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## Introduction

The study of sacred architecture, over the past few decades, has become a topic that is “integrative (interdisciplinary), diverse (ecumenical), cutting edge (at the forefront of research), rigorous, and open.”<sup>1</sup> In the expanding study of sacred architecture, however, a more contemporary religious building type that has often been neglected is the Mormon temple. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (whose members are often referred to as “Mormons”) has been characterized as one of the fastest growing Christian faiths in the world.<sup>2</sup> The Church’s growth is especially connected with the built environment. In December 2009, the Presiding Bishop H. David Burton stated that the Church would

## **(Re)interpreting the Cosmic History of the Mormon Temple Experience: Theological Connections between Jewish and Catholic Sacred Space\***

BY BRANDON RO

\* This article is an unpublished, revised, and expanded version of Brandon Ro, “The Mormon Temple Ritual-Architectural Experience: Connections to Jewish and Catholic Ritual Contexts and Sacred History” (paper presented at the 30th Meeting of the Southeast Society of Architectural Historians, Athens, GA, October 17-20, 2012).

<sup>1</sup> For the full argument, see Tom Barrie et al., “Architecture, Culture & Spirituality: Creating a Forum for Scholarship and Discussion of Spirituality and Meaning in the Built Environment,” (2007), accessed Nov. 8, 2010, <[http://www.acsforum.org/ACS\\_proposal.pdf](http://www.acsforum.org/ACS_proposal.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> See Hugh Hewitt, *Searching for God in America* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), 121. Cf. Douglas James Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace, and Glory* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 241-67.

"likely build more building square footage" that year than Wal-Mart.<sup>3</sup> This statement seems to confirm the suggestion of one scholar, who writes that Mormonism is "an intensely American story, and also one intimately associated with the molding of a physical environment."<sup>4</sup> This type of environmental growth may have been a reason why sociologist of religion, Max Weber, calls Mormonism "half-way between monastery and factory."<sup>5</sup>

The Mormon temple is often referred to as a "house of learning" because one of the main rites comprises a symbolic ritual drama called the "endowment."<sup>6</sup> According to religious scholar Douglas Davies, "the temple is a kind of educational environment teaching by action and educating through ritual."<sup>7</sup> Each temple provides a unique ritual context for the presentation of the endowment ceremony and has been referred to as a "theatrical setting."<sup>8</sup> The setting consists of a series of lecture rooms used both "for performing ritual acts and for viewing ritual acts."<sup>9</sup> The endowment rite is presented "part by dramatization, part by question and answer, part by lecture, [and] part by picturization on the walls."<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the symbolic and ritualistic learning experience "involves the physical, aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual human faculties through art, drama, symbols, and scriptural representations."<sup>11</sup> The Mormon temple experience places a high priority on visual aesthetics<sup>12</sup> since both "art and architecture were developed to convey a world of beauty and transcendence where

<sup>3</sup> H. David Burton, "These Are the Times," (Provo: Brigham Young University Devotional, December 1, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Peter W. Williams, *Houses of God: Region, Religion, and Architecture in the United States*, Public Expressions of Religion in America (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 216.

<sup>5</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976), 264. Cited in Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> See Doctrine and Covenants 88:119; 109:8 (hereafter referred to as D&C).

<sup>7</sup> Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 78.

<sup>8</sup> David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 2002), 166. More specifically, "the murals are used to create a sense of theatre in the Creation Room, Garden Room, and World Room—spaces that act as metaphors for mankind's progression through life." Josh E. Probert, "The Latter-Day Saint Architectural Tradition," *Faith & Form* 44, no. 3 (2011): 33.

<sup>9</sup> Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 78.

<sup>10</sup> Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee: Eleventh President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 578.

<sup>11</sup> Victor L. Ludlow, *Principles and Practices of the Restored Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 365; cf. Alma P. Burton, "Endowment," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 455.

<sup>12</sup> "Temple rites furnish a rich visual symbolic medium for gaining access to the truth of the faith...In terms of the history of religions, Mormonism resembles the Christian sacramental traditions of Catholicism and of Orthodoxy much more than the Reformed traditions as far as its preferred visual environment within temples is concerned." Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 78-79.

time and eternity might interpenetrate."<sup>13</sup> One Mormon explains "it's like going to heaven and coming back again."<sup>14</sup> This type of transformative ritual-architectural experience is occasioned by the temple's ritual context, providing a "heightened sort of awareness that goes well beyond mere education to a kind of spiritual awakening."<sup>15</sup> As one Latter-day Saint historian writes, "in temples, we have a staged representation of the step-by-step ascent into the presence of the Eternal while we are yet alive."<sup>16</sup> The Mormon temple experience thus appears to "facilitate some sort of 'trip to heaven' insofar as they expedite salvation, bring worshippers closer to God, or maybe even facilitate a state of unity with the divine."<sup>17</sup> Consequently, it is not difficult to understand why the temple and its rites remain one of the "most profound expressions" of Mormon theology.<sup>18</sup>

During the past twenty years Mormon temples have more than doubled in number and closely paralleled the increase in Church membership, yet the architectural experience of the temple remains (mis)understood and (mis)interpreted because of its inaccessibility to non-Mormon scholars.<sup>19</sup> In recent years, however, the more frequent construction of temple projects has resulted in an increased number of open houses where non-Mormons receive a glimpse of the interior before the structure is dedicated and closed to the general public.<sup>20</sup> Other temple resources have recently become available through the Church's publication of interior photographs, exterior renderings, historic architectural drawings,

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>14</sup> Mark P. Leone, "The Mormon Temple Experience: A Non-Mormon Look at a Latter-Day Saint's Most Sacred Ritual," *Sunstone* (May 1985): 6.

<sup>15</sup> Lindsay Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture: Experience, Interpretation, Comparison*, 2 vols., Religions of the World (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1:97.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew F. Ehat, "'Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?' Sesquicentennial Reflections of a Sacred Day: 4 May 1842," in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 55.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, 1:97.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon B. Hinckley, "Of Missions, Temples, and Stewardship," *Ensign* (November 1995).

<sup>19</sup> Of this challenge, one scholar has written, "The important yet secret nature of Mormon temples raises the obvious problem for non-Mormon scholars that they cannot be involved either as a mere observer or as a participant observer in what takes place there." Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 68.

<sup>20</sup> Davies, a non-Mormon scholar, was able to visit three temples prior to their dedication. He suggests that "Some benefit is derived from having seen something of the inside of temples during periods when they have been open to the public, either after being built and before they have been dedicated, or else during periods of refurbishment." Ibid.

and new site plan proposals.<sup>21</sup> These research opportunities demand the attention of both Mormon and non-Mormon scholars in conducting refocused comparative theological studies of the architectural experience of the temple as it sits in dialogue with sacred spaces of other faiths.

### A (Self)Identifying Confession

An important aspect for any project in comparative theology is to confess one's religious identity in order to establish the lens from which one has come to view the world.<sup>22</sup> An obvious minimal requirement, since one is dealing with a "theological discipline confident about the possibility of being intelligently faithful to tradition even while seeking fresh understanding outside that tradition."<sup>23</sup> To engage in this type of project, both writer and reader must strive for humility in reciprocal listening, the empathy towards learning a foreign tradition, the dedicated patience and mutual respect that is needed in assessing difference and similarity, and the honest evaluation of the final comparative journey of faith.<sup>24</sup>

As a faithful adherent to the Latter-day Saint tradition, the odyssey that has led me to this project in comparative theology originates in my interest in the powerful spiritual experiences that frequently occur in sacred spaces – a phenomenon that has led me to visit over 120 religious buildings of various faiths around the globe. My interest in exploring the architectural experience of the Mormon temple stems from time spent serving as an ordinance worker (a type of ritual specialist) in the San Diego California Temple as well as my undergraduate efforts in designing a theoretical proposal for a Latter-day Saint temple in Rome, Italy. The conversation specifically between the Mormon temple and Jewish and Catholic sacred spaces comes in part from my own tradition's emphasis on

<sup>21</sup> For example, some historic documents, such as the Salt Lake and Nauvoo temple architectural drawings, are available online at the Church History Library, <<http://churchhistorylibrary.lds.org>>. Site plans and exterior renderings for new temples can be found at <<http://mormontemples.org>>. The often rare interior photographs are published online after a temple is either open to the public or dedicated at <<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org>>. Exterior photographs and other relevant information about each temple, such as the endowment room sequence, can be found at the non-official Church website <<http://www.ldschurchtemples.com>>. A large cut-away architectural model of the Salt Lake Temple (located just south of the actual temple in a visitor center) has given scholars another method at understanding the temple architectural experience. See photographs in "Scaled Model Provides Salt Lake Temple Open House Experience," *Church News – The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (May 28, 2010), accessed Aug. 9, 2012, <<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/scaled-model-provides-salt-lake-temple-open-house-experience>>.

<sup>22</sup> See Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 16-19, 70.

<sup>23</sup> Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> See Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 162. Cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2009), 6-7.

Judeo-Christian theology but also from various life experiences with interreligious dialogue.

As a Latter-day Saint missionary in Chile, an architecture student in both China and Italy, and the “rare” Mormon graduate student studying at the national university of the Catholic Church, I have been exposed to a small sliver of the world’s diverse religious landscape. Consequently, my awareness of other religious traditions has been enriched through opportunities to engage in some sort of interreligious dialogue – at times ranging from casual conversations on dirt roads in the Andean countryside to more formal presentations and discussions in the academy. In each case, my experiences were, as Francis X. Clooney describes, “simply interpersonal conversations among persons of different religious traditions who are willing to listen to one another and share their stories of faith and values.”<sup>25</sup>

Members of the Latter-day Saint tradition are encouraged to seek truth and “learning even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118; 109:7, 14). While this includes a vast array of topics, it should include the study of other religious traditions – especially as manifested in comparative theology.<sup>26</sup> As defined by Clooney, *comparative theology* “marks acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions...for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered tradition/s as well as the home tradition.”<sup>27</sup> Consequently, Mormons should view *comparative theology* as a means of “learning by study and faith,” since it is “about learning across religious borders in a way that discloses the truth of my faith, in the light of their faith.”<sup>28</sup> The search for truth and understanding, especially in the academic sense of rigorous scholarship, can and should be viewed by Latter-day Saints as a form of dedicated discipleship to God. As Neal A. Maxwell, a noted member of the Church’s Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, explains:

For a disciple of Jesus Christ, academic scholarship is a form of worship. It is actually another dimension of consecration. Hence one who seeks to be a disciple-scholar will take both scholarship and discipleship seriously; and, likewise, gospel covenants. For the disciple-scholar, the first and second great commandments frame and prioritize life. How else could

<sup>25</sup> Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 10.

<sup>26</sup> See arguments in Spencer J. Palmer et al., *Religions of the World: A Latter-Day Saint View* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1997), 3-13. Cf. D&C 88:78-79; 91:1-6. For an example of such a project, see Alonzo L. Gaskill, *Know Your Religions: A Comparative Look at Mormonism and Catholicism* (Orem, UT: Millennial, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 15-16, see also 9, 36, 165.

one worship God with all of one's heart, might, *mind*, and strength? (Luke 10:27)<sup>29</sup>

Mormons come to perceive and interpret the world around them through their knowledge and understanding of God's truth. The disciple-scholar, therefore, "responds to religious testimony reflectively" and in return shares his or her understanding of God's truth with the world.<sup>30</sup> This is essentially a type of *hermeneutical* practice under the rubric of theology. In general, *hermeneutics* "explores how we read, understand, and handle texts"<sup>31</sup> or (more broadly speaking and for our purposes) how we interpret religious "texts" comprising scriptures, ritual practices, religious art, spiritual experiences, and sacred architecture.<sup>32</sup> The hermeneutical interpretation of these religious texts "can awaken us again to the witness they offer, the witness of a divine call." Then, the disciple-scholar is able to read "his or her religion reflectively, testifying hermeneutically of the divine transcendence witnessed in those texts," writes James E. Faulconer. This is "among the acts appropriate to religious life. It is testimony."<sup>33</sup> Consequently, there is a strong correlation between comparative theology and hermeneutics, because the latter "produces habits of respect for, and more sympathetic understanding of, views and arguments that at first seem alien or unacceptable." In essence, hermeneutics is an effort "to establish bridges between opposing viewpoints" that are commonly found in religion.<sup>34</sup>

### The Prospectus

In light of the above (self)identifying confessional, the prospectus of this paper seeks to (re)interpret the cosmic history of the Mormon temple experience – the focus resting on the "endowment" ordinance and its ritual drama spatial sequence. As a comparative theological project designed to enhance one's learning across religious borders, the Mormon tradition is compared to the ritual contexts and episodes of cosmic history for Jewish and Catholic sacred spaces.

To assist in the comparative procedure and produce the architectural hermeneutic, I have chosen to use the "morphology of

<sup>29</sup> Neal A. Maxwell, "The Disciple-Scholar," in *On Becoming a Disciple Scholar*, ed. Henry B. Eyring (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 7. Emphasis in original.

<sup>30</sup> Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen, eds., *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 434.

<sup>31</sup> Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> For more on how architecture can be viewed as a text, see Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, 1:121-33.

<sup>33</sup> Musser and Paulsen, eds., *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*, 434. Benjamin Huff even goes so far as to suggest that "Mormons may have more reasons than Catholics for approaching theology hermeneutically" because of the belief in continuing revelation. *Ibid.*, 482.

<sup>34</sup> Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 5-6. Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 162.

ritual-architectural priorities" (as outlined in the second volume of *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture* by Lindsay Jones). The framework is specifically designed to help researchers (such as myself) to "give serious consideration to versions of the interrelations between built forms, ritual processes, and human experiences that might otherwise have escaped their attentions, thus providing points of departure for endlessly diversified avenues of interpreting...architecture."<sup>35</sup>

The prospectus of the project also incorporates comparative theological practices to enhance one's learning across religious borders. The journey of faith turns its attention to the commemorative content of sacred architecture – namely the spiritual messages and symbolic meanings that it offers. The ritual environments of each religion are compared in terms of their narrative sequence of spaces and stage-like backdrops. These comparisons are an attempt to advance how the spatial experience of architecture can help religious participants (re)live episodes of cosmic history. Mormons, for instance, are given a lens through which the "plan of salvation," as taught through the temple experience, can be (re)interpreted in light of Jewish and Catholic symbolism.

The central thesis of the paper, therefore, is to explore how Jones' hermeneutical method of comparing and interpreting sacred architecture is compatible with the methods of comparative theologians. When the two are combined, their synergy helps enrich our understanding of the architectural experience for a specific religious building typology as it is compared non-historically, cross-culturally, or inter-religiously to other cases of sacred architecture. It is my hope that readers, especially those from the religious traditions discussed in this paper, will gain greater appreciation for the commonalities that exist between each case of sacred architecture so that we might attempt to bridge the chasm of difference and (mis)understanding. The ultimate success of the project will be in what types of "spiritual insights"<sup>36</sup> seekers actually receive from this dialectic and then how those "fresh

<sup>35</sup> Jones, *The Hermeneutics of Sacred Architecture*, 2:295.

<sup>36</sup> Lindsay Jones, "Architectural Catalysts to Contemplation: Unexplored Alliances between Ancient Monuments and Religious Sensibilities" (paper presented at the Interdisciplinary Symposium - Transcending Architecture: Aesthetics and Ethics of the Numinous, The Catholic University of America, October 6-8, 2001). Jones' paper will soon be published in the forthcoming book Julio Bermudez, ed. *Transcending Architecture: Aesthetics and Ethics of the Numinous* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013?).

theological insights"<sup>37</sup> can foster yet additional opportunities for future interreligious dialogue.

### **(Re)interpreting Cosmic History**

Many configurations of sacred architecture offer a prescribed sequence of spaces known as the "spiritual path." The goal of such an architectural move is to provide "a dynamic experience where symbolic themes are expressed three-dimensionally and experienced visually, haptically, and emotionally,"<sup>38</sup> writes Thomas Barrie. In most cases, the "path can be described as a series of stations or even separate rooms that the faithful go through in a defined order to prepare to come in contact with the 'other world.'"<sup>39</sup> Consequently, each series of stations or separate rooms along the "spiritual path" provide unique stage-like settings and theatrical backdrops that communicate some kind of thematic message.

There is a strong presence of this type of theatrical presentation in Mormon, Jewish, and Catholic architectural configurations. In each case, episodes of cosmic history are commonly represented by different rooms. For instance, early Mormon temples dedicated each one of their endowment rooms to a specific episode of cosmic history, which Latter-day Saints would more readily recognize as the "plan of salvation." Given that the primary focus of the current project is on (re)interpreting episodes of cosmic history within the Mormon temple, the five-room spatial sequence will be used to frame the intriguing cross-sections between religions. The definition for each episode of cosmic history has been expanded to address a broader Judeo-Christian audience, as the terminology for Mormon temple rooms (i.e., Celestial, Terrestrial, and Telestial) is typically unfamiliar to outsiders. Building upon Harold Turner's original episodes of cosmic history that he attributed to the Latter-day Saint temple,<sup>40</sup> the five themes discussed in this paper include: 1) the cosmogonic primordial era; 2) the paradisaal world of Eden; 3) the fallen, disordered world; 4) the Messianic paradisiacal era; and 5) the perfected Heavenly realm. The journey of faith in learning

<sup>37</sup> Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 10. Since Jones is both a student of Mircea Eliade and has followed in his footsteps as editor for the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, it is relevant to point out that a similar assessment was recently made between Eliade's hermeneutical methodology and the hermeneutical methods employed in comparative theology. See, for instance, Oludamini Ogunnaike, "Myth and the Secret of Destiny: Mircea Eliade's Creative Hermeneutics and the Yorùbá Concept of Orí," *Journal of Comparative Theology* 3, no. 1 (April 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Barrie, *The Sacred in-Between: The Mediating Roles of Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 107.

<sup>39</sup> D. Kirk Hamilton and David H. Watkins, *Evidence-Based Design for Multiple Building Types* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 167.

<sup>40</sup> Harold W. Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Sacred Space* (Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1979), 46. It should be noted that Turner left out the Terrestrial room which is associated with (what I have termed) the Messianic paradisiacal era.

across religious borders begins as each of the five episodes is compared against the others. The hermeneutical “texts” that will be “read” for each tradition includes holy scripture, ritual practices, spiritual experiences, religious art, and sacred architecture.

### Episode I: The Cosmogonic Primordial Era

The first episode in the comparative theological sequence is the cosmogonic primordial era. Several similar themes are interwoven between the three religions and include the following: spiritual creation, darkness, formlessness, and pre-created light.

#### Mormon

The Latter-day Saint temple five-room endowment sequence begins in a space representing the primordial era or preexistent state before the earth’s creation.<sup>41</sup> It is not ironic that it is named the Creation room. In this space, initiates are taught a “course of instruction [which] includes a recital of the most prominent events of the creative period.”<sup>42</sup> An important part of the creation story or cosmogonic myth<sup>43</sup> is the “spiritual creation [that] occurred ‘in heaven.’”<sup>44</sup> This event is believed to have occurred during a preexistent state before the earth’s physical creation, a period when “matter [was] unorganized.”<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Examples of temples with a five-room sequence include those in Salt Lake City (UT), Manti (UT), Mesa (AZ), Laie (HI), and Los Angeles (CA). There are a total of eleven Mormon structures that were designed with a five-room endowment sequence.

<sup>42</sup> James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord: A Study of Holy Sanctuaries, Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), 83.

<sup>43</sup> The term “myth” in relation to Mormon temple traditions may seem peculiar and even offensive to some Latter-day Saints. One LDS scholar explains that this should not be the case: “The use of the word ‘myth’...should not unsettle Latter-day Saints as it often does. In this context, ‘myth’ refers to sacred stories that explain the interventions of the divine into human affairs—the interventions that reveal covenant laws, temple rites, and the purpose of human existence.” John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, 27 March 1990*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 1:442.

<sup>44</sup> Lynn M. Hilton, *The Kolob Theorem: A Mormon’s View of God’s Starry Universe* (Orem, UT: Granite Publishing & Distribution, 2006), 85-86.

<sup>45</sup> Terry John O’Brien, “A Study of the Effect of Color in the Utah Temple Murals” (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 1968), 29. The LDS Book of Abraham reads, “We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell” (Abr. 3:24). Mormon doctrine proclaims a belief in *creatio ex materia* (creation out of pre-existent matter) instead of the mainstream Christian belief in *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing). Nevertheless, it should be noted that up until the third century early Christians did not adopt the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. See arguments in Jonathan A. Goldstein, “The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35, no. 2 (1984): 1; James Noel Hubler, “Creatio Ex Nihilo: Matter, Creation, and the Body in Classical and Christian Philosophy through Aquinas” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 102-27.

In the earliest temple configurations, Creation rooms were simple, unadorned, and dimly lit to reinforce the primordial era when the "earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2).<sup>46</sup> Later, Creation rooms were adorned with painted mural scenes depicting the creation of heaven and earth. For example, in 1915 the Creation room's plain walls in the Salt Lake Temple were embellished with "an encompassing wall and ceiling mural, depicting the stages of the earth's creation."<sup>47</sup> In this case, the murals served as a new symbolic message suggesting how the earth's spiritual creation or blueprint was planned and designed prior to having been constructed in physical form.<sup>48</sup> William Hamblin suggests that "we should understand the LDS Endowment as a ritual and dramatic participation in the...divine council of God, through which God reveals to the covenanter his...secret plan of salvation—the hidden meaning and purpose of creation and the cosmos."<sup>49</sup> It is in the Creation room, therefore, that Latter-day Saints are taught about the cosmogonic primordial era through lecture, murals, and spatial sequence. As we shift our attention to Judaism, we find important theological parallels to Mormon creation myths.

### Jewish

Similar to the Mormon endowment, creation accounts and symbolism played an important role in the liturgy of the Judaic

<sup>46</sup> This was the case in both the Nauvoo and Salt Lake temples. See Lisle G Brown, "The Sacred Departments for Temple Work in Nauvoo: The Assembly Room and the Council Chamber," *BYU Studies* 19, no. 3 (1979): 371; Talmage, *The House of the Lord: A Study of Holy Sanctuaries, Ancient and Modern*, 156; O'Brien, "A Study of the Effect of Color in the Utah Temple Murals", 21.

<sup>47</sup> C. Mark Hamilton, "The Salt Lake Temple: An Architectural Monograph" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1978), 114; cf. O'Brien, "A Study of the Effect of Color in the Utah Temple Murals", 21. While the wall murals helped to enhance the ritual backdrop, it should be noted that they were designed to be "subdued in tones" and not distract from the proceedings. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 204.

<sup>48</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 210-11. For related scriptural ideas found in LDS sources, see Moses 3:5-9; 6:63; Abra. 4:31; 5:3-5; D&C 77:2. See also Job 38:4-7. One Church leader has referred to the creation account in the LDS Book of Abraham 4:1-5:21 as "The Lord's Blueprint of Creation" since it is here that "Abraham gives an account of the planning in heaven for this earth and its inhabitants, before the work of building was done." Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:75.

<sup>49</sup> William J. Hamblin, "The Sôd of Yhwh and the Endowment," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4(2013): 151.

temple<sup>50</sup> and tabernacle.<sup>51</sup> One example emphasizing the importance of creation in Jewish sacred space can be seen in the symbolic connection of the Genesis creation account and the construction of the Mosaic tabernacle. Temple scholar Margaret Barker explains that the “six days of creation described in Genesis 1” are intimately linked with the “six stages of building the desert tabernacle.”<sup>52</sup> In fact, the tabernacle’s “most holy place” (Exodus 26:34), known as the Holy of Holies (*debir*), was believed to represent Day One of creation when light emerged and was divided from darkness (Gen. 1:3-5).<sup>53</sup> Somewhat reminiscent of the early Mormon Creation rooms, the Holy of Holies was a simple cube-shaped room kept in complete darkness and interpreted as the primordial state or Day One of creation (Genesis 1:1-2). In Jewish literature, however, God’s presence or dwelling place was often associated with light.<sup>54</sup> In fact, the “Holy of Holies, although in the temple a place of darkness, was [also] symbolically the place

<sup>50</sup> According to N. A. Dahl, the great festivals associated with temple worship included cosmogony. He asserts that “In the common worship, the creation was commemorated and re-enacted, and the future renewal for which Israel hoped, was prefigured.” Cited in W. D. Davies and D. Daube, eds., *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 424; cf. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, Bollingen Series, 46 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 59-62. “It has been suggested that the creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:4 was used in the temple liturgy of Israel at the New Year’s Festival before the Babylonian exile, when the enthronement of the Lord was celebrated,” yet it remains only an attractive hypothesis. More concrete evidence does confirm, however, the usage of creation accounts during the Second Temple Period. See Stephen D. Ricks, “Liturgy and Cosmogony: The Ritual Use of Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 120-22; cf. E. O. James, *Creation and Cosmology. A Historical and Comparative Inquiry* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 29. “Even in modern Judaism the Genesis creation account is accorded an honored place in the liturgy, being read *in toto* on Simhat Torah (the final day of the Feast of Tabernacles) and in part (Genesis 2:1-3) on Friday evening, twice during the service and once at *kiddush*, when the Sabbath is solemnly blessed following six days of labor.” Ricks, “Liturgy and Cosmogony,” 122.

<sup>51</sup> It should be noted at this point in the paper that the temple built by Solomon was based upon the sacred precedent of the desert tabernacle built by Moses. As the tabernacle “was planned according to the scriptural model of the cosmos, and was meant to symbolize it,” the temple also retained much of this unique symbolism. Michael Chyutin, *Architecture and Utopia in the Temple Era*, Library of Second Temple Studies 58 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 35. Since both tabernacle and temple often share the same theological interpretations, references to both instances of sacred space will be made throughout the paper.

<sup>52</sup> Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK 2004), 17. For a diagram of the temple and its creation symbolism, see *Ibid*, 18. “The builders of the Temple not only constructed the world; they also constructed cosmic time.” Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, 77-78.

<sup>53</sup> Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction*, 17.

<sup>54</sup> Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London ; New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 185-87.

of pre-created light," writes Barker.<sup>55</sup> Raphael Patai, a Jewish temple scholar, builds upon the symbolism of the Holy of Holies as the origin place of light. He explains:

The light created on the first day of creation, which is not identical with the light of the sun, the moon and the stars, which were created only on the fourth day, is in the legends closely connected with the Temple. It was from the spot on which later the Temple was erected that the first ray of light issued and illuminated the whole world. This light continued to emanate from the spot also after the Temple was built on it. Its source was the Holy of Holies in which the Holy Ark stood, and it lit up the Temple itself and shone forth through the windows. These windows were built not to let the light in from the outside, as windows usually do, but to let out the light from within. In accordance with this reversed function the form of the windows was also reversed. They were narrow on their inner side and widened towards their outer side.<sup>56</sup>

Besides their association with light, both Day One of creation and the Holy of Holies are believed by some to represent the invisible, spiritual creation of the world "before the dimensions of solidity [existed] in the material world." As Barker has noted, the earth's blueprint was associated during a time when "everything was deemed to exist in a flat state 'engraved.'"<sup>57</sup> One Jewish text, for instance, specifically states that several "things preceded the creation of the world. Some of them were [actually] created, and some of them [merely] arose in the thought [of God] to be created" (Gen. Rab. 1:4).<sup>58</sup> In each of these examples, we find the theme for a type of spiritual blueprint that precedes physical creation. This connection is not surprising since the scriptural traditions often speak of God as an architect-builder who plans, designs, and

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 185. For the Holy of Holies as a place of darkness, see Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Yhwh's Exalted House—Aspects of the Design and Symbolism of Solomon's Temple," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed. John Day (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 77.

<sup>56</sup> Raphael Patai, *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual*, 2d enl. ed. (New York: KTAV Pub. House, 1967), 84-85.

<sup>57</sup> Barker, *The Great High Priest*, 183.

<sup>58</sup> While "The Tora and the Throne of Glory were [actually] created," we find that "The Fathers, Israel, the Temple and the name of the Messiah [only] arose in the thought to be created." Cited in Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 19. Similarly, another Jewish text reads as follows: "Seven things were created before the world was created, and these are they: the Tora, Repentance, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna [i.e. destination of wicked], the Throne of Glory, the Temple, and the name of the Messiah" (B. Pes. 54a; B. Ned. 39a); also cited in Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, 19.

produces blueprints for his creations.<sup>59</sup> As we move on to Catholic sacred spaces, more connections between “creation” symbolism and the three religions are yet to strengthen the interreligious dialogue.

## Catholic

From its beginning, the creation story has played an important role for Roman Catholic architecture and liturgy. Specifically, parallels to both the Mormon and Jewish temples are found in Catholic liturgical practices from the middle Ages. For instance, in York, England “mystery plays” were largely derived from the creation story found in Genesis 1-2. During these ceremonies the “medieval audiences of the plays felt themselves to be deeply implicated in this presentation of sacred history” which included the creation of the world.<sup>60</sup>

Other examples demonstrate how Catholic creation symbolism is further connected to both ritual and spatial configurations. The Catholic Holy of Holies, similar to the one in the Jewish temple, came to represent a place of heavenly light amidst darkness because of early Christian rituals at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The “new Holy of Holies” in this building was believed to be the tomb of Christ and was rightfully named the “Anastasis, or cave of the resurrection.”<sup>61</sup> A component of the daily services in this church included a ceremony known as the “Holy Light” or “Fire” (*lucernare*) ritual and required that “all the lamps and candles were lit from a [single] flame that was kept constantly burning in the cave.”<sup>62</sup> As time progressed, the Holy Sepulcher’s “Holy Light” ritual eventually refined its parallels to Jewish temple

<sup>59</sup> Several biblical references speak of the creative process in architectural terms. See, for instance, Prov. 8:27-30; Ps. 24:1-2; 102:25; 104:2-6; Job 26:10-13; 38:4-6; 2 Esdr. 6.1-6. We also find in II Baruch 4:2-7, a Jewish pseudigraphic text, that a heavenly Jerusalem and temple were “prepared beforehand here from the time when [God] took counsel to make paradise.” Robert Henry Charles, ed. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2:482. One temple scholar writes, “In the scriptural tradition, God is the architect of the universe and also the architect of Israel’s temples, which were built according to a detailed divine plan that was conveyed to God’s messenger’s in the world.” Chyutin, *Architecture and Utopia in the Temple Era*, 12. See also Hubler, “Creatio Ex Nihilo”, 79-89.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King, *York Mystery Plays : A Selection in Modern Spelling* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 1. Paralleling the Mormon temple experience quite closely, “The essential episodes were the Creation of the world and of man, man’s deception by the Devil, resulting in the Fall and the expulsion from Paradise, and his Redemption through the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Christ...[and] Christ’s second coming at the Last Judgment.” Beadle and King, *York Mystery Plays : A Selection in Modern Spelling*, xi.

<sup>61</sup> Allan Doig, *Liturgy and Architecture from the Early Church to the Middle Ages* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), 34.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

rites.<sup>63</sup> Remnants from this ceremony were also carried over into the “old Paschal Vigil of the Catholic ritual at Eastertime.”<sup>64</sup>

Another important example linking the Catholic sanctuary or apse to darkness and light is found in Michelangelo’s ceiling murals in the Sistine Chapel. While his “vision is truly cosmic,” write Peter and Linda Murray, Michelangelo’s painting “begins with God creating order from the primeval chaos, separating night from day.”<sup>65</sup> It is interesting to note that Michelangelo strategically located his painting of Day One of creation in the western sanctuary directly above the altar, since it is a rather strong link to the creation symbolism of the Jewish temple’s western Holy of Holies as discussed above.<sup>66</sup> While some may argue that this is merely a coincidence, we find that “the Christian church throughout the Middle Ages retained the Judaic understanding of sacred architecture as a microcosm of creation.” This is in spite of the fact that a majority of churches reoriented their apse to the east after the fifth century.<sup>67</sup>

As the first episode of cosmic history concludes, the journey of faith has merely commenced. The theological dialogue, thus far, between the Mormon, Jewish, and Catholic traditions has been successful in connecting the overlapping themes associated with the cosmogonic primordial era. It is evident how the Jewish Holy of Holies and the Mormon Creation room share symbolic messages of pre-existence and spiritual creation. Likewise, it has been shown that the story of creation, especially of Day One and its associations with darkness and pre-created light, are intertwined in various ways within the Mormon Creation room, the Jewish Holy of Holies, and the Catholic sanctuary. The common threads found in their first episodes of cosmic history are a means to facilitate a continual (re)interpretation of theology through architectural comparison. The attention now shifts to the second episode of cosmic history and learning deeply across religious borders.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, during the “Holy Light” ritual the Greek “Orthodox Patriarch enters the Tomb alone on Easter—broadly paralleling the solitary entrance of the high priest into the Holy of Holies of the Temple on the Day of Atonement—and emerges with a miraculously lit candle that is used to light hundreds of candles in the church.” William James Hamblin and David Rolph Seely, *Solomon’s Temple: Myth and History* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 106.

<sup>64</sup> Marcus Von Wellnitz, “The Catholic Liturgy and the Mormon Temple,” *BYU Studies* 21(1981): 15.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Murray and Linda Murray, *A Dictionary of Christian Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 132-33.

<sup>66</sup> For other connections to Jewish temple symbolism, see Benjamin Blech and Roy Doliner, *The Sistine Secrets: Michelangelo’s Forbidden Messages in the Heart of the Vatican* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> Helen Ratner Dietz, “The Nuptial Meaning of Classic Church Architecture,” in Benedict XVI and Beauty in Sacred Art and Architecture: Proceedings of the Second Fota International Liturgical Conference, 2009, ed. D. Vincent Twomey, Janet E. Rutherford (New York: Scepter, 2011), 134.

## Episode II: The Paradisal World of Eden

The paradisal world of Eden is portrayed both literally and symbolically in Mormon, Jewish, and Catholic sacred space. Themes common between the three faiths include symbolic trees, tropical vegetation, abundant fertility, cherubic gatekeepers, and a period without physical death. According to Mircea Eliade,

the myths of many peoples allude to a very distant epoch when men knew neither death nor toil nor suffering and had a bountiful supply of food merely for the taking. *In illo tempore*, the gods descended to earth and mingled with men; for their part, men could easily mount to heaven. As a result of a ritual fault, communications between heaven and earth were interrupted and the gods withdrew to the highest heavens. Since then, men must work for their food and are no longer immortal.<sup>68</sup>

### Mormon

As Mormon initiates leave the Creation room they proceed upwards to an elevated ritual space called the Garden room.<sup>69</sup> The Garden room represents the paradisiac world of Eden or "terrestrial state which existed when the Lord God finished the creative enterprise."<sup>70</sup> In essence, it is a period of time after the "earth was clothed with a physical body and...passed through a veil."<sup>71</sup> Referring to the Salt Lake Temple's Garden room, architectural historian C. Mark Hamilton, suggests that the space represents the "earth as it was before sin entered and brought with it a curse; it is the Garden of Eden in miniature."<sup>72</sup> Both the doctrinal instruction and the Edenic décor on the walls are consistent in theme; they convey "the condition of our first parents

<sup>68</sup> Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, 91.

<sup>69</sup> The Garden room is typically higher in elevation than the previous Creation room (sometimes by as little as four inches and can go up to as high as several feet) giving initiates an experience of ascent. Such is the case in most five-room endowment spatial sequences. One exception is found in the original endowment spatial sequence of the Nauvoo Temple (1846) which was presented in a large linear attic with a series of spaces separated by canvas curtains. For interior descriptions, see Lisle G Brown, "The Sacred Departments for Temple Work in Nauvoo: The Assembly Room and the Council Chamber," *BYU Studies* 19, no. 3 (1979): 371-73; Buerger, *Mysteries of Godliness*, 74-78. The recently rebuilt Nauvoo Temple (2002) endowment rooms do not follow its original single level design but incorporate the ascending narrative sequence. See interior descriptions and floor plans in Roger P. Jackson, "Designing and Constructing the 'New' Nauvoo Temple: A Personal Reflection," *Mormon Historical Studies* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 218; Steven Daniel Cornell, "William Weeks and the Ephemeral Temple at Nauvoo" (M.Arch.History thesis, University of Virginia, 2008), Fig. 107.

<sup>70</sup> McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 494.

<sup>71</sup> Hilton, *Kolob Theorem*, 85-86.

<sup>72</sup> C. Mark Hamilton, *The Salt Lake Temple: A Monument to a People*, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: University Services Corporation, 1983), 92.

[Adam and Eve] in the Garden of Eden" along with "their disobedience and consequent expulsion from that blissful abode," writes James Talmage.<sup>73</sup>

The paradisiacal theme is evident in many Garden rooms through the use of living plants and continuous floor to ceiling painted murals. Some of the earliest temple records indicate that living potted plants and trees were used in the Garden rooms of the Nauvoo Temple,<sup>74</sup> the Salt Lake Endowment House,<sup>75</sup> and the Salt Lake Temple.<sup>76</sup> Adding to this paradisaical atmosphere, many temples also included painted wall murals of garden scenes. One study concluded that the paintings in the early Utah temples produced a "feeling of a lush, and often times tropical, garden."<sup>77</sup> The murals of some temples even include a symbolic tree of life or tree of knowledge, including its forbidden fruit, which are used during the ritual drama.<sup>78</sup> In the Biblical narrative, readers are reminded that after Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, God places cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way leading back into paradise just prior to expelling them from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:24; Moses 4:31). A painted representation of this scriptural scene is found in the Los Angeles Temple World room, which "shows Adam and Eve leaving the Garden of Eden [and] entering the lone and dreary world."<sup>79</sup> Behind the fleeting couple one notices a glimpse of a garden that is being protected by a flaming white sword. In similar fashion, above the threshold between the Endowment House's Garden and World rooms hang a pair of "flaming swords."<sup>80</sup> One last example is seen along the pathway from the Garden room to the World room in the Salt Lake Temple. Within the upper hallway, initiates pass "a Tiffany stained glass window depicting the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden" where a human-like cherubim holds a sword in his right hand and signals with his left hand for the couple to depart.<sup>81</sup> Garden rooms thus provide theatrical backdrops reinforcing the paradisaical world of Eden. Common threads between the Mormon and Jewish traditions continue to be identified as we further compare this episode of cosmic history.

<sup>73</sup> Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 99-100.

<sup>74</sup> Brown, "The Sacred Departments for Temple Work in Nauvoo: The Assembly Room and the Council Chamber," 371-72.

<sup>75</sup> Lisle G Brown, "'Temple Pro Tempore': The Salt Lake City Endowment House," *The Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 4 (2008): 40-41.

<sup>76</sup> Hamilton, "The Salt Lake Temple: An Architectural Monograph", 115.

<sup>77</sup> O'Brien, "A Study of the Effect of Color in the Utah Temple Murals", 46.

<sup>78</sup> This is the case for several of the early Utah temples, see *Ibid.*, 42-43.

<sup>79</sup> Edward O. Anderson, "The Los Angeles Temple," *The Improvement Era* 58, no. 11 (Nov. 1955): 806. For color photographs of the temple's wall murals, see the insert between pp. 824-825 of the same issue.

<sup>80</sup> "It is not clear if these were actual swords or representations painted on the wall," but they hung on the World room side of the doorway. Brown, "'Temple Pro Tempore': The Salt Lake City Endowment House," 41.

<sup>81</sup> See descriptions and photographs of the window in Hamilton, *The Salt Lake Temple: A Monument to a People*, 94-95, 119; cf. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 157.

## Jewish

In the Jewish temple, the Holy Place (*hekal*) was similar in symbolic meaning to the Mormon Garden room. The first intimation that the Holy Place is connected to the paradisaical world of Eden is through its interior decoration and furnishings. Similar to the vegetal-themed murals of the Mormon Garden room, the scriptural tradition holds that the walls of the Holy Place were ornamented with carvings of palm trees and flowers – a type of garden imagery (1 Kings 6:29).<sup>82</sup> Another parallel between the Holy Place and the Garden of Eden is found in the table of shewbread and its relation to the tree of knowledge. A link is established between the priests' eating of the shewbread "in the holy place" (Lev. 24:9) and Adam and Eve's eating "of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil...within the Garden of Eden."<sup>83</sup> While this parallel symbolism is quite probable, a rabbinical text from the late period (c. 1000-1200 CE) helps clarify the connection: "The Table is in the north corresponding to the Garden of Eden in which all sorts of pleasures are kept for the Righteous."<sup>84</sup> A further relationship linking the Holy Place to Eden is the seven-branched candlestick and its symbolism with the tree of life; a theme that will be explored in more depth in the fourth episode of cosmic history to follow.

As the expulsion narrative plays an important role for Jewish sacred space, another similarity to the Mormon temple is identified. After Adam and Eve partake of the forbidden fruit, one recalls that they are expelled from the Garden of Eden. Some biblical scholars, such as Donald Parry, argue that it is likely the couple was driven out towards the east, since it is at the eastern gate of the garden

<sup>82</sup> "The image of the temple as a garden can be further explained by reference to the descriptions of Solomon's temple found in the Bible, which state that the inner walls of the sanctuary were covered with carvings of gourds, flowers, and palm trees, all overlaid with gold. Rabbinic traditions about this 'gold of *parwayim*' (2 Chronicles 6) associate it with the Garden of Eden, from which it was said to come, and say that the trees made from this gold bore golden fruit." C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate. Part 1: The Jewish Sources," *The Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 2 (1993): 206.

<sup>83</sup> James L. Carroll, "The Reconciliation of Adam and Israelite Temples," *Studia Antiqua* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 99-100.

<sup>84</sup> "Midrash Tadshe," in *Mi-Kadmoniyot Ha-Yehudim*, ed. Abraham Epstein (Vienna: 1887), xxviii; cited in Patai, *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual*, 115-16.

where God placed cherubim and a flaming sword (Gen. 3:24).<sup>85</sup> Imagery of an eastern gate to Eden is reinforced through depictions of cherubim that are believed to have been carved into walls, doors, and panels of the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kings 6:29-35; 7:29, 36) as well as embroidered into the curtain-like veil of the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:31; 2 Chron. 3:14). Each cherub played a similar role to those at Eden's gate by functioning "as divine sentinels, guarding the path leading to the presence of God, preventing the trespass by unauthorized persons."<sup>86</sup> Jacob Milgrom maintains that the cherubim were protectors of "eternal time and space, the mysterious, transcendent reality beyond the portal."<sup>87</sup> Moving westward into the temple was a return to paradise, while leaving the temple to the east was to enter the fallen world. As temple scholar Jon Levenson explains,

The Temple is the world before the divine contraction [i.e., the Fall], the world in a state of grace and perfection. No wonder temples in the ancient Near East sometimes contained a paradisaal garden and no wonder that Zion...was equated with the Garden of Eden. The Temple offers the person who enters it to worship an opportunity to rise from a fallen world, to partake of the Garden of Eden.<sup>88</sup>

The last important association between the Holy Place and the paradisaal world of Eden is its location between the Holy of Holies and the courtyard. According to Flavius Josephus, the tripartite configuration of the temple was an "imitation and representation of the universe,"<sup>89</sup> such that the courtyard corresponded to the sea or lower regions, the Holy Place to the earth or land, and the Holy of

<sup>85</sup> "This celestial blockade suggests that there existed an entrance to the garden established at the east end of the garden. If no such entrance existed, then why would a blockade be necessary? Or, if other entrances were found to the garden, then why did God not establish cherubim and swords at other locations around the garden? Once more the eastward orientation of the Mosaic tabernacle and Jerusalem temples, having entrance at the east," reinforces the idea that the temple represented the Garden of Eden. Donald W. Parry, "Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary," in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 132-33.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>87</sup> Jacob Milgrom, "Cherubim - Gateway to the Divine," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21, no. 6 (Nov. 1995): 14-18; cf. Peter Thacher Lanfer, *Remembering Eden: The Reception History of Genesis 3: 22-24* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 128-31.

<sup>88</sup> Jon D. Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *The Journal of Religion* 64, no. 3 (1984): 297-98.

<sup>89</sup> *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. III, 7:7, in Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus, the Learned and Authentic Jewish Historian and Celebrated Warrior*, trans. William Whiston (Baltimore: Armstrong & Berry, 1839).

Holies to heaven.<sup>90</sup> In 2 Enoch 8:4, we learn that “paradise is in between the corruptible [or fallen earth] and the incorruptible [heaven].”<sup>91</sup> Since the Jewish temple is an imitation of the heavenly archetype, it makes sense why the Holy Place might be associated with Enoch’s in-between paradisaal realm. Hence, its placement between the Holy of Holies (heaven) and the courtyard (sea or lower region) seems appropriate. Consequently, the Holy Place, like the Mormon Garden room, was a theatrical backdrop for the Garden of Eden during the rituals of the priestly class.<sup>92</sup> A similar symbolism is found in the Catholic tradition.

## Catholic

While often more metaphorical and less representational, the Edenic theme is similarly important for Catholic ritual contexts. Similar to the Jewish temple’s Holy Place, the Catholic nave “stood for the earthly paradise once lost by Adam but now regained by Christ.”<sup>93</sup> One example of a more direct, yet rare, representational depiction linking the Catholic nave to the Jewish temple’s Holy Place is found in the ceiling murals above the Sistine Chapel’s nave. Here, the paintings appear to establish a close link to the Judaic understanding of the days of creation that pertained to the temple’s Holy Place.<sup>94</sup> As one recalls, anything after Day One of creation was believed to be part of the tangible, visible creation instead of the intangible, blueprint of creation.<sup>95</sup> In light of the Judaic interpretation, therefore, it is not difficult to see how the ceiling murals in the Sistine Chapel’s nave could represent the paradisaal world of Eden before the fall. Yet, if this interpretation is correct, it appears unusual that Michelangelo’s panel depicting the

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Bk. III, 6:4; 7:7. Similar to Josephus, Rabbi Pinhas ben Ya’ir, a Talmudic sage of the second century writes: “The Tabernacle was made to correspond to the Creation of the world...The house of the Holy of Holies was made to correspond to the highest heaven. The outer Holy House was made to correspond to the earth. And the Courtyard was made to correspond to the sea.” Quoted in Patai, *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual*, 108.

<sup>91</sup> James H. Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 1:115-16.

<sup>92</sup> Carroll, “The Reconciliation of Adam and Israelite Temples,” 96.

<sup>93</sup> Dietz, “The Nuptial Meaning of Classic Church Architecture,” 134. Cf. St Simeon of Thessalonica, “Homily on the Transfiguration,” *Patrologia Graeca*, col. 565A.

<sup>94</sup> With the assumption that the boundaries of the nave start at the marble partition grill and extend to the bottom of the stairs of the altar platform, the ceiling murals include: Day 4, the creation of the sun, moon, and planets; Day 2, the separation of the sky and water; Day 6, the creation of Adam; and Day 6 with the creation of Eve. Of all the panels of the creation, Day 1, the separation of light from darkness, is not included within the space. This makes sense since the first day of creation belonged to the temple’s Holy of Holies. For Catholics, we have already established how Day One was associated with the apse, sanctuary, and/or altar.

<sup>95</sup> “[E]verything made on or after the second day was part of the visible world but the works of Day One were beyond matter, beyond the veil.” Barker, *The Great High Priest*, 198.

temptation and expulsion is located outside the original placement of the nave's white marble partition-screen. Not surprisingly, directly below this mural is a porphyry disk on the floor where "the pope himself knelt during many rites in the chapel." Similar to the Israelite priests who entered through a veil into the tabernacle's Holy Place, it was "immediately after this disk when one entered... [through] the great portal" into the nave.<sup>96</sup> This exact spot in the Sistine Chapel, consequently, appears to be the symbolic gateway guarded by the cherubim and flaming sword discussed above. As Andrew Graham-Dixon extrapolates, the chapel's gateway served as a "kind of hinge – a hinge on which the whole grand narrative of the ceiling turns" and by which the faithful passed through to another world.<sup>97</sup> Could this spot of the chapel be none other than a symbolic gateway leading to the paradisiacal Garden of Eden and its tree of life? If the interpretation is correct, this particular Catholic painting in the Sistine Chapel is similar to the Mormon mural in the Los Angeles Temple by serving as the symbolic threshold between the Garden of Eden and the fallen world.

In Catholicism, another prominent link to the paradisaical world of Eden is found in the rite of baptism and its architectural setting. As we recall from the Jewish ritual, only priests were allowed to enter the Holy Place. Similarly, up until the Council of Trent, the Catholic nave was only accessible by those who had accepted Jesus Christ and had been cleansed from sin through baptism.<sup>98</sup> Christians began "their pilgrimage back to Eden beginning with the rite of baptism," writes Robin Jensen.<sup>99</sup> The connection between the fall and one's return to paradise dates back to early Christianity. Over the font in the baptistery at Dura Europos, there is both "a figure of the Good Shepherd and his sheep above a smaller painting of Adam and Eve." According to Jensen, the link between the two images is clear: "Adam and Eve were the perpetrators of the fall, which Jesus, the New Adam (and the Good Shepherd), reverses."<sup>100</sup> The Christian baptistery was eventually "designed to look like a mausoleum, but the interiors were often decorated to reflect the rich plant and

<sup>96</sup> Blech and Doliner, *The Sistine Secrets: Michelangelo's Forbidden Messages in the Heart of the Vatican*, 141-42.

<sup>97</sup> He continues his explanation: "It is here that man sins, here that his fate is sealed. Adam and Eve break with God's commands and are separated from God for ever. Unity gives way to alienation, harmony gives way to discord, oneness becomes fragmentation." Andrew Graham-Dixon, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel* (New York: Skyhorse, 2009), 94. Cf. Genesis 3:23-24.

<sup>98</sup> After the Council of Trent, the gradations of holiness and symbolic thresholds between the nave (i.e., the earthly paradisaical world of Eden) and the narthex or courtyard (i.e., a fallen, sinful, disordered world) were dissolved. The Council "had the effect of transforming the entire church into a narthex, an unadorned anteroom where, according to the custom of the ancient Church, public sinners would wait to be absolved." Martin Mosebach, *The Heresy of Formlessness: The Roman Liturgy and Its Enemy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 171.

<sup>99</sup> Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 87.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

animal life in Eden.”<sup>101</sup> It is in the Catholic tradition, therefore, that the “newly restored Eden” was “architecturally symbolized by the baptistery” and its rites.<sup>102</sup>

The theological comparisons between Mormon, Jewish, and Catholic traditions have engendered fresh insights that reinforce the themes from the paradisaical world of Eden. For example, the use of either living or representational vegetal motifs in the Mormon Garden room, Jewish Holy Place, or Catholic nave and baptistery reinforce the symbolism of abundant fertility associated with Eden. Likewise, the symbolic associations of the furniture in the Jewish temple’s nave or the painted trees in the Mormon Garden room each reinforce the importance in the Garden of Eden narrative in partaking of the forbidden fruit. The expulsion theme is also prevalent between the three religions with the use of cherubic gatekeepers to protect the entrance to the Garden of Eden. The architectural hermeneutic between the three religions continues to clarify the overlapping themes. In the next section, cosmic history shifts from paradise to the fallen, disordered world.

### Episode III: A Fallen, Disordered World

The next phase of the discussion is called the fallen, disordered world, and it marks the midway point of the journey through the episodes of cosmic history. Often with the starkest contrasts to the previous Edenic state, themes across the three religions include: opposition, contention, enmity, chaos, desolate landscapes, sacrifice, sin, repentance, and a period of time before redemption.

#### Mormon

After Adam and Eve’s fall and expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the sacred narrative of the Mormon endowment leads the initiate into a space representing the fallen, disordered world. This space is often called the World or Telestial room because it “represents the world we now live in, [and] gives the impression of conflict, in sharp contrast to the peace and harmony of the Garden room.”<sup>103</sup> Once again, floor to ceiling wall murals serve as theatrical backdrops for the World room in an effort to establish the desired thematic mood. The paintings in the Salt Lake Temple, for instance, depict a story of “struggle and strife; of victory and triumph or of defeat and death.”<sup>104</sup> Other five-room temples in Utah promote a similar message, as “there is contention and strife apparent in [all] the murals.” In each case, the overarching purpose of the paintings

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 212n71. For instance, see the Neonian baptistery in Ravenna and the baptistery of S. Giovanni in Fonte, Naples.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>103</sup> V. A. Wood, *The Alberta Temple: Centre and Symbol of Faith* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1989), 54.

<sup>104</sup> Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 158.

is "to instill in the participants a deep awareness of man's purpose on earth, and his obligations and opportunities to rise above his present [fallen] status."<sup>105</sup>

The World room and its portion of the ritual drama have been described as Adam and Eve's "condition in the lone and dreary world when doomed to live by labor and sweat."<sup>106</sup> The scriptural tradition of the Latter-day Saints teaches that the couple was able to enjoy living in the presence of God while they lived in the Garden of Eden; however, it is after their fall that they lose that sacred privilege. A visual barrier appears to have shut them (mostly) "out from his presence" but yet there remains some level of connectivity since the couple was still able to hear "the voice of the Lord" speaking unto them "from the way toward the Garden of Eden" (Moses 5:4). The reality of only a partial connectivity with God must have been a constant reminder of their fallen condition in the lone and dreary world. A further reason that this stage of the endowment is depicted as a dreary place of chaos, sin, conflict, and death is because it is associated with Satan's realm. Second Church President Brigham Young illustrates this doctrinal concept in these words: "We are here in this wicked world, a world shrouded in darkness, principally led, directed, governed, and controlled, from first to last, by the power of our common foe...the devil. Lucifer has almost the entire control over the whole earth, [since he] rules and governs the children of men and leads them on to destruction."<sup>107</sup> One method used in the original layout of the Nauvoo temple to aesthetically convey the mood of the lone and dreary condition of a fallen world included darkening a space so that it was "darker than any of the others."<sup>108</sup> Similarly, the World room in the Salt Lake Endowment House was kept "dark, [using] heavy curtains shutting out all but a few rays of light."<sup>109</sup>

At first glance, the mood of the World room appears to present a message of doom and gloom; however, the message quickly transforms into one of hope and reconciliation. After Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden of Eden they are instructed to "worship the Lord their God, and...offer the firstlings of their flocks" as a sacrifice (Moses 5:5). It is explained to them by an angel that their offerings are "a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth" (Moses 5:7). According to Talmage, it is here that initiates learn of "the plan of redemption by

<sup>105</sup> O'Brien, "A Study of the Effect of Color in the Utah Temple Murals", 31.

<sup>106</sup> Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 83.

<sup>107</sup> Statement by Brigham Young, in J. V. Long, George D. Watt, Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1854-1886), 3:223.

<sup>108</sup> Brown, "The Sacred Departments for Temple Work in Nauvoo: The Assembly Room and the Council Chamber," 372.

<sup>109</sup> ———, "'Temple Pro Tempore': The Salt Lake City Endowment House," 41.

which the great transgression may be atoned.”<sup>110</sup> The Mormon World room acts as a transitional point, similar to the Sistine Chapel’s porphyry disk on the floor, because in this space true reconciliation is obtained by accepting the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. While not part of the endowment sequence, part of accepting Christ is following his example by being baptized. Specifically in the Mormon temple, a baptismal font (somewhat reminiscent of the Jewish laver with twelve oxen) and the rite of baptism by immersion help to facilitate one of the first physical acts of the reconciliation process to return to God’s presence in the Celestial Kingdom.<sup>111</sup> In either case, it is through the Messiah that the faithful are able to return back into the paradisaal world of Eden and once again enter God’s presence. As one will see, this is an important concept for all three religious traditions.

## Jewish

Similar to the Mormon tradition, Judaism held the world of Eden to be in stark contrast to the fallen, disordered world. After having been cast out of the Garden toward the east, a reconciliation process needed to take place in order for Adam and Eve to return to paradise. According to one apocryphal text, these efforts are started “on that day in which Adam went forth from the Garden.” It explains that “he offered as a sweet savour an offering, frankincense, galbanum, and stacte, and spices in the morning with the rising of the sun from the day when he covered his shame” (*Jubilees* 3:27).<sup>112</sup> Adam and Eve’s burnt offerings and sacrifices just east of the Garden of Eden’s gate are viewed as a first step in reconciling their transgression and returning to paradise. Peter Lanfer observes that “in *Jubilees*, the sacrifice of Adam allows for the possibility of perpetual access to Eden...Thus, the fiery swords of the cherubim are metaphorically and symbolically replaced or removed by the fire of Adam’s sacrifice.”<sup>113</sup> Similar to these sacrifices at Eden’s gate, there is a close parallel to the sacrifices carried out in the courtyard also just east of the entrance to the temple proper.<sup>114</sup>

Conceptually speaking, the further a person was from the Garden of Eden the more chaotic, disordered, and unclean the world became. Adam and Eve’s transgression caused them to be driven out of the Garden of Eden towards the east and into the Land of Eden; likewise, when Cain murders his brother Abel he is driven out further east “from the presence of the LORD” and instructed to

<sup>110</sup> Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 83.

<sup>111</sup> See John 3:5; D&C 76:51–52, 62, 70; 138:32–34, 58–59; Articles of Faith 1:3–4.

Adam is also believed to have been baptized as part of his reconciliation process, see Moses 6:64–68.

<sup>112</sup> Charles, ed. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, 2:17.

<sup>113</sup> Lanfer, *Remembering Eden*, 134.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

dwelling “in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden” (Gen 4:16). The gradations of holiness established with these events carry over into the spatial configurations of the Jerusalem Temple. The Holy of Holies, located in the west, symbolized God’s dwelling place, while the centralized Holy Place became the figurative Garden of Eden. It is the eastern temple “courtyard [that] represented the fallen world in which Adam and Eve found themselves after their expulsion from paradise.” In fact, it is “their attempted reconciliation that took place just eastwards of the Garden of Eden” that has strong liturgical parallels to “the altar and laver [that] were eastward of the holy place.”<sup>115</sup>

Building upon this model for gradations of holiness, any area beyond the courtyard or Israel’s camp, particularly to the far east, was regarded as a profane, chaotic, unclean wilderness. It was associated with nothingness, impurities, demons, death, and sin (Lev. 14:40-41, 45).<sup>116</sup> Similar to the Mormon theological tradition, the “lonely wilderness” was regarded as the realm of the “leader of the rebellious angels” named Azazel (or Satan).<sup>117</sup> According to Philip Jenson, “Azazel represented the extreme opposite of God’s holy presence in the Holy of Holies. The domain of Azazel is not neutral or undefined space, but imbued with a personal quality which is the mirror opposite to God’s presence in his holy sanctuary.”<sup>118</sup> In light of Jenson’s observations, one can understand why the rite performed on the Day of Atonement at the temple with the two goats—one representing the goat of the Lord and the other the scapegoat (i.e., goat of Azazel)—was a “symbolical act [that] was really a renunciation of [Satan’s] authority. Such is the signification of the utter separation of the scapegoat from the people of Israel...Hence it was the practise in Jerusalem...to take the scapegoat to a cliff and push him over it out of sight. In this way the complete separation was effected.”<sup>119</sup>

After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve are reminded of the haunting truth that now they “shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). In order to reverse the curse uttered at the fall, they must repent. One Hebrew verb for repent used in Ezekiel is *shuwb*, meaning “to return, turn back, reverse, restore, or bring back.” One scriptural example reads, “but if the wicked will *turn from all his sins* that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, *he shall surely live, he shall not die*” (Ezekiel 18:21; emphasis added). Repentance signified that a person would turn

<sup>115</sup> Carroll, “The Reconciliation of Adam and Israelite Temples,” 96-97.

<sup>116</sup> See gradation of holiness charts, in Philip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 47, 63, 90, 202-03.

<sup>117</sup> Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler, eds., *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History*, 12 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1901-1906), 2:365-67.

<sup>118</sup> Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 203.

<sup>119</sup> Singer and Adler, eds., *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 2:365-67.

away from sin (death) in order to be restored unto God (life). In the context of returning to the Garden of Eden, we begin to see why repentance was so important in Judaism.

After Adam and Eve were expelled eastward, they turned around to look back towards their westward home in paradise. According to 3 Enoch 5:3, "the first man and his generation dwelt at the gate of the garden of Eden so that they might gaze at the bright image of the Sekinah," a visible manifestation of God's presence.<sup>120</sup> A similar pattern is found in the Jerusalem Temple. Since God's presence is believed to have resided in the Holy of Holies located in the west, to turn and face that direction was to turn towards God; whereas turning to the east signified the opposite. Consequently, it is understandable why, as outlined in Ezekiel's vision, God considered the act of the temple priests turning "their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east" to worship the sun a grievous abomination (Ezek. 8:16).<sup>121</sup> Subsequently, during the feast of tabernacles the priests "came to the eastern gate, they turned round towards the west (to face the Holy Place), and said: 'Our fathers who were in this place, they turned their back upon the Sanctuary of Jehovah, and their faces toward the east, and they worshipped towards the rising sun; but as for us, our eyes are towards the Lord.'"<sup>122</sup>

To repent was to be cleansed of sin so that one could return to God spotless. According to one Jewish text, the wicked must repent in order to be "accepted before the Shekhina [i.e., visible manifestation of God's presence] like the pious and the saintly who never sinned."<sup>123</sup> One further step in the reconciliation process, paralleling the Mormon tradition, required each wicked person to be washed, anointed, clothed in garments, led by the hand, and then presented clean before the Holy One at "the gate of the Garden of Eden." At this point, the Holy One "answers them and says: 'Let them enter and see My glory.'"<sup>124</sup> The large "molten sea" that sat on "twelve oxen" (yet another link to Mormonism) and the "ten lavers of brass" in the courtyard each reinforce the need to be ritually cleansed from sin before entering into God's presence in the temple (2 Kgs. 7:23-39; 2 Chr. 4:1-6). As the Psalmist writes, "who shall *ascend into* the hill of the LORD? or who shall *stand in his holy place*? He that hath *clean hands*, and a *pure heart*; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" (Ps. 24:3-4; emphasis added). The interreligious dialogue continues as we turn to the Catholic conception of the fallen, disordered world.

<sup>120</sup> Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:259-60.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Dietz, "The Nuptial Meaning of Classic Church Architecture," 132.

<sup>122</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services, as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ*, New rev. ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1881), 246-47.

<sup>123</sup> Mid. Alpha Beta diR. Akiba, BhM 3:27-29; cited in Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, 252-53.

<sup>124</sup> Mid. Alpha Beta diR. Akiba, BhM 3:27-29; cited in *Ibid*.

## Catholic

For Catholics, Adam and Eve lost their home in paradise after they partook of the forbidden fruit. In these regards, it is similar in theological understanding to both Mormonism and Judaism, since the fallen world was a place that needed to be redeemed and reconciled from original sin. As Eliade observes, "Christianity is dominated by the yearning for Paradise."<sup>125</sup> In many ways, the effects of the fall had to be reversed in order for mankind to be able to return to paradise, and the solution was to be found in Jesus Christ's atonement. "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22). Referring to architectural symbolism in "both the Eastern and the Western church, the narthex or vestibule stood for this earth before redemption."<sup>126</sup> Returning to Michelangelo's paintings in the Sistine Chapel, the last three ceiling murals correspond to this symbolism. The less sacred vestibule outside of the marble partition in this chapel is located beneath murals depicting the fallen, disordered world before redemption<sup>127</sup> – a familiar theme for some Mormon World room murals.

Building upon the above architectural symbolism, early Christian churches often possessed both an outer and inner narthex appearing to represent to some degree the disordered, sin-laden world under Satan's influence. The outer narthex (exonarthex), more commonly known as the atrium or courtyard, was reserved for more grievous sinners and criminals. According to Tertullian, "they were expelled not only from the doors of the church, but from every place that might afford them any shelter or covering" as part of the penance process.<sup>128</sup> Analogous to the courtyard of the Jerusalem Temple with its large basin of water used for purification rites, the Catholic courtyard also contained "a fountain, or a cistern of water, for people to wash their hands and face, before they went into

<sup>125</sup> Mircea Eliade, "The Yearning for Paradise in Primitive Tradition," *Daedalus* 88, no. 2 (1959): 261.

<sup>126</sup> Dietz, "The Nuptial Meaning of Classic Church Architecture," 134. Cf. St Simeon of Thessalonica, "Homily on the Transfiguration", *Patrologia Graeca*, col. 565A.

<sup>127</sup> As the ceiling murals transition from the Garden of Eden to the fallen world, "Unity gives way to alienation, harmony gives way to discord, oneness becomes fragmentation. The three scenes that follow [the temptation and expulsion scene] – all tracing the subsequent life of man on earth, through the story of Noah – are characterized by a busy brokenness, a mood of nightmare, a deliberate compositional disharmony, entirely at odds with the breadth and the sweeping simplicity that characterize the earlier scenes depicting the Creation. In this way, the very rhythms and formal structure of the paintings of the Sistine ceiling conspire to define a mortal life – the life that follows the Fall – as disharmony, disconnection, alienation." Graham-Dixon, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel*, 94.

<sup>128</sup> Cited in Joseph Bingham, *Origines Ecclesiasticae: Or the Antiquities of the Christian Church*, ed. Richard Bingham, 9 vols. (London: William Straker, 1843), 402-03.

church.”<sup>129</sup> The inner narthex (esonarthex), on the other hand, was immediately in front of the doors of the church and was reserved for the penitent, uninitiated, and outsiders (e.g., catechumens, Jews, heathens, heretics, etc.). These groups “were allowed to stand here to hear the Psalms and Scriptures read, and the sermon made by the preacher.”<sup>130</sup> It was also here in the narthex that “the priest absolved the penitent with the stroke of a long staff.” In essence, it was the responsibility of the priest to free the “people from the slavery of sin and subjection to the law by touching them with the staff.”<sup>131</sup>

The spaces where early Christian rites of initiation occurred during the fourth century appear to be another parallel with Mormon and Jewish ritual contexts associated with the fallen world. For example, at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, initiates entered the vestibule of the baptistery called the “outer chamber” – a space that was similar in meaning to the Jewish temple courtyard and Mormon World room.<sup>132</sup> The baptistery’s outer chamber was similar to the church’s narthex because of its symbolic associations to the fallen world of sin and darkness.<sup>133</sup> It is here in the “outer chamber” that initiates “faced westward,” stretched out their hand, and “renounced Satan as though to his face.”<sup>134</sup> After this enactment, initiates turned “from west to east, the region of light,” to get a glimpse into the baptistery or “inner room” which represented paradise and the Holy of Holies.<sup>135</sup> At this point initiates were told the following: “The gates of God’s Paradise are open to you, that garden which God planted in the east, and from

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 409-10.

<sup>131</sup> Mosebach, *Heresy of Formlessness*, 167-68. Emphasis in original.

<sup>132</sup> Alexis James Doval, *Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystagogue: The Authorship of the Mystagogic Catecheses* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 86-88.

<sup>133</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem explains, “The west is the quarter from which darkness appears to us; now the devil is darkness, and wields his power in darkness. So we look to the west as a symbolic gesture, and renounce the leader of shadow and darkness.” Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century* (Slough, Great Britain: St. Paul Publications, 1972), 69. As we recall from the Jewish tradition, however, it is the east and not the west that is associated with the realm of sin, chaos, demons, and Azazel. It is puzzling why this reversal of the holiness spectrum completely reverses since even Origen, the early Christian scholar from Alexandria, “identifies Azazel with Satan.” Singer and Adler, eds., *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 2:365-67. Up until the fifth century, as noted earlier, there appears to be a conflict between the new Christian religious ideal for paradise in the east and the architectural configurations based on the Jewish temple that place the Holy of Holies in the western apse. For more on this, see George Gilbert Scott, *An Essay on the History of English Church Architecture* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1881), 14-23; Walter Lowrie, *Monuments of the Early Church, Handbooks of Archaeology and Antiquities* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), 177-78. For the counter argument, see U. M. Lang, *Turning Towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

<sup>134</sup> Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 68-69.

<sup>135</sup> Doval, *Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystagogue*, 86-88.

which our first parent was expelled for his transgression.”<sup>136</sup> Although the directions are reversed in the Judaic tradition, the symbolism of repentance and turning unto the Lord remains the same.

At the conclusion of the journey through the fallen, disordered world, a greater appreciation has been gained in light of the comparative theological dialogue between Mormon, Jewish, and Catholic traditions. The religious interrelationships continue to be strengthened by comparisons between art, architecture, scripture, and ritual. The discussion during this episode of cosmic history includes the common story of Adam and Eve in all three religions and their posterity longing for paradise, immortality, and eternal life after the fall. Each person is seeking a way and means to be reconciled, saved, and restored from a world ruled by darkness. The goal in each case is to be cleansed from sin and (re)admitted back into God’s presence. Having reached the midway point in the journey through cosmic history, the next two stages incrementally get closer to God. Returning to paradise, the Messianic era is next in line.

#### **Episode IV: The Messianic Paradisiacal Era**

The fourth episode, similar to the second, is called the Messianic paradisiacal era. The symbolic themes associated with this period comprise peace, tranquility, earthly paradise, resurrection, prayer or confession at veils, and the return of a Messiah.

#### **Mormon**

The second to last room in the spatial sequence of the Mormon endowment is called the Terrestrial room and “represents the world during the Millennial period.”<sup>137</sup> In Mormon theology, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ ushers in a Millennial era which causes the earth to be “renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory” (Articles of Faith 1:10). The renewal of the earth can be interpreted as a return to its former paradisaical condition. As Bruce R. McConkie explains, “the earth is to go back to the primeval, paradisiacal, or terrestrial state that prevailed in the days of the Garden of Eden.”<sup>138</sup> McConkie’s statement suggests how both the Terrestrial and Garden rooms share a similar symbolic association to some sort of paradisaical realm; yet, each room pertains to a different and distinct episode of cosmic history within the Mormon plan of salvation.

The stage-like backdrops in Mormon Terrestrial rooms provide a similar atmospheric mood of “peace and order” as Garden rooms

<sup>136</sup> Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 73.

<sup>137</sup> Wood, *The Alberta Temple: Centre and Symbol of Faith*, 56.

<sup>138</sup> McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 211.

but through different aesthetic strategies.<sup>139</sup> While Garden room floor-to-ceiling murals depict scenes of tropical gardens and plant life, Terrestrial rooms, on the other hand, are prone to use less representational artwork and more “classical restraints” to convey their message.<sup>140</sup> The Terrestrial room in the Salt Lake Temple is “articulated with proportionately spaced engaged pilasters,” large wall mirrors, and two crystal chandeliers to enhance “the effect of spiritualism.”<sup>141</sup> In like manner, the Terrestrial room in the Los Angeles Temple was “planned for peace and comfort” by using “subdued colors and furnishings,” as explained by Church architect Edward O. Anderson.<sup>142</sup> While most Terrestrial rooms do not have painted murals reinforcing the Messianic paradisiacal era, the Alberta Canada Temple includes a painted scene located above the veil showing “the Savior appearing to Mary following His resurrection.”<sup>143</sup> Several thematic messages are derived from this example, such as the doctrine that death has been overcome through Christ’s resurrection and that all those who die during the Millennium will be changed in the twinkling of an eye to a resurrected, immortal state.<sup>144</sup>

Two important features within every Terrestrial room include an altar and a curtain-like partition called the veil of the temple. James Talmage clarifies that in order to enter the final endowment room, “passage leads through the Veil.”<sup>145</sup> Prior to passing through this threshold, a special prayer ritual is conducted at an altar. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* states, “the prayer circle is a part of Latter-day Saint temple worship, usually associated with the Endowment ceremony. Participants, an equal number of men and women dressed in temple clothing, surround an altar in a circle

<sup>139</sup> Wood, *The Alberta Temple: Centre and Symbol of Faith*, 56.

<sup>140</sup> Hamilton, “The Salt Lake Temple: An Architectural Monograph”, 118.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-18.

<sup>142</sup> Anderson, “The Los Angeles Temple,” 806.

<sup>143</sup> Wood, *The Alberta Temple: Centre and Symbol of Faith*, 56. For an image of this room and its mural above the veil, see the pamphlet titled “The Mormon Temple, Cardston, Alberta,” (Cardston, Alberta: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, c1961), 9. A copy of this pamphlet can be found at the LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City, UT.

<sup>144</sup> One LDS scholar writes: “During the Millennium there will, of course, be two kinds of people on earth. There will be those who are mortal, and those who are immortal. There will be those who have been changed or quickened or transfigured or translated (words fail us to describe their state), and those who have gone through a second change, in the twinkling of an eye, so as to become eternal in nature. There will be those who are on probation, for whom earth life is a probationary estate, and who are thus working out their own salvation, and those who have already overcome the world and have entered into a fulness of eternal joy. There will be those who will yet die in the sense of being changed from their quickened state to a state of immortality, and those who, having previously died, are then living in a resurrected state.” Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 644.

<sup>145</sup> Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 159.

formation to participate unitedly in prayer."<sup>146</sup> After this rite, individuals prepare to pass through the veil or symbolic "gate of heaven."<sup>147</sup> Douglas Davies suggests that the "veil symbolizes the division between the earth and the Celestial Kingdom of the heavenly realms" since "initiates do, literally, pass through it as they gain new status as endowed Saints invested with divine potential."<sup>148</sup> The cosmic symbolism of the Mormon veil crosses over into Judaism. As we recall from earlier, a veil separated the Jewish temple's Holy Place (*hekhal*) and the Holy of Holies (*debir*) – a boundary between heaven and earth. The Mormon temple veil, therefore, "is in similitude of [the] one in the Tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon."<sup>149</sup>

On other occasions, Mormons may interpret the veil of the temple with Christocentric symbolism. Paul writes that prior to Jesus Christ's atonement, "the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest" (Heb. 9:8). In fact, access to the Holy of Holies was only available to "the high priest alone once every year" (Heb. 9:7) on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). For Latter-day Saints, the rending of the veil in the Jerusalem temple at Jesus Christ's crucifixion (Matt. 27:51) symbolized the removal of the barrier between heaven and earth. This understanding is suggested by the experience of the Mormon temple endowment where followers of Jesus Christ actually do pass through a parted veil into the "holiest of all." The Mormon theological understanding of the role of the Savior's atonement in the temple might adequately be expressed in the words of Paul; all mankind might now have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh" (Heb. 10:19-20). The architectural experience of the Mormon temple reinforces the vivid imagery evoked by Paul's epistle to the Hebrews since initiates are able to gain access to God's heavenly realm through the veil. "To pass through it into the Celestial Room is to symbolize one's passage and acceptance into the Kingdom of God or the highest degree of spiritual reward" made possible through Jesus Christ's atonement.<sup>150</sup> Theological parallels between the Latter-day Saint understanding of a Messianic paradisiacal era to Judaic thinking will be discussed in the next subsection.

## Jewish

The progression back into the temple's central nave or Holy Place, in

<sup>146</sup> George S. Tate, "Prayer Circle," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1120.

<sup>147</sup> Brown, "'Temple Pro Tempore': The Salt Lake City Endowment House," 44.

<sup>148</sup> Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 80.

<sup>149</sup> Hamilton, *The Salt Lake Temple: A Monument to a People*, 97. This page also has a color photograph of the Salt Lake Temple Terrestrial room and its veil.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

Judaism, may have constituted a return to the paradisiacal realm during the Messianic era. The future paradisaical world, the light of God's presence, and the Tree of Life—as symbolized by the menorah<sup>151</sup>—are all interconnected and accessed as one passes through the eastern gates of the Garden of Eden. According to one interpretation found in 3 Enoch 5:1, the Tree of Life is the location where God's presence (*shekinah*) can be seen: "From the day that the Holy One...banished the first man from the garden of Eden, the Sekinah resided on a cherub beneath the tree of life."<sup>152</sup> While this passage explains that God's presence was associated with the Tree of Life, elsewhere we learn that God's presence is also connected to light. One rabbinical text clarifies this connection: "The candlestick is in the south corresponding to the World to Come in which there is but the light of the Shekhinah (the Presence of God)."<sup>153</sup> A passage from the Babylonian Talmud similarly reads: "In the future world...the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the divine presence, as it says, And they beheld God, and did eat and drink" (b. Berakoth 17a).<sup>154</sup> In each case, the Menorah, Tree of Life, light, and God's presence all appear to be associated with each other.

In Judaism, the fallen, disordered world will be transformed into a paradisiacal state during the Messianic era. Isaiah states that God "will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord" (Isaiah 51:3). Even the cursed "land that was desolate [shall] become like the garden of Eden," reads another passage (Ezekiel 36:35). The earth's transformation is reinforced aesthetically in the temple as priests moved from the courtyard to the ornate walls adorned with paradise sculptural motifs within the Holy Place. "It appears, then, that the interior of the sanctuary was both a replica of its celestial counterpart and an image of the primordial and future paradise, with which the heavenly temple

<sup>151</sup> One biblical scholar, Donald Parry, refers to Exodus 25:31-40 and calls the menorah a "a stylized tree of life" since it "must have had the appearance of a tree, possessing seven branches (a number of symbolic significance to the Israelite community) and a number of flowers (Almond blossoms?)." He further explains, "the actual, living tree of life was present in the garden, and symbolic representations of the tree of life, in the form of lampstands, were present in later Israelite temples." Parry, "Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary," 31.

<sup>152</sup> Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:259.

<sup>153</sup> "Midrash Tadshe," xxviii; cited in Patai, *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual*, 115-16.

<sup>154</sup> This quotation has reference to Exodus 24:9-11 when the 70 elders "saw the God of Israel" at the midway point up Mount Sinai. Here the elder's vision of seeing God and the future world are both interpreted as food and drink. Because the Temple's nave (Holy Place or *heikal*)—especially the south side with the menorah—symbolizes the future Messianic Era, the Sinai experience of seeing a vision of God (*shekinah*) at the midway point confirms the significance of tripartite eschatological symbolism. Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:259n5c.

was closely connected if not identified," asserts Morray-Jones.<sup>155</sup>

Accessing the future paradisiacal world, somewhat reminiscent of the Mormon conception of this episode of cosmic history, was made possible "through the eschatological renewal that comes with the appearance of the Messiah."<sup>156</sup> One Jewish text explains how this is to occur: "Then shall the Lord raise up a new priest...And in his priesthood shall sin come to an end...And he shall open the gates of paradise, And shall remove the sword which threatens Man, And give to the saints to eat from the Tree of Life...And he shall bound Belial [Satan], And give strength to his children to tread upon evil spirits" (Testament of Levi, 18).<sup>157</sup> The Messianic figure is the individual who reverses the effects of the fall by putting an end to sin, binding Satan, opening the gates of paradise, removing the flaming sword, and letting the righteous partake of the Tree of Life. Also connected with the commencement of the Messianic era and the (re)opening of paradise is the theme of judgment. Both the "Day of Judgment" and the opening of the "gates of the Garden of Eden in the east," for instance, occur on the third day of the Messianic era (Nistarot R. Shim'on ben Yohai, BhM 3:80-81).<sup>158</sup> In like manner, it is at the hour of judgment that "the sinners of Israel will be shaken into Gehenna [i.e. destination of the wicked] for twelve months, and thereafter the Holy One...will bring them up, and they will sit in the Garden of Eden and enjoy its fruits" (Nistarot R. Shim'on ben Yohai, BhM 3:80-81).<sup>159</sup> The examples in these texts closely resemble the Mormon sequence of events ushering in the Millennium.<sup>160</sup>

The Jerusalem temple Holy Place possessed both an altar and a veil – an interesting parallel to the Latter-day Saint Terrestrial room. The altar was overlaid with "pure gold" and was used daily to burn incense in the morning and evening (Exod. 30:1-10, 34-36). The rising smoke of the incense was symbolic of prayers ascending to God; as the psalmist writes, "let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Ps. 141:2).<sup>161</sup> Similarly, it is not by happenstance that both the burning of incense at the golden altar and the appointed time of prayer at the temple occurred at the same time: "And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense" (Luke 1:10). The burning of incense at the altar and its

<sup>155</sup> Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate. Part 1: The Jewish Sources," 206. See also Jon, "The Temple and the World," 297-98.

<sup>156</sup> Lanfer, *Remembering Eden*, 108-11.

<sup>157</sup> Cited in Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, 190-91.

<sup>158</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>159</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> For instance, the Second Coming of Christ includes the binding of Satan, the end of sin, a partial preliminary judgment, and the resurrection of the just (similar to the figurative expression of partaking of the tree of life and receiving immortality). See D&C 88:95-110; 45:44-59.

<sup>161</sup> John's apocalyptic vision later reaffirms this symbolism, see Rev. 5:8: 8:3-4.

connections to prayer are yet another link to the Mormon prayer circle rituals at an altar before a veil. Lastly, passage through the veil of the temple for both Judaism and Mormonism symbolized entering into the presence of God in the heavenly realm. As the discussion shifts to the Catholic tradition, the similarities among the religions continue to appear.

## Catholic

Like Mormon and Jewish temples, the Messianic paradisiacal era is present in Catholic churches. As was discussed in the third episode of cosmic history, Catholic initiates who moved from the narthex into the nave were said to have symbolically re-entered "the earthly paradise once lost by Adam but now regained by Christ."<sup>162</sup> According to Jean Daniélou, we learn that "contrasted with Adam, who falls under the domination of Satan and is driven from Paradise, the catechumen is as though [he or she is] freed from such domination by the New Adam [i.e., Christ] and led back to Paradise."<sup>163</sup> Similar to the Mormon endowment, Christ is the messianic figure who makes a return to the paradisiacal era possible. In an effort to reinforce this theme, many Gothic and Romanesque church doors and entry portals depicted Christ as the gatekeeper-guardian of paradise because of his messianic role at the Last Judgment.<sup>164</sup> The Gothic western Royal Portal at Chartres Cathedral is a prime example that emphasizes the Savior's millennial role as judge and gatekeeper. Spiro Kostof describes the scene: "encompassed by apostles, angels, and the twenty-four elders of the Apocalypse who witness His return, Christ sits in an aureole of glory...[Yet] Nothing is intimated of the punishments and rewards to be meted out at the Second Coming"<sup>165</sup> On the other hand, the main west facade tympanum above the doorway of the Romanesque church Ste.-Foy at Conques portrays a more dramatic scene of the Last Judgment with the righteous receiving rewards on Christ's right hand and the wicked banished to hell on His left.<sup>166</sup> These types of scenes are both "a warning and an encouragement to the uninitiated as well as the laity. Its timeless message," writes Thomas Barrie, "demands a commitment to die to the ways of the

<sup>162</sup> Dietz, "The Nuptial Meaning of Classic Church Architecture," 134. Cf. St Simeon of Thessalonica, "Homily on the Transfiguration", *Patrologia Graeca*, col. 565A.

<sup>163</sup> Jean-Guenolé-Marie Daniélou, S.J., *Bible et liturgie, la théologie biblique des sacrements et des fêtes d'après les Pères de l'Église* (Paris, 1951), p. 47, cited in Eliade, "The Yearning for Paradise in Primitive Tradition," 261.

<sup>164</sup> George Zarnecki, *Romanesque Art* (New York: Universe Books, 1971), 145; Thomas Barrie, *Spiritual Path, Sacred Place: Myth, Ritual, and Meaning in Architecture* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), 60. See also Christine Smith, "Before and after the End of Time," in *Before and after the End of Time, Architecture and the Year 1000*, ed. Christine Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Design School, 2000), 23.

<sup>165</sup> Spiro Kostof and Greg Castillo, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 336-37.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 305-07.

world and submit to God and the salvation promised by Christ."<sup>167</sup> Paralleling the cherubim guardians on the Jewish temple veil and doors, the Catholic church doors are similarly guarded by the Savior. "Only through Christ can one enter Paradise, for He is the door of Heaven," observes Margaret Frazer.<sup>168</sup> We are reminded that it was Jesus who declared, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9).

On certain occasions special entry rituals occur in Roman Catholic churches which reinforce the symbolism of a Messianic paradisiacal era. During the Christmas Eve ritual during the Jubilee year, for instance, the Pope opens the *Porta Santa* or Holy Door at Saint Peter's Basilica, symbolizing how Christ's coming into the world opens the doors of salvation.<sup>169</sup> In several seventeenth-century examples of commemorative Jubilee medallions, penitents are shown waiting for the Holy Door to be opened up unto them by the Savior who is the gatekeeper of paradise.<sup>170</sup> While the "Holy Gate" ritual is performed in the narthex of several other important churches, on each occasion the Pope knocks three times on the door, whereupon the symbolic gate of paradise is opened and redemption from the fall is made possible. Alonzo Gaskill explains the symbolism of this rite in these words: "knocking three times has been associated with the idea that the opening of the veil or 'gate of heaven' would bring joy to (1) those in heaven, (2) those on earth, and (3) those bound in purgatory or spirit prison. Thus, three groups rejoice over God's returning sheep, and hence the pope or bishop knocks three times."<sup>171</sup> Although each person passing through the sacred threshold is considered "saved," one must still "leave behind them the burden of sin before entering the Holy Gate!"<sup>172</sup> Similar to Adam's reconciliation process before Eden's gate, each person who entered the church must pass through the "doors in a spirit of contrition in order to receive pardon for their sins."<sup>173</sup> The Holy Door ritual also has close parallels to the temple gates at Jerusalem, as it "represents the return of the penitent into the presence of God."<sup>174</sup> Herbert Thurston claims that "the opening of the Holy Gate is further said to have been prefigured by the opening, on Sabbaths and Feasts, of the East Gate of the Temple at

<sup>167</sup> Barrie, *Spiritual Path, Sacred Place: Myth, Ritual, and Meaning in Architecture*, 225.

<sup>168</sup> Margaret English Frazer, "Church Doors and the Gates of Paradise: Byzantine Bronze Doors in Italy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 27(1973): 162.

<sup>169</sup> Herbert Thurston, *The Holy Year of Jubilee* (St. Louis: Herder, 1900; reprint, 1980), 30, 243-44.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 50, 99.

<sup>171</sup> Alonzo L. Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols: Finding Meaning in Rites, Rituals, and Ordinances* (Springville, UT: CFI, 2011), 231. Cf. Thurston, *The Holy Year of Jubilee*, 244.

<sup>172</sup> Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols*, 230. Cf. Thurston, *The Holy Year of Jubilee*, 53.

<sup>173</sup> Thurston, *The Holy Year of Jubilee*, 243-45.

<sup>174</sup> Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols*, 229.

Jerusalem, which remained closed on other days."<sup>175</sup> For Christians, the main doors into the church represented "celestial doors"<sup>176</sup> leading to another world; they were truly the "gates of paradise."<sup>177</sup>

The Messianic and paradisaical symbolism attributed to the nave of the church is further maintained by Catholic rituals performed at Christmas and Easter. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and its theological message that the gates of paradise are once again opened to humanity is commemorated during Easter rituals. In fact, "during Easter week, the great door to the altar remains open during the entire service" to reinforce how Christ's resurrection has opened the doors of salvation.<sup>178</sup> Likewise, the "Christmas reception of the Eucharist marked the end of the mournful but expectant season of Advent, during which time the Eucharist was not received by the laity and through which time the statues and pictures in the church, at least in some locales, were veiled from sight just as they were in Lent."<sup>179</sup> Thus, at the Christmas commemoration of the Savior's birth, salvation is again restored to the laity through the liturgy of the Eucharist. In some artwork, such as Petrus Christus' fifteenth-century painting titled *Annunciation*, one finds a type of Messianic-themed architectural symbolism. Here "the Virgin Mary is depicted standing in the narthex of a church because the Incarnation has not yet taken place. In the painting the doors to the nave, or earthly paradise, are as of yet closed," explains Helen Dietz. "In Jan van Eyck's *Madonna in a church*, on the other hand," Dietz continues, "the Incarnation has already taken place; hence, Mary, her divine Child in her arms, is depicted standing in the nave which is the earthly paradise now restored by the advent of Christ."<sup>180</sup>

Similar among all three religions is the use of curtain-like veils or partitions separating the heavenly and earthly realms. On certain sacred occasions, such as Holy Thursday, the sanctuary veil in medieval Catholic churches was pulled aside and allowed the laity to "experience a foretaste of the heavenly wedding feast, the veil between this life and the next having been, as it were, temporarily removed." A few days later, writes Dietz, "the lay communicants on Easter Sunday were admitted not physically, but in spirit, into

<sup>175</sup> Thurston, *The Holy Year of Jubilee*, 244. Cf. Ezekiel 46:1.

<sup>176</sup> Frazer, "Church Doors and the Gates of Paradise: Byzantine Bronze Doors in Italy," 162.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. See also Eloise M. Angiola, "'Gates of Paradise' and the Florentine Baptistery," *The Art Bulletin* 60, no. 2 (1978): 242.

<sup>178</sup> Hans Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung der Kathedrale*, Zurich, 1950, p. 119. Cited in Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, 1st American ed. (New York: Harcourt, 1959), 61-62.

<sup>179</sup> Dietz, "The Nuptial Meaning of Classic Church Architecture," 139. See also "Revelation through Veiling in the Old Roman Catholic Liturgy," in Mosebach, *Heresy of Formlessness*, 161-73.

<sup>180</sup> Dietz, "The Nuptial Meaning of Classic Church Architecture," 134-36.

the sanctuary which symbolized heaven."<sup>181</sup> Early Church Father John Chrysostom similarly comments, "when you see the veils withdrawn, then think you see heaven opened, and the angels descending from above."<sup>182</sup> While the Catholic veil experience did not allow initiates to physically enter the heavenly realm, as in the contemporary Mormon experience, it yet retained the connection to Jesus Christ's role in parting the veil and giving humanity a glimpse of eternity.

Christological symbolism, similar to the Latter-day Saint tradition, was connected directly to the veil of the early Christian church. "Jerome informs us that one fourth-century church in Anablatha (near Jerusalem) was discovered to have a veil hanging in the sanctuary that bore the image of Christ. Epiphanius, upon entering the church, was so unsettled by the discovery that he ripped it down and ordered a plain white veil to be hung in its place."<sup>183</sup> Another parallel to the Mormon veil experience is found in medieval confessions. Before wooden confession booths were prescribed, notes James White, "confessions had frequently been heard at the roodscreen, but without the distinct space to ensure secrecy."<sup>184</sup> At this symbolic boundary between heaven and earth, the penitent had the opportunity to speak with someone who represented the Lord as they confessed their sins through the veil.<sup>185</sup> Catholic confession up until the Council of Trent,<sup>186</sup> therefore, had clear references to the ancient Jewish temple veil as well as the "symbolic veil scene" of the Mormon temple where a "candidate appears before God, who alone can forgive sins."<sup>187</sup>

The learning across the religious traditions in the Messianic paradisiacal era has continued to be a productive venture. Theological themes from this episode of cosmic history are interwoven deeply into the symbolism associated with the Catholic nave, Jewish Holy Place, and Mormon Terrestrial room as a renewed paradisiacal garden. Another particularly fascinating

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>182</sup> Cited in Bingham, *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, 436.

<sup>183</sup> Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols*, 230. See Epiphanius, "Letter to John, Bishop of Jerusalem," cited by Jerome in "The Letters of Saint Jerome," Letter LI, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—Second Series*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 14 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 6:89. Cf. Bingham, *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, 436-37.

<sup>184</sup> James F. White, *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent to Today*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 4-5.

<sup>185</sup> "Like Catholics, Latter-day Saints have also occasionally used the term 'porter' for an office associated with ritual. In early LDS practice the individual who stood on the celestial side of the temple veil, representing the Father, was sometimes referred to as a 'porter.'" Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols*, 19n10.

<sup>186</sup> The symbolism of the veil was partially obscured after this Council since it had "the effect of transforming the entire church into a narthex, an unadorned anteroom where, according to the custom of the ancient Church, public sinners would wait to be absolved." Mosebach, *Heresy of Formlessness*, 171.

<sup>187</sup> Von Wellnitz, "The Catholic Liturgy and the Mormon Temple," 29.

insight that was (re)discovered in the Mormon temple endowment sequence during the theological dialogue with Jewish and Catholic traditions was the important role of the Messiah figure, who ushers in an era of Millennial peace by restoring humanity to the paradise once lost by Adam and allows the faithful to (re)enter God's presence through a veil. The journey of comparative theology through this architectural hermeneutic shortly comes to an end as we enter the final episode of cosmic history.

### **Episode V: The Perfected Heavenly Realm**

For Mormon, Jewish, and Catholic sacred space, the final episode of cosmic history is the perfected heavenly realm. In this episode, we find several themes common among the religions, which include God's presence, the ark or altar as a heavenly throne, divine light, and notions of a heavenly paradise.

#### **Mormon**

The Mormon endowment sequence comes to an end as initiates pass through the temple veil and enter a space representing the perfected, heavenly realm. The space is given the name of the Celestial room since, in Mormon theology, the Celestial Kingdom is the highest degree and glory of heaven (D&C 76:70 [50-70]; cf. 1 Cor. 15:40-42). Allen Claire Rozsa remarks that entering the Celestial room is a symbolic "return to the presence of God, a place of exquisite beauty and serenity, where one may feel and meditate 'in the beauty of holiness' (Ps. 29:2)." <sup>188</sup> The architectural experience of this space is unique because of its doctrinal significance. <sup>189</sup> Juxtaposed against the other endowment rooms that require active ritual participation, the Celestial room is inherently different. As "a place of aesthetic splendor and quiet contemplation," <sup>190</sup> the Celestial room shifts its focus away from the theatrical presentation of the ritual drama.

Architectural features of Celestial rooms are used to symbolize the transition to the heavenly realm and enhance the contemplative atmosphere. Several examples include the use of verticality, domes, and increased levels of light. As initiates first enter the Celestial room, a noticeable difference in comparison to the other endowment rooms is the increased size in spatial volume and/or ceiling height – a strategy for reinforcing the eternal rewards

<sup>188</sup> Allen Claire Rozsa, "Temple Ordinances," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1445.

<sup>189</sup> Hamilton, "The Salt Lake Temple: An Architectural Monograph", 120.

<sup>190</sup> Ludlow, *Principles and Practices of the Restored Gospel*, 367.

associated with heaven.<sup>191</sup> In the Salt Lake Temple, the Celestial room's "spatial expansion was a deliberate effort to express visually a feeling of exaltation and a spiritual terminus," writes Hamilton.<sup>192</sup> Domes are another feature used in Celestial rooms to evoke a sense of verticality. While this is a more recent strategy in Mormon temple architecture, its use links it to the symbolism of the "dome of heaven" that is found in many Byzantine churches.<sup>193</sup> The symbolism of light is yet another feature closely associated with the architectural message of the Celestial room, since light represents the brightness and glory of God's Celestial Kingdom – often compared to the sun (see D&C 76:70). Consequently, many Celestial rooms are designed to be the most brightly lit space within the endowment sequence. The San Diego California Temple, for example, has "three times more glass than any other Mormon temple,"<sup>194</sup> and its Celestial room is flanked by enormous vertical panels of art glass flooding the interior with heavenly qualities of light.

Another way the heavenly realm is commemorated is through painted murals, stained glass windows, and mirrors. In the Celestial room of the Vernal Utah Temple, there is a large painting of Jesus Christ with outstretched arms to greet initiates who symbolically enter God's presence.<sup>195</sup> Other artistic representations of the heavenly realm depict sky and clouds on either ceilings or walls.<sup>196</sup> After passing through the veil in the San Diego California Temple, for instance, initiates enter a barrel-vaulted corridor painted with "soft clouds" leading them to the Celestial room.<sup>197</sup> Other temples, such as those in Los Angeles, California and Hamilton, New Zealand, have light pastel-colored wall murals depicting heavenly

<sup>191</sup> "The hierarchical ascendancy of the Celestial over the Terrestrial and Teletial kingdoms of reward is architecturally evident in the height difference among these emblematic rooms." Hamilton, "The Salt Lake Temple: An Architectural Monograph", 120. See also Jackson, "Designing and Constructing the 'New' Nauvoo Temple: A Personal Reflection," 218. One of the tallest and most dramatic Celestial rooms is found in the San Diego California Temple.

<sup>192</sup> Hamilton, "The Salt Lake Temple: An Architectural Monograph", 119.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Kathleen E. McVey, "The Domed Church as Microcosm: Literary Roots of an Architectural Symbol," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 37(1983). Several examples of Mormon Celestial rooms with domes can be found in the St. Louis Missouri, Redlands California, and Boston Massachusetts temples. For a photograph of the St. Louis Missouri Celestial room, see "Things Pertaining to This House," *Temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1999): 48.

<sup>194</sup> Ann Jarmusch, "Spiritual Spectacle | Traditional Design Takes a Back Seat at Freeway-Close Mormon Temple," *The San Diego Union - Tribune*, February 21, 1993.

<sup>195</sup> A photograph of this room can be found in the booklet *Preparing to Enter The Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2002), 6.

<sup>196</sup> Two examples are found in the Celestial rooms of the Washington D.C. and Brisbane Australia Temples.

<sup>197</sup> Sandi Dolbee, "Public Gets First Look at Mormons' New Temple," *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, February 19, 1993.

gardens.<sup>198</sup> Temple patrons who enter the Celestial room in the Idaho Falls Idaho Temple encounter wall murals portraying heavenly gardens dotted with groups of people dressed in white clothing.<sup>199</sup> One theological message of this painting bears witness to the doctrine of eternal families; "And that same sociality which exists among us here [on earth] will exist among us there [in heaven], only it will be coupled with eternal glory" (D&C 130:2). Beyond painted murals, stained glass windows are another link to ideas about the heavenly realm. In several Celestial rooms, one finds stained glass depictions of the tree of life as a reaffirmation of John's apocalyptic vision that this unique tree is near God's heavenly throne (Rev. 22:1-2).<sup>200</sup> One last important feature adorning several Celestial rooms is the presence of large wall mirrors. Often the mirrors are placed on parallel walls to produce a set of diminishing images that reinforce sacred time, eternity, and the endless rewards of eternal life.<sup>201</sup> In the Mormon Celestial room, one finds the use of light, verticality, paintings, stained glass, and mirrors in order to assist temple patrons as they prayerfully contemplate within the space representing the heavenly realm. As Alonzo Gaskill explains, "that which is beyond the veil" and within the Celestial room truly "represents God's abode—Heaven, the Celestial Kingdom."<sup>202</sup>

## Jewish

Somewhat similar in theological significance to the Mormon Celestial room is the ancient Jewish temple's most sacred place or Holy of Holies (*debir*). As Flavius Josephus informs us, the Holy of Holies was meant to represent heaven; in fact, even the "proportion of the measures of the tabernacle proved to be an imitation of the

<sup>198</sup> Similar to these painted wall murals, the Celestial room in the Salt Lake Temple is "richly embellished with [sculptural] clusters of fruits and flowers" to convey the heavenly paradise. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 160.

<sup>199</sup> For a photograph of this Celestial room, see "Things Pertaining to This House," 49.

<sup>200</sup> This includes temples in San Antonio Texas, Accra Ghana, Palmyra New York, and Winter Quarters Nebraska. Val Brinkerhoff, *The Day Star: Reading Sacred Architecture*, ed. Sarah Cutler, 2 vols. (Honeoye Falls, NY: Digital Legend, 2011), 1:58, 142-43. The Palmyra New York Temple even has "twelve pieces of clear glass representing the fruit found on the tree" in parallel to John's "tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits" (Rev. 22:2). See Chad S. Hawkins, *The First 100 Temples* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Eagle Gate, 2001), 211; cf. Gerald E. Hansen, Jr. and Val Brinkerhoff, *Sacred Walls: Learning from Temple Symbols* (Salt Lake City: Covenant Communications, 2009), 4.

<sup>201</sup> Mexico City Mexico and Hong Kong China temples are two examples of Celestial rooms with mirrors, see photographs in "Things Pertaining to This House," 48.

<sup>202</sup> Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols*, 240.

system of the world.”<sup>203</sup> More specifically, the perfect one to one (1:1) proportions of the cube-shaped Holy of Holies “is itself expressive of perfection, the perfection of deity, and within the mythology of ancient temple building is the typical shape of the heavenly temple,” asserts John Lundquist.<sup>204</sup> In the Jewish tradition, we find that the perfected heavenly realm is reflected in the architectural form and proportions of the Holy of Holies. Possibly building upon this Judaic understanding of perfection, several Mormon Celestial rooms from the early twentieth century were designed to be cube-like.<sup>205</sup>

Moving beyond the geometrical form of the space, the spatial sequence or path leading into the temple demonstrates a level of hierarchy through material and technological gradation. Several studies have noted the various gradations by comparing architectural features (materials of doors, colors of woven curtains/veils), building materials and finishes (types of wood or metal paneling), furnishings (materials and finishes), and wall ornamentation (materials, finishes, and craftsmanship).<sup>206</sup> What is apparent in the Jewish model of sacred space is that “the deeper one penetrates towards the innermost part, the more valuable and more technologically sophisticated its components become.”<sup>207</sup> According to Victor Hurowitz, one of the purposes behind this hierarchy “was certainly to inspire a feeling of increasing holiness and grandeur while approaching the most sacred spot, and focusing attention on YHWH who sat enthroned in the *debir*.”<sup>208</sup> Both spatial sequences in the Jewish and Mormon temple are similar in symbolism as they demonstrate a level of increasing holiness as one approaches God’s presence, yet the actual experience is different. As one approaches the Celestial room in the Mormon temple, the ceiling height and light levels increase; meanwhile, the path leading to the Holy of

<sup>203</sup> *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. III, 6:4; 7:7, in Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus, the Learned and Authentic Jewish Historian and Celebrated Warrior*. Similar to Josephus, Rabbi Pinhas ben Ya’ir, a Talmudic sage of the second century writes: “The house of the Holy of Holies was made to correspond to the highest heaven.” Cited in Patai, *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual*, 108.

<sup>204</sup> John M. Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 19. Cf. Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 96-97. The perfect proportions of the cube continued to be used in later religious traditions such as in John’s apocalyptic vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem and the Ka’ba in Mecca. See “The Idea of the Temple within Christianity” and “The Idea of the Temple within Islam,” in Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem*, 151-97.

<sup>205</sup> This is suggested in the square proportions of the floor plans and cross sections of the Alberta Canada and Oakland California temples. See Nels Benjamin Lundwall, *Temples of the Most High*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City, 1945), 403-04; Hugh B. Brown, *Continuing the Quest* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 294-95.

<sup>206</sup> See Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995; reprint, 2nd), 158-65; Hurowitz, “Yhwh’s Exalted House,” 88-90; Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 101-06.

<sup>207</sup> Hurowitz, “Yhwh’s Exalted House,” 88; cf. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service*, 164.

<sup>208</sup> Hurowitz, “Yhwh’s Exalted House,” 89.

Holies in the Jewish temple was an inverse of the Mormon configuration, since the ceiling height and lighting levels incrementally decreased. The association of God's presence and symbolic light in the Holy of Holies, nonetheless, remains fixed despite the difference in experience.

A closer look at the Holy of Holies reveals its connection to the perfected heavenly realm. One factor reinforcing the idea of heavenly paradise was through its wall depictions of vegetation within the Holy of Holies (1 Kings 6:29). The décor of the walls, similar to the wall murals of Mormon Celestial rooms, professed that the "Holy of Holies was also beyond time. To enter was to enter eternity."<sup>209</sup> The Ark of the Covenant, encompassed by the cherubim, was placed in the exact center of the room and symbolized God's heavenly throne in eternity; it was a place of oracle where one received divine revelation.<sup>210</sup> Thus, when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies it was as if he were entering God's presence in the heavenly realm.<sup>211</sup> While painted representations of clouds in Mormon Celestial rooms evoke a sense of the heavenly realm, incense in the Jewish ritual could have stirred up a similar experience for the high priest. "Entering the Holy of Holies with a cloud of incense is the temple reality that underlies the visions of the human figure entering heaven with clouds or of the LORD appearing in clouds upon the throne," Margaret Barker illustrates.<sup>212</sup>

## Catholic

The sanctuary or apse within a Catholic church is connected to the symbolic association of the perfected heavenly realm. Some early sources link the arched and circular form of the apse to "the canopy of heaven."<sup>213</sup> In the early church, the sanctuary space was separated from the rest of the nave by railings, fences, veils, or screens; subsequently, access to it was restricted only to "ordained clergy."<sup>214</sup> Paraphrasing Eusebius, the "whole altar place was kept inaccessible to all but the clergy in time of divine service."<sup>215</sup> This imagery reminds us of the exclusive nature of the Jewish temple's

<sup>209</sup> Barker, *The Great High Priest*, 192. Cf. Philo, *Questions on Exodus* 2:91.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 199. We know that in "Solomon's Temple, the Holy of Holies (the innermost sacred sanctuary, which housed the Ark of the Covenant and the cherubim), was in the shape of a cube." In fact, "Yahweh was said to speak to his people from above the ark and between the wings of the cherubim...[since] this was at the quincunx, or dead centre, of the cube, which vibrationally was the place of power and transformation, just as it is within any pyramid shape." Gordon Strachan, *Chartres: Sacred Geometry, Sacred Space* (Poland: Floris Books, 2003), 56.

<sup>211</sup> Barker, *The Great High Priest*, 189.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 222. Cf. Isaiah 6:1-4; Dan. 7:13; Acts 1:9; Rev. 1:7, 10:1.

<sup>213</sup> Bingham, *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, 437.

<sup>214</sup> Dietz, "The Nuptial Meaning of Classic Church Architecture," 134. Bingham, *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, 2:431.

<sup>215</sup> Bingham, *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, 2:433.

Holy of Holies, which was accessed by the high priest but once a year. In many instances, the apse, altar, or sanctuary are sometimes referred to in language similar to the Holy of Holies discussed earlier.<sup>216</sup> Thus, the Catholic sanctuary “stood for the heavenly paradise which is the abode of God.”<sup>217</sup> The altar within the sanctuary had its parallels to the Ark of the Covenant. According to His Holiness Benedict XVI, Roman pontiff emeritus, “the altar is the place where heaven is opened up.” Accordingly, the closed end of the apse “does not close off the church, but opens it up—and leads it into the eternal liturgy.”<sup>218</sup> The Catholic altar and sanctuary are reminiscent of the Jewish Holy of Holies and Mormon Celestial room as they become the place of revelation. “Like the architecture of the Jerusalem Temple with its three ascending levels which reach a climax at the Holy of Holies, the classic Christian church with its three ascending levels which reach a climax at a curtained and canopied altar, expresses through architecture God’s revelation of himself,” claims Helen Dietz.<sup>219</sup> The connections between the apse and the temple’s Holy of Holies are further confirmed by looking at the ninth-century apse mosaic of Germigny-des-Prés Oratorio in France, which depicts cherubim and the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>220</sup>

Another way that the sanctuary and its apse reinforce heaven is through paradisaic themes. Often a cross is placed in the apse of Catholic churches as a symbolic Tree of Life. This is precisely because, in early Christian art, “the cross replaces the tree of Eden and opens again the potential for eternal life and favor with God.”<sup>221</sup> The Basilica of San Clemente in Rome has a fine example of a mosaic that reinforces this symbolism. According to one text, the cross in the mosaic “takes on the character of the Tree of Life of the Paradise, hitherto lost, but now restored by Christ. The Four Rivers of Paradise (Gen. 2:10), now springing from the foot of the Cross, are fed from ‘the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the Throne of God and of the Lamb’ (Rev. 22:1), i.e. from the Cross.”<sup>222</sup> As one recalls from the earlier discussion, several Mormon Celestial rooms depict a similar paradisaic theme to the San Clemente mosaic, but instead use stained glass windows to portray the Tree of Life. It is therefore in the Catholic apse that we have important theological connections to God’s perfected heavenly realm.

The journey of faith in learning across religious borders has come to

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 2:430.

<sup>217</sup> Dietz, “The Nuptial Meaning of Classic Church Architecture,” 134. Cf. St Simeon of Thessalonica, “Homily on the Transfiguration”, *Patrologia Graeca*, col. 565A.

<sup>218</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. J. Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 71.

<sup>219</sup> Dietz, “The Nuptial Meaning of Classic Church Architecture,” 142.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. Hamblin and Seely, *Solomon’s Temple*, 115.

<sup>221</sup> Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 154.

<sup>222</sup> *Mosaico Di S.Clemente*, (Rome, Italy: Collegio S.Clemente, 1988), Figs. 1-3; cf. *San Clemente, Roma*, (Rome, Italy: Collegio S.Clemente, 1992), Figs. 6-8.

an end with the perfected heavenly realm. The theological dialogue between the Mormon Celestial room, the Jewish Holy of Holies, and the Catholic sanctuary and apse has successfully identified several overlapping themes that the religions share in this last episode of cosmic history. The symbolism behind entering God's divine presence through a veil carries over into each religious tradition and is portrayed through art, architecture, ritual, and scripture. Similarly, divine light is representative of heaven. Whether it is the Celestial room, the Holy of Holies, or the sanctuary-apse, each space represents a place where the divine and human are meant to touch – they are spaces for God's revelations. Each of the common threads that have been identified have enhanced the (re)interpretation of the perfected heavenly realm and its place within the episodes of cosmic history.

### **Conclusions + Theological Reflections**

The comparative theology employed throughout the paper has been a means to clarify various similarities among the three religions by analyzing their ritual experiences, religious ideals, spatial sequences, and cosmic episodes of history. Although the architectural configurations are formally and historically different, faith-promoting parallels are discovered along with divergent opportunities for interreligious dialogue. The reflections presented in this paper suggest how one's understanding of the architectural experience of a specific typology of sacred space, such as the Mormon temple, can be enriched when it is compared cross-culturally, non-historically, and inter-religiously to other cases of sacred architecture. More specifically, I have found that Jones' hermeneutical methods of interpreting and comparing sacred architecture, when combined with Clooney's methods of comparative theology, appear to be compatible. The grouping of these methods has been fruitful in the "back-and-forth learning"<sup>223</sup> of this paper, but also in the revealing of rare and important connections across Mormonism, Judaism, and Catholicism.

My personal apprehensions and understanding of sacred architecture has greatly been enriched by visits to many of the buildings mentioned in this project. In each encounter, I have gained a greater appreciation for both the variety and similarity that exists among the architectural configurations. Each building (to some degree or another) conveys some type of spiritual message or symbolic meaning and leaves me with a spiritual experience. It is at this time that I desire to share some of those personal architectural apprehensions and theological reflections.

The journey I have been engaged in over the past several years has revealed important overlapping relationships across the three religious traditions. This revelation has come by comparing

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 11.

scripture, ritual, art, and architecture. Through an exploration of the five episodes of cosmic history, it is evident how the contemporary temple of Mormonism connects to both the ancient Jewish Temple and the Catholic Basilica. One finds in the story of creation, with its association to the light and darkness of Day One, a crucial pattern for the cosmogonic primordial era – a theme which is conveyed architecturally through the Catholic apse-sanctuary, Jewish Holy of Holies, and Mormon Creation room. The abundant fertility associated with the paradisaal world of Eden is, likewise, correlated to art, ritual, and architecture found in the Jewish Holy Place, Mormon Garden room, and Catholic nave. After being cast out of the Garden, Adam and Eve enter the fallen, disordered world ruled by Satan. The need for reconciliation from sin is once again architecturally reinforced across religions with the use of courtyards, narthexes, or rooms representing mankind's fallen condition. Later, one learns that the coming of the Messiah ushers in a paradisiacal era which (re)introduces Adam and his posterity into the Garden of the Lord. Here, prayer at altars, conversations at curtain-like partitions, and promises of resurrection for the faithful are found in the Mormon Terrestrial room, Catholic nave, and Jewish Holy Place. Finally, one encounters the perfected heavenly realm where the light of God's presence is reverently revealed in the architecture of the Celestial room, Holy of Holies, and sanctuary. Consequently, I have found that the Mormon temple can be (re)interpreted in light of the cosmic symbolism of the Jewish temple's tripartite spatial sequence and its themes of creation, fall, and atonement. Likewise, the Catholic tripartite architectural narrative and its eschatological meaning parallel the Mormon temple endowment sequence and its symbolic meaning.

It is as a Mormon studying Jewish and Catholic traditions that I have found the following comparative theological project to be a revelation full of faith-promoting insights and truths about God's "plan of salvation." First, I would suggest that Latter-day Saints can come to a better understanding of God's plan through this Mormon-Jewish-Catholic architectural comparison. For example, most graphical representations of the plan of salvation published by the Church (here I am reminded of flip charts I used as a missionary and the diagrams published by the Church Education System) are typically depicted in a linear format. The design of these diagrams are meant to be read from left-to-right, beginning with the following sequence of events: 1) pre-mortal life, 2) the veil or birth, 3) mortality or earth life, 4) physical death or the grave, 5) the spirit world, 6) resurrection and judgment, and 7) the three degrees or kingdoms of glory. Out of the seven elements listed, only three (perhaps four) of the five episodes of cosmic history are represented. In other words, only three or four rooms of the temple's five-room endowment sequence are conveyed in Church-published diagrams. Nowhere in this portrayal of God's plan of cosmic history do we find the paradisaal world of Eden or the Messianic paradisiacal era

(except for the case of resurrection or judgment). Theoretically, if we were to apply this technique of representing the plan of salvation to the symbolism associated with a Catholic basilica, the entire nave would disappear. The exact same thing would happen to the Jewish Temple's Holy Place if the symbolism of those episodes were removed. Similarly, if the presentation of the Mormon Temple endowment were to eliminate these episodes of cosmic history, then important aspects of God's plan of salvation would be missing and lose their theological significance. As a Latter-day Saint, it would be difficult to imagine the endowment sequence without Adam and Eve's Garden story and their subsequent fall and expulsion. Thus, an important insight that is (re)discovered by (re)interpreting the Mormon temple endowment sequence during its theological dialogue with other faiths is precisely how important these two episodes of cosmic history really are for God's "plan of salvation."

One last observation that was learned during my ongoing sojourn through comparative theology is the important role of the Mormon Temple's five-room endowment sequence in conveying a cyclical vision of cosmic history. One finds in the symbolism of the Creation and Celestial rooms, for instance, the notion that a person ends their journey where they began – namely, in the presence of God. The theological significance of a cyclical vision of salvation history for both Mormons and Catholics is how Jesus Christ is both "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev. 22:13). Latter-day Saints may more readily recognize the cyclical symbolism in the phrase, God's "course is one eternal round" (D&C 3:2; 35:1; Alma 7:20; 37:12; 1 Nephi 10:19).<sup>224</sup> When the tripartite layout of Jewish and Catholic sacred architecture is compared to the five-room sequence of the Mormon Temple, at first glance, the formal and spatial composition leads one to believe that there is no significant correlation between the religious buildings. After a closer examination of the episodes of cosmic history, however, one is able to (re)interpret the sacred architecture of Judaism and Catholicism in light of the Mormon Temple. Consequently, Jews and Catholics (though I venture with some hesitation) might be able to come to a new theological understanding of their linear configurations of architecture in light of the somewhat cyclical symbolism of the Mormon temple endowment.

During this journey of "faith seeking understanding," specifically in (re)interpreting the five-room sequence of the Mormon temple endowment, I have discovered a type of comparative hermeneutic theology. As established earlier in this paper, the Mormon Temple

<sup>224</sup> The cyclical nature of the Mormon endowment also has ties to Mircea Eliade's "myth of the eternal return" which he derives from non-Western or (so-called) primitive religions. See, for instance, Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*.

is similar to both Jewish and Catholic sacred spaces; it “stands as a transitional location. It mediates between time and eternity, between the pre-existence, earthly existence and the post-mortem realm of the afterlife.”<sup>225</sup> Thus, it is my hope that the reader will take these findings and allow them to become the means of alleviating some of the (mis)understandings and (mis)interpretations among different religious architectural traditions as well as cultivating opportunities for future interreligious dialogue. As a self-identified Latter-day Saint and novice disciple-scholar who has honestly sought for truth and understanding, I have come to view my humble research efforts “to learn across religious borders as in harmony with God’s plan.”<sup>226</sup> In conclusion, it is my testimony of God’s “plan of salvation,” as revealed in each religion’s architecture, which I have sought to share with the world.

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<sup>225</sup> Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*, 74.

<sup>226</sup> Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 37.

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