

THE SANCTIFYING POWER OF TRUE RITUAL WORSHIP

Carol Frogley Ellertson

Religious ritual is central to all past great civilizations. The ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians—as well as most Near and Far Eastern ancient societies—depended on ceremonial manifestations of God, “the gods,” or “the divine” to give structure and orientation to the world. Because the rites were communal in nature, they served as a fundamental mechanism that held a society together. The rituals generated common emotions linked to symbols that formed the basis for belief, morality, and culture.¹ This ritual foundation established a sacred order in the lives of the people. The order usually centered around a temple where kings were crowned, religious law went forth, and sacred ceremonies were performed. Some of these communal rituals included religious festivals, processions, choruses, dramas, and games.²

In contrast, the modern secular world emphasizes a different value structure to govern the social order of our lives. The secularization of society means that religious ideas, practice, and organizations have lost much of their influence in the face of scientific and other knowledge.³

Carol Frogley Ellertson is a doctoral candidate at Brigham Young University.

Western culture in general values individual autonomy and emphasizes pleasure seeking and material satisfaction.⁴ Ritual performances that build religious communities do not have the prominence they had anciently. At times they can even connote negative stereotypes as religious discourse and worship is increasingly pushed out of the public sphere.

Though we live in an “enlightened” secular culture, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are involved in sacred religious rituals from a young age. These rituals, called ordinances, include baptism, the sacrament, the laying on of hands for blessing and healing, and other rites involved in consecrating, dedicating, and covenant making. Sometimes, however, we experience tension between the secular and the sacred. This tension may be felt more acutely when we enter the Temple for the first time. Our secular world is the “water in which we swim.” Ancient, sacred rituals are generally not part of our cultural mindset in the same way they were to Saints in earlier dispensations. That is not to say that Saints of old did not feel pulled between the sacred and the profane, but secularism is the cultural view of our modern world.

We can receive insight into the great and sacred nature of ritual performance involved in covenant making by studying God’s dealings with his people in the ancient world. The purpose of this essay is to define what ritual is and then to show how sacred ritual worship is particularly illustrated in the Old Testament. It will focus on three aspects of true ritual: (1) its immediate enlivening power, (2) its increased power through renewal and remembrance, and (3) its long-term sanctifying power to bring us to Christ. After this I will focus on specific Old Testament rituals and ritual objects that illustrate these aspects and then compare ancient and modern qualifications to enter Temples. Some ancient rituals are similar to those in the latter-day Church. They illustrate commonalities between ancient and modern-day practice. This is one way in which we see that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (see 2 Nephi 27:23). There is great wisdom in the Old Testament for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

In my own experience, I have struggled in the past to understand why the Lord uses symbols and rituals in some of the most important covenants that we make. When I adopted an in-depth study regimen of the Old Testament over a long period, the Temple came alive for me in ways

I had not anticipated. I received unexpected understanding of the importance of ritual symbolism and the great eternal nature of God's dealings with his children. As one writer expressed, "What a critical blessing it is . . . to be able to see Church practices . . . from our Heavenly Father's perspective. That perspective . . . protects us from disenchantment, offense, or misunderstanding that can fester in our souls and take us out of the Church."⁵ By learning about ritual ordinances in the Old Testament, I feel I have an increased perspective on mortality and eternity.

WHAT IS RITUAL?

A ritual or rite is a carefully prescribed procedure. A performance is an act or deed. Though similar, a ritual may be more repetitive and structured than a performance. Both call for set action. In a gospel sense, a sacred ritual revealed by God is a ceremonial procedure that is a physical demonstration of an eternal truth. Put another way, it is the expression of truth through prescribed symbolic action. The concept of sacred ritual has been described by some scholars as one element in a kind of universal temple typology. Initiation rites have been part of sacred worship in the temples of many ancient cultures.⁶ In this context, the primordial purpose of these rites was to open up communication to higher states or realms.⁷ This definition is certainly part of a gospel understanding.

However, Latter-day Saints view sacred ritual in a more narrow sense. It is the symbolic act that is also known as an ordinance. *Ordinance* means "precept, given by one in authority." Over time, ordinance has come to mean a ritual act because God's precepts or laws were often given through ritual. Ordinance can also mean the act of conferring or receiving something that is holy. The biblical Hebrew "ordinance" (*huqqah*) usually means "law," "statute," or occasionally "rite." Thus Leviticus 18:4, "Keep mine ordinances, to walk therein," means "obey my laws and follow my decrees." *Ordinance* is derived ultimately from the Latin *ordinare*, which means to set in order or to arrange in ranks to prepare for battle.⁸ Taken altogether, these definitions imply that holy rituals prepare us for battle. Because God is a God of order (see I Corinthians 14:33), he requires specific physical acts to prepare us for the battles of this life. Many of these ritual acts are given in the "house of order," the Temple (D&C 109:8).

How does the physicality of these ordinances prepare us for the battles of life and to be worthy to see the face of God?

The Prophet Joseph Smith said that the power of godliness must be manifested to “men in the flesh”: It is “in the ordinances . . . [that] the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; for without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live” (D&C 84:20–22). In other words, it is through ordinances that God’s power is manifest, not just spiritually but physically. God’s ordinances must involve the physical body for his power to be manifested.

The rituals involved in gospel ordinances are the physical indications of what is happening inwardly. The whole person is involved in the act, whatever it may be, in order to show God that we are participating with our whole souls, our complete beings. In this way both our bodies and spirits are changed and given the power of godliness promised. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew *nefesh* refers to the whole living person. For example, when Jacob sought the birthright blessing from Isaac, he said, “Arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul [*nefesh*] may bless me” (meaning a physical laying on of hands) (Genesis 27:19). *Nefesh* was translated into the Greek Bible as *psyche*. Greek thought, which considered the body evil and corrupt,⁹ influenced the meaning of the term *soul* until it came to connote the unembodied moral essence of a person. The notion that the soul includes both body and spirit (see D&C 88:15–16) was eventually lost. Today, it is mostly unique to Latter-day Saint thought.

The ancient Hebrew sense of ordinances was nonmetaphysical. They existed only as they were expressed in a person. In other words, spiritual truths remained unfounded until they were experienced. The Lord said, “Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart” (D&C 8:2). How does the Holy Ghost “dwell in your heart”? It is received and experienced. Joseph Smith observed, “Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to *them*, can never give *us* a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. Knowledge of these things can only be obtained by experience through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose. . . . I assure the Saints that truth, in reference to

these matters, can and may be known through the revelations of God in the way of his ordinances.”¹⁰ In other words, eternal truths are not completely learned until they are experienced. They are experienced in the mind and the heart, in the body, and in the soul.¹¹ When Christ appeared to the Nephites at their temple site in Bountiful, they fell down before him in awe or fear. He invited them to see and feel his wounds. It was after experiencing the wounds of Christ one by one that they then felt an adoring reverence for him and shouted “Hosanna,” meaning “Save us now.” This physical witnessing of the wounds of Christ revealed to them their true condition in mortality (see 3 Nephi 11:12–17).

Truths reside and are expressed within people. “Activity in a physical body is the most fundamental category of Hebrew thought. . . . The way something is defines what it is. . . . How something is and what it is are inseparable.”¹² This Hebrew sense is conveyed when Jesus Christ said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). To embody truth is to live and act like Christ. It follows, then, that expressions in sacred ritual ordinances are expressions of truth. The physicality of ritual reflects the importance that God places upon the body and its eventual glorification for those who do his works.

THE ENLIVENING POWER OF RITUAL

As we attempt to grasp the function and meaning of ritual worship as individuals, we may react similarly to Adam of old when the angel asked why he offered sacrifices. He replied, “I know not, save the Lord commanded me” (Moses 5:6). The angel then taught Adam that his sacrifice had within it a symbol and a pattern that brought great meaning to his life. It was in similitude of the great sacrifice of Christ who was to come (see Moses 5:7–8). In fact, the physical performances of ritual ordinances, if done in faith, help to make us *alive* in Christ.

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel referred to this “aliveness” when he prophesied of a new spirit and a new heart for believers in the latter days. The Lord spoke through Ezekiel concerning the power that observing ordinances have to renew us: “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my

people, and I will be their God” (Ezekiel 11:19–20). Also, the Lord states in Jeremiah 31:33, “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” How does the Lord write his law in our hearts and in our inward parts? How does he give us hearts of flesh? Though these passages do not mention specific rituals, the implication is there in the phrase “I will put my law in their inward parts.” He gives us his law and statutes in an interactive covenant process with the Spirit of the living God to be put in the fleshy tables of our hearts (see 2 Corinthians 3:3). Rather than stone, or something lifeless, he gives us hearts of flesh, meaning we come alive and are reborn through a covenant process (see Hebrews 8:10–11; Mosiah 13:11).

The enlivening power of true ritual is attended by efficacy, virtue, and force (see D&C 132:7). After Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery baptized one another, they immediately experienced “great and glorious blessings from our Heavenly Father” and began to prophesy and rejoice. They received discernment in interpreting scripture (Joseph Smith—History 1:73–74). Their baptism was enlightening to the mind and enlivening to the whole soul. Similarly, Adam was immediately “quickenened in the inner man” after he was baptized (Moses 6:65). These passages demonstrate that sacred ritual quickens and invigorates our bodies and increases powers of discernment and revelation. This supports Joseph Smith’s claim that “being born again, comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances.”¹³

The enlivening power of a symbolic act is illustrated when Moses invited the children of Israel to look upon the brazen serpent to be healed from the bites of fiery serpents. Most did not understand this symbolic act. The serpent represented Christ raised up on the cross (see Numbers 21:6–9; Helaman 8:14–15). The performance was simple, to come and cast their eyes upon a symbol that could “enliven” them physically and spiritually. However, we learn from Alma in the Book of Mormon that some of the children of Israel “would not look, therefore they perished” (Alma 33:20). Others who did “look and live” did not understand the meaning of the symbol (Alma 33:19–20).

In the first group, “the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them” because of the hardness of their

hearts (Alma 33:20). They lacked faith, and thus they perished. But the second group who did “look and live” must have had enough faith to be healed. Alma described them *also* as having a hardness of heart. He noted that even though *many* did look and live, “*few* understood the meaning of those things [the symbol of the brazen serpent], and this because of the hardness of their hearts” (Alma 33:20; emphasis added). Perhaps this group’s hardness of heart was a lack of sensitivity or open-mindedness toward *practices* with which they were not familiar. Here was a symbol alluding to Christ and his saving power. Was it because they were unfamiliar with such a symbol or that it did not fit their cultural paradigm for healing that they were not willing to try to understand it? With our twenty-twenty hindsight, it is easy to judge their actions as ignorant and foolish. On the other hand, should we not ask ourselves about our own attitudes when we do not understand or have respect for the symbols and rituals the Lord has given to save us?

POWER OF RITUAL INCREASED THROUGH RENEWAL AND REMEMBRANCE

One way to gain understanding and respect for symbolic rituals is to repeat them often. When replicated, the power of ritual increases. This is done in two ways. First, the ritual becomes a memorial of the original act or covenant. Second, the ritual is renewed and strengthens the covenantal relationship.

A memorial serves as a remembrance of a person or an event. The Lord refers to the fact that some of the ordinances done today are a memorial for those done anciently. He told the Saints of this dispensation, “I commanded Moses that he should build a tabernacle . . . that those ordinances might be revealed which had been hid from before the world was. Therefore, verily I say unto you, that . . . your *memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi* . . . are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house” (D&C 124:38–39; emphasis added). This notion of memorial, or commemorating an earlier event through a later ordinance, was evident when the feast of the Passover was instituted. The Lord said, “This day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever” (Exodus 12:14). “Ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt

offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a *memorial* before your God” (Numbers 10:10; emphasis added).

Baptism and the sacrament are rituals that memorialize Christ’s death, Resurrection, and atoning sacrifice. Along with serving as a memorial, the sacrament renews the original covenant relationship the person has made with God. The person receives forgiveness of sins and strength through the Holy Ghost. This covenant includes a willingness to bear others’ burdens, which strengthens communal bonds. It also includes a promise to take upon ourselves Christ’s name, which implies renewing all other priesthood and Temple covenants we have made.¹⁴ Those who return to the Temple for proxy work find spiritual refuge, renewal, hope, and revelation. By remembering and commemorating the recent or ancient past, these ordinances instill a genuine optimism about the future.¹⁵

Is the concept of renewal, of sealing the ritual into our souls through repetition, merely figurative, or is there a literal manifestation of this repetition in our bodies? Perhaps this is one way in which we receive his image “engraven” upon our countenances (see Alma 5:14, 19). Apart from our minds, do our physical bodies have memory? Some social scientists assert that memory resides not just in our mind or brain but in all parts of our body.¹⁶ Such questions have implications for what our bodies will be like in the Resurrection. There “our works will condemn us” (Alma 12:14) if they have not been “holy works” (Alma 12:30).

Others believe memory can also reside within a culture or community.¹⁷ Communal rituals or performances such as Temple dedications, solemn assemblies, ward and Churchwide fasts, weekly sacramental ritual, and even regular conferences where God’s people gather to hear the law go forth from the prophet all invoke communal memory that strengthens God’s people.

Ritual objects and actions are given to us by God through priesthood channels. In other words, the physical symbols (such as those in the sacrament) remind us of the Lord’s sacrifice, but they are also tied to God because he gave them to us. One writer expounds on the importance of “memory” in ritual objects. He muses on the meaning of his wedding ring as a ritual object of his marriage. As a symbol it is connected to memory because when he wears it, it always reminds him of the day he got married. But it is more than just a reminder. Because his wife gave it to him,

it has a physical relation to her and is a memorial of their relationship. It demands an attitude of fidelity when it is worn. It gives order to his world.¹⁸ Likewise, sacred rituals and objects (such as sacred clothing or sacramental emblems) give order to our world and demand a certain attitude and behavior. God gave them to us, and they tie us to him. They were instituted from before the foundation of the world, and they sanctify, honor, and glorify the performer when the rites to which they are connected are done with faith in Jesus Christ (see D&C 124:34, 39). In this sense, ritual covenant making becomes the foundation of eternal relationships with God and with beloved family members.

LONG-TERM SANCTIFYING POWER

Sacred ritual has power to sanctify, which means “to make holy or to set apart for sacred use.” Additional meanings from the Hebrew for sanctify, *qadōš*, are “to consecrate, hallow, dedicate, prepare, appoint, and purify.” The Lord sanctifies us to enter his presence as well as to use us for his purposes on the earth. The Lord commanded Moses to bring Aaron to the tabernacle and “sanctify him” to minister in the priest’s office (see Exodus 40:13–15). Aaron and his sons were set apart and made holy in order to “*sanctify* the most holy things, he and his sons for ever, to burn incense before the Lord, to minister unto him, and to bless in his name for ever” (1 Chronicles 23:13; emphasis added). The law of Moses commanded that “all the firstling males that come of thy herd and of thy flock thou shalt sanctify unto the Lord thy God” (Deuteronomy 15:19). Likewise, the Lord set apart the house of Israel: “When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel” (Deuteronomy 32:8). The Lord sanctified one day for Israel. “I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them” (Ezekiel 20:12). To sanctify a people and a day is more than to just separate them, but to make them holy.

God’s people often spurned their identity as a sanctified people. The Lord said to Abraham, “My people have gone astray from my precepts, and have not kept mine ordinances, which I gave unto their fathers; and they have not observed mine anointing, and the burial, or baptism wherewith I

commanded them” (Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 17:4–5). Centuries later, Hezekiah reigned over the wayward Southern Kingdom of Judah during the time that the Northern Kingdom was carried away by the Assyrians. The people of the Southern Kingdom had corrupted sacred rituals and had lost the sanctifying power of covenantal ordinances. Hezekiah is known for bringing about religious reforms, especially concerning how and where sacrifice was performed. “He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made” (2 Kings 18:4) because the children of Israel were burning incense to it. He admonished the priests, “Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place” (2 Chronicles 29:5). This passage implies that the priests were to once again consecrate and make hallow the Temple and themselves through a ritual process. Hezekiah was reinstating the sanctifying process in Israel. Rituals sanctify by carrying away filthiness that may reside in us and in our holy places. We have this sanctifying process often close at hand in chapels and Temples. If we yield ourselves to the Lord, we can be consecrated and set apart for his purposes. The sanctifying process builds on itself throughout our lives as we prove our fidelity to God by keeping the rites and ordinances of his Church.

PATTERNS OF SACRED RITUAL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

God has established rituals as essential elements of his plan on earth. Ancient practices of ritual worship are evident during Adam’s day, the patriarchal period, and the time when the law of Moses was instituted. They include the use of altars, ritual prayers, washings and anointings, and the donning of sacred vestments, to name a few. Additionally, the law of sacrifice had many iterations during Adam’s day, as well as the patriarchal and Mosaic periods. Similar patterns of these rituals and performances are practiced today in the restored Church. By focusing on certain ancient rituals, we can discern significance and meaning in these practices from the scriptural text. We gain insight to the eternal importance of ritual to save us.

The use of altars. Adam learned the meaning of sacrifice at an altar (see Moses 5:5–8). Noah built an altar on the first land that emerged from

the Flood, which is seen as a renewal of the original creation ritual (see Genesis 8:20). Abraham had important spiritual experiences at several places where he built altars unto the Lord and called upon his name. When the Lord appeared to him and promised, “Unto thy seed will I give this land,” he built an altar at that place (Genesis 12:7). God appeared to Jacob “when he fled from the face of his brother,” Esau. The spot became sacred space, so he built an altar there and called the place El-beth-el (The God of the House of God) (Genesis 35:7). During the Mosaic period, Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, and other prophets also built altars that became sacred space because God was manifest there.¹⁹

These and other ancient prophets built altars of stone according to the prescribed command given in Exodus 20:24–25: “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings. . . . If thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone.” In other words, the stones were to be of the earth, not cut or made by man. One writer observed that this passage in Exodus suggests that an altar’s construction (to be made of earth) “is associated with the creation of the earth and God’s covenants with humankind. As the waters of creation receded, dry land appeared and was known as the primordial mound (first hill). Here, according to legend, the gods stood in order to complete the Creation. Because of divine presence, this spot became sacred or holy ground, a point of contact between this world and the heavenly world.”²⁰ Another ritual that connects the holy altar to creation is the pouring ritual of the Second Temple period. Blood was a symbol of mortal life. Leviticus 17:11 says: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” By pouring blood upon the altars of the Temple, the process of creation was ritualized.²¹

Thus a holy altar is considered sacred space because it represents this point of contact with heaven. Indeed, some ancient Near Eastern temples were in actuality seen by their people as giant altars.²² The word translated as “altar” in Ezekiel 43:15 is the Hebrew *Har’el*, which means “mountain of God.” Altars thus symbolize the Creation and the presence of God.

In general, altars in the Tabernacle and the Temple were also made of dirt or unhewn stone but were usually boxed in with wood and overlaid with finery. Altars had horns raised from each corner upon which

the priests would smear the blood of the sacrifice in order to bring the atonement nearer to heaven. The ancients built altars not only to make offerings but to lift up prayers and devotion unto the Lord. Today altars are found in Church meetinghouses (as sacrament tables) and Temples throughout the world. Their function is similar in that they serve as specific sacred sites to bring us nearer to heaven, often through the acts of sacrifice and prayer.

Ritual prayer. The Temple is known as a “house of prayer” (Isaiah 56:7). Of the four altars within the Jerusalem Temple complex,²³ the altar of incense was directly in front of the veil of the Temple. This was an altar of prayer. John describes the smoke ascending from this altar as a symbol of the prayers of all the Saints ascending to heaven (see Revelation 5:8; 8:3–4). David’s psalm indicates this connection as well: “Lord, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee. Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense” (Psalm 141:1–2). The Holy of Holies was a place of ritual prayer once a year when the high priest supplicated the Lord on Israel’s behalf. Many remarkable prayers were given by ancient prophets and Saints.

The ritual nature of these prayers is indicated in the prescribed position of those praying. Solomon “stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven: and he said, Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart” (1 Kings 8:22–23; see also D&C 109:1). Joseph Smith used similar language to Solomon’s in the dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland Temple. Both Temple prayers beseech the Lord in Israel’s behalf.

Prayers were offered standing or kneeling with hands spread toward heaven (see 1 Kings 8:22; Ezra 9:5; Isaiah 1:15). They were offered in the Sanctuary (see 1 Samuel 1:9–12; Psalm 42:2, 4; 1 Kings 8) or looking toward the Sanctuary (see 1 Kings 8:44, 48; Daniel 6:10; Psalm 5:7).²⁴ Hezekiah sought deliverance from the Assyrians by going “up into the house of the Lord” to beseech his help (2 Kings 19:14). At the evening sacrifice, Ezra prayed with hands “spread out” and confessed the sins of his people (Ezra 9:5); Nehemiah recorded that the Levites “stood up in their place” and blessed the Lord God for ever and ever in prayer

(Nehemiah 9). Daniel, in exile without a Temple, nevertheless prayed for all scattered Israel (see Daniel 9:7). Likewise today, ritual prayers of supplication for both gathered and scattered Israel are lifted up unto the Lord continuously from early morning until night from altars in Temples throughout the world.

Sacrifice—an ordinance of atonement. In addition to prayer, one of the chief functions of an altar in the Old Testament was to offer sacrifices of various kinds. Adam offered sacrifices as a symbol of the Atonement of Christ (see Moses 5:6–7). Sacrifices included the firstlings of the flock and, later, first fruits of the field (see Exodus 22:29; 23:19). Sacrifices were considered so important that God commanded the observance of this ritual ordinance directly following Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden. Abraham sacrificed at altars in Jershon, the plains of Moreh, between Bethel and Hai, and in the plain of Mamre (see Genesis 12; 13:18, Abraham 2). Abraham’s wrenching encounter in offering up his son Isaac underscores the extreme gravity given to the law of sacrifice by the ancients. The Lord gives this law whenever there are true believers on the earth, and it is administered by priesthood authority. Sacrifices are accompanied by prayer, devotions, and thanksgiving for life and blessings.

A paramount concern in Pharaoh’s freeing of the Hebrews surrounded the urgency with which Moses and his people yearned to fulfill this law of regular sacrifice. With each plague that came upon the Egyptians, Moses pressed Pharaoh to let Israel go in order that they could travel “three days’ journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the Lord our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence” (Exodus 5:3). Consider a hypothetical modern parallel. Imagine that members of the Church today were forbidden to partake of the sacrament—a vital key to renewing our covenants and feeling invigorated and rededicated to the Lord. How lost and unanchored we might become! Without this regular ritual renewal, it might be more difficult to repent or resist the temptation to stray. This was a key reason that Moses kept importuning Pharaoh, “Let us go, we pray thee, three days’ journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the Lord our God” (Exodus 5:3).

The law of sacrifice was observed in various forms throughout the Old Testament down through the ages in both true and corrupted forms (see Exodus 22:20; Deuteronomy 32:17; 2 Kings 18:22). One early account of

the corruption of a ritual offering is that of Cain just before “he listened not any more to the voice of the Lord” (Moses 5:26). When Cain brought his offering of the fruit of the ground, “the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell” (Genesis 4:4–5). Why did the Lord not respect Cain’s offering? Was it because he had an evil disposition (see 1 John 3:12)? Was it because the offering was motivated by greed? One of the reasons behind this rejection is explained by Joseph Smith. He indicated that Cain “could have no faith, or could not exercise faith contrary to the plan of heaven. It must be shedding the blood of the Only Begotten to atone for man; for this was the plan of redemption . . . to offer a sacrifice contrary to that, no faith could be exercised, . . . consequently Cain could have no faith; and whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”²⁵ Apparently, offerings of the fruit of the ground were acceptable at other times, especially under Mosaic law; however, for this particular offering, the Lord required the shedding of blood.

Cain’s offering was also not accepted because Satan commanded it (see Moses 5:18); it was the wrong offering, and it was performed without faith in the Lord (see Hebrews 11:4). In other words, Cain had already cultivated hardness in his heart. The Lord knew his heart, and Cain’s performance of this ritual became a mockery, “for without faith no man pleaseth God” (D&C 63:11). Perhaps his participation brought even more “damnation to his soul” for performing it unworthily (see 3 Nephi 18:29), though the Lord indicates he still was in a position to repent. The Lord warned that Cain would rule over Satan if he did not repent (see Moses 5:23).

This event indicates that rejecting the covenants made before the Lord at sacred altars allows Satan to gain power in our lives. It is an illustration of the seriousness of covenant making in the eyes of God. The Lord said to Jeremiah, “And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, . . . I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life” (Jeremiah 34:18, 20).

What was the nature of these sacrifices? Within the law of Moses, the ritual acts were very specific and intricate. Full explanations of these ordinances are given elsewhere.²⁶ However, the following are some main points of the law of sacrifice: One of the purposes of the peace offering

(also known as the vow or thank offering) was a recommitment to covenants the children of Israel had made. It had similar value then as the sacramental ordinance has for us today.²⁷

Also reminiscent of our sacramental ordinances were the sin offering and the trespass offering. The sin offering had to do with repenting of inward sins—sins of omission or sins in one’s heart and thoughts that were not usually outwardly manifest. In contrast, the trespass offering was performed when repenting of outward transgressions.²⁸ These ordinances pointed to the Savior’s redemptive power and were done on a regular basis. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “Whenever the Lord revealed himself to men in ancient days, and commanded them to offer sacrifice to him, . . . it was done that they might look forward in faith to the time of his coming, and rely upon the power of that atonement for a remission of their sins.”²⁹

In the Jerusalem Temple complex, the sacrifices performed on the altar directly outside the Temple proper were done more publicly than the others and can be compared to the altar of our sacrament table.³⁰ However, today we do not bring animal sacrifices as in days of old. The emblems of the bread and water represent Christ’s body and blood. In turn, the Saints both anciently and in latter days “offer [their] whole souls as an offering unto him” (Omni 1:26) with a “broken heart and contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20). The ritual emblems of bread and water tie us to the performance of his “great and last sacrifice” (Alma 34:10).

Washings and anointings. One kind of washing done anciently was immersion, or baptism.³¹ We know that Adam, Enoch, and Noah all practiced baptism (see Moses 6:59; 7:11; 8:24). According to Jewish legend, it was a ritual of conversion to Judaism.³² The Lord explains in Doctrine and Covenants 84:25–27 that when the holy priesthood was taken out of the midst of the children of Israel in the wilderness, “the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth the key of the . . . preparatory gospel; which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of *baptism*, and the remission of sins” (emphasis added). In Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 17:4–7, the Lord said, “My people have gone astray from my precepts, . . . and they have not observed mine anointing, and the burial, or baptism wherewith I commanded them.”

Another form of washing done anciently was the initiation rite of cleansing at the door of the Temple. Priests in ancient Israel were required to be washed and anointed with oil and then clothed in a ceremonial fashion before they could enter the Tabernacle or Temple complex: “And thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and wash them with water. And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office, . . . for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations” (Exodus 40:12–15). Notice the Lord indicates the purpose of washing, anointing, and clothing. It is for Aaron to be sanctified, or made holy. He is to be set apart and purified in order to participate in other ordinances.

Again, here we have an outward representation of an inward change. The physical washing was an emblem of spiritual cleansing. It signified the cleansing from pollutions for the Lord’s people.³³ Aaron and his sons were to be purified in order to enter the house of the Lord. Similarly, we must be clean in order to dwell in the presence of the Lord. This requires a cleansing—new birth into the kingdom of God on earth and then an ongoing renewal of this cleansing. The constant renewal is a personal journey that sanctifies us for his presence.

Anointings were to be done with scented olive oil. Oil was generally considered to be a symbol of the Holy Spirit (see D&C 45:56–57) and was used in the calling of prophets and kings anciently.³⁴ It symbolized an outpouring of the Spirit upon the person anointed. Isaiah wrote, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me” (Isaiah 61:1). When Samuel anointed Saul to be king of Israel, he “took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head” and said to him, “the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man” (1 Samuel 10:1, 6). Again, the ordinance emphasizes the newness and quickening into “another [or new] man,” a man of discernment.

Washings and anointings are an outward representation of inward purification and consecration. These particular ordinances of the biblical period have a parallel today. Baptism was formally introduced when the Church was formed in April of 1830, and washings and anointings were introduced in the Kirtland Temple in 1836. The Lord told Joseph Smith

to gather the Saints and “to prepare them for the ordinances and endowments, washings and anointing.”³⁵

Sacred clothing. Following the ritual washing and anointing in ancient times, the initiate was clothed in sacred vestments, but the Lord has commanded the donning of sacred clothing from the beginning. He clothed Adam and Eve in sacred garments just before their expulsion from the garden. “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). In the sacrifice of the animals killed for their skins is a symbol that points to the great atoning sacrifice of the Savior. These skins covered Adam and Eve’s nakedness. One root word translated as “nakedness” is the Hebrew, *erwah*, or uncleanness and shame.³⁶ Additionally, the Hebrew word for “atonement” is *kaphar*. The exact meaning of *kaphar* is not known though it is often interpreted as “covering.”³⁷ The Day of Atonement in Judaism is the high, holy day of Yom Kippur, which could mean “day of covering.” The sacrifice done in Adam and Eve’s behalf effectually covered their actual nakedness while figuratively covering their transgression and shame. They received a garment that reminded them of the sacrifice of the Lord who covers sins (nakedness). The actual Day of Atonement performed by Jesus Christ could be called a day when he covered our sins, guilt, and shame as well as our infirmities and sicknesses (see Alma 7:11–14)—everything that Adam’s Fall has brought into our mortal lives. The garment of the holy priesthood is a rich symbol with many levels of meaning, including the covering of atonement we can have here in mortality.

Following this pattern, we assume that all the prophets down through the ages have been clothed with skins or garments to remind them of the sacrifice of the Lord and of the covenants they have made. This clothing ritual is usually associated with a Temple setting, such as the Garden of Eden, a mountain, or a sacred place. Enoch “went up on the mount” and was “clothed upon with glory,” a metaphor for a type of sacred clothing (Moses 7:3). Moses was commanded to make special clothing for those who would enter the Tabernacle (see Exodus 28:1–3). Hugh Nibley identified the garment taken by Shem and Japheth and put upon Noah as a robe of the priesthood, or perhaps even the original skin given to Adam that was passed down to subsequent prophets (see Genesis 9:23).³⁸ Isaiah rejoiced when he said, “God . . . hath clothed

me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10). Here, Isaiah’s word “clothed” is written in the Greek as *enduo*, which is the root for our English “endow.” This passage seems to explicitly refer to the endowment.

We know that Joseph was given the birthright by Jacob along with a “coat of many colours” (Genesis 37:3, 23, 32). Here, the Hebrew word for “coat,” *kuttonet*, also means “robe or garment of linen.” There is discussion among scholars as to the exact meaning of the Hebrew word for “colors” (*passim*). One interpretation is that it may actually refer to the length of the garment, which reached to the palms and feet. Thus, “coat of many colors” could mean “a garment of linen reaching to the palms and feet.”³⁹ Some believe that Joseph was given this garment to represent the priestly birthright in order to lead his family in the patriarchal system of the time.⁴⁰

These ancient patterns of ritual clothing are similar to the patterns for the Saints today. Memory is associated with the ritual object of the garment. Elder Carlos Asay said, “I like to think of the garment as the Lord’s way of letting us take part of the temple with us when we leave. It is true that we carry from the Lord’s house inspired teachings and sacred covenants written in our minds and hearts. However, the one tangible *remembrance* we carry with us back into the world is the garment. And though we cannot always be in the temple, a part of it can always be with us to bless our lives.”⁴¹

Elder Asay also commented on allusions to the garment in the scriptures. “Don’t forget that the word *garment* is used symbolically in the scriptures and gives expanded meaning to other words such as *white, clean, pure, righteous, modesty, covering, ceremonial, holy, priesthood, beautiful, perfection, salvation, undefiled, worthy, white raiment, shield, protection, spotless, blameless, armor, covenants, promises, blessings, respect, eternal life*, and so forth. All of these words occupy special places in the vocabularies of people sincerely [striving] to become Saints.”⁴²

QUALIFICATIONS FOR ENTERING HOLY TEMPLES

We turn our discussion now to those in ancient Israel who were qualified to enter the Temple. Psalm 24 is presumably a hymn referring to the Sanctuary on the Holy Mount. David asks, “Who shall ascend into the

hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?” Then the answer to these questions is presented: “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.” David then recounts the blessings for those who qualify in this manner, “He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face” (Psalm 24:3–6). Some commentators have identified these verses as sort of a set of ancient Temple recommend questions.⁴³ Donald Parry cites some biblical scholars who suggest that a priest might have actually posed these questions to Temple visitors at the Temple gate, or written them on the doorposts of the Temple, or that these qualifications were even sung by worshippers or priests in the Temple courtyard.⁴⁴ In any case, they seem to indicate standards for Temple entrance in ancient Israel, and they also reflect some similarities to Temple entrance standards today.

If Psalm 24 indicates that temple entrants were required to have “clean hands, and a pure heart,” what does that mean? With a careful reading, it is apparent that clean hands and pure hearts represent two different things, possibly even two categories of things. The first, clean hands, is indicative of outward preparatory qualifications, some of them ritual oriented and some performance oriented. These qualifications may be compared to modern ritual preparations for the Temple such as baptism, receipt of the Holy Ghost, and priesthood ordination (formal rituals). Other less-formal acts are paying tithing, keeping the Word of Wisdom, attending Church meetings, sustaining Church leaders, meeting financial obligations and family responsibilities, wearing the garment correctly, and acting honestly. These are “the clean hands,” or outward performances. It is interesting to note that we can fulfill all of these outward performances without having proper motives.

However, the second kind of qualification in Psalm 24, pure hearts, *does* represent untainted motives for ancient Israel. Likewise, similar requirements of pure motives are part of Temple entrance qualifications today: having faith in the Godhead, having a testimony of the Atonement of Christ, having a testimony of the current prophet, desiring to keep our covenants, feeling worthy to attend the Temple, and so forth. These requirements cannot be met without proper motives or “pure hearts.” In a conference address, Elder David A. Bednar touched upon the meaning of

“clean hands and pure hearts.” He declared, “It is possible for us to have clean hands but not have a pure heart. Please notice that both clean hands and a pure heart are required to ascend into the hill of the Lord and to stand in His holy place.”⁴⁵ He observed that prophets throughout the ages have emphasized the dual requirements of (1) acting good and (2) being good. But Elder Bednar takes this teaching even further in recognizing that our clean hands and pure hearts are not what ultimately save us here and now or in the eternities. Our outward actions can sanctify us only if they are done with pure motives and faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, having a heart made pure through Jesus Christ is what makes clean hands efficacious. Elder Bednar continues, “Prophets throughout the ages have emphasized the dual requirements of (1) avoiding and overcoming bad and (2) doing good and becoming better. . . . All of our worthy desires and good works, as necessary as they are, can never produce clean hands and a pure heart. It is the Atonement of Jesus Christ that provides both a *cleansing and redeeming power* that helps us to overcome sin and a *sanctifying and strengthening power* that helps us to become better than we ever could by relying only upon our own strength.”⁴⁶

SUMMARY

The sanctifying power of ritual ordinances is illustrated in the Old Testament. This power can change us into new people whose hands are clean and hearts are pure. The power of these sanctifying actions should not be underestimated. The resulting blessings were described by Isaiah as he foretold of faithful Saints who would enter the Lord’s house to receive an everlasting name: “Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place [sometimes translated as *hand*] and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. . . . Every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (Isaiah 56:5–7). The beauty and effectiveness of sacred rites and ordinances illustrated in the Old Testament are similar to patterns that exist for Latter-day Saints, often leading to revelation and great blessings for the participants.

NOTES

1. Erika Summers-Effler, "Ritual Theory," in *The Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*, ed. Jan E. Stets and Jonathan H. Turner (New York: Springer, 2006), 135.

2. Hugh Nibley, *The Ancient State* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 99–147; see discussions about the "sacred and profane," and the term "hierophany," which signifies a manifestation of the sacred, in Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 1–37; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1987); see also Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

3. See Kenneth McLeish, *Key Ideas in Human Thought* (New York: Prima Publishing, 1995).

4. See the discussion of modernity in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 285–91.

5. Andrew C. Skinner, *Temple Worship* (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 2007), 131–32.

6. See John M. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 83–117; John M. Lundquist, "Fundamentals of Temple Ideology from Eastern Traditions," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 651–702.

7. See Lundquist, "Temple Ideology," 678.

8. *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, 1st ed., s.v. "ordinance"; Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=ordinance>.

9. John M. Dillon, "Platonism," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:378–81.

10. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 324–25.

11. See James E. Faulconer, *Scripture Study* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 135–53; Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: Norton, 1970).

12. Faulconer, *Scripture Study*, 139–41.

13. Smith, *Teachings*, 162.

14. Dallin H. Oaks, "Taking Upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ," *Ensign*, May 1985, 81.

15. See Skinner, *Temple Worship*, 21.

16. Though this is a new and somewhat controversial field in medicine and the social sciences (see Madhulika A. Gupta, "Somatization Disorders in Dermatology," *International Review of Psychiatry* 18, no. 1 [February 2006]: 41–47), it has been addressed by phenomenological philosophers for some time (see Thomas Fuchs, "The Tacit Dimension," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 8, no. 4 [December 2001]: 323–26; see also Thomas Fuchs, University of Heidelberg, paper entitled "The Memory of the Body," <http://www.klinikum.uni-heidelberg.de/fileadmin/zpm/psychiatrie/ppp2004/manuskript/fuchs.pdf>; see also Babette Rothschild, *The Body*

Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment [New York: Norton, 2000]).

17. Charles Golden, "Where Does Memory Reside, and Why Isn't It History?" *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 2 (2005): 270–74.

18. James E. Faulconer, "Remembrance," in *FARMS Review* 19, no. 2 (2007): 71–87.

19. Terrence L. Szink, "Altar of Stones," in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 44.

20. Bruce H. Porter, "Altar," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 36–37.

21. Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: Continuum International, 2003), 287–88.

22. Geoffrey W. Bromley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), s.v. "Religions: Assyria and Babylonia."

23. (1) The altar of sacrifice or burnt offering in the court of Israel; (2) the altar of incense in the holy place; (3) the table of shewbread which held twelve loaves of bread, frankincense, and a drink offering; and (4) the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies where the high priest represented all Israel in covenant prayer once a year on the Day of Atonement (see Porter, "Altar," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 36–37).

24. Bible Dictionary, "Prayer," 752.

25. Smith, *Teachings*, 58.

26. See Bible Dictionary, "sacrifices," 765–67; see also Gary A. Anderson, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:870.

27. For a full discussion of Mosaic sacrifices and their comparison to the gospel of Jesus Christ, see Edward J. Brandt, "The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ," in *Sperry Symposium Classics*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University 2005), 133–53.

28. Brandt, "The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ," 137.

29. Smith, *Teachings*, 60–61.

30. Porter, "Altar," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 36–37.

31. See Moses 6:65; Robert J. Woodford, "How Much Do We Know about Baptism before Christ's Time?" *Ensign*, July 1991, 74.

32. See Louis Ginzburg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1939), 3:88.

33. Donald W. Parry, "Washings and Anointings," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1551.

34. Matthew B. Brown, *The Gate of Heaven* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 1999), 127; Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 114–15; Immo Luschin, "Ordinances," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1032–33.

35. Smith, *Teachings*, 308.

36. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 788.

37. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 497.

38. Hugh Nibley, "On the Sacred and the Symbolic," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 579.
39. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 509.
40. William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1978), s.v. "colour."
41. Carlos E. Asay, "The Temple Garment: An Outward Expression of an Inward Commitment," *Ensign*, August 1997, 19; emphasis added.
42. Asay, "Temple Garment," 21.
43. Both Psalm 15:1, "Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" and Isaiah 33:14, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" are also presumed to be Temple entrance hymns. According to Joseph Smith, "everlasting burnings" refers to where God is enthroned with glory (see *Teachings*, 347).
44. Donald W. Parry, "Temple Entrance Hymns," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith*, 734–39; Brown, *Gate of Heaven*, 62.
45. David A. Bednar, "Clean Hands and a Pure Heart," *Ensign*, November 2007, 80–83.
46. Bednar, "Clean Hands," 82–83.