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"Bishop Robert Barron's *Catholicism* takes a path less traveled in leading us to explore the faith through stories, biographies, and images. In these pages, we meet the 'Word made flesh' not only in theological formulations but also in saints and poets, cathedrals and chants, priests and prophets. What makes *Catholicism* so compelling are the ways in which Bishop Barron shows how the Incarnation goes on in the true, the good, and the beautiful."

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"Clarity, intelligence, passion, and elegance—these are the marks of a writer in top form, and Bishop Barron brings all these gifts to bear in this extraordinary reflection on the Catholic faith. If you read one book this year on what Catholics believe and why, this is the book to read—and to share with others."

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"Bishop Robert Barron is a brilliant academic, a popular writer, a seeker, and a seer. In *Catholicism*, he illuminates truths that have the power to set us free. It will be a benchmark book for years to come."

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"Bishop Robert Barron's great gift is to wed intellectual depth with clarity and vividness of expression. His *Catholicism* is a superb exploration of the Catholic vision that seamlessly unites theological reflection and masterpieces of architecture and art. The story he tells comes truly alive in his portraits of concrete men and women who, in every age, have lived the journey of faith to the full."

—**Fr. Robert P. Imbelli**, associate professor emeritus of theology, Boston College, and author of *Christ Brings All Newness*

CATHOLICISM

A JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF THE FAITH

ROBERT BARRON

SECOND EDITION

WORD on FIRE

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Preface to the Second Edition

This book was written in a burst of energy during a three-month period in the spring of 2010, when I was a visiting scholar at the North American College in Rome. I typically worked from 8:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m., producing around two thousand words a day. To be sure, I did not produce the text *ex nihilo*, for it was based upon the rough scripts that I had prepared for the filming of the *CATHOLICISM* series, which was, in fact, still underway during those months in Rome. I do think that the concentrated way in which I wrote this book gave it a certain vitality, focus, and cohesiveness.

I recall, too, the fairly dark atmosphere of that moment in the life of the Church. The clergy sex abuse scandals were still roiling the American Catholic world, and that very year of 2010 saw the revelation of similar outrages in England, Ireland, Germany, and elsewhere in Europe. It seemed in the minds of many that Catholicism had come simply to be identified with shame and disgrace. Without denying for a moment the gravity of the abuse that took place (in fact, I wrote an entire book on the matter a few years after I finished *Catholicism*), I wanted to express as clearly as I could that there was much, much more to the Catholic Church than the gross misbehavior of some of its leaders. It was Chartres, Dante, Thomas Aquinas, Augustine's *Confessions*, Mozart's *Requiem*; it was Dorothy Day's commitment to the poor, Mother Teresa's mission in the slums of Kolkata, Teresa of Avila's mysticism, Thomas Merton's ardent quest for God—all of it emanating from the amazing and deeply unnerving figure of Jesus of Nazareth. I wanted to remind the world of those treasures.

The new atheists—Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and others—were still very much a cultural

force in 2010, drawing many young people under their sway and leading them to disaffiliate from the Christian churches. I was very mindful of this as I wrote this book, which is why it contains, along with the celebration of Catholic beauty, holiness, and mysticism, a fair amount of philosophical argument. I wanted people to realize that Catholicism is a smart religion, which has, throughout its long history, offered compelling reasons for what it believes.

When we were filming the series and when I was composing this book, I had absolutely no idea whether this project would be successful. My wonderful colleagues and I had the keen sense that we should finish it, but as to whether it would find an audience, we were in the dark, hoping against hope. And this is why I have been gratified beyond words by the success of both the film series *CATHOLICISM* and this accompanying book. Countless people—especially in the ranks of the young—have spoken of the impact that both have had on their faith. For that, all praise to God.

My prayer is that this new edition, published by Word on Fire, will find a fresh audience of both seekers and skeptics, and that those who peruse its pages will discover the truth, beauty, and goodness of the Church against which, as Christ promised, the gates of hell will not prevail.

Acknowledgments

This book emerged out of the scripts that I composed for the ten-part documentary film *CATHOLICISM*. The three years of planning, writing, traveling, filming, and editing that went into the production of that series constitute an unforgettable moment in my life. The many, many people who contributed to the film have helped, obviously, to shape the book that you are about to read. I am, from the bottom of my heart, grateful to Fr. Stephen Grunow, Mike Leonard, Matt Leonard, Nancy Ross, Diane Archibald, Peggy Pandaleon, Robert Mixa, Megan Fleischel, Patrick Thornton, Steve Mullen, Nanette Noffsinger, Brooks Crowell, Rozann Lee, Fr. Paul Murray, Dr. Denis McNamara, and John Cummings. I am also deeply indebted to my editor for the first edition, Gary Jansen, who read the manuscript with great care and whose suggestions have resulted in a better book.

Introduction

The Catholic Thing

What is the Catholic thing? What makes Catholicism, among all of the competing philosophies, ideologies, and religions of the world, distinctive? I stand with St. John Henry Newman, who said that *the* great principle of Catholicism is the Incarnation, the enfleshment of God. What do I mean by this? I mean, *the Word of God*—the mind by which the whole universe came to be—did not remain sequestered in heaven, but rather entered into this ordinary world of bodies, this grubby arena of history, this compromised and tear-stained human condition of ours. "The Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14): that is the Catholic thing.

The Incarnation tells central truths concerning both God and us. If God became human without ceasing to be God and without compromising the integrity of the creature that he became, God must not be a competitor with his creation. In many of the ancient myths and legends, divine figures such as Zeus or Dionysus enter into human affairs only through aggression, destroying or wounding that which they invade. And in many of the philosophies of modernity, God is construed as a threat to human well-being. In their own ways, Marx, Freud, Feuerbach, and Sartre all maintain that God must be eliminated if humans are to be fully themselves. But there is none of this in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. The Word does indeed become human, but nothing of the human is destroyed in the process; God does indeed enter into his creation, but the world is thereby enhanced

and elevated. The God capable of incarnation is not a competitive supreme being, but rather, in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, the sheer act of being itself, that which grounds and sustains all of creation, the way a singer sustains a song.

And the Incarnation tells us the most important truth about ourselves: we are destined for divinization. The Church Fathers never tired of repeating this phrase as a sort of summary of Christian belief: *Deus fit homo ut homo fieret Deus* (God became human so that humans might become God). God condescended to enter into flesh so that our flesh might partake of the divine life, that we might participate in the love that is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in communion. And this is why Christianity is the greatest humanism that has ever appeared, indeed that *could* ever appear. No philosophical or political or religious program in history—neither Greek nor Renaissance nor Marxist humanism—has ever made a claim about human destiny as extravagant as Christianity's. We are called not simply to moral perfection or artistic self-expression or economic liberation but to what the Eastern fathers called *theosis*, transformation into God.

I realize that an objection might be forming in your mind. Certainly the doctrine of the Incarnation separates Christianity from the other great world religions, but how does it distinguish Catholicism from the other Christian churches? Don't Protestants and the Orthodox hold just as firmly to the conviction that the Word became flesh? They do indeed, but they don't, I would argue, embrace the doctrine in its fullness. They don't see all the way to the bottom of it or draw out all of its implications. Essential to the Catholic mind is what I would characterize as a keen sense of the prolongation of the Incarnation throughout space and time, an extension that is made possible through the mystery of the Church. Catholics see God's continued enfleshment in the oil, water, bread, imposed hands, wine, and salt of the sacraments; they appreciate it in the gestures, movements, incensations, and songs of the liturgy; they savor it in the texts, arguments, and

debates of the theologians; they sense it in the graced governance of popes and bishops; they love it in the struggles and missions of the saints; they know it in the writings of Catholic poets and in the cathedrals crafted by Catholic architects, artists, and workers. In short, all of this discloses to the Catholic eye and mind the ongoing presence of the Word made flesh—namely, Christ.

Newman said that a complex idea is equivalent to the sum total of its possible aspects. This means, he saw, that ideas are only really known across great stretches of space and time, with the gradual unfolding of their many dimensions and profiles. The Incarnation is one of the richest and most complex ideas ever proposed to the mind, and hence it demands the space and time of the Church in order fully to disclose itself. This is why, in order to grasp it fully, we have to read the Gospels, the epistles of Paul, the *Confessions* of Augustine, the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas, the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, St. John of the Cross' *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, the *Story of a Soul* of Thérèse of Lisieux, among many other master texts. But we also have to *look and listen*. We must consult the Cathedral of Chartres, the Sainte-Chapelle, the Arena Chapel, the Sistine Chapel ceiling, Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Grünewald's Crucifixion in the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, the soaring melodies of Gregorian chant, the Masses of Mozart, and the motets of Palestrina. Catholicism is a matter of the body and the senses as much as it is a matter of the mind and the soul, precisely because the Word became *flesh*.

What I propose to do in this book is to take you on a guided exploration of the Catholic world, but not in the manner of a docent, for I am not interested in showing you the artifacts of Catholicism as though they were dusty objets d'art in a museum of culture. I want to function rather as a mystagogue, conducting you ever deeper into the mystery of the Incarnation in the hopes that you might be transformed by its power. I stand with the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, who held that the truth of

Catholicism is best appreciated from within the confines of the Church, just as the windows of a cathedral, drab enough when seen from the outside, shine in all of their splendor when viewed from the inside. I want to take you deep within the cathedral of Catholicism because I'm convinced that the experience will change and enhance your life. *Catholicism* is a celebration, in words and images, of the God who takes infinite delight in bringing human beings to fullness of life.

I shall commence with Jesus, for he is the constant point of reference, the beginning and the end of the Catholic faith. I will try to show the uniqueness of Jesus, how his claim to speak and act in the very person of God sets him apart from all other philosophers, mystics, and religious founders. And I will demonstrate how his Resurrection from the dead not only ratifies his divine identity but also establishes him as the Lord of the nations, the one to whom final allegiance is due. Next I shall explore the extraordinary teachings of Jesus, words at once simple and textured, that have, quite literally, changed the world. I will try to show how they constitute *the* path to joy.

St. Paul referred to Jesus as "the image [*eikon*] of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). By this he meant that Jesus is the sacramental sign of God, the preeminent way of *seeing* what God looks like. And thus we will look at God—his existence, his creativity, his providence, his Triune nature—through the lens of the Word made flesh. Next I will turn to Mary, the vessel through whom God came into the world. I will stress that Mary is the summation of Israel, the one who gives full voice to the longing of her people for God, the one who is, hence, the prototype of the Church, the new Israel.

Jesus' closing words to his disciples were an exhortation to go out to all the nations and tell the Good News. Peter and Paul were the indispensable players in the early Church, for they embodied this missionary spirit. I will show that these very particular

first-century men are also determining archetypes in the life of the missionary Church to the present day.

Paul consistently proclaimed that the Church of Jesus Christ is not so much an organization as an organism, a Mystical Body. I will present the Church, accordingly, as a living thing, whose purpose is to gather the whole world into the praise of God. And the central act of the Church, its "source and summit" in the words of Vatican II, is the liturgy, the ritualized praise of God. I will therefore walk through the gestures, songs, movements, and theology of the liturgy. The ultimate purpose of the liturgy and the Church is to make saints, to make people holy. This is why Catholicism takes the saints, in all their wild diversity, with such seriousness and why it presents them to us with such enthusiasm. And so I will devote a chapter to painting small portraits of four friends of God in order to show what life in Christ concretely looks like. Holy people raise their minds and hearts to God; they seek passionate communion with their Creator; they pray. I will turn next, therefore, to prayer, and I will focus on certain very definite persons—Thomas Merton, St. John of the Cross, and St. Teresa of Avila—who give concrete expression to the mystical path. Finally, I shall consider the last things: hell, purgatory, and heaven. God wants intimate friendship with us, but friendship is always a function of freedom. How we ultimately respond to the divine love—the sun that shines on the good and the bad alike (see Matt. 5:45)—makes all the difference.

I trust you will find that I have not written a plodding theological study, for this book is chockablock with stories, biographies, and images: Cardinal Francis George musing on the loggia of St. Peter's after the election of Benedict XVI, St. Thérèse of Lisieux's "little way," the candlelit procession at Lourdes, Edith Stein's journey to Auschwitz, Irish penitents at Lough Derg, pilgrims proceeding on their knees to venerate the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mother Teresa picking up the dying off the squalid streets of Kolkata, Karol Wojtyła hunkering down in the underground

seminary during the Nazi occupation, the prodigal son gathered into his father's embrace, Paul imprisoned in Philippi, Peter crucified on the Vatican Hill, Angelo Roncalli's "flourishing garden of life," and many more. But since the Catholic tradition is smart, this book also contains theological arguments, sometimes of a technical nature. Again, I hear almost every day from atheists who write off religion as primitive, premodern nonsense. I summon Aquinas, Augustine, Paul, Teresa of Avila, Joseph Ratzinger, and Edith Stein—in all their intellectual rigor—as allies in the struggle against this dismissive atheism.

Perhaps some will find the lyrical sections of this book more compelling, and others will prefer the intellectual passages, and perhaps still others will savor the images and the pictures. Good. Part of the genius of the Catholic tradition is that it never throws anything out! There is something for everyone in its wide space, and I want very much to communicate something of that Catholic capaciousness in this book. G.K. Chesterton, one of the quirkiest, funniest, and most intelligent Catholic writers of the twentieth century, once compared the Church to a house with a hundred doors. I hope you find this book an enchanting way in.

Christ Pantocrator
Unknown artist, sixth century

I

Amazed and Afraid

The Revelation of God Become Man

It all begins with a jest. The essence of comedy is the coming together of opposites, the juxtaposition of incongruous things. So we laugh when an adult speaks like a child or when a simple man finds himself lost amid the complexities of sophisticated society. The central claim of Christianity—still startling after two thousand years—is that God *became* human. The Creator of the cosmos, who transcends any definition or concept, took to himself a nature like ours, *becoming* one of us. Christianity asserts that the infinite and the finite met, that the eternal and the temporal embraced, that the fashioner of the galaxies and planets became a baby too weak even to raise his head. And to make the humor even more pointed, this incarnation of God was first made manifest not in Rome, Athens, or Babylon, not in a great cultural or political capital, but in Bethlehem of Judea, a tiny outpost in the corner of the Roman Empire. One might laugh derisively at this joke—as many have over the centuries—but, as G.K. Chesterton observed, the heart of even the most skeptical person is changed simply for having heard this message. Christian believers up and down the years are those who have laughed with delight at this sacred joke and have never tired of hearing it repeated, whether it is told in the sermons of Augustine, the arguments of Aquinas, the frescoes of Michelangelo, the stained glass of Chartres, the mystical poetry of Teresa of Avila, or the little way of Thérèse of Lisieux. It has been suggested that the heart of sin is taking

oneself too seriously. Perhaps this is why God chose to save us by making us laugh.

One of the most important things to understand about Christianity is that it is not primarily a philosophy or a system of ethics or a religious ideology. It is a relationship to the unsettling person of Jesus Christ, to the God-man. Some*one* stands at the center of Christian concern. Though Christian thinkers have used philosophical ideas and cultural constructs to articulate the meaning of the faith—sometimes in marvelously elaborate ways—they never, at their best, wander far from the very particular and unnerving first-century rabbi from Nazareth. But who precisely was he? We know next to nothing about the first thirty years of Jesus' life. Though people have speculated wildly about these hidden years—that he traveled to India to learn the wisdom of the Buddha, that he sojourned in Egypt where he became adept at healing, and so forth—no reliable information concerning Jesus' youth and young manhood exists, except the tantalizing story in Luke's Gospel about the finding of Jesus in the temple. Since Joseph—the husband of Mary, Jesus' mother—is described as a carpenter, we can safely assume that Jesus apprenticed to the carpentry trade while growing up. As far as we can determine, Jesus was not formally trained in a rabbinic school, nor was he educated to be a temple priest or a scribe, nor was he a devotee of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, or the Essenes—all recognized religious parties with particular convictions, practices, and doctrinal proclivities. He was, if I can use a somewhat anachronistic term, a layman.

And this made his arrival on the public scene all the more astounding. For this Nazarene carpenter, with no formal religious education or affiliation, began to speak and act with an unprecedented authority. To the crowds who listened to him preach, he blithely declared, "You have heard that it was said . . . but I say . . ." (Matt. 5:21–48). He was referring, of course, to the Torah, the teaching of Moses, the court of final appeal to any

faithful rabbi; therefore, he was claiming for himself an authority greater than that of Israel's most significant teacher and lawgiver. To a paralyzed man, he says, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (Matt. 9:2). Grasping the outrageousness of this assertion, the bystanders remark to themselves, "This man is blaspheming" (Matt. 9:3). Moreover, Jesus demonstrated a mastery over the very forces of nature. He tamed the storm that threatened to swamp his disciples' boat; he rebuked the dark powers; he opened deaf ears and brought vision back to sightless eyes; he not only pardoned the paralyzed man's sins but took away his paralysis; he even raised the daughter of Jairus back to life. All of this made Jesus a figure of utter fascination. Again and again, we hear in the Gospels how word of him spread throughout the country and how the crowds kept coming at him from all sides: "When they found him, [the disciples] said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you'" (Mark 1:37). Why were they drawn to him? Some undoubtedly wanted to witness or benefit from his supernatural power; others wanted to hear the words of an unsurpassably charismatic rabbi; still others simply wanted to commune with a celebrity. But I think it's fair to assume that all of them were wondering just who this man was.

Midway through his public ministry, Jesus ventured with his disciples to the northern reaches of the Promised Land, to the region of Caesarea Philippi, near the present-day Golan Heights, and there he posed just that question: "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27; see Matt. 16:13 and Luke 9:18). We're so accustomed to hearing this question in the Gospels that we've lost a sense of its peculiarity. He didn't ask them what people thought about his teaching or what impression he was making or how the crowds were interpreting his actions—reasonable enough questions. He wanted to know what they thought about his identity, his being. And this question—reiterated by Christian theologians through the centuries—sets Jesus off from all of the other great religious founders. The Buddha actively discouraged his followers

from focusing on his person, urging them instead to walk the spiritual way from which he himself had benefited. Mohammed was an ordinary man who claimed to have received Allah's definitive revelation. He would never have dreamed of drawing attention to his own person; rather he wanted the world to abide by the Koran, which had been given to him. Confucius was a moral philosopher who, with particular acuity, formulated a series of ethical recommendations that constituted a balanced way of being in the world. The structure of his being was never a matter of concern either to him or to his followers.

And then there is Jesus. Though he did indeed formulate moral instructions and though he certainly taught with enormous enthusiasm, Jesus did not draw his followers' attention primarily to his words. He drew it to himself. John the Baptist instructed two of his disciples to follow after Jesus. They asked the Lord, "Where are you staying?" and he said, "Come and see" (John 1:38–39). That simple exchange is enormously instructive, for it shows that intimacy with Jesus—staying with him—is what Christian discipleship is fundamentally about. This preoccupation with Jesus himself followed, as I've been hinting, from the startling fact that he consistently spoke and acted in the very person of God. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Sane philosophers and scholars invariably emphasize the provisional nature of what they write, but Jesus claims that his words will last longer than creation itself. Who could reasonably make this assertion except the one who is the Word through whom all things came to be? "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). We could easily imagine a prophet, teacher, or religious founder saying, "You should love God more than your very life," or at the limit, "You ought to love my teaching more than your mother and father," but "You should love *me*"? It has been said that the healthiest spiritual people are those who have the strongest sense of the difference between themselves and God. Therefore, who

could sanely and responsibly make the claim that Jesus made except the one who is, in his own person, the highest good?

Now, the possibility remains that Jesus might have been a madman, a deluded fanatic. After all, mental health facilities are filled with people who think they are God. And this is precisely what some of Jesus' contemporaries thought: "For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was . . . calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God" (John 5:18). What is ruled out—and C.S. Lewis saw this with particular clarity—is the bland middle position taken by many theologians and religious seekers today—namely, that Jesus wasn't divine but was indeed an inspiring ethical teacher, a great religious philosopher. Yet a close reading of the Gospel witness does not bear such an interpretation. Given that he repeatedly spoke and acted in the person of God, either he was who he said he was and purported to be, or he was a bad man. And this is precisely why Jesus compels a choice the way no other religious founder does. As he himself said, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Luke 11:23). I realize how dramatically this runs counter to our sensibilities, but Christian evangelization consists in the forcing of that choice.

There is a strange passage in the tenth chapter of Mark's Gospel that is rarely commented upon but that is, in its peculiarity, very telling. Jesus is in the company of his disciples, and they are making their way from Galilee in the north to Judea in the south. Mark reports, "They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid" (Mark 10:32). They were simply walking along the road with Jesus, and they found him overwhelming and frightening. Why they should have had such a response remains inexplicable until we remember that awe and fear are, in the Old Testament tradition, two standard reactions to God. The twentieth-century philosopher of religion Rudolf Otto famously characterized the transcendent God as the *mysterium tremendum*

et fascinans, the mystery that fascinates us even as it causes us to tremble with fear; in his presence, we are amazed and afraid. In his sly, understated way, Mark is telling us that this Jesus is also the God of Israel.

Once we grasp that Jesus was no ordinary teacher and healer but Yahweh moving among his people, we can begin to understand his words and actions more clearly. If we survey the texts of the Old Testament—and the first Christians relentlessly read Jesus in light of these writings—we see that Yahweh was expected to do four great things. He would gather the scattered tribes of Israel; he would cleanse the temple of Jerusalem; he would definitively deal with the enemies of the nation; and, finally, he would reign as Lord of heaven and earth. The eschatological hope expressed especially in the prophets and the Psalms was that through these actions, Yahweh would purify Israel and through the purified Israel bring salvation to all. What startled the first followers of Jesus was that he accomplished these four tasks but in the most unexpected way.

When Jesus first emerged, preaching in the villages surrounding the Sea of Galilee, he had a simple message: "The kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). Oceans of ink have been spilled over the centuries in an attempt to explain the meaning of "kingdom of God," but it might be useful to inquire what Jesus' first audience understood by that term. N.T. Wright argues that they would have heard, "The tribes are being gathered." According to the basic narrative of the Old Testament, God's answer to human dysfunction was the formation of a people after his own heart. Yahweh chose Abraham and his descendants to be "peculiarly his own," and he shaped them by the divine law to be a priestly nation. God's intention was that a unified and spiritually vibrant Israel would function as a magnet for the rest of humanity, drawing everyone to God by the sheer attractive quality of their way of being. The prophet Isaiah expressed this hope when he imagined Mount Zion, raised high

above all of the mountains of the world, as the gathering point for "all the nations" (Isa. 2:2). But the tragedy was that, more often than not, Israel was unfaithful to its calling and became therefore a scattered nation. One of the typical biblical names for the devil is *ho diabalos*, derived from the term *diabalein* (to throw apart). If God is a great gathering force, then sin is a scattering power. This dividing of Israel came to fullest expression in the eighth century BC, when many of the northern tribes were carried off by the invading Assyrians, and even more so in the devastating exile of the sixth century BC, when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and carried the southern tribes away. A scattered, divided Israel could never live up to its vocation, but the prophets continued to dream and hope. Ezekiel spoke of Israel as sheep wandering aimlessly on the hillside, but then he prophesied that one day Yahweh himself would come and gather in his people (Ezek. 34).

Now we can begin to understand the behavior of the one who called himself "the good shepherd" (John 10:11). As so many contemporary scholars have emphasized, Jesus practiced open-table fellowship, serving as host for many who would normally be excluded from polite society: the public sinner, the prostitute, the disabled, the tax collector. At the very place where, in his time as well as ours, the stratifications and divisions of society were often on clearest display, he was making possible a new kind of social space, one marked by compassion and forgiveness. It is important to note that he was not simply exemplifying the generic virtue of "inclusivity" so valued today; he was acting in the very person of Yahweh gathering in his scattered children. This helps to explain why he healed so many. In the society of Jesus' time, physical illness was typically construed as a curse, and in many cases sickness or deformity prevented one from participating fully in the life of the community, especially in common worship. Curing the blind, the deaf, the lame, and the leprous, Jesus was Yahweh binding up the wounds of his people and restoring them to communion. A particularly good example of this work is Jesus'

healing of a woman who had for many years been bent over at the waist (Luke 13:10–17). Jesus restored her to health in the physical sense, but he also thereby permitted her to assume once more the correct attitude of praise.

Jesus turned upside down many of the social conventions of his time and place precisely because he was so concerned to place the instantiation of the kingdom of God first in the minds of his followers. Among first-century Jews, the family was of paramount social and cultural importance. One's existence was largely defined by one's tribal affiliations and familial obligations. An enthusiastic disciple of Jesus took this for granted when she shouted out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!" (Luke 11:27). But Jesus dramatically relativized the family in responding, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!" (Luke 11:28). Another time, a prospective disciple said that he was willing to follow Jesus but first begged permission to bury his father. In that time, as in ours, it would be hard to imagine a more pressing familial duty than attending the funeral of one's own father. Surely such an obligation would justify a slight delay in giving oneself to the work of the kingdom. But Jesus, having none of it, responded in a manner that undoubtedly scandalized him: "Let the dead bury their own dead" (Luke 9:60). Once again, he was not being gratuitously insensitive to a grieving son; he was insisting that the in-gathering of the tribes into God's family is of paramount importance. He makes much the same point in one of the most puzzling scenes recorded in the Gospel. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Matt. 10:34–35). He would break up even the most revered social and religious system if it took precedence over the new community of the kingdom. Indeed, when we give the family a disproportionate importance, it becomes in short order dysfunctional, as is

evidenced in the fact that much violent crime, even to this day, takes place within families.

In first-century Palestine, men did not speak to women publicly, Jews did not associate with Samaritans, and righteous people had nothing to do with sinners. But Jesus spoke openly and respectfully to the woman at the well, who, as a woman, a Samaritan, and a public sinner, was triply objectionable. Even if we delight in fashioning structures of domination and exclusion, the in-gathering Yahweh plays by an entirely different set of rules. Jesus asked the Samaritan woman to give him something to drink. St. Augustine's magnificent commentary: he was thirsting for her faith. A pious Jew of that time would have been rendered ritually unclean by touching a dead body, but Jesus readily touched the dead body of the daughter of Jairus in order to raise her back to life. All of the rituals, liturgies, and practices of the Jews, he was insinuating, are subordinate to and in service of the great task of bringing Israel back to life. How wonderful that the Gospel writers preserve Jesus' Aramaic in their account of this episode: "'*Talitha cum,'* which means, 'Little girl, get up!'" (Mark 5:41). It is Yahweh speaking these intimate words to his people who had fallen into spiritual death. Again and again, Jesus is portrayed as violating the sacred command to rest on the seventh day. His disciples pick grain on the Sabbath, and many times he cures on the Sabbath, much to the dismay of the protectors of the Jewish law. When challenged, he declared himself Lord of the Sabbath (still another breathtaking claim for a Jew to make, since Yahweh himself held that title), and he clarified that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. In short, he claimed the properly divine prerogative of relativizing the significance of perhaps the defining practice of pious Jews and placing it in subordination to the kingdom of God.

One of the facts that even the most skeptical of New Testament scholars affirm is that Jesus chose twelve men as his intimate disciples. The number was hardly accidental. He was forming

around his own person a kind of microcosm of the gathered Israel, all twelve tribes joined in prayer and common purpose. And this core group he sent out to proclaim and further instantiate the kingdom: "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons" (Matt. 10:7–8). In time, he commissioned a further seventy-two (six times twelve) to preach, heal, and gather in. He encouraged this group to travel light and to do their work while relying utterly on God's providence. Upon returning from their mission, they exulted, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" (Luke 10:17). These first Apostles and missionaries were the new Israel and hence constituted the core of what would become the Church, which still has the mission of drawing the tribes into the community of Jesus.

According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus came, at the climax of his ministry, to Jerusalem and entered the temple precincts. Taking a whip of cords, he drove the money changers out and turned over their tables, announcing, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers" (Mark 11:17). By St. John's telling, Jesus, upon being asked for a sign to justify this outrageous act, calmly stated, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). To perform such an act and to say such things in the Jerusalem temple was to be massively, even unsurpassably, offensive to Jews of that time. The temple was everything to a first-century Israelite. It was the center of his political, cultural, and religious life; even more, it was appreciated literally as the dwelling place of God on earth. To get a sense of what Jesus' provocative action might mean in an American context, we'd have to imagine the violation of some combination of the National Cathedral, Lincoln Center, and the White House. Or perhaps we could evoke the texture of it more adequately if we compared it, in a Catholic context, to the desecration of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Jesus' cleansing of the temple most likely

led directly to his crucifixion, for this action not only offended Jews but also alarmed the Romans, who were acutely sensitive to civil disturbances in and around the temple. What in the world was Jesus doing, and what precisely did he mean when he spoke of the temple being torn down and raising it up again? In order to answer these questions, we have to step back from this scene and examine the mystery of the temple.

We have to go back to the very beginning, to the Genesis account of Adam and the garden. The ancient rabbinic interpreters appreciated the first human being as the prototypical priest and the Garden of Eden as the primordial temple. In fact, the same Hebrew term is used to designate Adam's cultivation of the soil and, much later in the biblical narrative, the priest's activity within the Jerusalem temple. Adam, we hear, walked in easy fellowship with God in the cool of the evening and spoke to him as to a friend. This ordering of Adam to God meant that our first parent was effortlessly caught up in adoration. The term "adoration" comes from the Latin *adoratio*, which in turn is derived from *ad ora* (to the mouth). To adore, therefore, is to be mouth-to-mouth with God, properly aligned to the divine source, breathing in God's life. When one is in the stance of adoration, the whole of one's life—mind, will, emotions, imagination, sexuality—becomes ordered and harmonized, much as the elements of a rose window arrange themselves musically around a central point. The beautiful garden in which the first priest lived is symbolic of the personal and, indeed, cosmic order that follows from adoration. This is why, by the biblical telling, orthodoxy, literally "right praise," is consistently defended as the key to flourishing, and why idolatry, incorrect worship, is always characterized as the prime source of mischief and disharmony. The worship of false gods—putting something other than the true God at the center of one's concern—conduces to the disintegration of the self and the society. Another way to formulate this idea is to say that we become what we worship. When the true God is our ultimate

concern, we become conformed to him; we become his sons and daughters. When we worship money, we become money men; when we worship power, we become power brokers; when we worship popularity, we become popular men; and so on. How trenchantly the Psalmist, speaking of carved idols and idolators, spoke this truth: "They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; they make no sound in their throats. Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them" (Ps. 115:5–8).

I mentioned previously that God's rescue operation required the formation of a people, and now we see why that people was marked, according to the book of Exodus, as "priestly" (Exod. 19:6). The people Israel were shaped primarily according to the laws of right worship and derivatively by the laws of right behavior so that they could model to the nations how to praise and how to act. Some readers of Exodus and Leviticus appreciate the ethical teachings found in those books but puzzle over the lengthy excurses into the arcana of ritual and temple practice that they find there. This is to get things backward from a biblical perspective, for right belief is the necessary condition for right action, not the other way round. Once we know who to worship, we then know what to do. At the heart of Jewish right praise was the formal and explicit worship of God, first in the desert tabernacle during the exodus, then in provisional centers of worship in Shiloh and Hebron as the Israelites established themselves in the Promised Land, and finally in the great Jerusalem temple constructed by David's son Solomon. When Isaiah dreamed of all the tribes of the world streaming to Mount Zion, he was thinking primarily of Mount Zion as the locale of the temple. His hope was that the orthodoxy of Israel would prove compelling to the rest of the nations so that, in time, all the people of the world would come to the temple, the proper place of praise. The Jerusalem temple was constructed so as to be evocative of the Garden of Eden. It

was covered inside and out with symbols of the cosmos—planets, stars, plants, animals, and so forth—because, as we have seen, the ultimate purpose of right praise was to order the universe itself. Furthermore, the curtain that shielded the Holy of Holies was woven of fabrics dyed in four colors—purple for the sea, blue for the sky, green for the earth, and red for fire—for it represented the totality of the material realm that the immaterial God had made. In its temple worship, Israel saw itself as carrying forward Adam's priestly vocation to "Eden-ize" the whole of culture and the whole of nature.

Now, all of this was true in principle, but throughout its history Israel fell into the worship of false gods—sometimes the deities of the surrounding nations, but other times the gods of wealth, power, nationalism, and pleasure. When we read the great prophets, from Hosea and Amos through Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, we hear, again and again, the summons back to righteousness and away from idols and wicked deeds: "How the faithful city has become a whore! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her—but now murderers! . . . Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. . . . They do not defend the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come before them" (Isa. 1:21, 23); "But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit. . . . For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:11, 13); and "My people consult a piece of wood, and their divining rod gives them oracles. . . . They have played the whore, forsaking their God" (Hos. 4:12). For the prophets, the symbolic focus for this wickedness was the corruption of the Jerusalem temple, the devolution of the place of right praise into a place of idol worship. Isaiah expresses this by presenting God himself as disgusted with the sacrifices of the temple: "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. . . . When you stretch out

your hands, I will hide my eyes from you" (Isa. 1:11, 15). But Ezekiel envisions it even more dramatically, declaring that, because of Israel's corrupt worship, the glory of Yahweh has abandoned the temple, forsaking its customary earthly dwelling place (Ezek. 10:18–19). However, he prophesies that one day Yahweh himself will return to the temple and cleanse it of its impurities (Ezek. 43:1–5), and on that day water will flow forth from the side of the temple for the renewal of the earth (Ezek. 47:1–12). This is, once again, the Edenic vocation of Israel.

Against this complex background of temple theology and prophetic expectation, we can understand many of Jesus' words and actions much more clearly. On one occasion, Jesus said in reference to himself, "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here" (Matt. 12:6). This was, of course, still another example of Jesus' outrageousness, for the only reality that could possibly be construed by a first-century Jewish audience as greater than the temple would be Yahweh himself. But this statement also serves as a particularly helpful interpretive lens for Jesus' ministry. One would have come to the temple for instruction in the Torah, for the healing of disease, and for the forgiveness of sin through sacrifice. If Jesus is, in his own person, the true Temple, then he should be the definitive source of teaching, healing, and forgiveness, and this is just what the Gospels tell us. The enormous crowds gather on a Galilean hillside or on the seashore or even in the temple precincts, but not to listen to the official scholars of the Law. Rather, they soak in Jesus' teaching. The woman with the hemorrhage, the man born blind, the man with the shriveled hand, blind Bartimaeus—all find healing not from the temple priests but from Jesus, the one greater than the temple. And the woman caught in adultery, the woman at the well, Mary Magdalene, and Matthew the tax collector all find the divine forgiveness, but not through temple sacrifice. They experience it through Jesus. He was not so much eliminating the temple as redefining it, indeed relocating it, in relation to his own person.