

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Picturing Christ in Temple Mysticism Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time Monday,
August 11, 2014 8:15 AM **Ez 1:2-5,24-28c**; Mt 17:22-27 St. Clare, virgin (The
basics of mystical encounters with God: light, splendor, and glory.)

Today we are reading from the scroll of Ezekiel, and it is in the manner of a mystical vision. This is part of the **tradition of temple mysticism**. It by no means begins with Ezekiel. Already if you **go back to the Old Testament** Book of Exodus, **Moses** is on the mountain for days and nights on more than one occasion. This is all about **a mystical encounter**.

Now here we see light, glory, and splendor. You could say that's **the basics of mystical encounters with God: light, splendor, and glory**. But there are figures which seem very peculiar; for example, they look like men but they have wings. That's doubtless where the idea came from that angels have wings. But what is described here aren't really angels. They are, however, **beings serving God in the heavenly temple**, sometimes called **cherubim**. Moses already instructed how to build the covering on the Ark of the Covenant. The covering of the Ark was supposed to be these figures with wings. They were the cherubim. Then there was also the seraphim. **Seraphim were pictured in the temple as bronze serpents**.

There is a story about the people being bit, but that's probably a story talking about the origin of the bronze serpents in the temple, because **the word *seraph* means burning**. So **seraphim were serpents in the temple**. They were also the burning stars in the night sky. They were also called the heavenly host, the seraphim. But also they are snakes, **serpents, because their bite is burning**. So in the Hebrew mind these all went together because the same word was used for all of it. **So the seraphim were pictured in the temple as serpents, bronze serpents**.

Now at some point—this is very important—at some point **all of this was cleaned out of the temple**, thrown away, burned. Why? Because of a different mentality that entered. We can see it happen around **the time of Josiah, around the seventh century**. And the idea was all these figures and images, that's like idolatry. We have to get rid of everything. This is part of what was called the **Deuteronomic Reform**. But with Ezekiel it's coming back, this mystical view of life. Why? Because the human soul is made for it. That's one way of putting it. The Deuteronomic Reform was to some degree puritanical, Calvinistic, if you want to call it that, **against images**.

We see that same **puritanical streak** in Islam. It lacks something. It's too narrow. It's too strict. **It starves the soul of the light, of the splendor, of the glory that it needs and in a sense is created for**.

When Christ comes the early Christians picture him in many of the temple tableaux, you might say. In the whole picture of the heavenly temple, they put Jesus there. He is now the **heavenly high priest**, the one who serves in the heavenly temple. And in many other ways they picture him as part of this household of God **in a very traditional mystical way**, but **in a way that had already become forbidden in the legal tradition of Israel**.