

Hannah K. Harrington

The Purity and Sanctuary of the Body in Second Temple Judaism



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To my lovely daughters, Sarah and Rachel

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Introduction

Paul exhorts the early church at Corinth, “Do you not know you are a temple for holiness” and that sexual sins, in particular, desecrate this “temple” (1 Cor 6:18–20)? What lies behind Paul’s query? Does the idea of holiness resident in the body begin with him? Is it a corporate temple or an individual one? Is this a Stoic notion? How does one get from the idea of going to the temple to the notion that God’s people are the temple? How does the temple change from a place where believers worship to something they are? In the passage quoted above, Paul seems surprised that his readers are unaware of this seemingly basic idea. Some Dead Sea Scrolls refer to the Qumran sect as a “holy house,” or “human sanctuary” (4Q174 1–2 I, 6–7). Is the notion of people-cum-temple the creation of Jewish sects at the end of the Second Temple period or does it have an identifiable pre-history? Where and how does this notion originate? Furthermore, what are its significance and implications?

The current study seeks to discover the origin and development of the notion of the body as temple in Second Temple Judaism. In my view, the concept sprouts from roots much older than the New Testament or the Scrolls. The aim is to provide a literary history of the matter by bringing into relief material from biblical times and tracing its interpretation through the Second Temple Period until the time of Paul’s letters to Corinth, highlighting innovations by various Jewish groups, including early Christian communities, along the way.

Definitions

A cursory read through the Damascus Document or Paul’s letters to Corinth will reveal the use of the temple as a metaphor for the people of God. Many have noticed the authors’ usage of the temple as a metaphor for the community, but few have discussed the full implications of it. Why use the temple as a metaphor for people? The answer is that the temple in Jewish tradition represented the central locus or “fulcrum of ancient Jewish religion.”¹ As God’s house, the temple was the place he owned and where he met with his people through his agents, the priests. One

1 Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), 104.

could call it his command center on earth. The daily operation of the cult which maintained the relationship of Yahweh and his people took place within this house.

The temple also had cosmological significance.² In Second Temple times, the temple was frequently viewed as a copy of the heavenly temple where the angels ministered before God. Philo, a Jewish philosopher writing in the first century BCE, describes it, “The highest, and in the truest sense the holy, temple of God is, as we must believe, the whole universe, having for its sanctuary the most sacred part of all existence, (namely) heaven” (*Spec. Laws* 1.66–67). Thus, the temple held both operational and symbolic significance. In templeless contexts, both ancient Jews and early Christians had to continue or reinterpret the temple cult in some way. None of these authors could afford to lose the strength of the language and processes of the Jewish cult. The temple was not simply a house of God, but it was the place where the divine activity of holiness among the body of Israel, both corporate and individual, was most intense.

Scholars often focus on particular features of the Temple, e.g. architecture, sacrifices, and priesthood, but more attention needs to be given to the processes of holiness and the impurity which threatens it. What is purity and how does it undergird and maintain the holiness of Israel? For answers, one must turn primarily to the priestly literature of the Torah.

Sanctuary

The term *מִקְדָּשׁ*, *miqdash*, “sanctuary,” occurs 73 times in the Hebrew Bible and refers to either the sacred area or sacred objects. Jacob Milgrom explains, “Indeed, it seems that the connotation of sacred objects for *miqdash* is limited to P and H (and possibly Jer 51:51). Everywhere else it refers to the sacred area or compound in which the Temple (*habbayit*) is the chief component but only one among others.”³ The full name of the Jerusalem Temple, *beit ha-miqdash*, literally means “the house of the sacred area” (cf. 1 Chr 2:10).

“Sanctuary” (*מִקְדָּשׁ*, *miqdash*) is derived from the root *קדש* and can be translated, “to be holy, separate.” The primary purpose of the tabernacle and temple,

2 Cf. Klawans, 144, “Two fundamental, symbolic understandings of the temple ... the first notion posits that the temple, its structures and rituals, symbolize the cosmos; the other posits that the Jerusalem temple, along with its personnel and practices, is the earthly analogue of heavenly phenomenon. In both cases, the temple has cosmic significance, and its ritual has symbolic value.”

3 Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, *The Anchor Bible*. (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 755. He explains the one possible exception “make me a *miqdash*,” (Exod 25:8) as “the Tabernacle ... and all its furnishings: in other words, all objects contained in the sacred precincts of which the Tabernacle is but one,” 754.

the sanctuaries of the Hebrew Bible, was to provide a separate, protected residence for Yahweh amid his people. The terms *Beit Yahweh*, “House of Yahweh” and *Beit Elohim*, “House of God” are both common designations of the sanctuary in the Hebrew Bible. Prior to the building of the first temple, the term *hekhal*, (הֵכָל) which reflects the Akkadian *e-gal*, “great house, palace,” designated a sacred shrine, the royal residence of the deity (but cf. also Isa 6:1).⁴

The term *mishkan*, (מִשְׁכָּן) from the root שָׁכַן, “to dwell, reside,” also conveys the notion of God’s living among Israel. On the one hand, it is a more restricted term than *miqdash* and refers in priestly literature to the holier enclosure of the tent or building where God’s presence resides. According to the Priestly tradition, the term *miqdash* refers to the *mishkan* as well as the court and sancta surrounding it.⁵ On the other hand, *mishkan* can also convey a sense of God’s unrestricted presence throughout the congregation of Israel. Milgrom points to Lev 26:11 where the term *mishkan* refers metaphorically to God’s “ethereal, spatially unbounded presence.”⁶

The problem of Yahweh living among Israel is stated well in Exodus, where the glory of the Sinaitic revelation so quickly dissipated after Moses’ absence and the people pressured Aaron to fashion them another god (Exod 32:1). According to the narrative, God was so angry after this breach of his covenant that he insisted that his angel lead the people to the promised land instead, lest he angrily destroy his own people on the way (Exod 33:3,5). The solution was to build a place for God to dwell in that would be accessible to the people only through the mediation of his special agents, the priests. Exodus states it clearly: “Let them [Israel] make me [Yahweh] a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them” (Exod 25:8). The

4 John Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present and Future* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2008), xii, lists a number of symbols and practices associated with the term “Temple” in the ancient world, including, the cosmic mountain, primordial mound, waters of life, heavenly prototype of the earthly sanctuary, divine revelation, covenant ceremonies in connection with promulgation of laws, the concept of center, dependency of the well-being of the community on the cult, initiation, concern for death and afterlife, sacral meals, animal sacrifices, economic and political power.

5 Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology*, 23 n. 78: “Indeed, מִקְדָּשׁ in P never means the sanctuary building. It either refers to ‘the sacred area,’ the holy place (Lev 12:4,16:33,20:3,21:12, 12,26:2 = 19:30; Num 19:20) or to ‘the sacred objects,’ the sancta (Lev 21:23, 26:31; Num 3:38, 10:21,18:1) ... It should also be noted that Ezekiel, just like P, never uses מִקְדָּשׁ for the sanctuary building”; cf. also Philip p. Jensen, *Graded Holiness: Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 90; Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 63.

6 Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 3B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 2300; cf. also Leviticus 1–16, 516, the term compares with the Aramaic מִשְׁכַּנָּא, “the innermost, forbidden portion of the Temple.” See also the rabbinic development of the term, *Shekinah*, as God’s glorious presence among Israel. The Rabbis often substitute biblical anthropomorphisms such as God manifesting himself to humans, walking, hiding or engaging in other human activities with the term *Shekinah*, “the Divine Presence,” e.g. Targ. Onq. Deut 12:5, where the temple is called “the house of the *Shekinah*.”

sanctuary and its courts would form a high voltage area which the priests kept clear of the sinful nation and its impurities. Thus, the relationship of Yahweh and Israel could continue by the mediation of priests who protected and maintained the divine residence.

Although ordinary Israelites could not enter the sanctuary, they could still be confident that the relationship between God and Israel was in effect by the manifestation of visible signs of the divine presence. One of the most obvious signs of this relationship was the perpetual altar fire which burned sacrifices to Yahweh in the sight of the congregation (Exod 40:29; Lev 6:13[Eng]). Also, confirming the relationship was the miraculous firecloud which rested above the sanctuary indicating that Yahweh was “home” and guaranteed the protection of his people (Exod 40:38). In a graphic vision of Yahweh’s displeasure, the prophet Ezekiel sees God’s glory, illustrated by a magnificent chariot drawn by fiery angels, lift off of the sanctuary and leave Israel vulnerable to her enemies (Ezek 10:18–19; 11:22–23).

The term preferred in Exodus, אהל מועד, *Ohel Mo’ed*, “Tent of Meeting,” sheds further light on the role of the sanctuary. Its purpose is a meeting place between God and his people, in particular Moses or the high priest. “... There I will meet you (Moses) and speak to you; I, *Yahweh*, will also meet the Israelites there and it will be sanctified by my glory” (Exod 29:43–44). Thus, part of the purpose of the sanctuary is to enable communication between Yahweh and the people of Israel. As Milgrom puts it: “The Tent is Israel’s oracular center. In the priestly schema, the mediation of Moses is replaced by the Urim and Thummim administered by the high priest. This is why the sanctuary is indispensable.”⁷ Although the priests are the officiants at the sanctuary, non-priestly traditions describe the Israelites communicating through prayer and praise to Yahweh when they come to worship him at his house. The temple of Jerusalem was not a silent sanctuary but praise to Yahweh was expressed through words, song and music (2 Kgs 8:12–54; 2 Chr 20:28). The sanctuary was supposed to be a place of communication between Yahweh and his people. Israel comes expecting the divine presence and revelation.

The sanctuary is a place where the rituals of the cult can take place and mediate the relationship between God and Israel. Purgation rituals atone for the sins of Israel. Purification rituals keep the sanctuary free of impurity. Other rituals, e. g. lighting the continuous menorah fires or setting out the sacred bread, symbolize the presence and provision of Yahweh among Israel. These rituals form the framework through which the penitent, supplicant, and jubilant can express themselves to Yahweh. The cult thus maintains and strengthens the relationship between God and his people.

⁷ Milgrom, Leviticus 23–27, 2300–2301, distinguishes between P’s view that Yahweh is confined to a sanctuary and H’s view that he is present everywhere in the land.

The priestly traditions of the Torah explain in detail the reciprocal relationship between the sanctuary cult and the impurities of Israel. On the one hand, proper implementation of the sanctuary cult functions to purge sins and other severe impurities from the people. On the other hand, the violations and impurities of Israel which are not mitigated by purgation affect the sanctuary which eventually becomes ineffective as a place of atonement.⁸ Israel's impurities, both moral and ritual, defile the sanctuary even from afar, and thus the people must maintain a certain level of purity even when not approaching the sanctuary.⁹ According to priestly doctrine, when the sins and impurities of Israel increase without confession, atonement, and purification, the sanctuary becomes polluted and the cult ineffectual (cf. Lev 20:1–3). The sacrifices of the Day of Atonement were made in order to purify the sanctuary of impurities (both moral and ritual, intentional and unintentional) which may not have been expunged during the year (Lev 16:16).

Greek terms for the sanctuary are instructive as well. The most common terms for sacred space in Greek are *to hieron*, *ta hiera*, “the holy place(s).” The terms refer to area marked out for the deity. Nevertheless, the LXX recognizes that the Hebrew understanding of sanctuary is different than the Greek concept. The writers avoid *hieron* in this context, preferring to translate terms for Israel's sanctuary, *miqdash* or *qodesh*, as *ta hagia* or *to hagion*.¹⁰ This change in terminology signals a difference between the Hebrew and Greek concepts of sanctity. What is this different essence? The answer comes with a more sustained look into the meaning of holiness in the Hebrew Bible.

Holiness

What is holiness? What does it mean that the sanctuary is a holy house? What connotations does the term “holy” bring to the table?

While the term מִקְדָּשׁ, *miqdash*, in biblical literature stood for the physical precincts where God's presence resided among Israel and the sancta which belonged to him, the noun קֹדֶשׁ, *qodesh*, “holiness, holy (one)” carries a wider semantic field. This term, which occurs 470 times in the Hebrew Bible, usually indicates

8 Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus 1–16, 258–59, offers several examples from ancient near eastern texts of the seriousness of polluting the sanctuary. In Israel, negligent temple gatekeepers were charged with a capital crime (Num 18:23; cf. 2 Chr 23:19); Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell, Qumran Cave 4: Miqsat Ma'ase Ha-Torah, DJD X (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 131.

9 Milgrom, Leviticus 1–16, 257.

10 According to Kevin Anderson, “Purity in the Epistle to the Hebrews” in *Purity: Essays in Bible and Theology* (ed. Andrew Brower Latz and Arseny Ermakov; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 154, *hagios* is rare in secular Greek and pressed into service by the LXX in order to translate *qadosh*. Anderson, 155 n 8, notes only a few exceptions: 1 Chr 9:27; 29:4; 2 Chr 6:13; Ezek 45:19). *Hiera* is used of pagan sanctuaries (e.g. Ezek 28:18).

the sacred character of an object dedicated to the service of Yahweh or designated as belonging to him (e.g. holy ark, 2 Chron 25:33; holy garments, Exod 28:2; holy ground, Exod 3:5; holy food, Lev 22:10; holy day, Lev 23:4). In 70 of these instances, *qodesh*, like *miqdash*, refers to a holy place, especially the sanctuary or a room within it (e.g. Exod 28:29, 35; Lev 10:17; Ezek 42:14). Significantly, several instances refer to Israel, lit. “people of (the) holiness” (e.g. אֲנָשֵׁי קֹדֶשׁ, Exod 22:30; עַם הַקֹּדֶשׁ, Isa 62:12). Thus, *qodesh* in biblical literature associates the holiness of Yahweh with certain objects, zones, chambers, and people.

In the Hebrew Bible, the concept of holiness can be properly understood only in the context of encounter with the Holy One, Yahweh, the God of Israel. Holiness is viewed as the essence of God himself (Lev 20:3; 22:32; Isa 30:15; cf. 1 Sam 2:2).¹¹ *Qadosh*, קָדוֹשׁ, “Separate One,” describes his uniqueness as the deity vis-à-vis humanity. Yahweh is separated from humanity by virtue of the fact that he is the Creator and human beings are his creation (Gen 1–2). As such, Yahweh can exercise complete control over his creation leaving them dependent on his will. Contrariwise, Yahweh has no point of origin, operates with complete autonomy, and holds life in his hands. The divine separation is perhaps most obvious in the fact that Yahweh, unlike his creation, is not subject to death and decay.¹² This distinction between divinity and mortality represents a chasm that human beings cannot bridge. Thus, Yahweh is the “Separate One” in that his essence is distinguished from human experience. His distinctness from humanity is not simply a matter of difference but carries the weight of his superiority, dominance, power, and perfection. It is the separation of the Creator from his creations. At the same time, the designation serves to associate him closely with the people of Israel (e.g. Isa 30:15, קְדוּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל).

The character of holiness, which can be equated with the Holy One, is not just a state of divine perfection and withdrawal, rather it is an all-consuming power with an unshakeable will. One of the key contributions of Jacob Milgrom’s work is the understanding that holiness is essentially the divine force. This dynamic force which emanates from the Creator causes all creation trembles (1 Sam 6:20; Ps 96:9;

11 Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Bible*. (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1712, explains that throughout the Hebrew Bible, “Holiness is his [Yahweh’s] quintessential nature ... distinguishing him from all beings It acts as the agency of his will. If certain things are termed holy ... they are so by virtue of divine dispensation. Moreover, this designation is always subject to recall,” cf. also 1735.

12 Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22, 1720–23*, sets out the polarities of holiness and impurity representing the forces of life and death, respectively; David P. Wright, emphasizes the process of decay and death as part of human mortality, the antonym of divinity, “Unclean and Clean (OT),” *ABD* (ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 6: 729–741. See also, Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 201; Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality, The Ritual Purity System and its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 31–32.

11:9). Deuteronomy refers to God as a “Devouring Fire” (Deut 4:24). The Holy One exercises himself on behalf of his people but always retains the prerogative to do as he sees fit. Thus, approaching Holiness is a dangerous proposition (Exod 33:20; Num 4:20; 18:3; Judg 13:22; 1 Kgs 19:13), and as set forth in the priestly literature, the Holy One is unapproachable except through proper channels and restrictions.¹³ Infringements upon his holiness, whether against his holy representatives or violations in the treatment of holy things, e. g. altars, donations, etc. bring judgment on the offender (Lev 10:2; 2 Sam 6:7). Because of the powerful chemistry involved in the encounter of the Holy One with humanity, Exodus reports that Moses had to set up a barrier at Mt. Sinai in order to protect Israel from Yahweh’s revelation to them (Exod 19:12). The mountain was on fire but encased in smoke preventing direct access to the Holy One. Israel was ordered to purify herself for three days in order to prepare herself for this theophany (Exod 19:10–13).

There is a paradox in Holiness in that it is both terrifying and inviting. Indeed, although holiness in the priestly tradition has at its core a sense of withdrawal and separation, holiness at its core is not a status but the divine force. It is God’s quintessential nature, distinguishing him from all beings (1 Sam 2:2), but also acting in accordance with his will. Like nuclear energy, it can destroy but it can also heal.¹⁴ The Psalmist exhorts God’s people, “O worship Yahweh in the beauty of holiness” (Ps 96:9). Yahweh channels his goodness into Israel by means of his (holy) spirit. Scripture equates the holy spirit’s presence with goodness: “I will pour my spirit upon your seed and my blessing upon your offspring” (Isa 34:3). The Targum inserts the word “holy” in front of “spirit,” making it clear that the divine holiness is the source of this blessing. Similarly, Psalms 143:10 reads, “you are my God; your spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness” (cf. John 16:13; Rom 8:14). Indeed, by his holy spirit, Yahweh revealed himself to Israel thus extending himself toward them and allowing them access to him (1QS VIII:16; 2 Tim. 3:16). Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good through the agency of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). The Rabbis uses the terms *Shekinah*, “the divine presence,” *Kavod*, “Glory,” *ha-Shem*, “the Name,” and *Ruah ha-Qodesh*, “the spirit of Holiness,” to describe God’s goodness and nearness to his people (b. Shabbat 22b; b. Berakhot 6a).¹⁵

The notion of human holiness is always derivative from Yahweh’s holiness and reflected most intensely among his agents, the Israelite priests. Our best source for the priestly traditions on holiness is the Book of Leviticus which takes up holiness

13 Milgrom, Leviticus 1–16, 730. For further discussion of the elements of holiness and the dichotomy between Yahweh’s perfection and power, on the one hand, and his ethical goodness toward his people, on the other, see Hannah K. Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism and the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001), 11–44.

14 Dwight D. Swanson, “Leviticus and Purity,” in *Purity: Essays in Bible and Theology* (eds. Andrew Brower Latz and Arseny Ermakov; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 42.

15 See discussion in Harrington, *Holiness*, 32–33.

as its central theme. Scholars continue to debate the date of the book of Leviticus with some placing its compilation in the late monarchial period, during the exile, early Second Temple period, or even in Hellenistic times.¹⁶ In terms of editing and placement, as I have argued elsewhere, many of the cultic traditions of this book must pre-date the Second Temple period.¹⁷ Most scholars are convinced that the first 16 chapters (Priestly Code = P) were edited before the latter eleven (Holiness Code = H) which present a more expansive idea of holiness adding an ethical component and including the laity. As many other theories, this one seems to overstate the case, but nevertheless still bears weight.¹⁸ I suggest that both corpuses were in place, except for late redaction, before the writing of Ezra-Nehemiah. The expansion of a degree of cultic holiness to the entire community is evident already by the time of Ezra-Nehemiah (see Chapter Two). The editor of the latter text democratizes the priestly genealogy rules which are found in H.¹⁹ He also extends pollution threats from an intra-Israelite problem to one between nations.²⁰ Jerusalem is represented as the holy city, and its gates and wall are purified (Neh 11:1; 12:30).

According to Leviticus, the high priest, Aaron, was originally anointed by Moses setting him apart as “holy” (Lev 8:12). Jacob Milgrom explains the meaning behind anointment, “The implication of anointing as a sacred rite is that the anointed one receives divine sanction and that his person is inviolable (1 Sam 24:7–8; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam 1:14, 16; 19:22).” The high priest’s anointment “‘sanctifies’ the high priest by removing him from the realm of the profane and empowering him to operate in the realm of the sacred, namely to handle the sancta.”²¹ The high priest wore a gold diadem on which the words, “Holy to the Lord,” were engraved, testifying to his special status as sacrosanct, a mediator protected by God who was able to make atonement for Israel’s sins (Exod 2:36–38).

16 Most scholars place the composition or at least redaction of Leviticus during the exile or Persian period, but cf. Israel Knohl, *Sanctuary of Silence*, 204–226, who dates H to the 7th century BCE and P earlier than that. Knohl still allows for redaction into the Persian period. Milgrom places P and most of H in the pre-exilic period, *Leviticus 1–16*, 34.

17 Hannah K. Harrington, “The Use of Leviticus in Ezra-Nehemiah,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* (electronic), June 2013.

18 For example, ritual impurity continues to be an important issue in H (cf. Lev 17 which requires even the ger to observe it), and likewise ethics is present in P (cf. Lev 4 which details sacrifices for those who commit fraud, theft, and other moral violations).

19 Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Inter-marriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (New York: Oxford, 2002), 10; Martha Himmelfarb, “A Kingdom of Priests’: The Democratization of the Priesthood in the Literature of Second Temple Judaism,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997): 89–104.

20 Mary Douglas, “Responding to Ezra: The Priests and the Foreign Wives,” *Biblical Interpretation* 10/1. (Leiden: Brill, 2002): 1–23.

21 Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 554, finds this figurative use of *mashah* already attested in Ugaritic texts.

The anointment of Aaron as the high priest sanctified a whole line of priests for service in the sanctuary. After the initial inauguration of Aaron and his sons (Leviticus 8–9), each successive high priest was supposed to be anointed for his elevated service but succeeding ordinary priests remained valid under the umbrella anointment of their ancestors (Exod 29:44; Lev 6:15; 22:9). This anointed, holy priesthood was empowered to operate in the sacred realm and mediate between the God and his people by maintaining God's cult in a state of purity and especially by offering the atoning sacrifices of Israel. Milgrom explains that in the priestly source (Lev 1–16) those who are specially designated to serve Yahweh, e.g. the priests, are termed “holy” in the sense of “set apart for God,” but this is so that they can be effective in his service. The elevated status of the priesthood is a given throughout the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

On a lesser scale, all Israel is holy. In the Torah, Israel's holiness is not considered cultic in the sense of priestly access to the deity and his sanctuary. It is derivative from Yahweh's holiness but its potency and significance are understood variously by different streams of biblical tradition (see below under Biblical Traditions), and these nuances become more pronounced in Second Temple interpretations. According to Deuteronomy, the people of Israel, not just the priests, are holy by election. Israel's holiness is a given simply because they are a chosen race.²² The entire nation has been selected from all other people as Yahweh's exclusive possession (Deut 7:6). It is because of this choice, that he expects Israel to keep his commandments. According to Leviticus, Israel is not inherently holy but must pursue holiness in their daily lives. In the Holiness Code (Lev 17–27), all Israel is enjoined to achieve holiness (Lev 19:2). As Milgrom puts it, “Israel, priests included, enhance or diminish their holiness in proportion to their observance of all of God's commandments.”²³ Both Leviticus and Deuteronomy agree

22 The Holiness traditions of Leviticus teach the notion that Israel is required to achieve holiness by being obedient to the commandments of Yahweh, cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1740, on Lev 20:8. Deuteronomy, on the other hand, emphasizes Israel's holiness by election (Deut 7:1–6). Milgrom explains that in the traditions of the Priests (P) as well as Deuteronomy (D), holiness is an inherent state, but in the Holiness Code, the concept is dynamic, “Lay persons can attain it, and priests must sustain it, for holiness is diminished or enhanced by either violating or obeying the divine commandments,” (Leviticus 17–22, 1740–41). Naomi Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness: Ancient Jewish and Christian Notions of Sexuality and Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6–9, 32, distinguishes these definitions by the terms, “achieved holiness” vs. “ascribed holiness.” Cf. also Baruch J. Schwartz, “Israel's Holiness: The Torah Traditions,” in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus* (eds. M.J.H.M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 58–59; C. Werman, “The Concept of Holiness and the Requirements of Purity in Second Temple and Tannaic Literature,” in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus* (eds. M. J. H. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 164–67.

23 Even in Deuteronomy's later section, Israel's holiness is dependent on their maintenance of the commandments (26:18–19; 28:9), Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1717.

that Israel's holiness designates her as Yahweh's possession, reflects his character, and marks her as distinct from her neighbors.

Leviticus presents holiness as a way of life that Israel, not just the priests, must strive for. The writer exhorts all Israel, "Be holy, because (some: as) Yahweh your God is holy," (19:2; cf. also 11:44) a mandate that no person would ever be able to fully achieve. The sense must be that Israel is to imitate God's holiness to the degree that they are able. Holiness requires both purification after various pollutions (see below), but also a commitment to a code of ethics, or "good behavior." "Bad behavior" is not just murder, adultery, and idolatry, although these are certainly capital crimes. Rather, being holy requires a commitment to goodness in emulation of The Holy One (Leviticus 19). In this way, holiness is a force for good in society, not just the absence of impurity. The command appears twice in the book, once after a catalog of ritually impure foods which Israel must abstain from or at least purify herself from (Lev 11:44), and again between a list of sexual ethics (Lev 18) and a list of miscellaneous, mostly ethical, commandments (Lev 19:2). Thus, Holiness in Israel requires not only separation from idolatrous practices and peoples (Lev 20:22–26) but a commitment to ethical standards (Lev 19:2–37; 20:2–21). "Holiness means not only 'separation from' but 'separation to.' It is a positive concept, an inspiration and a goal associated with God's nature and his desire for man."²⁴ It is a lifestyle that reflects and contains the energy of Yahweh himself. Israel not only represents Yahweh but implements his good will within society. The people function as the hands and feet of the invisible deity.

Couching holiness in ethical, as well as ritual, terms, and placing this mandate in terms of *imitatio Dei* reveals that Yahweh's quintessential holiness is defined by morality. It is who he is, his essence, his ethical goodness. In the view of the Torah, this is the trait which distinguishes his character from other gods, and I submit explains why the Greek translators chose a different term to describe the holiness (*hagion*) of Yahweh from the sacredness (*hieron*) of other gods (see above). Ethics without ritual, however, lack a sense of structure. Cult supplies framework and definition to the daily, ongoing relationship of Israel and her God.

The lack of holiness is the state of the profane [חל, *hol*, "profane, ordinary"]. It is the duty of the priest to distinguish between items which are holy and those which are profane (Lev 10:10). Scholars have argued that the profane is a neutral category in the priestly literature. For example, according to the priestly tradition, laypersons do not share the holiness of the priest, and so they are considered profane. They lack the special anointing that sanctifies the priesthood. While this is true, it is important to recognize that priests and animals which have been consecrated to the sanctuary become cultic sancta and may not be de-sacrilized (= desecrated), or "redeemed"; to profane them constitutes a sacrilege carrying the

24 Milgrom, Leviticus 1–16, 731.

penalty of death (Lev 27:28–29). Agricultural tithes, however, may be redeemed by paying a 20 % fine (Lev 27:27, 31). Thus, an item which is inherently profane is neutral in terms of its character but once it is set aside as a cultic sanctum (i. e. holy in a cultic sense), it becomes charged with holiness and becomes inviolable and subject to penalties. To de-sacrilize a sanctum is מַעַל, *ma'al*, “to commit sacrilege.” In priestly contexts this term carries a cultic usage synonymous with חָלַל, *hillel*, “to profane, desecrate” [from *hol*] (Lev 19:12).²⁵

Sacrilege in biblical tradition is committed against God either by trespassing the holiness of items dedicated to the sanctuary or by violating an oath sworn in God’s name (cf. also child sacrifice, Lev 20:3).²⁶ Sacrilege is a serious allegation that, as in the case of Achan’s theft of sacred property, involves rebellion against God and breaking the covenant of Israel and God (Josh 7:1, 11, 1 5). Deliberate sacrilege has no remedy but is punishable by death or extirpation (cf. Lev 22:9; Num 1:51; Josh 7; 2 Chr 26), but inadvertent sacrilege may be expiated by offering an *asham*, “guilt offering” (Lev 5:4–6). It is because of the *ma'al* of Israel against God that they have been exiled to foreign lands (Dan 9:7; cf. Lev 26:15, 40; Prov 17:18; 1 Chr 9:1; Neh 13:27).

For Leviticus, holiness is a divine force which brings blessing if the deity is obeyed and danger if he is disobeyed (Lev 26:3–39). This includes all of Yahweh’s commandments, whether they are directed toward the operation of the cult, or proper treatment of another person. Interpersonal violations, improper sexual relations, and even holding grudges, are as much of an offense against Yahweh’s person as improper sacrifices and inappropriate priestly rituals. By committing to behavior which reflects the character of the deity, Israel shares in the very holiness of Yahweh. It is not a large step of logic then to claim that the nation itself, not just the temple building, contains his sanctity. Indeed, this is the step taken by several of the ancient writers discussed in this study.

²⁵ Milgrom bases this on the parallel contexts of *ma'al* and *hillel*, the ancient near eastern concept of sacrilege and the rabbinic interpretation of *ma'al*, Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 320; for a full discussion of *ma'al* in the ancient near east, see 345–61. Cf. also D.J.A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NCB (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 248; H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 139, 165.

²⁶ The range of items which can be desecrated in Scripture is broad, including temple dedications of persons, animals, precious objects, and weapons, including items captured in war (cf. Num 31:42–52; 2 Sam 8:10–11; 1 Kgs 7:51; 14:26–27). Non-biblical ancient near eastern sources attest that captured vessels were dedicated to the gods and that these were subject to *ma'al*, cf. the Hittite “Instructions” (2.32–58; 4.12, 17, 25), Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 322.

Purity and Impurity

Impurity is a negative force antagonistic to holiness. Scholars argue over the nature of this power. Baruch Levine regards impurity in ancient Israel as a demonic threat in much the same way it was considered cross-culturally in ancient times.²⁷ Milgrom disagrees with Levine seeing the treatment of impurity by the biblical priests as an attempt to expunge the superstitious element rampant among Israel and her neighbors.²⁸ Instead, he argues the priestly regulations focus rather on human beings as the major source of impurity and the ones responsible for its purification. Not all impurity is evil but much stems simply from the frailty of the human body.

Both holiness and its antonym, impurity, work on the people of Israel in various ways pulling them into the realm of God or away from his presence and blessing. This holiness-impurity polarity is the basis upon which one can understand the cult in meaningful ways, as a system of interrelated parts. Even with the variety of interpretations in matters of cultic practice found in Second Temple texts, the interconnectedness of holiness, desecration, purity, and impurity forms an axis upon which the temple cult turns. These terms require careful definition.²⁹

Milgrom illustrated the chemistry between the categories of holy, profane, pure and impure in the following manner: the holy and the impure, being forces, impact the profane and the pure, which are states.³⁰ Israel is commanded to be holy, and for that reason must maintain a level of purity, but she is constantly drawn into impurity by virtue of her humanity and its limitations. Those items outside of the system, e. g. non-Israelites or other items insusceptible to impurity, can simply be categorized as profane. Nevertheless, a profane item, can be made holy, i. e. “sanctified,” to be used for the purposes of the deity or his cult.

Purity is best understood as the absence of impurity, a state of being Israel must maintain in order to enter the presence of Yahweh and receive his blessings. The holiness of Yahweh, the powerful divine force upon which Israel depends for protection and prosperity, must not be challenged by bringing impurity, its antonym, into his zone. From a cultic perspective this includes such actions as entering sacred space or handling sacred food while in a physically impure condition or failing to

27 Baruch A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and some Cultic Terms* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

28 Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 43.

29 An uncritical usage of these terms is confusing for any study of the cult, e. g. “holiness” is not the antonym of “private,” as in Luise Schottroff, “Purity and Holiness of Women and Men in 1 Corinthians and the Consequences for Feminist Hermeneutics,” *Distant Voices Drawing Near: Essays in Honor of Antoinette Clark Wire*, ed. Holly E. Hearon (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 90.

30 Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 730–32.

purify oneself after contracting an impurity (see Leviticus 11–15; Numbers 19). From a moral perspective, disobedience to the commandments of Yahweh results in severe impurity, both to the individual and to the sanctuary (Lev 15:31; 16:30–34; 18:24–30). Israel must emulate the holiness of their God by abstaining from impurity and committing themselves to a life of ethical goodness.³¹ Disobedience to the divine commandments will bring impurity into the sanctuary and habitual violation will bring disaster upon the nation (Lev 15:31; 18:28–29; 26:14–39).³²

Purity not only protects the sanctuary but also maintains the holiness of the people. In fact, the very purpose of Israel's purity system is to reflect and reinforce her separation from other people:

I, Yahweh, am your God who has set you apart [*badal*] from other peoples. So you shall set apart [*badal*] the clean beast from the unclean, the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not draw abomination upon yourselves through beast or bird or anything with which the ground is alive, which I have set apart [*badal*] for you to treat as unclean. You shall be holy to me, for I, Yahweh, am holy, and I have set you apart [*badal*] from other peoples to be mine (Lev 20:24–26).

According to the Torah, Israel is to eat by a unique standard of food laws so that she will not be able to interact socially with her pagan neighbors and thus be engaged in pagan practices and especially be entrapped by intermarriage (Lev 20:20–26; cf. Exod 34:15–16; Num 16:21).³³ Thus, Yahweh not only sets aside a sanctuary as a residence but he sets apart a people as holy as well and marks them both by purity restrictions.

Some impurities, often called “ritual impurity,” result from physical conditions of the body, which are incompatible, according to the priestly regulations, with encountering the sacred. These include the pollution resulting from death, various skin diseases, and sexual discharges resulting primarily from menstruation and sexual intercourse. These impurities repulse Yahweh for whatever reason.³⁴

31 Antony Cothey, “Ethics and Holiness in the Theology of Leviticus,” *JSOT* 30/2 (2005): 142–43, does not view Leviticus as operating under a moral code which requires individual responsibility because the sinner does not have to have feelings of guilt. However, Leviticus does not function as a psychological treatise, but as a practical system of handling transgression. Those at fault must demonstrate their repentance by repayment of damage. It is more akin to a legal code which supplies an objective means of handling transgression within Israelite society.

32 For more on the nature of holiness vis-à-vis purity, cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus* 17–22, 1721.

33 Shaye Cohen, “From the Bible to the Talmud: The Prohibition of Intermarriage,” in *Hebrew Annual Review Biblical and Other Studies in Honor of Robert Gordis* 7, ed. Reuben Ahroni (1983), 23; Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 24–26.

34 I disagree with those who suggest that *tum'ah* is a neutral term, e.g. Mila Ginsburskaya, “Purity and Impurity in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Purity: Essays in Bible and Theology*, ed. Andrew Brower Latz and Arseny Ermakov (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 22 fn 61; Vered Noam, *From Qumran to the Rabbinic Revolution: Conceptions of Impurity* (Jerusalem: Yad ben Zvi,