

TEMPLE BUILDING, TECHNOLOGY AND WORSHIP IN A TIME OF ISOLATION  
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*Introduction*

In this reflection, worship is flexed beyond the understanding of the liturgical and ritual practice. Worship is seen as an instrument to gather people. Worship is seen as a social dynamic of being united and gathered to overcome barriers of learning, discerning truth, and seeking common tribal and national purposes. Ancient communities used humanity's need for worship and temple building to bind people in common cause to overcome particular threats in society<sup>1</sup>. Likewise, worship is a powerful instrument that brings out the best of creative and technological advancement to gather and rally people to overcome a severe threat or a formidable enemy (2 Chronicles 20; Joshua 6). People say human solidarity is going to be vital to surviving this COVID-19 catastrophe. The church must be deployed in reimagining the point of temple building using technology as a common purpose. How can the church use technology building virtual spaces to overcome the divide?

*In Ancient Times*

Since the earliest of times, technology and worship served as uncanny bedfellows in humankind's arsenal of survival instruments. Technology could not be separated from worship since the earliest time any more than humankind's greatest invention – fire - cannot be separated from sacrifice. Whether one studies the metallurgical technology of the metalsmiths en-route to the promised land and their role in crafting the salvific bronze serpent (Numbers 21) or the idol of worship, the golden calf (Exodus 32), the catalytic relationship between worship and technology has left footprints in the sands of time. The study of the technology in the pulley and lever systems used in the building of the ancient African pyramids leaves little dispute about the strong relationship between the most advanced technology of the day and religious worship. All through the Old Testament and into the postmodern church era, technology and worship found common ground in stories like that of the building of the tower of Babel and many other religious buildings.

As people moved away from the design of scattered, nomadic hunter-gatherer mindsets, humanity became increasingly aware of its strength in numbers. Being united in common goals and purpose highlighted the inherent existence of Imago-Dei and the power not to simply be a fearful part of nature (nomadic movements controlled by nature's seasons) but to have the divine power to master nature using essential tools. Such mastery of knowledge and the sharpening of powers and control within the educated priestly class led to better animal husbandry and more organized agricultural communities (the Cane and Abel/Jacob and Esau models).

Wet-point settlements and security needs forged these agricultural commonalities into tribes- people with similar causes and close-knit communities. The priestly class (ancient Wise-men) usually ruled the tribes based on the locus of power that came from their abilities to administrate, heal, and plan. The use of mysticism and the claim to divine authority, whether by divine imputation or impartation, went a long way to raising leadership influence within the chief-priest classes in emerging communities. Worship as a religious cornerstone

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<sup>1</sup> Hodder, I. (Ed.). (2018). Religion, history and place in the origin of settled life. University Press of Colorado.

was a powerful unifying instrument to gather people together to overcome mainly societal challenges such as disease, war, and famine.

### *Worship at all Costs*

The innate human desire to worship someone or something has been the driving power behind our gathering for worship. Discovering collective, common spiritual experiences, and finding the most inclusive language and articulation of the experience is how the people of God formulate faith statements, creeds and doctrines that keep tribal unity and communal cohesion. So, the more communities gathered for religious experience, the more unity, and tribal cohesion served the survival of the tribe. Such gathering brought profound illumination of spiritual experiences, thereby forging greater social cohesion and political agreements toward fighting disease and other threats. On the other hand, gathering in the close community also brought the enormous potential for disease and contagion. It was also in the gathering and close communion that technology was fine-tuned and improved to treat social challenges of disease and disaster with a combined resource.

One can find in archeologically significant religious sites, places like Stonehenge, Mohenjo Daro, or Gobekli Tepe<sup>2</sup> the early evidence of the importance of a unifying faith for more significant social benefits. Nothing brought people, technology, artisanry, and sacrificial donations of resources like the challenge to build a religious temple. Temple building was used as a common tribal interest to unite people under the influential priestly healers. Temple building, for most of it, was an act of worship to the gods. This common tribal interest soon became a common national purpose.

Public gathering hotspots saw annual pilgrimages of thousands bannered under the people's need for worship and the leaders' need to instruct and provide law as truth. The Judaist religious design was not very different from the generalized overview of religious systems provided above. The critical difference was that the God of the Israelites called His people to be peculiar in the sense of being holy, prophetic, and a priesthood to other nations (Deut. 7:6-9; Exodus 19-10; Jeremiah 1:5; 1 Peter 2: 9-10). The sixty-six books of the Bible in Judeo-Christian traditions emphasize that God's interest was not localized, homogenized, or nationalized. Yahweh God was interested in a relationship with all of the people in all of the world. In the Bible, worship is integrally related to the development of God's Kingdom.

### *The Old Way was Good*

As the Old Testament evolved in its liturgical framework, the God of the Bible was still inviting people to gather around the given laws. These laws that Christians have come to understand through Jesus were motivated by God's love instead of a kind of narcissistic need for worship. God's love was about preserving life, even at the cost of breaking ancient nomadic child sacrifice culture. Love was demonstrated in providing relief for Abraham and Isaac. God was evidencing that gathering His people around law and liturgy was a means to an end. It was about teaching and empowering His people to offer themselves in sacrificial ways to serve others' greater good. Ultimately, worship gathered people to build up people, not buildings. In the ancient sense, gathering for liturgical worship, building, and the technology behind it had to do more with learning, finding common purpose, and offering hard-earned resources.

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<sup>2</sup> Michigan State University Press. (2015). *How we became human : mimetic theory and the science of evolutionary origins* (Ser. Studies in violence, mimesis, and culture).

*Still an even Better, New and Living Way*

In Christ, the temple building with all of its implications of gathering, giving, teaching, governance did become clearer that being called or gathered to worship in the fullest sense of the (ek kaleo) ecclesia was toward service to humanity. In the New Testament, the temple became organic. The work of the temple is a call to serve as an act of worship that was realized in Christ.

He was the ultimate wholeness, the full revelation of truth and law couched in love. Jesus was the temple of all temples. Christ was the ultimate point of ancient humanity's self-seeking, self-sacrificial building, resourcing, and common purpose epitomized in love. In Him, the "Ancient of Days", that everlasting temple, the system of truth, law and order is complete. There is the call to gather, and there is the call to scatter and physical distance as a loving act of worship. There is great symbolism in the technology of the temple of God. Worship which focused outwardly, like the ancient technology of aqueducts carried love, flowing with healing into the pools of Bethesda, creating an opportunity for people to jump in.

It is streams of living water flowing away from the temple toward the quarantined and shut-ins. This is the technology of the living temple for the isolated, quarantined world. The technology of masks and social distancing is an act of loving our neighbour at the point of self-sacrificial living. It is temple truth. The community teaches it for the community in Christ.

Deeply and technically, the powerful symbol of gathering for liturgy reminds us that the church of Jesus is the temple of God collectively and individually. Using technology, are worshippers not gathering again in virtual temple building sites to overcome threats? In Judeo-Christian traditions, worshippers from the most ancient times have evolved to become the ultimate kind of temple, technology, and common purpose of God's Kingdom. God's people are the priests who unite the prodigal children that are scattered, isolated, and even quarantined.

*Temple Building Continues in Cyber Space*

Are witnesses not seeing the fulfilment of the organic transition of the church towards fulfilling the Kingdom mandate? Again, building virtual temples for worship is about gathering to take hope outside of the church buildings. It is using social media to the fullest to seek and save the lost. God's people are building virtual temples like the ancients built their gathering halls to educate, enlighten, and empower. Worshipping communities are here again using technology as gathering halls to inform loved ones about the values of physical distancing and also the advantages of wearing masks. Are witnesses not seeing the priesthood and ecclesial mandate as utilizing the advanced aqueducts of technology through social media? Is it not still accomplishing the ancient purposes of gathering with common tribal interests?

Is the church still not reaching out to the most isolated, ruralized, quarantined communities through food deliveries and compassionate care drop-offs? This is worship! Working to preserve and gather people in truth is worship! Is the church not aiding in gathering people for a state of emergency compliance by offering discernment and testing truth differentiating it from conspiracy theories? Is it not the same as providing healing through prayer and governance as for the ancient communities when worshippers unify people around a Zoom meeting or a Facebook livestreaming? God's purpose remains the same, even from ancient times. It was for meaningful relationships, hope, prayer, healing, and discernment of truth that ancient communities met. As worshippers, God's people, as living

temples, continue bearing witness through ever-evolving technologies to the power of unity in the very same progressive ways through the Spirit of God. Denominational walls and territorial domains that are being trespassed through technology cause us to realize that we are still Christian. We are still missional, we are still connected, and we are still Holiness people.

### *Conclusion*

This article contains a wild optimism concerning the partnership of technology and worship in an age of physical distancing. Contrary to the popular phraseology of 'social distancing,' technology has stepped in to bridge the social divide. Under a strong imposition of physical distancing by most national governments around the globe, technology is doing what worship and technology have done so often in history- it gathers people, albeit in virtual spaces. The most ancient communities have shown us the way that overcoming a common threat is best done together. They used a common rallying point of building a temple to forge unity to face the enemy, whatever that may have been. By offering their material resources and artisanry, these ancient communities felt a sense of coming together and belonging as they built upon their need for worship. Gathering for governance and truth, law and order, they gave of themselves. Jesus' life wonderfully depicts this story of the advancement of worship as gathering and building.

Should the church not be the giving model exemplified in the earliest worshipping communities if communities are isolated due to a lack of resources and access to technology? It is that felt need within the pandemic that becomes a necessity that nurtures creative inventions. Should the people of God not be innovative in ways beyond what is current? The church must be able to imagine and innovate technology that is freely available beyond the significant data access charges. In many ways, the Kingdom of Christ will reinvent the market place of the empire-building systems of the world.

As God's people face a common enemy, the people cannot be divided. The people of God cannot rally around decentralized and personalized temples of preference. The church must not merely focus on the harsh economic impact of the virus. Instead, Christ's followers must see the possibilities for economic stimulation and evangelistic innovation to harvest and invest resources in more connective and healing ways. More hospitals and clinics, more technology, and applications that bring business and community together must warrant the repurposing of sacred spaces so that they remain life-saving places.

Science can tell us how to respond to the situation but cannot tell us why the church is here. The Scripture mandates the church's presence and purpose for being. The gathered worshipping community is here to worship God, which means loving and caring for each other. When the threat, the proverbial Angel of Death, has passed over what people will remember is how well the worshipping communities treated people in a crisis. Wearing a mask is how the temple community demonstrates love for neighbours. Taking care of self means caring for the neighbour. By restricting movement, whole communities are taking the pressure off the health care systems and personnel. Health care personnel are saved- that is the proper use of information. That is how the church builds. Our love is measured out by how others are treated.