Reading Ritual

Leviticus in Postmodern Culture

Wesley J. Bergen

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PLAYING THE TEXTS

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This book is dedicated to my wife, Deborah, and my children, John and Erin. I realize that having a book about Leviticus dedicated to you is hardly a major event in your lives. Hopefully the time we have spent in music, sports, auto mechanics, reading, and everyday activities has made up for the time I have sacrificed to this project.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1. *Beginnings*

Many centuries ago, a group of men (and possibly some women) gathered regularly at a sacred spot not too far from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. At this gathering they took a carefully chosen animal, killed it, and after cutting off the skin and certain other parts, they burned the carcass whole. Certain parts of this activity were done the same way every time.

Why? What did they think they were doing? What difference did it make to them that they did it the same way every time? Who decided what the 'right' way was? If you asked three of them to explain their actions, would you get three different answers, or three very similar answers?

Part of their answer would likely have had to do with a being they called Yahweh. What would they have understood the relationship between their actions and this Yahweh to be? How would they know what Yahweh thought of their actions? Were there also consequences for these actions within their communities? Were there consequences if these actions were not performed, or if they were performed improperly?

Most of these questions are simply unanswerable, because there is no one to ask. The text that describes this event (Lev. 1) doesn't answer most of these questions, and the ritual itself is no longer performed. It is also possible that many participants in this activity would not have had ready answers to these questions. These types of questions presume a great deal about the importance of theological formulation and abstraction. How much interest did this society have in abstraction?

The difference between the world as elaborated by the writer of Leviticus and a modern way of perceiving the world is seen by a cursory examination of Leviticus 1. When reading Leviticus 1 it is immediately clear that this is prescriptive speech, giving instructions regarding a set of *physical actions*. Only three phrases in the chapter portray mental activity. These are 'to make it acceptable to Yahweh', v. 3, 'It will be acceptable as effectual for his expiation', v. 4, and 'as a smell pleasing to Yahweh', v. 9, repeated in vv. 13 and 17.[1] All of this mental activity takes place in the mind of Yahweh. Yahweh desires humans to perform these actions, which have an effect upon the mind of Yahweh, which presumably will have an effect upon Yahweh's action, although this is never stated. Nothing

1. All biblical quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

is said about the effect these actions may have upon the mind of the one presenting the offering, or the mental state required for these actions, or the belief system that must accompany these actions. Neither the narrator nor Yahweh appears to care about the mental activity of the one presenting the offering.

This way of describing an activity can be contrasted with the current descriptions of events as found in the modern media. In most cases, the first question that is asked of a person at the scene of any event is 'How do you feel?' Athletes are asked that question after success or failure. People are asked that at scenes of triumph and disaster. Billions of dollars are spent annually on pharmaceuticals (legal and illegal) to affect people's mood. Yet the writer of Leviticus says nothing about the psychological state that either precedes or follows the slaughter of an animal.

Besides highlighting the difference between modern culture and that of the author of Leviticus 1, this contrast also highlights the further difficulty faced when trying mentally and verbally to deal with physical activity, especially physical activity such as ritual activity where the goal of the action is not directly related to the action itself. It would not be difficult to describe the slaughter of an animal if the purpose of the action was simply killing an animal to be eaten. But how is physical activity described when its purpose may not be reducible to words?

2. *Studying Ritual*

The questions above arise from an examination of Leviticus 1, and an attempt to understand the activity prescribed by the text. These are the kinds of questions that form the basis for this book. This book is a study of Leviticus 1–7, using a variety of academic tools to help the modern reader understand both the action and the language of animal sacrifice. Even more than simply understanding, I hope to create an encounter between Leviticus and the modern world, ultimately to create an encounter between Leviticus and you.

Much of this encounter will be based on the cross-cultural study of ritual. Since anthropologists have been wrestling with the study of ritual for years, it seems appropriate to consult with them regarding the questions above, and the questions of ritual in general.

The first problem encountered in this study is the question of how to define precisely what a 'ritual' is. Let me use two simple examples to demonstrate the issue. If I were to watch someone plant a tree, I would be inclined to say that this is not a ritual, because it is simply an action for a specific effect. But what if planting is accompanied by a traditional prayer and dance? Is it then a ritual? Why? It is still a repeated action for a specific effect, with the added action of calling on an unseen being. Why does the inclusion of an unseen being make an action into a ritual? For the person performing the dance, it is likely that the God/gods toward whom the prayer is directed is no less real than the seedling. Perhaps this person even believes that God is more real than the seedling. So we cannot distinguish ritual activity from non-ritual activity on the basis of the inclusion of deities.

What if planting the tree is for a purpose other than the growth of a new tree—what if it is for bringing blessing from the deity? In this case, the connection between the action and its intended outcome is outside the cause-and-effect rules of science. Is it then a ritual because the connection between action and result is 'supernatural' rather than 'natural'? I might want to say that, since there is no material connection between planting a tree and receiving blessing, the action is 'spiritual' or 'magical'. But this assumes that scientific explanations for events are more 'true' than spiritual ones. Yet for the person doing planting, the relationship between event and outcome might be perfectly logical within the system that she lives in (Herrenschmidt 1982: 27). So even a more specifically 'religious' intent does not transform something into a ritual. Let me use another example. Every day millions of Americans say the Pledge of Allegiance. Is this a ritual? It is not usually seen as one, since ritual is usually linked to religious activity. Can the definition of 'ritual' be expanded to 'secular' activity? Yet before we can ask this question, we would need to define what 'religion' is. Then we could decide whether American Nationalism constitutes a religion.[2] If it is, then saying the Pledge might be a religious activity. Yet even if American Nationalism is not a religion, might we still conclude that saying the Pledge at a specific place and time in a specific manner still constitutes a ritual.

The problem is not simply one of finding the 'right' definition for 'ritual' or 'religion'. Definitions are cultural, part of the language of a specific group. Even within a particular language, different groups use words in different ways. The same English word can mean different things in Alabama or Wales. Moving between languages makes the situation that much more difficult. Comparing actions rather than words compounds the problem. How can I use modern American words to explain ancient Israelite actions? Can I write about modern American actions to help someone understand ancient Israelite actions?

3. *Purpose and Effect*

Another problem in the study of ritual is deciding whose explanation of a ritual to accept. Anthropologists have generally chosen to explain rituals in ways that do not agree with the understanding of the people doing the ritual. For example, Michael Aune in his discussion of the purpose of ritual limits the purpose of ritual to the noetic and affective spheres (1996a: 143). That is, he wishes to confine the study of ritual to a description of the effect of the ritual on the psychological state of the person doing the ritual.[3] Fritz Staal says that in ritual results do not matter (1996: 488). Frank Gorman in his study of Leviticus says that the goal of ritual is the regulation of social order, and a means of world construction (1990: 19, 59). These explanations make sense within the worldview of the anthropologist, yet they are not the explanation for the ritual given in Leviticus. As Catherine Bell

2. The study of American Civil Religion is a significant discipline on its own. For a thorough introduction, see Jewett and Lawrence 2003.

3. Note that this is the opposite of the concerns of the writer of Leviticus.

notes, 'the notion that ritual resolves a fundamental social contradiction can be seen as a type of myth legitimating the whole apparatus of ritual studies' (1992: 37). In other words, anthropological explanations of ritual are based on a different myth than that of the culture performing the ritual. It is not a matter of moving to a description that contains no mythic elements. The idea that scientific societies have moved beyond myths is one of our central myths.

This point is easy to see by thinking again of the sacrifice described in Leviticus 1. Leviticus claims that the purpose of sacrifice is the expiation of sin (1.4). Biblical scholars would expand this explanation to observe that the consequence of sin was abandonment by God, which ultimately led to conquest by foreign armies (Deut. 28.18-68; 2 Kgs 17.7-23).[4] Since the modern anthropologist is unwilling to accept that Israelite sacrifice is actually and directly linked to the rise and fall of empires, they will be more likely to offer counter explanations for the purpose or effect of this ritual.

The difficulty of using modern explanations for ancient rituals is compounded by the fact that we cannot study the society in which the ritual operates. All we have is the text of the Bible as a guide to the specifics of 'Israelite society'. Further, I am not assuming that the text of Leviticus 1–7 was ever actually used as the basis for the correct forms of animal sacrifice. So when seeking to understand Leviticus, I will limit my explanations of sacrifice largely to those within the text.

Yet there is still room to distinguish between a ritual's purpose and its effect. This is true both of ancient and modern rituals. For example, a ritual by its very nature creates 'insiders' (those who perform the ritual) and 'outsiders' (those who don't).[5] This is not the stated purpose of the rituals of Leviticus 1–7, yet remains one of their effects. We cannot dismiss the effects of ritual, even the unintended effects, but caution must be taken not to impose our social constructs on an ancient social world.

Recognizing the effects of ritual also leads to the possibility of making another form of parallel between the text's world and ours. If one of the effects of sacrifice is to create insiders and outsiders, we can then examine the ways our society creates the same effect. As I will note in Chapter 5, one way American society distinguishes itself from outsiders by its claim to 'freedom'. While saying 'freedom' is not a ritual in itself, it becomes part of the language of the insider. Formal and regular use of the term 'freedom', then, becomes a possible clue that the occasion of its use may be a ritual of American Civil Religion.[6] Thus we can

4. Neither of these passages specifically mentions the abandonment of ritual. They do, however, state that conquest is a result of sin. If part of the purpose of these rituals is the expiation of sin, then something must have gone wrong in the system so that the ritual was rendered ineffective.

5. While Leviticus says that sacrifice can be done by anyone ('when any of you bring', Lev. 1.2), it is likely that this 'anyone' was limited to Israelite males.

6. It may also be that events can become rituals through the use of language. President George W. Bush is well known for his repeated use of limited, highly emotive language (e.g. freedom, terrorists, sacrifice). The continual use of repeated words, themes, and images suggests that many of his speeches are 'ritual' in the sense that the content of the speech is not as important to the event as

move from effect to ritual, distinguishing what a ritual is by comparing the effects of events across cultures.

4. *Defining Ritual*

In attempting to define 'ritual', it is tempting to say that, while it may be difficult to define, we know it when we see it.[7] The problem here is how do we know when we're *not* seeing it—activities that are ritual yet aren't quite. Using a term that 'everyone understands but no one can define' is dangerous for a whole host of reasons. For the purposes of this study, a general understanding of ritual is important because I will be using many examples from outside the usual boundaries of 'religious ritual'. In Chapter 2 I will argue that factory work, the fast food industry, and modern economics are 'ritual' activities in significant senses of the term. In Chapter 3 I will argue that viewing Monday Night Football is a religious ritual within the context of American Civil Religion. In Chapter 5 I will study sacrifice language in the context of the American military, which is certainly one of the more ritualized parts of American society. In all of these examples it is important to keep open the question of what constitutes a ritual, especially when comparing two societies as different as ours and ancient Israel's. I will also need to keep in mind the larger problem of using our language (both common and technical language) to describe another society.

In general, I will be using the criteria for ritual proposed by Catherine Bell. Bell stays away from a specific definition of what a ritual *is*, and instead talks about how regular actions become *ritualized* (1992: 7-8). She suggests that ritualized actions have certain features in common, namely formalism, traditionalism, disciplined invariance, rule-governance, sacral symbolism, and performance (1997: 138-69). While not all of these features are part of every ritual, this list provides a starting point for a comparison of the various rituals this book examines.

Much of this book will focus on the last of Bell's features, performance. It is by now commonplace to note that much of ritual study has traditionally been focused on the 'meaning' of ritual, giving priority to the verbal over the physical. Recently ritual theory has attempted to find ways to speak about movement, about action, as having its own effect. As Tom Driver notes, rituals are 'more like washing machines than like books' (1991: 93). Bell notes that it is the modern scholar who makes the dichotomy thought/action, not the one performing the ritual (1996: 23).

Ronald Grimes has long noted the difficulty inherent in studying ritual.[8] In his *Beginnings of Ritual Studies*, he notes the problem of having ritual described or analyzed by an outside interpreter/observer (1982: 2). His solution is to suggest

the psychological effect of the speech. His task is to 'say the right words for the occasion', rather than convey information. Thus a speech by George W. Bush may be more of a ritual than a speech by another president.

7. The same problem applies when attempting to define 'religion'. See Braun 2000.
8. See also Laeuchli 1992: 36; Staal 1996: 487.

that someone studying ritual should develop skills in the construction of ritual—skills of movement and response, rather than skills of transforming action into thought (p. 15). He also suggests that one should *map* ritual, rather than analyze it (pp. 19-30).

Grimes' list of aspects of ritual in need of mapping also helps clarify the difficulty faced when studying Leviticus 1–7. His list includes ritual objects, time, sound and language, identity, action (1982: 23-30). Yet we can map few of these for the rituals in Leviticus 1–7, because most of the information is missing. What kind of object was used to kill the animal? How much time did each part of the sacrifice take? What words or music accompanied the actions? Was there song-and-response, spoken liturgy, were texts read, or were the humans silent throughout? Who is this 'any of you' the text talks about (Lev. 1.2; 5.1; 6.1, etc.)—could it be anyone, or did the writer presume the head of the household? Comparing Grimes' list to our text, it is easy to see that a full description of the ritual is not a possibility. If so, what is left to accomplish?

The work of Bell, Grimes and others makes it clear that any attempt to understand the ritual apart from participation in the ritual is a fundamental misunderstanding of ritual as it is perceived by those who do participate. Observation is not the same as action. Movement is not reducible to language. Even if it were, describing ancient Israel's actions in our language involves the translation of an entire culture.

This would seem to make understanding fundamentally impossible, since the ritual prescribed in Leviticus 1 is no longer performed, and even if we were to replicate it, our modern perception of it would be significantly different from an ancient perception of the same activity. Yet while we must dismiss any notion of a complete understanding of Leviticus 1–7 and the rituals described therein, there is another way of understanding. Perhaps the most fundamental way of understanding something new is to link it with another thing that we already understand. Or, in the case of ritual, to link it to another action we already engage in. So long as we are comparing action to action, we can imagine the experience of an ancient ritual.

5. *Building Bridges*

I do not think, however, that we have reason to be overly optimistic in this regard. Often the gulf between ancient experience and modern experience is underappreciated. People who read Leviticus 1–7 too easily bring their own responses to the text, especially in the visceral reactions to killing, flaying, and manipulating blood.[9] There is no way to know how various people in ancient Israelite society felt about killing an animal. This becomes clearer when keeping in mind the illusion in the phrase 'ancient Israelite society', as if all people in all times of Israel's history would have reacted in similar ways. Any claim to understand all of these possible physical and mental responses is overstated.

9. Philip Budd in his commentary on Leviticus says that sacrifice is a response to ambivalence and alienation that arises from ploughing and killing (1996: 34).

Yet even here, there are possible bridges that can aid a study of ancient ritual. Part of the purpose of this study is to help us understand (or even experience) how much we don't understand, and why we don't understand it. Part of my task is to help you visualize the nature of the gulf that separates you from ancient tribal societies, from animal sacrifice, from blood manipulation. This aspect of ritual, too, can be mapped.

a. *Textuality*

There are two more observations regarding ritual that might better allow us to enter the world of Leviticus 1–7. The first is the recognition that Leviticus 1 is not a ritual. It is a text. And while it is a text about a ritual, this is not the same thing. In fact, texts about rituals likely arise from and certainly highlight the absence of a ritual. Why would you need a text about a ritual if you had the ritual? There is nothing in Leviticus 1 that could not be learned from simple observation, except for the three comments about Yahweh's attitude. The text is a sign of the absence of ritual (see Gerstenberger 1996: 12).

We see this clearly when we note Jacob Milgrom's use of later rabbinic interpretation to clarify our understanding of Leviticus in his groundbreaking commentary (1991: 137, *passim*). The rabbis wrote in the aftermath of the destruction of the second temple, and thus their writings are a response to the absence of these rituals. So it would not be surprising for the rabbis to highlight the interior motivation (guilt) rather than the exterior action (bringing offering) of the one performing the ritual, given that the exterior action is no longer performed. This is the use Milgrom makes of them, in corroborating his own preference for the interior.

Further, insofar as the text becomes part of sacred space and time, the reading of the text becomes part of a ritual. Thus, the ritual 'reading Leviticus' becomes a substitute for the ritual 'animal sacrifice'. While this ritual in its ancient setting is not immediately available for our study, it certainly resembles our own activity in many ways that an animal sacrifice does not. While the ritual performed as a result in Leviticus is not available for our study, the ritual performance of reading Leviticus is.

Leviticus as a text can be read by anyone with access and ability. Currently this includes much of the human race. The sacrifice ritual prescribed in Leviticus can be undertaken by anyone with an animal to kill, and access to an Israelite priest and the Tent of Meeting. Currently this includes no one, and may have included no one at the time that Leviticus was written. Yet this text continues to be read. Often it is read within a ritual context. Sometimes it is read by groups as part of a larger religious ritual; sometimes it is read by individuals as part of their own religious practice. In significant ways, both of these groups 'experience' the sacrifice.

The reading of the text as a ritual is even hinted at in the text itself. In Lev. 1.1, God speaks to Moses from the Tent of Meeting, and commands him to speak the forthcoming words to the people of Israel. Thus the text obliquely commands its own reading. Readers are given the opportunity to stand in the place of Moses while speaking these words to the people.

Thus, the textualization of the ritual is balanced by the ritualization of the text. The command by God to Moses (to speak these words) is fulfilled even while no animals are killed. The movement from animal sacrifice to reading of texts involves some loss and some gain, as all change does. So there is no loss of ritual, only its transformation.

b. *Imaginative Performance*

There is another sense in which the text of Leviticus 1–7 can be thought of as a performance. The text was not written in order to be a sign of absence of ritual. It was more likely written to allow a form of participation in the ritual by those unable actually to participate.[10] Let's call this form of participation *imaginative performance*.

There are two kinds of imaginative performances available to the reader of Leviticus. The first is done by persons who are able to imagine that they are doing ritual, and so 'perform' the action of the ritual in their heads/hearts. They are then allowed to participate imaginatively in the sights, smells, and reactions as if they themselves were conducting the ritual, and thus participate also in the reaction to Yahweh's pleasure.

The other kind of imaginative performance is to imagine oneself as part of the audience, for presumably the pleasure of Yahweh extends to those who observe the ritual even as the ritual is being performed by another. This allows readers to include themselves within Yahweh's favor without needing to presume that imaginative rituals are equivalent to real ones. Since Yahweh's favor extended, presumably, to the original audience of the ritual, then it is only a small leap to believe that Yahweh's favor also might extend to the modern audience of an ancient ritual. Thus, a modern reader is able to participate as audience in an ancient ritual, which is in many ways similar to the form of participation which was the only option available to much of ancient Israel.

Imaginative performance allows Leviticus 1–7 to be analyzed from a number of perspectives. For example, we might subject it to feminist analysis. Scholars have long noted that blood sacrifice is a male realm (Jay 1985: 283; Beers 1992: 12). In Leviticus, the presumed actor in the ancient ritual is male. Although women are not explicitly excluded, it is likely that imaginative performance as audience was the only form of participation allowed to most women. Thus, the modern reader who participates imaginatively, who is allowed to participate only as audience, may be said to participate as woman.[11]

Another type of feminist analysis might note the ongoing effects of this ritual in the actions and language of later cultures. In our society, 'sacrifice' is still a major category for women as they give up their own desires and ambitions for the sake of others. The male violence of sacrifice is also an active part of the world for other women as they become the victim of male violence. As I suggest

10. Again, see Gerstenberger 1996: 12. Whether or not it was written for this purpose, this became its primary purpose once it reached the diaspora community

11. Judith Wegner notes that women are excluded from coming into the 'presence of Yahweh' (2003: 454). In the absence of a temple, this is also true for the modern reader.

in Chapter 5, both the language and blood of sacrifice are still very present in the lives of men and women today.

Another form of feminist analysis might take more seriously the textuality of Leviticus. Nancy Jay in her study of blood sacrifice notes that women are not entitled to an opinion about meaning of action (1992: 11). The movement from action to language is one that is controlled by people who claim the authority to make that movement. This is likely to have been true in general, was certainly true in the case of the textualization of Leviticus, and remains true in our experience of male scholarship explaining Leviticus to both male and female readers.

Imaginative performance is also subject to class analysis. The ideal actor in the ritual is arguably also a wealthy person. While three offerings are described in Leviticus 1 (livestock, bird, and grain), and no formal distinction is made between them in terms of status, the phrase about expiation is not applied to the birds or the grain offering. This allows for the possibility that the ancient actor who brings either birds or grain does so in order to be able to participate imaginatively in the sacrifice of livestock (Lev. 5.7 and 12.8 consider the bird and grain offerings a substitute allowable for economic reasons). This is especially clear when we factor in the possible reaction of the human audience, given the performative aspect of ritual. Likely the audience reacts differently to the sacrifice of a large animal as opposed to the sacrifice of grain. Thus, the modern reader who participates imaginatively also participates as one of the poor, one who is unable to bring an offering of livestock before Yahweh.

6. *General Contents*

The studies that follow are a loosely connected series of chapters focusing on various aspects of Leviticus 1–7. Rather than make one specific extended discussion in this book, each chapter stands alone. Each chapter highlights one particular connection between our world and the world of Leviticus 1–7. The exception to this is the final chapter, which brings together the various studies into a sustained reading of Leviticus 7.

The various readings in this book are meant as a compliment to more traditional studies of Leviticus. While this book bears little resemblance to a traditional commentary, it would not be possible but for the careful analysis and socio-religious background provided by other readers. To suggest an analogy, the ground has been prepared by centuries of careful tending. I have planted some new seeds, and the chapters following are the results.

The chapters that follow are also rooted in another place (to stretch the analogy somewhat). Each of them is rooted in North American culture. The second chapter is about meat processing in Canada and the United States. The third chapter is about the Church of Monday Night Football, an American sporting event that may or may not have parallels in other societies. I will allow readers from other parts of the world to make their own judgments as to whether they have parallel rituals.

Even the chapter on Africa is rooted in North America. While it begins as a study of how Leviticus 1–7 is used and understood in Africa, the purpose of the overview is to help North American readers understand why it is they don't understand Leviticus 1–7. It is precisely in the African acceptance of Leviticus 1–7 that our own rejection is made clearer.

Parts of this study also highlight Leviticus 1–7 as a text. This may be the most significant tension underlying the book. On the one hand, I wish to take seriously the action involved in sacrifice. I do this by noting parallel actions in North American society, even though these actions are not 'theologized' in any manner similar to Leviticus. On the other hand, I want to read Leviticus as a text, as a series of words, concepts, and ideas that leak out into the world and have effects well beyond the performance of the actions prescribed.

For example, the purpose claimed by Leviticus 1–7 is to prescribe certain animal sacrifices that are to take place in the Tent of Meeting by the people of Israel. Yet the language of Leviticus 1–7 is applied to the death of Jesus of Nazareth, and the ideas of Leviticus 1–7 are twisted to form part of the language that is used to explain the current war in Iraq. These connections are ritual connections, in so far as both Jesus' death and war can be understood as ritual action. The connections are certainly performative, since in all of these examples the human action goes well beyond thought or speech. Yet the connection is finally largely discursive. The death of Jesus as an act bears little resemblance to any of the offerings described in Leviticus, and one looks in vain for references to armored vehicles in Leviticus. It is the ideas, however twisted and misappropriated, that connect ancient sacrifice to modern warfare or modern theology.

7. *Tensions*

At the core, two tensions propel this book. The first is the tension between the question 'What do rituals do?', and the question 'What do texts do?'. These questions are not separable in a study of Leviticus, since Leviticus is a text prescribing and influencing action. The questions are not separable in a text which continues to have an effect on the world, even though the actions that result from an encounter with the text are not those prescribed by the text.

The other tension that propels this book is an internal one for me. I have been increasingly drawn to popular culture as a place to find the parallels that help me understand Leviticus. In that sense, this is not a particularly 'religious' study. While Chapter 4 is about Christian readings of Leviticus, they are readings taken from Africa. It is precisely their difference from North American religious activity that makes them useful for me. Only Chapter 6 significantly takes into account the effects of Leviticus in the church, and even there the focus is often upon the effects that the church's ideas have upon the actions of society around them. All of this may lead to the impression that this is a secular reading of a religious text, one that does not take seriously the religious nature of Leviticus.

Yet this is the most religious book I can write about Leviticus. I am an ordained minister in the Mennonite Church, and write and speak as a committed Christian. In many ways this study is a more deliberately Christian analysis of

Leviticus than most others I have read. One thing I am trying to accomplish by using popular culture in this study is to stress that sacrifice was part of pop culture in its day. The distinction that Leviticus makes between clean and unclean, between holy and not-holy, is not the same as our distinction between sacred and secular. This latter distinction does not exist in the text of Leviticus. So, to limit a study of Leviticus to ideas and actions in the sphere that we call 'sacred' is unhelpful. We will only understand Leviticus as Christians when we see the 'religion' of the 'secular' society around us. The best North American parallel to what Leviticus is trying to speak about is not the church, but American Civil Religion. Since it is this Religion that also sets the parameters for the influence of 'religions' in American society (see Marvin and Ingle 1999: 9-11), any serious study of Leviticus must take it seriously. Leviticus wishes to be part of the 'Declaration of Independence' of Israelite peoplehood, and we continue to read it as part of its 'Bible'.[12]

In this sense, this study is both a study of Leviticus from the perspective of the church and pop culture, and a study of the church and pop culture from the perspective of Leviticus. I live in a culture which generally considers animal sacrifice to be a barbaric practice, yet feels proud of the continued human sacrifice practiced in the military (see Chapter 5). Who are the barbarians here? In the church we are often proud that Jesus death proclaims the end of cruel animal sacrifice, yet both our theology and our hands are dripping in the blood of our victims (see Chapter 6). The Jews stopped sacrificing animals two thousand years ago, yet we are still in the process of halting our sacrifice of the Jews.

8. *Conclusion*

As should be obvious by now, this study also ignores the traditional academic boundaries between various disciplines. My general area of expertise is Old Testament narrative. In this study I venture into legal studies, ritual theory, New Testament, early church history, systematic theology, African studies, and pop culture. I recognize that this is a risky venture. I hope it proves to be a fruitful one.

It has also been a study of self-discovery. As a Mennonite, I grew up in a tradition that considered the phrase 'empty ritual' to be redundant. As a fellow scholar noted, Mennonites don't do ritual, they just do the same thing over and over in the same way. So the study of ritual texts is hardly a natural place for a Mennonite scholar. Yet this hindrance was not without advantages.

One advantage this background has is that I began with few presuppositions about how rituals 'should' work, or how they 'are' done. Another advantage is that Mennonites are often more communities of orthopraxis rather than orthodoxy, so I find it easy to understand the relationship between 'religion' and everyday experience. Many of my Mennonite friends understand implicitly the

12. Within the bounds of American Civil Religion, only the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence are officially 'true'. All other truth claims, whether secular or religious, are 'true' within the realms assigned to them by American Civil Religion. Thus, the Bible can have 'religious' truth, but does not dictate foreign or economic policy. See Marvin and Ingle 1999: 9, 28.

relationship between Leviticus and McDonald's (Chapter 2), at least in so far as their faith precludes their worship at the Golden Arches. Finally, my goal is also to produce a truly interesting book about Leviticus. Writing a dull book about Leviticus would only add to people's perception that Leviticus is itself dull. The same could be said for the notion of relevance. Leviticus, I will argue, is an excellent place to begin a discussion on religion and society, on social ethics, on the economics and politics of our time. If I can demonstrate the connection between Leviticus and Monday Night Football, then any number of modern 'secular' rituals could be subject to similar analysis. There is still much life left in these old texts.

Chapter 2

ANIMAL SACRIFICE TODAY

1. *Introduction*

The first seven chapters of Leviticus prescribe the form for the various types of animal and grain sacrifices to be performed at the Tent of Meeting. For most Western readers these chapters describe events that are far removed from personal experience. Most people cannot even imagine why someone might want to study them.

The study of ancient ritual is complicated by a host of factors. First there is the question of language. How do we translate ancient terms into modern ones? Then there are the questions of cultural assumptions and practices that need to be accounted for. Ritual practices are part of a larger cultural system, and cannot be studied separately from non-ritual practices. So an understanding of ritual presumes an understanding of an entire cultural system within its larger historical setting. This makes the study all the more daunting.

Yet it does not help to overstate the difficulties. Despite the differences in time, language, and culture, there are many parts of life that are basic to human existence. People still breathe, eat, and talk. Many cultural practices that separate us from one another also connects us to one another. Part of the task of scholarship is to make these connections. While ancient Israelite meals looked quite different than lunch at McDonald's, the same basic elements were present.

This is also true in the study of ritual. Rituals are not actions that are completely different from other actions. Often rituals are ordinary actions that have become ritualized (Bell 1992: 90). Ordinary actions have acquired a certain pattern and meaning that set them apart, yet the basic elements are still present. So we can compare these basic elements across cultures, and ask how they are or are not ritualized in each culture. Even more instructively, we can look at ancient Israelite ritual practice, discern its basic elements, and ask how Western society responds to these same elements. The study of ritual as a cultural, rather than simply a 'religious' practice can allow us to enter the Bible in ways that would otherwise not be open to us. Our society still operates with significant amounts of ritual and myth. We will understand Leviticus better when we can see more clearly the way we mythologize and ritualize the very actions that Leviticus mythologizes and ritualizes.

The rituals prescribed in Leviticus 1–7 are about food. They are about animals used for food, as well as grain ground and eaten (or not). They are about the

practice of slaughter, the practice of eating, the practice of sharing food. It is likely that the prescriptions regarding sacrifice also influenced the practice of animal slaughter in the whole of Israelite life. Their influence extended beyond the cultic to have an effect on the treatment of animals and the eating of animals in all parts of life. The influence of the prescriptions and ideas in the text extended well beyond specific cultic rituals.

One way to understand the cultural dynamics of Leviticus 1–7 is to look at how Western society deals with similar basic issues. Leviticus 1–7 inscribes or influenced Israel's practice of animal slaughter. How does this compare to Western animal slaughter practices? Leviticus 1–7 talks about the practices of eating meat. Can a study of Western actions and attitudes help us understand both Leviticus and ourselves in new ways?

2. *Where's the Beef?*

There are practices in our culture that provide parallels to ancient rituals. The parallels I will suggest do not come from the arena of the 'religious'. This is because our modern distinction between the 'religious' and the 'secular' does not allow us to perceive usefully the interconnectedness of life in the ancient world.[1] Thus, I have deliberately chosen 'non-religious' activities for these parallels.

I used to work on the killing floor of a modern meat packing plant. This means that I spent my day within sight and hearing of the gun that killed an animal every twenty seconds. Is there any way this experience can serve as a bridge between ourselves and Leviticus 1–7?

Catherine Bell in her book *Ritual* lists six attributes of ritual: formalism, traditionalism, disciplined invariance, rule governance, sacral symbolism, and performance (1997: 138-79). Her characteristics are based on the idea that ritual activities are not an 'essentially different type of activity' than the routine events of daily life (p. 138). Rather, they are ordinary actions that have become 'ritualized', that have taken on the above six attributes.[2] In studying these attributes, she hopes to be able to 'see dimensions of the significance and efficacy of ritual activity' that are overlooked by other methods of analysis (p. 139).[3]

This form of analysis is very useful in the kind of comparison I am trying to make. The activities described in Leviticus 1–7, the actions of slaughtering animals and roasting or cooking them, are, in Western society, not usually thought of as ritual activity.[4] This is because ritual is usually seen as part of the sphere of 'religious' activity, and slaughtering animals is not religious activity.[5]

The person who worked beside me on the killing floor spent his day using a long stainless-steel rod to separate the tracheae from the esophagus of the

1. Nor the interconnectedness of life in our world.
2. The title of the chapter is 'Characteristics of Ritual-Like Activities'.
3. Bell's work consistently focuses on ritual as activity, rather than on the 'idea' or 'meaning' of ritual.
4. In fact, they are not usually thought of at all.
5. The obvious exception being kosher meat.

carcasses going past on the assembly line. He certainly would not have thought of his work as ritual activity. Killing animals was not part of his religious observance. Yet his actions met most of Bell's criteria for ritualized action.

First, the characteristic of *formality* describes all forms of assembly-line work. Tasks must be undertaken in specific ways, and little creativity or spontaneity is allowed.

In regards to *traditionalism*, the assembly line itself is a form of tradition. It arose in a specific historical and cultural context, and is limited to specific types of activity. It specifically countered the older tradition of craftsmen who completed an entire product. It is a form recognizable in many parts of industry in many countries, recognizable because of its links with the tradition.

Both *invariance* and *rule-governance* are also natural parts of assembly-line work. The action dominates, the individual who performs the action is unimportant. She or he can be replaced at a moment's notice by someone with minimal training or experience. The skill of the task, once acquired, requires little thought. A worker can easily write the rules for the task, and workers are made aware of the general rules of the factory that apply to all.

Thus, the activity of the person on the killing floor fits all of Bell's criteria except the last two—*sacral symbolism* and *performance*. Given that all of Bell's criteria are present in the activities prescribed in Leviticus 1–7, the absence of these two criteria for assembly-line work holds a key to our understanding of Leviticus.

First, sacred symbolism. While assembly-line work is not thought of as 'religious' activity, it is possible to argue that the action carried out on the carcasses on that killing floor are the most sacred actions this man performed in his week. If we define 'the sacred' within the context of biblical Israel as 'the core that infuses and informs and guides and explains the whole of life', then arguably the most sacred thing in our society is money. Modern economics claims to encompass all of life. It acts in our society as a complete system, a meta-system for our world. In our culture, religion is just one small part of our lives—it is individual, private, segregated. It is the stock market that acts as a final judge in larger society, an objective measurement of the pleasure or displeasure of our national deity.

It is not usual in Western society to think about money as a god.[6] Yet when we study the actions rather than the rhetoric of our society, the identification takes on more weight. Money, of course, is simply the most obvious sign of a larger system, the economic system, just as God is usually the most obvious sign for a larger religious system. Gods are usually understood to be beings (or Being) whose actions are open to some measure of explanation and attempts at prediction, but who are thought of as beyond direct control. Many actions are taken to influence gods, but the effects are often not sure. Much the same can be said of modern economics.

6. The idea is not new to scholars (see Tillich 1957: 3), but is not part of a general understanding of religion.

In biblical Israel economics was an indicator of the pleasure or displeasure of the deity. Economic success was understood as a sign of the blessing or curse of Yahweh (Deut. 28).[7] In our society, economics is the signified, not the sign. Economic prosperity has become an end in itself, rather than a sign of a greater good. People (now called *consumers*) are encouraged to sacrifice large amounts of time to increase 'productivity', which is said to help the economy. Then consumers are encouraged to sacrifice this money they have earned, to spend more than they have, which is also for the benefit of the economy. All of this obfuscation and suggestion of sacrifice without any personal benefit to either the individual or society sounds like the church at its worst.

These are just a few of the ways in which economics operates as a meta-system for our society. The functions of explanation, prediction, advice to government, calls for repentance and transformation that used to be the role of the religious specialist have now been usurped by the economist and the multitude of specialists devoted to the system.

Another way to illustrate the importance of economics is by understanding the reach of economics into other systems. Recent studies in the area of law and economics suggest that much of modern law is and should be based on the economic outcomes of legal decisions. Good law leads to good economics, and therefore economic outcome can be a factor by which we differentiate good law from bad (Posner 1972: 6). In the Old Testament, law was founded on the will of Yahweh. Law was not open to human debate at all (at least in theory), because one cannot debate the will of a deity. God spoke; humans obeyed or disobeyed. The current shift toward an economics-based legal system means that money has replaced God as the ground of value, as the arbiter of good or evil. If this is so, then actions done for money (jobs) have become the 'religious' ritual of our time.

In the meat packing plant the actions performed on the killing floor are purely about money. Most of the people on the floor have little notion of the relationship between their actions and the final product of the meat processing plant. (Why does the esophagus need to be separated from the trachea?) They do, however, understand completely and concretely the relationship between their actions and their paychecks. They also understand that there is some relationship between the sum of their collective action and the food served in the holy places under the golden arches. Certainly the daily performance of these duties in the name of the most holy dollar and the golden arches is much closer to the ancient priestly duties than are the actions of modern religious specialists, whether pastors, priests, religion professors, or religious broadcasters.

A further way to understand this parallel is to think about the question of status. In his book *Rites and Rank*, Saul Olyan argues that Israelite cultic ritual is 'a productive operation in which social difference is realized' (2000: 4). Briefly, his study demonstrates that the binary oppositions evident in the Bible act to construct a social hierarchy. Part of this hierarchy is the creation of a special status for the priest on the basis of cultic duties, but also the creation of hierarchy among the people of Israel.

7. There are, of course, other voices in the Bible that counter this claim.

In Western society, religious activities no longer confer status. This does not mean that we no longer have rituals or ritual language that confer status. It is simply that status and the rituals of status today are largely economic. The economic markers of status need no longer be reinforced by the religious.

The meat packing plant, like most modern workplaces, was highly stratified, with economics seen as a major indicator of status. Better jobs were jobs that paid more. This is especially true in a work place where there is little chance of other avenues for job satisfaction. In this way, economic rituals have replaced religious rituals as indicators of social status.

So the first parallel between ourselves and the world of Leviticus 1 is to note that ancient religious ritual may have more in common with modern factory work than it does with modern religious ritual. As part of a larger social system, animal sacrifice is more like our jobs than it is to our church services.

The second component of ritual that is missing from the killing floor is *performance*. Part of Bell's understanding of the term performance is action done in public, so that the action has an affect both on the actors and the audience (1997: 160). There is no audience on the killing floor. This was made especially clear to me when I attempted to bring some of that world with me to a larger audience. When I used part of this chapter as a paper for a conference, I requested a ten-minute audio recording from the killing floor of numerous meat packing plants. This request met a stone wall. I could not even get a response to my request.

This came as no surprise, given my experience at the meat packing plant. In order to enter the grounds of this particular plant, even to park in the parking lot, we needed to identify ourselves to an armed guard. There was no sign outside this business identifying what it was. Even the term I am using, 'meat packing plant', hides more than it illuminates, as if meat is something that simply appears, and they merely package it. All of this points to the fear that the owners of the plant have of animal rights activists, and the broader denial that modern people have of the killing that precedes the appearance of meat on our plates.

When television producer Doug Hamilton was working on a documentary for the PBS series *Frontline*, he met a similar wall of silence. In an interview, he notes:

> no major slaughterhouse would let us in their facilities. We spent months talking to every person we could think of in the industry to try to get access both to the plants and some of the executives to talk about some of the conditions and their food safety efforts. Almost all companies would not even talk to us off the record. And one company agreed to let us film inside their plant, only to cancel on us only a couple of days before our shoot. It was indeed disappointing that no executives in major companies within the industry would talk with us. (Hamilton 2004)

The complete absence of performance from modern animal slaughter ritual illustrates a significant difference between the ancient practice prescribed in Leviticus 1–7 and our modern practices. In our attempt to understand Leviticus, it is important to recognize the very different reaction we have to death and blood than did the authors of our text. For example, much ink has been spilled on the meaning of blood in the Hebrew Bible, and on the reasons for sprinkling or dashing blood

against the sides of the altar. My suspicion is that this fascination is our own. A simple explanation for this activity is the effect blood would have on a burning fire. If the blood remained in the animal or was poured on the fire of the altar, it would have taken vast amounts of wood to consume a whole burnt offering. We arrive at theological explanations because most of us have never witnessed how much blood can pour from an animal, especially one whose heart is still beating.

Western society usually prides itself on having moved beyond gory rituals such as animal sacrifice. We are able to maintain this illusion because of the efforts that meat packers make in hiding their work from our eyes. An entire ritual slaughter system remains in place, on a scale unimaginable in ancient societies. By comparison, 1 Kgs 4.22-23 describes the vast, likely greatly exaggerated quantities of meat consumed by Solomon's palace every day (ten oxen, twenty cattle, one hundred sheep, and uncounted wild game and birds). This amount of meat is about an hour's work for a small meat packing plant today.

Besides hiding this activity from ourselves, we also take care to hide the religiosity of our economic system. We compare the sacrifices of Leviticus to modern church services, rather than comparing them to the vast energy and time consumed by the worship of money. False comparisons do not help us understand Leviticus, nor do they help us understand ourselves.

3. *McDonald's vs. Leviticus*

Comparing the ritual actions of Leviticus 1–7 with the ritual actions of animal slaughter in Western society allows a certain degree of understanding that would otherwise not have been available to us. Yet both rituals are part of larger systems. These systems are both action-oriented and language-based. Both can be described by what they do and how they speak about what they do. One way to understand these systems is to compare various aspects of their rituals and practices as components of this larger system.

For Western society I will be using the example of McDonald's restaurants. I do not think McDonald's is unusual in its practices or its language. Rather, McDonald's is chosen because it is ubiquitous. The fact that McDonald's is everywhere means that it is the most successful example of the system at work. Whether one chooses to see McDonald's as the great American success story or the great Satan at work, McDonald's symbolizes an entire socio-economic system by its sheer success.[8]

For much of our society, McDonald's and similar restaurants are the places where people encounter the animals that are killed in the packing plant. They are, of course, not encountered as animals but as burgers. McDonald's, then, is the next link in the ritual chain of animal sacrifice in Western society.

8. Walmart is, of course, the other perfect example of the system at work. The fact that one can now purchase McDonald's food inside some Walmart stores demonstrates that these two companies work in similar ways. On the other hand, there is also a McDonald's in Brentwood Baptist Church in Houston, TX.

McDonald's exists because it successfully fills a need in our society. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that McDonald's fills a demand. The line between the two ideas is not always clear, but it is safe to say that most people would still find a way to feed themselves if McDonald's did not exist.

More broadly, we can also note that most people would find ways to feed themselves if the animals had not been killed at all. Meat is a common part of Western diets, but it is not a necessary part of the human diet. McDonald's sells meat because consumers (people) want to eat meat.

Thus the first parallel between McDonald's and Leviticus is in the area of demand. McDonald's serves meat to consumers as a response to human demand. Leviticus prescribes sacrifice to Israelites as a response to Yahweh's demand (Lev. 23; cf. Num. 6). Whatever the reason for the demand that McDonald's responds to, it is clearly not related to Yahweh's pleasure. It may be about human pleasure, or about time, or about money, but animal sacrifice has been firmly removed from the realm of the self-consciously religious.[9]

Secondly, both systems operate in response to demands from outside. Neither the priests in Leviticus nor the workers in McDonald's are responsible for the demand. Both claim to be innocent servants, responding to authority higher than themselves.

In both cases, however, there is reason to be suspicious of this claim. In the case of McDonald's, the demand for burgers is in part a creation of the marketing done by McDonald's. In the case of Leviticus, the texts that command sacrifice are usually ascribed to writers who are priests. Further, both groups benefit from this activity. So protestations of innocence in the demand might be met with some suspicion.

The parallel between the marketing of McDonald's and the textualization of sacrifice in Leviticus brings another insight into our study of the text. Might it be helpful to understand Leviticus as a form of advertising? If so, then we can again ask new questions of the text.

For example, as advertising, what is Leviticus offering the religious consumer? Who is the competition? How is Leviticus an attempt to separate sacrifice in the Tent of Meeting from the forms of sacrifice offered by the competition? What does the form of Leviticus' advertising tell us about consumers in ancient Israel?

Earlier I suggested that the animals sacrificed for McDonald's were sacrifices on the altar of human demand. Yet McDonald's is at least partly responsible for the creation of the demand. If this is so, then it is also worth asking why it is creating the demand, and what it is actually offering.

As a corporation, McDonald's exists to make money for its shareholders. McDonald's serves beef for profit, rather than as a public service in response to the hunger of the world. On the other hand, McDonald's does not advertise its profit motive in attempting to create or sustain demand. So it must offer something else to entice customers into its restaurants.

9. Of course McDonald's will never actually speak of the process of animal slaughter, although it has on occasion talked about the origins of its beef.

McDonald's advertising offers a wide variety of things to the consumer. Advertising is aimed at a variety of demographic groups, offering each group something McDonald's believes they want. Anyone can make a burger. Most people could make a better burger than McDonald's. So McDonald's must offer something else to attract people. Often that 'something else' is not directly related to the products at McDonald's. McDonald's offers fun, a sense of belonging, a place for friends to gather, toys, smiles, and a wide variety of other 'goods' to people to entice them into buying products.

Leviticus, too, offers people something to entice them into bringing sacrifice. Rituals in general offer people something. Yet it is also clear from the form of Leviticus that the text is not consumer-oriented. As advertising, it isn't appealing or fun or cute. It isn't even particularly engaging on an intellectual level. It assumes an audience that needs what it offers, and offers it to them in stark, simple terms.

In fact, Leviticus 1–7 does not always specify the need being addressed. Some sections begin 'When you bring...' (1.2; 2.1, 4), rather than attempting to coerce people into bringing a sacrifice. Other sections talk about the sin that is being addressed, but do not specify the punishment for non-compliance. Does this form of presentation suggest that the writers are uninterested in creating a need for sacrifice, or is this in fact good advertising strategy?

Advertising today often uses similar tactics to bring in consumers. The idea in advertising is to suggest to the consumer all the good things that will happen *when* (not if) they do something. More subtly, the consumer is shown, not told, these things, allowing them to experience the feeling vicariously. Further, advertisers seldom dwell on the negative repercussions for not taking advantage of their services (except 'paying too much'). In the case of McDonald's, it is hard to imagine any threats they could resort to, since there are almost always other restaurants near a McDonald's. Yet McDonald's can hint at hunger, thereby allowing the consumer to associate McDonald's with the fulfillment of a basic human need.

In this sense Leviticus, like McDonald's, offers people a service by associating this service with hints of reward, associations with fulfillment of basic human needs, and hidden suggestions of possible negative consequences for non-use of the service. Yet, like good advertising, most of this message is very subtle. People are told that they must eat some of the meat (7.16), rather than being enticed with the possibility of partaking in a feast. Punishments for incorrect sacrifice are only briefly mentioned near the end of the prescriptions (7.18, 21).

Yet even as we see the parallels between Leviticus and McDonald's, it is also important to notice the huge gap between the two worldviews that underlie each system. McDonald's is the largest single buyer of meat in the world. As a company spokesman said, 'Because we have the world's largest shopping cart... we can use that leadership to provide more focus and more order throughout the beef system' (Schlosser 2002: 275-76).[10]

10. Note that focus and order are two components of ritual.

As is typical in a consumer society, what constitutes good slaughter for McDonald's is economical slaughter. Yet economics is a more complex system than simple dollars and cents. Economical slaughter also involves a range of factors such as the healthiness of the meat. Due largely to pressure from consumers, McDonald's has altered the conditions in meat packing plants throughout the world. While the American government was unable or unwilling to make the meat packing industry follow new regulations regarding FDA feed rules, a quiet meeting at McDonald's headquarters led to strict observance of these regulations (Schlosser 2002: 275). These actions by McDonald's were not done out of a sense of moral obligation, and they certainly were not for reasons of religious observance. Rather, falling demand for burgers because of the Mad Cow scare lead to the action.[11] Economics dictates ethics.

The contrast with Leviticus is obvious here. The most glaring contrast is with the whole burnt offering (Lev. 1.1-9). It is difficult to imagine an economic advantage gained by having an animal burned to ashes. There may have been social status acquired by this act, but in ancient societies status and wealth are not as intimately related as in ours. In any case, the reasons given for sacrifice in Leviticus have nothing to do with status or economics. All questions of gain or loss are related to Yahweh.

From an economic perspective, a healthy animal burned in a fire is regarded as a loss, a waste. Waste is evil because it is bad economics. In Leviticus, waste is a sign of great good. The whole burnt offering is wasted. In other offerings, the fat is wasted (Lev. 4.31 etc.). Grain offerings are burnt entirely rather than eaten (6.23). All of this 'waste' must have meaning beyond the economic because it does not have obvious economic utility. This does not mean that is has no economic value at all. Deuteronomy 6.3 directly links the following of the law with future economic advantage. The difference is that link between the act of sacrifice and economic reward is through the agency of Yahweh.

These are merely some of the parallels that could be made between Leviticus and McDonald's. Both comparison and contrast provide valuable clues for our understanding both of ourselves and of Leviticus. The point is that our society is different from that of ancient Israel, but not as different as we often think. Very little of our language parallels the language of Leviticus, but our actions tell a different story. If we can make these parallels between the two systems, then we also can begin to wonder to what extent eating at McDonald's (or similar establishments) constitutes worship.[12]

4. *Back in the Good Old Days...*

Another way to relate our world to that of Leviticus comes from another story. My father was a pastor and a farmer at different points in his life, but he never stopped being both. After years of encouragement and cajoling from my mother,

11. For a detailed account of this action, see Schlosser 2002 or <http://www.mccruelty.com>.

12. Or see '25 Reasons Why McDonald's is Better than the Catholic Church' at <http://www.savethehumans.com/instantgrat/thelist/mcdonalds/index.shtml>.

he finally sat down and wrote for his grandchildren some memories of his life growing up as a child on the Canadian prairies. He chose to begin with fall butchering, the annual slaughter of animals to provide meat for the coming winter.

His description of butchering is similar to the Leviticus 1–7 prescription in that it is mostly about actions rather than attitudes. Like Leviticus, the attitudes which are recorded are those of someone who is mostly an outsider (in his case the little boy who is being allowed to watch, in the case of Leviticus, Yahweh). This is not to say that those involved had no attitude toward what they did. The animal they killed likely had a name. It had been on the farm since birth, and was known and had been cared for. Its death also represented survival through another hard cold prairie winter.

According to Bell's criteria, my father's experience does not constitute a ritual only because it lacks one of the six criteria, namely sacred symbolism. There is no suggestion in my father's story that the butchering was meant to influence God in any way. Nor were there special 'religious' observances that were part of the activity. Neither was God invoked as a reason for the action.

The story can form part of a bridge between ourselves and Leviticus because it shows us a world between. The world of my father's childhood is much like mine in geography, language, and many parts of culture. It is also available to me, in that I can ask questions of someone who was there. It is similar to that of biblical Israel in a number of ways. It shows a society that is connected to the land. 'Land' for my father is not an abstraction, but something you clean out from under your nails after a hard day's work. He understood the connection between his food and the earth because he had been involved in every stage of the process: seed to harvest, birth to death, grinding grain, feeding, cleaning pens, then spreading manure back on the fields for another cycle. This cycle is assumed by Leviticus.

My father also understood the poverty of a world like ancient Israel. There is still poverty in my world, but I notice it because some are poor and others aren't. My father says he never noticed they were poor, because everyone else was, too. There were those who were slightly less poor, but only by small degrees. In this setting, extravagance like that of a whole burnt offering is understood differently than the extravagance of the wealthy.

Finally, my father's world had an obvious relationship between work done and food eaten (raise a cow, kill a cow, eat a cow). In my world, the process is much less obvious (read a book, write a paper, eat a beef sandwich). Most modern Westerners are so separated from communities of production that we must be hesitant to claim to understand the 'theology' of Leviticus until blood has dripped down our hands and arms for a considerable amount of time.

In recognizing a world in between, it is also important to notice the impact of current rather romantic ideals of farm life. My children usually experience farms either through books or on television. Farms are bright, clean, healthy places with happy, cute animals who act as companions and interesting pets. There are no crowded pens, there is no manure or smell of manure, animals smile as you pass, and certainly there is little talk of death.

The reality of the modern farm (especially of the factory farm) bears little resemblance to either the romantic farm or to the agricultural world of Leviticus. Workers on the factory farm buy their meat and bread in the store like everyone else. Thus, as examples of agriculture and the culture of the farm, modern farms have little to teach about how ancient Israel understood animals and their slaughter.

Here again we encounter both contrast and comparison. This form of study allows us to see ritual as part of a larger social reality. It also allows a better understanding of the social structures and mythic systems that protect us from ourselves. Children are not encouraged to make any connection between the cute little calves in their books and the burger on their plates. They do not encounter this connection directly because they never participate in the process of making cattle into ground beef.

5. *Modern Ritual Performance*

Thus far I have been making connections between the modern food industry and the rituals of Leviticus 1–7. Hopefully these comparisons have helped in the further understanding of Leviticus' world and our own. The difficulty with making comparisons such as this is that, for most people, neither of these worlds are part of their direct experience. Few people have had the opportunity to work in meat packing, or to be involved in the corporate planning at McDonald's. The danger in making these comparisons is that we will arrive at a purely mental 'understanding' of ritual, rather than a connection we know in our muscles and bones.

This is especially true for scholars of religion. Not only do few of us have experience with blood and raw meat, we are also naturally inclined to intellectual understanding. We tend to live in our heads rather than our bodies. This does not mean, however, that we do not have rituals specific to our vocation. So I am going to use one of these rituals as another example of how modern ritual can show us the world of Leviticus.

However, instead of talking about this ritual, I will try to recreate it. Hopefully this will further enhance the visceral connection you make between the modern ritual and the ancient ones. The scene is the 1999 Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion in Boston. Each year these two organizations hold a joint conference where scholars read papers to each other on a vast variety of topics, all of which are connected to the study of religion. Reprinted below (with some editing) is part of a paper I presented there. It was one of hundreds of presentations at this conference. I had the misfortune of presenting my paper directly following the paper of Stephen D. Moore. This means that the room was relatively crowded for Dr Moore's paper, and then most people got up and left.[13] Much of the rest of the setting for the event is

13. It is important to recognize that we remember emotions long after we have forgotten words. The difficulty in quantifying and describing emotion is one of the factors that makes the study and description of ritual so challenging.

described in the paper. So after beginning with a description of the problem, and going through some of the information contained earlier in this chapter, I continued:

There is one activity that is clearly available for our examination which I believe meets all the criteria for a ritual. That, of course, is the action I am performing right now. Every year we gather, at a place chosen by a higher power, and bring our offering without defect or blemish, according to the prescribed form, and present it before the assembled priests and acolytes, offering it to the god we serve, whether this is Father Yahweh, Hagia Sophia, or the chair of our department.

This ritual, our ritual, connects in two ways to our study of Leviticus 1–7. As I suggested earlier, one of the keys to understanding ritual is to attempt to recognize and describe the performative aspects of ritual. If we turn that lens upon ourselves, we gain a much clearer understanding of our own attitude toward the performative. To put is succinctly, one of the rules that governs the performance of this ritual is that no attempt need be made to follow any of the usual rules for public presentation. We have made dullness a virtue, monotony a sign of true scholarship unfettered by emotional display.

Thus it would be incorrect to say that presentation is seen as a matter of no significance for our ritual. Rather, it has become important to the ritual that physical activity is not allowed, that performance be limited as much as possible to mental performance. Even words that lead to higher levels of adrenal activity that might lead to physical activity are frowned upon as unscientific, unscholarly.

It is no wonder, then, that our studies of Leviticus 1–7 have focused on the mental activity of those taking part in the ritual, even when Leviticus records no mental activity as necessary to the ritual. Not only does Leviticus not provide us a description of the mental activity of those taking part in the ritual, even its readers are not told what they are to think about this ritual, or about this text. Our search for the clues to 'the theology of P' is an attempt to create P in our own image, an activity that is more God-like than scholarly (according to P himself).

Ritual studies, like most other disciplines in our time, has become increasing self-reflexive and self-conscious.[14] Self-reflexivity is not a new idea to members of this audience. What ritual studies contribute is a spotlight on the dichotomy thought/action which we have constructed, and our clear preference for thought. Our analysis of Leviticus has suffered by this, as this is not the focus of the text itself, at least not as it applies to human thought. How might an analysis of Leviticus proceed if we overturned this dichotomy? To do this honestly would require that we act out a response, rather than write it.

There is one final lesson to be learned from the recognition that our activity today meets the formal requirements for ritual, and in significant ways parallels the activity described in Leviticus 1–7. If I can make valid comparisons between Leviticus and SBL, how might the parallels cause us to rethink our attempt to provide commentary on the text?

14. E.g. Bell 1996; Grimes 1982; Jay 1992: 8.

Given the parallels between our activity today and the activity prescribed in Leviticus, we might conclude that the victory of modern inquiry is not a victory over the savage or magical. Our very careful attention to the formal aspects of our ritual suggests that we still wish for some sort of magic to be released by our form. Perhaps, if we are careful enough, if all the correct elements are in place, we can attain the status of the true mage, the status of a 'scientist'. We have retained the formal elements which are the hallmarks of magic in our attempt to become scientists by means of magic.

So our victory is not over the magical elements of the ancient practices, but a victory over God. We have retained the blood (in the form of red ink) and the ritual, we have just eliminated God.[15]

The elimination of God is, of course, not the elimination of God as an object of discourse, but rather of God as an actor in the drama of our rituals.[16] Imagine someone praying in the middle of a paper. It would be a clear violation of the rules of this ritual to speak *to* rather than *about* God. In this way even our mental activity is circumscribed by the rules governing our mental ritual. If we then remember Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum—'the medium is the message'—then what is our message concerning the rituals of our world, and how can our academic medium lead to any sort of understanding of the world of Leviticus? The content of our form suggests that we believe ourselves to have conquered the magical, and retained the spiritual. The form itself suggests the opposite. It would appear that our carefully calibrated devices for cross-temporal voyeurism may turn out to be mirrors rather than telescopes.

6. *Conclusion*

The world of ancient Israel is radically different from the modern Western world. Yet despite these differences, parallels can be made. Basic realities like food and drink still need to be cared for. Social realities and the myths and rituals that accompany them can also provide places of connection. Modern practices can be used to understand better ancient ones.

These connections can also be used to understand ourselves better. Leviticus may still have something to teach us. We are not as far removed from blood sacrifice as we would like to believe. Our preference for hiding the reality of large-scale animal slaughter does not absolve us from the responsibility for this activity. Neither have we abandoned the rituals necessary to placate our deities; more often we have simply changed deities.

Our disgust at the rituals prescribed in Leviticus allows us to continue to hide the realities of our modern world. Biblical scholarship too often aids this self-deception, presenting Leviticus as part of a world far removed from our own. Creative parallels like the ones noted here can help us recapture the ethical and

15. Note the anticipation of this in Eilberg-Schwartz 1990: 24.

16. Eilberg-Schwartz states that, 'the key to a tradition often lies in what it excludes' (1990: 25); cf. R.C. Williams 1985: 432.

spiritual power of Leviticus. Parallels that grow out of experience can also recapture the physical connection Leviticus established between the worshipper and Yahweh. Leviticus, at first glance, does not appear to be ripe for contextual biblical studies. Hopefully I have demonstrated that the reward is worth the effort.

Chapter 3

SACRIFICING FOR THE TEAM: LEVITICUS 4 AND THE CHURCH OF MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL*

Leviticus 4 is a series of instructions concerning responses to unintentional sin, and the impurity this brings. The response provided is the ritual slaughter of an animal, an act that removes the offense. Much has already been written about the specific theology implied in this chapter, its notion of what sin is and what effect sin has on the people, the sanctuary, and God.[1] These are important questions, for we need to understand as best we are able how this ancient society understood its world, and how its worldview is different from our own.

One of the ways used to understand unfamiliar phenomena is to compare them to things already known. This is especially important when encountering ideas that seem wholly strange to us. Certainly the ritual killing of animals falls into this category. Animals die by the thousands every day in the US. We kill them via poison, insecticides, lethal injection, firearms, and electric shock. We do not, however, kill them as part of religious ritual in church; nor do we regularly sprinkle real blood around our sanctuaries. Animals occasionally enter worship spaces on special occasions such as Christmas pageants or the Feast of St Francis, but no thought is given to watching their blood flow down the aisle.

This does not mean that our society is without ritual. Neither does it mean that modern ritual has nothing in common with Leviticus 4. On the contrary, not only does the category of 'ritual' provide connections between ancient events and modern ones, but many modern religious and secular rituals use language that has parallels with ritual sacrifice. Part of the purpose of this chapter, then, is to allow modern readers to connect with Leviticus 4 through parallels made with modern ritual.

Another purpose for comparing ancient and modern rituals is to allow us to see new questions. Since our answers depend upon our questions, changing questions allows us new ways of connecting to ancient societies. Looking more closely at modern rituals can help us ask new questions of Leviticus 4 by observing similarities and differences between ancient and modern ritual.

This chapter will compare the rituals described in Leviticus 4 with the rituals of what is sometimes called the Church of Monday Night Football, the regular

* An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the Bible and Cultural Studies section, Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting, November 2002. An earlier version is also forthcoming in *From Babel to Babylon: Essays on the Biblical World in Honour of Brian Peckham.*

1. See the bibliography in S.K. Sherwood 2002: 89-94; also M. Douglas 1999.

participation in watching a particular football broadcast on television. This is not to suggest that the Church of Monday Night Football is parallel to animal sacrifice in its cultural significance or religious intent. The Church of Monday Night Football is a secular ritual, and one that claims no direct connection to the attitudes or actions of any deity.[2] Yet it is clearly a ritual, an action that has been ritualized to a high degree by our society.[3]

1. *Participants in the Church of Monday Night Football*

To understand Leviticus 4 from the perspective of ritual studies, it will be helpful to classify the participants involved in the ritual. The system for classifying participants will come from an examination of the modern ritual, the Church of Monday Night Football. What does it mean to participate in this ritual? Can we find a system to clarify the different types of participants?

With football, it is possible to distinguish four levels of participants in this ritual. Each level of participant has its own role to play, its own part in the ritual. By distinguishing the various ways people participate, we will be able to understand better the ritual of Leviticus 4.

The first level of participants is the players. The ritual is centered around a game of football a sport involving people throwing, catching, and kicking a ball around a grassy area. The entire ritual could not happen without these first-level participants, and they are the only participants truly necessary to the ritual. It is possible to play a game of football without any other people involved. The rest of the participants are unnecessary to the basic game, although they are necessary to the ritual of the Church of Monday Night Football.

The second level of participants is the people who make the game possible. In this category we could include officials, coaches, trainers, and others directly involved with the players. These second-level participants do not actually play the game, but are necessary to football as a professional sport.

The third level of participants is the fans that are at the game. While their participation is even less direct than that of the second-level participants, the game could not take place without them. They are needed to pay salaries, and are part of the ambience of the game in that they make noise, providing incentive to one team and indirectly impeding the success of the other team.

The fourth level of participants is the fans watching on television. They are even further removed from the actual game itself, for they do not even need to be in the same country as the players. They do not make the effort of actually playing football, neither have they traveled to the game itself. Their participation is necessary only insofar as television stations pay a significant part of the costs associated with professional football.

2. In studying ritual in the Bible, there is little point in trying to distinguish sacred from secular rituals since this is an anachronistic distinction. For an overview of ritual theory, see Bell 1997.

3. For a discussion on 'ritualized action' see Bell 1992: 7-8, 73-74, and Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 2 and *passim*.

Described in ritual terms, each level of participant has its own ritual. The Church of Monday Night Football is not a single ritual, but a cluster of ritualized actions. Even within a specific level of participants, individuals may have private rituals or subsets of persons may have rituals specific to their part of the action as a whole.

For the players, we can clearly see the ritual aspects of football. The whole notion of 'game' or 'sport' has much in common with that of 'ritual' (Arens 1981: 6; Montague and Morais 1981: 12; Price 2000: 208). Further, players are often involved in individual rituals before, during, and after the game.

This might also be said for second-level participants. They are a necessary part of the first ritual, plus they have their own parts to play in the larger action. For the officials, their clothing is specific to their role within the ritual, and sets them apart from other participants.

Third-level participants (fans) are involved in a separate ritual from that of the first two levels. While they are not involved in the 'playing football' ritual, they are involved in the 'going to the game' ritual. This ritual has its own rules. While it is not as rule-bound as the football game, it involves the open-ended performance of a large number of activities. Pre-game tailgate parties, face and body painting, organized cheering, sign making, wearing team colors, the over-consumption of food, all contribute to the ritual and add to its impact. Some of these activities are not specifically connected to the football game (food, drink); others might be seen as symbolic participation in the game (painting, cheering, dress).

The fourth-level participant (television watcher) is furthest removed from the game. Aside from prayer, the fan watching on television expects to have no impact on the game itself. This participant does not actually see the game, but merely sees light on a screen that presents the game as it is happening hundreds or thousands of miles away.

While this participant is far removed from the ritual of 'playing football', and is also removed from the ritual of 'going to the game', the fan watching on television does participate in the ritual sometimes called the Church of Monday Night Football. This ritual specifically involves television because it is a specific media event. As a media event, Monday Night Football involves special music for the opening sequence, certain personalities acting as commentators for the game (e.g. *not* Dennis Miller), special half-time shows, and other parts of the television broadcast specific to Monday Night Football.[4]

For this participant, there are also certain things that may be part of the Monday Night ritual. It is a ritual related to a specific season and a specific night of the year. It requires a working television, the bigger the better. It may also require a whole host of other elements specific to this ritual, depending upon the traditions of the participant.

This ritual is made possible through the medium of television. It would be a different ritual if a radio were used, and would simply not be possible without near-instantaneous long-distance communication. Television creates the possibility of the ritual, although it does not dictate the details of the ritual.

4. On television as ritual, see Goethals 2000: 132; Marsden 1980: 121.

2. *Participants in Leviticus 4*

In a similar way we can easily outline four levels of participants in the rituals of Leviticus 4. The first level participant is the person or group who actually brings an animal to the Tent of Meeting. This is the person who will carry out the actions described in the text, as well as any other actions prescribed by tradition or priestly dictate. The ritual described in the text is initiated for a specific purpose, and is meant to have a specific effect. Scholars have already done much work in describing this ritual, as well as the theology of this ritual as described by the text (see especially Milgrom 1991: *passim*).

The second level of participant in the rituals of Leviticus 4 is the priest. This is not to say that the priest is somehow parallel to a referee or a coach, except in so far as the priest is a second level participant. The priest is directly involved in the ritual, and the ritual as set out in Leviticus 4 could not take place without the priest.[5] Again, significant attention has been given to the specifics of the role of the priest in ancient Israel, and doubtless that discussion will continue.

The third level of participant in the rituals of Leviticus 4 is the persons who are watching the ritual event. Here is where the parallel with Monday Night Football can show us a question that is often neglected. Who is watching the sacrifice ritual? Do they have any part to play? Is their presence necessary or important to the ritual?[6]

The presence of third-level participants is inferred by the second section (4.13-21), where the 'assembly' brings the bull, but only the 'elders' lay their hands on the bull, thus creating a group of those who brought the bull but do not participate in the entire ritual. The presence of third-level participants is also suggested by cross-cultural comparison. Studies of sacrifice in Africa today assume that sacrifice is an action that is done in the presence of a community (Nussbaum 1984: 52; Olowola 1991: 4; Sawyerr 1969: 77).

The existence of third-level participants may have been assumed by the writer and his intended audience, yet these participants are given no specific function in the text. This does not mean that they have no function in the ritual. Witnesses are an important element in public ritual, especially in ritual involving larger social structures. In the instance of the ruler's unintentional sin (4.22-26), if the ruler's sin is known his atonement must be as public as his sin. While not all need to witness the ritual, sufficient witnesses are required to make sure that the word of the ruler's action reach as far as the word of his sin reached. Public sin cannot be atoned for via private ritual, unless the private ritual becomes public knowledge (Lasine 2001: 105-108).

5. It is, of course, possible to perform a sacrifice without a priest. The necessity of priestly participation is a creation of the text.

6. Again, I do not mean to imply that those viewing a sacrifice ritual are parallel to spectators at a football game, except as they exist as third-level participants. The importance of spectators for ritual sacrifice was highlighted for me in a conversation with Dorothy Billings, a professor in the Anthropology department at Wichita State University. She said that 'Who is watching?' is the most important question to ask for a sacrifice ritual.

I suggested that the third-level participant in the Monday Night Football ritual (fan at the game) is involved in a separate ritual from that of the first two levels of participants. While one can hardly imagine tailgate parties before a sacrifice, we cannot leave out the possibility that the third-level participants at a sacrifice ritual have their own specific parts to play, parts that are also ritualized. Thus, third-level participants in the sacrifice ritual can be said to be involved in their own ritual, one connected to but still distinct from those directly involved in the sacrifice. More importantly, we must also acknowledge that the 'meaning' of the event may, indeed *must* be different for the third-level participant than it is for the first- and second-level participants. This is so because the 'meaning' of the ritual *is* its enactment (Bell 1992: 69-93), and only the first two groups actually enact the football game.

Once we understand that ritual creates something other than verbal meaning through the use of time, space, physical movement, and the involvement of multiple senses, then we see that the third-level participant must be affected differently than the first-level participant. This would likely include any 'meaning' that is brought to verbal expression. This is true despite the attempts by the text to contain the meaning of the event via specific direction (specifically 'atonement' and 'forgiveness', 4.20, 26, 31, 35). The text 'explains' the effects of the event to the reader, but these terms cannot encompass the effects that slaughtering an animal, collecting its blood, and watching the carcass being manipulated can have on someone present. A text is simply too antiseptic a medium to be able to recreate the effects of the feeling of warm blood flowing over your hands, and this text is particularly lacking in this sort of detail.

It is when we look at the fourth level of participants in the sacrifice that new questions really become evident. The fourth level participant in Church of Monday Night Football is the fan watching on television, and participating in a separate ritual. These people are the true participants in the Church of Monday Night Football. Similarly for Leviticus 4, there is a fourth level of participants, namely the readers of the text. Like the fourth-level participants in Monday Night Football, the reader of the text is far removed from the events described in the text. In fact, the reader is even further removed than the football fan. While the fan is watching a live game,[7] the reader is not reading about an event that is happening as they read. In fact, the text very carefully removes any illusion of direct participation by locating the event in the 'Tent of Meeting', a building that did not exist even in the writer's own time.[8] So not only does the existence of the text create the possibility of the fourth-level participant, but the text deliberately creates readers who recognize that their participation in the act of reading the text involves imaginary participation in a dead ritual.[9]

7. Watching a recording is not true participation in the Church of Monday Night Football ritual.

8. While Milgrom argues that the 'Tent of Meeting' for P *is* both the sanctuary at Shiloh and the pre-Hezekian Temple (1991: 34) the use of the phrase 'Tent of Meeting' does not directly describe either building, but refers the reader back to the portable structure used during the time of wilderness wandering.

9. Even if the reader is reading in a time when sacrifices are taking place in the temple, this is a different ritual than one that takes place in the original Tent of Meeting.

The existence of the text of Leviticus 4 does not create the ritual of its reading.[10] Just because a text exists does not mean that it must be read in a ritualized way. But the text certainly creates the possibility of a ritualized reading, especially a text that is concerned with ritual space and ritual time. Further, within the Torah itself are the instructions to read the text within a ritualized environment (Deut. 31.11). It is hardly surprising that our earliest records concerning the use of this text are within situations that have a high component of ritual to them (2 Kgs 23.2; Neh. 8.1-3).

This is also where text best performs its task. As others have noted, the text of Leviticus 4 is not adequate as a guide for the first three levels of participants (Davies 1996: 230). It does not provide sufficient details to perform the sacrifice for either the sacrificer or for the priest. Many questions are left unanswered that would need to be known before the sacrifice could be performed.[11] It provides no instructions for the participation of the third-level participant, someone observing the sacrifice. It does not give participants any role to play, words to say, nor does it speak to their importance in a ritual that is clearly open to the view of others. The text as it stands is, however, very adequate for the fourth level participant. In fact, it is precisely this lack of detail that contributes to the text's ability to encourage the fourth-level participant. Readers from a wide variety of cultural settings can easily add their own details, details that fit their specific cultural understandings of the 'proper' method for actions (e.g. how the animal is killed, who does this killing, what words if any are spoken, etc.). In this way the text adapts itself to a variety of cultural situations while maintaining the idea that all readers are participating in the 'same' ritual.

If we can separate out the various levels of participants and the rituals specific to each, then we can also begin to ask new questions about the text of Leviticus 4. What is the effect of reading a text about a ritual? How does the setting of the reading affect the text? How does the setting of the reading affect the audience? What happens when a text is read within a ritualized setting? These are questions that can be asked both of the ancient ritual settings of textual reading and modern settings. They allow us to theologize and politicize the text-as-it-is-read, rather than attempting to describe a text without recognizing the reading process itself.[12]

3. *What Do People Really Believe?*

The book of Leviticus has influence the ideas and beliefs of millions of people throughout history. While the text is not written in the form of a sermon or didactic lesson, it nonetheless affects the way its readers and hearers understand themselves, and their relationship to God and the world around them. Leviticus 4 both complicates and focuses the question of the relationship between text and belief. While the question itself is complex enough, Leviticus 4 complicates it by

10. Or does Lev. 4.1 presume a ritual setting for the speech of Moses to the people?

11. Harrington (1996: 214) assumes that these gaps are filled in by the original audience of Leviticus. See the response in Davies 1996.

12. Another attempt to understand the text-as-it-is-read can be found in Wieseltier 1987.

virtue of its being a text, and a text about ritual, and a ritualized text. Leviticus 4 also helps us focus on the question of belief by providing parameters for the belief system of the participant.[13]

Before getting too deeply into the details of Leviticus 4, it is useful to look briefly at the larger issue of the relationship between ritual and belief. As Catherine Bell has demonstrated, traditional Western thought has dichotomized thought and action, and has privileged thought (1992: 19-55). Anthropologists, working within this framework, tried to identify the beliefs or ideas that stood behind the actions of the ritual. Thus, they would speak about the 'meaning' of a ritual, assuming that ideas put into words were superior to actions themselves. This is part of the 'logocentric' perspective of Western modernity.

More recently, focus has shifted to the actions themselves. The movement of the human body is different than an idea or a thought, and cannot be reduced to it. Theorists have come to speak more about the performance of ritual, rather than its meaning.[14]

It is from within this frame of reference that Leviticus 4, as a ritualized text about specific rituals, allows us to think in new ways about the relationship between rituals and ideas. Leviticus 4 is mostly concerned with description of action. Its detail focuses on performance. It says nothing directly about third- and fourth-level participants and their actions, focusing instead on the actions of first- and second-level participants. It says nothing about speech by any participant.[15] There is nothing about the thoughts or beliefs of any specific participant. In one sense, the whole ritual is silent, without word or even particular thought. Yet Leviticus 4 is just words. It is nothing but words. It is words that hide themselves as simple description of action.

There is one repeated phrase in Leviticus 4 that does speak to the meaning of the ritual, or at least to its effects: 'And they/he/you shall be forgiven' (4.20, 26, 31, 35).[16] The effect of the ritual is related to the action that brings about the necessity of the ritual. The ritual itself is a response to a negative situation, and the reader is assured that the ritual effectively alleviates the problem.

Another phrase in Leviticus 4 further adds to this picture by describing the mechanism of the ritual. While the problem has been identified at the outset (4.2, unintentional sin), and the outcome confirmed a little later on (4.20, sin forgiven), it is not until 4.31 that we are told the mechanism that causes the ritual to be effective. Why or how does sacrifice bring about the intended effect? What is the relationship between animal slaughter and the forgiveness of sin?

13. For now we will work with the focus on fourth-level participants as those for which Lev. 4 provides parameters of belief.

14. See Aune 1996b: 149; Burkert 1987: 152; Driver 1991: 47; Goethals 2000: 129; Grimes 1982: 17; 1996: 281; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 3; Kertzer 1988: 25; Lawson and McCauley 1990: 52; Prattis 2001: 39.

15. Except in so far as the whole is a speech by God to Moses which he is to speak to the people.

16. The effect of forgiveness is not noted in the case of the sacrifice for the priest in 4.3-12, but it is safe to assume that the effect is the same. There is a certain formality to the language here, but not slavish adherence to formula.

As readers we are able to provide a variety of explanations for this mechanism.[17] It is possible that the people involved in these rituals shared common understanding of this mechanism, or that writer and intended audience shared common understanding, so that no explanation was thought to be necessary. Yet one is provided, which means that as readers we are directed toward one particular explanation.

The explanation given is that the smoke on the altar is a pleasing odor to the Lord. This explanation is only partial, for it does not explain the need for the specific blood rituals,[18] or the division of the animal into specific parts.[19] Yet this is the only specific explanation for how the ritual causes forgiveness—forgiveness comes from God's pleasure at smelling the smoke of the offering.

Here is where the question of belief becomes interesting. Did the people of Israel, and do people today, really believe that a deity forgives sins on the basis of the odor of burning animal fat? This would presume a very anthropomorphic picture of the deity—one with a nose, for instance.[20] Further, this is not a deity who is appeased by vocal or felt contrition, nor by promises of repentance or renewal of commitment, but by the smell of burning animal fat, and one that prefers the smell of some kinds of fat to that of others.

This question is further complicated when we remember that the reader is likely one who does not participate in an actual animal sacrifice. If the deity is really only pleased by the smell of burning animal fat, how can a ritual of reading or an act of repentance replace the sacrifice ritual itself? This suggests that, when the text transforms animal sacrifice into textual performance, the existence of the text argues against the truth of its own statements. The words of the text say that Yahweh is pleased by the smell of burning fat; the existence of the text says that Yahweh is (also?) pleased by the reading of a text about animal sacrifice. Thus the existence of the text suggests that people are not to believe the words of the text.

The relationship between what texts tell us to believe and what they really expect us to believe can be illustrated by using the example of Monday Night Football. Specifically, it is the advertisements that are broadcast during Monday Night Football that might help in this search.

Advertisements are a very important part of Monday Night Football. They provide the income for the network, and thus make the broadcast possible. While ads have nothing at all to do with the actual football game, they are a significant part of the ritual for the fourth-level participant. Not only do they provide breaks during the game, advertisers attempt to make ads that are part of the entertainment value of the broadcast. Advertisers do not want viewers to think of ad time as break time. They want people to watch the ads, so as to be able to convince them to buy specific products.

17. More about this in Chapter 6.

18. For example, 4.6-7, the sevenfold sprinkling of blood on the altar, which would not affect the odor of the sacrifice.

19. For example, 4.8-12, for would not the meat also make a pleasing odor? Why then burn it outside the camp?

20. God's nose is mentioned numerous times in the Bible. Are these references to be understood literally or metaphorically?

Ads attempt to convince people to believe certain things. While at a basic level advertisements are ways for a company to increase name recognition or simply inform the consumer about a new product, specific ads appear to attempt to create belief in the potential customer's mind.

Two examples from common Monday Night Football ads should adequately demonstrate this point. One type of ad is the ubiquitous ads for sport utility vehicles (SUV's) and pickup trucks. While all SUV and truck ads are not the same, commonly they feature pictures of a specific type of people. These are usually young, rugged men, often involved in action such as hard physical labor or extreme sports. The SUV itself is used to transport the person to these activities, often through deep snow, thick mud, or even under water.

Another ad featured prominently on Monday Night Football is that for Coors beer. Coors ads are aimed at a younger, less wealthy, and less serious audience. They often feature young men and women at parties having a wonderful time listening to loud music. The men are shown as the 'participants' in the ads, while the women are subjects of the male gaze. Some of the ads feature songs where the 'I' of the song is clearly male.

In both cases the ads appear to present a scene where the viewer is asked to identify with a certain kind of person. The SUV ads attempt to create identification with rugged hardworking maleness, while the beer ads allow the viewer to identify with party-going college-age males. It is this identification that creates a certain association in the mind of the viewer.

Surely no one would claim that the average SUV purchaser really believes that buying an overpriced, uneconomical, pollution-causing vehicle with poor handling will cause them to become ruggedly masculine. And do viewers really believe that buying a certain brand of beer will cause beautiful bikini-clad young women to romp around them in the snow? Certainly if you asked either group of purchasers they would deny believing these statements. Yet those in charge of advertising for these companies do believe that causing this association will somehow increase the purchase of their products.

In the case of the reader of Leviticus the question is even more complex. The text attempts to convince the reader that participation in the sacrifice ritual will cause a deity to forgive sins. This can be understood as an attempt to control the meaning production of the ritual's participant. If the participant in the ritual does choose to bring his or her response to the ritual to verbal expression, the text hopes that this expression will parallel its own.

But as a text that is part of a ritual, a ritual that does not include an actual sacrifice; the text also creates the possibility of replacement—the replacement of the sacrifice ritual by the reading ritual. Yet in so far as the goal of the ritual is the forgiveness of sins, for the reading ritual truly to replace the sacrifice ritual, the reader/listener must to some extent believe that reading the text also causes the same outcome, the forgiveness of sins. Or at least the reader/listener must believe that participating vicariously is as effective as participating in person.

Like ads during a football game, the associations and emotions produced by the ritualized text most likely does not work at the level of consciousness. People

are not expected to articulate the dissonance between what they are reading and what they are doing any more than an SUV buyer is expected to articulate the dissonance between the young athletic male in the ad and his/her own old, overweight, overindulged body. Yet in both cases the text does work. We know that it does work because millions of people have participated in the ritual in which the text is read yet sacrifice is not performed, and they do not understand this new ritual to be inadequate to address the problem the sacrifice ritual is meant to address. The participant in the reading ritual does not go from the reading ritual to a performance of the sacrifice ritual. The sacrifice ritual is no longer performed, yet people presumably do believe that unintentional sins are still forgiven, or else they would find other ways of addressing this problem. While they are unlikely to say that simply reading the text has the same effect as performing a sacrifice, some kind of substitution is made and the text prescribing sacrifice is still read.[21] The new ritual does not replace the sacrifice ritual; it substitutes other things for the sacrifice, part of which is the reading ritual.

4. *Ritual and Enculturation*

One of the effects of ritual is enculturation. People who participate in social rituals do so as members of communities. Sometimes participation in ritual *presumes* membership in a particular community, sometimes participation *enacts* membership, and sometimes it *causes* it. Participation in ritual is not a passive event in a community. It does not simply define the community, it shapes the community.

Again we can look to the Church of Monday Night Football to provide an example, to illustrate the kinds of things we can look for in Leviticus 4. The Church of Monday Night Football as a ritual for fourth-level participants (people watching television) is more than mere entertainment. It involves incorporation into an identity with both social and individual dimensions.

a. *Social Enculturation*

Socially, Monday Night Football is presented as an American event with strong nationalist overtones. Football watching is not a ritual that all Americans participate in. The Church of Monday Night Football is its own community, a subculture within a larger community. This subculture is composed of those who watch the game, and respond with emotion when asked, 'Hey, did you watch the game last night?' Yet football is the quintessential American sporting event, with the Superbowl attracting more viewers than any other television program (Dean 2002: 149).

There are numerous parallels between football and American nationalism that make Monday Night Football a particularly good venue for celebrating and reinforcing and even teaching nationalist sentiment. Dean notes the parallels between the football game and the American frontier spirit (2002: 148-49). He also notes

21. The reasons for reading would vary depending on who is reading and what the specific ritual is. For more on this, see Chapter 6.

the way football enacts the American ambivalence towards violence, an ambivalence he also finds in the Bible (pp. 161-65).

Taking another approach, W. Arens suggests that football best ritualizes the realities of modern American society—the complex division of labor, the specialization, the use of high-tech equipment, the violence, the division between the sexes (1981: 4-5). Susan Montague and Robert Morais argue that football is a small-scale model of the business world, a world that is otherwise too complex to be easily summarized. Football upholds for the modern worker the model of personal self-sacrifice (1981: 16).

In a similar way, Leviticus attempts to provide a basis for the construction and continuation of 'Israelite culture'. Culture is always both a given reality and a work in progress. Ritual provides one means of cultural construction. Yet just as watching Monday Night Football on television provides some measure of culture formation and cohesion, so reading a text about sacrifice could provide a similarly vicarious experience of the goals and dreams of culture.

The nationalism inherent in Monday Night Football is connected to support for America's military. This was especially noticeable in the wake of September 11, 2001, with regular references made on air to 'our military personnel', and pictures of American troops watching from other parts of the world. Even a year later, Monday Night Football featured advertisements of individual members of the armed forces, sponsored by the National Football League. This was also noticeable on the November 11 broadcast of 2002, where military personnel were highlighted in the live pre-game show, a portion of which was shown during the half-time show on television (see Philadelphia Eagles 2002).

The advertisements about the armed forces, like any advertisements, are attempts to influence the participants to believe in a specific kind of world and a specific kind of nationalism. This is a nationalism that equates patriotism with support for a particular political/military agenda. In the eyes of Monday Night Football, love of country is equated with support for a strong military. There is nothing natural about this connection. There are many possible ways to be a patriotic American while not supporting the continued use of military force in many parts of the world. This option, however, is disallowed by the associations in Monday Night Football.

A similar thing happens when someone participates in reading Leviticus. The text of Leviticus is also an attempt to create a particular kind of social identity. In the case of Leviticus 4, there are a number of ideas that indicate the kind of world the reader is indoctrinated into.

First, Leviticus 4 suggests a particular type of political organization. This arises in 4.22-26. The individual dealt with in these verses is a *ns'*, a ruler or leader. Thus a particular structure is invoked here, and the reader is lead to the idea that communities are naturally led by a *ns'*, a man with particular authority. These people are understood to be capable of sin; they are also within the legal structure that binds others. These ideas are presented to the reader as natural, as simply the way things are, rather than argued for.

The most important way that Leviticus 4 creates social identity is in 4.2, where God tells Moses, 'Say to the Israelites...' One of the effects of participation in the reading ritual is to enculturate the reader within the society known as 'Israelite'. It creates in the reader a self-identification. Readers, especially in a ritual setting, are moved toward identification with this group of people known as 'Israelite'. In this sense, 'Israel' is a creation of the text. The text, especially when read in a ritual setting, becomes a major index of what it means to be part of 'Israel'. The text, as a portable object, can create units of 'Israel' at any point on the globe, regardless of the genealogy, skin color, and national origin or, given the possibility of translation, even the language of those who participate in the reading as a ritual event.[22] Yet the text does not merely create 'Israel', it creates a specific type of 'Israel', one with specific social patterns that are regarded as 'natural' by its members.

The power of this text to create 'Israel' and 'Israelites' is noticeable even in settings that are not specifically religious. When teaching Old Testament classes, I find that most students soon begin to take on the perspective of the 'Israelite', the audience intended and created by the text. This is true despite the fact that none of my students are Jewish, and some are not Christian, and so have no religious motivation to read the Bible from an insider's perspective.

While there are a number of possible explanations for the tendency of students to read the Bible from an insider's perspective, part of the answer lies in the ritual setting of the classroom. In undergraduate studies textbooks function as repositories of truth, and professors are invested with the authority of the priests of the cult of truth. In this ritual setting the Bible as textbook can be drawn into the role of provider of truth, rather than object of study.

In a variety of settings, then, the text of Leviticus has the ability to create in the mind of the reader the idea of 'Israel' and his or her own membership in this community. Christians may explicitly view themselves as members of 'spiritual Israel', but there is a sense in which membership in 'Israel' is always a 'spiritual' reality. 'Israel' in Leviticus is created on the basis of a story that is specifically about others (people long dead), rather than about oneself (Wieseltier 1987: 32). A personal connection to the people of 'Israel' is through the text, through the reader's act of identifying with the 'us' of the story.

The same, of course, can be said for the creation of Yahweh. Leviticus 4 makes no arguments for the existence of Yahweh, neither does it explicitly relate Yahweh's attributes. Readers are merely informed about Yahweh's speech (4.1), Yahweh's commandments (4.2, 13, 22, 27), Yahweh's presence at the sacrifice (*lpny yhwh*, 4.4, 6, 7, 15, 17, 18, 24), and are told that Yahweh is the recipient of the sacrifice (*lyhwh*, 4.31, 35); in this way the text 'creates' a particular image of the deity. This creation is especially effective in religious ritual settings, where the text itself takes a key role as canon, a repository of truth for those invested in the ritual (Aichele 2001: 2).

22. Here it is useful to separate specifically ritual from non-ritual readings of the text. This identification is less likely to happen when the text is read in classroom settings, or by individuals out of curiosity.

A further effect of looking to the Church of Monday Night Football for parallels is to recognize that in some sense neither society is a 'real' society. Monday Night Football is a television program, and watching television at a certain time of the week does not create a society. It does not even create a subculture, except as a small part of larger American culture and specifically American sports culture. Monday Night Football attempts to create the illusion of membership in a society in order to create fan loyalty. This loyalty is to extend beyond loyalty to team or to football or to sports. In packaging itself as a unique social event, it wishes to create an audience loyal to the particular package presented exclusively on Monday nights. It is not, however, a serious attempt to create a subculture.

In comparison Leviticus 4, as part of a larger text, is an attempt to create a culture, complete with laws, government, social and economic systems, food and drink rituals, and everything else that goes into the creation of a unique society.[23] Yet in this sense Leviticus 4 creates membership in a society that is significantly imaginary. For example, the ritual prescribed in Leviticus 4 is to take place in a building that no longer exists, the Tent of Meeting. It had certainly long ceased to exist by the time of the writing of this text. Yet the text presents ritual sacrifice at the Tent of Meeting as part of its picture of 'Israel'. Leviticus 4 retains its place as a text that defines 'Israel' even when sacrifice is no longer performed. So while the text creates a specific type of 'Israel', it also creates an imaginary one. Leviticus 4 is a more serious attempt to create a society than is Monday Night Football, yet both societies are illusory in significant ways.

b. *Individual Enculturation*

Enculturation includes not only the creation or reinforcement of a particular model of culture, but also attempts to affect how individuals might see themselves within that culture. For example, a person might be shown roles that they might play within a cultural context. Or they might be shown ideal individuals, examples of what it might mean to be a 'good man' or 'perfect woman'. These examples are aimed at the individual, but these individuals are still people within a specific cultural context.

In the world of Monday Night Football, a participant is offered a number of possible models for what it might mean to be a member in good standing within that (sub)culture. The primary example for the viewer is the players. They are idealized as representing manhood at its finest.[24] They are praised for their determination, drive, toughness, and a host of other specific characteristics. Viewers who chose to idolize the football players then compare themselves to a specific set of characteristics, and may attempt to emulate this ideal.

Another place where individual identities can be defined is in the advertisements. Ads provide a wider variety of images. They are directed at specific

23. This is especially true when the text is incorporated into a larger ritual structure.

24. Women are unlikely to see football players as examples for themselves, so the ideal is clearly male. The question of whether this also leads to an idealization of manhood as the ultimate symbol of humanity will be dealt with below.

demographic groups, people more likely to be watching Monday Night Football. Yet even in the implied audience of the advertisements there is variety. Automobile makers target males with sufficient expendable income to afford $40,000 Sport Utility Vehicles. Beer makers target younger audiences, those more likely to spend limited income on beer parties. Cellular telephone companies target 'regular folks', with attention paid to not alienating any potential customers.

Even in targeting audiences, however, advertisements create ideals and types for the audience. Truck buyers are shown tough men with tough jobs, or successful men where certain vehicles are necessary to display individual success. Beer advertisements, most notably those for Coors Light, highlight anti-intellectual 'just wanna have fun' attitudes. These advertisements are part of the ritual of Monday Night Football, that is itself an attempt to create a certain type of individual.

In Leviticus 4 the reader is also directed toward an idealized individual. Here the individual is one who is deeply concerned with sin and its effects. Even unintentional sin is cause for response. Not only should individuals be concerned with their own sin, they are also concerned with the sins of the king, the priest, and the sins of the entire community. By prescribing a ritual of response to sin, and repeating it for a number of different contexts, the text creates a reader who is constantly alert for sin, and who is then willing to respond in significant ways to this sin.

This effect is created even when the reader has no direct access to a means of sacrifice. While the response to sin is specified, what underlies the response is a vigilant attitude toward the detection of sin. The attitude can be maintained even without the means for response as directed by the text. Someone can still be concerned about sin even when they cannot sacrifice.

This attitude is a creation of the text. The existence of a ritual does not create this attitude. Rituals for sacrifice can exist without everyone being on guard against sin. Even the direct involvement of an individual in this ritual does not necessarily create this attitude. Rituals for unintentional sin could be associated with specific times, seasons, or places (e.g. 'we do this when we go to the temple'). The attitude of vigilance is created by the text, even in the absence of the ritual being described.

There are certainly other attitudes and responses that are created by the text. The point here is simply to show that Leviticus 4 creates a specific ideal character. Participants in the ritual of reading Leviticus 4 are drawn in to this idealization and may make it their own. This effect is subtle and indirect. It is enhanced by the graphic details of blood and fat, fire and forgiveness. The reader is drawn in through description of sight, smell, sound, and touch.

There is certainly nothing automatic about the effect. Modern North American readers are as likely to be repulsed as attracted (Cohen-Kiener 1997: 46). Yet even this repulsion indicates the power of the writing and its ability physically and psychologically to affect a reader. It may even be that the reader who is repulsed by the text is still drawn toward the picture of the ideal individual offered by the text. A reader may be disgusted by sacrifice as response, yet still take on the attitude of vigilance against sin.

5. *Male Religion*

Another parallel between Leviticus 4 and the Church of Monday Night Football is that both are examples of male religion. On the surface both appear to be rituals engaged in by males, with little or no thought given to the possibility that women might participate as equals in the ritual. Closer inspection reveals that the situation is not quite so simple.

The Church of Monday Night Football is, of course, not a formal organization with defined structure and rules. The phrase is more a description of how people engage in watching a certain television program than a description of a true organization. Even so, most Americans share a common understanding of what this 'church' is, and the place of men and women within it. The general norms for watching Monday Night Football are part of the *sensus communus* of American culture, and most Americans share the understanding that this is a male-centered event.

Football itself is traditionally a man's game. While women have long histories of involvement in baseball, hockey, basketball, and most other major American sports, there is little parallel in women's football. There are two women's pro football leagues listed on the internet, but little attention is paid to these leagues in the mainstream media. In high schools and colleges, women's football games are called Powder Puff games.

Just because football is dominated by males does not mean women are necessarily disallowed from watching, or naturally disinterested. Women can watch television with the same skill as men, can yell and cheer and eat just like men. Yet clearly part of ritual of the Church of Monday Night Football is its status as a male event. The role of women is supportive: they are to prepare the food and keep it coming; they must allow time for the event and clean up afterwards. In this sense it is not a male-only event but merely male centered. It reinforces the male and female place in the world, giving each sex roles to play that highlights male priority in the ritual. As a social ritual, these roles are part of the establishment of *male* and *female* identity in society, based on an oversimplified binary construction of human reality.

In Leviticus 4 the ritual is presented as a male-only ritual. The priest, king, community, and individual who bring the sacrifice are all assumed to be male. Women do bring sacrifice (ch. 12), but not for these reasons. This ritual of sacrifice is a male event.

The assertion that blood sacrifice is always a male event has recently been made by two authors. Nancy Jay asserts that blood sacrifice is a male event, based on her work as an anthropologist (Jay 1985: 284). William Beers comes to the same conclusion as Jay, although he does not offer verification (Beers 1992: 10). He uses object-relations psychology and self-psychology to explain why this is so.

Yet Jay also recognizes that women are not disallowed from sacrifice *as women*. Rather, it is women 'as childbearers or as potential childbearers' (Jay 1985: 284). While this clarification only excludes women, it does not exclude all

women. Thus, it also undermines the simple male–female dichotomy and creates a tripartite system (men; women who are childbearers or potential childbearers; women who are not childbearers or potential childbearers).

In Leviticus just the opposite seems to be the case. The only women who are directed to bring sacrifice are childbearers (Lev. 12). While the woman does not place her hands on the victim as the man does in Leviticus 4, it is still she that brings the sacrifice, rather than having her husband bring it on her behalf. She also does not perform the sacrifice, and the priest who performs the sacrifice for her is clearly a male.

Even with this caveat, it is clear that Leviticus 4 understands sacrifice to be a male event. The only mention of women in relation to sacrifice is in Leviticus 12, specifically in connection with a female-only source of uncleanness (childbirth). Otherwise sacrifice is the realm of men.

In this context, it is important to remember that Leviticus 4 is a text. It is an idealized prescription for a sacrifice ritual. It does not describe an actual event, nor does it attempt to describe the variety of ways similar events might have taken place outside (or even inside) the official cult. As the prescription for an event that no longer takes place at all (since the Tent of Meeting no longer exists), it sets out an ideal world.

In this setting, Leviticus 4 is also part of the way 'male' and 'female' are delineated in 'Israel'. That part of the text is also idealized—a simple dichotomy based on biology. In this instance, women are categorized through exclusion, or more precisely they are categorized by being ignored. This does not mean that they are completely absent from the ritual. It is likely that the part of the animal not 'turned into smoke' would be eaten by the participants (see the prescription for the well-being offering in 7.11-18). In this scenario, it is also likely that the meat of the sacrifice would be eaten with other food. It is unlikely that men would do all of the preparation of this other food. In this way, the women have a significant part to play in the ritual itself as experts in food preparation and as those generally in charge of the household as it incorporates ritual sacrifice into its activities. It may also be that women form part of the group that witnesses the offering (the third-level participants).

These various roles are not disallowed by the text. In fact, the text does not specifically disallow women from bringing sacrifice. Could Athaliah have offered sacrifice according to the prescriptions of 4.22-26 while she reigned in Jerusalem (see 2 Kgs 11.1-4)?[25] Might a woman bring a sacrifice as one of the 'people of the land' (Lev. 4.27)? These options are not discussed.

The whole scene changes when we think about fourth-level participants. The reader of the text is no longer someone bloody and sweaty from the effort of sacrifice outdoors in the sun and the wind. The reader does not need to be among other men, does not need a priest present, and does not need the sanction of a

25. It is, of course, unlikely that the prescriptions of Leviticus existed during the reign of Queen Athaliah. Within the world of the text, however, she is still responsible for upholding these laws and could be condemned for disobeying them.

specific social group. Reading texts is not a usual part of male bonding rituals, and does not create community the way blood ritual would.

Yet reading is part of traditional 'male' activity. In Western tradition men are part of the realm of words/ideas/culture, while women are associated with the opposites—actions/bodies/nature. Men are given priority in education, and have usually formed the leadership in theology and philosophy. So even in the form of a text, the ritual of sacrifice is remains within the 'male' realm.

This is even truer when the text is read in a ritual setting. Texts can maintain and enforce social boundaries when reading is confined by ritual context. For millennia the text of Leviticus has been under the ritual control of men. So while women are able to read as well as men (presuming they are taught), women have been disallowed from reading sacred texts in ritual settings.

In both the Church of Monday Night Football and the reading of Leviticus women are not disallowed from participating by the nature of the media. Women can watch television and read just as well as males. It is within the realm of ritual watching or reading that women are excluded.

6. *Conclusion*

At first glance Leviticus 4 has little in common with the Church of Monday Night Football. One can hardly compare football with religious slaughter of animals in response to sin. Yet when we take seriously the textuality of Leviticus, when we look more closely at the process of reading and how it might affect the reader, we can begin to see how this is like the process of watching a particular television broadcast, especially a broadcast with as many ritual elements as Monday Night Football.

This type of analysis cannot replace the study done in a traditional commentary. It is a supplement to the usual questions asked of Leviticus. It does, however, highlight the role that Leviticus continues to play in contemporary society. When Leviticus is read, especially in a ritual setting, it is read in certain ways, and it has certain effects on people that go well beyond the analysis found in traditional commentaries. Reading Leviticus is different from performing sacrifice, and the text-that-is-read is the only object available to us for study. As scholars we need to take seriously the textuality of Leviticus and our own position as readers.

Chapter 4

Ritual Sacrifice in Leviticus, Africa, and North America

One of the chief difficulties Leviticus poses for the modern Western[1] reader is the lack of direct parallels between modern Western religious/cultural practice and the practices Leviticus prescribes. Thus far in this study I have suggested various ritual parallels (animal slaughter, scholarly papers, sports) between Western practice and animal sacrifice that allow us better insight into ancient practice, and the real though usually overlooked parallels between our world and ancient Israel.

The use of modern Western practices as models for understanding ancient rituals and texts allows us an imaginative bridge between two otherwise quite different worlds. The bloody, sweaty, physical work of offering sacrifice is so different from the sanitized air conditioned logocentric worship of much of Western culture. The use of dying animals and warm blood to communicate with the world of spirit does not easily fit with Sunday-go-to-meetin' clothes or the use of computer-generated graphics for atmosphere.

Another avenue for exploring the gap between Western readers and the text of Leviticus is to examine how people in other parts of the world respond to Leviticus. While this book is deliberately written for a Western audience by a white North American, I cannot overlook the fact that much of world Christianity relates to Leviticus much more directly than I do. In fact, it is likely that most of world Christianity finds more points in common with the ritual and language of Leviticus than does white Western scholarship.

Given this reality, the first part of this chapter will look at animal sacrifice as it is discussed in the context of Africa.[2] Africa is one place in the world where animal sacrifice is still regularly practiced. It was part of traditional African religions, and remains a practice in some African churches. It is so much a part of African traditional religion that one African scholar has concluded, 'No sacrifice, no traditional religion' (Adewale 1988: 106). African scholars have written extensively on sacrifice and Christian responses to it.

1. 'Western' civilization is not a monolithic culture. The same is true for African cultures. The use of the term 'Western' and 'African' in this chapter is a shorthand for the many differences between Euro-American cultures and African cultures. Hopefully my characterizations will be broad enough that most Europeans and North Americans will recognize themselves. For a further discussion, see below, p. 46.

2. I am greatly indebted to Grant LeMarquand for his extensive bibliography on African biblical scholarship (2001) as well as personal information on finding sources.

My experience in Africa is limited to six weeks visiting in South Africa (what my sister in South Africa calls 'Africa for beginners'), so in this part of the study I will attempt as best as possible to allow African scholars to speak for themselves. I have mostly limited my research to African scholars, doing much less reading of Western scholars who have studied Africa.

This study is not an attempt to add anything to African biblical scholarship. The more modest goal is to allow Western readers to understand better Leviticus by encountering it through the words and lives of Africans. Their easy and straightforward connection to the sacrificial practices prescribed in Leviticus will not only emphasize the distance between Western society and that of ancient Israel, but also clarify the nature of the cultural gap.

Part of the difficulty when reading Leviticus in a North American setting is that we do not see what we do not see. Our culture is so removed from Israelite culture that we are unable to fill in the cultural gaps in the text. Leviticus assumes many things about the nature of life, community, physical and spiritual practice. Since we do not share these assumptions, we are often even unaware of our blindness.

This chapter will clarify some of these assumptions by reading Leviticus through African eyes. The many parallels between African and ancient Israelite society will allow a better understanding of the cultural world that is assumed in Leviticus. Hopefully African scholars will allow us to see our blindness.

When looking at other cultures, however, it is important to keep in mind the many parallels between Western culture and Leviticus. To understand Leviticus, however obliquely, through the eyes of Africans is to continue to think of Leviticus as the text of 'others'. The temptation is to maintain the attitude of an armchair traveler, 'understanding' other cultures while sitting comfortably in a world far removed from the object of our gaze. The temptation is not so much to sanitize our view of the 'other' as to sanitize our view of ourselves, to project the blood and sacrifice in our society onto the other. We risk increasing rather than decreasing our distance from both the ritual and the text.

To counter this possibility, I will also suggest parallels between the world of Leviticus and Africa and various parts of North American cultures.[3] Sometimes the world of Leviticus is less 'other' than we would like it to be.

1. *Africa*

If we were to travel to Africa to observe the rituals and culture of its people, we would first need to decide which part of Africa to visit. There are significant differences between North and South Africa, between East, West and Central. Once we decide which region or country to visit, most countries consist of various tribal groups whose tribal boundaries do not coincide with national boundaries. Even if

3. There is, of course, no single homogeneous 'North American culture'. Recognizing this allows for the possibility that some parts of North American culture can more readily identify with the culture of Leviticus than other parts.

we confine ourselves to a specific tribal group, there may be significant differences in ritual and religious practice between various clans in the same tribal group.

Given this reality, it is wise to begin a study like this recognizing that we cannot speak of 'African experience' or 'African traditional religion' as a single entity. For the purposes of broad generalization, we might want to talk about the role of ancestors in African traditional religion, but we need to note that the Maasai do not have a significant place for ancestors in their religious system (Priest 1989: 116). Examples of this type could be multiplied endlessly.

Nevertheless, African scholars regularly talk about Africa as a single entity, somehow distinct from other continents. Phrases like 'African Christian theology' (Ngewa 1987: 3) and 'African rituals' (M.A. Oduyoye 1992: 9) are a common part of African biblical scholarship. Ngewa deals directly with this question when he speaks of 'striking similarities' between African peoples, especially in regard to the manner and means of worship (Ngewa 1987: 46).

The assumption of an African worldview is also found in the title of books such as *The Bible in Africa* (West and Dube [eds.] 2001), *Jesus in Africa* (Bediako 2000), and similar collections of writers from across the continent who claim 'Africa' as a meaningful generalization. While Gerald West, a white South African scholar, does 'problematize' the idea of 'Africa' and 'Africanness' in his overview of 'African Biblical Interpretation' (2001: 49-50), he does so only at the end of an article that uses the terms unproblematically.

In one sense, this should come as no surprise to Western readers, given the casual way I write about 'Western readers' or 'American culture' as if black southern Pentecostals experience the world the same way as Latino Catholics in Seattle or Irish atheists living in Munich. Further, despite the great variety within Africa, Africa is clearly a distinct, unique place. Even the casual visitor to Africa from North America becomes quickly aware that 'Toto—I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore'.[4] For the purposes of this discussion, I will continue to speak of African religion and experience as a broadly unified reality, in keeping with the usage of African scholars, and recognizing that, for myself, 'African' stands as a broad example of 'modern other', someone who lives in the same century as myself yet sees the world in a significantly different way.

2. *Social Parallels*

One of the major reasons that Africa can serve as a useful bridge between Leviticus and modern Western readers is that African culture is similar to ancient Israelite culture in significant ways.[5] In fact, one of the major focuses of African biblical scholarship has been to outline the social and religious parallels between

4. From *The Wizard of Oz*, by Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allen Woolf. Transcript found on <http://www.un-official.com/The_Daily_Script/ms_wizoz.htm>. Copyright 1939 by MGM.

5. 'Israelite culture' is itself a problematic term, since there are important differences between Israelites of various social status, time periods, theologies, geographies, and so on.

the two.[6] It needs to be noted that this scholarship is a response to a concrete historical reality. Scholars did not 'discover' the parallels between African culture and the Hebrew Bible. Rather, scholars observed that much of Christian practice in the African churches comes out of the Hebrew Bible rather than the New Testament. Justin Ukpong notes that African Instituted Churches[7] take their *ideas* from the New Testament and their *practices* from the Old Testament (2001: 588). Thus scholarship on this issue is a response to practice, an explanation for something that is often observed in African churches.

The parallels between Israelite and African culture have been noted by a number of scholars. John Mbiti notes specific laws and 'customs like sacrifices, offerings, festivals and prayers' in the Old Testament that are like African traditions (1978: 15). Joseph Kaungya makes a list of eighteen parallels between Jews and Christians from an African perspective, including practices like polygamy, bride wealth, sacrifice, feasts, belief in evil spirits (1978: 32-34). This is an especially interesting list since neither Jews nor Christians in the West would feel comfortable with much of it.[8]

It is also helpful to note that many of these parallels are those of established social practice, rather than ideas or 'theology'. Africans read the Old Testament and recognize a social world that parallels their own, rather than a set of ideas to encounter. Even the category of 'belief in evil spirits' might be better understood as 'experience with evil spirits'.[9] This applies directly to sacrifice, which in Africa is an ongoing traditional practice rather than a theological concept. Western Christians may understand Jesus' death as a sacrifice, but African Christians will often have experienced sacrifice directly. In this way Christian ideas are connected to lived experience.

This connection between text and lived experience is lacking in Western culture, at least in the form of direct parallels. Yet it is also important to recognize the parallels that do exist. For many Western Christians, the experience of being 'born again' relates directly to the various ways the Bible talks about forgiveness and salvation. Through this and many other ways, people in the West have experiences that allow them to understand Leviticus with their bodies, rather than just with their minds

Still, even for the African, 'Jesus' death was a sacrifice' remains in the realm of idea, connected to lived experience but abstracted from it. People who have participated in animal sacrifice will understand sacrifice in a unique way, but Jesus'-death-as-sacrifice remains an abstraction. Participating in animal sacrifice is different from participating in a ritual of human execution. Africans may be

6. For an outline and critique of the 'comparative model', see Anum 2001. For bibliography, see 'Studies in the Use of the Bible in Africa/Hermeneutics' in LeMarquand 2001: 642-62.

7. 'AIC' is a common acronym used to describe churches in Africa not founded by Western missionaries. They are alternately called 'African Instituted Churches' or 'African Independent Churches'.

8. As Kaungya himself notes, most Africans have only met Jews through the Old Testament, and have no contact with modern rabbinic Judaism (1978: 32).

9. See the descriptions in Somé 1994.

able to understand sacrifice, but understanding is not equivalent to participation. Sacrifice done is sacrifice experienced, and abstraction does not compete well with experience.

a. *'Religion'*

Much of life in Africa has a lot in common with the type of society assumed in the Old Testament. First, neither group has a separate realm of 'religion' (Mbiti 1978: 15). Religion is simply an integrated part of life, not relegated to specific times or places. This can be seen clearly in the writings of Patrice Somé. Somé has written about his life growing up in an African village, and attempts to describe its world in terms that make sense to Western readers, while not downplaying the vast differences between worldviews (1993 and 1994).[10] His stories simply assume the integration of the 'religious' and the 'secular'.

The lack of separation between religion and the secular world provides us not only with a parallel between African and Israelite cultures, but an understanding of our own distance from Israelite culture. Ideas like this do not need to be explained to an African audience because they understand it experientially. It is not an 'idea' for them, it is the way the world is. Thus, J.J. Burden in his study of Old Testament magical practices can describe the attitude of the Old Testament as 'realistic' (1973: 108). One can hardly imagine a Western scholar offering an opinion like that, as magical practices are not part of predominant Western experience.

Yet while it is unlikely that a Western scholar would offer such an appraisal, it is not unlikely that some Western Christians would agree with Burden. Much of Western society makes a sharp distinction between sacred and secular, but a significant part of Western society also makes a distinction between the world of the scholar and the world of reality. Lay Christians may connect to the world of Leviticus because they understand it as 'true' regardless of whether they have had similar experiences. The difference between African scholars and Western scholars may not be one of worldview so much as African willingness to engage the text as related directly to their situation (LeMarquand 2004: 8-10).

b. *Community*

The second aspect of the Old Testament that relates directly to African life is the assumption of community. While I have found no direct study of this parallel, I suspect this is because it is simply too obvious to need explanation.[11] Both in the Old Testament and in traditional African life, all of life is lived within a stable, homogeneous, interdependent community. This is especially significant for our study of Old Testament ritual. The existence and continuity of ritual depends upon stable communities that maintain continuity over time and have cohesion of

10. Somé was sent from his village to the West to act as a bridge between the cultures, and thus writes as a kind of cultural translator, while insisting on the truth of the African worldview and the poverty of the Western one.

11. Somé notes that 'No one can practice tribal magical arts without a stable and supportive community', otherwise the art becomes unstable and dangerous (1994: 61).

worldview and practice. Whatever it is that we can do ritually in postmodern Western culture, it will bear little resemblance to ritual as enacted inside traditional African villages or that in the Old Testament due to the lack of continuous community tradition.

Part of the way African societies can help Western scholars understand sacrifice is by noting the way sacrifice arises as a natural extension of social practice. S.A. Adewale has noted how the devotion and care of the elderly in African society is seen as the surest way to success, peace, and satisfaction for children. The practices associated with this are extended naturally to spiritual beings (1988: 97-98). Similarly, Adewale shows how the various forms of sacrifice (communal offering, gift offering, thank offering, sacrifice of propitiation, votive offering, preventative offering, and substitutionary offering) are linked to parallel activity in the human realm (pp. 95-105). These parallels warn Western readers not to bracket sacrifice as a religious practice distinct from the other social practices prescribed by the Law or described in the narrative. Sacrifice is part of the larger social fabric of a society, rather than a cultic practice limited to 'religious' situations.

c. *The Body*

The third area of continuity between Old Testament culture and African culture is the attitude toward the body. Elochukwu Uzukwu in his study of worship notes the importance of body movement in African life. In Africa, he notes, the self is revealed in body and gestures (1997: 10). He contrasts this with the dualism he finds in the church fathers, a dualism sharpened by the Cartesian reduction of humans to thinking machines (pp. 6-7). This also has implications for our study of Leviticus. As readers we are left with only a text to read, the *bath qol* of the ritual that desires embodiment. To produce more texts (such as this one) in response to the text of Leviticus brings us little closer to an embodied understanding of Israelite life and worship.

d. *Land*

In his study of the Ibibio people of southern Nigeria, Justin Ukpong notes that they have a 'ritualistic-historical attachment to the land', not merely an economic attachment (1990: 15). They also view the sea as aggressive and dangerous, while the earth is friendly and benevolent (p. 20). Both of these ideas have clear parallels in Israelite culture. In these things we can see that sacrifice exists as part of a larger worldview. Sacrifice is merely one part of a much larger picture. Yet as one part of a picture, its removal or transformation affects the whole.

Even here, it is important to note that the difference between Western ideas and African ideas regarding land is that Westerners have ideas regarding land, while Africans have land that they experience a connection to. They know its color, its smell, the feel of it under their fingernails. All of this is part of a cultural package that involves all the senses. There are certainly many in Western culture who have a similar connection to 'home'. Invoking this connection allows a deeper appreciation for the culture of which sacrifice is a part.

e. *Male Ritual*

The fifth point of cultural contact between Israelite culture and African culture is one little noted by scholars, namely the predominance of males in community rituals. It may be that this is really more a parallel between texts than between the Old Testament and Africa. There is reason to believe that Israelite women had rituals pertaining to their own lives—to childbearing, womanhood, widowhood, and so on. Further, it is likely that women played some sort of role in rituals that pertained to the community as a whole. Yet women are seldom mentioned in Leviticus texts concerning ritual except at specific points of exclusion (times when they are unclean, and ritual of cleansing: 12.1-8; 15.19-29; exclusion from priestly food: 22.12-13).

There has also been little attention paid to the role of women in traditional African ritual. One gets the general perception that women do women's rituals and men do community rituals (see M.A. Oduyoye 1992: 17). This general worldview ignores the work women do to make community rituals possible, and the question of why they are not allowed to portray their own experience within the community as part of ritual. These questions are not generally probed by either the Old Testament, Western scholarship, or African scholarship.

The writing on African women's ritual has, not surprisingly, been done by women. Mercy Oduyoye notes not only the existence of women's rituals, but the way women are absent from community rituals. She suggests that, through ritual, 'religion operates in the human community as a determiner of power, influence, domination and oppression' (1992: 19). Ritual, then, is a significant part of the definition of roles and attitudes in society. It plays a significant part in the understanding of the position of individuals within society. As Oduyoye describes it, in Africa the position of women is 'prescribed by what is deemed beneficial to the whole community of men and women' (p. 10). She notes, however, that this prescription is done by men. This means that the absence of women from the text of Leviticus 1–7 is not an innocent omission. It commits women to an absence from the places of honor and significance that ritual enacts.

Another perspective is found in Joseph Thérèse Agbasiere. Her study among the Igbo of Nigeria notes the major role women play in most ritual ceremonies, although they do not act as priests (2000: 42). She notes that women provide most of the items for ritual ceremonies, and bear most of the expense. Women also have specific rituals and shrines for them alone, and for which they take complete responsibility (pp. 43-45). She further notes that Igbo society is patrilineal and patriarchal in theory, but in practice males have difficulty enforcing that dominance (p. 48).

This distinction between cultural theory and practice reminds us that Leviticus is an idealized text. We can learn much about Leviticus by noting what or who it leaves out. We can listen to its silences as well as its words. We also cannot assume that it accurately reflects the practices of any particular time, place, or people.

The question of the place of women in Israelite and later Christian practice will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 6. Issues of textual silence and silencing are not new to Western people. We still see the centrality of male

rituals in popular culture, whether in sports[12] or politics or music. As readers of Leviticus, we can at least be aware of these silences, and give voice to the voiceless where possible.

f. *Conclusion*

J.S. Mbiti has also noted that the close identification Africans have with the Old Testament has brought them into tension with the beliefs and cultural practices of missionaries (1978: 16). African Christians make a less sharp distinction between Old and New Testaments, seeing it all as 'in the book' (pp. 16, 18). Even when using the New Testament, Africans use the books of James and Matthew most frequently (p. 18), New Testament books most closely connected to the Old. This attitude has lead to groups breaking away from mission-founded churches. A tension is created when cultural parallels lead to identification with the 'wrong' message in the text. The experiential overrides the verbal, and the mind is strongly influenced by what the body knows. This is especially likely in a culture in which body knowledge, acquired through ritual as well as other experience, is valued and nurtured and given pride of place, rather than being subordinated to abstract knowledge.

This tension between the experiential and the verbal inhabits Leviticus. Leviticus is a text about experience. While it does not abstract upon experience, it does attempt to affect the experience through words. This is the nature of prescriptive speech. Yet it also presumes experience, and our reading of it is affected by our own experience. In Western culture, our lack of experience with ritual sacrifice affects our (lack of) interest in Leviticus. We see this disjunction more clearly as we listen to others whose experience of Leviticus correlates with lived experience. It is the social parallels that make the theological parallels possible.

3. *Theological Parallels*

a. *God*

The most obvious parallel between traditional African theology and the Old Testament is the belief in God. Mbiti states that Africans believe that the God of the Bible is the same God of their languages and traditions, who has been made known to them through God's actions (1978: 15). While it used to be common for Western missionaries to categorize African beliefs as animist, the African perspective is that they have always had a concept of a High God.

This sort of parallel at first appears to equate African and Western attitudes and beliefs. A closer look at this parallel, however, yields a slightly different result. For many Americans, belief in God has little if any impact on their lives. Belief in God is roughly equivalent to a belief in Santa Claus—yes, he exists, and I should be good. But little if anything is expected from God, and human concerns about God are often relegated to issues of life after death rather than life before death. The afterlife, for many Americans, including many Christians, is the main issue with which religion concerns itself.

12. See Chapter 3, above.

On the other hand, for the African, as for the Old Testament, the 'religious' theme of salvation is linked to material well-being (Ukpong 2001: 589). Gabriel Abe has noted that in Nigeria people long both for salvation by God and by a human leader (1996: 8). Even terms such as *redemption* and *propitiation*, normally used in a limited 'religious' sense in North America, are very concrete political/ economic/social terms in Nigeria (p. 8). He concludes that 'The gospel faith in African theology should respond concretely and effectively to the contemporary existential needs and crises which have engulfed the continent' (p. 11).

The use of *salvation* in a concrete historical sense arises out of a different perspective on the basic building blocks of theology. Western theology, influenced by the Western philosophical tradition, often speaks as if theology is a cluster of ideas that need to be understood. So the basic building block of theology is the word, an idea made explicit through the use of language. Leviticus shows us an alternative, even within the realm of words. The blood and gore of Leviticus 1–7 allows a visceral experience of salvation. Even negative responses are responses. People horrified by Leviticus can then ask, 'How should the body feel when it has been saved?'

b. *Life*

In Africa, however, the fundamental question that theology deals with is life (van Zyl 1995: 430). In Africa, life is understood as a dynamic balance between the physical and the spiritual, the individual and the communal, the worldly and the other-worldly. Evil upsets this balance, while good deeds secure and restore this balance. Ritual also plays a part in this balance, for it is a significant way of preserving or restoring balance (p. 431).

Within this framework, it is important to realize that in Africa ritual is an activity with physical consequences. People enact rituals, including rituals taken from the Old Testament, as a way of changing something in their world. Salvation that is sought through ritual includes salvation from disease, drought, hunger, and political oppression. In this sense, *salvation* is used more in a physical than a spiritual sense (again recognizing that the dichotomy is mine, not theirs).

This also forms a link between Africa and the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, salvation of the 'soul' (*nephesh*) is salvation from physical death, rather than the saving of a non-physical soul from punishment after death (see Pss. 22.20; 30.3; 33.19). In Africa, Old Testament symbols and rituals are used to seek restoration and health (van Zyl 1995: 435). As Rosemary Edet says, 'Ritual is a means by which humanity controls, constructs, orders, fashions, or creates a way to be fully human. Indeed, it gives meaning to the world, renews, and makes things right. It saves, heals, and makes whole again' (1992: 26).

In this discussion, it is important to recognize that many statements made by African scholars have parallels in the churches of the poor in North America. While some of the difference reflects larger cultural realities, there are many people in North America who would recognize African cultural realities as their own. Physical salvation remains an issue anywhere that people are unable to save themselves. Even among the elite in any society there are times when human

help is not sufficient for physical well-being, and at these times God becomes the court of last resort.

c. *The Spiritual Realm*

There is a further contribution that Africa can make to our understanding of Leviticus. Part of the distinction between African and Western spiritual understanding is that for the African the spiritual realm is understood in a different way. Van Zyl notes that Africans have a hierarchy of spiritual beings that mediate with the creator God (1995: 420). A variety of spiritual forces are real and active, and the Bible is read as a way of combating the power of these forces (Ukpong 2001: 590). For some Africans, it is the ancestors that are the major spiritual force active in their world (Somé 1993: 12). For others, there are a variety of spirits that need to be combated (Ukpong 2001: 590). In any case, the spiritual world is conceived of as being enmeshed in the physical world, so that spiritual and ritual practices have direct physical consequences in the lives of individuals and communities.

This understanding of the spiritual world affects how Leviticus is read. In Western scholarship, Leviticus is read (when it is read at all) as a way of understanding a theological system. One might read Leviticus to comprehend better the abstract ideas behind a particular text or particular practice. In our world where religion is a set of ideas closely linked to theology and the philosophic tradition, the ancient words of Leviticus are transformed into modern categories for our mental consumption.

In Africa, however, Leviticus is read as a set of instructions for practices to transform effectively physical reality. For example, Lev. 4.20 ends '...and they shall be forgiven'. In Africa this is more likely to be understood as an assurance of healing, prosperity, or long life than an abstraction about the state of one's soul. The question of the 'meaning' of the text then becomes a question of the practical effectiveness of a ritual (does it do what it is supposed to?) rather than a question of its underlying theology.

d. *Specific Responses*

It is when studying the specific practices and conceptual frameworks of African sacrifices that the variety of African experiences becomes more apparent. Not only do practices vary between tribes, but even between clans and within clans. Practices that are natural to one group are abhorrent to another. It is also important to note how the theology of various authors affects their points of comparison. So at this point various African scholars will be studied individually to allow each to teach us something different regarding Leviticus.

(1) *Defense*. Daniel Mondeh is from the region of Ghana–Sierra Leone. Part of his understanding of sacrifice comes from the view that spirits and ancestors act as intermediaries between God and humanity (1978: 76).[13] Sacrifice, then, keeps

13. It is generally assumed that the African High God is the same as the God of the Bible. I will continue with this assumption unless a particular author does not concur.

a balance between God and humans, the ancestors and humans, and the spirits and humans. In sacrifice, it is the blood that is most important, for it is 'life itself' poured out for the welfare of the people (p. 77). Sacrifices are used both to establish or re-establish good relations with God and to appease God when God is angry (p. 77).

Mondeh defends these practices, saying 'there is nothing wrong with these rites' (1978: 79). He argues for both the general and specific revelation of God to the African people. Within that context, he notes that no prophet has been raised by God within Africa to prepare the people for the idea of one main sacrifice (p. 79). Surely, he implies, if God had desired all sacrifice to be reduced to a single past event, then God would have made that known to the African people through an African prophet. Though Mondeh does recognize 'certain differences in significance' between African and Jewish sacrifice, he does not elaborate (p. 80).

Would it be possible to apply the same argument to American cultural practices? I realize that there is a significant undertone of critique of Western society in this book. Perhaps it would be useful to balance this with an openness to see Western cultural practice as part of the general revelation of God. Can Monday Night Football teach us about God? We already apply that type of thinking to Thanksgiving. Why not apply it to World Wrestling Entertainment, or figure skating, or soap operas?

(2) *Contrast.* Doug Priest lived as a missionary among the Maasai people of Kenya. Among the Maasai, animals are sacrificed in a variety of rituals. These animals are also killed in a variety of ways—smothering, strangulation, hanging (1989: 159, 163). Very little ceremony accompanies the actual killing of the animal. 'The moment of death goes almost unnoticed' (p. 176). It is the eating of the meat that creates the link between the animal and the person (p. 177).

Blood is a significant aspect of Maasai sacrifice, but is treated quite differently than in Leviticus. The Maasai drink the blood of the slaughtered animal, although this is regarded as an individual decision, and not a necessary part of the rite (1989: 111, 177). Blood is sometimes sprinkled on people during healing rituals (p. 189).

The Maasai do not have a significant place for ancestors in their understanding of the spiritual realm (1989: 116). They do have specific parts of certain sacrifices that require the presence of a ritual expert, who is feared (p. 168). They also believe that 'God does not have to accept the sacrifices offered to Him' (p. 157).

In this case, there are clear differences and parallels between Maasai and Levitical understandings of sacrifice. It is also striking how different these practices are from those that Mondeh relates. Yet in both cases we see people who can read Leviticus as correlating to real-life experiences, rather than to dead primitive cult. We can also see how the practices prescribed in Leviticus are not 'natural', are not a necessary part of ritual sacrifice. Each component is part of a larger system that exists at a particular time and place, among a particular people.

(3) *Sacrifice and Uncleanness*. Harry Sawyerr, in an early study of sacrifice in West Africa, notes that sacrifices are seldom offered to the High God (1969: 63). In his experience, priests are not necessary for sacrifice. It is blood that is central to sacrifice. 'Blood symbolizes in its fullest extent the life of an individual' (1969: 77). Blood creates a new bond among participants, and revivifies the object to whom the offering is made, whether the ancestor or a god (p. 77).

For the people of West Africa, the gods are not usually thought to be angry. The major problem that sacrifice addresses is uncleanness (1969: 79). In this context, sacrifices are joyous celebrations and not attempts to propitiate an angry god (p. 79).

Sawyerr thus shows us another system of sacrifice that has interesting parallels to Leviticus. Both are systems that are primarily concerned with uncleanness rather than propitiation of an angry deity.[14] Blood is a central part of both rituals. Sawyerr's study also allows us to explore new questions. In African sacrifice, priests are not essential to the ritual. How much of Leviticus is composed precisely to create or confirm the power of the priesthood? In African sacrifice, the mood is joyful. What is the mood of the participants in the sacrifices of Leviticus? Is the occasion somber or celebratory? What is the mood of the priest? What is the presumed mood of God? If God is pleased by the odor of the offering (Lev. 4.31), does this result in joy for the celebrant? While we may not be able to answer these questions, as readers our assumptions about the mood of the ritual may affect how we understand the text.

Our assumptions also serve as a guide for how we use the text. Or perhaps our use of the text guides our understanding of it. If Leviticus is read in a droning voice as a minor part of a larger worship service, then it would be hard for the listener to gain a sense of the joy that may have accompanied sacrifice. Perhaps if the reading of Leviticus was accompanied by the smell of roasting meat, we would be better prepared to accept sacrifice as a positive event.

(4) *Replacement*. Cornelius Olowola compares Old Testament sacrifice and African traditional sacrifice by noting that both practices are means of obtaining favor from God, and a means of fellowship and communion with the divine (1991: 3). He also notes that blood sacrifice creates a bond among participants, but in Africa it is also thought to revitalize the one to whom the offering is made (p. 4). He contrasts the different practices by noting that some African traditions engaged in human sacrifice, and that both people and priests drink blood, both of which are contrary to biblical teaching (p. 4).

He then uses Hebrews 10 to demonstrate that sacrifice is no longer necessary. Thus African Christians should no longer sacrifice, and the fact that they do is an indication that 'they are not deeply converted to Christianity' (1991: 5). He then reviews the implications of Christ's sacrifice, concluding that 'Christ's sacrifice is more than enough for all their needs' (p. 8).

14. With regards to Leviticus, this is one of the points Jacob Milgrom continues to make in his many writings. See the summary in Milgrom 2004: 9.

Olowola is not alone in using Hebrews as a major source for Christian thinking on sacrifice. This is a very important part of Christian study of Leviticus, for the ideas of Hebrews and other New Testament authors so easily form a subtext for the study of Leviticus.[15] While most modern Western commentaries make little explicit use of Hebrews in their understanding of Leviticus, it certainly is part of their understanding of what might be done with the text of Leviticus. With Hebrews firmly in mind, one can study Leviticus as a dead ritual text, a set of instructions from God that no longer bind the Christian reader.[16]

The explicit use of Leviticus in African ritual reminds us that Leviticus might still be taken seriously as a set of instructions. It is a set of instructions from God for the people of God. There is nothing in the writing of Leviticus that suggests a time limit on the application of these commands. There is also nothing in Leviticus that suggests that these instructions might someday be replaced by others.

Olowola also alerts us to the challenge that replacement ideas often overlook. He recognizes that part of the effect of sacrifice is fellowship with the divine, and the creation of bonds among the participants (1991: 3, 4). These effects are creations of the ritual, not creations of the ideas within the ritual. Talking about sacrifice or believing in sacrifice does not substitute for the actual ritual of a sacrifice. Sacrifice is an experience that cannot be simply replaced by an idea or concept. So the sacrifice of Christ cannot replace the rituals that create fellowship and community. There may be other rituals that can replace sacrifice and still produce this effect, but theology does not replace ritual.

(5) *Sacrifice and Sin*. Samuel Ngewa begins his study by setting forth theological presuppositions. This has the advantage of allowing these ideas to be recognized as part of the discussion, rather than lurking in the background unacknowledged. For him, the penal substitution theory is 'the truly Biblical way of presenting the significance of Christ's death and therefore as an integral part of African Christian theology' (1987: 3). He also believes that the best way to understand the Bible is to understand it as inerrant and infallible (pp. 101-104), while understanding that it must be read 'through the Africa eye' (p. 79). Ngewa does not regard African traditional religion as part of God's self-revelation, but only as part of general revelation (pp. 191, 350).

Within this framework, he reviews the various similarities and differences between African sacrifice and Christ's sacrifice (1987: 171-84). His list is not significantly different from those mentioned above. He notes that there is the idea of the necessity of sacrifice in times of calamity, since calamities are regarded as signs of God's disapproval (p. 185). This is part of the general understanding that salvation operates 'primarily in the physical realm' (p. 3). Otherwise he believes the African concept of human sinfulness to be 'shallow' (p. 185).

These observations also allow us to see new questions and recognize our presuppositions when we read Leviticus. If our Western understanding of sin/

15. See below, Chapter 6.

16. While the text of Leviticus is also not a set of living instructions for the Jewish community, it is so for a different set of reasons.

salvation is largely in terms of the fate of the soul after death, then this affects the kinds of understanding we have of words like 'atonement' or 'forgiveness'. If the results of atonement are warm fuzzy feelings in our 'hearts', this would require significantly different ritual and approach to ritual than if we expected atonement to result in rain or the removal of plague.

In much of Western culture, the role of sacrificial rituals has been replaced by science, not by Christ. Healing is accomplished through the science of medicine. Rain is predicted rather than sacrificed for. Religion is confined to concerns about the state or fate of the soul. Jesus takes care of our souls, and the scientists take care of the rest. Neither of these require animal sacrifice.

This is, of course, part of the larger question of the place of God in our worldview. Or perhaps it would be better to say that in the Western world we have a place for God in our worldview, but Africans expect God really to act in their lives. The non-performance of certain traditional rituals, then, is not simply a matter of adaptation to a new worldview or spiritual understanding, but a refusal to participate in the very activities that have brought health and well-being to the tribe for centuries. Refusal to participate in ritual is more akin to refusing to plant seed in spring than to refusing to 'believe in' something. If the end result is that crops do not grow, then people starve. Whatever the Christian confidence regarding the fate of the soul, few of us are anxious to really find out about life after death any sooner than necessary.

(6) *Incorporation.* Danie van Zyl writes about the use of Old Testament rituals among the Zionist churches in Africa. The Zionists are a group of the African Instituted Churches that formed outside of Western missionary influence. He finds in their worship a fusion of ideas from the two Testaments (1995: 432). Old Testament symbols are given Christological interpretation (e.g. Zion is reinterpreted as the body of Christ, the church [p. 433]), yet the Old Testament ritual texts are explicitly used in Zionist rituals. In this way, the understanding of the ritual is given within an African Christian worldview, but the Old Testament ritual remains as the means for worship. Old Testament taboos are maintained to protect the integrity of the group, and Old Testament symbols and rituals are used to seek restoration and health (p. 435).

All this is clearly set in a specifically African context. Zionists read the Bible 'from the perspective of African spirituality' (1995: 430). They still operate in a world with a hierarchy of spiritual beings who mediate with the creator God. They understand life as a dynamic balance between the physical and the spiritual, individual and communal, this-worldly and other-worldly. Ritual is used to secure or restore this balance (pp. 430-31).

In this use of Old Testament rituals we see a new element in our understanding of the place of the Bible itself in African faith. Van Zyl suggests that the basic cosmology of the African church remains traditional African, and the Bible is incorporated into this context. The church then has freedom to pick and choose rituals, symbols, and beliefs that enhance or integrate readily with the African

context.[17] The goal is to bring life and health, in the sense of wholeness and well-being (1995: 434). This goal is not explicitly 'religious' in our sense of the term. It is religious only because the other-worldly is intimately involved in the this-worldly, so health requires positive connection to the spirit world.

By contrast, our attempts to read Leviticus as a 'religious' book shows that our cosmology remains largely Western, with the Bible incorporated into our context. Placing Leviticus (and the rest of the Bible) into the 'religious' genre has significant implications for the limits we place on its ability to affect our lives. It also means that Leviticus is not allowed to challenge the religious/secular dichotomy that we have set up.

Van Zyl also notes that this reinterpretation of Old Testament symbol and ritual arises out of genuine physical need. It is a reappropriation of ritual for a specific purpose, a purpose found in the everyday lives of people. They are not theologizing; they are attempting to survive. 'Zionists manage to make God's salvation real to people in a world of need and suffering and disillusionment' (1995: 436). The Bible, then, is studied as a how-to book. A commentary written from this perspective might include a chapter like 'Rituals Against AIDS' as its discussion on soteriology.

(7) *Sacrifice and Life.* G.K. Falusi's study reflects the perspective of the Yoruba people from southern Nigeria. His[18] understanding of sacrifice adds a significant new idea to our understanding of Leviticus. He says that generally 'the purpose of sacrifice is not to destroy by to save', so the focus in sacrifice is on life, rather than death (1988: 79-80). The victim in sacrifice is slain so that its life may be released, its flesh transformed or 'etherealized' (p. 79).

This understanding of sacrifice shows the effect that attitude toward death has on our reaction to Leviticus. If death is the end of life, then sacrifice is about ending something, about killing. If death is transformation (a perspective we can see also in the New Testament), then sacrifice becomes something else entirely.

In relating traditional African sacrifice to Old Testament sacrifice, Falusi observes both points of similarity and difference. He makes these distinctions on the basis of the purpose of the sacrifice. He notes seven types of sacrifice in Yoruba culture. He relates substitutionary sacrifice to the sacrifice of Jesus, but sacrifice that is meant to withdraw the wrath of an angry deity is not applicable to Jesus (1988: 89).

Falusi comments on the ease with which the Yoruba can understand Jesus' death as a sacrifice, based on their cultural heritage of sacrifice. For the Western reader, it is equally important to note emotional comfort and discomfort when discussing death, blood, and sacrifice. Our words may be analytic but our attitudes are easily colored by emotion. This is as it is, and needs to be recognized rather than dismissed or compensated for.

17. Here it needs to be noted that Zionist churches vary widely in theology and practice, with little formal organization and no central structure.

18. I do not know if G.K. Falusi is a man or a woman.

4. *The Role of the Ancestors*

One of the central aspects of much of African religion that is key to a greater understanding of sacrifice is the ongoing role the ancestors play in African life. While not all African peoples have a strong connection to dead ancestors (Priest 1989: 116), most authors consulted spoke not only of the importance but also the centrality of the ancestor cult for traditional African life.

Patrice Somé simply assumes that the ancestors remain a vital part of the world after they die. His understanding of ritual is 'the yardstick by which people measure the state of connection with the hidden ancestral realm, with which the entire community is genetically connected' (1993: 12). The ancestors and spirits regularly intervene in human affairs, so ritual is necessary to maintain a healthy community (p. 32). He also believes that Western civilization is suffering a sickness of the soul that comes from a dysfunctional relationship to the ancestors (pp. 1, 9).

Benezet Bujo links the ancestor cult[19] to the general African focus on life (1986: 67). If the increase of life is the key element in daily practice, it is the ancestors who are the founders and unifiers of all life and all harmony in the clan community (p. 67). This is part of the order established by God, and the task God has given to the ancestors (p. 69).[20]

While ancestor worship is clearly not part of ritual practice according to Leviticus, this apparent disjunction does allow us to be more directly conscious of ideas and practices that may be lurking in the background. If ancestor worship is part of African traditional religion, might it have been part of Israelite worship that the writers of Leviticus were attempting to combat? Or might it have been part of the traditions of peoples around Israel, so that Israelite practice was formed in deliberate opposition to these practices?

Theodore Lewis has examined this possibility by using parallels from a different culture. His work contrasts Ugaritic ancestor cult with the practices that are described, prescribed and proscribed in the Old Testament.[21] He notes narratives such as 1 Sam. 28.3-25, the story of Saul and the medium at Endor, where the existence of mediums and their efficacy is admitted (1989: 104-17), or stories such as that of Elisha's bones in 2 Kgs 13.20-21 (p. 122).[22] Lewis also examines legal passages forbidding ancestor worship (e.g. Deut. 14.1; Lev. 19.26-36, etc.)

19. Note that for Bujo, cult is not linked to a specific place, time, or event. The ancestor cult is simply a way of being in the world that retains communion with the order of life established by certain ancestors (1986: 70).

20. Not all ancestors are looked to as a means of sustaining life. There are certain ancestors that are considered indispensable and even salvific, while others are evil (Bujo 1986: 67, 71).

21. Discussing 'Old Testament practices' or 'true Yahwism' is full of difficulties, as Lewis notes (1989: 2). Comparing sources that come from different periods and different perspectives makes it impossible to think that the Old Testament is a single description of one normative religion for Israel at any particular time. Lewis prefers the term 'Yahwism that became normative' to describe the stories and laws of the Old Testament (p. 2).

22. Lewis ascribes practices that fall outside the Old Testament's guidelines as examples of 'popular religion' (1989: 99) or labels them 'Canaanite' (p. 124).

and prophets who assume the practice exists (Isa. 8.19-20) (pp. 100, 128-32). His conclusion is that there is an ongoing battle to resist the cult of the dead in Israel, which seems to have lasting appeal (p. 174). It may be that the prescriptions for sacrifice in Leviticus are also written against this backdrop. This is not part of the usual Western discussion of Leviticus, precisely because it is not part of Western experience. The African church wrestles with this problem regularly. Observing this conflict allows us to read Leviticus against a wider backdrop of possible cultural practices.

Yet perhaps it is too easy to say that we have no cult of the dead in Western society. I have two children attending public school in Kansas. Each year they spend a significant amount of time studying various figures in American history, especially when compared to the amount of time studying world history. And American history as my children experience it is clearly tied to individuals rather than social movements or policy changes.

The veneration of ancestors also involves significant holidays. Besides holidays for specific individuals (Martin Luther King, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln), there are holidays marking the ancestors sacrificed for the nation (Memorial Day, Veterans' Day). These ancestors are also given significant places of honor, especially within the cult of militarism (Marvin and Ingle 1999: 129-71). Perhaps our society is more like that of Africa than we care to admit.

5. *Priests*

Leviticus 1–7 is usually ascribed to the Priestly writer (P), or is considered a supplement to P. This is so because of the important role the priest plays in the text, and the writer's insistence on the centrality of the cult.

Looking at African perspectives on sacrifice can provide further perspective on the role of the priest in the sacrifices in Leviticus. For example, African writers often use the term 'ritual expert' to describe the person whose presence is necessary for certain types of sacrifice. This change in terminology alerts us to the linguistic/cultural connotations of a term like 'priest' that may not apply in another time or situation.[23]

There is significant variety in traditional African understandings of priesthood. Among the Igbo, the role of the priest is very similar to that in Leviticus (Obinabu 1995: 71). Among the Ibibio different cultic personnel perform different sacrifices (Ukpong 1990: 28). Among the Maasai there is a certain role for the ritual expert, who is feared, but not all sacrifices require this expert (Priest 1989: 168-69). In other parts of Africa the senior elder in the homestead performs priestly functions (Nasimiyu-Wasike 1992: 43).

Given this variety, we can see that the role assigned to the priest in Leviticus is not something natural or automatic. There is nothing about the act of sacrifice that necessitates the services of a ritual expert. Even if some sort of ritual expert

23. I notice this in class when my Catholic students understand 'priest' differently than non-Catholic students.

would be required, a hereditary priesthood is more part of the creation of a central cult than it is part of the act of sacrifice itself. In other words, temples need (or create) priests more than sacrifices need priests.

6. *Christian Responses to African Sacrifice*

a. *General Responses*

Western Christian responses to African sacrifice have historically been negative. Among Protestant Evangelicals, it is seen as a denial of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus (Priest 1989: 81). While other churches have taken a position of accommodation, it has generally been believed that sacrifice has no place in Christian worship (Nussbaum 1984: 50). Sacrifice has been seen, however, as a bridge between traditional African religion and Christianity. Recently both Africans and Western Christians have wrestled with this question in new and interesting ways.

(1) *Starting from the New Testament.* The traditional Christian position is based on an understanding of Jesus' death as a sacrifice. Much of this thinking is directly related to the book of Hebrews. In this thinking, the death of Jesus atones for human sin, substitutes for our own need to be sacrificed for our sin, is the mediator of the new covenant, destroys the power of the evil one, and reconciles humanity to God (Olowola 1991: 5-8). If these are understood as the major purposes of any sacrifice, 'Christ's sacrifice is more than enough for all their needs' (p. 8). Thus sacrifice is no longer necessary, and the continuation of sacrifice remains a sign of people's superficial Christianity (p. 5).

This type of thinking is also applied to Old Testament sacrifice in general. Samuel Ngewa sees Old Testament sacrifice as 'images and shadows' of Christ (1987: 198). The work of Jesus was to grant atonement for humanity, and animal sacrifice, even that in the Old Testament, was not itself sufficient for this. Thus for the Christian to engage in sacrifice is a matter of 'hanging on to the shadows' after the real has come (p. 203).

E.A. Obeng provides a broader theological perspective when he says that Jesus' blood does not necessarily need to be understood in sacrificial terms since Hellenistic Christians rejected temple worship, and much of Judaism understood blood metaphorically (1986: 37). He also recognizes that blood in African sacrifice has a variety of uses, some of which do not fit with New Testament ideas. Still, he concludes that blood and sacrifice can be used to explain Christianity to adherents of African traditional religion, but that it is important to point to the distinctive, unique, and complete nature of Jesus' blood (p. 41).

In each of these studies there is a priority given to the way the question is framed in the New Testament. The New Testament authors were attempting to deal with the reality of Jesus' death, explaining it within the larger context of God's work in the world. They did not begin by asking the question of how God redeems humanity, or the general purpose of sacrifice, or even the general purpose of ritual. They were driven by event and its implications. The studies mentioned above are also driven by the implications of an event, but they do so

well outside the historical framework of the event itself. The question 'why did Jesus die?' was crucial for the church in its infancy—it needed to explain how a person executed as a criminal by legal authorities could claim to be the savior of the world.

The question is quite different in either the African or the Western context. The cross is no longer seen as a symbol of state-sponsored execution. People who wear gold crosses around their necks would be unlikely to wear little gold electric chairs. So if the question to which the text is an answer is no longer a question, what does one do with the answer? One response is to abstract upon the answer—to attempt to translate historically conditioned words into trans-historical ideas. This is often seen as the task of (biblical) theology. The text then is used as a way to think about sin, salvation, atonement, and other abstract categories.

This suits the Western context well, but does not appear to fit the African context. People who expect sacrifice to cure their disease may not be excited about sacrifice reduced to an abstract idea. On the other hand, Western readers also need to take care in transforming prescription into abstraction. The text says 'kill an animal', and we may be tempted to respond by speaking about atonement. The African response might be to kill an animal. We cannot pretend that these are the same things.

(2) *Translating Ideas Across Cultures.* J.J. Burden's study of divination and magic in the Old Testament and in Africa does not directly deal with the question of sacrifice, but his perspective and conclusions are instructive for a general framework. Burden is well aware of the problems of translating Hebrew ideas into African languages, wanting to find translations 'which will move the African reader without doing violence to the Hebrew term' (1973: 111-12). In this way he moves the question of cultural similarities into a concrete situation, the process of translating the text.

His study offers us a possible paradigm for connecting practices across cultures. He says that the Old Testament considers practices acceptable or unacceptable according to whether they are 'directed toward the true, living God' (1973: 109). Yet he ends up concluding that prophets in the African independent churches are not true prophets, but 'must be resisted, rejected and denounced', considering them forms of syncretism (p. 112).

Burden represents an older stream of African Christian thought, one that makes a much clearer distinction between traditional African practices and Christian practices. As we have seen, more recent studies are more likely to emphasize continuity and connection, and are much slower to draw sharp distinctions. In some ways, this movement is the opposite of the current situation in the Western world. Traditionally Western Christians have been free to baptize the entire Western culture, considering ourselves as 'Christian' nations, and exporting our culture along with our religion as largely identical. More recently, however, Christians from many traditions have been making a more clear distinction between Christian practices and Western values. The particular cultural practice where the distinction is made depends on the particular group, but in general the

church is much less likely to view contemporary Western society as 'Christian' than it was even a few years ago.

This new paradigm creates the possibility of a different reaction to ritual practices from the Old Testament. Practices that are not generally culturally acceptable need not be automatically dismissed. If Christianity views itself as countercultural in some sense, then ritual practices that separate Christians from 'the world' become crucial to Christian identity. While it is certainly unlikely that churches will begin to practice animal sacrifice, approaching the Bible with an openness to the 'otherness' of the biblical world(s) allows appreciative readings to replace dismissive ones.

(3) *Translating Practices Across Cultures*. Doug Priest's work is the most directly related to this discussion, describing the practice of animal sacrifice among Maasai Christians as a 'problem' that needs detailed study (1989 [note the use of 'problem' in the title]). Explicitly, his entire dissertation is devoted to the question of whether sacrifice can still have a place in Christian ritual (p. 10).

He begins by noting a few relevant but often overlooked points. He recognizes that the church has often adopted cultural forms and infused them with Christian meanings (1989: 11). He also notes that members of the early church offered sacrifices in the Temple in Jerusalem prior to 70 CE (citing Acts 21.17-26 [p. 11]). Another factor that he places into the discussion is the use of 'sacrifice' as a description of martyrs in the church (p. 21). In concluding these remarks, he states that the early church moves from 'physical, bloody, group activity to a more spiritualized, mental and individual one' (p. 42).

Putting the historical framework in these terms allows us to recognize the effect of binary thinking on our analysis of texts and ideas. If choices are placed in simple either/or terms (physical vs. spiritual; body vs. mind; group vs. individual), we limit our options and attempt to make clear distinctions where none may exist. Do we need to choose between blood sacrifice and 'spiritual' worship, or are there other alternatives? Can we worship with our bodies without killing animals? Or do we need to choose at all; can we have both?

Priest's conclusion also displays our biases in regards to these oppositions. Do we see this movement as progress, regress, or digress? Was it inevitable? Is it reversible? Were these deliberate choices, or part of larger historical movements beyond individual control or awareness?

After a long and detailed study, Priest argues for 'Christian transformational change' of traditional Maasai practices (1989: 218) based on a specific set of questions. These questions are: (a) do people have a history of sacrifice (sacrifice should not be introduced into a culture because it is not necessary), (b) are sacrifices directed to God or to other gods, idols, ancestors, chieftains, or spirits (only those directed to God are acceptable),[24] and (c) are sacrifices meant to purify from sin (this type is not acceptable because Jesus has already accomplished this) (p. 235). He also notes the difficulty of sacrifices where motives are mixed or

24. Priest does not talk about a possible mediating role for other spiritual beings.

unclear, and the question of the role of the ritual expert who is seen as a mediator between God and the people (pp. 235, 244).

Priest's study is helpful for its depth and clarity. It would be interesting to apply his method of study to Western cultural practices such as the Protestant work ethic or Santa Claus, to see if the type of study he engages in is one we would be comfortable having applied to ourselves. Priest also writes attempting to be conscious of his position as a white person in black African society. He grew up in a missionary family in Africa and has lived among the Maasai for ten years (1989: ii, 286), but for all of this he remains an outsider.[25]

(4) *Dialogue between Cultures.* A quite different approach is taken by Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike. Writing from a Catholic perspective, she attempts a dialogue between infant baptism and the African rite of birth and naming (1992: 41). She suggests that some African rituals can be 'Christianized' and made into sacraments (p. 43). After outlining the rituals around seclusion and the coming out of seclusion after the birth of a child (rituals that would include sacrifice), she suggests that much of this could be 'incorporated into the rite of infant baptism' (p. 47).

This deliberate attempt to weave together two cultures and two religious traditions creates a significant space for empathy in the study of ritual, and in a study of Leviticus. She creates this space by treating these rituals as rituals, rather than reducing them to theological statements that can be replaced by other theological statements. Rituals surrounding birth are an important part of the cycle of life and death. They are part of living, not merely part of worldview. There is also no suggestion here of 'new' replacing 'old' in some sense of progress.[26] Rather, two ancient traditions are brought together to create something new, something that is neither purely one nor the other.

Stan Nussbaum also offers a proposal for the continued place of African traditions and Levitical practice in African Christian churches. He begins his study by noting that sacrifices continue in some African Independent Churches, and that Leviticus is sometimes used as part of the service (1984: 51-53). He continues by placing the discussion in a theological rather than ritual setting. He believes that 'the world has entered into a new era with the incarnation...and particularly with Pentecost' (p. 55). He associates ritual precision with magic as opposed to Christian worship. He also does not believe that sacrifice can be used to invoke God's favor (p. 55).

Nonetheless, he recognizes that just because sacrifice is no longer theologically necessary does not mean is must be prohibited. Lack of prescription does not mean proscription (1984: 56). So he offers a proposal for 'evangelistic sacrifice' based roughly on Lk. 14.12-14. He proposes that an animal should be sacrificed by the elders of the church to feed the hungry. People would be invited to the sacrifice whether or not they are Christian. The event would be stripped of its

25. Priest has also reached his conclusions in concert with Maasai Christians (1989: iii).

26. Chapter 6 will look more at the question of progress in a Christian study of Leviticus.

ritual elements because true sacrifice must be spiritual, but an animal would be killed and people would share the meat (pp. 58-59). He also notes that doing this type of sacrifice rather than simply buying meat also means that African forms of communication are adopted over Western cultural practices (p. 61).

Nussbaum represents an interesting attempt by a Western person to validate and integrate current African practice into a specifically Christian context. There remains, however, a significant bias against 'ritual' in his thinking. While a few Christian rituals are noted (baptism, communion [1984: 56]), he generally reduces action to idea.

He also fails to account sufficiently for the negotiation of power and meaning within ritual. While his proposed sacrifice is a genuine attempt to communicate a specifically Christian message, as an action it is open to any number of understandings and responses for all participants. The giving of meat by one person to another may attempt to communicate welcome, but it can be undermined simply by facial expression or body position. There are dozens of ways that both giver and receiver can undermine the communication, especially when the ritual is seen as a deliberate attempt to communicate a message, rather than being a natural part of life in a specific tradition.

For our study of Leviticus, we are reminded of how much information we lack regarding the setting of the writing and reading of Leviticus. It may have functioned at some point to serve as a prescription for a ritual that replaced an earlier or rival tradition. Or it may have functioned as a text that replaced the ritual itself. It certainly functions as part of the theologizing of ritual, yet it is rather lacking in overt theologizing, choosing instead to focus our attention on the action. It is more like a script for a play than a philosophical argument, and as actors we are left with few clues to our motivation.

In Western Christianity we have a long history of translating practices and 'baptizing' cultural practices. Christmas trees and Thanksgiving are two obvious examples. Currently the trend here seems to be moving in the opposite direction. Cultural practices that formerly were amenable to 'basic Christian principles' have become much less so. Even network television has moved from 'Leave it to Beaver' to 'Wife Swap' for evening entertainment, never mind the programs available on cable and satellite channels. Western missionaries went to Africa to save them from their heathen practices and beliefs. There are already signs that the direction of missionary activity is reversing.

(5) *Conclusion.* The variety of ways Christians have responded to traditional African sacrifice in instructive in a reading of Leviticus. The biases and assumptions that are brought to bear on African practice are also likely to influence our engagement with sacrifice in Leviticus. Obviously the situation in Africa is more immediate. People continue to sacrifice, and the church needs to respond in some way. On the other hand, the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus are no longer practiced in the West, so we can, if we choose, simply avoid engagement with these texts, or dismiss them as irrelevant to our culture.

Yet Leviticus continues to be read in the church, albeit rarely. And sacrifice continues in Western society, albeit under different guises.[27] The direct engagement of African Christians with Leviticus does give us significant clues for our own engagement. The interaction of text and culture continues at all times and all places where the Bible is read. The example of the African church provides another challenge to the assumptions we make about how a text is to be read in the 'modern' world.

b. *Book Religion vs. Oral Religion*

The significance of the textualization of ritual can be seen when observing some African responses to book religion. Justin Ukpong has researched African responses to the Bible. In focus groups, discussions, and surveys he found that the Bible was regarded 'literally as God's own words, divinely inspired and communicated to human beings' (2001: 587). This belief engendered an attitude of reverence and submission, an attitude that was the same across denominations. He also notes that the book itself is thought to have magical dimensions, and is used to ward off evil spirits (p. 587).

The writer of Leviticus is quite clear that the written word is literally the words of God (1.1). Much of our response to Leviticus depends on our willingness to believe this narrative setting as an accurate portrayal of a real event. The text provides quite a different narrative setting than does modern Western scholarship, which prefers to talk about later writers/editors/redactors. In both instances our understanding of the text is influenced by a supplied narrative. The Bible supplies a narrative regarding the direct words of God to Moses at a particular time and place (Lev. 1.1). Western scholarship supplies a narrative about the work of P and his time and place (e.g. Birch *et al.* 1999: 135). Either of these can act as an interpretive framework for reading the text.

To dismiss the narrative *in* the text also places into question the veracity of the whole. If the text is incorrect (and possibly deliberately lying to us) regarding the events of the story, how can we know it to be reliable in its 'theology'? Why should we care about the theology of P if P is willing to deceive us regarding the basic story of God's self-revelation? If P is deceiving us, then what are we to do with these rituals?

This is part of the larger question of the relation of ritual to myth. In the Western world one of our greatest myths is that we have moved beyond myth into the realm of science. The influence of this blindness is significant as we attempt to understand the myths of other cultures. The idea of the lack of myth in Western culture forms part of a guiding narrative for our understanding of the world.[28] We need to note the effect of our guiding narrative on the reading of a text, especially when as readers we do not accept the guiding narrative within the text.

The attitude that many African Christians display toward the Bible is linked in some way to its existence as a book. Samuel Ngewa distinguishes between the

27. See below, Chapter 5.

28. Marvin and Ingle note that our belief that we have few if any myths is one of the central myths of our culture (1999: 3).

Bible and African religion on the basis of the status of the book. He regards the Bible as inerrant and infallible, while for him African Traditional Religion is not part of God's revelation (1987: 101-104, 191). At least part of this distinction is a result of the existence of the Bible as written, fixed word.[29]

In the Western world we have a different attitude toward texts than other cultures. Books are ubiquitous in our culture. Literacy is treated as a sign of basic intelligence. While many Christians treat the Bible as The Book, there remains a basic sense of books as a regular part of mundane life.[30]

The original text of Leviticus was not produced in this cultural setting. It was not even written as a book. It may have been part of a larger collection of scrolls, but was certainly not part of an easily accessible lending library, even if most people had been able to read. Further, the act of transforming an oral tradition into a written one affects not only what it is, but how it might be received. Did people respond differently to the words of a priest if he read from a book? Did literate priests acquire authority over non-literate ones?

When we begin to ask these questions, even if we are unable to find answers, we can see that the text of Leviticus is more than merely prescriptive. It is creative. The creation of a text creates the possibilities of new structure, new hierarchies of power, new relation between worshiper and priest. Access to text is different from access to oral tradition. Reading is different from storytelling. Written tradition has a different status from oral tradition. These are all parts of 'reading' Leviticus as an ancient document, as the product of a culture quite unlike our own.

c. *Syncretism*

One of the difficulties faced by Christians in Africa arises from the similarities between Old Testament prescription of sacrifice and their own sacrificial tradition. Leviticus clearly prescribes sacrifice as a response to various problems. African sacrificial traditions are both like and unlike the sacrifices in the Old Testament. Are they to combine the two? Can they continue with some sacrifices as they have traditionally performed them if they are judged to be equivalent to biblical sacrifices? Who is competent to judge this?[31] This is not a problem we share in the Western world, at least not in regard to blood sacrifice.

Whatever the answer to these questions, the problem of syncretism for African Christians helps us recognize that syncretism also was an issue for the writers and readers of Leviticus. Sacrifice was a common practice in the Ancient Near East. It is also likely that various parts of Israel performed sacrifices in their own ways, according to local tradition and culture. The writer(s) of Leviticus must have had at least some awareness of local variety. Where did they draw the line

29. The superiority of the Bible as a written book, as compared to African oral tradition, was part of the message of the missionaries to the African people. See West 2002: 29.

30. The much-discussed movement to visual culture will also affect our interaction with Leviticus.

31. See Burden 1973: 111; Ngewa 1987: 192-94.

between acceptable and unacceptable practice? Did they see these instructions as applying to all of Israel, or only to practices at a central shrine?[32]

Questions like this also allow the focus to remain on practice. The central question addressed in Leviticus 1–7 is one of practice. When someone brings an offering, what is to happen? Who does what? How is the blood treated? Which details are important to God? Acknowledging the focus of the text itself reminds us to focus on practice.

7. *Conclusion*

The existence of cultures in the modern world that continue to practice sacrifice allows us a glimpse into the world ancient Israel. The parallels allow us to see how Western society is different from Israelite society. The parallels also allow us to understand Leviticus in ways we might not otherwise be able to. We can see a social practice that affected the weather, fertility, health, and the threat or outcome of warfare. We can better understand the importance of correct ritual practice, given what is at stake in these rituals. We are also better able to account for the effect of textualization on our mode of apprehension. Reading texts is different from slaughtering animals.

The many parallels between African practice and Levitical prescription also allow us to see new parallels and discontinuities between our culture and Leviticus. The world of Leviticus is shown to be strange-and-yet-not-so-strange. Often it is more comfortable to highlight the differences rather than examine the cultural practices that show similarities. It is much more instructive to think about Leviticus as 'uncomfortably familiar', rather than allowing it to remain in the category of 'comfortably other'.

32. At the time of the writing of Leviticus the Tent of Meeting no longer existed, and Jerusalem had already become *the* central shrine (at least in the eyes of those responsible for Leviticus). Was the writer aware of competing places of sacrifice, and how much of Leviticus was written to counter their influence?

Chapter 5

BLOOD SACRIFICE IN THE UNITED STATES

1. *War and Sacrifice*

Thus far in the study of blood sacrifice in Leviticus I have noted various cultural practices in the Western world that have some similarities to the ritual of animal sacrifice. I have also noted how churches in Africa respond more comfortably than Westerners to Leviticus 1–7 because of their ongoing history of animal sacrifice. All of this might lead to a general understanding that the Western world lacks significant direct parallels to the language and practice of blood sacrifice. This might even seem a natural conclusion, or even an assumption not worthy of serious defense. In North America we do not sacrifice animals on an altar. We do not kill other creatures in an attempt to influence God.

There is only one significant, widespread cultural practice that might offer a direct parallel to the practices prescribed in Leviticus 1–7. This is the practice of war. As I write this, the United States and its allies are engaged in war on a number of fronts. The invasion of Iraq continues to cause casualties among American and British troops, and much larger casualties among Iraqis. There is increasing fighting in Afghanistan, with no signs of ending soon. Then there is the shadowy 'War Against Terrorism' in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center in New York.

When these various wars are talked about, the word 'sacrifice' is used regularly. Soldiers sacrifice themselves on the battlefield. Parent and spouses sacrifice their loved ones in the cause of freedom. The language of sacrifice is everywhere. The question of the relationship between this kind of 'sacrifice' language and that in Leviticus is a difficult one. How is the blood of the soldier different from or similar to the blood of a sacrificial animal? How is the language of sacrifice different in these two instances? Is it reasonable to make this connection?

The use of sacrifice language in situations of war is not sufficient reason to make any real parallels between war and ritual sacrifice. Words are regularly used in various ways in different parts of language. Yet the regular, repeated use of sacrifice language in the American descriptions of war dead is part of a larger ritual framework, a larger self-understanding, and ultimately a very specifically religious use of language.

2. *Nationalism and Religion*

In order to understand better the parallels between sacrifice language in descriptions of war and sacrifice language in Leviticus, it is necessary to understand

American nationalism as a form of religion. Fortunately, this point has been made widely by a number of scholars.[1] Nationalism in the United States,[2] with its attendant language and rituals, forms a system of belief and action that constitute what is often called American Civil Religion. The basic components of American Civil Religion have been outlined by others. What is important for our study is to understand that Americans are taught to view their nation as one with a special, divine calling (Wald 1997: 60). This calling is articulated in a variety of ways, but retains the idea that America is somehow different from other nations. This uniqueness means two things with regards to sacrifice.

The first is that the nation can call its people to sacrifice as an extension of the will of God. So long as American actions are seen as extending or defending its calling, human actions can be understood as God-ordained. Since God has given America this mission (whatever that may be), then God must support any action that extends or defends the mission.

The second is that any amount of sacrifice is justified to maintain this special peoplehood. There can be no limit to the amount of bloodshed, either of 'others' or of citizens, that may be required to maintain the American ideal. There is often an ongoing debate about whether a particular action is truly part of the American calling (e.g. Vietnam, Iraq, support of foreign regimes), but no debate is allowed regarding whether killing may be necessary in defense of this identity.

What is important here is the place of violence and war in this religious system. In both of these uses of 'sacrifice', the assumption is that sacrifice legitimately involves the death of people, whether of Americans or 'others'. Dying and killing are treated as morally equal actions, both required by the notion of 'sacrifice'.

In their book *The American Monomyth*, Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence outline the basic myth of American nationalism, as seen in various parts of popular culture. Central to this myth is the character of the hero, an outsider who uses violence to defeat the evil that is threatening the Edenic community.[3] In this way the myth both accepts the necessity of violence and purges the community of this violence by casting an outsider to enact its violent impulses.

Fred Burnett in his discussion of the movie *Lethal Weapon* notes that the American monomyth is a modified version of a Puritan millennial reading of the Jesus story (2002: 262). While the Jesus of the gospel does not enact violence for the sake of the Edenic community, millennial Christianity casts him in that role for the final apocalypse. As Mark Roncace notes in his study of the hero of

1. For an introduction to American Civil Religion, see Albanese 1981: 283-309 or Wald 1997: 59-70.

2. I am not suggesting that all forms of nationalism constitute religions. While there are various ways to make this distinction, it appears that empires are especially prone to religious nationalism.

3. In his study of terrorism, Mark Juergensmeyer notes that terrorism is undergirded by an epic story that ultimately ends triumphantly (2003: 168). He attempts to make a stark contrast between 'cultures of violence' and American culture, but often the parallels were, for me, more striking than the contrasts. The sharp distinction between 'terrorists' and 'brave American troops' is an important part of the propaganda of the current 'war on terror'.

Westerns, these heroes 'reflect primarily the image of Christ in Revelation' (2002: 282).[4] This Jesus is the archetype of the American hero.

In the twenty-first century, especially for adolescent culture, American Civil Religion is 'created and communicated through film' (Pahl forthcoming). Yet while the monomyth's outsider-hero is certainly a common feature of movies (see Burnett 2002), Jon Pahl argues that American movies more commonly perpetuate a religion of sacrifice, a theme that is paralleled in mainstream political culture.[5] As he says, 'national policies toward youth have increasingly over the course of the twentieth century come to depend on an all-but-unquestioned religion of sacrifice' (Pahl forthcoming).

It is this religion of sacrifice that links the outsider violence of the monomyth to the insider violence of 'our troops'. Pahl claims that, in the adolescent cinema, youth are 'continuously invited (if not coerced) to participate in military institutions and ventures'. The message is that youth are to accept the 'innocent' violence of sacrifice from time to time, and to invest unquestioningly in the logic of redemptive violence.

Much work on the connection between American Civil Religion and sacrifice has been done by Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle. In their book *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation*, they argue that 'violent blood sacrifice makes enduring groups cohere' (1999: 1). Their focus, however, is not the ritual slaughter of animals in 'traditional' societies but the blood sacrifice of persons in all societies. Their central example is the current situation in the United States.

Using the theories of Durkheim and Girard, Marvin and Ingle argue that the United States, like any similar group, *must* occasionally send its young men out to die in order to sustain the group. 'The nation is the shared memory of blood sacrifice, periodically renewed' (1999: 4). This action is understood within the logic of the scapegoat mechanism as set forth by Girard.[6] This killing must happen at the hands of the group itself—'we' must send 'them' to die, although the group myth washes its hands of the killing.

In making this assertion, Marvin and Ingle also understand American nationalism as a form of religion. They recognize that this is contrary to the ideas present in American nationalism itself,[7] but they argue that, when studying a culture, we need to look at its gestures more than its discourse (1999: 17). For them, what is finally most indicative of religious commitment is not private belief (the domain of denominational religion) but 'willingness to execute public obligations' (p. 27).

4. It is worth noting that Roncace's only reference from Revelation is 19.11 (2002: 284), where Jesus 'is' the rider on the white horse who kills his enemies with the sword (that comes out of his mouth). Otherwise in Revelation Jesus is portrayed as 'the Lamb that was slaughtered', more in keeping with the Jesus of the gospels who is the object of violence rather than the instigator.

5. Jon Pahl's book on sacrificial violence in youth culture is as yet unpublished. I want to thank him for allowing me to see a draft of this study.

6. Note that Girard's theory of sacrifice is heavily influenced by Christian theology and does not arise out of a study of Leviticus.

7. The rejection of nationalism as a religion may itself have religious motivation. Marvin and Ingle note that the American belief that America is a nation without central myths is one the central myths of the culture (1999: 3).

They also define religion as 'the worship of killing authority, which we claim is central to religious practice and belief' (1999: 9). While they do distinguish between sectarian or denominational religion and nationalism as religion, their understanding of religion leads them to see American nationalism as the true central religion of the United States, since only it is permitted to kill (p. 9).

These definitions and distinctions are certainly open to debate, but the basic contention that nationalism claims dominance over denominational religious expression is certainly correct.[8] This allows us to see that, if Western people are to understand the 'religious' system of ancient Israel, we may need to understand it as more closely parallel to our nationalism than our 'religious beliefs'. The Western temptation to understand 'religion' as a realm of life separate from economics, politics, and larger cultural issues often leads people to believe that we have no good parallels to the 'religion' of ancient non-Western societies. The pervasive character of nationalism as a totalizing system of belief and practice shows us that we are more like 'them' than we realize. We have simply (mis-) named our 'religion' as something else.

3. *Nationalism and Ritual Sacrifice*

Another way the link between American Civil Religion and sacrifice can be made is by trying to outline the logic of the American sacrificial system. While American Civil Religion exists in many forms, there are certain themes and terms that recur with sufficient regularity that they can be said to highlight the main points of the system. President George W. Bush is an excellent example for this study, since he tends to use key terms repeatedly in order to maintain a consistent message.

Besides the frequent references to sacrifice, President Bush also repeatedly talks about freedom. Sacrifice is necessary to ensure freedom. This is an idea that the president believes resonates with a wide variety of Americans. Yet what is 'freedom'? Is he talking about Freedom, a hypostatized idea as exemplified by totem objects? Or is 'freedom' merely another way of saying 'us'; a group marker that separates insiders from outsiders? In order to unpack this term, it is useful to think of what threatens it.

In the world of President Bush, 'freedom' is threatened by its enemies. These enemies are human rather than spiritual forces, although their true humanity is often denied. The monotheism of the American myth does not allow for threats from other deities except the Devil. There is a long history in Western Christianity of ascribing the power and motivation of 'our' enemies to the Devil, but I could find no reference where President Bush talked about the Devil. So the threat to freedom must be from humans.

Freedom is understood to be under attack from human forces, but it is, in general, also conceived of as a fragile thing that requires human action to help it

8. In his 'Harry Middleton Lecture' at the LBJ Library, Bill Moyers stated 'And whether my neighbor believes there are 20 gods or no gods, what matters to me is whether my neighbor has faith in democracy' (2002: n.p.).

survive. In this sense it is not a gift from God, but a human achievement. Freedom is associated with God, but has been paid for by human blood and effort.

The monotheism assumed in American discourse does not allow Freedom to become a god. Yet it clearly becomes more than an idea or a group marker. The non-god Freedom is able to require certain things from those who claim it. It requires blood, requires sacrifice.[9] This is not the blood of the enemy, for they are not sacrificed. This non-god is propitiated only by (male?) American blood.[10]

In Christian theology sacrifice is usually linked with atonement for sin.[11] But what sins are being atoned for in the sacrifice for Freedom? Since the monomyth assumes the basic community to be Edenic and therefore without sin, the sacrifice required by Freedom cannot be connected to atonement. In regards to Leviticus, it may be that the sacrifice to Freedom is parallel to Milgrom's notion that the expiatory sacrifices are meant for the purification of the temple (2004: 30). Yet even here, the purification is necessary because of the sins of the people. The attempt by Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson to link the September 11, 2001 disaster with the sins of 'others' is also interesting here. In their view, the nation is threatened because of the presence of sinners, yet these sinners are not part of the Edenic community within the nation. So even within the nation there are some who are 'outsiders'. American Civil Religion is only 'American' in a qualified sense of the term (i.e. white, heterosexual, Christian, etc.).

In American Civil Religion, the sacrifices are more similar to the daily or monthly sacrifices talked about in Numbers 28. The sacrifice of blood is simply required, it has no purpose other than itself, yet a group cannot continue without it. In this sense, the sacrifice is linked to the continued existence of a larger system. The ongoing sacrifice is a sign that the system is in place, and its absence signals a breakdown in the basic structure of society.

So the non-god Freedom requires the continuation of a system,[12] part of which is sacrifice. Sacrifice is a central part of the language of the cultic system of America. If this is so, then the system that makes ongoing sacrifice possible must constitute the true cultic system of the nation. In the case of sacrifice for country, the cultic system is the military. It is the military that makes sacrifice possible. The death of an American civilian does not count as sacrifice. Killing by a civilian is treated as murder. It is the military that makes killing and dying into sacred actions.

Somewhere in this discussion it must be recognized that there are real people who are killing real people in this country and around the world. The enemies of the American state are real, even when they are created by the system itself. Real blood is being shed. The system has taken on a sacred life of its own, has become

9. Marvin and Ingle assume the necessity of blood sacrifice for the ongoing existence of any group (1999: 4, *passim*). One of the difficulties with their study is its unquestioning acceptance of the myth of redemptive violence.

10. The case of Jessica Lynch suggests that female blood is treated differently than male blood.

11. Milgrom argues that atonement is not the heart of P's understanding of sacrifice, yet atonement is the major purpose for sacrifice in Christian theology (see Chapter 6).

12. It might even be reasonable to argue that Freedom is simply a cipher for American Civil Religion, a way of speaking about the sacredness of the system without actually saying it.

a deity which needs to be protected or defeated (depending upon which side you are on).

Yet despite the reality of the blood shed in defense of this system, the system itself remains hidden. The above ideas representing the 'logic' of the American Civil Religion as encoded in its rituals are not the stated beliefs of anyone I know. It is unlikely that even the President, the High Priest of this religious system, would claim these ideas as his own. So somehow the 'religious' system of American Civil Religion claims the energy and the blood of millions of people without being subject to the same rules of analysis that apply to most other parts of life, including denominational religious belief.

It appears that ritual operates by its own logic, in its own language. The 'language' of ritual is sub-lingual, even subliminal. This is its power. The ideas encoded in American Civil Religion rituals are never brought to the level of conscious language, and thus are not subject to logical confirmation or discussion. The language used in American Civil Religion is ritualized, and therefore is allowed to operate in the same fashion, that is, without careful examination. Yet thousands of people kill and die on the basis of this ritualized logic. In that sense, the logic of ritual is not sub-lingual but super-lingual. People believe in many things, and will often give some small portion of their income to various causes. As an actual dollar figure, the amount is not usually that great. Yet people will give a significant portion of their income to enforce militarily the logic of the rituals of American Civil Religion, and vote against any political candidate who dares to suggest that they should give less. Besides giving money, people will often risk their lives in defense of this system. So the effectiveness of ritual and ritualized language in influencing the actions of people is greater than the effectiveness of ordinary language.

How does this understanding affect our study of Leviticus? If the logic of the American ritual system is not the explicit logic of its practitioners, then it is entirely possible that the 'theology of P' that scholars have uncovered was not the explicit theology of any of the people who actually enacted these rituals.[13] In fact, the 'theology of P' may not have been the explicit theology of the writers of P. The actions prescribed by Leviticus 1–7 are ritualized action, not ideas subject to logical analysis. The text of Leviticus 1–7 is a ritualized text, usually read in a ritual setting, and thus the same rules apply. Both the text and the action can become objects of analysis, but their ritual setting militates against this. One cannot argue with a ritual because a ritual is not an argument.

Few people ever die to defend logical analyses. Yet many die and kill on the basis of the ritual logic of American Civil Religion, and these acts are officially honored by the community as a whole.[14] The ritual logic is thus significantly

13. Note that this leaves aside the question of whether anyone actually did enact these rituals.

14. It is important to keep in mind the amount of energy and money expended to perpetuate the system. Ritual systems do not necessarily continue under their own steam. This is especially true when the system is perpetuated for the benefit of the elite at the expense of the poor. Ritual systems also break down, for their own reasons. Soldiers returning from Vietnam did not receive the honor that ritual logic demanded. Currently in the Iraq war the government appears uncertain how to treat

more powerful than verbal logic. We may claim that ideas are more important than actions, that mind is superior to body. Modern anthropology and philosophy are attempting to overcome their preference for ideas over actions. Yet when it comes down to both our money and our lives, ritual logic, the logic of bodies in motion, has a greater impact than verbal logic.

Another interesting aspect of ritual logic is that the same ritual can be analyzed in different ways. Using a study of the language of President Bush, I suggest above that Freedom is the (non-)God that requires sacrifice in order to be sustained. In Marvin and Ingle's study they highlight the actions rather than the language of American Civil Religion. Rather than focusing on Freedom, they see nationalism itself as the object of worship. In other words, we worship our corporate selves. They also believe that killing authority is the key component of true religion (1999: 9). Thus war, the legal enactment of killing authority, is the key ritual of American nationalism. War is the means by which young men[15] are sacrificed for the sake of group cohesion.

Taking an opposite position, Mark Juergensmeyer argues that war is the ultimate context that needs to be studied. But war is not a ritual act. For him, the language of sacrifice merely acts to excuse the actions of people who kill (2003: 172). Similarly, James Aho in a book on the religious mythology of war defines war as 'collective raping, looting, burning and killing' (1981: 3). Actions such as this require mythological justification, which is provided by religious language.

In another study of war and sacrifice, Bruce Lincoln argues that religion acts as an ideological smokescreen 'whereby priests provide supernatural sanction for self-serving kingly policies' (1991: 5).[16] In his view, economics is the number one reason for war, alongside the 'prestige economy' that must be maintained (p. 138). Thus religion is not the cause of war, but is 'intimately bound up with other causal factors more familiar to the world of Realpolitik' (p. 141). His work is based on the idea that myth and ritual cannot be studied without careful attention to the society they help perpetuate (p. 173).

In between these various options is the book by R. Scott Appleby. Like Marvin and Ingle, he focuses on threats to the group, which are met by the ideology and rituals of sacrifice (2000: 90). He also notes that war creates a special time, set apart from 'normal time'. Thus the normal teachings about love, tolerance, and peace are suspended in times of war (p. 85). In addition, traditions are used selectively and applied situationally in order to explain the current situation (p. 90). Like Juergensmeyer, Appleby limits this part of his study to 'religious extremism', yet much of his characterization of terrorist language could also be used to describe American language regarding the invasion of Iraq.

those sacrificed. While it continues to honor soldiers killed in the line of duty, they are given very little publicity since the public appears willing to accept only a small number of sacrifices for this particular cause.

15. Within the larger framework of Marvin and Ingle's theory, only men can truly act as scapegoats, since women represent the 'fertile center', the creative vision of a connected community (1999: 242).

16. Lincoln does not expressly apply his analysis to the religion of nationalism, but the logic fits nonetheless.

War correspondent Chris Hedges uses quite different language to bring words to the situation of war. He states that 'war is a God...and its worship demands human sacrifice' (2002: 10). Patriotism is the religion that 'provides divine sanction and messianic certitude for the worship of the God (of) War' (p. 14). In his experience, the myth of war does not endure for those who experience combat; 'No one ever charges into battle for God and country' (p. 38). Nationalism is meant to change the people at home, using state-sponsored rhetoric to limit discussion to clichés, and emphasize victimhood (p. 72).

What all this variety illustrates is the various ways ritual and myth can be brought into ordinary language. Further, the relationship between the rituals and myths of civilian life and the war itself can be analyzed in a variety of ways. What is also clear is how the rituals of civic life are linked to real politics. As already noted, Bruce Lincoln argues that we cannot study myth and ritual without careful attention to the society that they usually help perpetuate (1991: 173). This is just as true for our study of ancient Israel or modern Christianity as it is for our study of American nationalism.

Given this connection between war and sacrifice, it is surprising that the Bible never uses sacrifice language to describe the death of people in war. The Hebrew Bible describes those who are killed in battle in a very straightforward way: they died. Even those who died in battles specifically ordered by Yahweh are simply described as having died. There are some places where a link is made between human death and sacrifice, such as the commandments not to sacrifice sons and daughters to Molech (Lev. 18.21; 20.2-5, cf. 2 Kgs 23.10; Jer. 32.35), the story of the near-sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22), and the King of Moab's sacrifice of his son in the face of military defeat (2 Kgs 3.27). Only the final passage relates to war, and even there the sacrifice of the son is not part of a battle, but is the killing of the son by the father, supposedly to bring victory to the Moabites.[17]

There are also a number of stories where the word *sht* ('slaughter' for 'sacrifice') is used to describe the killing of people. In 1 Kgs 18.40 Elijah slaughters the prophets of Baal. In 2 Kgs 10.7 the people of Samaria slaughter the seventy sons of Ahab to avoid conflict with Jehu. In 2 Kgs 25.7 the sons of King Zedekiah are slaughtered by the Babylonians (also in the parallels in Jer. 39.6 and 52.10). In Jer. 41.7 Ishmael slaughters seventy men from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria for reasons that are unclear. Yet none of these instances are part of war, and none of them say anything about the victims fighting back.

Thus the connection between sacrifice language and the language of war is not unavoidable. While the language connecting sacrifice to human bloodshed becomes more prominent in the New Testament,[18] even here the connection to warfare is tenuous at best. This does not mean that there are no political implications to cultic animal sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, what we can say is

17. It is curious to note that the sacrifice appears to work. The text does not tell us why or how it worked, but Israel withdrew in the face of 'a great wrath' (2 Kgs 3.27). Even here, the text does not tell us the origin of this wrath. See Bergen 1999: 72-83.

18. See below, Chapter 6.

that the language specific to sacrifice is not used in the realm of warfare. Human sacrifice is an American practice, not an Israelite one.

4. *Ritual Failure*

Another lesson that can be learned from a study of modern sacrifice is that rituals are subject to failure. Marvin and Ingle argue that, in order to be successful, the war ritual requires five components: blood stakes, unanimous victimage, willing sacrifice, uncertain outcome, and clear result (1999: 87-97). The absence of any one of these components means that the ritual will not be fully successful. Yet even rituals that only meet some of these requirements may be successful in renewing the group, albeit for only a short time.

As examples, they cite the relative failure of Vietnam (1999: 122) or the (first) Gulf War (p. 89), both of which failed to unite the nation in any lasting way. The major successful war ritual they cite is World War II, a ritual that is still upheld as the ideal in Memorial Day services (p. 137).

In the context of Leviticus, it is interesting to ask similar questions about ritual failure. What constituted a successful sacrifice, and how would someone know if the sacrifice failed? Ross, in his commentary on Leviticus, says that it was one of the duties of the priest to discern whether true repentance was being expressed, and to signal God's acceptance or rejection by eating or not eating the meat of the sacrifice (2002: 176). Yet the text of Leviticus contains no suggestion of this.

In order to study the possibility of ritual failure in Leviticus 1–7, we would first need to come to some sort of understanding about the 'true' purpose of the sacrifice rituals prescribed there. Leviticus 1–7 says little about the purpose of the sacrifice. Most sections begin with 'when you bring' without explaining why. Anthropologists often suggest purposes for rituals that are different from the purpose stated by those involved in the ritual. Theologians debate various purposes for sacrifice, depending on their understanding of God and sin. Again, Marvin and Ingle provide an instructive example. They claim that blood sacrifice is the true purpose of war. Every other reason given for war is treated as a deception, a way of refusing to speak the 'totem secret' of the group. Yet Michael Moore in his documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* suggests that the language of sacrifice is the deception, a way of refusing to speak the truth about the war in Iraq which is that the war is all about money. For Moore the war is not the ritual; the rituals around war disguise the truth about the war.

Similar contradictory arguments could be made about Leviticus. The purpose of blood sacrifice is sin and forgiveness (Ross 2002: *passim*). The purpose of blood sacrifice is to manage rivalry by engaging in mimetic violence (Girard, see J.G. Williams 1991: 6-14). The purpose of blood sacrifice is to deflect people's attention away from the truth of monarchic power (Lincoln 1991: 5). The purpose of blood sacrifice is group cohesion. The purpose of sacrifice is to underscore the power of the priesthood (Gerstenberger 1996: 88).

These various explanations cannot all be correct. Yet they can be persuasive if we substitute the word *effect* for *purpose*. An action can have multiple effects,

even though it may have a single purpose. Language of *purpose* can too easily get bogged down in contesting theories of psychology, sociology, or theology.

The language of effect can also allow a better insight into Leviticus as textual object. The purpose, for which Leviticus 1–7 was written, edited, transmitted, incorporated, redacted, and canonized are all lost to us. Some of the effects of these actions are at least open to scrutiny. This kind of study also allows us to place modern effects alongside ancient ones, rather than privileging one specific point in time, the time of origin, as the true reflection of the purpose of the text.

The study of ritual effect does not need to leave aside the question of purpose. Rather, we can still study intended effect as it relates to actual effect. This sort of analysis already takes place in the context of the Bible. The rituals of Leviticus 1–7 were intended to have the effect of maintaining the presence of Yahweh as the provider and defender of Israel (Klawans 2001: 150). Yet the land was invaded numerous times, and the people killed or lead off into exile or ruled by foreign powers. Why did this ritual not have its intended effect? This question is already subject to analysis by various writers in the Bible, including the former and latter prophets (e.g. Isa. 66.1-4; Jer. 6.19-21).

5. *Ritual Texts*

Analysis can also wrestle with effects beyond those stated in the text. For example, it is certain that, at some point in history, ritual in the temple at Jerusalem was used to unite the people of 'Israel'. While this was only one of many ways 'Israelite' identity was formed and maintained, it certainly held a key place in major celebrations and national/religious events. What is less certain is the effectiveness of these rituals in the initial stages of their existence. When did the sacrifices in the temple become key to Israelite/Jewish identity?

Whatever the date of ritual success, it is more certain that the *texts* prescribing these rituals did play a significant role in the formation of Israelite/Jewish identity. Again the date of this effect is impossible to ascertain, but texts do hold significant advantages over centralized rituals, especially in their ability to affect identity among far-flung people.

The ability of texts to create identity as part of ritual extends beyond their existence as myth. Thinking of texts as portable myths does not do justice to the physical presence of text as object. The text can function both as portable myth and as a totem object. This is certainly true of the text of Leviticus as it currently stands within the Christian Bible. Most Christians will affirm the status of Leviticus as Word of God, but it functions as this for them without them ever having read it, or even wanting to. In affirming Leviticus as Word of God without having read it, Christians affirm Leviticus as part of a totem object, the Bible. In this sense, we could even study the effect Leviticus as totem object has on people who have never even read it, whether or not they have performed a blood sacrifice.

The importance of Leviticus as text also has a parallel in the religion of American nationalism. Marvin and Ingle note often the importance of the news media in the ongoing creation and maintenance of group cohesion (1999: 139-52). The media serves as the handmaiden to state ritual. The media not only report

and present rituals, but are themselves part of the ritual. Television serves as the national substitute for morning prayers. It is the ritual that suits us, an ever-changing stream of information with a stable underlying message (p. 139). The media is especially important in a religion where the central ritual act, the shedding of blood for the sake of the nation, takes place well away from the view of the people for whom the sacrifice takes place. We do not witness soldiers die 'for us' except through the media. The parallel with Leviticus as text is striking.

Jewett and Lawrence also note the importance of the media in the creation and maintenance of American Civil Religion, but focus on entertainment media. They note that 'official cultic events' are no longer key formative cultural experience. These have been replaced by 'mythically inspired entertainment' (2003: 27-28). Pahl (forthcoming) makes the same argument regarding youth culture. He focuses on the importance of teen movies for the creation of a religion of sacrifice.

In making a parallel between the American media and Leviticus, we can begin to see how a text functions in the creation and maintenance of specific ideas, ideals, and identities that are crucial to society, politics, and religion. This remains true even in the absence of the specific ritual prescribed by the text. Not everyone needs to go to war; not everyone needs to sacrifice. Israel developed new rituals to compensate for the loss of sacrifice, yet was able to do so without getting rid of the texts describing the rituals.[19] Apparently everything accomplished by animal sacrifice can be accomplished in some other way. Or is there some remainder, something lost (or possibly gained) in the replacement of one ritual by another?

6. *The Role of the Ancestors*

Another interesting ritual theme that runs through Marvin and Ingle is the importance of the ancestors in American nationalism. They note two types of ancestors: totem fathers, such as former Presidents or other great leaders, and soldiers who have died in battle. In their focus on sacrifice they concentrate on the latter group.

In their schema, ancestors function as outsiders. They threaten the community with destruction should the community fail in its duty to them. The community owes them the duty of revenge, of more blood. Exhorting new West Point graduates, General Douglas MacArthur said, 'The long grey line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and grey, would rise from their white crosses , thundering those magic words: Duty, honor, country' (in Marvin and Ingle 1999: 80). It becomes the duty of the current citizen to offer new blood to these ancestors. 'The dead must be acknowledged. They must receive offerings' (p. 117). The mechanisms that drive this system are guilt and debt. Those who survive have not made the ultimate sacrifice, as have the dead. This induces survivor guilt, and the promise not to fail next time. 'Success' in this model means shedding one's own blood. Blood that has been shed by the dead (their own—shedding the blood of the enemy does not

19. One wonders if America could do the same thing with its war rituals.

fulfill the logic of sacrifice) also creates debt. 'We' who have survived owe the dead both gratitude and revenge. Blood is the only offering they will accept. Since the dead have paid the ultimate price, the debt can never be paid. Therefore enough blood can never be shed to end the need for further sacrifice. Every new sacrifice regenerates the system, producing further guilt and debt, and requiring further sacrifice from the next generation (pp. 117-19). 'The dead ancestors must not be neglected. If they do not receive the offerings of remembrance due them, sooner or later they will exact them in blood' (p. 128).[20]

This discussion of the role of ancestors in American nationalism contrasts in interesting ways with the role of ancestors in African societies, and the role of ancestors in the Bible. There was nothing in my reading of African ancestor worship to indicate this type of bloodthirsty ancestor. There was nothing to indicate that ancestors killed in war had any special status over against those who died from natural causes.

Much the same can be said for the biblical ancestors. Some examples like Samson come to mind, but Saul provides the counter-example, where dying in battle (or at least near battle) is punishment from God that requires no emulation (1 Sam. 31). None of the other great ancestors die in battle (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, etc.).

The exception, of course, is Jesus. While Jesus does not die in battle, he is killed by enemy troops. Language of sacrifice is often used to describe his death.[21] The example of Jesus is often used in connection with the sacrifice of soldiers. Marvin and Ingle make this association clear: 'The myth of the sacrificed Christ who died for all men makes every sacrificed soldier a remodeled Christ dying to redeem his countrymen' (1999: 69).

It is at points like this that Marvin and Ingle abandon Girard in favor of the myth of American nationalism. Girard claims that Jesus' death is precisely the renunciation of the scapegoat myth (J.G. Williams 1991: 13).[22] Whatever the weaknesses of Girard's argument, Marvin and Ingle offer no explanation for their decision to abandon Girard at this point. They not only continue with the scapegoat myth, but refuse to treat the myth even as theory, treating it rather as Truth. The advantage for them in doing this is that neither myth nor Truth requires proof. If theory is myth with footnotes, Truth is myth without myth.

7. *Conclusion*

War is not the only context where sacrifice language continues to operate in Western society. Yet it is the place where blood flows freely, where the act of killing continues to be part of the language of sacrifice. It is also a place where ritual language is regularly employed to hide the facts.

20. One of the more frustrating aspects of Marvin and Ingle's book is that it is sometimes difficult to tell when the authors are presenting the myth and when they are presenting 'facts'. There is nothing in the paragraph around this quote to indicate that it belongs in one category or the other.

21. The question of Jesus' death and its relationship to Lev. 1–7 will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter.

22. A study of church history hardly bears out this conclusion. See below, Chapter 6.

The use of biblical language to excuse political and military conquest is an important avenue for study. It is too easy to claim that we have left behind the gory history of animal sacrifice. It is much more accurate to say that while ancient Israel sacrificed animals, we sacrifice young people. The gods have changed, the motives have changed, the outcomes have changed, but the language remains.

The book of Leviticus has not lost its ability to instruct Western people in regards to religious and civic behavior. Israel's priests managed to operate a sacrificial system that did not involve the killing of thousands of foreigners. They did not need to manufacture external enemies to continue the myth of an Edenic community. They did not use aggression as a substitute for confession. I am not advocating a return to animal sacrifice. As I noted in Chapter 2, we kill enough animals already. I am suggesting, however, that Leviticus can form part of a larger discussion on the place of sacrifice in our own society.

Chapter 6

THE AFTERLIFE OF LEVITICUS 1–7 IN THE CHURCH

Part of the question that has been running through this study is how modern Christians might read Leviticus as a meaningful part of their scriptures. If we are going to take this question seriously, we need to recognize that the most obvious answer to the question is that modern Christians do not read Leviticus, especially not the first seven chapters. Other parts of Leviticus are used in the context of a discussion on the death penalty or homosexuality, but these brief references are given much more attention than the extended section on sacrifice.

There are good reasons why Christians would believe that Leviticus 1–7 is no longer relevant to their lives. The most obvious reason is that the rituals of sacrifice prescribed in Leviticus 1–7 are no longer performed, so reading instructions on these performances is hardly relevant to the Christian life or the modern rituals of the church. Although a significant part of this reasoning is purely practical (there is no temple or tabernacle at which to sacrifice), this reasoning also relates closely to the discussions regarding sacrifice in the New Testament and the early church.

The discussion regarding sacrifice in the early church has already undergone significant analysis. Much of it, however, has focused on theological issues.[1] Ideas and meanings and related terminology have been carefully examined. My contribution to this discussion will focus more on the practical and ritual aspects of the early church. My hope is that a brief look at the physical realities of early church life and worship will allow a better understanding of the relationship between physical action and abstraction in language.

This chapter will also move beyond the early church into the theological debates in later church history and to the present. Here again the focus will continue on the relationship between physical action (whether ritual action or not) and theological ideas.

The movement of practice and idea from Leviticus to modern church practices is not simply one of spiritual transformation. Neither is it a movement from blood sacrifice to more 'progressive' ideas and practices. Rather, it involves the transformation of the basic rituals into something the authors of Leviticus would have found horrifying. The setting of the sacrifice will move from the floor of the Tent of Meeting, where an animal is carefully killed and offered to God under the

1. See Daly 1978; Kilmartin 1998; Straw 2002; Young 1979.

direction of a priest, to the bloody battlefields of the Crusades, World War I, and 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'. The death of Jesus on the cross will become an excuse for the slaughter of countless human beings, all within the language of sacrifice. Christians will cease to sacrifice animals, and will eventually begin to sacrifice 'themselves' by attempting to kill others. All of this action will retain a significant ritual aspect. The movement is not from ritual to theology, but from old ritual to new. Most often the language involved will simply be an excuse for actions that would take place anyway.

1. *The Prophets and Psalms*

In order to understand the afterlife of Leviticus 1–7, we need to look briefly at the prophetic books of the Old Testament. This is necessary because the prophetic critique of sacrifice forms much of the basis for the discussion in both the early and later church. The early church reads the institution of sacrifice through the lens of the prophets, while inserting the death of Jesus as the major factor in its reinterpretation of the purpose and ongoing relevance of sacrifice.

The major passages in the prophets that deal with sacrifice are Isa. 1.10-17, Jer. 7.1-15, Hos. 4.4–5.7, Amos 2.6-16, and Mic. 3.9-12. In each of these passages the writer decries the sacrifices in the temple. Yet none of these prophets call for an end to sacrifice. Their purpose is to call for greater attention to social sin.[2] What the prophets do highlight is the caveat attached to the ritual. The ritual does not provide automatic results. There are other conditions that must be attended to.

This fact has already been stated in the Torah. The blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28 encompass the rituals of sacrifice as part of obedience (28.1, 15), but ritual does not substitute for a wider obedience.

The prophetic critique of cultic ritual can take on new meaning at a time when sacrifice is no longer an option. It provides a way for people who wish to follow the laws and commands of Yahweh to substitute other actions for animal sacrifice, and also to reapply the language of sacrifice outside the cultic sphere. We may not be able to sacrifice animals in the temple, but there are more important ways of observing the commandments, and there are also other ways that we can 'sacrifice'. The words of the prophets provide a bridge between a Judaism that includes animal sacrifice and one that doesn't.

Much the same can be said of the Psalms. There are a number of places in the Psalms that echo the critique of cultus in the prophets. For example, Ps. 40.6 proclaims that sacrifice and brunt offerings are not required by God. Psalm 51.16-17 says that a broken spirit is the true form of sacrifice. While there are many more Psalms that speak positively about sacrifice (see, e.g., Pss. 4.5; 20.3; 27.6; 66.15), the verses above do provide language for people who are searching for an understanding of worship of God without animal sacrifice.

2. This conclusion is a commonplace in prophets scholarship. See, e.g., Andersen and Freedman 1989: 539.

2. *Sacrifice in the New Testament*

The New Testament contains no significant analysis of Leviticus 1–7. There are, so far as I know, no direct references to these chapters in any part of the New Testament. It might even be argued that New Testament writers have no interest in directing our attention to Leviticus 1–7 since the prescription of animal sacrifice may be counter to their aims. Yet there are numerous references to sacrifice and sacrifice rituals in the New Testament. My interest in this study is to highlight the practical aspects of the discussion, why it is necessary, and how it relates to the real world experiences of the early church. These practical issues will relate further to ritual issues, both the rituals of society and the rituals that are forming in the emerging church. It is the interaction of the practical, the ritual, and the ideational that will allow a more complete understanding of how parts of the emerging church interacted with the ritual texts in Leviticus 1–7.

a. *The Crucifixion*

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by the Roman authorities, in some sort of collaboration with the Jewish elite in Jerusalem. This simple fact is the foundation for all discussion of sacrifice in the New Testament. It is important to recognize the priority of the act. Jesus was not crucified in response to a carefully debated theology of atonement. He did not die as a response to the arguments about sacrifice found in the book of Hebrews. Nor did he die because he followed a widely recognized social pattern of how a Messiah should die. The New Testament itself is clear that the disciples' interpretation/understanding of the event did not precede the event (Mk 9.31-33 and parallels; Jn 12.16). However Jesus himself understood his death, the disciples' understanding begins afterward.

There are a number of important points here that need to be highlighted. The manner of Jesus' death was a surprise. While the early church made significant use of Old Testament images and ideas to explain the cross, and while second-temple Judaism had already had significant discussion on a theology of suffering, there is nothing in the Old Testament that would point toward the idea that someone claiming to be a Messiah should be expected to be brutally executed by foreign occupiers.

So it is the event that triggers the particular responses found in the New Testament. The event happened. There was little point in the early church trying to deny it. Nor was there much to be gained from attempting to downplay its significance. Imagine an historical account of the Kennedy presidency that does not mention his assassination. Now imagine that Kennedy had been executed as a criminal by the legal system rather than assassinated by a lone gunman.[3] While the legal system that executed Jesus was already considered illegitimate by many of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries, its ability to kill him would have negated any claim he had to messiahship. The gap between expectation (the Messiah was expected to overthrow the Romans) and reality (Jesus died at the hands of the

3. This is similar to the 'what if' raised by the various conspiracy theories regarding Kennedy's death. These theories ascribe greater meaning to his death rather than less.

Romans, and there was no subsequent successful revolution) was too great to be ignored.

Further, Jesus' death was not just any death. It was a particularly public, brutal death. Presumably the historical Jesus would have died at some point anyway. His death could have been accidental, or the result of a disease. Or he might have died quietly in his bed at the end of a long life. As Messiah he might have died in battle, striving valiantly to rid Israel of the Roman occupiers.

The public suffering accompanying his death would have called for some sort of response from his followers. The suffering of others elicits emotional and rational response. It would be in the interests of the early church to direct these responses in ways suitable to it. Should people who hear of this death feel ashamed for Jesus? Should they feel angry at the Romans or the Jewish authorities? Are there actions that this death calls for? All of these possible responses to the brutal death of a person are part of the meaningfulness of the event.

Besides the death itself, it is important to note the actions of both Jesus and his followers before his death. Some of these actions are likely unknown by the general population, and therefore are subject to the creation of legend, the creation of meaning.

Others of these actions can be inferred from the nature of the event. If Jesus died on a cross, then he did not die fighting the Romans. Why not? If Jesus died on the cross and his disciples are still alive, why did they not die defending him? While certain legendary types are available for a socially acceptable answer to these questions, any story that arises must account for the facts that are known.

Another important aspect of Jesus' death is that it was already a ritual event. It was a public execution carried on in a ritualized fashion in order to proclaim a specific set of meanings to the general populace. There are a wide variety of ways of killing a person. The Romans used crucifixion at specific occasions for specific purposes. The 'meaning' of the cross was so widely known that the Romans merely had to erect upright poles at the intersections of major roads to carry the meaning without the need for a body.

Like many widespread rituals, the specific details of the event were open to regional variation. The torture that preceded crucifixion was likely left to the local authorities. There appears to have been no single 'correct' method of keeping the body on the cross. The 'meaning' of the cross was simple and stark. So long as there was a body dying a slow, painful, public death, the message got through.

So the 'meaning' of the cross was already built into the event. Simply put, it was 'We are the Romans. This could be you.' So the challenge for the early church was not to bring meaning to a meaningless death, but to challenge the meaning already attached to the event.

On the other hand, the 'meaning' of the cross as an event was already likely being challenged from below. The meaning cited above was that given by the Romans. They asserted their meaning in the same way that they asserted their authority. The cross event might even be said to be a symbol of their ability to assert their own meaning structure on the event. Yet even when the Romans could dictate the ritual, they were not fully able to control its interpretation. For the powerful the cross served as a site of control, but for the apparently powerless

it could have served as a site of contention. The meaning of the cross from below may have been that of martyrdom. So the early church likely had a set of counter-hegemonic readings of the cross that it had access to in its attempt to re-define the death of Jesus.

Another way to counter the Roman ritual of crucifixion was to create a counter-ritual. For the early church this was the Eucharist.[4] The Eucharist uses verbal elements that parallel the physical elements of crucifixion (body and blood), but replaces the physical elements with bread and wine. Seen in this way, the Eucharist does not transform the meaning of 'bread and wine' so much as it transforms the meaning of 'body and blood' that naturally accompanies crucifixion.

This also means that the church does not take the physical components of the crucifixion ritual and transform them into verbal elements. The church challenges ritual with ritual, action with action. The action of domination and death is replaced with the action of hospitality, sustenance, life.

b. *Ongoing Suffering*

A second factor that required response from the church was the reality of ongoing suffering. While the direct persecution of the church as the church was occasional and sporadic in the early years, there was also no obvious indication that the church would soon take over the world, except through direct divine intervention. As early apocalyptic zeal faded, the church needed to account for its place as a minor social group under the continuing domination of Roman authorities.

While this is self-evident, it remains important to recognize that a 'theology of suffering' developed as response to actual suffering. These are not abstract discussions among overfed academics. Modern feminists did not invent the idea that theology must be done as reflection upon lived experience. The early church proclaimed Jesus as Lord, as the ruler of all. In doing so, it also needed to account for the undeniable political and social conditions of its existence, or risk becoming a farce.

c. *Ongoing Experiences of Jesus*

Most members of the early church never met the historical Jesus. In fact, only a tiny portion of it leadership could claim this, and they soon died. Yet there were those inside the church that claimed to have experienced Jesus after his death. Paul is the most obvious example (1 Cor. 15.8), but John's writing are filled with the language of experiencing Jesus (know, abide, walk in the light). These experiences were *supernatural* in the plain sense of the term. They transcended natural experience. They also affected the thoughts and the lives of people in the church.

Ritual is another form of experience that transcends normal experience. Ritual is also a way to invite, induce, or democratize supernatural experience. Not

4. This particular ritual of the church is known by various names. I grew up calling it Communion. Other traditions call it Holy Communion or the Mass. I will continue to call it Eucharist here for the sake of simplicity.

everyone had these experiences, but the language of the Eucharist found in the New Testament points to this action as a form of experience of Jesus ('this is my body'). The different interpretations of the event found in the gospels and Paul provide responses to other factors, but the basic experience of the body of Jesus in the bread remains.

d. *Destruction of Temple*

Like the crucifixion, the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem is an event that was simply too crucial to be avoided. Paul wrote before 70 CE, and so does not deal with it, but much of the rest of the New Testament was written either in the actions leading up to the destruction or in the aftermath of the event.

For the church's response to Leviticus 1–7, and its larger response to the issue of sacrifice, there is nothing more crucial. It appears from the accounts in Acts that members of the early church in Jerusalem continued to worship and sacrifice in the temple after Jesus' death (Acts 2.4; 3.1; 5.42; 24.17). So long as sacrifice continued in the temple, the church had a number of options in formulating its response to the question of the relationship of Jesus to temple-oriented Judaism. They might have rejected the temple altogether, but they also may have decided that the death of Jesus was part of the ongoing work of God, a work which also included the sacrifices in the temple. The temple may have become a significant place of pilgrimage, or a place of contention where the church centered its conflict with other Jewish groups.

Once the temple was destroyed most of these options no longer were available. The notion of Jesus as sacrifice no longer needed to compete with ongoing sacrifice in the temple as instituted by God in the Law. Both the church and synagogue needed to deal with the end of the temple, the end of sacrifice as it was directly prescribed in the Law.

Of course for both groups this was not an entirely new problem. Diaspora Judaism had long dealt with the question of how to be Jewish without being able personally to sacrifice in the temple. The Pharisees responded by making the household table equivalent to the table of the Lord in the temple (Neusner 1973: 65). Similarly, the church outside of the area of Jerusalem never appears to have seen temple sacrifice as important to its practice. Nonetheless, the destruction of the temple changed the nature of the question, which must mean a change in the answer.

e. *The Problem of Break/Continuity with Judaism*

The reality of the destruction of the temple highlights the ongoing question of the relationship between the church and the synagogue. What is important for this discussion is to keep in mind that this was again not an abstract theoretical discussion. It was a discussion among real Jews and real Gentiles, with people likely belonging to both 'institutions'.[5]

5. There is also the question of whether the church and synagogue were parallel institutions. If the synagogue was a gathering/teaching place for people of Jewish lineage, and the church was a voluntary association, then people could have been free to be part of both groups without conflict (Ascough 2000: 328).

The relationship of church and synagogue to the rituals of Judaism was likely one point of focus for the tension. In the modern church it is difficult to see a close parallel between the Eucharist and any Jewish ritual as it is currently practiced. While the Passover is often used as a symbolic template for the Eucharist, there are few practical parallels besides the physical presence of bread and wine.

This is not the case in the early church. As Dennis Smith has demonstrated, both Jewish and Christian traditions draw on a common Greco-Roman banquet tradition and ideology (2003: 134, 175). This foundational similarity would have provided an opportunity for confusion and the subsequent development of distinctive practices. Thus, much of the weight of distinction would have been born by specific ritual practices, practices that displayed both continuity and contrast with Jewish ritual. The early church did not theorize its distinction from Judaism (and society at large) so much as it enacted it.

f. *Social Institution of Banquet*

As Dennis Smith has shown, the Greco-Roman social institution of the banquet/symposium provided the traditional customs and ideology out of which the early church celebrated the Eucharist (2003: 3, 5, 175). Certainly in many parts of the early church the Jewish banquet would have been a significant model, but it, too, was modeled on the larger Greco-Roman practice (p. 134).

What this means for our study of Eucharist and sacrifice is that the form of the Eucharist was not modeled on sacrificial rituals found either in Leviticus or in the temple. Since the practice of Eucharist is not based on sacrifice models, sacrifice language is not a necessary part of an interpretation of the ritual.

In the Greco-Roman world the dining area was the room in the house best suited for having guests, and thus the most logical gathering place for the house church. The rules of hospitality in Greco-Roman society (and also Jewish society, however influenced by Hellenism) would have dictated the serving of a meal. The form and ideology of the meal and events that followed the meal were strongly influenced by cultural norms and expectations, except where specific practices were regarded as pagan (such as the question of eating meat offered to idols—see 1 Cor. 8). It is this practice and the various ritual aspects of it that develop into the Eucharist (Smith 2003: 174).

The banquet/symposium was also important to a group like the early church because of the social codes it enacts. The banquet defines social boundaries, creates a social bond and social obligation, and is a locus of both social stratification and social equality (Smith 2003: 9-11). All of these are important in the construction of a specifically Christian identity. Banquets were used for these purposes by other Jewish groups such as the Pharisees and the Essenes (pp. 133-58). The Passover was also celebrated in a manner that paralleled the banquet/symposium (pp. 147-50).[6]

6. Although the Mishnah's Seder liturgy cannot be automatically retrojected onto practices in the first century CE.

Thus, while the Eucharist is given various sacrificial interpretations in the New Testament,[7] these are responses to performances and ideologies that already exist. When we understand that the various Eucharist rituals in the modern church are derived from a banquet tradition, we can also see how much ritual transformation is possible within a continuing tradition. Sacrificial language, shaped partially by Leviticus, is combined with the social institution of a banquet which would have involved a full meal, and results in a ritual that contains neither the death of an animal nor the consumption of significant quantities of food and drink.

g. *The Place of Sacrifice in Greco-Roman Religions*

Frances Young notes that in the ancient world 'Sacrifice was assumed, and played an essential part in everything which claimed to be a religion' (1979: 7). He also states that Christianity is the first movement to claim to be a religion without a visible sacrificial cult (p. 7).[8]

While mainstream Judaism did have a sacrificial cult prior to 70 CE, and continued to have sacrifice inscribed in its canon even afterward, diaspora Judaism had long dealt with the question of the lack of public sacrificial rituals in its diaspora communities. Thus, the synagogue had arguments that could easily be adapted by the church in its public apologetic (Young 1979: 59-70). Further, numerous Greek writers questioned the practice of sacrifice, although they did not suggest its abolition (p. 19). Thus, models and ideas were available for the church to defend itself, yet in doing so it also needed to distinguish itself from other philosophies and groups.

h. *Ritual and Group Identity*

The existence of rituals of banquet and sacrifice in Greco-Roman society also points to the importance of rituals in general for defining group identity. Since the early church was not an ethnic group with a specific cultural identity (Smith 2003: 20), it needed specific rituals to establish this identity. Once established, rituals would also serve to solidify, affirm, and continue this identity. In this sense, rituals are not a response to a need so much as they are a need in themselves (Driver 1991: 4). In this sense also, the specifics of the ritual are not as important as the fact of the ritual. Thus, the Eucharist develops out of a variety of local Christian practices. The local practices are responses to local needs, and the unified tradition is a response to the desire for commonality between Christian groups.

i. *Conclusions*

In response to these practical considerations, as well as a host of local conditions and pressures unique to each situation, various writers in the early church

7. Daly says that the presentation of the Eucharist in the New Testament is 'laden with sacrificial connotations' (1978: 499).

8. One of the difficulties in talking about the early church is attempting to define what exactly it was. The English term 'religion' does not really apply. The early church is not yet a culture nor a subculture. Our attempt to find a term to describe it was likely paralleled by the early church in its attempt to describe itself.

responded to the question of sacrifice for their audience. A complete study of the various passages in the New Testament relating to sacrifice is outside the scope of this paper, and has already been undertaken elsewhere. For my purposes, I want to highlight two major forms of response, one theoretical and the other practical. Then I will look at the intersection of these responses.

One way the church developed a response to the many needs and problems it faced was to create a connection between the death of Jesus and the idea of sacrifice. This connection is usually studied under the general heading of *atonement*. What concerns us here is not the specifics of this doctrine, but to note how the connection between Jesus' death and sacrifice is a response to the practical considerations listed above.

In looking through the list above, it is easy to see how many problems were met through the intersection of sacrificial ideas and the reality of the death of Jesus. If Jesus' death is conceived as sacrifice, then the shame of the event is taken away. The church then has access to martyr ideology already present in Judaism. The suffering of the church becomes a matter of identifying with and continuing in the path of Jesus. The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem confirms the importance and singular nature of Jesus' sacrifice. The singular nature of Jesus' sacrifice becomes an important, if not central theme in the question of continuity or break with Judaism. Jesus' death as a unique once-for-all event serves as an explanation to the larger society since it means that the church need not and cannot continue to sacrifice, at least not in the temple in Jerusalem.

The varied language describing Jesus' death as sacrifice in the New Testament is a practical response to practical problems for the church. These 'abstractions' on the nature of an event fill specific needs in a community that is in the midst of the creation of self-identity. They draw on specific parts of available tradition, drawing new conclusions on the basis of venerated language.

Not surprisingly, the central images of sacrifice in the New Testament do not parallel those in Leviticus 1–7. The New Testament writers make extensive use of the prophetic critique of temple cult, and no direct use of Leviticus 1–7. Similarly, the critiques of cultic sacrifice found in the Psalms are used as a pattern to express God's preference for godly living over ritual that does not lead to godly living. The prophets and Psalms are more useful in confronting the realities of the early church.

The second form taken by the church's response to sacrifice was the formalization of the Eucharist. As noted earlier, the Eucharist ritual grew naturally out of a common banquet/symposium tradition that the early church adapted from the Greco-Roman world in which it existed. It grew naturally out of the needs of the church, and also out of the common human action of ritualization. In specific contexts, ordinary actions are given more meaning than is implied by the simple action. Within the Christian tradition, the ordinary action of the sharing of food and drink, bread and wine, were given the additional meaning of mystical participation in the body and blood of Jesus.

Again, the ritualization served to answer a number of the concerns listed above. More importantly, it answered the need for common ritual. The replacement of

sacrifice by verbal abstraction does not fully respond to the force of the sacrifice ritual. Ritual as experience cannot be replaced by ideas without some sort of remainder. That remainder is physical experience.

This is not to say that eating bread and drinking wine is an experience parallel to the sacrifice of an animal. Neither is it likely that the experience of eating and drinking is as profound as that of sacrifice. Yet this is not really the issue, at least not in the diaspora or in the church after the destruction of the temple. Since sacrifice in the temple is not an experience available to either of these groups, the physical experience of Eucharist is fuller than the mere reading of a text about sacrifice. In a culture in which sacrifice was the norm for most people, the church was able to offer its members a ritual that it claimed was parallel to and even superior to animal sacrifice. The church as body-of-Christ participated not only mystically but also physically/ritually in the sacrifice of Christ. The ideas of sacrifice were matched by the ritual of sacrifice.

3. *Texts of the Last Supper*

Besides the texts that link the death of Jesus to the idea of sacrifice, the New Testament also contains texts that provide a basis for the ongoing ritual of the Eucharist. Studies of these texts abound, for their historical, theological, and liturgical content. Here I simply want to compare these texts as texts with the text of Leviticus 1–7.

There are four major texts and one minor one in the New Testament regarding ritual of the Eucharist. The first three are the parallel synoptic gospel texts (Mt. 26.17-30; Mk 14.13-26; Lk. 22.7-39). Paul also described the ritual in 1 Cor. 11.23-24.[9] The gospel of John does not have a firm parallel to this ritual, but instead describes (institutes?) the actions of footwashing (13.1-30).

As texts setting forth a ritual, it is only Paul that deliberately sets out the event as a ritual. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul breaks off from his instructions to the church in Corinth to insert a narrative section. The narrative is presented as part of received tradition (11.23), and is one of few places in the Pauline letters where he actually speaks about the actions or words of the historical Jesus. The instructions to repeat these particular actions of Jesus are also part of the narrative, being spoken by Jesus ('Do this' twice in v. 24).

The context makes it clear that Paul is attempting to correct the Corinthian church regarding its performance of this ritual. Yet the instructions are narrative, so that the words that are presumably to be uttered during the ritual are not formal ritual words (they do not describe the ritual) but narrative words (they describe the event that is ritualized). Thus, in order for someone to use these words during the ritual, the reader must use the voice of Jesus. The reader becomes a character in the original drama, rather than a commentator upon the drama.

9. The actual beginning and ending of these texts is rather arbitrary. I have simply included verses that allow for a description of the ritual and some of its setting.

The narrative of the ritual in 1 Corinthians points back to the event in the life of Jesus. The narrative in the synoptic gospels points even further back to the Passover (Mt. 26.17; Mk 14.13; Lk. 22.7). In this way, the ritual described in the New Testament is not about itself, but about something else, about a previous event. Yet even that event (the last supper) is not only about itself; it foreshadows the cross. The ritual of Eucharist, then, is presented as a ritual of remembrance both in its form and more obviously in its contents ('do this in remembrance of me'). Still, Paul is quite clear that this ritual has ongoing purpose and consequences for those who perform it. He speaks of the supper as a proclamation of Jesus' death (11.26), something that can be performed in an 'unworthy manner' (11.27). Self-examination, discernment, and self-judgment are a necessary part of preparation for the ritual (11.28-30). The consequences of ritual failure may include death (11.30). These ideas speak of seriousness well beyond recollection of an historical event.

The verses describing the ritual itself combine description and monologue. The description of the action is simple, though not entirely consistent between the accounts. Bread is taken, broken, and shared. Similarly the cup: blessing is said, thanks is given. The details differ, especially in Luke where there are two cups of wine (22.17, 20).

If someone were to perform these actions they would be allowed significant freedom in how the movements are performed. Like the prescriptions in Leviticus 1–7, much is left open. There is no description of the bread or the cup. Neither do we read about the correct manner to hold or break the bread, when to pour the wine into the cup, how the sharing is accomplished, nor a large number of other possible ways to enact the ritual.

In contrast to this and to Leviticus 1–7, some of the *words* in the ritual are explicit. Unlike the silence that appears to pervade sacrifice in ancient Israel, there are specific and non-specific words in this ritual. Neither the prayers nor the blessing are specified;[10] yet Paul, who rarely quotes Jesus in his letters, here records specific words from Jesus regarding the institution of the ritual. Paul's uncharacteristic quotation from Jesus suggests that specific words of Jesus were seen as important to this particular ritual. The alternative would be to place these words in the voice of the narrator. Paul might have said 'and when he had given thanks, he broke it and shared it. He did this in order to...' Placing the words in the mouth of Jesus ritualizes the words in a specific way ('this is *my* body' not 'this is Jesus' body').

In the synoptics, the inclusion of the story within a larger story also opens up the possibility of ritual failure. Those present at the meal include Judas, who went on to betray Jesus. The failure of the ritual is made more interesting in the use of bread as a symbol of disunity and betrayal (only in Mk 14.20). Whatever the ritual is meant to accomplish, it clearly does not accomplish this for Judas.

10. We might presume that most of the early church would have used the blessings and prayers of the Passover ritual. Yet Paul does not specify this as a Passover celebration, and neither does he specify the content of the thanksgiving prayer (1 Cor. 11.24).

Luke makes further use of the ritual by using the term 'table' to link the supper (22.14) with the later discussion on betrayal (22.21), greatness (22.27), and future reward (22.30). The fourfold use of a single image allows the metaphoric stretching of the ritual to speak to other concerns. These metaphors also highlight the question of authority within the ritual, conferring highest status on the one who serves (22.27).[11]

These various points of comparison again highlight the textual nature of our object of study. They also show us various ways that texts might relate to ritual. The narrative structure of Leviticus is thus seen as important, rather than incidental to our understanding of it.

4. *Hebrews*

The book of Hebrews provides the most extended discussion of sacrifice in the New Testament. A complete treatment of the idea of sacrifice as found in Hebrews would be a book on its own, and has already been undertaken by others (e.g. Dunnill 1992). Hebrews is important for this study because it provides the lens through which Leviticus is read for much of Christian thought. Leviticus is thought to be irrelevant to Christian teaching and practice because of the arguments in Hebrews. Whether this is a well-reasoned argument or merely an excuse to avoid difficult questions, Christians throughout history have regularly resorted to the language of Hebrews to explain their understanding of the sacrifices mandated in Leviticus.

For the purpose of this study, I want to highlight two aspects of the approach Hebrews takes. First, it is important to note the regular use Hebrews makes of the Old Testament in its discussion. Hebrews regularly quotes scripture, often placing these sayings in the mouth of Jesus (e.g. 10.5) or the Holy Spirit (e.g. 10.15). Yet in all of these quotes, none of them are from Leviticus 1–7. Hebrews 10 is the most extended discussion of sacrifice. In that chapter he quotes Psalms 40 and 135, Jeremiah 31, Deuteronomy 32, and Habakkuk 2. These quotations serve a variety of purposes in the chapter. The lack of direct reference to Leviticus 1–7 suggests that Hebrews is undertaking an indirect response to Leviticus, and serves more as a response to an idea than to a particular prescription.

Much discussion has already taken place regarding the specific ideas in Hebrews regarding sacrifice. For example, Graham Hughes in his study of the hermeneutics of Hebrews says that the writer 'has actually replaced the sacrifice ritual with the infinitely more profound concept of the sacrifice of the will' (1979: 89). Hughes' comment is interesting because of the way he contrasts 'ritual' with 'concept', highlighting a general preference for idea over action. Craig Koester in his commentary on Hebrews argues that redemption 'can best be understood as cleansing from defilement rather than as payment of ransom' (2001: 412). These are just some of the many discussions on the theological ideas in Hebrews.

11. The elasticity of this type of metaphor is shown in later church tradition where the one who presides at the ritual is often said to 'serve'. The church manages to reverse Jesus' reversal of status markers.

More interesting for our discussion is the suggestion by John Dunnill that Hebrews is not presenting us with an argument 'but with a *liturgy*, a sacral action' (1992: 122). Dunnill argues that Hebrews is centered around the sacral action of 'drawing near the throne of grace' (Heb. 4.16), of 'tasting the heavenly gift' (6.4), rather than around belief (pp. 123, 242). In all of this, Hebrews does not expound the logic of sacrifice so much as simply assume it (p. 117).

When seen in this light Hebrews becomes an example of how the line between ritual action and ordinary action can become blurred. For the writer of Hebrews, 'approaching the throne of grace' is not a metaphor that is enacted in ritual but a continual action in which the Christian, following the example of Jesus, lives life in obedience to the will of God (Dunnill 1992: 244). Even the sections of Hebrews that highlight the sacrifice of Jesus focus on it as an action of obedience (Heb. 10.9; see Hughes 1979: 89).

This understanding of ritual is quite in keeping with the language of Leviticus 1–7. These chapters do not present the logic of sacrifice, a theology of sacrifice, or the correct understanding of ritual. They present sacrifice as something that needs to happen, so here is how to go about it. Explanations are kept to a minimum. It is almost as if the writers are fearful that too many words would get in the way. Both Hebrews and Leviticus want to keep the focus on the action of approaching God.

Yet this is not how Hebrews is commonly used. Typically Hebrews is used to explain the superiority of Christ's sacrifice over Jewish practice or local practice (in the case of Africa). Animal sacrifice is no longer necessary because of Jesus, as read through the lens of Hebrews. While for North Americans the point is largely moot, in other parts of the world the question remains a real one. Hebrews allows Christians to remove 'sacrifice' from the realm of action into the realm of abstraction, since the action of sacrifice has been done away with.

5. *Sacrifice in the Early Church*

The early church continued to transform the practice and language of sacrifice, in response to both the language and practice of tradition, as well as the various pressures and ideas that faced it in its society. Many of the issues were the same as those in the New Testament church.[12] In addition, the church faced new challenges, including those from inside its own ranks. A more complete discussion of these issues has been developed by others (Daly 1978; Kilmartin 1998; Straw 2002; Young 1979). For the purposes of this study, I want to highlight the interaction of idea and ritual, specifically regarding sacrifice and the Eucharist.

One term that is commonly used to describe the early church's understanding of sacrifice is 'spiritualization'. The church is said to 'spiritualize' the idea of sacrifice, following the general outlines set by the Psalms and Prophets. In his study of sacrifice in the early church, Robert Daly helpfully defines 'spiritualization' as

12. I recognize that there is no clear demarcation between 'the early church' and 'the New Testament church'. The terminology is here a shorthand for distinguishing New Testament texts from other writings of the early church.

an emphasis on 'the inner, spiritual, or ethical significance of the cult over against the merely material or merely external understanding of it' (1978: 4). While this definition is not without difficulty,[13] Daly contrasts this definition of 'spiritualization' over against one that means 'dematerialization'. The early church did not simply remove the idea of 'sacrifice' into the 'spiritual' realm (whatever that might be). It did, however, emphasize parts of sacrifice unrelated to the continuing action of killing animals.

One of the ideas in the Greek world that the early church found attractive was that a perfect God should not need anything. Any notion that sacrifice was for the benefit of the god meant that the god was insufficient on its own (Young 1979: 98). Thus, all sacrifice that was offered was reconceived as thanksgiving offering (p. 132). 'Only prayer, charity, a life of Christian virtue, and self offering in martyrdom were reckoned to be suitable sacrifices for the one true God who was in need of nothing but the loyalty and devotion of his creatures' (p. 98). Even with these delineations of acceptable sacrifice, Justin claimed prayer and good deeds as metaphoric sacrifice, rather than literal sacrifice (Lathrop 1991: 38).

The inclusion of martyrdom within the realm of sacrificial acts parallels ideas within the Roman and Jewish worlds. In the Roman context, Christian writers transformed the social glory of the gladiator into the eternal glory of the innocent suffering one (Straw 2002: 40-41). 'The Christian church cherished the victim *qua* victim as blameless sacrifice to their God' (p. 43). Here again it is important to remember that this was not developed as an abstract response to a theoretical issue. The ongoing reality of martyrdom called for some sort of response. Both Christian and non-Christian needed to be provided with a spiritual context for the suffering and death of people who claimed to be God's chosen ones.

The early church, then, did not simply remove the idea of sacrifice into the abstract realm. Even if only conceived of in metaphoric terms, Christians were called upon to real physical sacrifice. Christians understood giving food to the poor, rather than to the gods, as an act of sacrifice (Lathrop 1991: 38). Personal suffering was also seen as a form of sacrifice, including the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom. Rather than simply offering an animal as an offering to God, Christians offered their own bodies.

Yet with the abandonment of cultic sacrifice by the church there remained a strong ritual element in the church's ideas around sacrifice. The church was neither anti-sacrifice nor anti-ritual. Much of the language of the sacrifice ritual was transferred to the Eucharist. As Daly notes, the early church made liberal use of sacrificial terms and concepts when describing the Eucharist (1978: 501-507).

This means that, in a strong sense, the early church retained a sacrificial ritual within its practice. While the Eucharist was understood as a sacrifice in different ways by different parts of the church, the language of sacrifice remained as a way of verbalizing ritual activity.

The instructions regarding sacrifice in Leviticus 1–7 are specific instructions regarding what is otherwise the ordinary experience of slaughtering an animal.

13. There remains in this definition a priorization of understanding over action. There also remains the question of his definition of 'spiritual'.

In this case, there are also unusual acts involved in the sacrifice, acts not related to the usual activities of preparing an animal for eating. One example of unusual activity is the placing of the hands upon the head of the animal. This act is unusual insofar as it is unnecessary to the simple action of slaughtering an animal. The most unusual act in Leviticus 1–7 is the burning of the complete carcass. This is not only unnecessary, but renders the animal unfit for consumption. Thus, these specific actions, along with other unique features such as place, time, and the presence of cultic personnel, create a uniquely ritual event out of an ordinary event.

We can describe the Eucharist in similar language. The ordinary actions of eating bread and drinking wine are given special significance both through the ideas that accompany them and the specific way they are performed. What is additionally interesting in this case is that language from one sort of ritual event is transferred to quite a different event. The specific descriptions of the event found in Leviticus cannot be used literally in the early church due to its lack of animal sacrifice. The major phrase that carries the tradition forward is that 'the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the sin you have committed, and you shall be forgiven' (Lev. 4.35 and pars.). Even this phrase is not simply transplanted to a new ritual, but is given new meaning by its association with the Christian message.

Further, the 'meaning' or the official explanation of the Eucharist undergoes changes as time passes. Kilmartin notes that in the early history of the North African church a common systematic understanding is lacking, although there appears to be a common ritual (1998: 4). So one can imagine various Christians participating in the same ritual event with significantly different understandings of the event. On the other hand, both Kilmartin and Daly note that, as the systematic understanding of the Eucharist changes in the early church, so does the ritual. Daly records this as a movement from seeing the Christian life as a sacrifice to seeing the Eucharist itself as a sacrifice (1978: 508). The effect of this change is that the laity are removed from participation in the Eucharist, since the ritual 'is a totally real, cultic sacrifice' (p. 508). Here, then, Leviticus intrudes on the ritual practice of the early church, since most of the actions of the sacrifice in Leviticus 1–7 are performed by a priest.

Kilmartin concurs with Daly, and also notes that when the Eucharist becomes a sacrifice in itself it becomes 'a spiritual good which can be exchanged for material goods' (1998: 23). This effect creates further parallels with Leviticus. The Eucharist as spiritual good becomes a means by which the priest can both assure his status in the community and assure his material well-being through the offerings that accompany the Eucharist. The same can be said for the place of the priest in Leviticus 1–7.

6. *Sacrifice in Later Church History*

It is, of course, impossible to summarize all of the uses of the idea and actions of sacrifice over the next 1500 years of church history. It is also impossible to account for all the uses to which Leviticus 1–7 is put. The transformation of

sacrificial language and practice is not a direct movement from one thing to another, yet major themes emerge.

For the purposes of this study, I want to highlight two overlapping developments in the practice and doctrine of the church. These two are chosen because of their continuing relevance for the doctrine and practice of the twenty-first-century church, and the debate that surrounds them today.

First, the development of the doctrine of atonement becomes crucial in the church's efforts at self-definition. This discussion includes questions of definition for terms such as *propitiation* and *expiation*, and corresponding terms in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. It furthers the early church's discussion regarding the meaning of Jesus' death. It attempts to impose singular understanding on the canonical record.[14] It also sets a course for the various ways the church interacts with the world around it, and how Christians acted in regards to the various demands placed upon them.

The various theories and their histories have been adequately discussed by others. Aulén's *Christus Victor* remains a valuable overview and handbook for the discussion (1940). What is interesting for this discussion is first how very different this discussion is from the descriptive text of Leviticus 1–7. As we have seen, Leviticus 1–7 has very little to say about the specific mechanism for the relationship between the act of slaughtering an animal in a particular fashion and the forgiveness of sins. The message is simply, 'do it this way and you will be forgiven'.

This does not mean that the ancient Jews did not speculate further on this relationship. What it does mean, however, is that this particular author emphasized action for its own sake. One does the sacrifice in this manner because that is how it is done. The manner of the sacrifice is not linked to any particular doctrinal idea. Why is a priest necessary? The matter is not discussed. Presumably one goes to a priest because priests do sacrifice. This action is not given overt theological justification. The author might have said that a priest is part of the sacrifice because he is especially clean due to his ongoing association with the Tent of Meeting. Or perhaps he might have said that a priest was necessary because certain words, not recorded in the text and known only to the priest, must be said in order for the ritual to 'work'. But for whatever reason, the author creates a text that usually limits itself to description and effect.

Within the tradition of the church, however, there often appears to be the opposite tendency. Theological justification is made to appear to exist prior to ritual prescription.[15] The statement is not 'you do *X* and *Y* happens' but rather 'because *Y* needs to happen, you must do *X*'. Thus the texts of the discussion in church history reverse the priority of Leviticus 1–7. This follows naturally from the Western priorization of spirit over body, abstraction over action. Leviticus 1–7 allows us to see what ritual texts might be like without this priorization.

14. George Aichele considers this part of the purpose of the canon (2001: 218).

15. Again we run into chicken-and-egg questions here. It is just as likely that theological justification follows ritual practice, but the theology is written as if it takes priority.

The second development in church history of interest to this study is the transformation of sacrificial language from prescription of animal slaughter to description of and justification for warfare. This development is parallel to the first one. As Anthony Bartlett notes in his study of the cross, Anselm's classic work on atonement theory, *Cur Deus Homo*, is locked into a feudal logic of violence, and creates a system of honor and satisfaction (2001: 84). J. Denny Weaver in developing his *Nonviolent Atonement* also notes that classic atonement theories are based on an idea of retributive justice, and provided a way for Christians to claim salvation 'while actively accommodating the violence of the sword' (2001: 5).[16]

Still, quite apart from the cloisters of the monks, there developed a language of sacrifice that applied not only to the suffering of Christians for the sake of Christ, but to the suffering of Christians as they actively attempted to kill others for the sake of Christ. These ideas are recorded first-hand for us by an anonymous knight, writing in rough Latin from the midst of the first Crusade (late eleventh century).[17] This knight understood himself as a pilgrim, taking up his cross to set free the road to Jerusalem. He understood his task as that of spiritual warfare, different from carnal warfare. He believed it important to their success that pilgrims conduct themselves as holy people.[18] He understood those who died as martyrs. His understandings are framed by the narratives of the Old Testament.

Given this self-understanding, it is possible to categorize this person's actions as ritual actions. He takes on a number of roles that are described in Leviticus, although not unproblematically. As someone suffering as Jesus suffered, he becomes the sacrifice. It is as unblemished sacrifice that he wishes to present himself to God, hence his need to act in a holy manner. However, as one who is involved in spiritual warfare, he is also the one doing the slaughtering. This language has significant resemblance to the idea in Hebrews where Jesus is both High Priest and sacrifice (7.26, 27), yet the difference is also clear in that Jesus as High Priest offers himself, while the knight, when killing, kills others.[19]

Part of what is happening at this time is the transformation of knighthood into a Christian calling. Before the eleventh century, knighthood was seen as un-Christian. In part, it was Christianized through the deallegorization of Old Testament narratives (Lynch 2003: 33-36). Old Testament stories about God and warfare came to be interpreted literally, which gave the Christian a template for actions of killing in the name of God.[20]

16. Later Weaver adds that it also served as an accommodation to chattel slavery and racism (2001: 5).

17. The following descriptions are from Lynch 2003: 24-28. The knight's account is called *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum.*

18. Part of this holiness would have been keeping clean from contamination by women. For a discussion of the myth of the warrior-priest and its relationship to male blood, see L.A. Johnson 2003: 191.

19. There appears to be no suggestion that the knight considers those he kills as sacrifices. The ideology of victim as blameless and willing would not allow for this.

20. Allen Frantzen in his study of the language of chivalry notes that knights understood themselves to be exacting revenge for the death of Christ (2004: 77).

What gets lost in this movement is specific reference to the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus is theologized to the point where the 'meaning' of his death overwhelms the actions of his life (again within the paradigm of the prioritization of thought over action). This movement can be traced all the way back to Paul ('For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified', 1 Cor. 2.2), yet goes well beyond Paul in separating Christ from Jesus.

What also gets lost is the idea of substitution. However we wish to understand Leviticus 1–7, the animal dies and the people do not. However we choose to understand the death of Jesus, Jesus died and his disciples did not (at least not immediately). Similarly, the choice that Jesus made to suffer rather than inflict suffering is lost.

In this sense, the idea of substitutionary sacrifice becomes its opposite. 'Substitution' includes some sense that something happens so that something else doesn't. This 'something else' is the 'natural' course of events within the system; it is what is 'supposed' to happen. So Jesus' death as substitution means that something that was supposed to happen no longer needs to.

Yet people who proclaim Jesus' death as sacrifice still will proclaim that further deaths are needed. Whether this is Paul's(?) 'completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions' (Col. 1.24) or Stephen's death in Acts 7 or the many martyrs in church history, the early church needed to deal with the continuing reality of suffering even after the substitutionary death of Jesus. The idea of substitution is, however, completely stood on its head when it is used as a way of understanding willful human action in killing others for the cause of Christ. 'Jesus died for you, so now I must kill you' is hardly a logical outcome of the idea of substitution.

During the time when Leviticus was used as a basis for ritual sacrifice of animals, hundreds and thousands of animals died. On the other hand, during the Crusades, hundreds and thousands of people died, on both sides. While Israel was not without war and conflict, there is little in the Old Testament that would suggest a crusade mentality outside the book of Joshua.[21] The transformation of sacrifice to include the slaughter of one's enemies (or God's enemies) involves a major shift in both the actions of ritual and the relationship between ritual and non-ritual action. Murder is transformed into self-sacrifice. Animal sacrifice becomes bread-and-wine which becomes the Children's Crusade (or 'Shock and Awe').

This transformation is not logical. Instead it operates within the logic of ritualization. Ordinary actions are transformed into sacred actions. This becomes especially important when the ordinary actions are not those we would otherwise reward. If described in non-ritual language, the Crusades (ancient or modern) are monstrous actions. Only their connection to the Sacred (whether God or Country) allows us to claim them as our own.

The impact of this shift can be seen when these ideas are contrast with those found in the *Martyrs Mirror* (van Braght 2001). Originally published in 1660, this work chronicles the lives and especially the deaths of those who were

21. The book of Joshua can also be read as a critique of this mentality.

martyred for their Christian faith, often at the hands of other Christians. *Martyrs Mirror* uses the term 'sacrifice' 111 times, all of which describe the deaths of people who chose not to kill, as a response to the example and teachings of Jesus.[22]

Another place where we can view the intersection of sacrifice language and Christian history is in the ideology of World War I. In his study of images of sacrifice in World War I, Allen Frantzen focuses on the relationship between sacrifice and chivalry. He notes that there is a tension between sacrifice (taking one life to avenge another, which perpetuates the cycle of violence) and anti-sacrifice (opposes the taking of life, seeking to end the cycle of violence).[23] This tension is resolved in chivalry through the notion of self-sacrifice, which blurs the line between them (2004: 3).

Historically, Frantzen says that St George and the dragon are often used as images of chivalry. This is rather ironic, given that St George was a martyr who chose to die for his faith rather than fight for it (2004: 18). He also notes that the church literalized the metaphor in Eph. 6.13-17 concerning the armor of God in order to provide justification for the knight's place in the church (p. 19).

The ideology of chivalry is still in use during World War I. It does, however, require some transformation because of the particularities of the situation. One of the difficulties in using images of chivalry and sacrifice is that conscription does not allow for an ideal of voluntary self-sacrifice (Frantzen 2004: 16).

Another difficulty is that Christian imagery of sacrifice is being used by both sides in the conflict. The eleventh-century knight could go off to do battle with the heathens. Both the English and German sides in World War I believed they were on the side of God, but the enemy was hardly responsible for the death of Christ. Vengeance needed to be recast as vengeance for the fallen. Frantzen, in his discussion on Wilfred Owens' poem 'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young' (1918) notes that the soldiers 'did not die for their country, or even for their God, but rather for one another' (2004: 242, cf. 146).

In seeing the progression of sacrificial ideas from the New Testament through the early church to the Crusades and then World War I, we can see the gradual disappearance of most of the basic images, ideas, and rituals that are found in Leviticus. The setting of sacrifice moves from the clean, sacred space of the Tent of Meeting to the muddy, bloody trenches of World War I. The act of a community bringing an unblemished animal to be killed and often eaten becomes an act of a 'nation' (an abstraction in itself) 'sending' (a euphemism after conscription) its young men off to kill or be killed. The sin of the offerer that is being addressed in Leviticus becomes the sin of the enemy. Revenge replaces atonement as the motive. The list could go on.

22. Much of *Martyrs Mirror* chronicles the suffering of the early Anabaptists. Within the context of re-baptism and martyrdom, baptism also becomes a significant ritual that is associated with sacrifice.

23. Frantzen begins his discussion of sacrifice within the study of chivalry. The question within chivalry is one of participation in violence, rather than a discussion regarding the general notion of 'sacrifice'. For the knight, the question is not 'How should I understand Christ's death as a sacrifice?' but 'Should I revenge the death of Christ?'

Almost the only thing remaining from Leviticus is the image of blood. Blood itself is a neutral image; it possesses no intrinsic 'meaning'. It does not inherently represent anything. In the non-Western world it is also something that is encountered fairly regularly. Most of the time it is encountered in meaningless ways. The regular cuts and bruises and deaths of everyday life are not given special 'meaning' by those who see it.

There is also no sense that this journey of images is a textual hermeneutic activity. Soldiers in World War I did not go to war on the basis of an exegetical study of Leviticus 1–7. The transformation of language is much more ordinary than that. In the human attempt to narrate and thus make sense of life, ideas and images from the past are used regularly. This is especially important in an otherwise meaningless and monstrous event like the Great War. Honesty is not an option, so it is not surprising that the attempts to bring meaning are quite far from the origins of the images and language used.

7. *Leviticus, Atonement, and Sacrifice Today*

While the study of Leviticus is hardly a hot topic among theologians today, the rituals and language of sacrifice are undergoing significant re-imagining. The current debate is often in response to the rituals and actions of the past, especially as they relate to human violence. In the late twentieth century, a major discussion developed in the church and religious academia regarding the atonement. J. Denny Weaver in his study of the atonement suggests that 'except perhaps for the sixteenth-century debates about the characteristics of Christ with respect to his presence within and outside the sacrament, the twentieth century may well have experienced the most important, sustained conversation about the person and work of Christ since early church debates' (2001: 1).

Weaver also notes that the twentieth century began and ended with debates about the historical Jesus (2001: 1). This latter discussion is important to note because one of the ingredients of the new discussion about the atoning work of Jesus is that it takes into account the life and teachings of Jesus. The leap from 'born of the Virgin Mary' to 'suffered under Pontius Pilate' in the Apostle's Creed without any reference to the life in between had significant consequences for atonement discussions.

An even more important new development in theological discussion is the attempt to consider the effects of theology on the lives of real people (and the environment). Credit for this development is rightly given to feminist and liberation theologians, who have carefully examined the repercussions of atonement theories on the lives of women and the poor and marginalized. Works by Joanne Carlson Brown, Rebecca Ann Parker, Rita Nakashima Brock, Rosemary Radford Ruether and a host of others have become standard reading for those thinking about the atonement in Christian circles. Responses to these pioneering works[24]

24. In the early responses to feminist theology, and still in some circles in the church, these scholars are called many other things besides 'pioneering'.

have come from womanist scholars such as Jacquelyn Grant and Dolores S. Williams.

In addition, other voices from outside the mainstream have claimed a place in the discussion, so much so that it is now impossible to discern a 'mainstream'. There are varieties of Latin American theologies, Afro-American theologies, African theologies, and post-colonial voices from around the world. What most of them share is an attempt to re-think atonement theories on the basis of an analysis of their effects.

One of the results of this new way of thinking is that the line which used to separate 'theology' from 'practical theology' has become less clear. The body has become an important component in theology. This has allowed ritual a new place in the discussion as a practice that sits on the boundary between the concrete and the abstract. While Leviticus 1–7 has hardly become a key text within the discussion, its intrusion into the world of theology is much less improbable that it was a few decades ago.

This new emphasis on the effect of theology has not lead to a similar convergence in suggestions for what a new paradigm might look like. Some scholars, such as Anthony Bartlett and J. Denny Weaver, still attempt to use standard methods of academic analysis to come to a better abstract understanding of the concept of atonement. Even though Bartlett is working with 'a sensitivity to contemporary human crisis', he still wishes '[t]o let the Crucified speak originally from the cross' (2001: 2). Weaver formulates a 'model' of the life and work of Jesus based on a study of the Bible (2001: 10). This sort of work remains largely within the traditional paradigm of biblical theology. The criteria for 'good' theology is its faithful representation of the 'meaning' of the Bible.

Other responses to sacrifice and the modern world borrow ideas on sacrifice from the work of René Girard. Girard begins his work on sacrifice from the perspective of anthropology, and the question of the origins of violence in human societies.[25] His work directly affects atonement ideas when he states that Jesus' death is an indication of God siding with the victim in the sacrifice, rather than the one who kills. James Williams builds on this foundation by applying Girard's thesis to the sweep of the biblical narrative (1991).[26]

Here the critique of traditional doctrines of atonement comes from an inquiry into the root of human violence. Within this framework, a theology of atonement is finally to be judged on the violence it creates, allows, or overcomes. This work assumes that changing theologies or ideologies of violence will also change behavior. 'The truth will set you free' (Jn 8.32). There are no specific rituals or actions that accompany this theory, except those judged to be 'non-violent'.[27]

25. Any attempt to describe Girard's model briefly would be inadequate. Summaries can be found in J.G. Williams 1991: 6-25, and the works he further recommends on p. 259 n. 8.

26. See also Lefebure 1998 and Weaver 2001: 46.

27. Lefebure notes that Girard does not define 'violence', which leaves the question of the renunciation of violence vague (1998: 21). In general, Girard is useful to theologians who wish to argue from an idealist perspective ('if we had understood the cross correctly, none of this violence would have happened'). It becomes problematic when Girard's theory about the origins of human violence does not match current research.

One of the difficulties in re-thinking ideas about sacrifice in our world is the question of our relationship to orthodoxy. This question arises especially in this context because the idea of 'sacrifice' is antithetical to so much of current North American culture. Our culture advocates self-fulfillment, success, and self-realization, ideals that are contrary to the message of sacrifice (Seasoltz 2001: 387).[28] While self-sacrificial principles are invoked in certain contexts, in these instances they have lost their religious connotation (Bradley 1995: 22-23).

This reworking of sacrificial ideas can be noticed more clearly in Germany. In his introduction to a collection of essays on sacrifice in twentieth-century Germany, John Borneman defines sacrifice as a social act 'required by collective life to bring the individual into a relationship with something greater than themselves' (2002: 5). In this case, however, the 'something greater than themselves' is German culture rather than God.

In attempting to relate orthodoxy to the modern situation and the challenge of liberationist theologies, some authors question the connection that is made between orthodoxy and violence. Richard Mou studies Reformist Theology from this perspective, and concludes that, while there is much violence in Reformist/Calvinist history, it cannot be explained with reference to a Reformed doctrine of atonement if properly understood (2003: 164).[29]

Other theologians are less interested in defending orthodoxy and more interested in reworking it. Anthony Bartlett uses a wide variety of sources from the Bible to Girard, through Augustine, Anselm, and Abelard, but finally insists on an *abyssal* understanding of the cross, one that he wants to separate from any notion of exchange value in Christ's death (2001: 2-3). The central impulse for this theology is not a correct understanding of the Bible or God, but a response to the violence of our world (p. 5).

From a Scottish perspective, Ian Bradley calls substitutionary atonement 'monstrous'[30] and promotes the idea that the sacrifice needs to be located in the cultic rather than the legal or monetary setting (1995: 8-9). Further, he adds to our picture of God by speaking of the sacrificing God, rather than limiting our perspective to a God who requires others to sacrifice (pp. 10-11). Bradley is less constrained by traditional orthodoxy or the biblical record than other theologians we have noted,[31] and is thus more free to speak of the meaning that the cross 'should carry' in Christian teaching (p. 83).

All of these theological responses to sacrifice attempt to deal with the current world situation (as they understand it) while still speaking of sacrifice within the Christian/biblical context. These attempts, however, remain distant from any specific ritual or cultural action. The texts they produce offer new understandings of existing ritual, or concern themselves with action that may be affected by a

28. Bradley notes the same thing for Scottish culture, calling the idea 'obsolete' (1995: 5).

29. Mou is not the only theologian who attempts a re-understanding of orthodoxy. His work is exemplary, not unique.

30. Later in the book Bradley speaks of 'the heretical demons of propitiatory atonement or penal substitution' (1995: 114).

31. Bradley sees the theology of the book of Hebrews as 'unfortunate' (1995: 119).

particular theological understanding, but in form retain the basic style of theological writing. The abstraction of theological ideas is quite removed from the direct prescriptions of Leviticus 1–7.

As modern readers, we no longer follow the imperatives of Leviticus' sacrifices. They have become 'religious' texts read in ritual contexts, not prescriptions for contemporary action. Yet the imperative of direct action still reads quite differently than the suggestion of new or reworked abstraction. Even those authors who work directly with the ritual action in/of the Eucharist do not venture to prescribe new ritual or alter existing behavior in the ritual. They limit themselves to abstraction or suggestions for action outside of ritual. Apparently the violence in Christian history has no connection to the rituals of the church, but merely reflects an incorrect understanding of these rituals. This might lead one to conclude that, for these authors, the actions in rituals have no effect on people. Whatever does or does not happen in the Eucharist is not connected to the lives of people who do these rituals.[32]

The situation is significantly different when it comes to feminist and liberation scholars. Rafael Avila, writing from the context of Latin American liberation theology, writes of the need 'to realign, harmonize, the liturgy and the aspirations of our continent', and 'the necessity of restructuring the Eucharist according to our situation of dependence' (1981: 74, 81). Avila is quite clear that the action of the Eucharistic celebration is as important as the words, and it is these liturgical actions that form 'the beginning point for theological reflection', not vice versa (p. 86).

North American feminist scholars have also understood the importance of action in ritual. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza talks about the need for a new experience of worship through 'religious creativity and the feminist power of ritualization' (1984: 21). Wendy Farley speaks of the Eucharist which 'enacts the fellowship of all people', and discusses this enactment even as she avoids the 'murky regions' of Christology (1990: 130, 100). Letty Russell has written on the church in numerous contexts. In her book, *Church in the Round*, she uses the table as the central metaphor for the church (1993: 24, *passim*). She expands the discussion on the Eucharist ritual to include this action within the broader range of action by the church. She says that to administer the sacraments 'rightly' 'probably would include the need for a community of celebration to live out a life of righteousness or justice' (p. 140).

Marjorie Procter-Smith has written extensively on ritual and sacrificial language. While her writing often focuses on the words and ideas of ritual, she believes that Christian identity is 'ritually created, not doctrinally defined' (1995a: 120). With this focus, she can speak of the possibility of judging the effectiveness or validity of ritual, based on the type of community it creates or plays out (pp. 117-19). She also speaks about alternatives to the Eucharist, recognizing that the Eucharist as celebrated in the church today is a tradition that can

32. Note a completely different perspective on ritual in John H. Yoder's *Body Politics* (2001), where it is the ritual actions of the church (and not a correct understanding of these actions) that define what the church is.

be altered to forms that are 'generating and extending emancipatory life beyond ritual into the political and social world' (p. 120).

Many of these writers make significant use of the work of Nancy Jay. Jay's work is especially interesting for this study because of the explicit connections she makes between ritual blood sacrifice and modern Eucharist celebrations. Having noted that blood sacrifice is a way to replace matrilineal descent with patrilineal descent in ancient Israel as well as other societies (1985: 290-93), she notes how connections between the Eucharist and blood sacrifice are made most clearly in churches that do not ordain women (p. 300). This allows us to see the connection between the performance of the Eucharist by males and the continuing tradition of patriarchal leadership. The ideas and the practice are not separable, as if one can change the 'theology' of the ritual while retaining the existing form.

These modern discussions on ritual theory and practice demonstrate the ongoing, though usually indirect, effects of Leviticus on the modern church. Issues of sacrifice, blood, purity, and forgiveness continue to be a significant part of Christian theology and practice. Issues of ritual effectiveness and validity continue to be raised. Ritual innovation vs. traditionalism remains a concern. The connection between ritual practice and the creation of community affects these discussions, and also affects practice.

When people came together at the Tent of Meeting to sacrifice an animal something happened. Many things happened. Some of these 'things' can be described physically; others call for anthropological, psychological, or theological explanations. Transforming this set of actions into new actions means that some of the things that happened at the Tent of Meeting no longer happen. This is true within each area of explanation. This loss (and gain) means that transformation has consequences. If what is lost is no longer necessary, then the loss is minimal. But who decides what is necessary?

This study also allows us new insights into the ritual prescriptions of Leviticus 1–7. The lack of overt 'theologizing' in Leviticus 1–7 is highlighted in comparison to the lengthy current discussion on the 'meaning' of the Eucharist. Yet the implicit theologizing in Leviticus is also highlighted when we note the importance of ritual action in the creation of community. Given the significant lacunae in the prescriptions of Leviticus 1–7, what kinds of community is being assumed, and what kind of community is being fostered by these particular actions?

The question raised above about tradition vs. innovation also raises the same question in regards to Leviticus. While it is generally assumed that Leviticus 1–7 is an attempt to preserve a tradition, it is also possible that the writer may have been more interested in transforming a pre-existing practice. This does not preclude the reality that Leviticus 1–7 becomes a significant locus for tradition. It merely opens the question of its origins. Radical innovation often becomes codified tradition for later generations. The last supper of Jesus as portrayed in the synoptic gospels is a significant departure from, or at least addendum to, traditional Jewish Passover ritual. One generation's novelty is the next generation's inheritance.

The emphasis that feminist scholars place on the subtle messages implicit in ritual about belonging or place also highlights similar questions regarding Leviticus. Where are the women in these rituals? Even if no argument can be made from the text, as readers we need to ask about our mental picture of these rituals. As we recreate the sacrifice in our mind's eye, are there women in our view? Where are they, and what are they doing? Since most of the picture in our imagination comes from assumptions, can we add in some women? How does this change our reading of Leviticus? The same questions need to be asked about the poor, the outsider, and the servants in the temple. Part of our task as scholars is to render visible the invisible in these texts.

8. *Conclusion*

In mainstream Western Christianity the practice of animal sacrifice ended with the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Yet the language of sacrifice lives on. The language also remains connected to ritual in the Eucharist. None of the forms of the Eucharist bear significant resemblance to the prescriptions of Leviticus 1–7, yet ritual continues, and the language retains its influence.

The transformation of ritual and ritual language is always part of a larger cultural movement. The young men who set out to defend Christianity by 'freeing' Jerusalem in the Crusades did not do so as a response to a careful exegesis of Leviticus and 1 Corinthians. Even today, theologians attempting to reformulate the doctrine of atonement, while paying attention to the biblical texts, also work within a cultural context that strongly influences their responses. In both cases, the intersection of text and ritual informs and transforms their responses to the world around them.

Yet there remains the question of responsibility. However much human action is a response to text, ritual, and culture, people around the world have died and continue to die as a result of our responses. Whether in the streets of ancient Jerusalem or modern Jerusalem, ancient Constantinople or modern Baghdad, our actions are not innocent simply because of our environment. There is no automatic connection between stimulus and response, between Eucharist and warmongering.

This responsibility lies heaviest on those of us who claim expertise, on those who claim to understand. It also lies on those who plan and officiate at ritual events. Even though we cannot program responses to ritual, the form of ritual and the words that accompany it are part of people's perception of how the world is. However small our influence may be, we still bear responsibility for what we attempt.

Chapter 7

LEVITICUS 7: A COMMENTARY IN THREE VOICES

1. *Introduction*

Thus far I have mainly traced themes, ideas, and parallels across the broad face of Leviticus 1–7. Much of the text has been discussed, but no sustained reading of a particular text has been undertaken. In this chapter I will fill that gap in this study.

I have chosen Leviticus 7 for no particular reason. It does not look any simpler or more complex than any other section. It really isn't a separate section within the overall outline of Leviticus 1–7. Leviticus 7 continues naturally from Leviticus 6, the two chapters forming a subsection that adds details regarding the rituals of the sacrifices.

The purpose of this chapter is to work through the implications of the previous chapters. Given what has been learned about Leviticus 1–7, how does this affect a reading of the text? Another purpose of this chapter is to continue one of the larger purposes of this book, to bring Leviticus 1–7 into discussion with a larger variety of disciplines than are usually included in most readings.

One of the major challenges of this chapter is to respond to the whole tradition of the commentary. The traditional form of the commentary as it is practiced in biblical scholarship tightly controls the type of responses allowed, and offers few opportunities for creative or provocative engagement. This is built into the whole notion of *commentary*, where the writer is constrained not to create anything, but merely to comment on what has already been created.

There is much to be said for the traditional commentary form. A good commentator adds much to a reader's understanding of the text, especially a text as initially foreign and intimidating as Leviticus. The success of the commentary does not, however, mean that there cannot be other ways to enhance the reader's engagement with the text. Neither is the modern commentary necessarily constrained to produce a text which is even more dull than the original. Perhaps a better approach would be to produce a variety of creative responses to a text. Certainly scholarship on the book of Job has been greatly enhanced by the plethora of modern creative responses which Job has inspired.[1] Perhaps the same might be done for Leviticus.

The parallel with Job brings another caution into the question of how to comment on Leviticus. While Job is a creative literary work, Leviticus 1–7 is already

1. See Glatzer 1969 for a good example.

a commentary in some significant sense of the term. It is a commentary on a ritual. It may or may not have been meant as a text to be read in public, but it is hardly a classic page-turner. Like a commentary, the text of Leviticus 1–7 wishes to 'disappear', to function in the background as an aid to ritual. So the modern commentator must choose between commenting on the text and commenting on the ritual, or attempting to do a little of both.

Responding creatively to Leviticus might then also entail re-creating Leviticus, creating new aids to ritual that are modern parallels to the rituals of Leviticus. As a commentator I cannot write a ritual. A ritual is a performance. I could describe or create instructions for a performance, but I cannot make my reader do anything. Neither, however, could the writer of Leviticus. We are both stuck in the world of words.[2] Yet this limitation does not mean that responses to Leviticus are restricted to writing commentaries about commentaries about the commentary that is Leviticus. There are no 'rules' to writing a commentary, merely conventions imposed by editors, publishers, readers, and my own fear. Having been released by editor and publisher from the limits of traditional commentaries, and having limited my fear as best I can, it is time for me to write. You, dear reader, will have to care for yourself.

2. *The Writer*

Having begun this chapter in the first person, it only makes sense to continue in that voice. But whose voice is this? It is not simply a matter of telling you who I am. While there might be some point to that, it would also be a significant oversimplification. Part of the difficulty for me is that in my writing I am continuously attempting to communicate something specific to someone I cannot see, or know, or receive feedback from. So rather than just writing what I think, I ask myself questions like: How does this sound to an educated lay person?, or How would so-and-so think about this?. In addition there are, reading with me, the host of teachers and writers who have taught me to read, and whose opinions I value. Inside a commentary on Leviticus, I am also in constant mental dialogue with other commentators and writers who have added much to my understanding of the text.

Aside from these considerations, there is an entire theoretical discussion regarding the whole concept of 'the reader' and 'reading'. One author has noted 15 different theoretical readers, ranging from the *implied reader* through the *competent reader* to the *resisting reader* (Long 1996: 86). Thus, I face the question of which of these readers I wish to embody as I undertake the task of writing a reading.

Perhaps the largest complication to the whole enterprise is that, even choosing to read as 'myself', I begin with the recognition that at different points in my life I speak with different voices. I am both a teacher and a pastor, and my sermons

2. Of course the technology now exists for multi-media commentaries with interactive Web sites and video displays. The decision to limit this commentary to mere words has to do with my own limitations, rather than that of the form itself.

sound different from my lectures. I am both a pastor and a parent, and how I read the Bible depends on whether I want to explain it to a congregation or to my children. Besides these *personas*, I have a strongly cynical side which I allow more or less rein depending upon the situation. And this does not take into account the years I have spent learning to read like people I admire, or have attempted to resonate with the voice of someone quite different than myself.

This commentary on Leviticus 7 is going to be done in three of my voices, which I will distinguish by means of typeface.[3] You can eavesdrop on a conversation between the various parts of myself as I struggle to respond to the text and the ritual. The readers involved are all 'me', with the occasional reference to the opinions of others. In order for this reading to be successful, I would invite you to read while listening for the responses from the various voices of 'you'. I encourage you to listen to yourself, and find the parts of yourself which connect with or diverge from the various parts of me.

I am Wes the scholar. I am the voice that will guide the conversation, since this is a scholarly book. I will ask questions such as the following: Is this academically plausible? Am I straying too far from my text? Am I forgetting that the text's world is not my world? How would some of my professors respond to this? I am also the cautious voice which wonders how this book might affect my job prospects.

Hi, I'm Wes the pastor. This is the part of Wes that cares about how the word remains the Word of God. I want to ask questions like: What difference does this make to my life? How could I preach this? How do I make this word available to the needs of my audience? I am the voice most focused on the audience, on you. The scholar can worry about the book; the preacher is worried about the message. I have been preaching for more years and in more situations than I have been teaching or writing, so my pastoral voice is more confident than my scholar's voice, and I will likely intrude at will.

I am Wes the poet. Look at those guys up there, wringing their hands, worrying about what people might think. We can't afford to take ourselves that seriously (no one else does).

This is the part of me which prefers to make statements rather than carefully control the questions. I want to make outrageous statements like: We don't have to like everything in the Bible, you know. Sometimes it is more important to be honest than to pretend to be holy. If the Bible is God's word, then we don't need to defend it all the time. Just let it be what it is.

I know that the other parts of Wes don't like me sometimes. I tend to say things in a way that is incompatible with traditional academic writing. I like to express myself in ways that are raw, rhetorical, confrontational; but this is where the creative energy often comes from.

The commentary below is in the form of a discussion between these three voices. Much of the usual commentary discussion regarding translation of specific terms or parallels with other cultures will be avoided, as these have been taken up in other places by people more qualified than I.

3. I have used this device in an earlier paper. See Bergen 2001.

> (7.1) This is the ritual of the guilt offering. It is most holy; (7.2) at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered, they shall slaughter the guilt offering, and its blood shall be dashed against all sides of the altar. (7.3) All its fat shall be offered: the broad tail, the fat that covers the entrails, (7.4) the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which shall be removed with the kidneys. (7.5) The priest shall turn them into smoke on the altar as an offering by fire to the LORD; it is a guilt offering.

Well, I should probably start, since this is a scholarly book. Before we dive into the details of the text, we should provide a broad outline of the setting of the text. The whole of Leviticus 1–7 is set within a speech of Yahweh to Moses, which Moses is then to speak to the people of Israel (Lev. 1.1, 2). It is generally thought to be a fictitious setting, placing a much later writing into the narrative framework of the origins of both the text and the community of 'the people of Israel'.

It is important to note here that this is also a ritual setting. The voice of Yahweh does not come from just anywhere, but emanates from the Tent of Meeting. This connects the text with the rituals it prescribes. Further, when Moses does as Yahweh commands and says these things to the people of Israel, we have a second ritual setting.

Let's not forget that this whole thing is a fiction. If we are going to talk about a ritual setting, we might want to try to confine ourselves to real rituals. Unfortunately, there are no real rituals to discuss. We know that sacrifices did take place in a variety of settings in ancient Israel over many centuries, but we have no firm evidence that Leviticus 1–7 was seen as a handbook for the performance of these rituals.

Yes, yes, but in any case this is a study of a text. We can't know what people did, but the text is right in front of us. Further, if we are going to speak of narrative settings, then we should also talk about the narrative behind the ritual. One of the problems in reading Leviticus today is that it is written by and for a people who knew a lot of 'common sense' things about sacrifice that we don't know today. If you've grown up with animal sacrifice, and have witnessed them numerous times in your life, then a text prescribing certain actions can leave out a whole lot of details because 'everyone knows that'. So, Pastor, let's tell a little story about a guilt offering.

Some of the background to this story has already been discussed in Lev. 5.14–6.7. A narrative might go something like this: Yakov is a farmer who lives near Jerusalem.[4] He is a member of the people of Israel, and believes that his action in regards to the Law of God can have a direct impact on his life. This impact is more likely thought of in communal terms rather than individual terms. In other words,

4. One of the problems here is the whole question of whether the text really expects people who live far from a place of sacrifice to bring all offerings to Jerusalem. These questions of verisimilitude have a significant impact on reading when the text is read as the straightforward prescription it claims to be.

Yakov is more worried about foreign invaders or plague than about the fate of his soul after death.

One day, Yakov's father dies, and Yakov, as the eldest, must oversee the distribution of his father's land and possessions. In this process, he lies about certain details regarding some of his father's possessions to his younger sister, which allows him to gain more than his fair share.

As the years pass, Yakov becomes ashamed of his action, and decides to make restitution. He informs one of the local elders regarding his action. The elder dictates the response necessary for restitution. Both Yakov and the elder understand that restitution is necessary both in the sense that what was stolen must be restored, and that Yakov must be restored to the community, for this action has created a division between himself and his sister, and also between himself and his neighbors. Further, Yakov's restitution involves restoring the community's covenant with God, which has been broken by Yakov's action. Yakov has put the people of his village in danger by this action.

This is sounding a bit too holy for my liking. Yes, there were undoubtedly people like Yakov in his village, but there were others who lied and cheated and stole and weren't really concerned about the effects this might have on the precious covenant with some faraway God. Yakov is likely also well aware of statues and sacred poles in the houses of some of his neighbors. This may be of great concern to him.

Yes, you're possibly right, although we shouldn't anachronistically assume strong individualism in an ancient society. It is also possible that Yakov is aware of people like that, but that those people have been driven from his community. The demand of holiness has some very sharp edges to it.

In any case, Yakov does as the elder commands. He takes what he has stolen and restores it to his sister. In addition, he offers an additional gift that is valued at roughly twenty percent of the stolen item (Lev. 6.5). His sister might respond in a variety of ways, but recognizes the gravity of the situation, and also understands the restitution ritual. They both share a context in which restitution must be made, and also must be accepted. Negotiation is not an option, neither is holding a grudge. They do not need to discuss these things because this is simply how these things are done, and the survival of the community depends on them.

In addition, Yakov must journey to Jerusalem, bringing with him a ram for a guilt offering.

For the benefit of a Christian audience, it might be helpful to use the gospel of Mark to understand the force of this 'must'. In Mk 8.31, Jesus teaches his disciples that the Son of Man 'must' die. Mark never explains this 'must'. It is the will of God, and apparently further explanation is not necessary.

At least it is not necessary for Mark. Other New Testament writers take significant time to explain the meaning of 'must', offering a variety of explanations. Later Christian writers expand further on these actions, often arguing vehemently that one or another explanation is the only possible one. Yet these explanations do not seem to be of concern to the writer of Mark. This is

not a sign of Mark's stupidity or simple-mindedness. Metaphysical speculation is just not his interest.

So Yakov understands fully that he must bring a ram to Jerusalem to sacrifice. His elder may have one explanation for this 'must', the priests in Jerusalem may have another (or several), but Yakov is satisfied in the knowledge that he is doing something he must.

Perhaps modern American readers can understand this 'must' with another parallel. When someone commits a crime in this country, people believe that they 'must' be caught and punished, usually with time in jail. For most people, the logic of this 'must' goes unexplored. Why is it important that lawbreakers are only allowed to associate with other lawbreakers? The system exists because it 'must'.

The modern parallel also reminds us that Leviticus is meant to be the law book for a people. This is not a 'religious' book in the modern sense of the word.

Right! The intention of this book is to be more like the Constitution than the Bible. In modern America, all forms of 'truth' are subsumed under the final truth of the constitution and the Declaration of Independence. 'Religious' truth is only true for certain groups, in certain situations. So modern Americans want to read the Bible as the Bible, but it wants to be read as the Constitution.

But how does a book 'want to be read'? Perhaps you mean that it functioned that way at some point in the past.

No, it really wants to be read like this. It claims for itself to be a record of the voice of the one and only God who is creating the basic principles for a people. These principles encompass not only 'spiritual' realities but also economics, politics, and a host of other issues. I don't know if it ever actually functioned as a constitution-like document for any group of people who were in control of their own land, but it does attempt to claim that status for itself.

Anyway, here is where the third narrative becomes an important part of our reading of the text. But before we can get to that, we need to get back to the second narrative and finish the story.

Yakov goes to Jerusalem with his ram. Of course, this is far from a simple operation. Herding an adult animal toward a specific goal is not easy. The ram isn't leash trained! Further, Yakov's village might be miles from Jerusalem, miles made additionally long by rough terrain, weather, and that stupid ram. Even five miles is a long way to walk towing a ram.

Are we assuming he goes alone? We might want to suggest that either the elder or his sister or both accompany him. Or does the crowd of witnesses need to be even wider? The text does not speculate, but this becomes an important part of our mental picture.

I think it best to assume at least a small group of witnesses, depending on the distance to Jerusalem. After all, if sin is a social action, then restitution must be social as well.

When Yakov gets to Jerusalem he goes to the Temple. After telling the priest in charge what the offering is for, he and/or the priest slaughter the animal, remove the skin, and dissect it to remove certain parts that are to be burned on the altar.

This is hot, sweaty work. It is also an important part of ritual. the time spent in this activity comprises the majority of the ritual. The priest has an interest in doing the flaying well, since he will receive the skin. Both men have an interest in bleeding the animal correctly, which is also time consuming.

I wonder if Yakov sticks around to watch the parts being burned, or the animal being cooked and eaten. He doesn't get any, so watching someone else cook and eat his animal could certainly be part of the 'lesson'.

After the ritual Yakov goes home. He has done what was necessary, and now he is restored to relationship with God and his neighbors. The ritual in the Temple took place away from the community, but certainly everyone is aware of what happened.

Of course, it wouldn't work if people didn't know about it. The physicality of the ritual is matched by the physicality of the outcome. Yakov is now 'clean'. The community is now 'clean'. These are metaphors for a real, physical danger that has been averted.

Before we get further in discussing the details of this particular narrative setting, it is important to recognize the third narrative setting for the text. The setting is the text's reception as text. Obviously this setting is impossible to describe in the same way we described the second setting, because the possible settings are almost infinite. Once a ritual is transformed into a text, many of the limits imposed by the ritual no longer apply.

What he's trying to say is that texts can be used any way that a literate person wants to use them. They can be read, or simply stored on a shelf. They can be treasured or burned. People who read the text or have it read to them are under no compunction actually to do what it says. In fact, this particular text is very specific about its own non-performance. Readers are unable to perform this ritual because they lack a Tent of Meeting. So while the text seems to say 'do this ritual', what it really says is 'don't do this ritual'.

At this point, then, the text takes on a life of its own, apart from the ritual it prescribes. Historically the most common usage for this text is as a substitute for the sacrifice ritual. Millions of readers have read this text in sacred rituals while not performing the actions in it.

It is kinda like kids watching Barney do exercise on TV while they are sitting on the couch eating junk food. Or like Christians reading 'take up your cross and follow me', then taking up the sword to defend their faith.

No, it isn't. Because Leviticus 7 does not want its readers to do what it tells them to do. The writer already knows that there is no Tent of Meeting to sacrifice at. He also knows that readers in the diaspora will be specifically disallowed from constructing sites of sacrifice because of this text. So the authority of this text rests largely in its ability to stop sacrifice from happening.

Of course, that does not make this an anti-ritual text. Rather, what is happening is the textualization of ritual. So the third narrative framework is simply the reading of this text as part of a larger ritual, wherever and whenever that takes place.

Yet the authority of the text in this particular case is not its authority to prescribe action, but to prescribe inaction. It is like Letterman doing 'top 10 reasons why you can't sacrifice'.

Yet the text still matters to people who read it, despite their inability to sacrifice. The reading ritual is still a ritual. The second narrative setting becomes myth, ritual's twin. The removal of sacrifice from the ritual does not mean that the ritual dies.

It may even be possible to argue that the textualization of ritual strengthens it. We are now almost 2000 years from the last time a sacrifice was performed in the temple, and 3000 years from the last time one was performed in the Tent of Meeting. Yet the whole notion of 'guilt' as described in this text has hardly disappeared from Jewish or Christian vocabulary.

Too many Jewish comedians have made a living doing Jewish guilt jokes for anyone to deny that. Millions of Christian preachers have used 'grace' as a cipher for 'Guilt' as a way of keeping the flock in line. Apparently the message is 'you are guilty and there is nothing you can do about it, because you can't sacrifice'.

Before we get too hung up on 'guilt', we need to remember that the 'guilt' offering is not an offering in response to a psychological state. In our little narrative, Yakov performs the sacrifice not because of his psychological state, but because he has physically done something that contravenes God's instructions. As we wrote the story, it was his feeling of guilt that caused him to seek restitution, but we could have written the story to focus more on public awareness of his legal guilt.

Right, so as the years pass others become aware of Yakov's action, and confront Yakov with his sin/crime. Yakov risks being shamed in front of the community, and thus decides to make restitution.

Sounds good to me! Yakov may not feel any guilt at all. He may be doing this to protect his standing in the community, or his standing within his family. His psychological state is not at issue here.

So the textualized ritual embeds the notion of sin and its consequences. The consequences of sin become actualized through the ritual of reading the text.

But what you're saying is that what the text is really doing is trying to make you feel guilty (in the legal sense) so that you accept its offer of restitution. But then the text withdraws the offer of restitution by tying restitution to a physical action that you can no longer perform, namely sacrifice. Aren't we going in circles here?

Maybe.

No. It doesn't go in circles because the text is an attempt to solve a problem that already exists, rather than an attempt to create a problem. The reality is that diaspora Jews did transgress the instructions of God, yet could not sacrifice as they already knew they should. Sacrifice was not invented by Leviticus, nor by the Jews. All ancient religions of that region sacrificed animals. Yet the Jews of Antioch or Damascus or Babylon could not sacrifice at one of the temples dedicated to other gods, nor did they feel free to construct their own local temples. The textualization of these social norms does not invent them, it merely reflects them.

So the text offers a way out of this dilemma. Reading the text as part of a ritual of worship and confession becomes part of a substitute for sacrifice. But there is more than that. Reading the text also codifies the idea that restitution is part of the solution. In the case of the guilt offering, the instructions of the text concerning restitution can be understood as instructions to be carried out.

I wonder if it really worked. I'm still suspicious about replacing a bloody, physical ritual with a clean mental one. I am still left wondering how a Jew in ancient Damascus (or a Christian in modern Wichita) knows that they are forgiven. Leon Wieseltier, in his commentary on Leviticus, argues that, for the 'impatient Jew', 'acknowledgment is the fondest wish of his faith' (1987: 38): What 'the modern Jew' wants is the fire from the altar of Lev. 9.24. A similar sort of thing could be said for the modern Christian. What 'the impatient Christian' (of which I am certainly one) wants is the real body of Jesus, not a cracker and some juice. I don't want to eat Jesus, I want to converse with him.

It sounds like you've been reading the gospel of John. John's Jesus says he needs to go away so that the Advocate can come to be the presence of Jesus with us (Jn 16.6-15). This is a nifty bit of circular reasoning.

Like Leviticus, it is also a response to a prior reality. Jesus is gone. He died, he rose, he ascended: he's gone. The question being addressed is 'now what?' Both texts are responses to the question of whether the end of the physical reality (whether of sacrifice or of Jesus' presence) is the end of God's presence. Both want to assure us that the answer is 'no'.

Well, we should probably move on *(or our commentary will end up the size of Milgrom's)*. What does the next bit of Leviticus look like?

> (7.6) Every male among the priests shall eat of it; it shall be eaten in a holy place; it is most holy. (7.7) The guilt offering is like the sin offering, there is the same ritual for them; the priest who makes atonement with it shall have it. (7.8) So, too, the priest who offers anyone's burnt offering shall keep the skin of the burnt offering that he has offered. (7.9) And every grain offering baked in the oven, and all that is prepared in a pan or on a griddle, shall belong to the priest who offers it. (7.10) But every other grain offering, mixed with oil or dry, shall belong to all the sons of Aaron equally.

Well, this part looks a lot more like basic instruction, rather than holy writ. The change in focus is rather stark. Until now most of Leviticus 1–7 has been prescription of the actual action of sacrifice. Now we get details about who gets to eat what part.

This is really difficult material to focus on. My mind wanders quickly, consigning this portion to the genre of 'insignificant details'. Maybe that's the point. Someone is writing a 'mental interlude' to take the listener's mind off the problem of immediacy.

Or maybe our American minds are trained to ignore anything that doesn't fall immediately under the genre of 'entertainment'. Let's not pretend that the writers are interested in being interesting. This is not infotainment. Surely someone who styles himself as a 'poet' understands that distinction.

Well, if we're going to look at this poetically, we should bring Everett Fox into the discussion. Let's look at his translation of 7.6-7:

> Any male among the priests may eat it,
> in a holy place it is to be eaten,
> it is a holiest holy-portion!
> Like the *hattat*-offering, so the *asham*-offering—
> one Instruction for them;
> the priest who effects-purgation through it, his shall it be. (1995: 534)

Now that is a completely different text. This is J.R.R. Tolkien rather than Tim LaHaye.

So let's pursue that comparison. All three authors are writing about worlds that do not exist. Yet LaHaye and the writer of Leviticus would likely claim that their stories are about the 'real world' in a sense that Tolkien would not. Further, applying the category of 'entertainment' to any of these works is problematic, all for different reasons. We could really explore some interesting theoretical issues here.

No, let's not. Let's go back and read Fox's Leviticus.

I'm with him. I love the way the translation effects what it speaks of. This is all about holiness, separation, otherness. Something has happened to this animal so that it has been transferred from the realm of the mundane into the realm of the holy. So Fox's translation has transferred the text from the realm of the mundane into a different realm. This is about otherness. The otherness of the text is conveyed through the use of transliteration, poetic phrasing, and the capitalization of 'Instruction'. Simply reading the text allows us the experience of otherness that the text describes.

It also affects the imagination differently. The beauty of the text ritualizes the eating. This text is no longer a simple answer to 'Who eats what?'. Rather, the holiness of Israel it ritualized, is realized, is made physical in the eating of the ram-that-has-become-holy.

Before we get too caught up in the deification of Fox, we also need to recognize the effects of holiness. Holiness is about separation. Yes, God is Other, so things belonging to God are also Other. But the separation doesn't stop there. There is a whole series of gradations that follow. Priests are holier than the people. Israelites are holier than Canaanites or Philistines. Men are holier than women. So Fox helps us see the holiness of the system, but holiness also blinds.

I realize that this is a potential danger, but in our modern world, there is so little awareness of holiness. Everything is mundane. Everything is commodified. Everything is for sale, including holiness. We need to celebrate this text as a significant step toward something more.

No, just the opposite is true. Yes, most things are mundane, commodified, and for sale, including religious holiness. But right now the United States is caught up in a huge holiness system that so clearly wants to define the Other. We are Americans, 'they' are not. We believe in freedom, 'they' do not. We are willing to sacrifice for what we believe in, 'they' kill out of hatred. In that sense, President Bush is the embodiment of national holiness.

So we have not lost our sense of holiness or of otherness. We have simply separated the two categories. Otherness is now evil, and holiness is America.

Yes, but this holiness does not apply equally to all people. Presidents are still holier than citizens; citizens are holier than resident aliens. Whites are holier than blacks; men are still holier than women. Right now our most clear 'other' is 'Arab', but that is subject to the direction of the political wind. In 1984, Orwell was trying to describe the evils of totalitarian communism, and ended up describing the evils of hyper-nationalist capitalism.

Getting back to our text (hem, hem), is there any possible redress for the absence of women from the ritual? In our research, we have found no examples of blood sacrifice that involve female priests. I realize that transforming ritual into text allows women access to ritualized reading, but they are still reading male ritual. They are still reading themselves out of the story, a story they may not want to participate in.

The most obvious answer lies in simple observation. Almost no one actually reads this text. We don't need to rescue it from misogyny. We can simply let sleeping dogs lie.

Too easy! Besides, while the text may be sleeping peacefully, undisturbed by real readers, the larger issue of women's relationship to the Bible remains. Christians have chosen to ignore the lack of women at the Last Supper, and therefore 'graciously' include women at the communion table (at least at the receiving end), but the larger question of whether a woman can be 'like Jesus' is still very real.

So apparently we are stuck with (another) misogynist text, one that also must be found guilty of being hostile to non-Jews and non-humans.

I still think there is something to be said for a picture of God who demonstrates otherness beyond particular embodiments. Nonetheless, we should move on to other parts of the chapter.

> (7.11) This is the ritual of the sacrifice of the offering of well-being that one may offer to the LORD. (7.12) If you offer it for thanksgiving, you shall offer with the thank offering unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour well soaked in oil. (7.13) With your thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being you shall bring your offering with cakes of leavened bread. (7.14) From this you shall offer one cake from each offering, as a gift to the LORD; it shall belong

> to the priest who dashes the blood of the offering of well-being. (7.15) And the flesh of your thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being shall be eaten on the day it is offered; you shall not leave any of it until morning. (7.16) But if the sacrifice you offer is a votive offering or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that you offer your sacrifice, and what is left of it shall be eaten the next day; (7.17) but what is left of the flesh of the sacrifice shall be burned up on the third day. (7.18) If any of the flesh of your sacrifice of well-being is eaten on the third day, it shall not be acceptable, nor shall it be credited to the one who offers it; it shall be an abomination, and the one who eats of it shall incur guilt.

Wow, that was exciting. If we can make that passage interesting, we must be geniuses.

So our first lesson is clear. This is not entertainment. This is more like an American civics textbook or a car repair manual than a Stephen King novel.

Of course, both American civics and car repair are interesting books for certain people. For the modern reader, however, it is difficult to read a text like this when there is so little motivation. Whomever this text was written for, it wasn't written for us.

It's like imagining a bunch of guys sitting around, drinking a few beers, and discussing Victorian wig construction. How do we connect this passage to something that anyone would care about?

I would like to go back to the analogy of reading American civics. The detail of the construction of our civil society is a subject that few people enjoy studying in detail. Yet it is a subject that everyone has an opinion about, and a reality that everyone participates in. Paying taxes, going to school, stopping at red lights; even choosing not to vote is a form of civic participation.

The same thing can be said of this passage, or all of Leviticus. It is an outline of idealized Israelite civics, part of which is a clear non-separation of church and state, and an even clearer non-separation of religious and civic duties. Clearly they took the phrase 'one nation under God' a lot more seriously than we do.

Let's push that analogy a bit further. One of the things about civic participation is how much of it we do without thinking. 'I pledge allegiance to the flag…' How much thought to we regularly put into the idea that Americans feel their ultimate allegiance is to a piece of cloth? Is this not a clear violation of the first commandment?

So Leviticus is part of the textbook for participation in Israelite civil society. Part of that society includes bringing a sacrifice to the Tent of Meeting when certain major life events have occurred. The nature of these events is not spelled out in detail, presumably because 'everyone knows'.

What is important for our understanding is that none of these sacrifices are about forgiveness. Christians are programmed to assume that all sacrifice is 'about' forgiveness.[5] These ones clearly are not. There are, then, parts of the experience of 'religion' that are not about sin.

5. Even this construction assumes that sacrifice is 'about' something, as if there is some sort of verbal reality 'behind' the physical one. The problem is impossible to deal with adequately when writing about sacrifice since I am confined by words.

So we see here the realization of other ways of approaching God. We can be thankful about something other than forgiveness. We can desire to approach God for reasons other than guilt. We can joyfully bring gifts to God because we choose to.

There is, however, a distinct lack of joy in this passage. Yes, you can bring thank offerings and shalom-sacrifices to God, but here are a bunch of rules to follow: oil on these sacrifices, but not on those. These are leavened cakes, those unleavened. You can eat this one only on the first day, but that one also on the second day, but God help anyone who eats some on the third day. The writer of this passage is not someone that you want to have plan your next party.

So we encounter the relationship between order and control. The text clearly wishes us to believe that the demand for order comes from God (Lev. 1.1, etc.). So the question of control is deflected to a level that is beyond question or dispute. You can't do things another way because God says so.

And if you want to know why, you have to take that up with God rather than the priest, and God doesn't grant personal interviews. So the priest can tightly control the order of things without being held accountable. Neat system!

Again, I think you've got the picture backwards. This is a system based on certain human realities. God does not grant personal interviews. This is not a rule that the priest made up. The priests did not lock God away. They did try to respond to the reality of the God-who-is-other by ensuring that those who approach God do so in a way that reflects the character of God. You don't have a Mac-and-cheese dinner when the Queen visits. You don't serve leftovers to the President.

Remember also that the priests were not simply in charge of 'worship services' for Sunday morning (or Saturday morning in this case). They were in charge of national survival. Failure properly to instruct the people in the ways of God resulted in the deaths of thousands of Israelites, and the loss of national sovereignty. Even the prophets agreed with this (Jer. 6.13-15; Hos. 4.1-6).

But this, too, is hardly innocent reporting. The efforts by the prophets to blame the priests also blame the prophets. In this way, both forms of leadership are given special place in the social world of Israel. To receive blame is to be given authority, or at least to have authority recognized. So the prophets collude with the priests by upholding their authority. What they want in return is inclusion in this authority.

Getting back to our text, 7.15 is also a major indication of a larger gathering for the offering than merely an individual worshiper. If the offering is a bull (3.1), we can hardly imagine an individual sitting down and eating an entire animal by himself in one day.

Even the Atkins diet doesn't suggest this quantity of meat.

So the text does not merely imply a group of people, it commands it. Suddenly our religious ritual becomes a feast. Our lone male worshiper now requires the help of his entire family, and the company of his community. What we need to understand this passage is a video from an African village feast.

No we don't. We need to think about a graduation party. We'd need to assume an event that is not catered, where the food is prepared by the family. Then we need to recreate the social context of the event. Who gets invited, and why? Who shows up and who doesn't? What kinds of social debts are created or paid by this event? What kinds of financial debts are incurred for this event? Are we showing off wealth or hiding financial hardship?

Or maybe we need to imagine a much less stressful event. In a small village everyone comes to a graduation party. This is the best party of the month. Sure, there are still many types of social stress involved, but after three glasses of wine no one cares. You don't have to be so neurotic about it.

So our mental image of this event depends on whether we title it 'Beaver Cleaver's Baptism' or 'Woody Allen's Bar-Mitzvah'.

In either case, the question of 'What are we going to do with all these leftovers?' becomes one that needs to be dealt with. This is especially significant in this case because the leftover meat is holy. So the following verses continue this discussion, asking questions about holy meat and unclean guests.

> (7.19) Flesh that touches any unclean thing shall not be eaten; it shall be burned up. As for other flesh, all who are clean may eat such flesh. (7.20) But those who eat flesh from the LORD's sacrifice of well-being while in a state of uncleanness shall be cut off from their kin. (7.21) When any one of you touches any unclean thing—human uncleanness or an unclean animal or any unclean creature—and then eats flesh from the LORD's sacrifice of well-being, you shall be cut off from your kin.

This is a useful text to help us understand what happens when the holy contacts the unclean, but first we need to understand 'unclean'. In this passage, unclean is clearly not a moral category. Even touching an unclean animal causes a person to become unclean, yet these things are hardly 'sins' or moral failures.[6]

Yes, but this does not affect the seriousness of the problem. Someone who is 'ritually impure' may not be 'sinful', yet when someone who is impure comes into contact with holy meat, the result is severe. Suddenly that person is no longer part of the covenant community, and there is no way to redress this wrong.[7]

At this point it might be useful to ask the question of realism again. Is this text really serious? Since we have argued that this text was written not to be followed, then the same must be true for the cut-off penalty. The text does not expect people to be 'cut off' since it does not expect people actually to sacrifice at all. The message is not 'take ritual impurity very seriously', but 'take this text very seriously'.

Those aren't our only two options. Perhaps the message is 'take God very seriously', or maybe 'take the leaders of the community very seriously'.

6. See Klawans 2000: vii, *passim*.

7. Commentators have given a number of explanations for the 'cut off' penalty, but all agree that it is extremely severe and without possibility of redress.

Of course we don't need to decide between these options. The same text can provoke all of these responses, or none of them.

The most common Christian response to this text is 'nap time'.

So in that instance the reader first needs to be someone who is already very serious about these matters to be paying any attention to this text. In that sense, the text chooses its readers and preaches to the choir.

Right. Only anal-retentive individuals desperate for tenure would bother studying Leviticus 1–7. People like that are pre-programmed to take purity and impurity seriously. In many ways, the question of purity and impurity is the basis of scholarship anyway. We distinguish pure from impure arguments on the basis of footnotes and bibliographies, and whether the text stays within the bounds of acceptable discussion.

Obviously the same could be said of seminary education, perhaps even more so. Seminaries are bounded both by academic borders and theological/ denominational ones. Students are really stuck when the two sets of boundaries conflict.

Klawans talks about the same thing when discussing purity in ancient Israel. Sometimes the demands of home life would conflict with the demands for ritual purity. Burying a family member would involve touching the corpse; this would make it temporarily impossible to participate in temple activities.

Many preachers understand this challenge intimately. Sometimes the demands of honest exegesis conflict with the recognition of what a particular congregation is willing to hear. So we choose.

An interesting parallel, but it still misses the point. The preacher's choice is a moral one, but the Israelite's choice is about conflicting demands of community. Further, the text does not present us with a real choice. Since there is no Tent of Meeting to sacrifice in, the reader is not faced with a decision about ritual purity in regards to sacrifice. Rather, the question is more about how these demands for ritual purity might affect the life of the reader outside the realm of sacrifice.

In this way, the later rabbinic discussion on this point addresses the right question. The problem of how to be God's people outside the sacrificial cultus is exactly the problem assumed by Leviticus. The way Leviticus chooses to answer the question is to provide a highly 'readable' text, one open to a variety of responses while hammering home a few basic themes—holiness, purity, separation.

In this way, the text does not need to answer the question of exactly what 'cut off' means. It is meant as a threat, and suffices as an ambiguous one.

But can it function as a threat? If the penalty is attached to an impossible action, how can the reader take the threat seriously? Isn't that like telling little Johnny 'never play with nuclear weapons or else'?

Not if the principle still holds, even when the example is beyond the reader's reach. This is more like a story from Grandpa about how you should never hit people, even when the story is about his own adventures in 'the old country' or 'the olden days'.

Remember also that this whole text is read by a people who have been 'cut off' in a very significant sense—cut off from the very possibility of following the Torah of God. Further, they are being told by a variety of voices (Torah, former and latter prophets) that they have been cut off because of their (or their ancestor's) sin.

So our Johnny lives in a post-apocalyptic world, and is being told 'never play with nuclear weapons'. At least part of the message is 'this is how we got into the mess we are in'.

* * *

Obviously a discussion of this sort could go on endlessly. One might even imagine a Blog being set up for the inclusion of multiple voices. (Of course, exactly who would imagine this, and why, is another question.)

It would also be important to think about the relationship between our study of Leviticus and the lives we lead. Leviticus wants us to do something. Ritual is part of this. So how might we move in response to Leviticus 7? We cannot sacrifice animals, but could we dance the text? Most of the ritual parallels I have looked at in this book—football, animal slaughter, war—are poor substitutes for animal sacrifice. Can we find positive ways of acting out the impulses that drive Leviticus?

The writer of Ecclesiastes says 'Of making many books there is no end' (12.12). The same could be said of ritual, and also of beauty. The writers of Leviticus responded to their situation by writing a text describing a ritual. We need not respond to our own situation in the same way.

3. *Conclusion*

We live in a world where most of the activities described in Leviticus 1–7 have been transformed into something else. The action of animal sacrifice on an individual scale has been transformed into corporate factories hidden from view. The action required for the forgiveness of sin has been removed to a hilltop in Israel some 2000 years ago. The basic needs of justice and restitution have been moved into the courts, which occasionally squabble about the placing of the Ten Commandments on public buildings, but otherwise seldom reference the Old Testament in their deliberations. The language of sacrifice has been taken over by sports teams, army recruiters, politicians, and marriage counselors. The role of priest has been taken by scientists. Many of us live in cities with a variety of temples and 'Tents of Meeting' to a variety of gods.

In this sense, none of the elements of animal sacrifice have disappeared. The rituals that repel us in Leviticus are all around us, hidden in the ordinary places of our lives. Children who will never encounter the book of Leviticus seriously will sit enraptured by the sounds and images coming out of their personal altars while eating McDonald's hamburgers.[8] It isn't a question of whether we encounter sacrifice, but how.

8. This allows them to sacrifice animals and brain cells at the same time. Then again, any scholars (and pastors) who don't understand the way their offices function as a private chapels aren't paying attention.

In these encounters Leviticus is able to provide an alternative way of experiencing the world. We do not need to kill an animal in order to experience Leviticus 1–7, we just need to read it. Our experience of Leviticus can then be enhanced by comparing it to the everyday places and events that provide the modern substitute for animal sacrifice. Simple notions of progress and theological advancement should soon drop away, and we may become aware of the great loss of connection to God, connection to one another, and connection to the natural world God created.

Once we become aware of this loss, we can mourn it through ritual, through movement and action. After we have enacted the distance between ourselves and Leviticus, we can again approach the text, but this time as a companion on the journey. No animals need to die in this encounter. Perhaps as a result of this encounter we can also work to lessen the number of people who die on our behalf.

Many of our modern self-perceptions may not survive this encounter. Our civilization has certainly created a highly ordered process of killing. This does not make us morally superior. We have elevated life to be the highest good, with billions of dollars allocated for health care, medical research, and other ways to prolong human life. But our ability to save life is overmatched by our ability and willingness to take life, both human and non-human.

There is still plenty of life left in these dead old texts. While Leviticus is unlikely to become regular reading in church services, occasional glimpses into its world can still provide lessons for our own.

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