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LEVITICUS

1-16



A New Translation
with
Introduction and Commentary

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Course Reading

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Note that $a + a_1 = a_1' + a'$ and that $b + b_1 = b_1' + b'$, which involves a subtle introversion of a and b in the second half (a_1 and b_1 preceding a and b). Above all, the word (or examples) of *mûm* 'defect' occupies every center: the twelve cases of *mûm* being the pivot of the entire introversion ($A X A'$) and the word *mûm* being the pivot of the four smaller units ($a x b$; $a_1 x b_1$; $a_1' x a'$; $b_1' x b'$), the first two of which form panels and the last two, chiasms. The final unit ($b_1' x b'$) is itself chiasmatically constructed, a neat finishing touch to the pericope.

The remarkable thing about the structure is that it accounts for every single word. The alleged redundancies, which have been the despair of critics (see the commentaries), make perfect sense once it is realized that they fulfill an aesthetic purpose. The full implications of this structural device will be drawn in the commentary to this chapter in volume 2. Here it needs only to be noted that such literary artistry is patently beyond the capacity of P. It demonstrates an advance in compositional technique, and it adds further evidence to my general theory that H is later than P. Moreover, it generates even more significant implications concerning the extent of the H stratum in the Pentateuch. In my commentary on Numbers (1990a: XXII-XXXI), I have made it a point to emphasize the structured sophistication of much of the book's content. Whether its composition or—the more likely prospect—its redaction is due to H will be discussed in volume 2.

E. THE PRIESTLY THEOLOGY

Theology is what Leviticus is all about. It pervades every chapter and almost every verse. It is not expressed in pronouncements but embedded in rituals. Indeed, every act, whether movement, manipulation, or gesticulation, is pregnant with meaning: "at their deepest level rituals reveal values which are sociological facts" (Turner 1967: 44). In describing the Priestly theology I shall not distinguish between the two main strands P and H, except when they clearly differ from each other. Most of the time, they form a single continuum: H articulates and develops what is incipient and even latent in P.

The basic premises of pagan religion are (1) that its deities are themselves dependent on and influenced by a metadivine realm, (2) that this realm spawns a multitude of malevolent and benevolent entities, and (3) that if humans can tap into this realm they can acquire the magical power to coerce the gods to do their will (Kaufmann 1937-56: 1.297-350; 1960: 21-59). An eminent Assyriologist has stated, "The impression is gained that everyday religion [in Mesopotamia] was dominated by fear of evil powers and black magic rather than a positive worship of the gods . . . the world was conceived to be full of evil demons who might cause trouble in any sphere of life. If they had attacked, the right ritual should effect the cure. . . . Humans, as well as devils, might work evil against a

person by the black arts, and here too the appropriate ritual was required" (Lambert 1959: 194).

The Priestly theology negates these premises. It posits the existence of one supreme God who contends neither with a higher realm nor with competing peers. The world of demons is abolished; there is no struggle with autonomous foes because there are none. With the demise of the demons, only one creature remains with "demonic" power—the human being. Endowed with free will, his power is greater than any attributed to him by pagan society. Not only can he defy God but, in Priestly imagery, he can drive God out of his sanctuary. In this respect, humans have replaced the demons.

The pagans secured the perpetual aid of a benevolent deity by building him a temple-residence in which he was housed, fed, and worshiped in exchange for his protective care. Above all, his temple had to be inoculated by apotropaic rites—utilizing magic drawn from the metadivine realm—against incursions by malevolent forces from the supernal and infernal worlds. The Priestly theologians make use of the same imagery, except that the demons are replaced by humans. Humans can drive God out of the sanctuary by polluting it with their moral and ritual sins. All that the priests can do is periodically purge the sanctuary of its impurities and influence the people to atone for their wrongs.

This thoroughgoing evisceration of the demonic also transformed the concept of impurity. In Israel, impurity was harmless. It retained potency only with regard to sancta. Lay persons—but not priests—might contract impurity with impunity; they must not, however, delay their purificatory rites lest their impurity affect the sanctuary (COMMENT on 5:1-13). The retention of impurity's dynamic (but not demonic) power in regard to sancta served a theological function. The sanctuary symbolized the presence of God; impurity represented the wrongdoing of persons. If persons unremittingly polluted the sanctuary they forced God out of his sanctuary and out of their lives.

The Priestly texts on scale disease (chaps. 13-14) and chronic genital flows (chap. 15) give ample witness to the Priestly polemic against the idea that physical impurity arises from the activity of demons who must be either exorcised or appeased. Purification is neither healing nor theurgy. The afflicted person undergoes purification only after he is cured. Ablutions are wordless rites; they are unaccompanied by incantation or gesticulation—the quintessential ingredients in pagan healing rites. The adjective *tâher* means "purified," not "cured"; the verb *râpa* 'cure' never appears in the ritual. A moldy garment or a fungous house (13:47-58; 14:33-53) does not reflect on the character of its owner, for he brings no sacrifice and performs no rite that might indicate his culpability. Even though the scale-diseased person does bring sacrifices for possible wrongdoing, the only determinable "wrong" is that his impurity has polluted the sanctuary. Especially noteworthy is the bird rite at the beginning of his purification process, which, in spite of its clear exorcistic origins, has solely a symbolic function in Israel (see the NOTES on 14:4 and 5). Above all, it seems

likely that most, if not all, of the varieties of scale disease described in chap. 13 are not even contagious (chap. 13, COMMENT A), which supports my conclusion that scale disease is only a part of a larger symbolic system (explained below and in chap. 15, COMMENT G).

Another example of the way the Priestly legists excised the demonic from impurity is the case of the person afflicted with chronic genital flux (15:1-15, 25-30). It is the discharge that contaminates, not the person. Hence, objects that are underneath him—bed, seat, saddle—but no others are considered impure. In Mesopotamia, however, his table and cup transmit impurity. The difference is that in Israel the afflicted person does not contaminate by touch as long as he washes his hands (see the NOTE on 15:11). As a result, he was not banished or isolated but was allowed to remain at home. The same concessions were extended to the menstruant, who was otherwise universally ostracized (chap. 15, COMMENT A). She, too, defiled only that which was beneath her. Touching such objects, however, incurred greater impurity than touching her directly (15:19b, 21-22). As illogical as it seems, it makes perfect sense when viewed from the larger perspective of the primary Priestly objective to root out the prevalent notion that the menstruant was possessed by demonic powers.

The parade example of the evisceration of the demonic from Israel's cult is provided by Azazel (16:10). Although Azazel seems to have been the name of a demon, the goat sent to him is not a sacrifice requiring slaughter and blood manipulation; nor does it have the effect of a sacrifice in providing purification, expiation, and the like. The goat is simply the symbolic vehicle for dispatching Israel's sins to the wilderness (16:21-22). The analogous elimination rites in the pagan world stand in sharp contrast (see chap. 16, COMMENT E). The purification of the corpse-contaminated person with the lustral ashes of the Red Cow (Num 19) can also claim pride of place among Israel's victories over pagan beliefs. The hitherto demonic impurity of the corpse has been devitalized, first by denying its autonomous power to pollute the sanctuary and then by denying that the corpse-contaminated person must be banished from his community during his purificatory period (chap. 4, COMMENT G).

Israel's battle against demonic beliefs was not won in one stroke. Scripture indicates that it was a gradual process. The cultic sphere attests a progressive reduction of contagious impurity in all three primary human sources: scale disease, pathological flux, and corpse contamination. The earliest Priestly tradition calls for their banishment (Num 5:2-4) because the presence of God is coextensive with the entire camp, but later strata show that banishment is prescribed only for scale disease (13:46). The fact that genital flux and corpse contamination permit their bearers to remain at home indicates that the divine presence is now viewed as confined to the sanctuary. Henceforth in P, the only fear evoked by impurity is its potential impact on the sanctuary. (The H school, which extends God's presence over the entire land of Israel, also innovates a nonritual and nonexpiable impurity, but this matter is reserved for volume 2 of this

commentary.) The driving force behind this impurity reduction is Israel's monotheism. The baneful still inheres in things, but it spreads only under special conditions, for example, carrion when consumed and genital discharges when contacted. But note that impurity springs to life, resuming its virulent character, only in regard to the sphere of the sacred (COMMENT on 5:1-13), and that these impurities are not to be confused with evils.

A similar gradation in the contagion of holiness is also exhibited in Scripture, but for different reasons. In the earliest traditions of the Bible, the sancta communicate holiness to persons, the sanctuary's inner sancta more powerfully so—directly by sight (if uncovered) and indirectly by touch (if covered), even when the contact is accidental. According to the early narratives, this power can be deadly; note the stories about the Ark (1 Sam 6:19; 2 Sam 6:6-7), Mount Sinai (Exod 19:12-13), and the divine fire (Lev 10:1-2). In P a major change has occurred. This fatal power is restricted to the rare moment in which the Tabernacle is dismantled (Num 4:15, 20), but otherwise the sancta can no longer infect persons, even if touched (chap. 7, COMMENT B). Clearly, this drastic reduction in the contagious power of the sancta was not accepted by all Priestly schools. Ezekiel holds out for the older view that sancta (in his example, the priestly clothing, 44:19; 46:20) are contagious to persons (contrary to P; see the NOTE on 10:5).

The texts are silent concerning the motivation behind this priestly reform. Undoubtedly, the priests were disturbed by the superstitious fears of the fatal power of the sancta that might keep the masses away from the sanctuary (cf. Num 17:27-28). To the contrary, they taught the people that God's holiness stood for the forces of life (see below) and that only when approached in an unauthorized way (e.g., 10:1-2) would it bring death. Contact with the sancta would be fatal to the encroacher, that is, the nonpriest who dared officiate with the sancta (e.g., Num 16:35; 18:3), but not to the Israelites who worshiped God in their midst. There is also a more realistic, historically grounded reason that would have moved the priests in this direction—the anarchic institution of altar asylum. Precisely because the altar sanctified those who touched it, it thereby automatically gave them asylum regardless of whether they were murderers, bandits, or other assorted criminals. By taking the radical step of declaring that the sancta, in particular the altar, were no longer contagious to persons, the priests ended, once and for all, the institution of altar asylum. In this matter they were undoubtedly abetted by the king and his bureaucracy, who earnestly wanted to terminate the veto power of the sanctuary over their jurisdiction (details in chap. 7, COMMENT B; and in Milgrom 1981b).

It can be seen from the preceding discussion that the ritual complexes of Lev 1-16 make sense only as aspects of a symbolic system. As noted, only a few types of scale disease (many clearly noncontagious) were declared impure. Yet, to judge by the plethora of Mesopotamian texts dealing with the diagnosis and treatment of virulent diseases, it is fair to assume that Israel knew them as well

(chap. 13, COMMENT A) but did not classify them as impure. The same situation obtains with genital discharges. Why are secretions from other orifices of the body not impure: mucus, perspiration, and, above all, urine and feces? This leads to a larger question: why are there only these three sources of impurity—corpse/carcass, scale disease, and genital discharges? There must be a comprehensive theory that can explain all of the cases. Moreover, because the phenomena declared impure are the precipitates of a filtering process initiated by the priests, the “filter” must be their invention. In other words, the impurity laws form a system governed by a priestly rationale.

This rationale comes to light once it is perceived that there is a common denominator to the three above-mentioned sources of impurity—death. Genital discharge from the male is semen and from the female, blood. They represent the life force; their loss represents death (chap. 12, COMMENT B). The case of scale disease also becomes comprehensible with the realization that the Priestly legists have not focused on disease per se but only on the *appearance* of disease. Moldy fabrics and fungous houses (13:47-58; 14:35-53) are singled out not because they are struck with scale disease but because they give that appearance. So too the few varieties of scale disease afflicting the human body: their appearance is that of approaching death. When Miriam is stricken with scale disease, Moses prays, “Let her not be like a corpse” (Num 12:12; cf. also Job 16:13 and chap. 13, COMMENT A). The wasting of the body, the common characteristic of the highly visible, biblically impure scale disease, symbolizes the death process as much as the loss of vaginal blood and semen.

It is of no small significance that the dietary laws (chap. 11), which are contiguous to and form a continuum with the bodily impurities (chaps. 12-15), are also governed by criteria such as cud-chewing and split hoofs, which are equally arbitrary and meaningless in themselves but serve a larger, extrinsic purpose. This purpose can be deduced both from the explicit rationale of holiness (11:43-45; cf. chap. 11, COMMENT E) and the implicit assumption of relevant texts (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:3-5, 10-14; cf. chap. 11, COMMENT C), to wit: animal life is inviolable except for a few edible animals, provided they are slaughtered properly (i.e., painlessly, chap. 11, COMMENT D) and their blood (i.e., their life) is drained and thereby returned to God (chap. 11, COMMENT C). To be sure, the rationale of holiness and the equation of blood and life are first articulated in H (11:43-45; 17:10-14), but they are already adumbrated in P (e.g., Gen 9:4).

Because impurity and holiness are antonyms, the identification of impurity with death must mean that holiness stands for life. No wonder that reddish substances, the surrogates of blood, are among the ingredients of the purificatory rites for scale-diseased and corpse-contaminated persons (14:4; Num 19:6). They symbolize the victory of the forces of life over death. A further example: the blood of the purification offering symbolically purges the sanctuary by symbolically absorbing its impurities (see below)—another victory of life over death.

Moreover, the priest is commanded to eat the flesh of the purification offering (6:19, 22; 10:17; chap. 10, COMMENT C), and the high priest dispatches the sanctuary's impurities together with the people's sins (16:21). In neither case is the priest affected. Again, holiness-life has triumphed over impurity-death. Impurity does not pollute the priest *as long as he serves God in his sanctuary* (see also the NOTE on 16:26). Israel, too, as long as it serves God by obeying his commandments, can overcome the forces of impurity-death.

Because the quintessential source of holiness resides with God, Israel is enjoined to control the occurrence of impurity lest it impinge on his realm (see below). The forces pitted against each other in a cosmic struggle are no longer the benevolent and the demonic deities who populate the mythologies of Israel's neighbors, but the forces of life and death set loose by man himself through his obedience to or defiance of God's commandments. Despite all of the changes that are manifested in the evolution of Israel's impurity laws, the objective remains the same: to sever impurity from the demonic and to reinterpret it as a symbolic system reminding Israel of the divine imperative to reject death and choose life.

In the NOTE on 11:11, it will be shown that the distinction between animals that are *šeqeš* and those that are *šāmeʿ* is, according to Gen 1 (P), that the former were created from the sea and the latter from the land. The fact that Lev 11 is rooted in Gen 1 is of deeper theological import. It signifies that, from the Priestly point of view, God's revelation is twofold: to Israel via Sinai and the Tabernacle and to humankind via nature. The refrain of P's account of creation is “God saw that it was good.” In common with Israel's contemporaries, P holds that God punishes humankind through flood (Gen 6:19-22), plague (Exod 7:8-13; 8:12-15; 9:8-12), sickness (chap. 13, COMMENT B), and death. It is, however, P's distinctive teaching that nature maintains a balance between the forces of life and those of death, and it is incumbent on the human being, by dint of his intelligence, to discern the difference between them and to act accordingly. Israel, moreover, is charged with the additional obligation to distinguish between pure and impure, thereby providing it with a larger database for distinguishing between the forces of life and those of death. With P, therefore, we can detect the earliest gropings toward an ecological position (for details, see Milgrom forthcoming A).

It would be well to point out that the blood prohibition is an index of P's concern for the welfare of humanity. In Leviticus, to be sure, all of P is directed toward Israel. But one need only turn to the P stratum in Genesis to realize that it has not neglected the rest of mankind. P's blood prohibition in Genesis appears in the bipartite Noachide law, which states that human society is viable only if it desists from the shedding of human blood and the ingestion of animal blood (Gen 9:4-6). Thus it declares its fundamental premise that human beings can curb their violent nature through ritual means, specifically, a dietary discipline that will necessarily drive home the point that all life (*nepes*), shared also

by animals, is inviolable, except—in the case of meat—when conceded by God (further, chap. 11, COMMENT C).

The P strand in Genesis also indicts the human race for its *hāmās* (Gen 6:11). Because the Noachide law of Gen 9 is the legal remedy for *hāmās* (Frymer-Kensky 1977), it probably denotes murder (as in Ezek 7:23), though in subsequent usage, especially under prophetic influence, it takes on a wide range of ethical violations (Haag 1980). Thus, the blood prohibition proves that P is of the opinion that a universal God imposed a basic ritual code upon humanity in general. Israel, nonetheless—bound by its covenantal relationship with the deity—is enjoined to follow a stricter code of conduct.

One would expect a sharp cleavage separating the theology of P from the non-Priestly strands of the Pentateuch. Still, it may come as a shock to realize that even the two Priestly sources, P and H, sharply diverge on many theological fundamentals. A comprehensive discussion of these differences must await volume 2 of this commentary. Here let it suffice to present my provisional conclusions in summary form.

The most important ideological distinction between P and H rests in their contrasting concepts of holiness. For P, spatial holiness is limited to the sanctuary; for H, it is coextensive with the promised land. Holiness of persons is restricted in P to priests and Nazirites (Num 6:5-8); H extends it to all Israel (see chap. 11, COMMENT E). This expansion follows logically from H's doctrine of spatial holiness: as the land is holy, all who reside in it are to keep it that way. Every adult Israelite is enjoined to attain holiness by observing the Lord's commandments, and even the *gēr*, the resident alien, must heed the prohibitive commandments, for their violation pollutes the land (e.g., 18:26).

P's doctrine of holiness is static; H's is dynamic. On the one hand, P constricts holiness to the sanctuary and its priests. P assiduously avoids the term *qādōš* 'holy' even in describing the Levites (compare their induction rites, Num 8:5-22, with the priestly consecration, Lev 8). H, on the other hand, though it concedes that only priests are innately holy (21:7), repeatedly calls on Israel to strive for holiness. The dynamic quality of H's concept is highlighted by its resort to the same participial construction *mēqaddēš* 'sanctifying' in describing the holiness of both the laity and the priesthood. Sanctification is an ongoing process for priests (21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16) as well as for all Israelites (21:8; 22:32). No different from the Israelites, the priests bear a holiness that expands or contracts in proportion to their adherence to God's commandments.

The converse doctrine of pollution also varies sharply. P holds that the sanctuary is polluted by Israel's moral and ritual violations (4:2) committed anywhere in the camp (but not outside) and that this pollution can and must be effaced by the violator's purification offering and, if committed deliberately, by the high priest's sacrifice and confession (16:3-22). H, however, concentrates on the polluting force of Israel's violation of the covenant (26:15), for example, incest (18; 20:11-24), idolatry (20:1-6), or depriving the land of its sabbatical

rest (26:34-35). Pollution for H is nonritualistic, as shown by the metaphoric use of *tāmē'* (e.g., 18:21, 24; 19:31) and by the fact that the polluted land cannot be expiated by ritual, and, hence, the expulsion of its inhabitants is inevitable (18:24-29; 20:2). The underlying reason for these substantive changes will be thoroughly investigated in volume 2 (provisionally see Knohl 1988: 146-93).

The sacrificial system is intimately connected with the impurity system. Nonetheless, it possesses a distinctive theology (rather, theologies) of its own. No single theory embraces the entire complex of sacrifices (chap. 7, COMMENT A). All that can be said by way of generalization is that the sacrifices cover the gamut of the psychological, emotional, and religious needs of the people. We therefore adopt the more promising approach of seeking the specific rationale that underlies each kind of sacrifice. Even with this limited aim in mind, the texts are not always helpful. Nevertheless, hints gleaned from the terminology and the descriptions of the rites themselves will occasionally illumine our path. As of now, I believe, the comprehensive rationales for two sacrifices, the burnt and cereal offerings, still elude us (COMMENTS on chaps. 1 and 2), whereas the three remaining sacrifices—the well-being, purification, and reparation offerings—can be satisfactorily explained.

I begin with the well-being offering because of its connection with the blood prohibition (COMMENT on chap. 3; chap. 11, COMMENT C). This connection, however, was not present from the beginning. In the P stratum, the well-being offering is brought solely out of joyous motivations: thanksgiving, vow fulfillment, or spontaneous free-will (7:11-17). The meat of the offering is shared by the offerer with his family and invited guests (1 Sam 1:4; 9:21-24). The advent of H brought another dimension to this sacrifice. H's ban on non-sacrificial slaughter meant that all meat for the table had initially to be sanctified on the altar as a well-being offering (17:3-7). To be sure, the prohibition to ingest blood had existed before (Gen 9:4; cf. 1 Sam 14:32-35), implying that although man was conceded meat, its blood, which belongs to God, had to be drained (chap. 11, COMMENT C). Now that the blood had to be dashed on the altar (3:2, 8, 13), however, it served an additional function—to ransom the life of the offerer for taking the life of the animal (17:11; chap. 11, COMMENT C). Thus the principle of the inviolability of life was sharpened by this new provision: killing an animal was equivalent to murder (17:3-4) unless expiated by the well-being offering.

The rationale for the purification offering has been alluded to above. The violation of a prohibitive commandment generates impurity (NOTE on 4:2) and, if severe enough, pollutes the sanctuary from afar. This imagery portrays the Priestly theodicy that I have called the Priestly *Picture of Dorian Gray*. It declares that while sin may not scar the face of the sinner it does scar the face of the sanctuary. This image graphically illustrates the Priestly version of the old doctrine of collective responsibility: when the evildoers are punished they bring

down the righteous with them. Those who perish with the wicked are not entirely blameless, however. They are inadvertent sinners who, by having allowed the wicked to flourish, have also contributed to the pollution of the sanctuary. In particular, the high priest and the tribal chieftain, the leaders of the people, bring special sacrifices (4:9, 23), for their errors cause harm to their people (see the NOTES on 4:3 and 10:6). Thus, in the Priestly scheme, the sanctuary is polluted (read: society is corrupted) by brazen sins (read: the rapacity of the leaders) and also by inadvertent sins (read: the acquiescence of the "silent majority"), with the result that God is driven out of his sanctuary (read: the nation is destroyed). In the theology of the purification offering Israel is close to the beliefs of its neighbors and yet so far from them. Both hold that the sanctuary stands in need of constant purification lest it be abandoned by its resident god. But whereas the pagans hold that the source of impurity is demonic, Israel, having expunged the demonic, attributes impurity to the rebellious and inadvertent sins of man instead (details in chap. 4, COMMENT C).

The reparation offering (5:14-26) seems at first glance to be restricted to offenses against the property of God, either his sancta or his name. It reflects, however, wider theological implications. The noun *'āšām* 'reparation, reparation offering' is related to the verb *'āšam* 'feel guilt', which predominates in this offering (5:17, 23, 26) and in the purification offering as well (4:13, 22, 27; 5:4, 5). This fact bears ethical consequences. Expiation by sacrifice depends on two factors: the remorse of the worshiper (verb *'āšam*) and the reparation (noun *'āšām*) he brings to both man and God to rectify his wrong. This sacrifice, however, strikes even deeper ethical roots. If someone falsely denies under oath having defrauded his fellow, subsequently feels guilt and restores the embezzled property and pays a 20-percent fine, he is then eligible to request of his deity that his reparation offering serve to expiate his false oath (5:20-26). Here we see the Priestly legists in action, bending the sacrificial rules in order to foster the growth of individual conscience. They permit sacrificial expiation for a deliberate crime against God (knowingly taking a false oath) provided the person repents before he is apprehended. Thus they ordain that repentance converts an intentional sin into an unintentional one, thereby making it eligible for sacrificial expiation (discussion in 5:14-16, COMMENT G).

It should already be clear that the Priestly polemic against pagan practice was also informed by ethical postulates. The impurity system pits the forces of life against the forces of death, reaching an ethical summit in the blood prohibition. Not only is blood identified with life; it is also declared inviolable. If the unauthorized taking of animal life is equated with murder, how much more so is the illegal taking of human life? And if the long list of prohibited animals has as its aim the restriction of meat to three domestic quadrupeds, whose blood (according to H) must be offered up on the altar of the central sanctuary, what else could the compliant Israelite derive from this arduous discipline except that all life must be treated with reverence?

The reduction of sancta contagion may have been motivated by the desire to wean Israel from the universally attested morbid fear of approaching the sancta. But, as indicated above, there coexisted the more practical goal of breaking the equally current belief that the sanctuary gave asylum even to the criminal. As also noted already, the ethical current also ran strong in the rationale for the sacrifices. The purification offering taught the ecology of morality, that the sins of the individual adversely affect his society even when committed inadvertently, and the reparation offering became the vehicle for an incipient doctrine of repentance. The ethical thrust of these two expiatory sacrifices can be shown to be evident in other respects as well. The Priestly legists did not prescribe the purification offering just for cultic violations but extended the meaning of the term *mišwā* to embrace the broader area of ethical violations (see the NOTE on 4:2). And the texts on the reparation offering make it absolutely clear that in matters of expiation man takes precedence over God; only after rectification has been made with man can it be sought with God (5:24b-25).

A leitmotif of the sacrificial texts is their concern for the poor: everyone, regardless of means, should be able to bring an acceptable offering to the Lord. Thus, birds were added to the roster of burnt offerings (see the NOTE on 1:14-17), and the pericope on the cereal offering (chap. 2) was deliberately inserted after the burnt offering, implying that if a person could not afford birds he could bring a cereal offering (COMMENT on chap. 2). Indeed, this compassion for the poor is responsible for the prescribed sequence of the graduated purification offering: flock animal, bird, cereal (5:6-13). This concession of a cereal offering, however, was not allowed for severe impurity cases (12:8; 14:21-32; 15:14) because of the need for sacrificial blood to purge the contaminated altar (NOTE on 12:8).

The ethical impulse attains its zenith in the great Day of Purgation, Yom Kippur. What originally was only a rite to purge the sanctuary has been expanded to include a rite to purge the people. To begin with, as mentioned above, the pagan notion of demonic impurity was eviscerated by insisting that the accumulated pollution of the sanctuary was caused by human sin. Moreover, another dimension was introduced that represented a more radical alteration. The scapegoat, which initially eliminated the sanctuary's impurities, now became the vehicle of purging their source—the human heart. Provided that the people purge themselves through rites of penitence (16:29; 23:27, 29; Num 29:7), the high priest would confess their released sins upon the head of the scapegoat and then dispatch it and its load of sins into the wilderness (see the NOTE on 16:21; chap. 16, COMMENTS B and E). Thus, an initial widely attested purgation rite of the temple was broadened and transformed into an annual day for the collective catharsis of Israel. God would continue to reside with Israel because his temple and people were once again pure.