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*Typology of the Ceremonial Law
and the Feasts of Israel*



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Typology of the Ceremonial Law and the Feasts of Israel

Moral, Ceremonial, and Judicial Precepts in the Law of Moses

There is a rich typology in the Law of Moses in the ceremonial law. St. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes three distinct types of precepts in the Mosaic Law: moral, judicial, and ceremonial. The moral law is that part of the Mosaic Law that sets forth the precepts of the natural law, also written on the human heart. The Ten Commandments contain the essence of the natural law, and set it forth in a perfect manner, in perfect order, in a way worthy of God. The judicial laws likewise have their basis in the natural law; they contain particular ways of realizing the natural law by setting up particular penalties and judicial procedures. They are like the precepts of human civil law, but mandated by God for Israel.

The ceremonial precepts command particular ways in which Israel was to give worship and reverence to God. For example, in the third commandment, a particular day of the week is singled out for giving worship to God. What pertains to natural law is that some time be singled out as sacred to God. The particular day on which it is done does not pertain to natural law as such, and cannot be said to be written on the human heart. A similar example regards the prohibition of eating pork, which cannot be said to be written on the heart of man. The same is true of all the commandments concerning the special feasts of Israel, the particular way they were to conduct divine worship, and the laws regarding ritual purity. These laws concerning divine worship and ritual purity are referred to by St. Thomas Aquinas and the Catholic tradition as ceremonial laws. They have a basis in the natural law, which commands us to worship God with special tokens of honor and to separate what is sacred from what is profane. However, the particular ways in which this is to be realized are not directly dictated by the natural law, and thus they have a certain contingent quality which needs to be determined by positive law.

In what follows we shall examine the typology of some aspects of the ceremonial Law of Moses, especially the great feasts of Israel.

General Purpose of the Ceremonial Law

God commanded the ceremonial law to regulate divine worship. St. Thomas sees the various ceremonial laws as having three principal purposes: to give fitting form to the worship of God; to keep the people of Israel from falling back into various forms of idolatry; and to prefigure Christ, the sacraments, and the Christian life. Thus he

understands the ceremonial precepts as having meaning both on the literal level, and on the level of typology. On the literal level, the ceremonial commandments ordain a fitting form of worship for Israel, and they also prohibit forms of idolatry that were common at the time of the Old Testament. They convey all three typological meanings, for they prefigure Christ and the sacraments (allegorical sense); the Christian moral life in Christ (moral sense); and the life of glory in heaven (anagogical sense). St. Thomas explains:

First, in respect of the Divine worship which was to be observed for that particular time: and these reasons are literal: whether they refer to the shunning of idolatry; or recall certain Divine benefits; or remind men of the Divine excellence; or point out the disposition of mind which was then required in those who worshipped God. Secondly, their reasons can be gathered from the point of view of their being ordained to foreshadow Christ: and thus their reasons are figurative and mystical: whether they be taken from Christ Himself and the Church, which pertains to the allegorical sense; or to the morals of the Christian people, which pertains to the moral sense; or to the state of future glory, in as much as we are brought thereto by Christ, which refers to the anagogical sense.¹

Aquinas illustrates these general principles with two important examples: the command that blood is reserved to God, and the precepts regarding ritual purity. He gives four reasons why the blood of sacrifices, and of animals in general, was reserved to God.² First, to prevent idolatry, “because idolaters used to drink the blood and eat the fat of the victims, according to Deuteronomy 32:38.” Secondly, to impress on the Israelites the sanctity of human life, sustained by blood. Aquinas says that “For they were forbidden the use of the blood that they might abhor the shedding of human blood; wherefore it is written (Genesis 9:4-5): ‘Flesh with blood you shall not eat: for I will require the blood of your lives.’” Third, blood was reserved for God alone to show that God is the Author of life. Blood is a fitting symbol of life, for which reason Leviticus 17:11-14 says that life is “in the blood.” Hence Aquinas says that “in order to show that to God we owe both life and a sufficiency of all good things, the blood was poured out, and the fat burnt up in His honor.” Finally, Aquinas says that the blood of sacrifices offered to God alone serves to prefigure Christ’s offering His own life in sacrifice by shedding all His blood for our salvation.³

1 St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 102, a. 2.

2 St. Thomas, *ST I-II*, q. 102, a. 3, ad 8.

3 St. Thomas, *ST I-II*, q. 102, a. 3, ad 8: “Fourthly, in order to foreshadow the shedding of Christ’s blood, and the abundance of His charity, whereby He offered Himself to God for us.”

St. Thomas explains ritual impurity as having both a literal and typological sense. The literal meaning is principally to inculcate reverence for divine things, for which ritual purity was required:

The literal reason was taken from the reverence due to those things that belong to the divine worship: both because men are not wont, when unclean, to touch precious things: and in order that by rarely approaching sacred things they might have greater respect for them. For since man could seldom avoid all the aforesaid uncleannesses, the result was that men could seldom approach to touch things belonging to the worship of God, so that when they did approach, they did so with greater reverence and humility.⁴

A secondary reason was to avoid idolatry, because “in their sacrificial rites the Gentiles sometimes employed human blood and seed.”

The figurative reason for ritual impurity was to signify various kinds of sins by which we become morally impure:

The figurative reason for these uncleannesses was that they were figures of various sins. For the uncleanness of any corpse signifies the uncleanness of sin, which is the death of the soul. The uncleanness of leprosy betokened the uncleanness of heretical doctrine: both because heretical doctrine is contagious just as leprosy is, and because no doctrine is so false as not to have some truth mingled with error, just as on the surface of a leprous body one may distinguish the healthy parts from those that are infected. The uncleanness of a woman suffering from a flow of blood denotes the uncleanness of idolatry, on account of the blood which is offered up. The uncleanness of the man who has suffered seminal loss signifies the uncleanness of empty words, for “the seed is the word of God.” The uncleanness of sexual intercourse and of the woman in child-birth signifies the uncleanness of original sin. . . . Speaking generally, the uncleanness contracted by touching an unclean thing denotes the uncleanness arising from consent in another’s sin, according to 2 Corinthians 6:17: “Go out from among them, and be ye separate . . . and touch not the unclean thing.”⁵

Ritual purity is re-established by a ritual immersion or baptism.

The Feast of Pentecost (Shavuot)

One of the most important parts of the ceremonial law concerns the feasts of Israel. We have already considered the typology of Passover. Let us look at the feast of Pentecost, Booths, and the Day of Atonement. The feasts of Israel have four fundamental dimensions. They commemorate an event in salvation history; they actualize that event in liturgy; they give thanks for creation; they prefigure Christ and the Church.

After the Passover and Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites journeyed for fifty days (seven weeks) through the desert to Mt. Sinai (Ex 19–20), where God gave them the Ten

Commandments. This foundational event of the giving of the Law is called by Greek-speaking Jews “Pentecost,” which means fifty, to acknowledge the fifty days which separate the Passover from the solemn covenant on Mt. Sinai.⁶ In Hebrew it is called the Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot*), for the seven weeks.

At Sinai the Israelites were commanded to celebrate a feast to commemorate this second foundational event of their existence, and also to give thanks for the harvest by the offering of the first fruits in the Promised Land.⁷ This feast has two principal aspects: thanksgiving for the gift of the Ten Commandments and the Covenant of Sinai, and thanksgiving for the first fruits of the land.

It is important to know this background to the Jewish feast of Pentecost/Shavuot in order to understand the Christian feast of Pentecost, for it was not by chance that on this day the Lord chose to communicate to the Apostles and disciples the fullest gifts of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by the miracle of speaking in tongues. Just as the written Law of the Ten Commandments and the sealing of the Covenant with Israel was given fifty days after Passover, so too the New Law of the Holy Spirit was given fifty days after Easter.

The giving of a New Covenant written on our souls rather than on tablets of stone had been announced by the prophets, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Ez 36:24–27), some six centuries before the coming of Christ. Jeremiah, in 31:31–33, proclaims: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. . . . I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” This promise was fulfilled first in a manifest and public way on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand Israelites were baptized, as recounted in Acts 2.

This first Pentecost was also the first “celebration” of the sacrament of Confirmation. In this case, it was not offered by ministers of the Church, but by God Himself to the Apostles.

What is the relationship between the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost? St. Thomas Aquinas and other great doctors of the Church see the New Law of Christ as principally the grace of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to accomplish God’s Law in charity. In other words, the parallelism between the Pentecost of the Old Testament and that of the New shows us the respective characters of the Old and the New Law. The Ten Commandments are holy indeed, for they teach us what we must do and refrain from doing. The New

⁶ See Tob 2:1; 2 Macc 12:32.

⁷ See Ex 34:22: “And you shall observe the feast of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest.” See also Ex 23:16: “You shall keep the feast of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor”; and Lev 23:15–21.

⁴ St. Thomas, *ST I-II*, q. 102, a. 5, ad 4.

⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 102, a. 5, ad 4.

Law of Christ presupposes the Ten Commandments, but crowns and transcends them, for it consists essentially in supernatural charity, “the bond of perfection” (Col 3:14), giving us love for what we have been commanded, and the interior capacity to put it into practice in a holy way.

Mt. Sinai and Pentecost

The difference between the two covenants is spoken of at length in the Letter to the Hebrews. The letter culminates with the comparison between the revelation of God in the two covenants as manifested in two very different kinds of theophanies — that of Mt. Sinai and that of Mount Zion:

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.⁸

What a contrast between the two events in which the Torah was communicated, first exteriorly, and then interiorly! The giving of the Law of Moses was marked by the emotions of extreme fear and trembling, accompanied by great supernatural thunder, lightning, and smoke; whereas the giving of the new law of the Holy Spirit is marked by spiritual exultation and great confidence in God on the part of the Apostles who begin to preach without fear, speaking in tongues so that they are understood by all the Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem who had come from the Diaspora. In place of the terrible fire and smoke, there is a rushing wind and each disciple has a tongue of fire over his head, indicating that the New Covenant is to be spread by the fire of preaching.

And on that very day, the preaching of St. Peter won for the Church three thousand Jews who were immediately baptized. Thus the Christian Pentecost corresponds mystically to the Jewish feast of the first fruits. The material first fruits of the harvest correspond to the spiritual first fruits of the Apostolic preaching — three thousand adult converts — as well as to the gifts and fruits of the Holy

⁸ Heb 12:18–25. Cf. Ex 19:18–19 and 20:18–19: And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. . . . Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.”

Spirit in the souls of the disciples. These first fruits were of grace and apostolate.

The fact that the Apostles miraculously spoke in tongues is itself a figure of future events. Their ability to speak all languages was a prophetic indication of the universality of the Church, called to be the ark of salvation for the whole human race and to speak all tongues and be understood by all. The event of Pentecost was thus the antitype of Babel with its confusion and “pluralism” of tongues. Although materially there continue to be many languages, which will doubtless continue until the end of time, in the Church the original harmony is recomposed in the unity of faith, which proclaims one Creed. In the words of St. Paul, the faithful should be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.”⁹ There is no room for “pluralism” in the faith, for the truth is one.

The essence of the New Covenant is not a new written law, but sanctifying grace, from which flow the theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity) and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These supernatural gifts give the faithful the inner strength to put the Law into practice and to merit eternal life.

In summary, just as the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai on the fiftieth day after Passover was the central event in the life of ancient Israel, bringing it to birth in a certain sense, so likewise the event of Pentecost is at the center of the life of the Church, and her full birth. As the Torah could be said to be the “soul” of Israel, so the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church, by which she lives in Christ, and whose sanctifying impulses move her through history amidst sin and persecution.

Feast of Booths (Sukkot)

The third great feast is *Sukkot*, the feast of Booths or Tabernacles. *Sukkot* is a Hebrew word meaning “huts” or “booths.” It is celebrated five days after Yom Kippur, in the month of Tishri (Sept.–Oct.). All adult Jewish males were to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for this feast. The feast is commanded in Leviticus 23:39–43:

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord seven days; on the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. And you shall take on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord seven days in the year; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations; you shall keep it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days; all that are native in Israel shall dwell

⁹ Eph 4:3–6.

in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”¹⁰

Levels of Meaning

The feast of Sukkot, like all the great Jewish feasts, has various levels of meaning. First, it has a historical meaning, for it commemorates the wandering of the Israelites in the desert under God’s miraculous protection (Lev 23:42) as He led them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Aquinas, drawing on Maimonides, explains that the literal meaning of the festival is

to commemorate the blessing of being protected and led by God through the desert, where they lived in tents. Hence during this feast they had to take “the fruits of the fairest tree,” i.e. the citron, “and the trees of dense foliage”, i.e. the myrtle, which is fragrant, “and the branches of palm-trees, and willows of the brook,” which retain their greenness a long time; and these are to be found in the Land of promise; to signify that God had brought them through the arid land of the wilderness to a land of delights.¹¹

Sukkot is also a festival commemorating the ingathering of the harvest, and the corresponding joy (Lev 23:39). Third, it involved the offering of a great number of sacrifices in the Temple (Lev 23:36–38). A fourth meaning, not found in Scripture but in the Zohar, a Kabbalistic work,¹² is a spiritual sense in which the booths prefigure the eternal tabernacles of heaven, and the guests who are invited represent the saints in heaven.¹³ A fifth meaning, this time from the Talmud, is the libation of water offered with great festivity and rejoicing.

This festival is celebrated with the construction of huts or booths (tabernacles) covered by leafy branches that give shade, but through which one can see the stars at night. All meals during the week of the festival are taken in these huts. By tradition the walls are decorated with tablets bearing the names of seven patriarchs who represent the heavenly guests who are invited to dwell within for the seven days of the feast.¹⁴ This feast thus reminds the Jews that, like their forefathers wandering in the desert on the way to the Promised Land, they are pilgrims on earth, sojourners in the desert awaiting a Kingdom—that of the Messiah—and a heavenly dwelling place, or eternal tabernacle, as Jesus says in Luke 16:9. They too realize that in this pilgrimage we live by faith and not yet by vision. We yearn for God and for heaven, a yearning expressed by the sight of the stars through the branches that form the roof of the *sukkah*. This yearning, although not yet satisfied,

is nevertheless a source of joy through hope for what lies beyond this vale of tears.¹⁵ The joy is produced also by gratitude for God’s providing us in this pilgrimage with both physical and spiritual means of sustenance.

This sense of our existence as pilgrims wandering for forty years in the desert of this world is beautifully expressed in Hebrews 11:13–16:

These [Abraham and the patriarchs] all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Another aspect of the ritual of Sukkot, no longer practiced, concerns water. On the morning of the first day of the feast, after the daily sacrifice and daily libation of wine, a procession went from the Temple mount to the spring of Shiloah. A priest drew the water and returned to the Temple through the Water Gate that led to the inner court. There he chanted the words of Isaiah: “With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Is 12:3), and poured out the water on the altar as a libation.¹⁶ A text from the Talmud states: “He who has not witnessed the joy of the water drawing has never in his life experienced real joy.”¹⁷

This ritual had an obvious agricultural significance, for it was a prayer for rain (which in Israel occurs in winter). It also had an important historical significance, for it was associated with the miraculous water that Moses drew from the rock in the desert during the seven weeks of wandering before arriving at Mt. Sinai.

The New Testament sees this water coming from the rock as referring spiritually to Christ and His grace. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:4 that the rock was Christ. In John 7:37–39, Jesus speaks of this element of water in the feast of Sukkot:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, “If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

In this way Jesus reveals that the inner meaning of this aspect of the feast points to man’s sanctification through

¹⁵ It is interesting that the book of Kohelet, which speaks of the vanity of all earthly things, is read in the synagogue on the Sabbath during the festival of Sukkot.

¹⁶ See Hayyim Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals. A Guide to Their History and Observance* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), 181. See also Talmud, Taanit 2b and 3a.

¹⁷ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sukkah 5:1–3.

10 The feast is also described in Deut 16:13–15.

11 St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 102, a. 4, ad 10.

12 Writings of Jewish mysticism.

13 See http://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/571505/jewish/The-Ushpizin.htm#footnoteRef2a571505

14 This is marvelous affirmation of the communion of saints between heaven and earth.

sanctifying grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit—symbolized by the water drawn from the spring of Shiloah—which enable God’s people to carry out and accomplish His Torah. They produce spiritual joy and peace of heart in God—that “joy in the Torah” (*simhat Torah*) which is celebrated on the final day of Sukkot in a feast called *Simhat Torah*.

Carnal man sees the Law of God all too often as something negative that limits his freedom and imposes a burden. However, the spiritual man rejoices in the Law of God because it offers him the possibility of true freedom to do good and to walk with God. This transformation in our inner attitude to the Torah can only occur through the great gift of God’s grace.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is spoken of through the image of water because it is the Spirit who satisfies the thirst of the heart for God. Every man desires perfect happiness, which is only found in God, in His love and forgiveness. In the words of Psalm 42:1–5:

As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me continually, “Where is your God?” These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.

Jesus spoke of this water of His grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit in His conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4:10: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” Not surprisingly, the woman fails to understand Jesus’ meaning, thinking that He is speaking of physical water. So she asks for that. He responds: “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:13–14). The water springing up to eternal life that Jesus gives is sanctifying grace, by which we are made sons of God in the Son, pleasing to God, and heirs of heaven. It is the water by which the thirst of our hearts for the living God is satisfied.

Sukkot and the Transfiguration of Christ

We have said that Jesus chose the feast of Passover to institute the Eucharist and offer His Body and Blood on Calvary as the Lamb of God. Is there any parallel for the feast of Sukkot in Christ’s public ministry? We have seen that the dialogue in John 7 occurred during the feast of Sukkot. Another significant event in the Gospels that should be associated with Sukkot is the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mt. Tabor, in which Jesus appears in glory with two special guests: Moses and Elijah. Pope Benedict XVI writes about the relation of these two feasts in *Jesus of*

Nazareth.¹⁸ The Transfiguration of Jesus is described by Matthew as follows:

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.¹⁹

Peter’s reference to making three booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah makes sense if the context of the event is the Feast of Booths.²⁰ First of all, Sukkot has an eschatological aspect. Its commemoration of the wandering of the Israelites in the desert without a permanent abode is a figure of longing for the eternal tabernacles of the just in heaven. The Transfiguration was a glimpse of that glory of Heaven, radiating from the person of Jesus accompanied by Moses and Elijah, and giving a foretaste of the glory of all the just in heaven. It seems that it was for this reason that Peter exclaimed: “Lord, it is well that we are here!” (Mt 17:4).²¹

Secondly, the leafy branches overhead which let through the light of the stars is a figure of the cloud that represents the special presence of God, referred to in Hebrew as the *Shekinah*. This cloud covered the Tent of Meeting containing the Ark of the Covenant during the wandering of the Chosen People in the desert, and later it descended on the Temple in Jerusalem. As Peter, James, and John were watching, a cloud descended on Jesus as it had a millennium earlier on the Temple of Solomon. In this event it was not a dark cloud, but bright, and the voice of God the Father is heard from it: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

18 Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 306–17.

19 Mt 17:1–8.

20 See Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 340: “It seems certain that we should see in these tents an allusion to the Feast of Tabernacles.”

21 See Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 340: “This detail is explained still more clearly if the Transfiguration actually took place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. Then it would show that the realities prefigured by the Feast were accomplished: the Transfiguration represents the true feast of Tabernacles. This eschatological significance is still clearer if we admit . . . that the exclamation of St. Peter: “It is good for us to be here” is the expression of the rest, of the eschatological *anapausis*.”

In addition, Sukkot is a time in which one seeks to entertain heavenly guests, and here Moses and Elijah appear conversing with Jesus. It is interesting to consider what they are speaking about. According to Luke 9:31, their conversation concerned Jesus' "exodus which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem." The Greek word "exodus" means "departure," and clearly refers to His upcoming Passion. The use of the word "exodus" to indicate the Passion underscores the typology. Jesus is the new Moses who will pass out of the Egypt of this world, redeeming all humanity in the waters of His "Baptism"/"Exodus."

Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

Five days before the beginning of the feast of Sukkot, Israel celebrates the solemn Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), which centers on imploring God's forgiveness for sin. This celebration is commanded in Leviticus 23:27–29:

On the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present an offering by fire to the Lord. And you shall do no work on this same day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. For whoever is not afflicted on this same day shall be cut off from his people.

The feast had three other important elements: the solemn invocation of the sacred name of God by the High Priest; his entrance into the Holy of Holies behind the veil and before the Ark of the Covenant with the blood of sacrifice; and the rite of the scapegoat.²²

The holy name, the Tetragrammaton YHWH (יהוה), was pronounced only on this day. In the liturgy of the Second Temple, the holy name was pronounced ten times by the High Priest, after each of which the people would prostrate themselves and say, "Blessed be the Name, the glory of His kingdom forever and ever."²³ The solemn pronouncing of the sacred name is mentioned in Sirach 50:20, which describes the liturgy of Yom Kippur presided over by the High Priest Simon (c. 220–195 BC). The liturgy concludes with the blessing of the people with the holy name: "Then Simon came down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, to pronounce the blessing of the Lord with his lips, and to glory in his name; and they bowed down in worship a second time, to receive the blessing from the Most High."

The High Priest entered alone into the Holy of Holies also only on this most solemn day. He entered twice, first with incense and the blood of a bull for his own sins and for his house (Lev 16:4), and then with the blood of a goat sacrificed for the sins of the people (Lev 16:15). The blood

of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the mercy seat.²⁴ In this way, atonement was made "for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel" (Lev 16:17).

The rite of the scapegoat is described in Leviticus 16:7–22:

Then he [Aaron] shall take the two goats, and set them before the Lord at the door of the tent of meeting; and Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel. . . . Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood within the veil, and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it upon the mercy seat and before the mercy seat; thus he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel. . . . And when he has made an end of atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat; and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land; and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness.

It is obvious that no goat can bear the sins of the people and make expiation for them, and no mere bull can atone for the sins of the High Priest and his fellow priests. This graphic image of the scapegoat and the other sacrifices are clearly a figure of the true sacrifice that expiates sin: the sacrifice of the Suffering Servant, the Passion of Jesus Christ.

The liturgy of Yom Kippur is a magnificent type of the Paschal mystery of Christ and of the Eucharistic liturgy. As the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies with the blood of sacrifice to re-consecrate the holy place and atone for his sins, those of the priests, and of all the people, so Christ went with the blood of His own sacrifice to the Father through His death, Resurrection, and Ascension, and through the Eucharist His blood consecrates His disciples and the entire Church until the end of time.

Hebrews 9:6–15 explains how the sacrifices of Yom Kippur are but a figure of the sacrifice of Christ. As the High Priest consecrated the sanctuary with the blood of animals, ritually purifying it of the sins of that year, so Christ the High Priest has consecrated the Church with His Blood once and for all, "securing an eternal redemption":

The priests go continually into the outer tent, performing their ritual duties; but into the second [the Holy of Holies]

22 These aspects of the feast came to an end with the destruction of the Temple.

23 See Hayyim Schauss, *Guide to Jewish Holy Days: History and Observance*, trans. Samuel Jaffe (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), 135.

24 In the time of the Second Temple (after the loss of the Ark of the Covenant), the sprinkling of blood was on the interior veil of the Holy of Holies. See Schauss, *Guide to Jewish Holy Days*, 137.

only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people. . . . But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

In Yom Kippur, the High Priest enters the sanctuary alone. Christ through His Passion also enters the true Holy of Holies—the glory of heaven—alone with the Blood of His own sacrifice, so as to open a way for all.

Yom Kippur is also a type of the Eucharistic liturgy, for the latter sacramentally makes present the paschal mystery. In every Eucharistic sacrifice, the same divine Victim is sacramentally immolated and liturgically brought before the Mercy Seat of God, as the propitiation for the sins of the faithful and of all mankind.²⁵

Yom Kippur and Christ's High Priestly Prayer

A significant parallel between the liturgy of Yom Kippur and Christ's priestly prayer in John 17 is brought out by the twentieth-century exegete, Fr. André Feuillet.²⁶ As mentioned above, on Yom Kippur the High Priest prays and offers atonement for himself, for his house (that is, for his brother priests), and for the whole assembly of Israel. In John 17, Christ's high priestly prayer is structured in the same way. He prays first for Himself, saying: "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you" (John 17:1). Secondly, He prays for His Apostles, beginning in John 17:6: "I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world; they were yours, and you gave them to me." Finally, in John 17:20–26, He prays for all His future disciples, that they be one: "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17:20–21).

As the High Priest in Yom Kippur consecrated himself, the sanctuary, and the people with the blood of sacrifice, so

25 The Roman Canon perhaps also contains an allusion to the entrance of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies in the liturgy of Yom Kippur. After the consecration, the Roman Canon prays that "these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty."

26 André Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 49–79.

Christ in John 17:19 says: "And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth." Unlike the High Priests of the line of Aaron, Christ consecrates Himself and the People of God with His own blood. Feuillet comments:

Each year, during the festival of atonement, the high priest entered the holy of holies and restored to Israel its condition as a holy people that was consecrated to Yahweh amid a pagan world. So too, in John 17, Jesus the high priest enters the dwelling of the Father and intercedes with him to keep from sin the new people of God whom Jesus has won by his redemptive sacrifice, to preserve it from the attacks of the evil one, and to consecrate it by maintaining it in unity and thus turning it, as it were, into a mirror of the unity between Father and Son.²⁷

Furthermore, as the High Priest repeatedly spoke the sacred name of God on that day, Jesus refers explicitly to His Father's name four times in this discourse. In John 17:6 and 17:26, Jesus says that He has made His Father's name known to men and will continue to make it known to them. The twofold mention of the Father's name in John 17:11–12 is more difficult, and can be read in two different ways. I think the better reading is given in the RSV-CE: "Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me."²⁸ The Father has communicated His name to the Son by eternally communicating to the Son all that the Father is, so that as the Father is "He who is," so the Son too says of Himself: "I am."²⁹

The Father has given His name to the Son in the eternal generation of the Son, eternally communicating the divine nature, and He has manifested that name above all in Christ's glorious Resurrection, as stated in Philippians 2:9. Christ revealed the name of the Trinity by revealing Himself as the only-begotten Son of the Father who sends the Holy Spirit. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 240 states that "Jesus revealed that God is Father in an unheard-of sense: he is Father not only in being Creator; he is eternally Father in relation to his only Son, who is eternally Son only in relation to his Father." This is the essential meaning of Christ's manifestation of the name of the Father. André Feuillet explains:

Despite claims to the contrary, the Father's name, which it is Jesus' mission to manifest to men, does not mean primarily his fatherhood in relation to men or his loving plan for mankind (truths, both of them, which had already been taught to some extent in the Old Testament). The revelation

27 André Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers*, 74.

28 This is the reading preferred by Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ & His Ministers*, 67. For the other textual variant, see the translation of John 17:11–12 in the *Jerusalem Bible*: "Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us. While I was with them, I kept those you had given me true to your name."

29 See John 8:24; 8:28; 8:58; 13:19.

of the name means, above all else, the revelation of the fact that from all eternity the Father has a Son to whom he communicates all that he has and is.³⁰

As the Father has communicated His name to the Son, so the Son keeps the disciples in the name He has eternally received from the Father. The “keeping” of the disciples in the name of the Father seems to be a reference to the gift of sanctifying grace, by which the faithful receive a participation in the divine nature, according to 2 Peter 1:4. Thus the communion between the Father and the Son in the divine life is the model and source of the communion of the faithful in the Church.

Yom Kippur and the Confession of Peter

There is an interesting connection between the holy day of Yom Kippur and the confession of Peter in Matthew 16:16–20. In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Joseph Ratzinger endorses the idea that the confession of Peter was made on the feast of Yom Kippur,³¹ which occurs five days before the feast of Sukkot. Matthew tells us that the Transfiguration of Jesus, which we have connected with the feast of Sukkot, occurred six days after the Confession of Peter. Thus, according to the Semitic reckoning of time, the confession could have occurred on the Day of Atonement.

This is deeply fitting, for, as we have seen, Yom Kippur was the one time of the year in which the sacred name of God was pronounced by the high priest in the Temple. In Matthew 16:13–15, Jesus asks the disciples who people say that He is, and then He asks them who they say that He is. In other words, Christ is asking about His name, which signifies His true identity. Peter answers: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter has solemnly confessed the new name by which God has revealed Himself to mankind. The name of God is holy because it indicates the sacred reality that God is. By referring to Jesus as the Son of the living God, Peter has confessed his faith in the sacred mystery of the Trinity and the Incarnation. God is not a solitary, but is Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and the Son has become man in Jesus of Nazareth. This confession of Peter has the same sacred import as the solemn confession of the sacred name of God in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.

And it is pronounced by Peter, who will be ordained High Priest of the New Covenant during the Last Supper. Interestingly, Christ then proclaims His “faith” in Peter, giving him a new name—Cephas or Rock—on whom He will build His Church. And He gives to Peter the power to forgive the iniquities of the new Israel: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” This promise thus fulfills what was prefigured in the sacrifices of Yom Kippur.

³⁰ André Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers*, 67.

³¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 306.