VISUALIZING THE PERFECT CULT: THE PRIESTLY RATIONALE FOR EXCLUSION

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The literature of Leviticus is rich and intriguing, but access to its mysteries is gained only through patience and through careful scrutiny. Many of its concepts seem exotic to the reader living at the end of the twentieth century. Leviticus seems to create its own universe as it invites the reader to immerse herself in a world beyond her ken. The reader who enters into the recesses of Leviticus and who seeks to ferret out its meanings soon finds herself in a realm where the presence of holiness in the sanctuary is both desirable and dangerous; and the impurities of human beings can encroach upon that presence, even from afar. Purity, then, is an urgent matter in the social world of Leviticus; and earnest priests must "distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean" (10:10). Within that world and on its terms, the details make sense, and the pieces fit neatly. Outside that world, Leviticus' stipulations seem cryptic and its words incongruous.

The book creating this world of sacrifice and sanctuary, land and ethical conduct, is in the main the product of two schools of priestly writers, those who created the Priestly Torah (the predominant contribution to chapters 1–16) and those who belonged to the Holiness School (who were responsible for most of chapters 17–26). Both schools of writers/compilers were especially concerned with creating an orderly, coherent, and consistent way of life for the community. The common goal shared by both sections of Leviticus is persuasion— to convince the reader to follow the stipulations presented in the verses of the book.

Much of the priestly writers' literature is admirable for its content as well as for its skillful construction. In the sacrificial laws, chapters 1–7, provision is made for the poor to bring more modest offerings if they cannot afford the usual animals prescribed. Chapter 19 is thought by some to reflect the highest ethical standards of the Hebrew Bible. These passages exhort the members of the community to respect their fathers and mothers and to leave the corners of the fields for the poor and for the sojourners. The same chapter persuades the individual that "you shall love your neighbor as yourself . . . " (v. 18). Most relevant for this volume, chapter 19 also cautions the community member not to curse the deaf nor to put a stumbling block before the blind (v. 14).

Alongside these passages concerned with ethical behavior are those that charge the descendants of Israel to adhere to standards for sexual behavior or urge the maintenance of bodily purity. Chapters 18 and 20 list in detail forbidden partners for sexual intercourse. Leviticus 12–15 establishes norms for physical purity and discusses rituals required of those who have been affected by impurity. Leviticus 21–22 contains regulations designed for the priests, which set stricter standards for sexual conduct and more exacting requirements for physical purity than those commanded of laypeople.

Generally speaking, one major section of Leviticus envisions a goal of preserving the divine presence in the sanctuary. (Hector Avalos referred to this briefly in chapter 1 [page 41].) The other pictures a life in the land that aspires to holiness like that of YHWH's. Both aims are fulfilled by means that are chiefly physical. Chapter 19 is concerned with the ethical treatment of others, but even the casual reader is struck by the emphasis on an orderly physical world elsewhere in the book. The literary style of the priestly writers seems to reflect this desire for consistent material existence. Mary Douglas, the cultural anthropologist, remarks on the physical inclination of these priestly norms.

In short the idea of holiness was given an external, physical expression in the wholeness of the body . . . Wholeness is also extended to signify completeness in a social context. . . . Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused. To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind.[1]

Douglas is insightful about these physical standards. Her mistake is to equate those standards with holiness. The writers of the Priestly Torah never refer to a person as holy unless that person has been consecrated to priestly service or to the temporary consecrated status of the Nazirite. In the writings of the Holiness School, members of the community are exhorted "to be holy," but they call no layperson holy. Holiness seems to be a goal that cannot be attained. Nevertheless, as Douglas observes, in Leviticus physical flawlessness appears to be the norm for embodiment. As Leviticus 21:16-24 indicates, to be without blemish is a prerequisite for full priestly status.

STIGMA AS INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

Since physical standards are established in part by devaluing alternatives, this chapter will explore the stigmatizing power of Leviticus 13–14 and Leviticus 21:16-24, the power of the texts to devalue persons based on physical attributes or appearance. Crucial questions asked of these two texts are: Is the rhetorical intention of this passage to devalue certain individuals? What options are available to those who would interpret these passages? How shall people in parish or synagogue apply these texts to the question of who shall participate or officiate in worship? Since stigma is a crucial issue for the passages in this context, the overall aim of this chapter is informed by the social/psychological theory of stigma.

Stigma was established as a pertinent and fruitful pursuit in sociology or social psychology by Erving Goffman's *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*.[2] Goffman is the first to define stigma as a socially constructed phenomenon that deeply discredits a human being on the basis of physical attribute, character, or "tribal" affiliation (race, nation, or religion). When a community has constructed a stigma, it has made legitimate a particular kind of response to difference, a response that classifies the person with a stigma as failing to meet the community's standards of normalcy. "On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his [sic.] life chances. We construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents."[3] Societies develop specific terms that describe stigma, terms that are invested with devaluing power—terms like "cripple," "bastard," and "leper." Out of the immediate context,

the terms can be used metaphorically to impute negative attributes to other people, sometimes in ways that depart from their original meaning. Around the stigma, additional terms (representing other attributes) tend to cluster, adding on imperfections. The stigmatizing process tends to assign other socially devalued characteristics to the person with stigma. Finally, stigma is usually accompanied by some form of ostracism, either limiting social interaction for the stigmatized or excluding them from the community altogether.

Goffman explains the origin of the term stigma:

> The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places.[4]

Communities do not always construct stigma in such a straightforward manner as that practiced in ancient Greece. In Leviticus 13–14 and 21:16-24, the stigma process is much more subtle. There are differences between the two Leviticus texts as well—the second text is more moderate than the first; the devaluation of status is less severe. But, especially in the case of Leviticus 13–14, there are indications in the passage, and in closely related texts, that the types of dermatological disfigurement or discoloration represented by the Hebrew term, *sāra' at*, are caused by wrongdoing.[5]

The mark of *sāra'at*, according to the texts of the Hebrew Bible, was placed on the person's skin as a punishment for an encroachment against G-d, so *sāra' at* is a sign of moral failure, much as stigma was for the Greeks.

Goffman urges us to consider a "language of relationships" in examining and understanding the concept of stigma.[6] "A language of relationships" applies to Leviticus 13–14 and 21:16-24 in this way: whose "usualness" is confirmed when another's access to community or altar is restricted? In every case of exclusion, someone else's claim to religious or social communion is confirmed.

The issues are subtle in chapter 21, for the priest who has a physical imperfection is not completely excluded from the community or the tent of meeting, but his access to the altar is restricted. He is not declared impure, he need not dress differently, he need not an-

nounce his impurity, nor does he need to dwell outside the camp. The priest who has an imperfection is not subjected to all the classic traits of stigma that Goffman outlines. He is not permitted, however, to offer sacrifices; and in that partial sense, he is devalued.

A LITERARY APPROACH

While stigma theory can provide an interpretive framework for comprehending these passages, it is more appropriate to apply a literary method for a close reading. The texts themselves seem to suggest a three-pronged approach. They construct meaning through an arrangement or cluster of signs, with some passages organized around a broader concept, and they attempt to persuade the reader through a skillful use of rhetoric. An organizing principle or concept especially helps to explain 21:16-24, while the arrangement of signs is more useful for interpreting chapter 13.

Umberto Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics* has influenced my treatment of signs in Leviticus.[7] Approaching a definition for sign, Eco prefers instead to describe a sign-function—a correspondence between expression and content. By introducing the sign-function, he dispels the idea of the sign as a fixed and rigid entity, describing, rather, a pliable phenomenon that adapts to the surrounding context of signs. Even within a single text, the sign-function allows for a momentary linking of expression and content, then an uncoupling, and other subsequent correlations later in the same passage.[8]

Eco's clarification of the nature of content is advantageous. Within the correlation, "an expression does not, in principle, designate any object, but on the contrary conveys a cultural content."[9]

So, in the pursuit of meaning or semantics, the object of the quest becomes the content. Content is best defined as a cultural unit, a unit defined by cultural convention, that is, a segment of the semantic field drawn from the cultural background. It is a semantic unit imbedded within a system.

The cultural unit, conveyed by an expression, can be our access to cultural attitudes imbedded within the texts of Leviticus. Eco draws on a definition from cultural anthropologist, David M. Schneider: "A unit in a particular culture is simply anything that is culturally defined and distinguished as an entity. It may be a person, place, thing, feeling, state of affairs, sense of foreboding, fantasy, hallucination,

hope or idea."[10] In the same way, ṣāra'at, nega', "affliction" and ṭāmē' "unclean," "impure" are signs whose expression conveys a cultural unit. These units are ultimately derived from the community of the descendants of Israel. But the cultural units imbedded in the texts of Leviticus have been transformed by the compilers. These texts represent the writers' view of communal attitudes and their attempt to shape those attitudes. So the signs of Leviticus are expressions that convey cultural units, as filtered through the perceptions and intentions of these schools of writers.

With this cautionary note in mind, Eco's theory suggests a possible avenue of access to these contents. Two concepts are especially helpful, that of interpretants and the related one of unlimited semiosis. The interpretant is a sign that explains or defines the content of a previous sign. Eco envisions a series of these definitions, providing closer access to the cultural unit. This notion of interpretants reflects the systemic nature of language. A semiotic system defines and explains the content of each sign by means of other signs, "a series of conventions that explain each other."[11] The process is continuous and never-ending, hence unlimited semiosis.

A useful way to access the semantic content of these signs is to look at the series of signs that define that content. Though texts are limited social discourse when compared to the spoken language of a community, still, an appropriate way to discern meaning is through the cluster of signs surrounding a cultural unit, that circumscribe and define that unit.

THE CULTURAL UNITS *NEGA'* AND *ṢĀRA'AT*

Our first passage, Leviticus 13–14, is a compilation of fascinating texts. There is some evidence of great antiquity; and the preserved ritual is considered to be a step removed from pagan rite, lightly adapted for the priestly system.[12]

Many scholars no longer consider these texts to be about Hansen's disease (known colloquially as "leprosy").[13] Rather than attempting some alternative diagnosis, it is better to accept these texts according to their own representation—as religious-legal discourse pertaining to cultic impurity. Our passages do not suggest a treatment, or make a prognosis. Perhaps the scientific bias of the last few centuries has

compelled scholars to impose modern medical categories on cultic texts.[14]

For Leviticus 13–14, two key terms clearly dominate: nega', "stroke" or "touch," and ṣāra'at. The translation of the Hebrew word ṣāra'at is a disputed topic among biblical scholars. Since its historical linkage with "leprosy" has proven problematic, it is important to find an alternative. This is a difficult task because symptoms of ṣāra'at represent a broad class of skin disfigurements or discolorations (13:2-43). Ṣāra'at appears on fabric or hide (13:47-59) and in the walls of houses (14:33-53). Traditionally, scholars have understood the noun ṣāra'at to derive from the Hebrew root ṣr'. The verbal root has parallels in Arabic, Aramaic, and post-biblical Hebrew, and means "to strike-down." This implies that the noun has a meaning "struck-down" or "disfiguring, degrading disease."[15]

Akkadian parallels suggest a meaning of "struck down" for ṣāra'at. The Akkadian words saharšubbû and sennītu are terms for skin diseases regarded with abhorrence, like ṣāra'at. Sennītu is etymologically related to ṣāra'at.[16] Saharšubbû and sennītu occur together in several texts; in one case an introductory phrase suggests that they are both incidents of "the punishment of God."[17] Also, as Albert Goetze points out, in at least one incantation against disease, sennītu (among other maladies) is "said to have descended from heaven."[18] The evidence from Near Eastern parallels implies that ṣāra'at is a special punishment from God, signifying a severe case of divine displeasure.

Turning to another key term, the noun nega', it seems the most likely meaning is "becoming touched" and/or "becoming struck." According to Jacob Milgrom, the noun nega', in its origins, probably relates "to attacks from the demonic sphere."[19] As encountered in biblical literature, nega' most often means "stroke." With great frequency, it designates a "stroke" inflicted by someone. God is the usual initiator. Genesis 12:17; Exodus 11:1; II Samuel 7:14; I Kings 8:37, 38; Psalms 39:11; 89:33—all imply that nega' is a form of divine punishment. The arrangement of signs in Leviticus 13–14 illustrates the importance of the concept. The noun nega' appears sixty-one times, most often denoting "the affection" (affliction) itself, several times "the affected person." Since the idea of "stroke" is inherent within the sign itself, as a first level denotation, disease as a result of divine action is emphasized throughout.

Having a *nega'* requires one to go to the priest to be checked, but does not necessarily result in a declaration of impurity. The term seems to describe a range of illnesses—from minor illnesses that do not render a person unclean to those that generate severe impurity. *Nega'* can be seen against its Ancient Near Eastern background as one of many terms describing afflictions ascribed to divine agency. As Hector Avalos puts it, "In Mesopotamia illness was often, if not normally, viewed as ultimately rooted in the will of the gods."[20]

Yet, the Priestly source attributes all divinely sent conditions to one source, the God of Israel. P's view of illness gives the material a distinctive shape embracing a world view that purges the demonic from existence.[21] No rhetorical evidence hints of P taking illness into a new sphere, where disease has only "natural" causes. Nor does the Priestly source make disease a purely secular matter. Instead, P's treatment presupposes diseases dispatched from a divine being. P does not reshape the tradition to the point where disease becomes a random misfortune or accident.[22]

THE VISUAL BASIS FOR EXCLUSION IN THE CASE OF ṢĀRA'AT

To explore further the stigmatizing power of the declarations addressed in chapters 13–14, this section discusses the arrangement of signs in the text. According to Eco's theory, the content of a sign can subsequently become the expression that conveys another cultural unit. For instance, while *ṣāra'at* denotes a particular type of "disfiguring, degrading disease," it also connotes "severe impurity" and "isolation." From another vantage point—the expression denotes "content A," while the sign-function as a whole connotes "content B." Eco's theory of unlimited semiosis permits us to consider the second-level contents or connotations a sign conveys as well as the primary denotation accomplished by the original correlation of expression with content.[23] By considering the arrangement of signs in the text and the associations among them, the social concerns underlying the passage become clearer.

Two classes of signs dominate chapter 13; locative signs and signs of examination or appearance. Locative signs denote a spatial location—in the world they create, they indicate a place on the surface of the skin or a location on the body where the symptoms of disease appear. The locative signs include prepositions that locate symptoms

to a point on "the skin of the body." They include nouns like "head" and "beard" as sites for other symptoms. Signs of examination or appearance are those whose expression conveys a content with a visual aspect. A frequent example is the sign *wĕrā'â,* "and he will examine," which is used in connection with the priest's role in examining the signs of disease. This verb form and its variants appear forty times in these chapters. This is significant since these verbs appear only forty-eight times in the entire book of Leviticus. Other signs pertain to the appearance of symptoms: the color of the hair or the appearance of depth in a shiny spot.

Together, the locative signs and the signs of examination or appearance create a world where the priest must examine the surface of the skin and symptoms of disease. The priest does not touch or measure; decisions are based on appearance alone. The signs of appearance are so dominant in the text that they infuse the text with visual connotations. Symptoms like "swelling" and "scab" carry a visual connotation, where their appearance becomes a matter of urgency.

There are a few appearances that the priest must declare impure. If the hair of the *nega'* has turned white, and its appearance is deeper than the skin, the priest shall declare it impure. The combination of white hair and raw flesh also results in a declaration of impurity. In the event the *nega'* occurs on the head or in the beard, the combination of an appearance that is deeper than the skin with sparse yellow hair must be declared impure. If a *nega'* lacks these appearances, it is still declared impure if it spreads on the skin. However, if someone develops a reddish white swelling in a bald spot on the crown or temple and its appearance is like *ṣāra'at,* the priest must not fail to declare him impure.

Verses 45-46 of chapter 13 give the consequences of a declaration of cultic impurity. The person afflicted with *ṣāra'at* must tear his or her clothing, mess up the hair, cover the mustache, and cry "Impure, impure." Ironically, the person impure from *ṣāra'at* upon the skin must change appearance to make impure status evident. Crucial for the present discussion, however, is the afflicted person's exclusion from the community. As long as the *nega'* is present on the skin, the person must dwell outside the camp.

A rationale for exclusion may be implied in 13:12-13. In the event that *ṣāra'at* covers all the skin, from head to foot, and all of it has turned white, the individual is declared clean. The text assumes *ṣāra*

'at, but surprisingly, as long as it covers the entire body (from what the priest can see) and has completely turned white, the priest shall declare him clean! It seems, then, that visual consistency and completeness is a more influential factor than the presence of ṣāraʻat. Perhaps appearance is the most important consideration here, as the great prominence of signs of appearance would suggest.

ṢĀRAʻAT AS DIVINE PUNISHMENT (REVISITED)

Chapter 14 provides clues as to how the Priestly Torah interprets a "stroke" of ṣāraʻat. One clue arises from Leviticus 14:33-53, about strokes of ṣāraʻat in houses. Verse 34 states explicitly, "When you enter the land of Canaan, which I am giving to you as a possession and I put a stroke of ṣāraʻat on a house in the land you possess" (author's translation). YHWH, then, is the source of ṣāraʻat in houses. The priestly writers, both P and H, construct conceptual analogies between the material or animal spheres and the human domain. The concluding summary (14:54-57) to the long discussion of ṣāraʻat stresses the similarity of ṣāraʻat on fabrics, houses, and human beings. The situations of ṣāraʻat on persons and mold on fabric and in houses have been equated through similar arrangement of signs and by means of this summary statement. If the affliction in houses is attributable to God, one suspects that the same thing is true for human beings.

The sign ṣāraʻat is invested with the connotation of divine punishment throughout the remainder of its occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. The paradigmatic story of ṣāraʻat is in Numbers 12, in which Miriam is struck with ṣāraʻat for speaking against Moses. An important element is the reference to God's anger in v. 9, which helps to establish a motive for divine punishment. Miriam's appearance is an especially crucial matter. Verse 10 states that she is mĕṣōraʻat (flakey?), "like snow." In Aaron's prayer (v. 12) he pleads, "Let her not be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb" (author's translation). Jacob Milgrom's theories are supported by this passage: (a) that ṣāraʻat is a result of divine punishment, (b) ṣāraʻat's severe impurity is attributable to its death-like appearance.[24]

Chapter 14 hints at the priestly rationale for excluding the ill or disabled from worship through its requirement of an ʼāšām or "repa-

ration" offering. This offering is an essential element in the ritual to return the person healed of skin disease to full cultic status. While a ḥaṭṭāʼt, or "purification offering," indicates only that a person needs to be restored to a state of cultic purity, an ʼāšām, or "reparation offering," implies that moral wrongdoing, desecration of sancta, or an encroachment against the divine presence in the sanctuary, has taken place. This suggests that P regarded a "stroke of ṣāraʻat" as a punishment inflicted by God.[25]

THE CONCEPT OF TĀMÎM, ANIMAL SACRIFICE, AND LEVITICUS 21:16-24

The primary intention of Leviticus 21:16-24 is to prohibit a priest from officiating in the sacrificial cult if he has a physical defect. Though Moses is instructed to speak to Aaron, clearly the passage concerns any direct male descendant of Aaron who is qualified to officiate as priest by virtue of his lineage. The section stipulates that these priests shall be free of defect, a requirement that shall have sway indefinitely, "throughout their generations." Specifically, a priest with a physical imperfection may not approach the altar to present a sacrifice. This is the meaning of the recurring phrase "to have access" in vv. 17, 18, 21, and 23. In addition, in verse 23, the high priest who has a physical defect is prohibited from approaching the curtain that separates the shrine (the portion of the sanctuary containing the table, menorah, and incense altar) and the adytum (the innermost portion of the sanctuary containing the ark). He, too, is forbidden to "have access to the altar" (here, the incense altar within the shrine).[26]

A significant statement is made in verse 22, indicating that the blemished priest may eat "the bread of his God," the priests' allotted portion of the food offerings to YHWH. The statement is meaningful not only because of the leniency it discloses but also because of its implications for ritual status. The priest's physical defect does not render him ritually impure. If he were impure, he would be unable to eat from the holy or most holy portions.

Leviticus 22:1-13 addresses just that concern. If a priest is rendered impure through ṣāraʻat, a discharge, contact with the dead, and so forth, he may not eat of the holy things until he returns to a pure state. If the priest were made impure by a physical defect, then this situation

would be included in the list. If impurity were the governing concern in 21:16-24, that would be indicated by declarations of impurity.

Though a physical defect does not make the priest impure, his physical state does represent a threat to holy places or objects. The "seed of Aaron" who has a physical imperfection is forbidden access to the altar and the curtain, "so that he does not desecrate my holy things" (v. 23, author's translation).

For the writers of the Holiness school, the act described by the verb *yĕhallēl* "he desecrates" or "he profanes" is a very serious violation. It is classified under the general heading of "trespass against sancta," because it represents an encroachment upon the domain of the holy. According to the Holiness writers, acts of *ḥll* are met with the severest of punishments.[27] The desecration of holy things by the blemished priest in 21:23 must be considered a dangerous offense that puts both the trespasser and the sacra at risk.[28]

The concept of *tāmîm,* or physical perfection, is central for understanding the section Leviticus 21:16-24. Though the word *tāmîm* is not mentioned explicitly here, the term does appear in the conceptually analogous passage concerning appropriate animals for sacrifice, (Leviticus 22:17-25; specifically, v. 19).

There are striking conceptual and stylistic similarities between the passages. Leviticus 22:17-25 requires a sacrificial animal to be male and free of defect. So too according to Leviticus 21:16-24, a priest who offers sacrifices upon the altar is assumed to be male (any man from the seed of Aaron, v. 17, [author's paraphrase]), and he must be free of physical defect. Given the Holiness school's propensity for carefully crafted, stylistic arrangement of ideas, the parallels are undoubtedly deliberate.

Verse 18 acts as the introduction to 22:17-25. If a resident of the land offers a sacrifice to fulfil a vow or presents a voluntary offering, the animal, according to verse 19, must be male, *tāmîm,* and a domesticated animal ("of the cattle or the sheep or the goats"). Verse 20 provides an explanation for *tāmîm*—free from any *mûm* (a physical defect). So that there might not be any misunderstanding, verses 22-25 provide several examples of *mûm.* Thus, *tāmîm* is defined negatively, as having no defect. *Mûm* is clarified by means of examples, though one presumes the list is not exhaustive. Verse 22*b* seems to hit on the heart of the matter: Food offerings shall not be obtained from these imperfect animals, for they must not come into contact with the altar, which has been consecrated (Lev. 8:10-11). An animal with a defect must not make contact with sancta, much as a disabled priest must not touch sancta.

EARLY JEWISH INTERPRETATION

Several of the Dead Sea Scroll texts appear to have been influenced by these stigmatizing texts of Leviticus. 4QD[a] associates the appearance of *ṣāra'at* with that of death. A degradation in the condition was described as "the addition of the living part to the dead part" (4-5, 10-11, 11-12). A symptom of scall, its yellow color, becomes an indication of loss of vitality: "for it is like a plant, which has a worm under it, that cuts off its root, and makes its bloom dry up" (7-8).[29] 4QD[g] also identifies *ṣāra'at* with death (5-11).

Several Dead Sea Scrolls passages exclude the person afflicted with *ṣāra'at* or the person with a physical defect from full participation in worship. A halakhic letter, 4QMMT, affords us a glimpse at the Qumran community's concern for issues of purity and cultic participation, and helps to clarify the community's position on these matters over against certain other forms of Judaism. These Qumranic texts tend to intensify the purity standards in the Hebrew Bible and to reinterpret the Bible's stipulations to apply to the community's particular situation. In 4QMMT the spatial boundaries of the "tent of meeting" and the "camp" of Leviticus are reconfigured; "We are of the opinion that the sanctuary is the tent of meeting and that Jerusalem is the camp, and that outside the camp is outside Jerusalem" (Composite text B, lines 29-30).[30] The letter excludes certain persons from the congregation and prohibits them from marrying a congregation member. An Ammonite, a Moabite, a bastard, a person with crushed testicles, one whose male member has been cut off may not enter the sanctuary. Reverence for the sanctuary requires separation from these persons (lines 39-49). 4QMMT maintains that the blind and the deaf are unable to follow cultic practices; the blind cannot see a mixture, the deaf cannot hear the purity regulations. However, like "the seed of Aaron" in Leviticus 21:16-24, these persons may eat the sacred food (49-54). The halakhic letter holds that a person healed of *ṣāra'at* must not enter a house containing sacred food. Though the person has been readmitted into the camp, that person

still has residual impurity until sunset of the eighth day, a stricter requirement than that in Leviticus 14:20.

The Temple Scroll prohibits certain persons from entering the temple city (11Q 19 XLV, 7-18). Notably, the Temple Scroll bans the blind person from entering the temple city and provides a rationale, much in keeping with the concepts presented in Leviticus; "so that they shall not defile the city in which I dwell, for I, the Lord, dwell among the sons of Israel forever and ever" (13-14).[31] A person with ṣāra'at may not enter the temple city until clean (17-28), dwelling east of the city until that eventuality.

Specific classes of people are excluded from the eschatological community by The Rule of the Congregation (1QSᵃ): "the crippled in the legs or hands, the lame, blind, deaf, or mute," anyone with a visible defect, and anyone too old to stand securely (1QSᵃ 2:3-9). 1QSᵃ, like the Temple Scroll, offers a rationale for this exclusion; "for holy angels are in their council." The issue is holiness and the problem of contact between holiness and physical imperfection.[32] Similarly, the War Scroll (1QM VII, 4-5) requires the man who fights in the eschatological battle to be tāmîm in both spirit and body. 1QM provides a rationale, "for holy angels are together with their armies" (VII, 6). Angels will fight with men in the final battle, and holiness must not come into contact with physical imperfection. The Habakkuk Pesher, 1QpHab IX, 1-2, reiterates an idea we have encountered before: Diseases of the body are punishment for wrongdoing.

The Mishnah's apparent aim, in its interpretation of Leviticus 13–14, is greater precision in diagnosis, in certification of purity or impurity, and in applying the processes of purification rituals.[33] The Tractate Bekhorot (7:1-7) seeks greater precision in identifying the physical imperfections that disqualify a man from serving in the temple and has an explicit rationale for disqualification. A man whose eyelashes have fallen out and a man whose teeth have been taken out are disqualified "on account of the appearance of the eye" (i.e., because of how they look).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This brief study of two passages in Leviticus makes a few themes very clear. Deviations from the physical norms set by the compilers of the Priestly Torah and the writers of the Holiness school have very

serious consequences. Decisions about physical purity/impurity have a strongly visual basis, and deviations from physical norms may be interpreted as signs of God's displeasure. These themes were quite apparent in the biblical texts as well as in the brief glimpse at the history of interpretation.

The tapestry of meanings conveyed by the expressions in Leviticus 13–14 and 21:16-24 have a significant theme in common. According to these passages, within the religious community physical imperfection can result in some form of exclusion. The exclusion can range from restrictions in privileged access to divine communion to complete and potentially permanent exclusion from the residential community.

Given the stigmatizing power of these two Leviticus passages, what can biblical interpretation do to lessen that power without compromising the authority of the scriptural text? Since stigma is socially constructed, surely it can be reconstructed.[34] Although I would not recommend de-sacralizing texts, I do think we can de-sacralize stigma imbedded within them. Feminist interpretation and liberation approaches to Scripture have offered us ways to face the prejudice in texts and to recast their influence. In this instance we are fortunate. Within Leviticus, chapter 19 offers us a different paradigm. Leviticus 19:14 instructs us: "You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD." Further on, Leviticus 19:18b reminds us, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." The first verse gives us a different example to follow. It suggests that we should not take advantage of the person who has different physical abilities. One way we can avoid reviling the deaf and putting a stumbling block before the blind is to allow both full access to the altar, to the worshiping community, and to God. One way to love our neighbors is to refuse to devalue them and to resist using Scripture to justify our prejudice.

Leviticus 13–14 and 21:16-24 can serve as examples for us of how we subtly make our own declarations of "uncleanness" or establish physical standards that devalue others. Although we do not require anyone to shout, "Unclean! Unclean!," religious communities lag behind secular organizations in making our meeting places accessible. We don't overtly put stumbling blocks before the blind, but we find subtle yet effective ways to discourage their ordination as ministers, as Al Herzog and Jan Robitscher point out in chapters 7 and 9.

Perhaps we don't openly revile the deaf, but we certainly don't invite them to lead worship. We discourage through our attitudes and through our resistance, failing to see the inherent authority of a call to ministry. By understanding the exclusive strands in a book such as Leviticus, we may still learn what inclusion in the sight of God implies.

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1. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1966), 51-54.

2. Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963).

3. Ibid., 5.

4. Ibid., 1.

5. I have left the term *sāra'at* untranslated because of the variety of discolorations or disfigurements of skin and fabric represented by the term in Lev. 13-14. See Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 311-15.

6. Goffman, *Stigma*, 3.

7. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics,* Advances in Semiotics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).

8. Ibid., 49.

9. Ibid., 61.

10. David M. Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 2. Also quoted in Eco, *A Theory,* 67.

11. Eco, *A Theory,* 69.

12. See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16,* The Anchor Bible, vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 833, about its antiquity. Concerning an early date for P, see Milgrom's *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), xxxii-xxxv and his *Leviticus 1-16,* 3-35. See also Avi Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship Between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1982).

13. For example, Milgrom, Leviticus 1-16, 816; Klaus Seybold and Ulrich B. Mueller, *Sickness and Healing,* trans. Douglas W. Stott (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 68.

14. Diagnosis is evidently impossible; John J. Wilkinson, "Leprosy and Leviticus: The Problem of Description and Identification," *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 30 (1977): 153-69.

15. Theodor Seidl, "*sāra'at,*" *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament,* eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, vol. 7 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1973-77), col. 1127-133.

16. Albert Goetze, "An Incantation Against Disease," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies,* vol. 9 (1955), 8-18 sees the development * *sarra'atu* * *sarra'tu* * *sanna'tu* * *sanne'tu* * *sennē'tu*/*sennettu* (12). Similarly, the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary,* 127.

17. CT 40, 1:6-11; CT 38, 30:20-25. Karel Van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1985), 72.

18. Goetze, "Incantation," 13.

19. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16,* 776.

20. Avalos, *Illness,* 129.

21. Jacob Milgrom, "Priestly ('P') Source," *Anchor Bible Dictionary,* vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 454-62.

22. Contra the entry *ng'* in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament,* ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, vol. 6 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1977), col. 219-26. For a discussion compatible to that argued here, see Karl Elliger, *Leviticus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1966), 180.

23. Eco, *A Theory,* 54-57.

24. Milgrom, *Leviticus,* 816-26.

25. Jacob Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The Asham and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 80-82.

26. Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 40.

27. For examples of these punishments, see Exodus 31:14, Leviticus 20:3, Leviticus 22:9. Exodus 31:14 is newly attributed to the Holiness School; see Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 16.

28. The absence of the death penalty may not be coincidental. See Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology I,* 41.

29. J. T. Milik, "Fragment d'une source du Psautier, et fragments des Jubilées, du Document de Damas, d'un phylactère dans la grotte 4 de Qumran," *Revue Biblique* 73 (1966): 105.

30. Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, X* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 48-51.

31. For a similar rationale, see *Discoveries, XLVI,* 11-12.

32. Lawrence H. Schiffman, *The Eschatological Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 37-52.

33. For more information about Mishnah's interpretation of Leviticus, see the tractate, *Neg.*

34. Gaylene Becker and Arnold, "Stigma as a Social and Cultural Construct," *The Dilemma of Difference: A Multidisciplinary View of Stigma,* eds. Stephen C. Ainlay, Gaylene Becker, and Lerita M. Coleman (New York: Plenum Press, 1986), 52.