

Divine Purification and Sanctification: Distinguishing the Holy from the Common and the Unclean from the Clean

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Introduction

All of the Holy Scriptures are about Christ. The Old Testament is the promise of the coming Messiah, the “anointed one.” The Old Testament is not merely the law of Moses. No, first and foremost, the Old Testament is the promise of Christ. St. Paul makes it clear in Galatians 3:16–29 that the law—namely, the law of Moses—came after the promise and does not nullify the promise. This promise of Christ is first seen after the fall into sin by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when God says that the Seed of the woman will crush the head of Satan (Gen 3:15). Adam and Eve believed in the promise, which is indicated in Genesis 4:1 by Eve’s declaration after giving birth to her firstborn, “I have given birth to a man, Yahweh.”¹ She believed that she had given birth to Christ, which—before too long became clear—was not the case. The purpose of the genealogies that followed the creation account was to track the promised Seed. That promise can be traced from Adam and Eve to Abraham, whose Seed would be the one through whom all nations on earth would be blessed by God (Gen 22:18). From Abraham and Isaac and Jacob/Israel the promised Seed can be traced to Judah and then King David, whose Seed would establish an eternal kingdom (2 Sam 7:12). From David’s line the Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, thus fulfilling the promise of the Old Testament (Matt 1–2; Luke 1:26–38). After the death and resurrection of Jesus, our Lord explains to the two sad disciples on the road to Emmaus that the Old Testament foretold that these things would happen.

And he said to them, “Foolish ones, and slow in heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses then all the Prophets, he explained to them *the things about himself in all the Scriptures* [the Old Testament Scriptures]. (Luke 24:25–27)

¹ All Scripture references are either my own translation or based on the ESV with modifications to convey the intent of the original text. Italics are added for emphasis.

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Later that night on that first Easter Sunday, Jesus appeared to all the disciples together, including the two who returned from Emmaus.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, in order that *everything having been written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms is necessary to be fulfilled.*” Then he opened their minds to perceive the Scriptures [again, the Old Testament Scriptures], and said to them, “This is what has been written: the Christ will suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:44–47)

There are many other references, but these will suffice to show that the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of the incarnation of Christ and his redeeming works.

The promise of Christ in the Old Testament Scriptures is manifested in two ways: prophecy and typology.² Prophecies are words from God; and the messianic prophecies foretell that the Christ would come. There were also specific prophecies about the virgin conception and birth of Christ, his suffering and crucifixion, his resurrection and ascension, and his eternal priesthood in the order of Melchizedek. The Old Testament promise of Christ is seen in these prophecies.

Additionally, the Old Testament promise of Christ is seen in typology. Types are people, things, and events that foreshadow and point to the coming Christ, his works of redemption, and his sacraments. Typology is not so much about the meaning of a given scriptural text as it is about a person, thing, or event that the scriptural texts depict. In Leviticus, one example would be the high priest, in his person, office, and rituals that he enacts. Another example is in the tabernacle where the ark, incense altar, font, outer altar, lampstand, and table are all placed at right angles, in cruciform. Still another example is in the divine service, with all its various rites, ritual activities, offerings, and sacrifices. Each of these is a type that points to Christ in one way or another. In other places in the Old Testament, typology can be seen in the almost-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, in Joshua leading God’s people into the promised land in the book of Joshua, and in another Joshua in Zechariah 3 and 6 who is simultaneously the high priest and the king. (Actually, in Zechariah 3–6 there are both messianic prophecy and typology closely connected in the same context.) The Old Testament promise manifested in typology is confessed in part of the second stanza of the great Epiphany hymn “O God of God, O Light of Light” by John Julian, where it says, “For deep in prophets’ sacred page, / And grand in poets’

² On the distinction between prophecy and typology, see Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 17–18, and John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 29.

winged word, / Slowly in *type*, from age to age / The nations saw their coming Lord.”³ The point is that the promise of Christ in the Old Testament Scriptures occurs in prophecy and in typology.⁴

The promise of Christ in Leviticus is entirely typological.⁵ There appear to be no messianic prophecies in Leviticus, which presents challenges for understanding it. Part of the difficulty of Leviticus, as well as all the ritual sections of the Old Testament, has to do with how to approach interpreting ritual texts. Good and careful exegesis is necessary, and is the foundation and starting point for understanding Leviticus; but to truly get to the sense of what God intends us to learn from Leviticus and other ritual sections of the Scriptures, our hermeneutical question is not so much “what does this mean?” as “what do/did these rituals do?” The rituals themselves must be interpreted. They need to be analyzed to determine how they functioned and what God was doing through them for the people of ancient Israel *and* how they pointed to Christ and his works of salvation. It is of great benefit for us and the people we serve to learn about Leviticus with a ritual and typological hermeneutic, which points us to Christ as the true temple and his sacrifice as his accomplished redeeming works for the salvation of all people.⁶

One of the key passages for understanding the typology of Leviticus and other ritual texts is Leviticus 10:10, which unlocks how to rightly view holiness, sacrifice, and worship in the entire Old Testament as well as in the New Testament Scriptures for today’s royal priesthood: “You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean.” Distinguishing the holy from the common and the unclean from the clean, as stated in this passage, is the basis for examining divine purification and sanctification. But as we will see, God’s acts of purification and sanctification for the ancient Israelites—and for us in a fuller way—are what comprise the entire book of Leviticus.

In Leviticus 1–7, God institutes the offerings and sacrifices as his means of purifying and sanctifying the ancient Israelites. Leviticus 8–10 is the establishment of the priesthood with ordination, the consecration of the sanctuary, and the institution of the divine service through which God purified and sanctified the Israelites at specific times during the liturgical calendar. Leviticus 11–18 is the purity code. It is noteworthy that this section includes the Day of Atonement with its comprehensive removal of all sins and impurities from the sanctuary, the priests, the people, and all

³ John Julian, “O God of God, O Light of Light,” in *Lutheran Service Book*, ed. The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 810, st. 2. Emphasis my own.

⁴ Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 17.

⁵ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 24–30.

⁶ For ritual analysis as a method of interpretation, see Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 20–24, and Robert D. Macina, *The LORD’s Service: A Ritual Analysis of the Order, Function, and Purpose of the Daily Divine Service in the Pentateuch* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019), 19–21.

Israel. This is also the one occasion during each year when the tabernacle/temple and all its furnishings were reconsecrated. The purity code in Leviticus instructed the Israelites how to avoid defilement and uncleanness so as to maintain their ritual purity in the presence of the Lord. Leviticus 19–27 is the holiness code. This part includes God’s instruction to the priests concerning how they should maintain their holiness and not be desecrated and defiled. The liturgical calendar is also in this section, by which God sanctified the priests and people through the required offerings. The holiness code in Leviticus instructed the ancient Israelites how to remain holy in the presence of the holy God, who dwelled in the midst of them. Each of these sections of Leviticus within the context of the entire book correlates with the distinction between the holy and the common and between the unclean and the clean, with divine purification and sanctification summarized in Leviticus 10:10.⁷

This study will deal with four interrelated topics: holiness in the first main section, sacrifice in the second, worship in the third part, and Leviticus for today’s royal priesthood in the last section.⁸

I. Holiness in Leviticus

In Leviticus 10:10, God tells Aaron the high priest to distinguish between, or separate, the holy from the common. The common—sometimes called “profane”—things are not in and of themselves sinful, evil, or bad. Common just means something or someone that is not holy, and therefore is outside the divine realm. The common are things or people that are in creation but have no direct connection with God. The holy has to do with the divine realm. This pertains to God and how contact with him and the things that mediate his holiness affect other things and people. The holy and the common each pertain to a status, standing, or position with regard to God. Holy things and people are safely in the holy presence of God, while common things and people are outside the holy presence of God. Additionally, the distinction between the holy and the common is necessary because the holy and the common

⁷ My proposal for the sections of Leviticus is a generalization, especially what I identify as the purity code and the holiness code, based on the major themes of purification and sanctification. For a more detailed outline of the content of Leviticus, see Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 31, 325, 351, where he rightly identifies Lev 16 and the Day of Atonement as central to the book of Leviticus and the entire Pentateuch, and which involves both purification and sanctification. Thus, he treats it as a unique stand-alone section within his outline of Leviticus.

⁸ For biblical scholarship on holiness, sacrifice, and worship in Leviticus, the most important resource is the Concordia Commentary on Leviticus by my doctor-father, John Kleinig. Specifically on matters relating to the liturgy in the Pentateuch is my book, *The LORD’s Service*. For an analysis of the daily, weekly, monthly, and several yearly services and their typology, see my article “The Liturgy of the Old Testament: Its Festivals, Order, Purpose, and Typology,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 86, no. 3–4 (2022): 215–240. Also helpful is John W. Kleinig, *Hebrews*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017). For more comprehensive scholarship on the topic at hand, most helpful are the bibliographies listed in these resources.

are ritual powers.⁹ These forces oppose each other and affect the things and people that come into contact with them. Thus, there is movement from one status to another, either from holy to common or from common to holy, based on contact with them. When something or someone moves from the status of the common to that of the holy, that movement is sanctification. The movement in the opposite direction—from the holy to the common—is desecration. This separation between the holy and the common is a theological distinction, since it pertains to God and whether something or someone has status, standing, or position in his holy presence.¹⁰

Holiness comes from the thrice-holy God, the Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit. The triune God is the source and origin of holiness. Grammatically in Hebrew, the superlative¹¹ of the term “holy” is expressed in the threefold *qadosh*, *qadosh*, *qadosh*, קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ (“Holy, Holy, Holy”), which is found in the Hebrew Scriptures only in Isaiah 6, where Isaiah sees a vision of Yahweh sitting on his throne in the temple and he hears angels chanting the Trisagion to each other. The only other place in the Bible where “Holy, Holy, Holy” occurs is in Revelation 4, where John also sees a vision of the heavenly temple with the throne of God and hears four living creatures—chanting this same angelic hymn. Superlative holiness refers only to God, which means that all holiness comes from God. I propose that we can refer to the thrice-holy God as “super holy” since his holiness is superlative to other forms of the holy.

The super holy God instituted what is regularly referred to in English translations, including the ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, and RSV, as “most holy” things. Grammatically in Hebrew, the most holy things are expressed in the twofold *qodesh qodoshim*, קֹדֶשׁ קְדוֹשִׁים. This is the same term that designates the Most Holy Place in the sanctuary, also known as the Holy of Holies (Exod 26:33). In distinction from the thrice-holy superlative form, this twice-holy form can be understood as a comparative construction.¹² An accurate designation could be “more/greater/extra holy.” However, since the term “most holy” is so widely used in English translations, I think the term can rightly be retained and used in distinction from the other categories of holiness.

God instituted the most holy things, through which he makes other things as well as people holy, who are qualified to come into contact with these most holy

⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 3–5, 7–29, 110, 130, 160–180.

¹⁰ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 4–13.

¹¹ Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 175–188; Macina, *LORD's Service*, 175, 187; and Saul M. Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), 33–34.

¹² Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 175–188; Macina, *LORD's Service*, 175, 187; and Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, 33–34.

things. We can rightly identify the most holy things as some of the “sacraments”¹³ of the Old Testament, which include the tabernacle, all the furniture in the sanctuary, the incense and smoke from the inner and outer altars, the most holy food that the priests eat from the bread/grain offerings, the meat from the sin and guilt offerings, and the twelve loaves of the bread of the presence that the priests ate every Sabbath. It is important to note that people are never most holy, and never have the power to convey God’s holiness to other people or things. Only the most holy *things*—sacramental *things*—have the power to make things or people holy. The super holy God instituted the most holy things, through which he conveyed his holiness to others.¹⁴

Another category of holiness is simply holy. Grammatically in Hebrew, holy things or holy people are expressed in the onefold *qodesh*, or some variant of this singular term.¹⁵ Any ritually clean person or thing that comes into contact with the most holy things becomes holy. Holy things and holy people are in the gracious presence of the super holy God. Having received their holy status from God, they share in his holiness. God’s sanctification of the priests, tabernacle, and people of ancient Israel was for the very purpose that he could safely dwell among them with his gracious real presence. This is expressed in Exodus 29:43–46 in the context of the LORD’s instructions about the ordination of the priests, the consecration of the tabernacle, and some of the instructions about the daily divine service. It says,

There [at the tabernacle] I will meet with the sons of Israel, and it [or possibly “he” referring to the man Israel and his descendants] shall be sanctified by my glory. I will sanctify the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will sanctify to serve me as priests. I will *dwell among* the sons of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am Yahweh their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt *in order that I might dwell among them*. I am Yahweh their God.

We can conclude from this passage that the purpose for which God makes things and people holy is so that he can dwell among them and they can be safely in his presence, partaking of his own holiness.¹⁶

¹³ The term “sacrament” is purposely used here for a predominantly Lutheran audience to express that holy and most-holy things in Leviticus—and the entire Old Testament—were effective means through which God acted for the benefit of his people. Furthermore, the word “sacrament” is related to the Latin term for something that is made sacred or holy. Thus, it is a fitting term used in a broader sense to describe the things that God instituted to cleanse and consecrate the ancient Israelites. Still, the New Testament sacraments—instituted by the incarnate Christ—are superior to all the “sacraments” of the Old Testament because they appropriate the *accomplished* works of redemption for the members of Christ’s church.

¹⁴ Macina, *LORD’s Service*, 175.

¹⁵ Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 175–188; Macina, *LORD’s Service*, 175, 187; and Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, 33–34.

¹⁶ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 1–7.

There are two additional substances that comprise a special classification of holiness by which the thrice-holy God initiates and perpetuates his holiness. One is the holy anointing oil; the other is the fire at the sanctuary. The holy anointing oil is the only substance that God uses to make the most holy things. It is also used to make the high priest and regular priests holy. The anointing oil is so unique that the Lord calls it “*my holy anointing oil*” in Exodus 30:31. The super holy God used this spiced and fragrant oil in such a way that it is an extension of himself, so much so that everything and everyone that is anointed with this oil of God becomes an anointed one: a “messiah,” a “christ.” For this reason, the entire tabernacle with all its furnishings, as well as the priests and especially the high priest, are types of the incarnate Christ. Based on Isaiah 61:1–2 (which is quoted in Luke 4:18–19 and referenced in Heb 1:9) as well as 1 John 1–2, the holy anointing oil can be understood as a type of the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, the fire at the sanctuary was no ordinary fire. This is the same fire that Moses saw at the burning bush on Mount Sinai. It is the fire that enveloped the top of the mountain after the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. This is the same fire that was in the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites out of Egypt, accompanied them through the wilderness, and took up residence in the Holy of Holies at the tabernacle. During the inaugural service in Leviticus 9, this fire came out from the Holy of Holies, consumed the offerings on the altar, and ignited the perpetual fire used in the divine services. This fire was so necessary for the ongoing enactment of the liturgy at the sanctuary that the Lord tells the priests three times in Leviticus 6 that they must not allow this fire to extinguish. In Leviticus 10, following the establishment of the divine service—and on the very day of its inauguration—the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, were destroyed by this fire for offering strange/unauthorized fire in their censers in the presence of the Lord. The perpetual fire incinerated the offerings on the outer altar, smoked up the incense on the inner altar, set ablaze the lamps in the Holy Place, and smoked up incense in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement.

The perpetual fire at the tabernacle in ancient Israel was divine fire, the fire of God. The fire of God at the sanctuary in ancient Israel made most holy the incense, the smoke, the priests’ food from the grain offerings, sin offerings, guilt offerings, and the bread of the presence (which had frankincense on each pile throughout the week but was burned on the outer altar on the Sabbath). The fire also made the peace offerings—the only kind of offering burned on the altar that the lay Israelites and non-priestly Levites were allowed to eat—to be holy. The holy anointing oil initially mediated God’s “super holiness” to make the tabernacle and everything in it most holy, as well as to make the priests and high priest holy. The holy fire of God

perpetuated God's holy presence every day in the divine service, making holy and most holy things of all that rightly came into contact with it.¹⁷

In Leviticus 10:10, God also tells Aaron the high priest to distinguish between or separate the unclean from the clean. Unlike the holy and the common, which is a theological distinction, the unclean-versus-clean dichotomy is an anthropological distinction.¹⁸ This is entirely in the common realm apart from the presence and holiness of God. Like the holy and the common, the unclean and the clean are ritual powers that are opposed to each other and affect things and people who come into contact with them.¹⁹ The movement of people and things from the unclean to the clean is called "purification" (verb **תָּטַף**, noun **טָהוּר**). The movement of people and things from being clean to unclean is "defilement." However, while contact with unclean things or people defiles, clean things (or people) do not have the power to purify and make something or someone ritually clean. This is where the divine realm must intervene in the common/anthropological realm, because holy things have the power to purify.

For example, the water from the font in the courtyard of the tabernacle was holy water because it came from the most holy font; therefore, it purified the priests when they washed during the divine service (Exod 30:18, 40:12, 40:30; Lev 8:6, 16:4, 16:24). Likewise, the blood of animal offerings purified the Israelites when it was applied to the altar for burnt offering, because the altar was most holy (Lev 1:5, 1:11, 1:15, 3:2, 3:8, 3:13, 4:7, 4:18, 4:25, 4:30, 4:34, 8:19, 8:24, 9:9, 9:12, 9:18, 17:6, 17:11).²⁰ These holy things that have the power to purify may also be understood as "sacraments" in the Old Testament. When God tells Aaron in Leviticus 10:10 to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, he is warning and insuring against the defilement of the Israelites, the priests, and the tabernacle, which would jeopardize the super holy God's continued dwelling and real presence among them.

In Leviticus 10:10, when God tells Aaron to distinguish between the holy and the common and between the unclean and the clean, he is combining the theological with the anthropological into three categories or statuses. These are as follows: firstly, a category of holy and clean; secondly, a category of common and clean; and thirdly, a category of common and unclean. Contact with things in these categories will result in desecration, defilement, purification, or sanctification, as indicated in the previous discussion.²¹ More significantly, however, the unification of the

¹⁷ See Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 146–147, 198–199; Macina, *LORD's Service*, 72, 75; and Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 134–138.

¹⁸ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 6.

¹⁹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 3–5, 7–29, 110, 130, 160–180.

²⁰ Regarding the anointing and most holy status of the font and the altar, see Exod 30:22–29, 40:9–11.

²¹ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 6; Macina, *LORD's Service*, 120, 185–193, 200; and Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 616.

theological and the anthropological is typology that anticipates the incarnation of Christ, in whom the divine/theological and the human/anthropological now have communion with each other. Through this union of the divine and human natures in Christ, God has fulfilled the ultimate means of purification and sanctification so that we New Testament Christians can now partake of his holiness in a way that is far superior to that of anyone in the Old Testament, including the high priest.

The distinction between the holy and the common and between the unclean and the clean, as well as desecration, defilement, purification, and sanctification, are not merely Old Testament teachings. These carry over into the New Testament as well. Purification in the New Testament relates to Holy Absolution in 1 John 1:8–9; to Holy Baptism in Acts 22:16, Titus 3:5–7, 1 Peter 3:21, Revelation 7:14, and Revelation 19:7–8; and to Holy Communion in Matthew 26:28, Hebrews 9:14, and 1 John 1:5–7. Sanctification in the New Testament corresponds with the holy word of God and prayer in 1 Timothy 4:4–5; to Holy Baptism in Ephesians 5:25–27; and to Holy Communion in Hebrews 10:29 and Hebrews 13:11, as well as 1 Peter 1:2. Purification and sanctification together in the same context can be seen in Acts 10:14, Acts 10:28, Acts 11:8, Romans 6:19, 1 Corinthians 6:11, 1 Corinthians 7:14, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 5:26, 1 Thessalonians 4:7, 2 Timothy 2:21, Hebrews 9:13, and Revelation 22:11. There are many other places in the New Testament where one or more of these occur, but the best and fullest way to understand these terms in the New Testament is to see them in light of their use in Leviticus 10:10.

However, there is a major difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament sacraments that must be pointed out. In the Old Testament, there were specific rites and substances that purified in distinction from those that sanctified. Water and blood were purifying materials. Smoke and the priest's food from the altar were sanctifying substances. In the Old Testament, the only times when blood was used as a sanctifying agent were when it was applied together with the holy oil to the priests at their ordinations, as well as on the Day of Atonement after the blood becomes most holy from coming into contact with the super holy God in the Holy of Holies. Typologically, these point to two things. First, for us New Testament Christians, every time we receive the blood of Christ in Holy Communion, that is our Day of Atonement. Second, the blood of Christ consecrates each Christian to be a high priest who has access to the super-holy presence of God in the true and heavenly Holy of Holies. In the New Testament, the sacraments both purify and sanctify simultaneously. Baptism, Absolution, and Communion obviously purify from sin; but because of the instituting words that effect the sacraments, they also sanctify and make us holy (1 Tim 4:5). The incarnation of Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament sacraments and made the New Testament sacraments fuller and more comprehensive in purification and sanctification.

II. Sacrifice in Leviticus

There is a problem with the word “sacrifice.” This term comes from the Latin *sacrificium*, which is formed from two Latin words: *sacer*, meaning “holy/sacred,” and *facere*, meaning “to make/do.” So the word “sacrifice” literally means “to make holy.”²² People often use the word “sacrifice” loosely in various contexts, like a sacrifice hit in baseball, or putting oneself in harm’s way to protect others. I am not being critical, since these are expressions with meanings that are commonly understood. Even though I know the difficulties with the term “sacrifice,” many times I, too, will loosely refer to all the animal offerings in the Old Testament as “sacrifices.” The problem is when a term is used to translate a word in the biblical text that does not portray the meaning.

The Hebrew word that is often translated into English as “sacrifice” is *zevach*, זָבַח. The noun *zevach* is always and only used in Leviticus in connection with the peace offering and Passover lamb that is offered at the sanctuary. Prior to the institution of the divine service in the Old Testament, the verb *zavach*, זָבַח, refers to both the burnt offering and the peace offering in Exodus 20:24, but this is a unique use of the verb; and the burnt offering is never called the noun form, *zevach*. Except for the peace offering and the Passover lamb (after the exodus), the burnt offering with its accompanying grain offering and drink offering, as well as the sin offering and the guilt offering, are never called *zevach*. They are never called “sacrifices” in English translations.

Quite honestly, I do not know how to best translate the Hebrew term *zevach*. A thorough analysis of the term in another study would prove to be most helpful. What is certain, however, is that *zevach* is not best translated as “sacrifice.” The Hebrew *qadosh*, and its various forms have to do with sacrifice, the making of something holy, but *zevach* has no relation to holiness from an etymological perspective. Having said that, however, because there is currently no clear way to translate it otherwise, and because it is so widely used in the English translations, I concur that we can refer to the Hebrew noun *zevach* as “sacrifice.” Although we can concede the term “sacrifice” for use in relation to the peace offerings and Passover lambs, it is best to refrain from using it in reference to any other category of offerings, such as the burnt, grain, drink, sin, and guilt offerings. Every kind of offering can be rightly referred to as an “offering,” something that is brought to and presented—קָרַב, *qarav*, in Hebrew—to the Lord at the sanctuary. To be careful and accurate, though, just understand that not all offerings are sacrifices, even if we loosely refer to them by the term “sacrifice.”

There are several kinds of offerings in Leviticus 1–7. God instituted the burnt offerings in Leviticus 1:2–17, the grain offerings in 2:1–16, the peace offerings in

²² *The American Heritage Dictionary: Second College Edition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 1083.

3:1–17, the sin offerings in 4:1–5:13, and the guilt offerings in 5:14–6:7. The institution of these offerings includes the kinds of animals or materials that are acceptable, how to prepare them, how to slay them, how to cut them into pieces, what to do with the blood of the animals, and what parts of the offerings should be burned on the altar. The Lord gives further ritual instructions about the burnt offerings in Leviticus 6:8–13, the grain offerings in 6:14–23, the peace offerings in 7:11–36, the sin offerings in 6:24–30, and the guilt offerings in 7:1–10. The ritual instructions provide additional information about what to do with each of the offerings, especially who gets to consume various portions of them.

The burnt offerings and high priest's bread offerings were burned up entirely to the Lord. Token portions of the grain offerings and all the animals' fat and certain parts of their internal organs were burned up on the altar. The priests ate specific cuts of the meat from the peace offerings, while the laypeople offering them ate the rest. Depending on the circumstances, the priests either ate all the meat from the sin and guilt offerings or would eat none of it. In addition, according to Exodus 29, Leviticus 23, and Numbers 28–29, every burnt offering had an accompanying grain/bread offering and drink offering of wine. A handful of the grain/bread offering was placed on the body of the burnt offering on the altar fire, while the wine was poured out on the side of the altar at its base where the blood of the sin offering was poured. These several offerings comprise most of the sacramental materials that God instituted in ancient Israel's divine service to bring about purification through the blood and sanctification through the incense, smoke, and most holy food.

It is also important to understand that the offerings were not offered just occasionally or randomly. Individuals could bring offerings at will, but God prescribed that specific offerings must be offered at certain times. Every morning and evening of every day, the priests were required to offer a burnt offering with its accompanying grain offering and drink offering in the context of the daily divine service with its other rites and ritual activities. The morning burnt offering was always the foundation upon which all the other kinds of offerings would be placed on the altar fire. The entire daily service was the context in which all the required services in the ritual calendar were enacted. So in addition to the daily liturgy with its required burnt offerings, each week additional offerings were made on the Sabbath. One part of the offerings on the Sabbath has to do with the bread of the presence, upon which was placed frankincense as the two piles of bread sat upon the table in the Holy Place. On the Sabbath, that frankincense was burned on the altar fire in the courtyard as the priests ate the loaves of the bread of the presence. On the first of each month, additional offerings were made during the morning part of the divine service. On specific occasions once each year, required offerings were made over and above the daily burnt offerings. These times include Passover, the Festival of Firstfruits, the Festival of Weeks (Pentecost), the Day of Acclamation/Trumpets, the Day of

Atonement, the Festival of Booths/Tabernacles, and the Final Assembly.²³ As seen in Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28–29, on some of these occasions there were many offerings that were required. Each of these holy times, God provided the offerings in order to purify and sanctify the ancient Israelites.²⁴

All these offerings were types of Christ, pointing ahead to his fulfillment of them by his works of salvation and giving himself to us through his New Testament word and sacraments. The burnt offering indicates him giving his entire life for us by the divine fire of the Holy Spirit. The peace offering, sometimes called the fellowship offering, anticipates the holy communal meal of the Lord's Supper. The sin and guilt offerings are fulfilled by Christ's crucifixion and pouring out of his blood to make complete atonement and perfect restitution for the sins of all people. The accompanying grain/bread offering that is placed on the body of the burnt offering and the wine of the accompanying drink offering that is poured out on the blood of the sin offering foreshadow the union of the bread with the body of Christ and the wine with the blood of Christ in Holy Communion. Because of the incarnation of Christ, the Old Testament sacraments were fulfilled, and by his powerful word he instituted greater sacraments for us and our forgiveness, purification, sanctification, and eternal life.

III. Worship in Leviticus

Etymologically, the basic meaning of the English word “worship” is “to acknowledge worth or worthiness.”²⁵ This is a human act that we should do as part of our relationship with God in thanksgiving for his gifts and salvation. Worship in Leviticus is described in two places and the word used (לְהִשָּׁתַחֲוֹת) literally means “to bow down with the face to the ground,” or “to prostrate oneself.” One verse is Leviticus 26:1, where God forbids bowing down to an idol, which is idol worship/idolatry. The other passage is Leviticus 9:24, which describes what happened at the end of the inaugural service, when the fire of the Lord came out of the Holy of Holies and consumed the offerings on the altar in the courtyard of the sanctuary. When the Israelites saw the fire of God, they shouted and fell on their faces. That is “worship” in the Old Testament.

A better way to describe what is sometimes referred to as “worship” in Leviticus—and in the rest of the Old Testament—is divine service or liturgy. This is God's

²³ The Final Assembly is mentioned in Lev 23:36 and Num 29:35 in the Pentateuch, as well as in other places in the Old Testament, and in John 7:37. In Hebrew, the word is עֲצֵרָת, meaning “assembly.” The rendering “Final Assembly” comes from a combination of the Greek translation ἐξόδιον, meaning “finale, final festival day,” and “assembly.” Since this was the final festival day of ancient Israel's ritual calendar, it is fitting to refer to it as the Final Assembly. Kleinig calls it the “closing ceremony.” Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 492, 496, 504.

²⁴ Macina, “Liturgy of the Old Testament,” 215–240.

²⁵ *American Heritage Dictionary*, 1392.

activity and purpose. In Leviticus, divine service is seen most clearly in three chapters. First, Leviticus 8 is the consecration and ordination of the high priest and regular priests, together with the consecration of the tabernacle and all its furnishings. It is significant that the priesthood and the sanctuary are prepared inseparably and consecrated together over a seven-day period. In the Old Testament, there is no public divine service for the ancient Israelites without the priesthood or without the sanctuary. Thus, from the outset the holy agents, the holy places, and the holy things are purified and sanctified within and for the divine service.

Second, Leviticus 9 is the inaugural service, the first corporate divine service that God instituted for the ancient Israelites. After the seven days of consecration for the priests and tabernacle, on the eighth day God instituted the public service. This inaugural service was similar to, but not exactly the same as, the regular ongoing daily liturgy. The most significant difference is that at the inaugural service, the holy fire of God ignited the altar fire at the end of the service, while the daily service maintained that divine holy fire on the altar at all times and from the beginning of each day.

Third, Leviticus 16 spells out the ritual acts for the Day of Atonement. These were enacted in the context of and in addition to the regular daily divine service once per year to make comprehensive atonement and purification for all the sins of the Israelites. One of the most significant aspects of the Day of Atonement is that its rites purified and reconsecrated the tabernacle and all its furnishings. Throughout the year, the sanctuary absorbed the sins and impurities of the people of Israel. On the Day of Atonement, these were purged from the tabernacle. Furthermore, as indicated in Leviticus 16:19, because the high priest brought the blood of the sin offerings all the way into the Holy of Holies, where it made contact with the super holy God, the blood changed from a holy purifying material to a most holy sanctifying substance. Thus, the entire sanctuary and all its furnishings were reconsecrated by the most holy blood once per year to perpetuate the divine service in ancient Israel. These three chapters in Leviticus give details found nowhere else in the Scriptures about some important aspects of the initialization of the divine service with its priesthood and sanctuary, as well as its most comprehensive purification throughout the year and reconsecration for its continuance.

After the inaugural service, the divine service in the Old Testament always occurred within the context of the daily liturgy that was done every morning and evening. All the weekly, monthly, and yearly services were enacted as part of and in addition to the daily divine service, usually added to the morning service but occasionally held as part of the evening service (such as during the Passover). The daily service consisted of seven rites that were performed every morning and every evening.²⁶ First is the fire rite, which consisted of procedures for maintaining and

²⁶ Macina, *LORD's Service*, 24–67.

perpetuating the divine fire on the altar for burnt offering in the courtyard of the tabernacle. Second, the presentation rite provided the materials, such as the animals, bread, grain, and wine, for the offerings. Third, the blood rite disposed of the animal blood according to the divinely prescribed manner, and functioned as the means of atonement. According to Leviticus 17, all blood from qualified animals was applied to the altar for burnt offering, and occasionally elsewhere in the sanctuary, for the purpose of atonement and purification. Fourth is the incense rite, wherein fine spiced incense was burned on the incense altar before the veil inside the Holy Place. Other ritual activities during the incense rite were also performed at the table with the bread of the presence and at the lampstand. Fifth, the burning rite consisted of the offerings being placed on the divine fire on the altar for burnt offering and the drink offering of wine being poured out on the side of the altar near its base. Sixth was the blessing rite, when the high priest announced the benediction to the Israelites and the regular priests blew silver trumpets. The blessing rite was the only spoken part of the divine service in the Old Testament.²⁷ It is important to note that the threefold placing of the name of the LORD upon the Israelites in the priestly benediction also sanctified the people of Israel; the name of the LORD was so holy that it had its own commandment to protect the Israelites from desecrating and defiling it.²⁸ Seventh, and finally, was the meal rite, when the priests ate the most holy food from the bread/grain offerings and the most holy meat from the sin and guilt offerings. If a peace offering was offered, the priests and people would eat its holy meat also during this time.

Through these seven divinely instituted rites with their several ritual activities, God acted for the sake of his people in the Old Testament. He purified them from their ritual uncleanness and sanctified them to share in his holiness. He also revealed his gracious real presence among them and blessed them with his holy name.²⁹ God does these same four things in the New Testament—purifies us, sanctifies us, reveals

²⁷ This does not mean that the only thing that was spoken during the blessing rite was the benediction. Later in Israel's history, especially after the temple was built in Jerusalem, the Levitical choir sang the psalms during the blessing rite. See John W. Kleinig, *The Lord's Song: The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993). Certainly, the Old Testament Scriptures nowhere forbade chanting psalms during other parts of the divine service, which may be seen in Ps 141:2, "Let my prayer rise before you as incense; the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." In the New Testament Scriptures, prayer is also associated with the offering of incense in Luke 1:10 and in Rev 5:8 and 8:3. However, the only part of the divine service of the Old Testament in which God commanded that words be spoken was in the blessing rite. See Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). In the Pentateuch, the divine service that God instituted for ancient Israel consisted mostly of unspoken ritual acts, with the exception of the benediction. See Macina, *LORD's Service*, xvi–ii, 24–67. The high priest and priests did not conduct a liturgy of spoken words like we have in the church today.

²⁸ See also Christopher Wright Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK "To Bless" in the Old Testament*, SBL Dissertation Series (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987).

²⁹ Macina, *LORD's Service*, 198–200.

his presence to us, and blesses us—in a fulfilled and fuller way. As Hebrews 9:8–14 teaches, the Old Testament divine service affected the Israelites bodily and outwardly, but the New Testament divine service affects both body and soul, purifying and sanctifying the conscience and innermost being. The divine service that God instituted in the Old Testament through types has been fulfilled and yet continues in the New Testament but with different and greater rituals and superior sacraments because of the incarnation of Christ and his redeeming life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

IV. Leviticus for Today's Royal Priesthood

The royal priesthood is not explicitly mentioned in Leviticus. In Exodus 19:6, God says that the people of ancient Israel are a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” “Kingdom of priests” is the way the royal priesthood is expressed in translation from the Hebrew, but the Septuagint/Greek translation of this verse is the exact form in 1 Peter 2:9, which is usually rendered as “royal priesthood.” Therefore, both translations, “kingdom of priests” and “royal priesthood,” are interchangeable and should be understood as expressing the same thing.

Neither of these phrases is seen anywhere in the book of Leviticus. However, there is an embodiment of the royal priesthood in Leviticus 8:9 with the holy crown that is placed on the head of the high priest with the inscription “Holy to Yahweh.” The holy crown for the high priest was first prescribed in Exodus 29:6, and the description of its construction is seen in Exodus 39:30. The holy crown indicates that the high priest in ancient Israel was not only a priest; his office was royal and kingly. This was so, not only because the high priest was distinct from the other priests, the non-priestly Levites, and the lay Israelites, but because he represented all Israel before God; and he represented God before all Israel. The “kingdom of priests” or “royal priesthood” mentioned in Exodus 19:6 refers not merely to the priests or even the high priest alone; it refers to all the people of ancient Israel. The entire holy nation was a kingdom of priests; all the people comprised the royal priesthood.

This is seen in part with the most holy anointed vestments that the high priest wore during the divine service in the Old Testament, which included the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites inscribed on his shoulder pieces and again upon his breast piece. In the service, the high priest wore the ornate vestments not merely as coverings. As he wore them, the different parts of the vestments were ritual acts in and of themselves. Thus, when he bore the names of the tribes of Israel on his shoulders and upon his breast into the Holy Place every morning and evening, all the people of Israel vicariously performed the priestly rituals. Furthermore, as spiritual head of all Israel, the high priest wearing the holy crown signified that the people were kingly and royal. This in no way indicated that the lay Israelites, or even the non-priestly Levites, could perform the duties of the priests, especially of the high

priest, in the divine service at the sanctuary. The events related to Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16 make this clear. Each group of people had its assigned place and order, with restrictions of location, touch, and sight regarding the holy places and most holy furnishings of the tabernacle. Still, as Leviticus 8:9 implies, the high priest did represent all Israel as royal priests in the presence of God.³⁰

Typologically in Leviticus, as the representative of all Israel to God and God to all Israel, the high priest held a unique office. Long before God gave kings to the Israelites, the high priest was seen as royalty. Although Moses is the one whom God chose to be the establisher of the nation of Israel and the instituter of their divine service, it was the high priest who served as the ongoing head of Israel. He was the mediator between the Lord and his people, not only in a priestly way but also in a kingly way. From its beginning, the high priest's office was a unique royal priesthood.

In ancient Israel, the high priest was a type of Christ. This is confirmed in Zechariah 6, where there is a messianic prophecy in a typological context about the high priest Joshua, who is also a king. Significantly, "Joshua" is the Hebrew name that is translated through Greek and into English as "Jesus." This Joshua is both a high priest and a king, who foreshadows the incarnate Christ as priest and king. All throughout ancient Israel's history, the office of high priest was a royal priesthood. However, the royal high priesthood of Christ Jesus was unique in and of itself. Whereas all the Old Testament priests were descendants of Levi, according to his human nature Jesus was a descendant of the royal line of Judah. The kingly office of Jesus came about through the Old Testament promise and prophecy that the Seed of Judah, as well as the Seed of David, would be the Messiah/Christ. The high priesthood of Jesus was not through bloodline, but through the prophecy and oath in Psalm 110:4, "you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." As Hebrews 5:6 states further, Jesus was "designated by God as a *high priest* in the order of Melchizedek." This means that his high priesthood is not temporary, like that of all the high priests who served and then died in the Old Testament order of Aaron. Rather, Christ's high priesthood continues forever without end based on the power of his resurrection from the dead and his immortality. If the type of Christ in Leviticus and the Old Testament royal high priesthood was unique, how much more so is the royal high priesthood that is fulfilled in Christ himself!

As with all Christ's offices and works of salvation, he was not only a royal high priest for himself. The eternal Son of God became a man not for his own sake, but for you and for me and for all people. He had nothing to gain by his incarnation; he did it for us. Christ became the incarnate, eternal, royal high priest so that in him,

³⁰ Macina, *LORD's Service*, 178–182.

we, too, might become royal high priests forever. There are several passages in the New Testament that bear witness to this. Hebrews 4:14–16 says,

Since we have a great high priest who has entered into the heavenly realms, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every way has been tempted like us, yet without sin. Therefore, *let us draw near to the throne of grace* [in heaven] confidently, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 6:19–20 says,

We have this [the hope set before us] as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that *enters into the inner place behind the curtain* [in the Holy of Holies], where Jesus has gone *as a forerunner on our behalf* [he is our forerunner into the Holy of Holies], having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:23–26 states:

The former [Old Testament] priests were many, since they were prevented by death from continuing, but he [Christ] holds his priesthood permanently, because he remains forever. Consequently, he is able to save perfectly those who *draw near to God through him* [again, in the heavenly Holy of Holies] since he always lives to intercede for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from the sinful, and exalted above the heavens [and we be exalted there with and in him, already now by faith and hereafter in soul and body].³¹

Hebrews 10:19–22 says:

Since we have confidence to *enter the holy places* [i.e., the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies] by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a high priest over the house of God, let us *draw near* [to God in the Holy of Holies] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience [in Holy Communion] and our bodies washed with pure water [in Holy Baptism].³²

Revelation 1:5–6 speaks of our royal priesthood in slightly different terms:

³¹ Eph 2:6 indicates that we Christians—by faith in Christ—have already been resurrected with him and enthroned with him in heaven.

³² Kleinig, *Hebrews*, 503–505. See especially footnote 38 regarding the sprinkling of hearts as referring to Holy Communion rather than Baptism.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us *a kingdom, priests to his God and Father*, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Again, Revelation 5:9–10 states:

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you purchased for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them *a kingdom and priests to our God*, and they shall *reign* [as royal priests] on the earth.”

Revelation 20:4–6 says:

Then I saw *thrones*, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They were alive and *reigned with Christ* for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not live until the completion of the thousand years. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over them, but they will be *priests of God and of Christ*, and *reign with him* [as royal priests] for a thousand years.

Finally, Revelation 22:3–5 states,

No longer will there be anything accursed [in the city of God], but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him [λατρεύσουσιν αὐτῷ]. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads [like the holy crown of the high priest in the Old Testament]. And there will be no night. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will *reign forever and ever*.

Our royal high priesthood as Christians is far superior to that of any of the high priests in Leviticus and the Old Testament. What we have and do as high priests in Christ far surpasses what is described in Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement. Our purity and holiness as royal high priests in Christ are superior to those of the Aaronic priests in ancient Israel. As royal high priests, we Christians have the right to enter the heavenly Holy of Holies to reign with Christ and to enjoy the divine service of the super holy God for all eternity.

Conclusion

The book of Leviticus is an essential part of the Holy Scriptures. It is in the center of the Pentateuch, which is the foundation of the entire biblical canon. Leviticus—together with the ritual sections in Exodus and Numbers—constitutes the

beginnings of the divine service, the sanctuary, and the priesthood, as well as God's activities of purifying and sanctifying his people of old. On the one hand, the Levitical service with all its rites and ritual activities, including the offerings and sacrifices, was for only the ancient Israelites. The Lord's commands to construct the tabernacle, ordain the priests, bring offerings, and perform all the rituals at the sanctuary were not given to us New Testament Christians. Most of all, and as part of the promise, the typology in Leviticus was fulfilled in Christ. His body is the real tabernacle and temple; he is the ultimate offering and sacrifice to God; he is the eternal high priest in the true and heavenly Holy of Holies; he purifies and sanctifies completely through the New Testament divine service. The types of the Old Testament have been fulfilled in Christ.

On the other hand, though, Leviticus is in *our* Holy Scriptures. It is part of our Christian heritage and must be interpreted in a christological and trinitarian manner. This means that we view Leviticus as part of the broader Old Testament promise of Christ, specifically from a fulfilled typological perspective that acknowledges his advent, his completed works of redemption, his newly instituted word and sacraments, and his inaugurated eschatological kingdom. Understanding Leviticus with this hermeneutic gives a greater appreciation for the historical and theological foundations of our New Testament holy ministry and divine service. Christ fulfilled in Leviticus what we now have by faith in him. Through his holy liturgy and holy ministry, the super holy God purifies us and sanctifies us completely to share in the perfect holiness of the incarnate Christ as his royal priests in the heavenly Holy of Holies, and to commune in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) of the Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit.