saw that Moses’ presence on Mount Tabor indicates that the promise was finally fulfilled. Moses did indeed behold the glory of the Lord. The glory that Moses witnessed was the transfigured Jesus.

Bucur cites the work of Tertullian who makes a similar case for the fulfillment of Moses’ expectation: “He reserves to some future time his presence and speech face to face with Moses—for this was afterwards fulfilled in the retirement of the mount [of Transfiguration], as

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<sup>9</sup> Bogdan Bucur, “Neglected Strand,” 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

we read in the Gospel, ‘Moses appeared, talking with him.’”<sup>11</sup> Further, Bucur presents Anastasius the Sinaite beautifully making the case. In a sermon prepared for pilgrims who visited Mount Tabor, Anastasius wanted those present to be taken up in the vision of the transfiguration. He said, “Today the ancient heralds of the Old and New Testaments have both wonderfully gather with God on the mountain[...].”<sup>12</sup> The mountain is the common scene for theophany, and Anastasius understood that Peter, James, and John joined with Moses and Elijah in an altogether new experience of God on the mountain. He went on to explain that the transfiguration was the fulfillment of what Moses desired. In Anastasius’ sermon Moses said:

“Now I have seen you, the truly existing one...you, who said on the mountain, *I am He-Who-Is*...I have seen you, whom of old I desired to see saying, *show yourself clearly to me*...I have seen you, no longer as you revealed your back and turned me away on the rock of Sinai, but made visible to me clearly on the rock of Tabor.”<sup>13</sup>

Anastasius made a twofold claim. The first is that Christ was manifested in salvation history before the incarnation. Moses was speaking to Christ when he said, “I have seen you [...] who on the mountain said, *I am He-Who-Is*.” The title “I am He-Who-Is” harkens back to Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Horeb. Anastasius claimed that it was Christ who was present in the burning bush. Additionally he understood that it was Christ who was with Moses on Sinai when Moses asked to see God: “I have seen you [Christ], whom of old I desired to see saying, *show yourself clearly to me*.” The second claim that Anastasius made was that in the Transfiguration, Moses had finally seen God clearly. “I have seen you, no longer as you revealed your back and turned me away on the rock of Sinai, but made visible to me clearly on the rock of Tabor.” The God, who on Sinai was otherwise veiled through the vision of his

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>13</sup> Bogdan Bucur, "Exegesis and Intertextuality in Anastasius of Sinai's Homily On the Transfiguration," *Studia Patristica* 68 (2013): 10.

backside, was made clearly visible in the person of Christ on the rock of Tabor. So we see in Anastasius' sermon both a hindsight and a present theophanic Christology. Christ was present in past theophanies, in the burning bush and on Mount Sinai (hindsight), and Christ's presence in the incarnation, especially in the transfiguration, is a theophany of God's presence among His people.

Bucur, like Hanson, insists that it is insufficient to label this rich exegetical tradition as "typology" or "allegory." We have here used the term, "hindsight christology." Whatever the term, Anastasius' sermon is very difficult to be understood as typology or allegory. In his sermon, the burning bush was not a type of the transfiguration, nor was the concealed glory of the Lord to Moses a type of Christ's glory. The encounter in the burning bush was an encounter with Christ. Moses really spoke with Christ on Sinai. In this tradition, the transfiguration is the Apostles' vision of the theophany of Moses and Elijah finally fully realized. Additionally, the vision of the Apostles was also a theophany.

### **Present Theophanic Christology**

*John 1:14: And the Word became Flesh and Tabernacled*

It is widely known that the preexistent Logos was important to John's prologue christology with all of the connections made to the Word of God and the personified Wisdom of God.<sup>14</sup> However, what is absolutely striking is his blunt affirmation, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)." Leon Morris notes that of all of the options John had for describing the Logos becoming human, choosing "flesh" (σὰρξ) communicated the sense that the Logos

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<sup>14</sup> See for example: Craig Bloomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 162; George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 274-278; Raymond Brown, *John*, 32.



took on the totality of the human being.<sup>15</sup> This, according to Moody Smith, did not simply communicate that a god took on a human form or body, as in other religious myths, but that the Logos took on human nature.<sup>16</sup>

Further, in the flesh of human nature, the Logos lived (σκηνώω) or tabernacled or pitched a tent among us. Most commentators quickly show the parallels between the verb σκηνώω and the noun for the tent of meetings of Exodus 29:42, σκηνήν.<sup>17</sup> Beyond the word allusions, Morris sketches the literary parallels between Exodus 33 which described the cloud (which he associates with glory), and John's prologue:

Exodus 33

7 Now Moses used to take the tabernacle  
9 the pillar of cloud (shekinah) descended  
10 all the people saw the pillar of cloud  
11 Yahweh spoke to Moses face to face  
20 You cannot see my face  
23 you will see my back; but my face shall not be seen.

John 1

14 The word became flesh and tabernacle among us  
We beheld his glory  
17 the law was given through Moses  
18 no one has ever seen God  
The only begotten Son...  
Has made him known.<sup>18</sup>

It would appear that John may have had in mind Exodus 33 as he began his gospel. The tent was a place of theophany. John said that through the incarnation, the Word was made flesh and built the tent among us. Even more, John said that in that tent, Jesus' flesh, we have seen his glory.

Raymond Brown explained the significance of the glory of God to the Jewish mind. The glory of God is on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:15-16), in the Tent (Ex. 33:9), in Solomon's Temple (1

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<sup>15</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 90.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *John*, 59.

<sup>17</sup> For example: Brown, *John*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 93.

Kings. 8:10-11), and Ezekiel envisions the glory returning to the Temple (Ezek. 43:4). In short, the glory (or shekinah in later Jewish theology) was the manifestation of God's presence.<sup>19</sup> "And we have seen his glory..." John makes a significant claim to have seen the glory of the Lord in the flesh of the incarnated Word. That is to say that God has dwelt with God's people through the flesh of Jesus.

*John 8:58: Jesus as the I AM*

Another commonly acknowledged feature of John's gospel is the "I Am" statements. Brown explains that sometimes the use of "I am" is the predicative nominative as in "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35).<sup>20</sup> The use of "I am" flows within the sentence. However, there are times when the phrase takes the absolute form as in "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I AM (John 8:58)." In these instances, where the tense could have easily reflected the temporal meaning of the sentence (before Abraham was, "I was") but does not, Brown sees an intentional adaptation of the divine name.<sup>21</sup> In response to Moses' inquiry into the divine name, God responds, "ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὄν" (Ex. 3:14). "[...]Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ἐγώ εἰμι has sent me to you." Morris admits that translating the name into Greek is odd, but the LXX does in fact render the divine name as ἐγώ εἰμι which is the exact language adopted by Jesus in John's gospel.<sup>22</sup> John applied the divine name to Jesus. This is supported by that fact that the Jews responded by wanting to stone Jesus (John 8:59) which is the proper punishment for blasphemy (Lev. 24:16).<sup>23</sup> By putting the divine name on the lips of Jesus, John was showing that the name which represented God's presence in the Temple was also residing in Christ. This was a claim not only to Jesus' divinity, but to YHWH's theophanic presence in the person of Christ.

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<sup>19</sup> Brown, *John*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, 534.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 533.

<sup>22</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 420.

<sup>23</sup> Morris, 420; Smith, *John*, 189.

### *John 2:21: The Temple of Jesus' Body*

That John understood Jesus as a present theophany is further shown by Jesus' relationship to the Temple. In John's version of the cleansing of the Temple, he gives the readers post-resurrection insight into the event. After Jesus' clearing action, he was asked for a sign. His response was "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The answer did not satisfy Jesus' opponents and it seemed to have even confused his disciples. "But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (John 2:20-21). By John calling Jesus' body the temple, Morris admits that it could have indicated that Jesus' death and resurrection is the sign for Jesus' authority to cleanse the Temple.<sup>24</sup> Morris goes on to say that it may have a double meaning. Jesus' body was the Temple that was destroyed, and he meant to end the era of Temple worship in Jerusalem by replacing the Temple with his resurrected body.<sup>25</sup> Brown contributes that the rebuilding of the Temple was associated with the Messianic Age. Thus at Jesus' trial, after a witness mentioned this Temple scene, they commanded Jesus, "If you are the Messiah, tell us" (Luke 22:687, cf. Mtt. 26:63 and Mark 14:61).<sup>26</sup> What is clear is that John calls Jesus' body the Temple. Much like in his prologue, John insists that God dwells in the flesh of Jesus. Through this Temple imagery John interprets Jesus as the present theophanic presence of God.

### *Revelation 21:1: The Lamb Seated on the Throne*

One final example comes from the book of Revelation. The common conception of God's presence was that of a king seated on a throne. We see this first in Exodus 24:10 with the vision of God's feet resting on a footstool on Mount Sinai. It is emphasized by the structure of

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<sup>24</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 127.

<sup>25</sup> Morris, 129.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, *John*, 123.

the Ark of the Covenant which acted as a throne on which God would be carried by Cherubim (Ex. 25:22). Prophetic glimpses into the heavens revealed God seated on a magnificent throne surrounded by Cherubim (Ezek. 1). It is no surprise then, that when John looked through the heavenly door in his apocalyptic vision, he saw a throne surrounded by magnificent creatures (Rev. 4). When the throne is first mentioned there is one seated on the throne who looks like jasper and carnelian (4:3). The image is beyond human description.

As the narrative continues, the Lamb's relationship to the throne changes. In chapter 5, the Lamb (the resurrected and glorified Christ) appears between the throne and the elders around the throne. He becomes the co-object of the praise of all of creation, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever (Rev. 5:13)!" In Revelation 7:17 the Lamb is at the center of the throne. By the end of the apocalypse, the throne also belongs to the Lamb, "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1)."

Who sits on the heavenly throne in John's revelation? John's interpretation is certainly in line with the prophetic visions. Yet he adds that the Lamb also belongs on the throne. In John's apocalypse, the resurrected and glorified Christ is on the heavenly throne that was witnessed in the previous theophanies of Ezekiel and Isaiah. With this as part of the New Testament tradition, it is not surprising when Bucur points out that early Christian iconography depicts Christ sitting enthroned in the visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel.<sup>27</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter an early view of Christ was summarized. Understanding Jesus first as active in Old Testament theophanies highlighted Jesus' divinity as well as his preexistence in

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<sup>27</sup> Bogdan Bucur, "Sinai, Zion, and Tabor: An Entry into the Christian Bible," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4, no. 1 (2010): 43.

salvation history. This early view also understands that Christ's presence through the incarnation is the continued manifestation of God with his people. Both the hindsight christology and the present christology work together to show that Christ is the ultimate theophany through which God's presence is available to all of creation.

We summarized the way the New Testament employed this christology. 1Corinthians saw Christ present in the rock sustaining the people in the wilderness, and in the pillar of cloud that followed them. The church was urged not to put Christ to the test, as the Israelites had put Christ to the test (1 Cor. 10:1-9). John, in his gospel, insisted that in Isaiah's heavenly vision, Isaiah beheld the glory of Christ (John 12). The King that Isaiah beheld in his vision was the same Jesus who rode into Jerusalem. John's gospel bridges that gap between a hindsight and present theophanic christology. In his prologue, John describes the glory of the Lord as tabernacling with his people in the flesh of the incarnated Word (John 1:14). John names Jesus with the divine name (John 8:58), and understands Christ's body to be the Temple where God's presence abides (John 2:19). Finally, in John's apocalypse, we see that the Lamb, who is the crucified and resurrected Jesus, sits on the throne where God is revealed to be sitting in previous theophanies (Rev. 22:1).

Some early patristics continued this interpretation. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian all wrote of Christ's activity in Old Testament theophanies. We examined the work of Bucur who wrote of Anastasius the Sinaite's sermon on the Transfiguration. Anastasius said that the promise to Moses, to see the glory of God, was finally fulfilled in the transfiguration. There, in the person of Christ, Moses and Elijah, and indeed the Apostles clearly beheld the glory of the Lord.

### Chapter 3: The Church as Embodied Theophany

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” (Matt. 28:16-20)

Viewing the person of Jesus as the ultimate theophany of God’s presence in the world offers a certain reading to the great commission. The theophany narrative structure offered by George Savrans becomes apparent in the text. First, the disciples were drawn away from ordinary life. Jesus met them on the mountain to which he directed them. The mountain is the place of theophany (Horeb, Sinai, Zion). Second is the appearance of the divine. “They saw him.” Matthew’s narrative omits any details about what they saw, but apparently the vision was such that it initiated a drastic reaction in the disciples. Third, there is the human response. Some of the disciples worshipped or rather “prostrated” themselves. Bowing to the ground echoes the reaction of others in the face of the numinous (Ex. 34:8, Num. 22:31, Matt. 17:6). Some, upon seeing Jesus, doubted. This is of course another reaction to theophany (Gen. 18:12). Words of divine revelation follow the human reaction. Fourth, there is the command to externalize the experience. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” This externalization is met with the promise of persistent divine presence.

It has been called a commission in the history of the Church because in this experience, which can be seen as a theophany, the disciples receive a mission from Christ. This commission comes at the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. It shows some continuity between the saving activity of Christ and the activity of the early disciples. If in Jesus’ humanity God was thought to dwell with his people, what are we to make of the absence of Jesus’ humanity in history? The experience of the theophany of the commission offers one answer to this question: Jesus’

theophanic presence is in some way present with the disciples who receive the mission of the Christ.

The goal of this chapter within the larger project of this thesis is to bridge the gap between Christ and the Church. It has already been shown that Christ has been interpreted as the ultimate theophany of God's presence in human history. How does the theophany of Christ relate to the Church? To answer this question we will turn toward two other models of the Church, the Church as Sacrament and a eucharistic ecclesiology, both of which were utilized by Lumen Gentium. This chapter will summarize the document's use of the models. The two models will be appropriated to inform the Church as a theophanic community. It will be shown that the Church as a Sacrament can inform the ability of human nature to mediate divine presence. Lastly, eucharistic ecclesiology will illuminate the Church as constituted by theophany.

### **The Embodied Church**

#### *The Church as the Sacrament of Christ*

Peter De Mey, in an article "The sacramental nature and mission of the Church in Lumen Gentium" argues that the dominant image of Lumen Gentium that best defines the document's approach to the Church's nature is the human and divine reality that makes the Church a sacrament.<sup>1</sup> Though the activities of the Church are human activities, nothing happens as an activity apart from the will of Christ and the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> The Church of Lumen Gentium, according to this account, is the visible activity of Christ's invisible will in the world.

As a significant model to the document, it helped to mark a shift from the institutional models of the Church that the Council inherited. Even the first draft of the document stressed the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter De Mey, "The Sacramental Nature and Mission of the Church in Lumen Gentium," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 14, no. 4 (2014): 349.

<sup>2</sup> De Mey, "The Sacramental Nature and Mission of the Church in Lumen Gentium," 59.

institutional structure over the communion and mystical nature of the Church.<sup>3</sup> The Church as Sacrament, which was finally propagated, stressed the inner unity between the visible and invisible. This, combined with the emphasis on mystery, made it impossible to locate the Church solely within the hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> Of course the visual component to the Church as Sacrament includes the hierarchy, but it opens new dimensions to the Church.

The document only refers to the Church as a sacrament explicitly three times.<sup>5</sup> The document opens with this theme in the forefront. The second sentence says, “Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission.”<sup>6</sup> In this excerpt there is an indication both of the nature of the Church and the nature of what the document means by “sacrament.” A sacrament is defined as a sign and instrument. It makes invisible realities visible and it is the instrument through which these realities occur. In this first paragraph, the realities that are signified and effected are the unity with God and the unity within humanity. Significantly, the Church is a sacrament due to its being “in Christ.” Its sacramental association with Christ is central to the Church’s nature.

Chapter II, paragraph nine uses this language in a similar way. “God gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and established them as the Church that for each and all it may be the visible sacrament of

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Rausch, *Towards a Truly Catholic Church: An Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Rausch, *Towards a Truly Catholic Church*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> The lack of explicit references does not necessarily contradict De Mey. He dealt also with the implicit language of the document as well.

<sup>6</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], Vatican Website, November 21, 1964, section 1, accessed March 30, 2015, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).



this saving unity.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus is seen as the “author of salvation and the source of unity and peace.” However, that saving unity is made present in history through the visible sacrament, the Church. That paragraph continues to describe the need for the Church to be present in human cultures so that the grace of God may be available within human history. In this section, the Church is the sacrament of Christ in that it makes Christ’s grace of saving unity present.

The third instance of this language in the document comes in Chapter VII, section 48:

Christ, having been lifted up from the earth has drawn all to Himself. Rising from the dead He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through Him has established His Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father, He is continually active in the world that He might lead men to the Church and through it join them to Himself and that He might make them partakers of His glorious life by nourishing them with His own Body and Blood.<sup>8</sup>

This text draws out the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church as a sacrament. The Church is made a sacrament of salvation through the life-giving Spirit. Even with the close association between Christ and His body, there is a distance between the two, even to the point of divine activities happening in the world separate from Christ’s body. The text says that Christ is continually active in the world by drawing people to the Church. Christ’s activity of drawing people is distinguished from the Church’s activity. However, it is through the Church that people are joined to Christ and made partakers of His life. In this way, the document speaks of an association and a distance between Christ and the Church.

Vatican II was greatly indebted to theologians who laid the groundwork for its own understanding of the Church as Sacrament. Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx and others developed this ecclesiology before the Council, although Avery Dulles attributes its early

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<sup>7</sup> *Lumen gentium*, sec. 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Lumen gentium*, sec. 48.

advancement to Henri de Lubac.<sup>9</sup> De Lubac and Rahner were both peritus theologians at the Council, and Schillebeeckx influenced the writings of some of the documents, including *Lumen Gentium*. It is not difficult to see how this ecclesiology influenced the Council.

Schillebeeckx's approach to the model of the Church as Sacrament is particularly grounded in human embodiedness. In a well-known work from 1960, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, Schillebeeckx argues for the human need for the sacramental encounter with the glorified and ascended body of Christ. He says that because of human bodiliness, Christ had to mediate grace to humanity by becoming human.<sup>10</sup> In that inter-human encounter, the person is able to experience grace precisely because it was made bodily present.<sup>11</sup> The ascension of Christ is seen as necessary for the ultimate glorification of humanity and the sending of the Holy Spirit, but it poses a problem: humanity no longer has physical contact with the redeeming body of Christ, through which grace is made present. Schillebeeckx's solution is that he calls the specific sacraments "the earthly prolongation of Christ's glorified bodiliness."<sup>12</sup> The Church becomes the tangible presence of grace in history. "Thus the essence of the Church consists in this, that the final goal of the grace achieved by Christ becomes visibly present in the whole Church as a visible society."<sup>13</sup>

This awareness of the historical, embodied nature of human experience is reflected in *Lumen Gentium's* approach to sacramental ecclesiology. In Chapter II, after calling the Church the "visible sacrament of this saving unity," the document goes on to say, "While it transcends all limits of time and confines of race, the Church is destined to extend to all regions of the earth

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<sup>9</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 55. Dulles lists de Lubac's work, *Catholicism*, which was published in 1950. This is some thirteen years before Rahner's contributions in *Theological Investigations*, and Schillebeeckx's, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, trans. Paul Barrett (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 42.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

and so enters into the history of mankind.”<sup>14</sup> This text brings into unity the transcendent and imminent qualities of the Church. The Church cannot be reduced to any one time or culture, but it must at the same time find expression within human history. Without this historical embodiedness, the Church cannot be said to be a sacrament of salvation. It must at once maintain its mystical identity, and be concretely realized in history.

Sacramental ecclesiology connects Christ to the Church by way of the Church making Christ present, who is the first sacrament. Christ is sometimes called the primordial sacrament through which the grace of God is made present in the world. The Church is sometimes called the fundamental sacrament. According to Rahner, “The Church is the abiding presence of that primal sacramental word of definitive grace, which Christ is in the world, effecting what is uttered by uttering it in sign.”<sup>15</sup> As a sacrament, the Church effects what it signifies, that is, the presence of Christ who is “the historically real and actual presence of the eschatologically victorious mercy of God.”<sup>16</sup> Schillebeeckx used his own language of bodily prolongation to explain the sacramental connection between Christ and the Church. The Church as Sacrament connects the two realities.

Piet Fransen frames his sacramental ecclesiology with theophanic language. He sees in the person of Christ and his redemptive activity, the twofold movement that is characteristic of the economy of salvation. There is first the descending movement whereby God establishes his presence in his Son through the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> Fransen refers to Christ as the “living Tabernacle of God” and God’s “Shekinah.”<sup>18</sup> In this descending movement, he calls Christ the Fundamental Sacrament. The ascending movement where humanity returns to God the obedience of faith and

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<sup>14</sup> *Lumen gentium*, sec. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Rahner, *Inquiries* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 200.

<sup>16</sup> Rahner, *Inquiries*, 196.

<sup>17</sup> Piet Fransen, “Sacraments, Signs of Faith,” *Worship* 37, no. 1 (1962): 38.

<sup>18</sup> Fransen, “Sacraments,” 39.

love is also seen in Christ, and we are made to share in that obedience. Referring to Scripture again, Fransen says, “The Church is the Body of Christ and the Temple of God, and therefore the visible ‘sign set up before all nations’ of this descending Presence of God. But, as the Bride of Christ, she is also united with Him in this movement of ascending obedience, love and adoration. Therefore the Church nowadays is truly called the Primordial Sacrament.”<sup>19</sup> It is in the Church’s union with Christ and participation in the descending and ascending movements of salvation that it can be called the Primordial Sacrament.

While each of the theologians has his own approach to the issue, they each answer the question of the ascension of Christ in a similar way. In Christ’s historical existence, the grace of God was made definitively present. Through his humanity, the descending and ascending movement of grace was made perfect in the human response to God. When Christ ascended to the Father, the sacrament of the eschatologically victorious mystery of God became absent to humanity. The embodied, historical sign and instrument of grace is continued in the historical, visible Church.

### *The Church as Embodied Theophany*

It is precisely at the point of Jesus’ humanity that he can be interpreted as the ultimate theophany. Theophany is a completely mediated experience between God and humanity. As such, the incarnation is the appropriate means for God to manifest his presence to his people in a definitive way. To recall the words of John’s prologue, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). To have seen his glory whether through the transfiguration, baptism, commissioning, or Jesus’ everyday living, required this embodied presence. 1 John 1:1 speaks of the revelation in even more tangible terms, “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have

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<sup>19</sup> Fransen, “Sacraments,” 39.

heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.” The theophany was tangibly accessible to the disciples through the humanity of Jesus.

The incarnation, and particularly the experience of the transfiguration as interpreted by some patristics, was called in this study a “present” theophany as opposed to a “hindsight” theophany of Christ which read him back into the Old Testament. The term “present” seems to be inadequate considering the absence of the theophanic body of Christ because of his ascension to the Father. Either the theophany of Christ has ceased to be available in the world today, or the form of presence has shifted.

It is not uncommon in theophany for the form of presence to shift.<sup>20</sup> The study from Chapter 1 showed the multiplicity of forms of God’s presence. In the book of Exodus alone the physical manifestation is experienced in many different ways. At Sinai, a single theophanic event, the forms of God’s presence varied for different people. Those at the base of the mountain saw a dense cloud (Ex. 19:9), thunder and lightning and a trumpet blast (Ex. 19:16), and smoke and fire (Ex. 19:18). Moses later brings Aaron and seventy elders up the mountain with him. As they ascended the mountain, they beheld a more anthropomorphic vision of God. They saw God’s feet as if resting on a footstool (Ex. 24:9-10). Moses left the seventy elders to ascend even further. Visual elements all but faded away as he experienced only a thick cloud (Ex. 24:15). The text even contrasts the experience of the people with that of Moses in verses 17-18, “The sight of the Lord’s glory was like a burning fire on the top of the mountain before the children of Israel. So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up the mountain; and he was on the

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<sup>20</sup> Carey Walsh wrote about the shift from multiplicity of images to one form in the cultic life of Israel. Carey Walsh, “Where Did God Go? Theophanic Shift in Exodus,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 42, no. 3 (2013): 115–123.

mountain forty days and forty nights.” In theophany, the form of presence can shift even within the same episode.

The theophany of the incarnation can shift forms after the ascension of Christ. Because of the Church’s connection to Christ, the Church community is a continuation of the theophany of Christ. Similar to the model of the Church as Sacrament, the Church continues into history the mystery of the bodily divine presence. To modify Schillebeeckx’s words, the Church is an earthly prolongation of Christ’s bodily theophany. What was once a manifestation of divine presence in the singular person of Jesus of Nazareth becomes a plurality of manifestation in the community of believers. Even though there is a shift, something essentially unique to the incarnation remains the same: God is made present in history through human mediation.

The incarnation marked a unique shift in theophany. In the past, the intermediaries employed in divine visions were either natural phenomenon—like fire, clouds, and lightning—or the vague malach or ἄγγελος.<sup>21</sup> Intermediaries made God present to a human. The human was the recipient of theophany, not the intermediary of the experience.<sup>22</sup> The incarnation marks a definitive shift whereby in Jesus’ humanity, the disciples witnessed divinity. The sacramental model shows that Jesus’ human activities made divine activities present. Jesus’ human words were the divine words of God. Because theophany is a completely mediated experience, the encounter with the humanity of Jesus mediates the divine. Human nature is taken up into the divine so that it is capable of manifesting the presence of God.

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<sup>21</sup> William Dyrness explains that the biblical notion of angel was simply “messenger” and the messenger could not always be distinguished from God. The angel of the Lord often spoke in first person and brought the fearful presence of the Lord. See William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 31-32.

<sup>22</sup> Although, hindsight christology sees the preexistent Christ as the one present in OT theophanies. The patristic rationale was that the Father was invisible, but the Son was apparently visible. Andrew Malone highlights some of the difficulties of assuming that the preexistent Son was more visible than the Father *before* the incarnation. Andrew Malone, “The invisibility of God: A Survey of a Misunderstood Phenomenon,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (2007): 311-329.

By taking the form of human mediation, theophany makes permanent that luminous experience that is so transient. It is typical of theophany narratives for the character to desire more of the encounter while God tries to send the character outward. When asked to leave Sinai, Moses resists and asks to see God's glory (Ex. 33). Peter reacts to the transfiguration with the words, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (Matt. 17:4). The individual is so caught up in the vision that he does not wish to leave. However, that is not the way of theophany (until the incarnation). The vision ceases, and the words of revelation stop. Eventually the character, or community, must leave the place to do what they are commissioned to do. The theophany of Christ is different. As long as the body of Christ was present to the disciples, they beheld the glory of the Lord and heard his words of revelation. Jesus could not cease to bodily mediate God's presence. Human mediation makes theophany less transient.

The beginning of *Lumen Gentium* beautifully weaves together rich biblical images to illustrate the continued mystery of the Church. The Church is a sheepfold whose door is Christ and who is shepherded by God.<sup>23</sup> The Church is a piece of land, like a vineyard, and Christ is the true vine who gives life to the faithful.<sup>24</sup> The Church is the building of God made by the stone which the builders rejected. This building is the household of God. It is especially called the holy temple, the dwelling place of God among humanity.<sup>25</sup> The Church is "our mother" and the bride of Christ.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, the Church is the Body of Christ.<sup>27</sup>

The image of the Body of Christ is, according to some interpretations of Pauline theology, the central image that connects Christ to the Church. Paul's encounter with the

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<sup>23</sup> *Lumen gentium*, sec. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 7.

resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus could explain why he adopts this image says Paul McPartlan. Jesus' question, "Why do you persecute me?" taught Paul that Jesus was alive, "not at a distance but somehow in his followers, to such an extent that to lay violent hands on *them* was to lay violent hands upon *him*."<sup>28</sup> Further, Paul's "body of Christ" was rooted in the Hebrew anthropology that saw the body not as a part of the person, but as the whole outward expression of the person. Quoting Robert Jenson he says, "Calling the Church the body of Christ therefore means that 'the church is the object as which the risen Christ is available to be found, to be responded to, to be grasped'. 'The church is the body as which Christ confronts his world.'"<sup>29</sup> This direct link from the body to the person leads McPartlan to say that when Christ held up the bread at the last supper and said, "This is my body," he was essentially saying, "This is myself."<sup>30</sup> The body is the person, and consequently, the Church as the Body of Christ is the visible person of Christ.

The Church being composed of embodied humans is capable of transmitting the presence of God into history. Even with the potential for sin, because of the incarnation, humanity is able to mediate the divine. The theophany of the incarnation does not cease when Christ's body is taken up to heaven. Instead, it continues in Christ's body on earth. Because the theophany takes place in the permanence of humanity, the manifestation of God's presence never ceases to be tangible in history. Precisely in the humanity of the Church is the divine revealed.

It should be noted at the outset that while the Church shares in the divine life, it cannot be said that the Church also has a hypostatic union. The Church is a community of people brought together in the Holy Spirit through the Son in union with the Father. This means that the Church

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<sup>28</sup> Paul McPartlan, "The Body of Christ and the Ecumenical Potential of Eucharistic Ecclesiology," *Ecclesiology* 6, vol. 2 (2010): 152.

<sup>29</sup> McPartlan, "The Body of Christ," 156. See also: Robert Jenson, "The Church and the Sacraments," in *Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 207- 225.

<sup>30</sup> McPartlan, "The Body of Christ," 156.



would not exist if not for the divine life within it. The divine component is inseparable from the human element. *Lumen Gentium* speaks of this as a “complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element.”<sup>31</sup> According to the document, the incarnation is “no weak analogy”<sup>32</sup> for the reality of the Church. However, it can only be said that the divine/human natures of the Church is *like* the divine/human natures of Christ. There was never a time in his earthly existence that Jesus did not fully reveal the divine. Human sinfulness, on the other hand, sometimes impedes the Church’s ability to reveal God through its words and actions. While there is a similarity between Christ’s and the Church’s human mediation of the divine, there are some real limitations.

This becomes even more complicated when dealing with the various localizations of the Church. To be a group of people united as the historically expressed Body of Christ requires a visible, historical structure in order to delineate the Church from not the Church. *Lumen Gentium* repeatedly identifies the source of the visible structure and union of the Church as the bishops and especially the Supreme Pontiff.<sup>33</sup> As a visible structure, the Church whose unity is rooted in the college of bishops and the Pope is a manifestation of the theophany of Christ. Yet to be embodied means to be localized. The constitution also says that the Church of Christ is fully present in local congregations in union with their pastor and bishop.<sup>34</sup> Congregations therefore, are also visible manifestations of the theophany of Christ. Even further, these human societies take on their humanity from the participation of individual humans in the Church. The Church is only a human institution in so far as it is composed of individual people.

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<sup>31</sup> *Lumen gentium*, sec. 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 8, sec. 14, and sec. 18.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 26.

Consequently, since the Christ theophany is mediated through human nature, it is possible for the individual Christian, albeit never separated from the Church, to mediate the theophany of Christ.

The embodied theophany of the incarnation of Christ did not cease with the ascension. Much like the Sacramental Model, embodied grace is present in the Church. Jesus' humanity marked a shift in that human nature is capable of manifesting the presence of God. Through his body on earth, the Church, the theophany of Christ continues in history. It is a permanent, visible, historical, localized embodiment of God's presence.

### **The Theophanically Constituted Church**

#### *Eucharistic Ecclesiology*

Paul McPartlan attributes the origin of eucharistic ecclesiology to Nicholas Afanassieff who tried to reestablish the link between the Eucharist and the Church which had been lost to medieval theology.<sup>35</sup> In an article about the ecumenical potential of eucharistic ecclesiology, Radu Bordeianu summarized Afanassieff's approach. The main principle is that the Church of Christ is fully manifested in the Eucharistic assembly. He quotes Afanassieff who said, "The Church is where the eucharistic assembly is. It is also possible to formulate this in another way. Where the Eucharist is, there is the Church of God, and where the Church of God is, there is the Eucharist."<sup>36</sup> Afanassieff elaborates on the consequences of the Church being defined by the local Eucharistic assembly, to which Bordeianu offers helpful critique.<sup>37</sup> Still, identifying the Church within the local Eucharistic assembly was important in a time when the hierarchy itself was the source of the Church's unity and identity.

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<sup>35</sup> McPartlan, "The Body of Christ," 163.

<sup>36</sup>Radu Bordeianu, "Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue: Retrieving Eucharistic Ecclesiology," *Journal Of Ecumenical Studies* 44, no. 2 (2009): 241. Quote from: Nicolas Afanassieff, "Una Sancta," trans. Michael Plekon, in *Tradition Alive: On the Church and the Christian Life in Our Time — Readings from the Eastern Church*, ed. Michael Plekon (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), pp. 12-13.

<sup>37</sup>Bordeianu argued that when tempered with the later theologies of Zizoulas and Staniloae, Afanassieff's eucharistic ecclesiology could be a helpful tool toward Christian unity.

Lumen Gentium was influenced by the eucharistic ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanassieff.<sup>38</sup> There are primarily two texts from the document that address this ecclesiology. The first comes from section seven when the document says, “Really partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another. ‘Because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread’. In this way all of us are made members of His Body, ‘but severally members one of another’.”<sup>39</sup> Partaking of the body of the Lord in the Eucharist enables communion between the Church and Christ and between those who share in the Eucharist. Paul’s words in 1Corinthians are interpreted to mean that the Eucharist is not only a sign of the unity of the Church, but the effector of that unity. We who are many are made members of Christ’s body through the Eucharist.

The second instance of Afanassieff’s influence comes in section 26. “A bishop marked with the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, is ‘the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood,’ especially in the Eucharist, which he offers or causes to be offered.”<sup>40</sup> The bishop’s Eucharistic role is reestablished. Further, as we had seen above, the fullness of the Church is said to reside in the local congregation. The document even refers to local congregations as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, by virtue of the fullness of the Church in their Eucharistic celebrations. Additionally, the Eucharist is said to constitute the congregation.

In any community of the altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, there is exhibited a symbol of that charity and "unity of the mystical Body, without which there can be no salvation.’ In these communities, though frequently small and poor, or living in the Diaspora, Christ is present, and in virtue of His presence there is brought together one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. For ‘the

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<sup>38</sup>See Bordeianu, “Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue.”

<sup>39</sup> *Lumen gentium*, sec. 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 26.

partaking of the body and blood of Christ does nothing other than make us be transformed into that which we consume'.<sup>41</sup>

The celebration of the Eucharist in union with the bishop constitutes the very nature of the local church as truly the Church of Christ. Paradoxically, the Church, which is the Body of Christ, becomes what it consumes, the Body of Christ.

Alexander Schmemmann later developed this ecclesiology in his book, *Eucharist*. He argues that the Eucharist constitutes the very nature of the Church. To quote him at length:

Yes the institution of the Eucharist did occur at the last supper—but not as “another” institution separate from the institution of the Church, for it is the establishment of the Eucharist as the sacrament of the Church, of her ascent to heaven, of her self-fulfillment at the table of Christ in his kingdom. The last supper, the Church and the Eucharist are “linked” not through an earthly cause and effect connection, to which an “institution” is so often lowered, but through their common and single referral to the kingdom of God—which is manifest at the last supper, and granted to the Church and remembered, in its presence and actuality in the Eucharist.<sup>42</sup>

He sees the institution of the Church and the institution of the Eucharist as inseparably linked.

The Eucharist, in his view, is never separated from the Church. It is not an object to be possessed, but rather the very activity of the Church realizing its nature relative to the kingdom of God. Neither the Church nor the Eucharist could exist without the other. This is essential for eucharistic ecclesiology.

### *Theophanically Constituted Church*

In Chapter One, we saw that the theophany of Sinai and the making of the covenant were essential to the identity of the Israelite community. Without that event, the Israelites were just like any other people. That combined with the ritualized theophany of the Temple would indicate that they were a people constituted by theophany.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid..

<sup>42</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Eucharist*, trans. Paul Kachur (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 202.

Eucharistic ecclesiology draws out clearly that the Church is a community constituted by the presence of Christ who perpetually transforms it into his body. In the words of *Lumen Gentium*, “‘we are taken up into communion with him and with one another’ to ‘become what we consume.’”<sup>43</sup> There, in the Eucharist, the Church finds its goal and most complete expression. As Christ’s self continues in his body, the Church, he continues to sustain it from within. Because the Church is the continuation of the theophanic body of Christ, its own actualization in the Eucharistic event is nothing short of an event of theophany.

An interesting tension that exists in this theology is that the Church is at once directly linked to Christ and distinct from him. In the Eucharist, as McPartlan pointed out, Christ says, “This is myself,” as he nourishes the Church which, incidentally is Christ’s body becoming Christ’s body. In the celebration of the Eucharist, is the Church the theophanic body of Christ, or is the Church beholding the theophanic body of Christ? It would seem that the answer to the question must be both. As distinct from Christ, the Church is in a process of becoming what it is not yet fully. This draws out the eschatological dimension of the theophanic experience. Beholding the presence of Christ in its midst, the Church is taken up into the vision. As the body of Christ amidst the Church, the Eucharist can rightly be called a theophanic celebration. Conversely, as the Church is the theophanic body of Christ in which the Eucharist derives its meaning so the Church is the community of divine presence. At once the Church is both the theophanic community, and the recipient of the theophanic vision.

Like the nation of Israel, it can be said that the Church is constituted by theophany. First the disciples were gathered around the person of Christ whose body was the Temple of the glory of the Lord. In the absence of Christ’s body, the Church gathers around the Eucharist which

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<sup>43</sup> *Lumen gentium*, sec. 7.

makes the Church that which the Church celebrates. Where Christ's body is present in human history there is theophany. The Church is constituted by the theophany of Christ's body.

### *Conclusion*

As an interaction between God and humanity, theophany is a physically mediated experience. The Sacramental Model of the Church has shown the need for embodied grace in human history. Christ's body which made God present in history marked a shift whereby human nature mediates the presence of God. Like the Sacramental Model, the Church as the Body of Christ perpetuates this humanly mediated presence into history. Eucharistic ecclesiology posits that the Church is constituted by the Eucharist. Interpreted in light of Christ's theophanic body, the Church becomes theophanically constituted. Thus the Church is in the process of being and becoming the body of Christ. Notably absent from the discussion thus far is the role of the Holy Spirit. In the next chapter we will turn toward the theophany of Pentecost.

## Chapter 4: The Temple of the Holy Spirit

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (Acts 2:1-4)

An important criticism of the Sacramental Model of the Church is that it focuses nearly exclusively on Christ. In fact, Yves Congar aptly pointed out the christomonism of ecclesiology in his day.<sup>1</sup> This theologian of the Spirit was instrumental in developing the role of the Holy Spirit in ecclesiology and within the documents of Vatican II. The Church as a theophanic community in this work has thus far been informed by sacramental and eucharistic ecclesiology and has notably featured an absence of pneumatology.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will be a remedy for that absence by acknowledging the role of the theophanic coming of the Spirit within the life of the Church. Many scholars have observed the connection between Luke’s description of the first Christian Pentecost and the Sinai theophany. Further, other scholars see the descent of the Spirit as the restoration of Israel through the Church who is the Spirit filled Temple. While *Lumen Gentium* has no problem holding multiple images of the Church in tension, the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit seem to highlight two different dimensions of the Church. This chapter will bring out the coherence between the two images by affirming that the Church is not only constituted by the theophany of Christ’s Body, but also the theophany of the Holy Spirit.

### **Pentecost and Sinai: The Coming of the Theophanic Spirit**

Some scholars interpret the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2 as Luke’s theological understanding of the restoration of Israel. Luke Timothy Johnson sees this as a central program

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<sup>1</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York : Seabury Press, 1983), 151-163.

<sup>2</sup> Not that eucharistic ecclesiology does not have a pneumatology. See for example John Zizoulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

of Luke-Acts. Throughout the gospel, Luke weaves in images of the new Moses which reaches a climax with the ascension of Jesus. Whereas it is typical, according to Johnson, for Luke to have a quick sequence of prophecy and fulfillment, Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit is delayed ("but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49b, c.f. Acts 1:4-5).<sup>3</sup> This abnormal delay is due to the replacement of Judas so that the apostles once again numbered twelve (Acts 1:12-26). Johnson sees intentionality in Luke's narrative showing that the number of the Apostles needed to be twelve before the descent of the Holy Spirit for the restoration of Israel.<sup>4</sup> The twelve are restored so that after being empowered they can proclaim the Messiah to the twelve Tribes of Israel.<sup>5</sup>

The reconstitution of Israel is made even clearer by scholars who associate the event of the Christian Pentecost with the Sinai event. It has been shown that the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost in Greek) was associated later in Judaism with the celebration and renewal the Covenant.<sup>6</sup> Exactly when this association was widely accepted is unknown, but there are two sources that pre-date Luke's writing that show that it was not completely invented by him. James VanderKam points to testimony from the book of Jubilees "Therefore, it is ordained and written in the heavenly tablets that they should observe the feast of Shebuot in this month, once per year, in order to renew the covenant in all (respects), year by year"<sup>7</sup> (Jubilees 6:17,18a).<sup>8</sup> Secondly,

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<sup>3</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 209.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 210. See also: Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 31 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 220-221.

<sup>5</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 234.

<sup>6</sup> Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 32; Gerd Ludemann, *The Acts of the Apostles: What Really Happened in the Earliest Days of the Church* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005), 47; Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 234; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 5 of *Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 42-46. AJW Wedderburn offers scholars who disagree with this association: AJW Wedderburn, "Traditions and Redaction in Acts 2:1-13," *Journal of the Study of the New Testament*, no. 55 (1994): 30.

<sup>7</sup> *Book of Jubilees*, trans. O.S. Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 2, ed. James Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983-1985), 67.



VanderKam looks toward other Qumran initiatory texts of the Rule of the Community which also associate covenant renewal and the Feast of Weeks.<sup>9</sup> Sejin Park identifies 2 Chronicles 15:10-14 as a potential biblical link of the festival with covenant renewal.<sup>10</sup> There is a precedent for the assertion that Pentecost at the time of Luke was linked to covenant renewal. If this is the case, it is not coincidental that Luke situates the giving of the Holy Spirit within the context of Pentecost and the restored Twelve.

Covenant renewal conjures up images of Moses on Sinai receiving the Law from the Lord. Interpreters have shown that Luke intentionally draws parallels between his narrative and the narrative of Exodus. Johnson points out that the loud sound echoes the sound of Sinai (Ex. 19:16-19), and the theophany to Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-12).<sup>11</sup> He also observes the common association of fire with theophany, particularly on Sinai, as well as the LXX association of the voice of the Lord and splitting the fire (“The Lord’s voice, as he divides flames of fire” (Ps. 28:7)).<sup>12</sup> Gregory Beale says that the parallelisms are consistent with Luke’s use of Moses as a type for Jesus. “Particularly striking is the matching description of Moses who ‘received living oracles to give to us’ (Acts 7:38) with that of Jesus who ‘having received the Holy Spirit, poured forth this which you see and hear’ (Acts 2:33).”<sup>13</sup> Just as Moses ascended into the cloud before bringing the Law to the people, so did Jesus ascend into a cloud before sending the Spirit.<sup>14</sup> The divisions of the flames, according to Beale, though not directly associated with Sinai, reflect the division of the Spirit which was given to Moses but then shared with the seventy elders (Nm.

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<sup>8</sup> James VanderKam, “The Festival of Weeks and the Story of Pentecost in Acts 2,” in *From Prophecy to Testament*, ed. Craig Evans (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 204. Also: Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 46.

<sup>9</sup> James VanderKam, “Covenant and Petecost,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 37, no. 2 (2002): 243.

<sup>10</sup> Sejin Park, *Pentecost and Sinai: The Festival of Weeks as a Celebration of the Sinai Event* (New York : T&T Clark, 2008), 198. Although he also points out that Dt. 31:10 and Neh. 8 do not associate the two.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson. *Acts of the Apostles*, 42.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple in the Form of the Spirit at Pentecost: Part 1: The Clearest Evidence,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 56, no. 1 (2005): 82.

<sup>14</sup> Beale, “The Descent of the Eschatological Temple,” 81.

11:25).<sup>15</sup> Sejin Park adds that just as Moses blessed the people on Sinai, so did Jesus bless the disciples before the ascension.<sup>16</sup> Further, he says that Jesus' command to wait (Acts 1:4) reflects Moses command to wait (Ex. 24:14).<sup>17</sup> Lastly, James VanderKam notes that the disciples' question about if the restoration of the kingdom is at hand, may have envisioned the words of the Covenant from Exodus 19:6 "[...] you shall be to me a priestly kingdom [...]"<sup>18</sup> Together, these interpreters suggest that Luke had in mind not only that Pentecost was the time for covenant renewal, but that the coming of the Spirit in sound and fire was intentionally linked to the Sinai theophany. Read in this way, the first Christian Pentecost is nothing less than a theophany of the Holy Spirit through which God reestablished God's people.

#### *Pentecost as the Establishment of the Temple of the Holy Spirit*

Based upon the previous interpretation of the coming of the Holy Spirit as a theophany like Sinai, some scholars have posited that this event established a new Temple that would stand in opposition to the Jerusalem Temple. According to Anthony Le Donne, this is the reason why Acts 1-7 is centered in Jerusalem. It was meant to show that the Church inhabited by the Holy Spirit was the epicenter of religious life for Israel, no longer the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>19</sup> This vision of the Temple of the Holy Spirit read into Acts sheds light on the other New Testament references to the Temple of the Holy Spirit found in the writings of Paul and Peter. These two approaches to the Temple when put together can find cohesion with the Body of Christ.

Joseph Greene's study shows that though the original conception of God's presence on Sinai and in the Temple was manifested either as the *kabod* or the name of the Lord, later

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<sup>15</sup> Beale, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Park, *Pentecost and Sinai*, 204.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>18</sup> James VanderKam, "The Festival of Weeks and the Story of Pentecost in Acts 2," 196.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Le Donne, "The Improper Temple Offering of Ananias and Sapphira" *New Testament Studies* 59, vol. 3 (2013): 349.

interpretations suggest that it was the Spirit of the Lord that dwelt with God's people. First he gives examples from the Psalms where God's Spirit is compared to God's presence.<sup>20</sup> Psalm 129:7 draws a parallel between God's presence and God's Spirit, "Where can I go from your spirit?/ Or where can I flee from your presence?" Psalm 51:11 draws the same parallel, "Do not cast me away from your presence,/ and do not take your holy spirit from me." Greene goes on to point out that Isaiah 63:7–15 interprets God's presence among the people as the Spirit.<sup>21</sup> Isaiah 63:11-14 says, "Then his people remembered the days of old, of Moses. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put his Holy Spirit in the midst of them? The Spirit of Yahweh gave them rest. So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name." He says that Exodus does not mention the Spirit among the people; only the cloud was among the people. This enables him to postulate that Isaiah interpreted the cloud as the Spirit of God.<sup>22</sup> He makes a similar argument for reading Haggai 2:4b-5, "for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear." Greene asserts that again the Spirit of the Lord is associated as that presence among the people.<sup>23</sup>

If Greene is correct about the association between the Spirit and God's presence with his people, then it is quite natural to assert, as he does, that Paul's use of the Temple of the Holy Spirit is a transference of the Temple of Jerusalem to the Church. "Just as the Spirit of God dwelt in the Jerusalem temple, so he now dwells in the church body. This indwelling is based

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Greene, "The Spirit in the Temple: Bridging the Gap between Old Testament Absence and New Testament Assumption," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55, no. 4 (2012): 725.

<sup>21</sup> Greene, "The Spirit in the temple," 726.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 727.

upon Jesus Christ as the foundation of the temple (1 Cor. 3:11).”<sup>24</sup> According to Greene, the presence of God in the Temple is the Holy Spirit that now dwells in the Church. A group of people referring to themselves as the Temple of God is not new to Paul. Fitzmyer points out that the Essenes also called themselves the Temple of God because of what they perceived as a corruption of the Jerusalem cult.<sup>25</sup> The community becomes the Temple in which the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, dwells. As for the present study of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, it would appear that the allusions to Sinai combined with the evidence that the Spirit was present among the people would lead to the conclusion that the presence in the Jerusalem Temple came to reside among the primitive Church.

Gregory Beale makes a cumulative argument that not only was Acts 2 a theophany likened to Sinai, but that it truly represented the establishment of the eschatological Temple envisioned by Joel 2-3. His cumulative argument will not be developed here, only his last interpretive key which is found in Peter’s first sermon following the descent of the Spirit. There Peter interprets the events in light of Joel 2:

In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.  
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.  
And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.  
The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 742.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 32 of *The Anchor Yale Bible* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 196. He continues to say that the same antagonism toward the Temple likely does not exist in Paul’s letter due to its Gentile audience. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 202.

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.  
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:17-21).

Beale points out that this eschatological judgment is situated in Joel as coming from Mount Zion, "for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls" (Joel 2:32). According to Beale, Mount Zion is "is inextricably linked to 'the house of the Lord.'"<sup>26</sup> These eschatological events found in Joel and which Luke claims as descriptive of the Pentecost event is directly linked to God's dwelling in an end-time Temple.<sup>27</sup> This is reflected in Joel 3:17-21:

So you shall know that I, the LORD your God,  
    dwell in Zion, my holy mountain.  
And Jerusalem shall be holy,  
    and strangers shall never again pass through it.  
In that day  
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
    the hills shall flow with milk,  
and all the stream beds of Judah  
    shall flow with water;  
a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD  
    and water the Wadi Shittim.  
Egypt shall become a desolation  
    and Edom a desolate wilderness,  
because of the violence done to the people of Judah,  
    in whose land they have shed innocent blood.  
But Judah shall be inhabited forever,  
    and Jerusalem to all generations.  
I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty,  
    for the LORD dwells in Zion.

Beale's conclusion is that Joel had in mind a reestablishment of the eschatological Temple of God. Luke casts Peter's sermon as an interpretation of the coming of the Spirit as a fulfillment of Joel's anticipated Temple. "This faithful remnant is the beginning of the new people of God, the continuation of true Israel, and, what we have argued, the initial corporate form of the new

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<sup>26</sup> Beale, "The Descent of the Eschatological Temple," 98.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid..

spiritual temple.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, for Beale, the coming of the Spirit was indeed a theophany which brought judgment, the restoration of Israel, and the return of God to dwell in God’s Temple which is now the Church.

Anthony Le Donne also interprets Luke’s use of Joel as the affirmation that the eschatological Temple is present in the Church.<sup>29</sup> His view is nuanced in that the Apostles did not at first make up the new Temple to the exclusion of the Jerusalem Temple. Instead he shows how Acts 1-7 shows the activity of the Apostles within Jerusalem relating to the Temple. In his view, the apostles became the new religious authorities at the Temple.<sup>30</sup> As the narrative continues it becomes clear that, “The Lord’s presence has extended from the Holy of Holies to include those on the periphery, including those who congregate in the Court of the Gentiles.”<sup>31</sup> Finally, as the religious authorities of God’s Temple, Peter accepts cultic offerings in Acts 5 as Ananias and Sapphira bring a bad sacrifice. Le Donne compares their death with the dangers of offering unworthy sacrifices to God in God’s holy Temple.<sup>32</sup> His conclusion is that the Church not only mediates cultic worship at the Temple, but functions as the Holy of Holies which appeared in the Court of the Gentiles, and then extended to the ends of the earth.<sup>33</sup>

The Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit, when interpreted with the insights of Greene, Beale, and Le Donne, is not simply a generic sacred building which is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Instead, the Temple of the Holy Spirit connotes that the very presence of God, the Spirit, dwells in the eschatological Temple. This is not a novel replacement of the Jerusalem Temple, but the authoritative extension of the Holy of Holies to all nations.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>29</sup> Le Donne “The Improper Temple Offering of Annanias and Sapphira,” 355.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 354.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 363-364.

## **Lumen Gentium as the Cohesion of Images**

Lumen Gentium promoted multiple images of the Church at the same time. We saw in chapter three the use of both sacramental ecclesiology and eucharistic ecclesiology. Further, the document strung together multiple biblical images to capture the mystery of the Church.<sup>34</sup> The Church is described both as the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This thesis has argued that the interpretation of Christ as theophany, both hindsight and present, enriches the notion of the Church as the Body of Christ. Precisely because the Church shares in Christ's humanity it can physically manifest his theophany into history. The Church is at once the recipient of the theophanic body of Christ, and constituted as the theophanic body of Christ. Yet, in this chapter, the Church is conceived of as the Temple in which God dwells through the presence of the Spirit. In both the Body and the Temple imagery, theophany occurs, but the person of the Holy Trinity that enables that theophany is different. In the first image, it is the Son who is the theophanic presence. In the second, the Holy Spirit is the presence. With Lumen Gentium as our guide, the two images can be held in tension and find a cohesion.

Lumen Gentium uses the Temple imagery five times. Two of the usages are not particularly helpful to this study. The first instance refers to the Church simply as a generic sacred place. "The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple."<sup>35</sup> Here the document does not seem to have in mind the Jerusalem Temple where YHWH dwells. The second instance is when at the end of the document Mary is uniquely referred to as the temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup> All of the faithful are considered temples of the Holy Spirit<sup>37</sup> (this is a third use) but here Mary receives special attention.

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<sup>34</sup> *Lumen gentium*, sec. 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 53.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 9.

A fourth use of the image comes in section six where the document employs a variety of language from the New Testament:

Often the Church has also been called the building of God. The Lord Himself compared Himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the cornerstone. On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles, and from it the Church receives durability and consolidation. This edifice has many names to describe it: the house of God in which dwells His family; the household of God in the Spirit; the dwelling place of God among men; and, especially, the holy temple. This Temple, symbolized in places of worship built out of stone, is praised by the Holy Fathers and, not without reason, is compared in the liturgy to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. As living stones we here on earth are built into it.<sup>38</sup>

This passage is interesting because it combines ideas about the Church as a building or Temple in a cohesive way that the texts themselves could not imagine. Paul, for example, spoke of himself as a master builder who laid a foundation in Corinth which is Christ (1Cor. 3:10-11). Sentences later he asks, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you” (1Cor. 3:16). Paul’s building is clearly the Temple of the Holy Spirit, but it is likely that he did not have in mind the Lucan eschatological Temple of Acts 2.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, 1 Pet. 2:5 refers to Christians as living stones being built into God’s house. John Elliot understands the passage to refer not to the structure of God’s temple, but to the household of God’s family.<sup>40</sup> Lastly, John’s revelation of the New Jerusalem envisions the Lord and the Lamb as the Temple (Rev. 21:22), rather than the Church. Either this passage from *Lumen Gentium* was an eclectic pasting of un-researched snippets from Scripture, or the text intentionally tried to hold these

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles : In Two Volumes*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002), 108.

<sup>40</sup> John Elliot, *1 Peter : A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 37B of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 415.



passages in tension. The latter seems more in sync with the document's concept of the "mystery of the Church."<sup>41</sup>

The final instance of Temple imagery in *Lumen Gentium* that has not been mentioned is precisely a blending of multiple images: "In this way the Church both prays and labors in order that the entire world may become the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and that in Christ, the Head of all, all honor and glory may be rendered to the Creator and Father of the Universe."<sup>42</sup> All of these images combined are needed to begin to capture the mystery of the Church. Whether the theophany of the Church is described in terms of the theophany of the Body of Christ, or the theophany within the Temple of the Holy Spirit, both images capture some of the mystery that is characteristic of theophany, and the Church.

### **The Body of Christ as the Temple of the Holy Spirit**

A way to find a clear cohesion between the two theophanic images of the Church is to again be attentive to embodiedness. We saw in chapter two that John interpreted Jesus' statement, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," (John 2:19) as a reference to his body, "But he was speaking of the temple of his body" (John 2:21). Some see this as a prediction of his resurrection,<sup>43</sup> while others see it as Jesus replacing the Temple with his own body.<sup>44</sup> Raymond Brown interprets this saying as the place where the Temple and Body metaphors come together. He insists that in John's writings, Jesus is the Temple. From John's prologue where the Word tabernacles (1:14), to the end of Revelation where the Lamb is the Temple (Rev. 21:22), John interprets Jesus with this theophanic language.<sup>45</sup> Brown points out

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<sup>41</sup> *Lumen gentium*, sec. 63.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 17.

<sup>43</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 179.

<sup>44</sup> Moody Smith, *John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), *John*. 91.

<sup>45</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, vol. 29 of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1966), 124-125.

that in Mark's Gospel the Temple is the Church, whereas in John's Gospel the Temple is Jesus's Body. The two may not be so far detached, he posits, when we consider that the Ephesian community (which he assumes is the audience of John) knows of the Church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23).<sup>46</sup> Because Jesus' body is the Temple and the Church is the Body of Christ, the Church is also the bodily Temple of God's presence.

The Church, as the bodily prolongation of Christ's theophanic incarnation is the Temple (like Jesus' body of John 2:22) of the Holy Spirit. This cohesion highlights the interrelatedness between christology and pneumatology. In the Gospel tradition, one can detect the Spirit's activity throughout the life of Christ. It is significant that at the moment of Christ's conception, the Spirit overshadowed Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (Luke 1:35). If Greene is correct that the Spirit in later Jewish thought was parallel to the presence of God in the tabernacle, then Jesus' conception is marked by the theophanic presence of the Spirit. It was through the presence of the Holy Spirit that Jesus received his human nature through Mary. Jesus' embodied theophany was dependent upon the theophany of the Spirit.

Conversely, Luke frames the sending of the Holy Spirit by Jesus' bodily ascent into heaven. "And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:49-52; see also Acts 1:4-11). Luke suggests that by Jesus ascending he was able to send the Spirit, which we have seen from Acts 2, constituted the disciples as the Temple of the

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<sup>46</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 125.

Spirit. The incarnation of Christ was dependent upon the theophany of the Spirit, and the sending of the Spirit upon the Church was dependent upon the theophany of the incarnation.

Finding this inner cohesion between the Temple and the Body of Christ shows that the two images, though alluding to different dimensions of the Church, are concretely connected in the theophany of the Church. It is difficult to identify a historical moment of institution whereby the Church comes to be realized. The Eucharistic Model suggests that the institution of the Eucharist is the moment of the institution of the Church<sup>47</sup>, but this has the Church existing before its gathering in the Holy Spirit. A Pneumatological Model would identify the descent of the Spirit at that first Christian Pentecost as the institution of the Church<sup>48</sup>, but not all of the New Testament writers seem to be aware of this radical moment. What becomes clear is that the Church is the Body and the Temple because of the Son and the Spirit dwelling within.

Insofar as the Church is and is becoming the Body of Christ, and insofar as the Church is the eschatological Temple of the Holy Spirit and awaits the eschatological Temple, the Church is in the process of realizing itself. The Church is fundamentally constituted by theophany, both christological and pneumatological. Much like the soteriological interpretation of the Transfiguration, as the Church beholds the theophany, the Church becomes transformed into that which it beholds. Until at last in the eschaton the pilgrim Church will behold the glory of the Lord in the heavenly Temple and will be taken up into the vision. The realization will be complete:

See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;  
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

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<sup>47</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Eucharist*, trans. Paul Kachur (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 202.

<sup>48</sup> This is done on a popular level as we celebrate the "Birthday of the Church" on the Feast of Pentecost.

Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away (Rev. 21:3-4)

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:22-27).

## General Conclusion

In this work theophany has been defined as an appearance of God's presence to a human (or group of humans) in which some spacial-temporal manifestation is made tangible, and in which the human (or group) understands a message from God. This definition assumes that God intends to initiate encounters with humanity. It also assumes that the encounter is an inter-personal encounter between divine presence and human presence. However intangible divine presence really is, this definition of theophany shows that when God initiates an encounter with a human it is done by way of physical mediation and this is because of our embodied experience. It was shown that there is no non-physical mediation in theophany. From the visual component to the divine message, theophany is a mediated experience.

An early christology was examined in which Jesus was seen as the theophany of God's presence both in the Old Testament and in his earthly life. Some New Testament writers and patristic interpreters saw Jesus as the vision of God which Moses and Elijah sought. An integral insight of John's gospel was that the theophany was made present not through natural intermediaries but through the human body of Jesus. In the flesh of Jesus the disciples beheld the glory of God which resided in the Temple. Significantly, the incarnation marked a shift whereby humanity became the mediator of divine presence.

The absence of Christ's body through the ascension was treated by the model of the Church as Sacrament. The Church acts as a sacrament of Christ. That same methodology was used to show that the Church is the continuation of Christ's theophanic body. It is precisely because human nature becomes a medium of God's presence through Jesus that the Church can be said to mediate the presence of Christ. Human nature which extends beyond an *event* of theophany is capable to *perpetually* mediate theophany. The insights of eucharistic ecclesiology

were used to show that the Church is instituted and constituted by the Eucharist. When Christ's body is seen as a theophany, the Church is constituted, like Israel, by the theophany of God. Thus the already/not-yet, visible/invisible natures of the Church are held in tension as the Church is and becomes the theophanic body of Christ by sharing in his Eucharistic body.

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Luke's narrative was read as the descent of the eschatological Temple. Read in this way, the Holy Spirit is seen as the theophanic presence of God in the Temple which extends to all nations through the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church. In this model, the Church is constituted by the theophanic presence of the Holy Spirit.

The christological and pneumatological approaches come from the biblical images of the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Read as theophany, the presence of God is seen as Christ in the first model and the Holy Spirit in the second. In the New Testament, the images represent two aspects of the Church that are generally unrelated. *Lumen Gentium* similarly uses the two images without any attempts at harmonizing the two. This is, of course, well within the methodology of *Lumen Gentium* (and the New Testament for that matter) which holds various models of the Church in tension as a way to reflect the mystery of the Church. However, it was suggested that the two find a cohesion by understanding the Church as theophany. In John's Gospel, Christ's body is seen as the Temple in which the glory and name of God dwell. Christ's body is associated with the Temple. If Greene is correct that the Spirit in later Jewish thought was parallel to the presence of God in the tabernacle then it would follow that Christ's earthly body can also be thought of as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Together, the Son and the Spirit are the presence of God. The Church which is the prolongation of the body of Christ is constituted as Christ's theophanic body and is consequently the Temple of the Spirit. It

is suggested, therefore, that the Church as a theophanic community is a synthesis of the Church's christological and pneumatological constitution.

This work has achieved at least four goals. First, it is attentive to the embodied experience of humanity. Attentiveness to the human embodied experience is well documented in the Church as Sacrament and other theologies "from below." Whether the concept of absolute truth exists, it is now commonly understood that it is only known by humanity through our embodiedness. Theophany speaks to the human experiencing the supernatural or supra-material. By now in theology, it may be a matter of course that the supernatural is only available to humanity through material mediation. Yet, theophany is a biblical model of divine/human encounter that presumes the need for mediation. This is especially expressed when the incarnation is interpreted as a theophany through which the appropriate means of revelation was through the human body. Though the concept of the human need for embodied grace is well established, this thesis has supported that assertion by way of the consistent experience of theophany which spans the Old and New testaments, and if this thesis is correct, continues in the Church. This thesis is another source on which the epistemological discussion can draw upon.

Second, it expresses in a nuanced way that humanity can mediate the presence of God. Certainly the Catholic tradition already has a sacramental worldview where physicality can be an instrument for divine grace. In the sacramental worldview, even the human person can be an instrument. The ordained who act *in persona Christi* are instruments for divine presence in their bodily existence (in magisterial teaching, male biology is essential for them to act *in persona Christi*). It must be noted, however, that this sacramental approach is dependent upon a Thomistic view of the person and sacramental efficacy. In this thesis, it was shown that the human person can mediate the presence of God without the use of Aristotelian philosophy. In a

postmodern context that is exploring other theological avenues besides onto-theology, the Church as a theophanic community is an alternative approach. Methodologically, it was inspired by the Church as Sacrament, but the theological source was neither Thomistic sacramental theology nor Aristotelian philosophy. The main source was a biblical-theological approach to theophany.

The third achievement is that it understands the nature of the Church in terms of encounter. When the Church is a community of theophany, it exists to enable the encounter between God and all of humanity. The Church's own identity is caught up in its encounter with God, and its missional activity enables encounter. In this way the Church is personal and corporate; mystical and engaging with the world; prayerful and serving. Every activity of the Church finds its fulfillment in the encounter with God.

The fourth achievement is that by responding to the call of Vatican II to nourish theology with Scripture, this model of the Church has ecumenical potential. Sources were used from various Christian traditions: Evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox. Scripture was interpreted in light of Scripture and then applied to the Church. This engagement is well within the theological discipline of most Christian traditions. By being rooted in the Scriptural concept of God's presence, the Church as a theophanic community could be a common model for various traditions.

*For Further Study: Word and Sacrament*

It was said in Chapter Three that the celebration of the Eucharist is nothing less than a theophanic encounter in which the Body of Christ encounters the Body of Christ to become the Body of Christ. This suggests that the Eucharist can be seen as theophany. Contemporary sacramental theology has begun to see the efficacy of the sacraments in terms of encounter. It



would be worthwhile to explore the consequences of the sacraments as theophany. Viewing the sacraments as theophany may satisfy some postmodern critiques of manipulating our understanding of God's presence. Just like the Temple at once made God present and showed a distance, and in the Church Christ's body is both theophanically present and distant, God is with us in the sacraments, but he is certainly not contained or limited by our ritual.

Sacraments as human encounters with the Church and the divine can be understood as theophanies. Each sacrament celebrates the presence of God's grace among God's people. This is easier to see with ritual celebrations like baptism and Eucharist. However, Marriage and Ordination are sacraments that continue beyond the ritual or event. The typical theophany narrative is an event of encounter that eventually ceases. Yet, the two sacraments continue even when the celebration stops. We saw with the incarnation that embodiedness makes it so that theophany can continue as long as embodiedness persists. The Church as a community of theophany has the potential to enrich sacramental theology.

William Wright IV has stated that the Word of God in Scripture is sometimes likened to the fiery flame of theophany. When Jeremiah received the Word of God it was like a fire welling up within him (Jr. 5:14. Cf. 20:9 and 23:29). Still further, when the resurrected Jesus explained the events that happened in Jerusalem to the travelers on the road to Emmaus, they responded, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke. 24:32). This parallel between the Word of God and the fire of theophany would suggest that Scripture can mark an experience of theophany. This is not unlike the sacred reading of the contemplatives who experienced divine intimacy by meditating on the Scriptures. The Church is a community of theophany especially when gathered together for the proclamation of the Word of God. In that proclamation, infused with the power of the Holy

Spirit, the fire of theophany can burn within the community. The theophany can continue as the individual encounters God through the Scriptures privately. Here again the Church is at once the proclaimer of theophany and the recipient of it. The Word of God as a theophany within the Church could be a fruitful area of further research.

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