

Interior of St Gommarius Church by Genison Jules (manipulated)

a sense of place

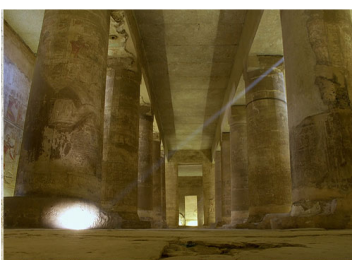
ber filled with huge pillars. I was suddenly overcome not just by awe, but a sense of *belonging*—as if this room had once been as familiar to me as my own dwelling. I felt at home there, even at peace. Since I do not subscribe to the theory of reincarnation, to this day I have no explanation for the sensation that passed through me. But I have never forgotten the overwhelming sense of belonging I experienced in that ancient room.



Last weekend we attended the wedding of a young and slightly distant relative. Upon entering and taking our seat in the church sanctuary, I experienced a sensation not unlike the one I had back in Abydos almost thirty years ago—only this time I knew why. It was an older church, and we were seated not on chairs, but in real wooden pews. Even amidst all the chattering of the invited guests, one could feel a glorious yet under-

BACK IN 1981 MY WIFE AND I were traveling in Egypt, seeing most of the obligatory tourist sites, as well as a few off the beaten path. One day we visited the Temple of Seti I in Abydos. Seti (or Sethos) was the father of Ramses II (a.k.a., Ramses the Great) and ruled Egypt from 1303 to 1290 BCE. His is a distinctive temple, both in function and design, and was my favorite of all we visited.

Roaming away from the organized tour, I wandered deeper into the recesses of the temple, until I came upon a large, shadowy cham-



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stated majesty in that sanctuary. On either side were huge, floor-to-ceiling stained glass windows; centered between the opposing sides of the choir loft hung a tall, ornately carved wooden cross. And when the bride came down the aisle, and the pipe organ thundered the “Trumpet Voluntary,” my eyes welled with tears—not out of any emotional connection with the bride and groom, but for the deep holiness of the room. It seemed as if I had entered the very throne room of heaven.

The atmosphere of that room was *substantial*, it was heavy with history and purpose. In this place one could *feel* the majesty, the holiness of Almighty God. And in this place I experienced again a breathtaking sense of familiar *belonging*.

A CONDITION OF REVERENCE

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,”
declares the Lord.

“For as the heavens are higher
than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:8-9

The contemporary paradigm of worship has cheapened the majesty of God. We have worked diligently to bring God down to man, rather than lift man up to God. We have made God “accessible” by lowering

Him to our standards, when what *He* did to make Himself accessible was to raise His only Son upon a cross.

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

John 3:14-16

It is true that part of what I experienced last weekend in that church sanctuary was a return to my roots, for I was born and raised in the church. My earliest memories are of wooden pews and stained glass windows, and a robed choir and pipe organ leading in the singing of hymns. It is natural for us to be drawn to any place that reminds us of our beginnings.

But something else was going on in that holy place. I was drawn to it—I was both comfortable and exhilarated there—because in that place I was lifted out of this temporal existence, lifted out of myself, lifted upward into the throne room of very God! The tears came because I could see Him, high and lifted up, glorious in majesty. And my spirit soared into reverent communion with His.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every

nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

Revelation 7:9-12



Our sense of place comes not just from architecture, but from the condition of our heart. One does not require stained glass windows and a resounding pipe organ to feel the presence of God. But what is required is a condition of reverence, and an expectation of finding Him seated upon His throne of majesty.

When you enter the sanctuary—whatever it is and wherever it may be—are you insisting that God be brought down to the level of pedestrian humanity, or are you longing to be lifted up to the exultant glories of His lofty plane?

