The Holiness of God in Sacrificial Worship in Leviticus

Concordia Theological Seminary Continuing Education
College Hill Lutheran Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa
August 18-22
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A. Introduction to Leviticus

1. Its relevance
   • Student from New Guinea about Lutherans in the USA: “For them nothing is sacred any longer.”
   • Loss of a sense of holiness in the western world: effect of the Enlightenment
   • Sense of contamination from our bodies: see Mary Douglas
   • Modern obsession with pollution and natural purity
     ➢ Infection as impurity: germs as dirty in modern thought
     ➢ Racial purity: Hitler
     ➢ Ecological movement
   • Modern contempt for ritual

2. Its use
   • Lack of use in the church: only Lev 19:1, 2, 15-18 for Proper 25 in the three year lectionary
   • Importance of Leviticus for Jews: centre of the Hebrew Bible
   • Usefulness in our mission to animists, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus

3. Liturgical contents: Israel’s involvement in God’s service
   • Word of God: 36 speeches by God
- Address to Moses as cult founder and mediator (32x)
- Address to Moses and Aaron (11:1; 13:1; 14:33)
- One address to Aaron (10:8-11)
- Seventeen as teaching for the people (1:2; 4:1; 7:23, 25; 11:1; 12:1; 15:2; 18:2; 20:1; 23:2, 10, 24, 34; 24:2; 25:2; 27:2) and the whole assembly (19:2)
- Five as teaching for the priests (6:9, 25; 21:1; 22:2, 17)
- Two as teaching for the priests and the people (17:2; 22:18)
- One as teaching for Aaron (21:19)

- God’s institution of the divine service by his word
  - Divine mandate: legislation as God’s gift of the divine service to Israel
  - Divine authorisation and empowerment

- Purpose of divine institution
  - Liturgical “enactment” of God’s word: see the use of the formula of compliance with God’s word in 8:4, 36; 16:34; 21:24; 23:44; 24:23 and the formula of execution of God’s word in 8:9, 13, 17, 21, 29; 9:7, 10, 21.
  - Cooperation with God in enacting his word
  - Sanctification of the service by his word in 20:7-8:
    *Consecrate yourselves and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. Keep my statutes and do (enact) them; I am the Lord who sanctifies you* (pl).
  - Avoidance of the occult practices of pagan rituals

- Terms for God’s word
  - Ritual “statute” (*huqqah*) on what is to be done (eg. 3:17)
  - Ritual “ordinance” (*mishpat*) on how the service is to be done (eg. 5:10; 9:16)
  - Ritual “teaching” (*torah*) on right enactment (eg. 6:9, 14, 25)
  - Ritual “commandment/mandate” (*mitzvah*) that authorises a right enactment in the divine service (eg. 22:31; 26:3, 14, 15;
27:34) or prohibits a wrong enactment (eg. 4:2, 13, 22, 27).
See the summary in 27:34 about the whole book

- Ritual “provision” (hoq) of food from the offerings for the priests (eg. 6:17, 18, 22; 7:34)

- Shift in location for God’s speaking in 1:1
  - from Mt Sinai in Exodus
  - to the tabernacle

- Narrative context: sacred procession of the Israelites with God from Egypt to Canaan
  - Part of ongoing story: historical origin
    - Events at Mt Sinai: Exodus 19 to Numbers 10
    - After the building of the tabernacle
  - Continuation of narrative in three places
    - Ordination of priests and inauguration of the divine service in 8-9 followed by the death of Aaron’s sons for desecration in 10
    - Institution of the Day of Atonement in response to the death of Aaron’s sons in 16
    - Stoning of a man for blasphemying the holy name in 24:10-23

B. Theological Framework of Leviticus

1. The theology of holiness as the key to Leviticus:
   See God’s word to Moses in 19:2: *Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, “You will be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”*
   - Self-declaration and self-presentation as intrinsically holy: *I the Lord your God am holy.*
• See also 11:44-45; 20:7, 26 as well as the remarks about the priests in 21:6-8, and the claim that the priests are "holiness/a holy thing/ a holy place" in 21:6
  ➢ Holiness as a liturgical term
  ➢ No definition of holiness as it has to do with God’s divine being
• Call to be holy in 19:2
  ➢ Promise: You will be holy
  ➢ Demand: You shall be holy
  ➢ Statement of fact: You are holy
• Ongoing source of holiness: I am the Lord, who sanctifies
  ➢ Holy people: 20:8; also 21:8; 22:32
  ➢ Holy things: 21:23; also 22:16
  ➢ Holy priests: 22:9; also 21:15
• Sanctification by God’s name and his word in 22:31-33:
  I am the Lord; you therefore shall keep my commandments by enacting them. I am the Lord; you shall therefore not desecrate my holy name, so that I may show myself as holy among the Israelites. I am the Lord, who makes you holy, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord.
  ➢ My holy name: the name of my holiness, the name of my sanctuary, my sanctuary name (cf. 20:3; 22:2)
  ➢ Connection of the name with the sanctuary (20:3) and the offerings (22:2)
  ➢ LXX for 22:2: the name of my sanctified things
  ➢ Desecration of the Lord’s name by its ritual misuse (19:12; 20:3; 21:6)
• Sanctification by divinely instituted rites in 20:7-8: You shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy, for I am the Lord your God. You shall keep my statutes and enact them; I am the Lord, who makes you holy.
• God’s consecrating presence in the divine service in Ex 29:43: There (at the altar) I will meet with the children of Israel, so that it (Israel or altar)
may be consecrated by my glory.

- Liturgical participation in God’s holiness
- Reception of it through holy meals

- Reception of God’s holiness by contact with the most holy things
  - Altar of burnt offering: Ex 29:37
  - Anointing oil: Ex 30:29
  - Meat from sin and guilt offerings: Lev 6:17-18, 27
  - Bread from grain offerings: Lev 6:17-18

- The use of the formula for sanctification by physical touch:
  whoever/whatever touches x will become holy.
  - The altar for burnt offering (Ex 29:37) as well as the ark, the table for the bread, the lampstand, the altar for incense and the laver (Ex 30:26-29)
  - The bread from the grain offerings of the priests and the meat from the sin and guilt offerings (6:14-18, 27)

- Distinction in 21:22
  - Most holy things that sanctify (means of grace)
  - Holy things/offerings that are sanctified by them (5:15, 16; 12:4; 19:8; 21:22; 22:2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14,15, 16)

- Degrees of holiness from proximity to God
  - Holy of Holies: Holy Place: courtyard: camp
  - High priest: priests: Levites: lay Israelites

- God’s wrath at the desecration of his holiness
  - Death from desecration by the performance of strange/alien/unauthorised service: case of Nadab and Abihu in 10:1-3
  - Death from the individual desecration by defilement: 15:31
  - Exile from corporate desecration: 20:22-26

- Result of sanctification: safe access to God’s blessings
2. **God’s mandate to Aaron and the priests in 10: 10-11:**

*Then the Lord said to Aaron, ‘You and your sons are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them through Moses.’*

- The holy: what is divine and in God’s presence (the tabernacle, the meat of a sacrificed animal)
- The common: what is permitted for human use in the order of creation (sex, ordinary food)
- The unclean: forbidden as disorderly, unnatural and perverted in the order of creation (sickness, homosexuality)
- The clean: the proper, natural condition of something common (bread, sexual intercourse in marriage)

3. **Impurity as the opposite of holiness**

- Powers rather than concepts
- Impurity as the opposite of God’s holiness
- Impurity as a life-denying and destructive power
- Incompatibility with God’s holiness
  - Darkness by light
  - Petrol by fire
- Problem of impurity: 15:31: *Thus you shall separate the Israelites from their impurity, so that they do not die in their impurity when they defile my tabernacle that is in their midst.*
  - Death from defilement of God’s holiness: wrath rather than grace
  - Separation for safe access to God’s holy presence: avoidance of desecration and death (7:20-21)
  - Exclusion of unclean people from participation in the divine service (12:5)
• Defilement by contact with impurity
• Spiritual power of impurity from desecration of holiness
• No creature as intrinsically clean or unclean
• Impurity as an unnatural power: association with disorder and death
• Demons as the source of impurity (?) ➤ unclean spirits in NT

4. Three domains from God’s holy presence on earth

• The clean holy domain
  ➢ Order of salvation: rule by the gospel
  ➢ Luther: kingdom of God’s right hand
• The clean common domain
  ➢ Order of creation: rule by the law
  ➢ Luther: kingdom of God’s hand
• The unclean common domain
  ➢ Domain of darkness: disorder and chaos
  ➢ Dominion of pagan gods and the occult

God’s Presence

↓

 Sanctification            Purification

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holy and clean</th>
<th>Clean and common</th>
<th>Common and unclean</th>
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Desecration ➤ Defilement
Evil Powers

5. Four changes: states of being before God
   • Desecration: transference of something holy into a common state (redemption of firstborn son)
   • Defilement: transference of something clean into an unclean state (touching a corpse)
   • Purification: transference of something unclean into a clean state (washing after menstruation)
   • Sanctification: the transference of something clean into a holy state (presentation of offering to God)

6. Three kinds of ritual impurity
   • Physical disorder (sickness, irregular menstruation)
   • Moral disorder (adultery, murder)
   • Religious disorder: occult use (menstrual blood, semen, corpses, pork)

7. Degrees of impurity
   • Mild forms
     ➢ Sexual emission: until evening
     ➢ Menstruation: seven days
   • Worst forms: excommunication or death in 20
     ➢ Sacrifice of children to Molech for prosperity
     ➢ Consulting mediums and spiritists
     ➢ Cursing parents
     ➢ Sexual abuses: adultery, incest, sodomy, bestiality
   • Difference of focus in 18 and 20
     ➢ God’s life-giving ordinances and statutes for all humanity: 18:2-5
God’s penalties for the desecration of his holiness by his holy people in the Promised Land: 20:22-26

- Self-pollution and the pollution of the holy land by four kinds of impurity
  - Sexual impurity
  - Child sacrifice to Molech → idolatry
  - Murder
  - Spiritism (20:27; cf. 19:26, 31)

- Requirement: greater purity for those who are closer to God

8. Purity as a liturgical rather than social or moral category in Leviticus

- Origin in God rather in certain classes of people as is common in most cultures
- Impurity of all Israelites including the priests
  - Connection with sin: unclean environment
  - Cleansing of minor impurities by washing
  - Cleansing of serious impurities: blood
- Need for continual purification
- Rules for purity and impurity
  - Admission to God’s presence: safe access
  - Inclusion in the holy congregation
  - Maintenance of holy status
- Unclean food as forbidden for liturgical use
- Use of the Ten Commandments for lay diagnosis of impurity and desecration

9. Use of theology of purity and holiness

- Connection of physical life with the divine service
  - Tabernacle → home
  - Holy meals → common meals
  - God’s work → human work
  - God’s blessing → procreation
• Demand for purity from the Lord’s holy presence with His people in His land
• Sanctuary as bridgehead for holiness: home, land and world
• Call to “do guard duty”
  ➢ People for clean land: 18:30
  ➢ Priests for holy sanctuary: 8:35; 22:9
• Importance of the body and its location

C. Structure of Leviticus

1. Legislation for offerings and removal of impurity: 1-15
   a. The manual of offerings for the divine service
      • Voluntary God-pleasing offerings (1:1-3:17)
        ➢ Burnt offerings
        ➢ Grain offerings
        ➢ Peace offerings
      • Mandatory offerings for atonement (4:1-6:7)
        ➢ Sin offerings
        ➢ Guilt offerings
      • Consumption of holy food (6:8-7:38)
        ➢ The public burnt offering
        ➢ Most holy bread from the daily grain offering
        ➢ Most holy meat from the sin offering
        ➢ Most holy meat from the guilt offering
        ➢ Holy meat from the peace offering
   b. The inauguration of the divine service
      • Consecration of the priests (8)
      • Inaugural performance of the divine service (9)
      • Penalty and remedy or desecration (10)
   c. The manual for purity
      • Clean and unclean meat (11)
• Impurity from childbirth (12)
• Impurity from skin diseases and fungus in a house (13-14)
• Impurity from genital discharges (15)

2. Purification on Day of Atonement: 16

3. Participation in God's holiness: 17-27
   a. The use and abuse of blood from animals (17)
   b. Avoidance of sexual impurity: life-preserving ordinances for humanity (18)
   c. The holiness code: participation in God's holiness (19-26)
      • Holiness of the congregation (19-20)
      • Holiness of the priests (21-22)
      • Holy times for worship: liturgical calendar (23)
      • Holy things: lamp stand, show bread, the Lord's name (24)
      • Holy land: sabbatical and jubilee years (25)
      • Results of right or wrong worship
         ➢ Blessings from respect for holy things (26:1-13)
         ➢ Penalties for desecration (26:14-39)
         ➢ Restoration after repentance (26:40-46)
   d. An appendix on the treatment of votive offerings and tithes (27)

D. Theology of Worship

1. The Daily Sacrifice
   • Its location at the tabernacle
• The arrangement of the tabernacle in three zones
  ➢ The Holy of Holies as God's private quarters: throne made up of the **mercy seat**, the **cherubim** as the throne-bearers and the **ark** as the footstool
  ➢ The Holy Place as God's audience room for priests with the **altar for incense**, the **lampstand** and the **table** for the showbread.
  ➢ The courtyard with **the altar for burnt offering** as the place for public assembly and meeting
• The terms for the tabernacle
  ➢ The LORD's earthly **dwelling** place for him to **dwell** with His people(*mishkan*: 8:10; 15:31; 26:11)
  ➢ The LORD’s **sanctuary** (*miqdash* 12:4; 16:33; 20:3; 26:2)
  ➢ The **Tent of Meeting** (*'ohel mo’ed*) where the LORD **met** with Moses to speak with him (1:1)
• The function of the daily service as the public offering
  ➢ Public service for all Israel
  ➢ Combination of three offerings: basic food stuff for Israelite household
    ➢ Burnt offering: male lamb
Grain offering: flour, olive oil and incense
Drink offering: wine

Times: morning and evening
Order of enactment
Splash of blood on altar: atonement
Burning of incense in the Holy Place: intercession
Burning of lamb and oil soaked flour with its incense: meeting
Aaronic benediction: blessing

Meal: eating holy food by the priests on duty
Framework for other offerings
Additional offerings for festive occasions
Family offerings on the three pilgrim festivals: peace offerings and grain offerings
Offerings for pastoral needs: sin and guilt offerings

The inauguration of the divine service in chapter 9
Purpose of the service in 9:6: *This is what the Lord has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you.*
Climax of the story of God's glory
Egypt (Ex 13:20-22)
Red Sea (Ex 14:19-25)
Desert (Ex 16:6-10)
Top of Mt Sinai (Ex 19:16-19 and 24:15-18)
Face of Moses (Ex 34:29-35)
Tabernacle (Ex 40: 34-38)
Daily service

Manifestation as fire on the altar: 9:24
Origin: the Holy Of Holies
Source of the perpetual fire on the altar (6:8-13)
Use for the burning of incense in the Holy Place
Use for the production of sweet smelling smoke as pleasing aroma for and from the LORD

Technical term *hiqtir*: sending up in smoke (9:10, 13, 14, 17, 20)

Association with the perpetual fire on the altar and the pillar of smoke from the daily burnt offering
- Connection with the benediction and jubilation: 9:23
- Daily theophany in the divine service: see the common idiom of appearing before the Lord

God’s acceptance of his people in the divine service
- Function of the incense and the burnt offering: cloud of fragrant smoke
- Formula of approval: *a pleasing aroma to the Lord*
- Formula of acceptance: *for your acceptance* (1:3; 19:5; 22:19, 20)

God’s meeting with the congregation in Exodus 29:42-45:

*For generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord where I will meet you (priests) and speak to you (Aaron); there also I will meet with the children of Israel so that it may be sanctified by my glory; I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar and sanctify Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the children of Israel, and I will be their God.*

- God’s *meeting* with the priests and the Israelites at the altar rather than in the Holy of Holies
- God’s *sanctification* of the priests and the Israelites by His presence through the most holy things
- God’s *dwelling* among them in the tabernacle as his dwelling place to act as their God

2. The Personal Offerings of the Israelite Families

- The personal offerings as an addition to the national offerings
- Presentation by the families at the three pilgrim festivals
- Peace offering with offering of bread and wine
- Provision of food for holy meal as God’s guests (Deut 12:17-18; 14:22-23)
- Presentation after the public burnt offering in the middle of the day
- Placement on the lamb for daily burnt offering

  • The offering of grain offering with olive oil and frankincense: 2:1-16
    - Offering of first ripe grain (2:14) and the first processed produce (2:12) as rent for the land
    - Grain as flour or bread without yeast
    - Smoking up of the memorial portion with incense
    - Leftover flour or bread from cereal offering for priests as most holy food for them
    - Consecration of other bread as holy food
    - Provision of holy bread from the Lord’s table from tithes: 27:30-33

  • Peace offerings of domesticated animals: 3:1-17 and 7:28-34
    - Rare consumption of meat in ordinary life except on special occasions
    - Offering of firstlings: first born male animals from flock and herd (Deut 15:19-20)
      - Sheep, goats, cattle
      - Animal without defect
    - Three kinds of peace offerings
      - Thank offerings: offerings with song of thanksgiving
      - Votive offerings: offerings to fulfil a promise
      - Free will offerings
    - Slaughter by head of the household
    - Disposal of blood by the priest
Presentation of breast with fat and right thigh
  - Right thigh: officiating priest
  - Breast: shared among the priests on duty

Burning of fat with kidneys and liver lobe

Eating of holy meat as Lord’s guests
  - Family with guests: Levites and poor
  - Families of priests: food from God’s table

Theological purpose in 19:5: God’s approval and acceptance of person with offering

3. Impurity and the Need for Atonement

  - The need for atonement: 10:1-3
    - Problem: how can unclean people meet with their holy God without desecrating his holiness?
      - Impurity ► desecration
      - Desecration ► wrath
      - Wrath ► death: see the proverbial cases of Nadab and Abihu in 10:1-3 and of the sons of Korah in Num 16-17

    - Treatment of impurity
      - Avoidance of contact with unclean things
      - Washing for minor impurities
      - Atonement for major impurities
      - Cleansing from impurity: forgiveness

  - Basic sense of kippahpher: to perform the rite of atonement by which the Lord cleanses people and things from impurity
    - Propitiation: God’s grace rather than His wrath against impurity
    - Expiation: cleansing and release from sin

  - The use of blood for atonement in 17:11: The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I myself have given it to you to make atonement for
your lives upon the altar, because it is the blood that makes atonement by means of the life.

- Drinking of blood in pagan rites for the lifepower of animals
- Reservation of blood for atonement
- Institution of rite of atonement
- Application of blood on the altar
- Ransom of person’s life by the blood of the animal
- Cleansing and forgiveness through the blood
- Prevention of desecration by defilement

- Regular rite of atonement: splashing of blood against the sides of the altar
  - Burnt offering
  - Peace offering

- Rite of atonement with a corporate sin offering for purification of the high priest and congregation
  - Two young bulls
  - Disposal of blood
    - Sprinkling 7x against the curtain
    - Smearing of horns of incense altar
    - Pouring on base of altar
  - Disposal of meat
    - Fat burnt on altar
    - Incineration of all meat outside camp

- Rite of atonement with sin offering for the purification of a lay person (4:27-35)
  - Male goat for tribal leader
  - Female goat or lamb for lay person
  - Disposal of blood
    - Smearing on horns of the altar
    - Pouring at base of the altar
- Disposal of meat
  - Fat burnt on the altar
  - Eating of most holy meat by priest
- Atonement on the Annual Day of Atonement
  - Fasting by people
  - Sin offerings
    - Male bull for priests
    - Male goat for people
    - Male scapegoat
  - Rite of atonement for the Holy of Holies
    - Sprinkling of bull’s blood: once on the mercy seat and seven times on the floor ($8^x$)
    - Sprinkling of goat’s blood: once on the mercy seat and seven times on the floor ($8^x$)
  - Rite of atonement for the Holy Place
    - Bull’s blood: smeared on the four horns of the incense altar and sprinkled seven times on the floor ($11^x$)
    - Goat’s blood: smeared on the four horns of the incense altar and sprinkled seven times on the floor ($11^x$)
  - Rite for the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard
    - Mixing of most holy blood from bull and goat
    - Smeared on the four horns of the incense altar and sprinkled seven times on the altar ($11^x$)
  - Bearing of iniquity by scapegoat
    - Levites for people: Num 18:23
    - Priests for Levites: Num 18:1
    - High priest for congregation: Ex 28:38
    - Scapegoat for sins of Israel: Lev 16:22
  - The theological purpose of the ritual enactment
Atonement for all the sins of the Israelites (16:34)
Cleansing the altar for burnt offering (16:19) and the Israelites from impurity (16:30)
Reconsecration of altar for burnt offering for the new year:16:19

E. Living with a Holy God

1. Reception of blessings through right worship: 26
   - Basic requirements: 26:1-3
     - Negative: avoidance of idolatry
     - Positive: respect for holy day and holy place
   - Four kinds of blessing: 26:4-12
     - Regular rainfall with good harvests
     - Peace with security and victory
     - Growth of families with abundant food
     - God’s residence and service of them
   - Result: freedom to walk as his royal people: 26:13
   - Repentance and restoration: 26:40-45

2. Living as holy people in God’s holy presence: 19:1-18
   - Call to share God’s holiness: 19:1-2
   - Common participation in God’s holiness: 19:3-10
     - Respect for parents as holy people
     - Observance of Sabbath
     - Avoidance of idols: worst desecration
     - Respect for holy offerings
   - Rule of justice and love in God’s holy community: 19:11-18
   - Avoidance of defilement
• Ethics of holiness
  ❖ Israel as holy community
  ❖ Priestly fraternity
  ❖ Communal participation in God’s holiness
  ❖ Common holiness ► justice and solidarity in love

Further Reading

Note that all my articles can be accessed www.johnkleinig.com

• Kleinig, John W. “Luther on the Reception in God’s Holiness,” *Pro Ecclesia* 17/1 (2008): 76-91.