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A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEMPLE IN 175 ENTRIES

David Calabro

Review of Donald W. Parry, *175 Temple Symbols and Their Meanings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020). 310 pages. \$26.99 (hardcover).

***Abstract:** In a must-have book written for a Latter-day Saint audience, Donald Parry offers profound insights into 175 features of ancient and modern temples, including architectural features, aspects of ritual, and temple-related doctrine.*

In this book written for a temple-going Latter-day Saint audience, Donald W. Parry, professor of Hebrew Bible at Brigham Young University, provides a personal yet intriguing introduction to the complex symbolism of temples in the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ. Although clearly oriented to latter-day temples and temple doctrine, the book repeatedly highlights the continuity between ancient Israelite and modern concepts of the temple.

The book is nicely bound and illustrated with more than 110 images, mostly color photographs. It includes a table of contents listing all 175 entries, an introduction laying out the purpose and principles of the book, entries organized in alphabetical order, a bibliography, and a single alphabetical index.

The selection of topics in the 175 entries covers temple ritual and general temple-related doctrine as well as temple architecture. Among entries relating to ritual, the topics of hand gestures and sacred vestments are well represented (see “*Gestures of Approach*,” “*Hands and Covenants*,” “*Hand, Filling the Priest’s*,” “*Hand, Raised in Oath*,” “*Hands, Clasped*,” “*Hands, Laying On of*,” “*Hands, Laying On of, on Sacrificial Animals*,” and “*Hands — Prayer with ‘Uplifted Hands’*”; “*Garments*,” “*Symbols, Diverse*,” “*Vestments, Sacred*,” “*Vestments*,

Sacred, Anticipate the Resurrection,” “Vestments, Sacred, Point to Jesus Christ and His Atonement,” “Vestments, Sacred, Symbolism of,” and “Vestments, Sacred, Worn by God, Angels, and Redeemed Souls”). The emphasis in these areas reflects the similar emphasis in Parry’s previously published works. Other entries also deal with topics Parry has published about, including “Prayer Circle (Ancient and Modern)” and “Recommend, Temple” (see my comment 7, below).

Although this book contains much that deals with ancient temples and that is of interest to scholars (drawing on Parry’s decades-long professional engagement with ancient studies), it is not a purely scholarly treatment of temples. Indeed, the book is unapologetically devotional. Parry frequently bears his testimony of temple work in these pages. In the introduction, he shares inspiring personal experiences from his own life and those of his relatives (pp. 10–11, 25–26). Time and again throughout the book, he reminds the reader that temples — both ancient and modern — are Christ-centered (see, for example, pp. 16–18, 41–42, 43–44, 60–61, 162–63). Parry clearly sets forth a paradigm of temple doctrine in which ancient temples, the Bible, modern temples, and the teachings of the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ represent one continuous whole. Thus, he quotes from modern prophets and apostles to illuminate the ancient temple, and he refers to the Bible to explain the modern temple (see pp. 5–8, 21, 25–26).

Many readers will be surprised to find their knowledge expanding as they encounter facts and insights they never considered before. To cite just one of my personal favorites, the entry on “Big Dipper (Ursa Major)” (pp. 65–67) mentions four temples that include representations of this constellation (Salt Lake, Washington DC, Winter Quarters Nebraska, and Anchorage, Alaska) and provides profound insights into the symbolism of these representations, one of which was originally given by Truman O. Angell, the architect of the Salt Lake Temple.

On the whole, this book is highly recommended for any reader who seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the modern temple and to enrich his or her experience in attending the House of the Lord. The book will expand the horizons of even advanced Gospel scholars, yet it is also appropriate reading for youth just beginning their temple experience. It is difficult to imagine a better addition to the library of a family seeking a more invested pattern of worship centered on the temple.

Here I offer some comments on selected portions of the book, including some suggested improvements that could be taken into account if a future edition is made:

1. On page 14, Parry points out that “God has ‘always commanded’ His covenant people to build” temples, citing Doctrine and Covenants 124:39. He correctly explains that “each and every dispensation has had temples” — or, he writes, “the equivalent of temples, which includes mountains and mountaintops.” It is true that mountains have sometimes functioned as temples where men and women have experienced theophanies (see the entry “Mountain as ‘Temple’ and Temple as ‘Mountain’” and the subsequent mountain-related entries, pp. 182–86). However, the inclusion of mountains in this context on page 14 seems to obscure the point. The verb *build* implies an actual constructed temple, and it is significant that the practice of constructing such buildings has existed in every dispensation. In the context of D&C 124:39, the emphasis is on the importance of a *built* structure with a baptismal font as the preferred place for temple ordinances on behalf of the dead.
2. In the entry “Ascension” (pp. 58–59), it may be worth mentioning that even smaller temples that do not require upward movement through staircases, like the Nashville and Saint Paul temples, are constructed so there is an incline from the endowment room to the celestial room. Thus, the architectural embodiment of the notion of spiritual ascent is very common. This entry ends with a rare (and welcome) cross-reference, referring the reader to the entry “Stairs/Staircases”; another related entry is “Jacob’s Ladder (‘Flight of Steps’)” (p. 162).
3. In the entry on “Blemishes, Priests and High Priests with” (p. 67), Parry states that priests with “certain physical conditions” were not permitted to serve at the altar “nor partake of the holy food,” citing Leviticus 21:16–23. Actually, according to this passage, priests with blemishes *were* permitted to partake of the holy food (see verse 22: “He shall eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy, and of the holy”). Parry also states that this restriction of priests with blemishes was enforced by “excommunication or even death,” citing Leviticus 22:1–9. However, this latter passage deals with a different commandment regarding priests who are ritually unclean. The law regarding priests

with blemishes does not involve a prescribed punishment and has to do with a distinction between the holy and the profane, not with the distinction between clean and unclean, as Jacob Milgrom and other commentators have noted.¹

4. In the entry on “Gethsemane, Temple Symbolism in” (pp. 131–32), Parry points out that Jesus’s progressive separation to pray left concentric groups of eight and three apostles. This recalls the eight witnesses and the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon. It could be that the apostles in Gethsemane were likewise to serve in the role of witnesses (which would make the fact that they fell asleep all the more poignant). There are also many points of similarity between this event and Jesus’s sacred intercessory prayer in 3 Nephi 19:16–36.
5. In the last row of the table on page 136, Parry compares different types of food associated with the graded holy spaces in the Israelite temple. Under “Most Holy” (corresponding to the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle), he has “Sacrifices”; under “Holy” (corresponding to the Holy Place), he has “Sacrifices, tithes”; and under “Less Holy” (corresponding to the court surrounding the altar of sacrifice), he has “Pure food.” More explanation would be helpful here. I would tend to put “Sacrifices” under “Less Holy,” “Shewbread” under “Holy,” and “Pot of manna” under “Most Holy” (compare the entry on “Seven Promises ‘to Him that Overcometh,’” p. 222, with the explanation of the “hidden manna” in Revelation 2:17 — the reference in Revelation is to the manna “hidden” in the ark of the covenant in the cella of the temple).
6. Under “Hands, Laying On of, on Sacrificial Animals” (p. 145), Parry cites the procedure for the scapegoat ritual in Leviticus 16 to demonstrate that the laying on of hands “symbolically transmits the sins of the human(s) onto the animal’s head.” However, the scapegoat ritual was different

1. For discussion, see my essay (published after the book under review), David M. Calabro, “Disability and Social Justice in Ancient Israelite Culture,” in *Covenant of Compassion: Caring for the Marginalized and Disadvantaged in the Old Testament*, ed. Avram R. Shannon, Gaye Strathearn, George A. Pierce, and Joshua M. Sears (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2021), 383–406.

from the laying of hands on animals offered for sacrifice. Many commentators consider these to be entirely different gestures with different functions. The function of the gesture as described by Parry is one among many options. Some discussion on the relationship between this gesture and the laying on of hands in priestly ordination (which Parry includes as a separate entry) would also be helpful.

7. In the entry on “Prayer Circle (Ancient and Modern)” (pp. 200–201), I wish that Parry had included a reference to his own article about the possible reference to a prayer circle in Psalms.² This would be significant because it would demonstrate the continuity of the prayer circle from ancient Israel through early Christian times and into the modern dispensation. Elsewhere, Parry does provide references to his own studies where relevant, such as in the entry on “Recommend, Temple” (pp. 208–10), which includes a reference to his article “Who Shall Ascend into the Mountain of the Lord?”³
8. The discussion of “Women and the Ancient Temple” (pp. 274–75) should be read together with “Hannah, Anna, and Mary” (pp. 147–50). In these two sections, the omission of any discussion of differences in women’s access to sacred space over time is noticeable. For instance, one wonders about Hannah’s ability to approach the sanctuary in Shiloh (1 Samuel 1:9, 12), while the “court of the women” in the temple of Herod was separated from the temple court by the “court of the men of Israel.” Parry states (p. 274) that “women had access to the temple court area,” but this statement should be qualified.

Finally, I offer one general suggestion for improvement. As Parry states in the introduction, despite the alphabetical organization of the entries, the book is not intended to be encyclopedic. The alphabetical organization allows all the topics to be made accessible without the need

2. Donald W. Parry, “Temple Worship and a Possible Reference to a Prayer Circle in Psalm 24,” *BYU Studies* 32, no. 4 (1992): 57–62.

3. Donald W. Parry, “Who Shall Ascend into the Mountain of the Lord?: Three Biblical Temple Entrance Hymns,” in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 729–42.

for a subjective hierarchical organization of the topics. However, this also means that some topics which logically belong together have to be split up — for example, “Cherubim (Guardians of Sacred Space)” and “Guards, Temple (Sentinels and Angels); “Clouds and Cloudstones,” “Earthstones,” “Moonstones,” and “Sunstones/Sun Images.” There are no cross-references between these entries. Also, the Index already functions as an alphabetical guide to the entries. Thus, in a subsequent edition, there may be an opportunity for a structuring of the entries based on a logical progression rather than on alphabetical order. Alternatively, if alphabetical order is retained, it would be helpful to have more cross-references, perhaps in the form of a “See also” section immediately under each header or at the end of each entry.

Parry, an exceptionally perceptive and creative scholar of the ancient world, has given us the cream of decades of study on temple symbolism. This book promises to deepen the faith and enrich the temple experience of any who undertake to peruse its pages.

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