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Christ and Church as Temple in John 14.2–3

And Implications for Eschatology and Funeral Ministry

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Abstract

Temple is a key biblical-theological theme, especially in the Fourth Gospel. A case is made that the farewell discourse employs this theme at its outset to introduce its key priorities. If the 'Father's house' is the body of Jesus and its 'many dwelling-places' are the disciples, then John 14.2–3 uses the theme of temple to speak to the relational nature of both being a disciple of Jesus and the reconciliation of all things to God in Christ. This has implications for our eschatology, which are related particularly to funerals, where this scriptural reading is enduringly popular.

Keywords

Temple, John's Gospel, Farewell Discourse, Dwelling, Funerals, Body, Eschatology

Introduction

John 14.2–3 is an important text for biblical-theological consideration of the theme of temple, the eschatological formation of Christian disciples, and our conception of the New Creation. Crucially, 'my Father's house' and 'many dwelling-places' have both been recognised as temple motifs.[1] From here interpreters tend to go one of two ways. First, the Father's house could be God's heavenly temple. Then, the implication would be that the text refers to Christ's ascension to Heaven and his heavenly session before his return at the Parousia to take his disciples home. Alternatively, the Father's house is the body of Jesus. The many rooms are those who believe in him, his body 'prepared' for them at the cross as

[1] For example see James McCaffery, *The House with Many Rooms: The Temple Theme of John 14:2-3* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1988); Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001); Alan Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

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Jesus goes to the Father, only to make his home with his followers by the Spirit whom he breathes out.

Both approaches to John 14.2–3 have eschatological implications and inform a Christian's hope. John 14.1–3 features prominently in funeral liturgies and prayers for those near death. Troubled hearts are once again in need of comfort. However, it is clear to the reader of John that Jesus in the farewell discourse is not firstly comforting the disciples as they face their death, but as he faces his. The gospel story as John presents it demands that Christ and his cross remain central. John's stated purpose does involve us: he sincerely hopes that we will 'believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' and that by believing we may have 'life in his name' (Jn. 20.31, NRSV). We are invited in; but into what exactly, or into whom? Whilst Jesus' intention to comfort his disciples in John 14.1 is plainly stated, the nature of this comfort needs careful exegetical attention, so as to try to ensure the legitimacy of a Christian's hope.

John 14.2–3 is housed within a Gospel rich in the biblical-theological theme of temple, much of which will have to be passed over here, though greater consideration will be given to the texts surrounding 14.2–3 and the broader context of the farewell discourse.

The Context of the Farewell Discourse

The key contextual matter addressed in John 14.1 is the disciples' troubled hearts at Jesus' news from John 13.31–38 that he is going away alone. Jesus explicitly states his going away as the reason for troubled hearts in 16.5–6 – the farewell discourse operates as a whole, with chiastic patterning[2] and a sense of 'timeless time'[3] throughout. Galloway suggests that Jesus' foot washing may be a cause for troubled hearts, which certainly seems likely in Peter's case because it makes explicit the subservient nature of following Jesus.[4] Jesus' talk of going away alone is even more provocative than this.

For the reader, Jesus' going away is closely associated with his death because of the way the narrator interweaves through the gospel the themes of glorification, lifting up, and going away. Firstly, Jesus speaks of his glorification and being lifted up in John 12.23–33. The narrator explains, 'He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die' (Jn. 12.33). This also interprets for the reader several prior references to Jesus being lifted up, notably 3.14 and 8.38. Indeed, references to Jesus' death can be traced right back through John to the Temple incident, after which the narrator talked of a time when Jesus would be 'raised from the dead' (Jn. 2.22). Secondly, having revealed his betrayer in 13.18–30, Jesus speaks once more in 13.32 of his imminent glorification, but this time it is in the same breath as talking about his going away, insisting that 'where I am going you cannot come' (Jn. 13.36).

[2] Wayne Brouwer, *The Literary Development of John 13-17: A Chiastic Reading* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 167–70.
[3] Ian Galloway, *Called to Be Friends* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2021), 233.
[4] Ibid., 83.

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So, it is clear to the reader that glorification, lifting up, and going away are all closely related to Jesus' death, if not synonymous with it in the flow of the narrative.

It is not clear, however, how closely the disciples have followed Jesus' meaning. Peter's promise to lay down his life for Jesus in 13.37 may indicate his awareness of what Jesus has been talking about. His avowal takes on an ironic quality for the reader considering the narrator's clarity around Jesus' future and Jesus' strong rebuttal of Peter. It seems unlikely that the disciples take Jesus' talk of going away altogether at face value. John 11.55–57 made it clear that official opposition to Jesus was public knowledge, and that his arrest was a strong possibility. The disciples have everything to lose, and what appears to be their ignorance may be more like incredulity. At the same time, they seem unaware of the real significance of Jesus' commitment to the way of the cross. Jesus teaches in preparation for what is about to unfold, to facilitate their future faith (Jn. 14.29).

All of this being the case, Coloe is right to question the idea of Jesus offering the disciples the promise of prepared heavenly rooms post-mortem, or post-Parousia, in response to their troubled hearts.[5] In the first instance it is not that the disciples face death and wonder at their eternal resting place, as we might. It is that the disciples face the loss of Jesus and with him, their hopes and dreams for the here and now.

With this contextual framework of Christ and his cross firmly in place, four key phrases in 14.2–3 require attention: 'my Father's house,' 'many dwelling-places,' 'I go to prepare a place for you' and 'I will come again.'

'My Father's House'

'My Father's house' appears in John on two occasions. Jesus' description of the Temple as a house in John 2.16 resonates with Old Testament descriptions of the Temple as the house of the LORD. The key development in 2.16 is Jesus' unique claim that the house of the LORD is the house of his Father – 'my Father's house' (Jn. 2.16). He then goes on to talk of his Father's house as his own body. In this way John 2.22 develops the prologue's description of Jesus as the Word who 'became flesh and made his dwelling among us' (Jn. 1.14, NIV). John 2.16 is the only use of 'my Father's house' in the gospel before 14.2. There are several reasons why Coloe seems right to insist that 14.2 is read through 2.16.[6]

Firstly, at 2.22 Jesus' association with 'my Father's house' is directly linked to his death. The same link is present again at 14.2, if 'my Father's house' is once again being used as a metaphor for Jesus' body. We have seen how contextually central Jesus' death is at the beginning of the farewell discourse. Jesus has repeatedly spoken of his death in symbolic, euphemistic terms: as his glorification, lifting up and going away. In John, 'my Father's house' should be added to the list of phrases symbolically and contextually connected to Jesus' death.

[5] Mary L. Coloe, 'Temple Imagery in John,' Interpretation 63 (2009), 375.
[6] Coloe, 'Temple imagery in John', 375.

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Taking this further, Coloe explains that the key to understanding 14.2–3 is to recognise the symbolic, metaphorical use of 'my Father's house' carried through from the Temple incident.[7] Once the narrator has explained Jesus' Temple metaphor in 2.22 the reader is supposed to recognise it again without the need for explicit comment. Salier agrees that 'the reader is invited to think of Jesus' body in Temple terms,' from John 2 onwards.[8] A heavenly temple interpretation of 'my Father's house' underestimates the symbolic nature of Jesus' speech in 14.2 and the continuity of metaphorical symbolism in the gospel.

Furthermore, the metaphor 'my Father's house' with its 'many dwelling-places' may anticipate that of the vine and branches in the following chapter. Coloe grants that 'the metaphor of the vine and branches is more easily perceived as a symbol since it makes no sense to speak of dwelling or abiding '"in" a [literal] vine,' and that if 2.16 is passed over, 'the metaphorical use of "my Father's house" is not so readily perceived' at 14.2.[9] But to connect the Father's house and many dwelling-places of John 14 with the vine and the branches of John 15 acknowledges the nature of the farewell discourse as a coherent teaching moment. In 16.25 Jesus describes his own teaching method throughout the farewell discourse as highly dependent on metaphor and symbol: 'I have said these things to you in figures of speech' (Jn. 16.25, NRSV). Though 'my Father's house' could in theory symbolise a heavenly temple, this would be a new metaphorical use for a symbol that already has an established meaning in the narrative, which is not a heavenly temple per se, but the body of Jesus.

Additionally, the Old Testament 'house of the LORD' is not solely a heavenly temple, but often God's earthly abode. In 2.17 the narrator includes the disciples' recollection of Psalm 69.9 on the theme of zeal for the Jerusalem Temple and deliverance from persecution. When we read in 14.1–2 of the Father's house in the context of troubled hearts, Psalm 27 comes to mind, with its vital association of the house of the LORD with a place of refuge in times of trouble. David longs to dwell in the house of the LORD 'all the days of my life,' (Ps. 27.4) and not in God's heavenly home post-mortem or post-Parousia. Indeed, it is not a heavenly temple but God himself who is repeatedly celebrated as the refuge of his people throughout the Psalms. God himself was his people's 'dwelling place' (Ps. 90.1).

McCaffery argues that because Jesus relates most often to his Father as located in Heaven throughout the Gospel – which is probably the case – the Father's house of 14.2 should be taken as a heavenly temple.[10] The problem is that this correlation does not seem as strong as the direct link between the use of 'my Father's house' at 2.17 and again at 14.2. Kerr agrees, that Jesus coming down from Heaven and lifting his eyes to Heaven to pray do not necessitate a specific connection between Heaven and 'my Father's house' at 14.2.[11]

[7] Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 79–80.
[8] Bill Salier, 'The Temple in the Gospel According to John,' in Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology, eds. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), 128.
[9] Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 160.
[10] James McCaffery, *The House with Many Rooms* (Rome: Editrice Pontifico Istituto Biblico, 1988), 31.
[11] Alan R. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 277.

O'Day adds the vital observation that 'throughout the Gospel, location has consistently been a symbol for relationship.'[12] At any rate, in 2.16 it is not a heavenly temple that is in view, but the Jerusalem Temple and Jesus' body. The text of John is too deliberate to associate Jesus with 'my Father's house' on only two occasions but for there to be no literary connection between the two.

None of this means that Regev is wrong to question an overly simplistic Johannine temple replacement theory.[13] The Jerusalem Temple is a significant teaching aid, but not directly equivalent to Jesus as the Father's house. What is being claimed of Jesus is something reminiscent of the Temple's known identity and function as the dwelling place of God on earth and the venue for the practise of the sacrificial cult. At the same time, Jesus' body as his Father's house on earth is clearly metaphysically and qualitatively different in nature to the Jerusalem Temple. In John's Gospel the Temple is both affirmed and surpassed in Jesus: Jesus' self-association with the Temple 'empowers the Temple'[14] whilst at the same time he is using the Temple symbolically to teach something unprecedented in relation to his own body, identity, and destiny. The Word becoming flesh, making his dwelling among us, being glorified in crucifixion and breathing out the Spirit of resurrection life for any who believe – this is something new.

'Many Dwelling Places'

If the Father's house in 14.2 is referring to the temple of Jesus' own body, then the many rooms are in that body, in Christ. This is where Coloe's distinction between 'house' and 'household' is helpful, though care must be taken to affirm Christ as central.[15] In her commendable enthusiasm for the household of God, Coloe is sometimes accused of arguing for a three-stage, wholesale transition from Temple to Jesus to Church. Salier reads Coloe this way and insists that the disciples do not 'replace the Temple in any sense through their association with Jesus.'[16] But Coloe holds together Christological and ecclesiological perspectives, the latter arising out of the former, which is precisely the vital interpretative key to the text. This is clear when she summarises: 'The phrase "in my Father's house are many dwellings" is best understood, within the context of the Gospel, to mean a series of interpersonal relationships made possible because of the indwelling of the Father, Jesus and the Paraclete with the believer.'[17] There is no suggestion that the disciples replace the

[12] Gail R. O'Day, 'The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,' in New Interpreter's Bible, Volume IX (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 740. She continues: 'This reference to the Father's house needs to be read first in the context of the mutual indwelling of God and Jesus, a form of "residence" that has been repeatedly stressed.'
[13] Eyal Regev, The Temple in Early Christianity: Experiencing the Sacred (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 197–221.
[14] Ibid., 218.
[15] Coloe, 'Temple Imagery in John,' 375.
[16] Salier, 'The Temple in the Gospel According to John,' 133.
[17] Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 163.

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Temple through mere association with Jesus. What is in view is an abiding of trinitarian, eschatological proportions.

Kerr uses the helpful language of two shifts and one incorporation: 'In 2.21 there has been a shift from the Temple of Jerusalem… to the Temple as the body of Jesus; and now in John 14.2–3 there is this further shift to incorporate not only Jesus, but also the disciples as "my Father's family."'[18] Vitally, this language of incorporation keeps Christ central whilst making room for the disciples. Salier would agree that Jesus is 'the replacement Temple and all that that means,'[19] so it is strange that he makes little allowance for there to be people within his 'walls' in the figurative reassurances of the farewell discourse.

Christ constitutes the Father's house and the Father's household. The difference between the two is not the presence of Christ, which remains foundational, but the presence of the disciples. The matter is their abiding in him, as it will continue to be throughout the farewell discourse. 'The church's future is completely determined by its union with Christ.'[20] This incorporation is precisely the assurance that Jesus brings in this pivotal moment – though in one sense he is leaving them, in another he will be closer than ever before. In John 14.2–3 we have Christ and Church together as temple. Having 'denied the presence of ecclesiology' in John, Motyer 'reinstates it' here in John 14, where 'the notion of community, so vividly pictured by the foot-washing, is given substance.'[21] It is as if Jesus reassures his disciples, 'there is room in me for you!'

Jesus' going away will not change the present fact of many rooms in the Father's house. There are already many dwellings in the Father's house, just as the Spirit of truth 'dwells with you [already] and will be in you' (Jn. 14.17). 'Saving events are actualised in the here and now.'[22] The disciples are already the branches of the vine. They must remain so as Jesus goes away.

At this point it seems pertinent to return briefly to the question of the application of these verses in ministry contexts, especially surrounding end-of-life and funeral settings. The nature of Christian comfort and hope is being introduced as nothing less than sharing in the very life of God, in Christ, from new birth, through death, and into eternity. This is a greater hope than a room in Heaven. The Christian's hope is nothing less than room in God, now and forever.

'I Go to Prepare a Place for You'

First, a physical, structural metaphor from earlier in the gospel was revisited to communicate a relational, communal reality – Jesus is 'the Father's house' with 'many dwelling-places'

[18] Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body*, 298.
[19] Salier, 'The Temple in the Gospel According to John,' 133.
[20] Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 490.
[21] Stephen Motyer, 'Bridging the Gap" in The Gospel of John and Christian Theology,' eds. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: Eeardmans, 2008), 156–61.
[22] Paul Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), 270.

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incorporated. It is followed by a transitional, locational figure of speech that concludes with further relational reassurance: 'I go to prepare a place for you' (Jn. 14.2).

Jesus goes to the Father, not the Father's house. Jesus coming from the Father and returning to the Father are key motifs in John and in the context of the farewell discourse. For example, the narrator sets the scene before Jesus' foot washing: 'Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father' (Jn. 13.1). Jesus explicitly states that he is 'going to the Father' in 14.12, and again at 14.28, but the emphasis continues to be relational rather than locational. At John 14.20, the disciples will understand Jesus' location at the point of his return to them: that 'I am in the Father, and the Father is in me' (Jn. 14.23). The key location is the relationship between Father and Son. Apart from that, 'the geographical origin of Jesus is presented as a mystery'.[23] John 14.23 also suggests that the core issue cannot be Jesus' return to a locational heavenly temple, because the Father and the Son will come to make their home with any disciple who loves them. John 14.6 now seems to fit – Jesus is 'the way, the truth and the life,' and 'no one comes to the Father' except by sharing in Jesus. (Jn. 14.6). Similarly, the exchange with Philip no longer seems out of place – the issue at 14.2–3 is relationship with God, not Jesus' departure for and preparation of a heavenly temple. The heavenly temple is wherever Jesus is, in relationship with his Father.

This being the case, what is Jesus' preparatory work on behalf of the disciples? Jesus' return to the Father seems to be closely connected to the cross. As already mentioned, the narrator paired 'my Father's house' with talk of Jesus' death and resurrection at the Temple incident of John 2. If Jesus is talking about the Father's house of his own body again at 14.2, it is likely that 'I go to prepare a place for you' reflects the narrator's emphasis at this stage on Jesus' impending death. In 13.33–38 the language of 'going' accompanied talk of Jesus' glorification and death. The Father's house of Jesus' body is the vehicle of his going to the Father, as well as the 'place' of the preparatory work completed at the cross. Thus, at the cross 'it is finished' (Jn. 19.30). The cross as the preparatory work Jesus speaks of makes sense of Jesus' rhetorical question in John 14.2, in which he implies that he has already told them that he goes to prepare a place for them. This is the first time he has talked about preparing a place for them, but it is not the first time he has talked about his death.

If the place prepared is Jesus' body broken at the cross, then truly he is the new temple location for worship spoken of in John 4. Jesus speaks of a time to come, which is already here, when the place for worship will not be locational, but relational – 'neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem,' but 'in spirit and truth' (Jn. 4.23). Like the woman at the well, the disciples' concern during the farewell discourse seems locational and linear, but Jesus is teaching them of divine, relational realities that transcend time and space. The Logos is

[23] Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body*, 294. See John 7.27, 40–44, 9.29.

now the 'new locus of eschatological worship,' a 'Christological centre rather than a geographical one.'[24]

How is the preparatory work of Jesus' death for the benefit of the disciples, 'for you?' Jesus will die for them, and in a sense, Jesus will take them with him through death. Just as the branches are already part of the vine, so in 14.2 there are already many rooms in the Father's house. The preparatory work of the cross, like the pruning of the branches, benefits the disciples from their position of already sharing in Jesus and his story. The disciples will share in Jesus' preparatory work as abiding recipients of the grace of Jesus' sacrificial obedience. From here, they will go on to 'bear much fruit,' living out the story of Jesus that they themselves have been connected to. Jesus warns them, 'if they persecuted me, they will persecute you' (Jn 15.20).

An essential aspect of Christian comfort is the reality of sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Christian hope cannot bypass the way of the cross on the way to the Father. Jesus said that 'no one comes to the Father except through me' (Jn. 14.6). If the way is through Christ, it is through sharing in his cross. Again, disciples of Jesus today may benefit from recognising John 14.2–3 as a reassurance given not firstly to the dying, but to the living and suffering follower of Jesus in need of encouragement to press on even in the most intimidating of circumstances.

'I Will Come Again'

The goal of reaching the Father is dependent on Jesus coming again, but it seems out of step with the text to try to assign to 'I will come again' a particular moment of fulfilment, be it the resurrection, a resurrection appearance, or the Parousia. Since Jesus' cross seems very much in view in 14.2, it is likely that the resurrection is implied in 14.3. Truly, there is no coming again for Jesus without it. But 'I will come again' cannot simply be referring to the resurrection or a resurrection appearance, because of the rest of Jesus' promise to take the disciples to himself and share with them the same location of relationship with the Father. Identifying this coming again solely with the resurrection only sets up another problematic departure of Jesus at his ascension. At the same time, Kerr is right to recognise that the Parousia would not 'fulfil the immanent expectancy that is present in John 14.'[25] Rather, 14.3 introduces a key theme for the farewell discourse – Jesus' association with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' return to the disciples is fulfilled in the realised eschatological experience of sharing together in the trinitarian life and love of God by the Spirit. In John 14.17–18, Jesus speaks of his return to the disciples and the giving of the Spirit, interchangeably. This happens again at 14.25–28. Jesus uses a first-person pronoun to talk about the coming of the Spirit, who is 'another' Jesus. Coloe talks of the Spirit as resolving the paradox of Jesus'

[24] Stephen Um, *The Theme of Temple Christology in John's Gospel* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 186–88. See also David Peterson, Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship (Leicester: Apollos, 1992), 97.
[25] Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body*, 310.

'presence in absence.'[26] Jesus' words of comfort regarding the disciples' dwelling in him at 14.2 are mirrored by his talk of the Father and the Son dwelling in the disciples at 14.23, the Holy Spirit acting as the agent of this mutual indwelling.

That being the case, Woll goes too far, suggesting that Jesus as 'his own successor' returns 'as Spirit,'[27] unwittingly sounding more like a modalist (an early heresy) than a Johannine trinitarian. Rather, 'it is better to see the Paraclete as a functional parallel to Jesus… To have the Spirit is to have Jesus (and the Father) dwelling within.'[28] Crucially, 'the distinctions between the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit-Paraclete are maintained even in the intimacy of their union.'[29] Just as the progression is not strictly from Temple to Jesus to Church, neither is it from Temple to Jesus to Spirit, but there is an incorporation of the disciples in the mutual indwelling of Father and Son, by the Holy Spirit, through which Jesus is closer than ever before. As John brings the farewell discourse to an end, we hear Jesus praying to his Father for his disciples, that 'as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us;' indeed, that 'the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them' (Jn. 17.21–26). It is as the Father says 'yes' to this prayer that Jesus comes to the disciples and takes them to himself, by the Spirit.

Implications for Ministry

Again, hope that focusses on anything less than this mutual indwelling is less than Christian hope. In the context of an end-of-life scenario, we can experience a similar physical and geographical dislocation from loved ones to that which Jesus seeks to prepare the disciples for in the farewell discourse. The issue with direct comparison is that Jesus alone comes again to dwell with his people following his death. Nevertheless, we can be similarly reassured: if Jesus is so committed to dwelling with his people, even through his death, the death of loved ones or our own passing will not likely challenge his determination to facilitate our mutual indwelling with him. There may even be a deepening of the experience of mutual indwelling in God, just around the corner of death. Just as Jesus' death did not change the closeness of his relationship to the disciples for the worse, but for the better, so our death may not leave us further away from him, but closer than ever before; and therefore, perhaps even closer than ever before to each other.

In the inaugurated eschatology of John's Gospel, a Christian goes to a better place not so much at death, but at the new birth. When a Christian dies, they simply settle further into that truest of dwelling-places, long since prepared for them at the cross, a house that was already their home by faith and the filling of the Spirit – the crucified and resurrected body of Jesus, in the bosom of the Father from all eternity. For those who abide in the vine,

[26] Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 174.
[27] D. Bruce Woll, *Johannine Christianity in Conflict: Authority, Rank, and Succession in the First Farewell Discourse* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), 80, quoted in Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body*, 311.
[28] Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body*, 312.
[29] Coloe, *God Dwells with Us*, 175.

dying is not so much moving house, but unpacking the final few boxes and really settling in. Jesus' comfort at John 14.2–3 is as astonishing as being told by the Lord, 'make yourself at home in me'.

Funeral liturgies will often express something of the reassurance of the union with Christ spoken of in the farewell discourse. This should be celebrated. Though there tends to be an understandable emphasis on the Parousia, the 'sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life' and being brought 'to the eternal joy of [Christ's] kingdom,' end-of-life liturgies also speak of the presence of God as an abiding and remaining reality.[30] Following Psalm 139, a suggested prayer from the Church of England asks God to, 'help us to know your presence in this life and, in the life to come, still to be with you.'[31] This perfectly expresses the reassurance of the eschatological abiding of the farewell discourse.

When John 14.2–3 is referenced explicitly in the Church of England funeral service, it is a shame that more is not provided to help participants apply what I have argued is Jesus' figurative reassurances. A non-metaphorical understanding of the place Jesus prepared for his disciples is the most immediate conclusion for most. For example, we might hear 'God has prepared for those who love him a heavenly dwelling place,' and that is all.[32] We might then pray,

> Eternal God,
> whose Son Jesus Christ said,
> 'Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid,'
> take away our fear of death;
> bring us to the place he has gone to prepare for us;
> and give us his peace for ever.[33]

Here, the most immediate understanding of the prayer would suggest a locational remedy to our fear of death, made ready by Christ, rather than union with Christ as the reassurance we need in life and in death. A better alternative might be to pray instead:

> Father God,
> whose Son Jesus Christ said,
> 'Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid,'
> continue with us even through death;
> as we trust that Jesus' body was prepared at the cross as our eternal dwelling place,
> and so give us peace in him now and forever.

[30] Common Worship (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2013), <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/death-and-dying/funeral#mm123> (accessed 1 September 2022).
[31] Common Worship (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2013), <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/death-and-dying/funeral#mm112> (accessed 1 September 2022).
[32] Common Worship (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2013), <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/death-and-dying/funeral#mm123> (accessed 1 September 2022).
[33] Ibid.

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Another suggested prayer for those approaching death captures quite beautifully the heart of John 14.2–3:

> Within your wounds hide me.
> Let me never be separated from you.[34]

If a sermon was to be preached on John 14.2–3 in a funeral context, the preacher would be able to extend a greater comfort to friends and family than that the dearly departed has now taken up residence in their well-prepared heavenly room. Did they know Christ in life? Then death will only have deepened that knowledge. Their place in Heaven is the wounded body of Christ, and in him, all things are theirs; the room, the house, and even the grounds. Just like Jesus in the bosom of the Father, and just as the beloved disciple leant back against Jesus, so even now the departed remains hidden at his side. Turning to those who remain, the comfort and invitation might be that they need not wait until death to know that same blessed position: 'he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe"' (Jn. 20.27, ESV).

Towards an Eschatological Reconciliation of McCaffery, Coloe, and Kerr

At this stage, a concession needs to be made to the heavenly temple interpretation, in eschatological perspective. McCaffery, arguing for a sophisticated version of the heavenly temple interpretation of 'my Father's house,' still identifies Jesus' preparatory work with the cross and the place prepared as Jesus' body. For McCaffery, 'the disciples have access to the heavenly temple in the New Temple of the risen Jesus.'[35] This two-temple reading, whereby the Father's house is a heavenly temple but the place prepared is the body of Jesus, is a creative interpretation, but seems difficult to justify textually. I will offer an alternative sense in which the temple of Jesus' body can also speak of a heavenly temple.

The fundamental eschatological vision of the farewell discourse is Jesus' intention 'that where I am, you may be also' (Jn. 14.3, NRSV). Jesus' disciples are to abide in him, by the Spirit whom he breathes out, whether Jesus is on earth or ascended to the Father. In this way 'they are never without his presence'.[36] The vital point is that 'my Father's house' is the body of Jesus at any stage of redemptive history post-incarnation. Indeed, even before the incarnation, 'the Word was with God.' (Jn. 1.1). We live in that relational house by faith and the Spirit, and we will live in that same relational house clothed in the geography of the New Creation, when the relational and locational are fully reunited at the Parousia. There is a heavenly temple – the ascended body of Jesus. There always has been – the Word eternally in the bosom of the Father, incarnated to tabernacle among us, crucified, risen,

[34] Common Worship (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2013), <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/death-and-dying/funeral#mm112> (accessed 1 September 2022).
[35] McCaffery, *The House with Many Rooms*, 190–96.
[36] Marianna Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press: 2015), 308.

ascended and returning. In this sense, 'my Father's house' is the body of Jesus and the heavenly temple at the same time, but there is no heavenly temple apart from the relationship between Father and Son. As Bruner says, 'what we call "heaven," John's Jesus calls "where I am."'[37] If we misunderstand 'my Father's house' as an independent heavenly temple accessed through the temple of Jesus, the goal of redemption is not Christ, nor even reconciliation to the Father in Christ, but access into the Father's 'real estate,' managed by the Son.[38]

The 'man in heaven today' is what makes Heaven so. Heaven is coming to Earth because he is coming, and all creation will be made new in his resurrection life. Beale uses the language of the transformation of the temple, but in a way that keeps the presence of God central: 'the temple of God has been transformed into God, his people and the rest of the new creation.'[39] Peterson agrees that 'Jesus replaces the Temple of Jerusalem as the source of life and renewal for the world and as the centre for the ingathering of the nations.'[40] Perhaps, speaking of temple as the incorporation of all things into the mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit is even better. Jesus does not simply inherit a biblical-theological temple theme that began in Eden before passing through Tabernacle, Temple, incarnation, Church, and New Creation phases. The Word was in the bosom of the Father from the beginning. This is the original, relational temple reality, complete, trinitarian, and overflowing, reflected by all the others, bringing into its midst that which it delights to create, redeem and renew. The ultimate temple is the Trinity, which is why John 'saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.' (Rev. 21.22).

John 14.2–3 contributes to a wider temple project the central fact of this intensely relational reassurance of life in Christ. A biblical theology of temple can be so expansive as to become detached from the bosom of the Lord. John ends his Gospel with an exasperatingly nonchalant comment about not having enough room for books. Taken literally, it makes no sense. There is an awful lot of room for books in the whole world. Whatever was he thinking? Perhaps just this: that in the final analysis, the whole cosmos won't be able to fully contain the Word. As the final expression of ultimate temple reality, 'the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.' (Hab. 2.14). But that glory remains the mutual-indwelling, life-giving love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which the Church, and indeed the whole cosmos, share in at the New Creation. John says that there is not room enough in the whole of creation to contain the Word – but there is room enough in the Word for the whole of creation. Such is the scale of his scars. All things will find eternal life in the crucified and resurrected temple body of Jesus, the house of the Father, long since prepared as our eternal resting place, for life, in

[37] Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 811.
[38] Bruner's reading here is rather problematic: 'The Father has real estate, and the people of God are en route to this most prized of properties.' Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 810.
[39] G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 393.
[40] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 101.

death, and for eternity. But as John reminds us, however cosmic the scope, he has something personal, something wonderful in mind for his reader: 'these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.' (Jn. 20.31, ESV). There is room in Christ for you.

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