Sin and Expiation

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Abstract

Expiation refers to a ritual attempt to deal with sin, and while in the Hebrew Bible it can include such things as prayer and acts of mourning, we most frequently find it manifested in sacrifice. Biblical texts rarely explain how sacrifice functions in relation to sin, but sacrifice is described at greatest length in the Priestly writing, particularly in Leviticus 1-7, which has been described as a manual of sacrifice. Even here, however, P does not provide a theory of sacrificial expiation—does not, that is, explain how or why sacrifice functions as the proper ritual response to sin. Jacob Milgrom's re-creation of the worldview that stands behind P's understanding of sacrifice claims that the Priestly tradents understood sin as creating a miasma of impurity that polluted the sancta, and saw the blood of the sin or purification offering as a ritual detergent that cleansed the sanctuary. If we read the Priestly narrative without trying to reconstruct this worldview, but look rather for the ways in which P portrays sacrifice and expiation, we see that sacrifice functions as a way for Israelites to publically acknowledge their sin and to signal that they have no intentions of violating God's commandments again. Part of this ritual message involves honoring God as sovereign, and so acknowledging as well God's right to command and indicating the sacrificers' awareness that they must act as loyal subjects to their divine sovereign.

Keywords

Sin, sacrifice, expiation, blood, sin offering, Priestly writing

Responses to sin

Some biblical texts describe sin as an inherent part of the human condition. One of the biblical flood stories states that God saw "that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5); in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple he says that "there is no one who does not sin" (2 Kgs 8:46; 2 Chr 6:36), and we find the same sentiment in places such as Job 4:17-19; Ps 143:2; Prov 20:9; and Eccl 7:20, among other passages. Violations of God's law are obviously understood to be sins, and law codes like Exod 20:22-23:33 and Deuteronomy 12-26 prescribe punishment for a whole host of crimes. Disobedience of divine command not formally inscribed in law also merits punishment, as in the story of 1 Samuel 15, where Saul fails to completely fulfill the task God orders him to undertake and is stripped of the kingship as a result. Sin is often understood to be a national rather than individual endeavor. The prayer of Neh 9:6-37, for example, refers to the repeated punishments of all Israel for the nation's failure to keep the law, reflecting the view of Judges and Kings, which present repetitive punishments of Israel because of their worship of foreign gods (see, e.g., Judg 2:11-23; 2 Kgs 17:7-23). Even non-Israelite nations, who assumedly know nothing of God's law, are condemned to punishment for their evil in places such as Amos 1.

Expiation refers to a ritual response to sin meant to cope with or eliminate its expected negative effects. Expiation is not always the biblical reaction to sin, and sometimes individuals or a nation, upon being confronted with their sin, change their ways in the hope of staving off the punishment, a hope that is sometimes realized. For example, when Ezra hears that the post-exilic

community has been intermarrying with "the peoples of the lands" (Ezra 9:1-3), something that he understands as a violation of the law (9:6), he does not deal with the sin by ritual means but by working with the community to expel the foreign women (Ezra 10) in order to prevent the punishment he believes the community has earned (9:10-15). In Jer 26:16-19, the people recall Micah's pronouncement of the destruction of Jerusalem that did not come to pass because King Hezekiah entreated God's favor in response to the prophecy, causing God to relent. In 2 Chr 30:18-20, Hezekiah prays on behalf of the Israelites participating in Passover who had not purified themselves, and "the LORD heard Hezekiah, and healed the people." In Jonah, the Ninevites undertake acts of mourning in response to the prophet's proclamation of punishment, reasoning, "Who knows? God may relent and change his mind," which is precisely what happens (3:9-10).

Prayers and acts of mourning are, however, ritual activities, and so the final cases mentioned above really are acts of expiation. (Ezra does pray in Ezra 9, but the prayer is not related to forgiveness or expiation.) Still, it is common to think of sacrifice as ancient Israel's expiatory ritual *par excellence*. Many different biblical writers who lived at different times refer to sacrifice, although individual authors tend to provide little description as to how sacrifice was conducted, or explanation as to what different things they believed sacrifice to accomplish. The sacrificial system changed and developed over time (Marx 2005:15-51), making it difficult to discuss a single understanding within ancient Israel of sacrifice and expiation. Pentateuchal material that scholars associate with the Priestly tradition contains by far the most detailed descriptions of sacrificial rituals and their relationship to sin; this is especially true of Leviticus 1-7, which has been described as a kind of manual or handbook of sacrifice (Budd 1996: 13; Gilders 2004: 61), and so this is where we will focus our attention. Arguably, the most influential

modern attempt to reconstruct the understanding of sacrifice that lies behind these texts is that of Jacob Milgrom (Watts 2007: 3). The Priestly texts themselves do not provide an overarching theory of sacrifice, which is to say that P does not directly explain how or why sacrifice works, but Milgrom believes that P texts provide enough detail to reconstruct the worldview behind the sacrifices in these texts and the understanding of expiation assumed within them.

There are many theories of sacrifice within biblical scholarship that compete with Milgrom's (Eberhart 2004: 486), the result of P's lack of explicit explanation, but it will become clear in the following discussion that three elements are key to the Priestly tradents' understanding of expiation: the *ḥaṭṭā't* (a word that can mean "sin" but in the sacrificial texts is often translated as "sin offering"), the manipulation of sacrificial blood, and the verb *kipper* (*kpr* in piel), often translated as "to make atonement," which is used to express the outcome of the *ḥaṭṭā't*. The very lack of explanation in P as to how and why sacrifice functions in relation to expiation, however, suggests that the Priestly tradents were not interested in providing readers with a comprehensive understanding in this regard. Our investigation, then, will cover two different things: how the priests may have understood sacrifice to function for expiation, and what messages P sends to readers through its narrative as it discusses sacrifice and expiation.

The worldview behind Priestly concepts of sacrifice and expiation

Leviticus 1-7 refers to five different kinds of sacrifice: the burnt offering, grain offering, offering of well-being, *ḥaṭṭā't* or sin offering, and guilt offering, which are discussed in that order in Leviticus 1-5 and again in Leviticus 6-7. These chapters provide no information as to why one would offer the first three of these, although 6:12-16 [19-23] refers to the use of the grain offering in the priests' anointing, and other parts of P's narrative refer to their use in the

inauguration of the tabernacle cult (Exod 29:10-14, 36-37; Lev 8:14-17). But in regard to the regular cultic offerings, Leviticus 1-7 provides a clear function only for the *ḥaṭṭā't* and the guilt offering in Leviticus 4:1-5:26 [6:7], both of which are used in expiation. Leviticus 4 specifies that the *ḥaṭṭā't* must be offered if anyone *teḥĕṭā' bišgāgâ* "sins unintentionally, sins in error" and the chapter describes the process of offering the *ḥaṭṭā't* in the cases of the unintentional sins of the high priest, all Israel, an Israelite ruler, and an individual Israelite. 4:27-31, for example, describes the details of blood manipulation and burning of the animal offered for an unintentional sin committed by Israelites once they become aware of it, and it concludes by saying, "the priest will make atonement (*kipper*) on your behalf, and you shall be forgiven," although not scholars agree that "make atonement" is the proper translation of *kipper*.

Using evidence from Leviticus 4 and throughout the Priestly material, Milgrom argues that the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā't* is a "ritual detergent" that cleanses the cultic sanctuary, but not the sacrificer; the descriptions of the blood manipulation, Milgrom points out, consistently demonstrate that sacrificial blood is applied to the sancta and never to the sinner (Milgrom 1991: 253-93). Because of the role he sees for the *ḥaṭṭā't*—purifying the sancta—he prefers the translation "purification offering," even though the more traditional "sin offering" reflects the root from which the word derives. Sinners benefit from the forgiveness that follows the sacrifice, writes Milgrom, but their sin has polluted the sanctuary in which, according to P, God's glory is present (Exod 40:34-38). In Milgrom's reconstruction of the cosmovision behind the Priestly texts that discuss sacrifice, Israel's sin and bodily impurities (which can be caused by childbirth, skin diseases, and contact with a corpse) act as a "miasma" that is attracted to and pollutes the sanctuary. The fact that references to blood manipulation in passages like Leviticus 4 show that blood is applied to the sancta rather than to sinners demonstrates that the result of the ritual,

expressed by *kipper*, is realized by the sanctuary and not the sacrificer. In P's worldview, Milgrom concludes, God will not dwell in a polluted sanctuary and so it must be cleansed with sacrificial blood or else God will depart from Israel's midst.

Even though the basic sense of the root *kpr* is "to cover," Milgrom appeals to linguistic evidence to argue that in the context of P's sacrificial texts *kipper* means "to rub off, wipe" (Milgrom 1991: 1079-82); this is the actual effect of the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā't* for Milgrom as it wipes or cleanses Israel's sin and impurity from the sanctuary. In his understanding, then, the sacrifice really functions to purify, not to grant expiation, although forgiveness is the inevitable secondary result of the sacrifice when it is offered for sin. In P's worldview, blood can function to cleanse the sancta of the miasma of sin and impurity because, as Lev 17:11 tells us, P seems to equate blood with life, and so the blood counteracts the effects of impurity that, says Milgrom, P associates with death (45-47, 711-12). For example, male and female genital discharges result in impurity (Leviticus 15), and this is because the loss of vaginal blood and semen both suggest "the diminution of life" (767).

Milgrom's reconstruction of the worldview behind P's presentation of sacrifice hinges on a number of important conclusions, which we will investigate in turn. The first of these is that the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā't* cleanses the sanctuary and not the sinner, since it is placed on the sancta. In drawing this conclusion, Milgrom infers meaning to a ritual action, a meaning that the text does not clearly articulate (Gane 2005: 108), and one can argue that since the descriptions of blood manipulation in Leviticus 4 are inevitably followed by forgiveness that the blood acts for the sacrificer as well as for the sancta (so, e.g., Kiuchi 1987: 39-66; Jenson 1992: 156-60; Maccoby 1999: 175-80; Dennis 2002: 112-15; Watts 2007: 81), and thus directly expiates sin. If it is true that Leviticus 4 never explicitly makes the word *kipper*—which expresses the end result

of the *ḥaṭṭā't*—the cause of forgiveness, it is also true that in this chapter forgiveness inevitably follows *kipper*. Perhaps we should conclude, rather like Milgrom, that the sacrifice that results in *kipper* is technically the prerequisite for rather than the cause of forgiveness (Levine 1974: 65-66; Marx 2003: 117), but the inevitability of the connection means that the ritual always results in expiation for unintentional sins. Milgrom's explanation of the purification provided by the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā't*, moreover, relies on his belief that in the Priestly worldview sin is an impure miasma that could pollute the sanctuary, but this is not a process that he clearly explains (see Maccoby 1999: 167-70). Milgrom does refer to the Akkadian cognate *kuppuru* "to wipe" to justify his understanding of *kipper*, but Mesopotamian texts make no connection between sacrifice and *kuppuru* purification rituals, whereas the Arabic cognate root *kfr* is used in the context of covering or annulling sin (Janowski 2000: 57-60, 93-95). It is true that there are places in P where the *ḥaṭṭā't* is used only to purify holy things—its use to initiate the tabernacle cult in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8 is an obvious example of this—but we need to pay attention to the different contexts in which we encounter this ritual. If Leviticus 4 consistently connects it to forgiveness, then it is reasonable to assume that in the Priestly worldview it has expiatory capability when offered in the context of unintentional sin.[1]

Should we conclude, then, that in the Priestly worldview blood is a ritual detergent, perhaps one that could cleanse the sinner as well as the sancta? When used in the context of the initiation of the cult, the outcome of the *ḥaṭṭā't* is not forgiveness but holiness (e.g. Exod 29:36; Lev 8:15), so it is possible that we should understand blood as efficacious because it communicates holiness (Eberhart 2002: 257-61; Lemandelé 2002: 286), although P never

[1] For studies of the different contexts in which the *ḥaṭṭā't* appears, see Schenker 1994 and Rendtorff 2004: 209-14.

actually makes the claim that blood itself is holy (Gilders 2004: 18). Since Lev 17:11 equates blood with life, perhaps it is easiest to see the sacrificial blood as a ransom or payment for the life of the sacrificer. After all, the noun *kōper* from the root *kpr* is used to refer to a ransom or payment in exchange for human lives in P (Exod 30:12; Num 35:31-32, and see Levine 1974: 67-69; Kiuchi 1987: 101-109; Janowski 2000: 246-47), although here again P never explicitly makes the claim that the sacrifice is offered as a ransom. And the fact of the matter is that the meaning of virtually every word in Lev 17:11 is disputed (Gilders 2004: 168) and that there is virtually no evidence that blood manipulation has anything to do with an equation between it and life (182), making the verse of rather less help in determining P's understanding of the meaning of blood manipulation than might at first seem to be the case.

To some degree, one's understanding of the role of blood in expiation will depend upon one's understanding of the meaning of *kipper*. Since, for example, *kipper* is used in other texts to refer to social reconciliation (e.g., Gen 32:21 [20]), we could understand the blood manipulation in P that results in *kipper* as reconciling the breach of relationship between sinners and God (Albertz 2001: 136-39, 143). In this case, the traditional translation of the verb as "to make atonement" would make sense. If one, like Milgrom, understands the basic sense of *kipper* in the sacrificial context as referring to wiping, then one is more likely to understand blood as purifying the sancta and/or sinners (Sklar 2005: 105-36). Of course, if one understands the basic sense of the verb as "to ransom," then one will see the blood as paying or substituting for the life of the sacrificer (Levine 1974: 67-73, and see Milgrom 1991: 1081). But considering that the *ḥaṭṭā't* and its blood manipulation lead, as we have seen, to purification and holiness as well as forgiveness, then perhaps it is easiest to understand the Priestly use of *kipper* merely as indicating the completion of the sacrificial ritual (Rendtorff 2004: 176-78) that results,

depending on the context, in purification, holiness, or forgiveness. In the context of the expiation in Leviticus 4, where the *ḥaṭṭā't* is consistently followed by forgiveness, we could simply say that the accomplishment of the sacrifice removes a barrier that had prevented God from granting forgiveness, for the texts present God as responding automatically to this sacrifice with forgiveness (Gane 2005: 194-95). Forgiveness, purity, and holiness are not, in P, things that come into being without sacrifice, and to that extent we can say that the *ḥaṭṭā't* is the cause of expiation, where the use of *kipper* simply signals that the necessary ritual action has been performed that allows forgiveness to occur.

P's lack of explanation as to how sacrificial expiation functions is responsible for the variety of scholarly reconstructions of the Priestly worldview that lies behind sacrifice. Perhaps, as Milgrom reconstructs P's sacrificial worldview, the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā't* is a detergent that results in purification, making forgiveness a secondary or mediated aspect of the sacrifice. Perhaps the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā't* is a payment of or ransom for the life of the sacrificer, in which case expiation results from this payment as a kind of exchange. Perhaps the blood purifies sinners as well as the sancta, and/or conveys holiness to sinners, allowing them to remain in Israel and in proximity to God's presence. Perhaps, based on the way the verb *kipper* is used in other biblical texts, we should see the blood of sacrifice as simply restoring a broken relationship between the sinner and God in some unspecified way, making the two at one again. Perhaps we should simply conclude that the information with which P provides us just is not enough to clearly understand what the Priestly tradents believed about the role of blood in the cult (Gilders 2008). It was, obviously, within their ability to make this clear, and so we might ask why they chose not to do so. One obvious response to this question is that this is simply not the goal of P's texts that discuss sacrifice, blood, sin, and forgiveness, and that only a close reading of them in

P's narrative might give us some sense as to what P is doing in its discussions of these issues.

Before we turn to just that sort of reading, it is important to emphasize that Leviticus 4 discusses the expiation only of unintentional sins. In P, sacrifice is generally not an option for those in deliberate violation of divine command, and so the sinner of Num 15:32-36 who breaks the law by working on the Sabbath is executed. He presumably has acted "high handedly," as 15:30-31 puts it, and 15:27-31 is clear that sacrifice will not expiate such actions; high handed sinners will "bear the guilt" because sacrifice cannot expiate it, and they must be "cut off." When Exod 31:14 demands that violators of the Sabbath law be "cut off from among the people," it specifies that this refers to capital punishment, the sentence carried out in Num 15:32-36. There are numerous places where Priestly and Holiness materials stipulate that violators of particular laws are to be "cut off" (Exod 30:33, 38; Lev 7:20, 21; 17:4; 18:29; 19:8, etc.), but Exod 31:14 is unusual among them because it specifically equates this with the death penalty. The use of "cut off" by itself may simply imply expulsion from Israel, but at any rate P seems clear that there is practically no place within the people for those who act in high handed violation of the law. There are a small number of sins to which P refers that the *ḥaṭṭā't* and the guilt offering will expiate (Lev 5:1, 21-26 [6:1-7]; Num 5:5-10), assumedly because they are not high handed.

The Priestly presentation of sacrifice and expiation

To ask how P portrays sacrifice and expiation is a different question than asking how the priests who conducted the sacrifices believed they functioned; here, we are not interested in a theory of sacrifice, something P does not elucidate, or the worldview that stands behind such an unexplained theory, but in what readers of the texts learn when they read about the sacrifices, and specifically what they learn about the relationship between sacrifice, sin, and expiation.

Scholars often simply assume that a rational worldview lies behind the presentation of the sacrifices in these texts, one that will make all of P's descriptions of sacrifice and its effects cohere, and this assumption is based on another one, that there is no essential difference between text and ritual (Watts 2007: 11-13). The possibility exists that Leviticus 1-7 was never meant to function as some kind of priestly manual or handbook and that a great gulf exists between how priests believed the sacrifices worked to bring forgiveness and what the Priestly tradents meant to communicate in texts like Leviticus 1-7. The fact that we do not find a clear explanation as to how sacrifice functions in P (see Budd 1996: 28; Marx 2003: 103) suggests the tradents had other goals in mind than providing a theory of sacrifice when putting Leviticus 1-7 together.

Our search here is for the ideas communicated by the text's description of sacrifice, particularly in regard to the description of the *ḥaṭṭā't*, blood manipulation, and what these are said to accomplish, since these appear to be the key elements Leviticus 4-5 associates with the forgiveness of sin. As we shall see, P's narrative emphasizes that Israelites who sin violate the cosmic order established by God insofar as in their sin they have failed to remain in submission to God. The *ḥaṭṭā't* is a public admission of this failure that simultaneously recognizes the validity of the moral order God has established and the place of the individual and Israel within it. Before readers even reach P's description of the *ḥaṭṭā't* they are taught to see blood manipulation as signaling a distinction between Israel and God, a distinction that, in the context of Leviticus 4-5, draws readers' attention to the distinction between God as the sovereign who commands and Israel as the subject who should obey. The use of the *ḥaṭṭā't* for bodily impurities rather than sin in Leviticus 12-15 shows readers that this sacrifice is a cultic act that publically signals a break with an undesirable state—one of being impure in the cases of Leviticus 12-15—and an ordered one, the way one was in the past and the way one should be in the future. The

repetitive appearance of the sacrifice that literally means "sin" suggests to readers that a similar cultic message is broadcast by the *ḥaṭṭā't* when it is offered in the context of unintentional sin. In this case it is not only a public admission of guilt, something that does not apply in the context of impurity where culpability is not at issue, but also signals the end of the state of being a sinner and points to the way Israelites should be. And in such a case, sacrificers signal the way they want to be, obedient to God's law, and thus the sacrifice also communicates a pledge that the sinner will aim not to act against God's commandments again. The verb *kipper*, which signals the conclusion of the sin offering, thus expresses that this public confession concerning the validity of the moral order and its recent violation, a confession that implicitly includes a pledge to avoid further sin, has been fully made. Only once such acknowledgment is complete, says P, will God forgive.

P's interest in cosmic and moral order, emphasized through the use of repetition that structures the text, is clear from the beginning of its narrative in the creation story of Gen 1:1-2:4a, where humans are created in the divine image (1:26-30). A scene that begins with the universal chaos of *tōhû wābōhû* is quickly converted into a created order in which animals and humans can be fruitful and multiply. The first three days of creation narrate acts of separation, while the corresponding three days that follow narrate the creation of things to fill these spaces. This created order sets the stage for moral order, which is an absolute necessity in P. To survive the flood, Noah must do "all that God commanded him" (Gen 6:22), and the Israelites only survive God's slaughter of the firstborn in Egypt because they "did just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron" (Exod 12:28). In the story of the construction of the tabernacle, Moses and Israel consistently do what "the LORD commanded"—a phrase used twenty two times in Exodus 35-36; 39-40—as they put the sanctuary together following divine orders; only after

these repetitive acts of obedience does the divine glory settle in Israel's midst (40:34-38). P's world is ordered by holiness as well, and the Priestly texts clearly distinguish between the most holy, which is the area of the sanctuary in immediate proximity to the divine presence, the holy, the area that surrounds this, and the common, which can be either pure or impure, while the holy must remain pure (Jenson 1992).

Since the importance of order is such an obvious part of what P communicates, it comes as no surprise to readers to find that it is an important element of the texts that deal with sacrifice. Leviticus 1-7 consists of a series of divine speeches concerning sacrificial requirements and stipulations. The first of these speeches, Leviticus 1-3, repetitively focuses on the parts of different sacrifices that are to be devoted to God alone, without mentioning that the priests and even Israel receive portions of some of these offerings (e.g., cf. 3:1-16a; 7:28-36; and 17:1-13). The conclusion of the speech provides a clear summary of this focus: all fat and blood is to be consumed by God alone, and Israel may never consume these parts of the animal under any circumstance (3:16b-17). We could say that an important theme of the first speech is a distinction between the diets of Israel and God; both consume the same species of animals (God's consumption [*'kl*] is accomplished through sacrificial fire according to Lev 6:3 [10] and 9:24) but fat and blood are to be consumed by God alone (Marx 2005: 141-42). As humans created in the divine image, Israel is both like and unlike God, and Leviticus 1-3 makes this point on the level of diet. The priests in P are holy (Exod 29:21, 44), and readers discover in Leviticus 6-7 in the final divine speeches of this section that the priests may eat of some of these sacrifices (6:9-11 [16-18], 19 [26], etc.), making them appear more like God than the rest of Israel, just as they are holy according to P while the rest of Israel is not. But, like the rest of Israel, fat and blood are prohibited in the priests' diets.

Having pointed to similarities and distinctions between God and Israel in the first divine speech of Leviticus, the second, 4:1-5:13, moves to the *ḥaṭṭā't*. Unlike the discussion of the sacrifices in the first speech, the narrative provides us with the circumstance under which this sacrifice is to be offered, unintentional sin. The name of the sacrifice itself simply means "sin," and for this reason alone, "sin offering" rather than "purification offering" would appear to be the translation that most clearly accords with the tradents' thinking in their presentation of sacrifice; the fact that the first prolonged discussion of it concerns its use in the context of sin also points to this conclusion. The sin offering is to be presented when Israel does not do what God commands, and having just been exposed to a long divine speech concerning sacrifices that provides no clear purpose for offering them, unless it be to distribute fat and blood to the sole subject who may lawfully consume them, this second speech directs readers to yet another way in which God and Israel are different, one seemingly more consequential than simply diet. Sin is defined in 4:2 as a failure in regard to "any of the LORD's commandments," and thus the difference between Israel and God that the second speech repetitively emphasizes is one between a people who are to obey and a God who commands. Any subversion of this order may not be left unaddressed, and there is no forgiveness until such faults are publically acknowledged in sacrifice. The discussion of the sin offering in Leviticus 4 focuses on what is to be done with the fat and blood, the two aspects of diet that the previous divine speech used to distinguish between God and Israel. When Israel fails in submission to God, the text points readers to the cosmic difference just established between them in order to bring attention to the moral difference undermined in unintentional sin, and so this narrative of sacrifice reminds readers that they are under God's law (Watts 2003: 97-98). And insofar as this sacrifice consists of agricultural products that Israel consumes from the land God has given to them, the sin offering, like the

sacrifices of Leviticus 1-3, also appears as a meal that honors God, providing God with some of the usufruct of the land, just as vassals provide for suzerains, and thus that recognizes God as sovereign (Eberhart 2002: 358-59; Marx 2005: 78-88). Those who are too poor to offer animals for their unintentional sin may offer vegetable products (5:11-13), a sacrifice that does not involve blood manipulation at all and that yet culminates in forgiveness. The common element to all of the sacrifices that P has discussed so far, then, is not blood manipulation but burning (Eberhart 2004), the manner in which God consumes sacrificial material, and thus the way that God's subordinates may honor him by giving back part of what their sovereign has given them.

So while the Priestly tradents refuse to provide us with a theory of sacrifice, their narrative does suggest that readers reflect on the difference between themselves as subjects and God as sovereign, and on the moral order to which Israel is also subject. There is no explanation here as to how or why the sin offering leads to forgiveness, but the narrative emphasizes the burning of fat and blood manipulation, distributing these where they rightly belong. In P's presentation, expiation is the result of cultic acknowledgment of a moral order violated when Israelites unintentionally implied through their actions that they did not recognize God's right to order their moral universe. In this picture with which the text provides readers, expiation amounts to public acknowledgment or confession of the unintentional sinner's true belief in a cosmic order in which God is sovereign and in a moral order in which Israel constantly submits to God's commands. But just as the *ḥaṭṭā't* deals with sin in Leviticus 4-5, in Leviticus 12-15 it functions in cases of individuals who need purification rather than forgiveness. Despite the fact that reproduction is a divine command in P (Gen 1:28), the parturient must offer a burnt offering and a sin offering after the time of her blood impurity has been completed (Leviticus 12). When the *mĕṣōrā'* (someone with a skin disease, although the word is sometimes translated as "leprous

person") is cured, blood from the guilt offering must be applied to parts of his or her body and a sin offering and burnt offering must then be sacrificed following shaving and bathing (14:1-32). Those with uncontrollable genital discharges must offer a burnt offering and a sin offering (15:13-15, 28-30) after waiting seven days following the end of the discharge; otherwise, says God, Israel will "die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle" (15:31).

Sacrifice does not effect healing in any of these cases, for it is not offered until after the *mĕṣōrā'* is healed, the genital discharges have ceased, and the time of the parturient's blood impurity is over. It is perhaps easy to see the sacrifices offered in these cases, including the *ḥaṭṭā't*, as offered in order to allow a reincorporation of these figures into society (Marx 1996: 9-12), since their previous conditions excluded them from contact with other Israelites (Lev 13:45-46; 15:4-12, 16-18, 19-27), although reincorporation into the social body is not something the narrative mentions. Readers have seen in P's narrative that sacrifice in general honors God as sovereign and distinguishes between God and Israel, and they have encountered the sin offering presented as an implicit confession of a failure to acknowledge the moral order to which Israel is subject. But unlike the case of unintentional sin, Israelites cannot be blamed for the impurities Leviticus 12-15 discusses, not even reproduction, since it is divinely mandated in P. Why, then, does P's narrative draw attention to a sacrifice literally called "sin" in order to deal with these issues? Why, for that matter, mention the burnt offering here, or any sacrifice at all? The narrative is certainly clear that sacrifice is essential in each of these cases, as Lev 15:31 tells us: "you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, so that they do not die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle." The sacrifices are needed to "separate" Israel from their uncleanness, and a failure to do so will lead to destruction.

The fact that 15:31 refers to ritual impurity as defiling the tabernacle may well provide an

important piece of evidence for Milgrom's miasma theory, but it is important to note here that the defiling of the sanctuary is not something P has been emphasizing in these texts. However, P certainly does emphasize that sacrifice provides a separation between the state of impurity and that of purity. Since they are not involved in healing, then the sacrifices are involved in this separation, which is to say that they broadcast a message that the individuals in question are not longer unclean but clean. And the fact that these texts have repetitively referred to the sin offering as involved in this ritual claim (12:6; 14:19, 31; 15:15, 30) allows readers to interpret the earlier discussion of it in Leviticus 4-5 in light of its appearance here. In those earlier chapters, as we saw, the narrative signals that the sin offering is portrayed as a confession of sinners' failure to rightly acknowledge the cosmic order in which God is sovereign and Israel subject, and of the moral order in which God commands and Israel obeys. In Leviticus 12-15 readers encounter the sin offering as involved in separating Israelites from past states of uncleanness. After the bodily impurity is over, the sin and burnt offerings (and, in the case of the *mĕṣōrā'*, the guilt offering as well) make a non-optional cultic statement that the individual is no longer unclean. One might say that sacrifice restores order (Jenson 1992: 163-65), but really sacrifice signals that order has been restored. More specifically, it makes the cultic statement that individuals are no longer in the undesirable (if unavoidable) state of being unclean and are instead in the desirable state of being clean; it is an announcement that things are now back to the way they should be. Readers, then, can broaden their understanding of sacrificial expiation based on these chapters. If forgiveness is granted after sinners make a public confession in sacrifice of their allegiance to the cosmic and moral orders God has established, the sin offering also signals a separation between individuals' past state as sinners and current state as obedient subjects to their divine sovereign who follow God's law. And insofar as they acknowledge in sacrifice that

this is the way things should be, they make an implicit pledge to avoid further sin, since the sacrifice claims that this is the way they want things to be, the way they want themselves to be.

What is at stake here, according to Lev 15:31, is Israel's very survival; death is the result of failing to acknowledge the differences between God and Israel. The very next speech of P's narrative, the one describing the Day of Atonement, opens with a reference to the story of Leviticus 10, in which two priests perform a cultic act in the tabernacle in a manner in which God "had not commanded them" (10:1); as a result, "fire came out from before the presence of the LORD and consumed them" (10:2). It is not Israel's fault that members of its community contract skin diseases, but the community is held liable to destruction if the sacrifices and their attendant blood manipulation are not carried out once the diseased person has been healed. And if unintentional sinners acknowledge through sacrifice that things are back to the way they were—they once again are loyal subjects of their divine sovereign whom they did not mean to disobey—this will not work for the high handed sinners who intentionally abandon the law and thus reject God's sovereignty. High handed sinners would not even want to acknowledge in sacrifice their subordination to God's moral order because they do not acknowledge its legitimacy. For them, living in accordance with God's law is not the way things should be, and so they have no intention of being obedient subjects in the future, and thus they could not sacrifice a sin offering without engaging in a ritual lie. On the other hand, the unintentional sinner did not mean to erase the boundary between Israel and God, and even if unintentional sin is as inevitable as disease, the sacrifice of the sin offering acknowledges the order in which the sacrificer believes and conveys an implicit promise not to violate it again.

As a result, there is no place in Israel for high handed sinners; they are to be killed or "cut off from among the people," just as the one with a skin disease is banned from life within the

community (Lev 13:45-46). What is not part of the divinely established order does not belong within Israel. Israel can demonstrate that it does not countenance overt flaunting of divine law not only through the death penalty and banishment, but also through the sacrificial rituals of the Day of Atonement, which include a goat designated as a sin offering that is not slaughtered as this sacrifice normally is but that bears the sins of Israel confessed over it outside of the community into the wilderness. Chaos such as intentional sin belongs outside of Israel in distinction with the divinely mandated order that is to exist inside (Davies 1977; Gorman 1990: 76-81, 101-102; cf. Gilders 2004: 43-49), and in Israel's sacrifices the people can acknowledge the disorder they have created and portray it as what does not belong.

Leviticus 1-3 introduces readers to sacrifices in a way that focuses on it as something done to give blood and fat to God, and in so doing draws a distinction between God and Israel. Even before we reach the sin offering of the second divine speech of Leviticus, sacrifice places Israel in obedience to God: God is speaking these instructions as commandments to Moses. P's tradents could have provided a clear understanding of sacrifice that explains how they believed it to function in regard to sin and in other contexts had they wished, but did not. What readers find instead is a presentation of inadvertent sin, something as inevitable to the human condition as disease, that can be expiated when Israel acknowledges its existence in sacrifice. Because this acknowledgment recognizes an action as in violation of God's law, it publically demonstrates sacrificers' belief in the validity of that law and their support of it. In this narrative, sacrifice expiates because it acknowledges Israel's place in the divine order as one of vassals to their divine sovereign. With their sacrifices they acknowledge God's place as king and give back in sacrifice a small part of what God has given to them, thereby honoring God as their sovereign who has the right to command.

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