THE BLOOD MANIPULATION OF THE SIN OFFERING AND THE LOGIC OF DEFILEMENT

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In a meeting this year of "Old Testament geeks," as Tim Meadowcroft called us, we had an animated discussion about the significance of sacrifice driven by some of the questions I raised. Towards the end, Tim turned to me and said, "I'm not sure that we have answered your questions." While the questions do not always get answered and new ones keep coming, I am grateful for the opportunity for such conversations and offer up my reflections on the sin offering in honour of Tim.

The *hatta't*, usually translated "sin offering," is a key expiatory sacrifice marked out by its unique blood manipulation that forms a central part of the ritual on the Day of Atonement.[1] Understanding the significance of the prescribed actions in the *hatta't*, however, is fraught with difficulty. First, as with most descriptions of rituals, there is very little explanation as to the meaning, so that there is a certain amount of gap-filling involved in the process of interpretation. Since the mid-twentieth century increasing methodological doubts have been raised in anthropology regarding the interpretation of rituals, though biblical scholarship has only recently started to take on board these considerations. Essentially, given the multiplicity of interpretations around rituals in general and the paucity of explanation in the biblical material in particular, the former scholarly confidence of finding a univalent meaning in ritual action was called into question. The focus shifted from a symbolic system (what does it all mean?), interpreted either from a participant or an outsider's perspective, to a functional view (what does it do/achieve?).[2]

Secondly, the *hatta't* is brought to address two distinct "problem areas," namely, unintentional sins (e.g., Lev 4:2, 13–14, 22, 27) and some ritual impurities (e.g., Lev 12:6; 14:19; 15:30). In the first case, the offerer is forgiven (e.g., Lev 4:20), in the second he or she is pronounced clean (e.g. Lev 12:8). Thus, both the issue and the resolution are markedly different in the two cases, yet the sacrifice offered is the same. The question that springs to mind is what the exact connection is between these two seemingly disparate concerns that are united under the same remedy, as it were.

This article then will address two issues. Taking into consideration the methodological strictures around interpreting rituals symbolically, I nevertheless wish to reflect on the actions performed in the blood manipulation of the *hatta't* sacrifice, specifically the daubing of blood on the horns of the altar

[1] Other sacrifices with expiatory functions (Lev 1:4; 5:16b) are the burnt offering (*'ola*) and the guilt offering (*'asham*). The former, however, does not specify any particular sins and the latter has a narrower application for very specific sins (mainly sacrilege). It is also not performed on the Day of Atonement. I also note that throughout this article I use transliterated Hebrew in line with SBL's General-Purpose Transliteration rules.

[2] For some of the recent methodological issues, see W.K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 1–11 and Y. Feder, *Blood Expiation in Hittite and Biblical Ritual: Origins, Context and Meaning* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 147–65.

and sprinkling. Secondly, I shall consider the connection between ritual impurity and sin in order to understand why the same sacrifice deals with both issues.

TWO INFLUENTIAL INTERPRETATIONS

The Substitutionary Model

While a detailed history of interpretation regarding the *hatta't* sacrifice is outside the scope of this article, I wish to take two representative examples to set up some of the background and issues at stake. Traditional Christian interpretation has generally followed a substitutionary perspective on sacrifices focussing on the resolution to sin and primarily concerned with the effect of the ritual on the worshipper. In this view, the sins of the person were placed on the sacrificial animal via hand-leaning and its death was accepted in place of the person's (based on the view that sin leads to death cf. Rom 6:23).[3] The actual details of the blood manipulation were left unexplained.

Despite its prevalence, this view suffers from a number of shortcomings. First, it does not address ritual impurities (which also require the *hatta't* sacrifice), or tacitly assumes that they fall under the category of sin, which is not the case. Secondly, the idea that there is a transfer of sin via the hand-leaning in the *hatta't* is questionable. It is based on the ceremony at the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:21) when the high priest places both hands on the head of the scapegoat and confesses Israel's sins over it. However, as Milgrom points out, the hand leaning in the regular *hatta't* involves only one hand not two, and there is no mention of confession or the transference of sins. Moreover, it is also performed in sacrifices that have no expiatory function (*shelamim*—Lev 3:2).[4] Thirdly, the transfer of sins is problematic because these would defile the animal, whereas we are told that its flesh is holy (Lev 6:22).[5] Further, ritual impurities and inadvertent sins (for which *hatta't* is offered) do not require the death penalty.[6] Thus the punishment (the substitutionary death of the sacrificial animal) would be disproportionate to the crime.

Although many modern commentators maintain that the *hatta't* purifies persons, how this is achieved if not via substitution is often sidestepped. One theory that does address the question is Gane's view that the blood of the *hatta't* carries the sin or impurity of people to the altar, which is removed on the Day of Atonement.[7] His meticulous analysis and insightful reflections have much to commend them, though the idea that *hatta't* blood carries impurities and sins into the sacred sphere seems counter-

[3] E.g., C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol.1 of *Commentary on the Old Testament* (trans. James Martin; 1866; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 305–7.
[4] J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, AB3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 150–53.
[5] A. Dillmann, *Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1897), 459.
[6] J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, AB3A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1475. Also e.g., W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament I*, trans. J.A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 165, n.2.
[7] R.E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 176–81.

intuitive. It runs into the same difficulty as the substitutionary model in that the blood would be contaminated as it reaches the altar.

Milgrom's Theory of Defilement

Perhaps the most influential alternative theory in the twentieth century has been Milgrom's construal, which proposed that the *hatta't* purifies sancta, not people.[8] Sancta acts as a magnet to impurity attaching itself aerially to the temple to be cleansed regularly, as well as thoroughly once a year on the Day of Atonement. Impurity in the holy precincts is the primary problem because its undue accumulation may lead to the deity leaving his earthly abode. Thus, according to Milgrom, once sancta is cleansed from the effects of the worshipper's offence, the person can be restored in relationship to God, declared clean or forgiven. The idea, he contends, is supported first by the observation that the *hatta't* blood is never applied to people, only to sancta, thus what is being affected must be sancta. Secondly, at the ordination of priests when the altar and the tabernacle are also consecrated, the daubing of the *hatta't* blood on the altar is followed by the statement that Moses cleansed the altar (*vayyehatte' 'eth-hammizbeah*—Lev 8:15). Milgrom further notes the parallels with ANE practices where impurity is feared as demonic. While Israel did away with demonic connotations, Milgrom argues that impurity's dynamic power to defile sancta has been retained.

There is much to admire in Milgrom's simple scheme and in his meticulous handling of the material. By fusing the source of the problem (pollution of sancta), he is able to unite the solution and explain how the same blood manipulation resolves such seemingly diverse issues as ritual impurity and inadvertent sin. For lack of space, it is impossible to give a detailed critique of Milgrom's view here, nevertheless, I wish to make two basic points. First, his argument fundamentally depends on the fact that both ritual impurity and sin defile from a distance (which he bases on Lev 15:31; Num 19:13; Lev 20:3).[9] Admittedly, grave sins can defile without the person's physical proximity as seen in Lev 20:3 (Molech worship pollutes the sanctuary no matter where it is performed). However, where the effects of ritual impurity are described explicitly, they always spread by contact (e.g. Lev 15:4–11; Num 19:16) or close proximity (e.g. Lev 14:46–47; Num 19:14–15). The first two references on which Milgrom bases the idea of ritual defilement by distance involves gap-filling in a way that runs counter to how ritual impurity normally behaves. The actual verses do not describe the effect of the original ritual impurity; rather, they point to the result caused by delaying purification or a refusal to do so.

There are, however, some alternative ways of understanding the issue, which are congruent with ritual impurity's general behaviour of spreading by contact or proximity. One is the rabbinical view that

[8] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 253–261. Milgrom's theory has been followed by others. E.g., J.E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC4 (Dallas: Word, 1992), 57, 70. G.J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 93–96. Throughout this article I use "sancta" as the technical category for sacred objects including the sanctuary.
[9] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 257, 310–11, 946.

the person goes to the sanctuary or eats sacred food in an impure state (*t. Shevu.* 1:8; *Sifra*, Hovah 13:10).[10] Similarly, Maccoby does not think that delaying purification is sin unless the person comes to the temple in such a state. He understands neglecting purification to include an ellipsis: "if the person enters the sanctuary."[11] Another approach, I would argue, is that it is not ritual impurity *per se* that causes defilement either by contact or from afar, but the defiant, rebellious attitude of the person who refuses to undergo or grossly neglects purification despite the express command of YHWH.[12] Both of these interpretations are in line with how impurities behave in general.

Secondly, Milgrom's theory relies on etymology to support his argument that *kipper* (usually translated as "to atone/expiate") primarily means "to purge" (from the Akkadian cognate *kupurru*, "to smear, wipe" or "wipe off").[13] However, as Feder points out, this is a fallacy because the word in Hebrew is never used in this concrete sense, so "there is no reason to assume that any of these potential 'original meanings' were known to Hebrew speakers."[14]

The above interpretations illustrate the kind of gap-filling involved in making sense of ritual and highlight why scepticism over ritual meaning has grown in recent decades. Despite the methodological strictures there is good reason to question these extreme positions. As Feder points out, ritual arises out of social and personal concerns (famine, illness, etc.) and it functions to alter the state of affairs that are at issue. As such, it is seen as a means of communicating with inanimate forces and in order to be recognised as viable, it must do so in an unambiguous way.[15] In Feder's construal, the reason why the original connection is obscured is because rituals undergo a development in which the original action addressing a specific need is removed from its socio-historic context when codified and needs re-interpretation within a new framework.[16] This development is rather like the way writing evolves in some cultures from pictograms that have an iconic relationship to the object they stand for (e.g. the pictogram for a house resembles a physical building). As writing becomes conventionalised the resemblance gradually disappears until the signs come to represent phonetic values and lose the connection to the original object altogether.[17]

It should be noted, however, that even though the linguistic analogy is illuminating, it does not follow that rituals are equally arbitrary once codified. To be sure, the connection is more conventionalised, but that does not make it meaningless and it may still retain aspects from its former social context such that it is possible to discern "iconic" echoes. If so, then a diachronic view may provide

[10] Cited *ibid.*, 257.
[11] H. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 165–181 (esp. 170).
[12] So too Gane, *Cult and Character*, 144; Kiuchi similarly posits that sancta pollution occurs because of a failure to undergo purification in Lev 15:31 and Num 19:13, 20 not because the unclean person enters the sanctuary complex. It is not clear though whether he thinks that it is explicitly the act of defiance that is at issue. N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function,* JSOT SS 56 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 61–62.
[13] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1080.
[14] Feder, *Blood Expiation*, 169.
[15] *Ibid.*, 151–52.
[16] *Ibid.*, 164.
[17] *Ibid.*, 163.

an extra test against which a proposal on a particular ritual's function-meaning may be evaluated. In the following, then, I shall discuss the significance of the blood manipulation in the *hatta't* sacrifice and put forward my own proposal regarding the blood daubed on the horns of the altar, which I shall test against Feder's diachronic reconstruction, as an added check on my views.

THE BLOOD MANIPULATION OF THE HATTA'TH

Daubing Blood on the Horns of the Altar

Turning to the blood manipulation in the *hatta'th*, the key and most constant act present in all such sacrifices and unique to it, is the daubing of blood on the horns of the altar.[18] Its function is nowhere explained in connection to the *hatta'th*. Nevertheless, it is reminiscent of the practice of taking hold of the horns of the altar in an appeal to God's mercy and protection (Exod 21:14; 1 Kgs 1:50; 2:28). This is not a substitution of the animal's life in exchange for the worshipper. Rather, the hand-leaning ceremony expresses ownership and a symbolic identification between owner and animal.[19] As the blood of the animal is daubed on the horns of the altar, it is as if the worshipper had grasped them in a plea for mercy. While initially this may sound like an unexpected connection, a closer examination highlights some noteworthy parallels.

The concept of criminals seeking asylum at an altar or sanctuary against prosecutors is well known in the ancient Mediterranean world (e.g. *Thucydides* 4:98).[20] In the legislation of Exod 21:13–14 the only type of crime mentioned is bloodshed, and protection is only offered if the killing is not premeditated.[21] Some biblical narratives further suggest that asylum was sought in other cases as well, though again, intentionality mattered. Thus, Adonijah seeks sanctuary after plotting to make himself king (1 Kings 1:50 cf. 1:5–8, 24–27). Given that there was a certain amount of uncertainty around the succession of David, he is at first given the benefit of the doubt but eventually executed when he continues to manoeuvre for power (2:13–25). A further example of asylum in cases other than bloodshed

[18] Likewise, the blood poured out at the base of the altar is unique to the *hatta't*, though less significant (*shpk*—Exod 29:12; Lev 4:7, 12, 18, 25, 30, 34 or synonymous *ytsq*—Lev 8:15; 9:9; cf. 'to dash' *zrq* elsewhere—Lev 1:3; 3:2; 7:2). In the Day of Atonement ceremony, it is not even mentioned perhaps because no blood is left after all the sprinkling. This may reinforce its secondary importance.

[19] A number of scholars understand hand-leaning with one hand as ownership. E.g., D.P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature", *JAOS* 106 (1986): 433–46; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 151–53; Gane, *Cult and Character*, 53–56.

[20] E.g., W.H.C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, AYB (New York: Yale University Press, 2006), 208. S.R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 216.

[21] Barmash, in her detailed study of homicide, argues that altar/sanctuary asylum was not for homicide but for political intrigue based on 1 Kings 1:51; 2:28, and that Exod 21:13–14 cannot be used as an argument for altar asylum for killers. Among other things, she finds it doubtful that a killer would be allowed to touch the altar when defiled by the blood spilled. P. Barmash, *Homicide in the Biblical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 71–93. However, her arguments fail to convince, not least because accidental manslaughter does not create the same bloodguilt as premeditated murder. It is preferable to read the narratives recounting altar asylum as an extension on the practice described in Exod 21:13–14.

is reflected in Solomon's verdict of Shimei who, having cursed David when he fled Absalom, is now offered protection as long as he stays in Jerusalem (1 Kings 2:36–38). Although it is not the perpetrator who seeks asylum in the sacred city, but the judge who offers this alternative, it may nevertheless demonstrate the idea that asylum could cover a wider range of crimes than bloodshed.[22] Again, intentionality plays a part in the judgement of his case. Although cursing God's anointed is a weighty matter, Shimei's crime is extenuated by his later confession when David is reinstated in power (2 Sam 19:23). Solomon extends clemency with some conditions (asylum only in Jerusalem), but when these measures are flouted, protection is withdrawn. The same principle of intentionality (or lack thereof) is also evident in the law of asylum cities (Numbers 35).[23] This is paralleled by the unintentional sins for which the *hatta'th* is offered. To the question of how ritual impurities fit into the above scheme I shall return later. Suffice it to say here that they likewise share a lack of intentionality and mostly arise out of the human condition. Thus, the person with skin disease cannot help the outbreak, nor the one with a discharge. Although childbirth can be traced back to an intentional sexual act that triggered a chain of events leading to it, conception itself cannot be predicted or controlled. We see then that there is a reasonably good parallel between altar/sanctuary or city asylum, which encompass a wider set of sins than accidental homicide and the unintentional sins and ritual impurities covered by the *hatta'th*.

It is also noteworthy that Feder in his exploration of the social contexts in which the root *kpr* was used, traces the lexical forms back to homicide and blood feuds in which the verb *kipper* was originally about appeasing the blood avenger or the innocent blood of the victim, which cried out for justice.[24] If he is correct, then this diachronic perspective provides further connection and support for my theory.

The one exception that does not fit comfortably with my analysis is Lev 8:15 where Moses daubs blood on the horns of the altar and thereby purifies it (*vayyehatte' 'eth-hammizbeah*). The preposition *'eth-* makes the altar the direct object of cleansing. As mentioned before, this forms the basis for Milgrom's theory that the *hatta'th* purifies sancta, not people. It is worth noting, however, that this is a unique occasion, which is not meant to be repeated regularly and therefore not the best basis on which to build a case for the interpretation of the regular *hatta'th*.

Moreover, Feder argues in his diachronic examination of Leviticus 8 and Exodus 29 (consecration of the altar and the priests) that the original function of the *hatta'th* was atonement for

[22] Milgrom observes that asylum in a city with a temple is common in the ANE extending the idea of protection from the sanctuary to the whole city unlike the Israelite cities of refuge which had no known connection to sanctuaries. J. Milgrom, *Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989), 505–506.

[23] Earlier scholarship supposed that cities of refuge were developed in a later period, when altars became off-limits to the laity due to the priestly theology of holiness (e.g., Milgrom, *Numbers*, 505). Barmash, however, argues that the two developments are parallel rather than consecutive (e.g. Deut 19:1–13 does not introduce cities of refuge as an innovation and Neh 6:10–11 suggests that sanctuary asylum was still valid in the postexilic period). Barmash, *Homicide*, 73–74, 78–79. The supposed chronology of these developments does not affect my argument, though if Barmash is right and altar/sanctuary asylum is an ongoing possibility even in the post-exilic period, then the blood daubed on the altar does have a stronger iconic connection that would be recognisable and memorable.

[24] Feder, *Blood Expiation*, 167–96.

people. The idea of purging the altar was a later development, together with the shift of expressions moving from *kipper ʿal-* "making expiation on behalf of" to *kipper ʾeth* + direct object "to purge."[25] This is a good example of the earlier point about the evolving of ritual function moving away from an iconic relationship between action and function to an increasingly conventionalised one needing explanation. Thus, the fact that an explicit statement is given regarding the function of daubing the blood on the horns of the altar suggests that the original iconic (and therefore self-evident) link between action and function has become obscured. In other words, the *hattaʾth* sacrifice in Lev 8:15 may be the exception (in its function as cleansing or consecrating the altar) that proves the rule, i.e. that daubing the blood on the horns of the altar primarily functions in affecting people, not cleansing sancta.

Sprinkling the Blood

I now turn briefly to the action of sprinkling (*hizzah*) in the *hattaʾth* sacrifice, which is uncontroversial and fairly straightforward. While it is not unique to the *hattaʾth*, it is never practised in the other major sacrifices (burnt, peace or guilt offerings). In the *hattaʾth*, it is only performed when the whole community is implicated in the sin. Thus, it is done in the case of the high priest whose unintentional sin brings guilt on the people (Lev 4:3, 7) and when Israel, as a whole, sins (Lev 4:13, 17). Corresponding to the above, sprinkling occurs in the Day of Atonement ceremony in connection with the high priest (Lev 16:11) and the people as a whole (v.15), highlighting again the communal aspect. Leviticus 4 does not explain the reason for the sprinkling and the atonement formula still points to atonement for the people involved (*kipper beʿadh* or *ʿal-* "to atone for/on behalf of"). Nevertheless, this additional action underlines the seriousness of communal sin. In the Day of Atonement ceremony, however, sprinkling becomes a prominent element alongside daubing blood on the horns of the altar. Corresponding to it, the atonement formula for people (Lev 16:11, 17) is complemented by a second formula for sancta (*kipper ʾeth-* + direct object – Lev 16:16, 18–20). The former appears in every *hattaʾth* just like the daubing of blood on the horns of the altar.[26] Therefore I propose that the twofold action in the *hattaʾt* relate to the two objects the *hattaʾth* affects: the blood on the horns is linked to atonement for people and sprinkling to the same for sancta. In other texts where blood, water, or water and ashes are used in sprinkling, the action is interpreted as cleansing the person or object (Lev 14:7, 51–52; Num 8:7; 19:12, 19) and there is no reason to doubt the same function in the Day of Atonement ceremony of sprinkling the *hattaʾth* blood.[27]

From a diachronic perspective, Feder considers sprinkling a secondary development.[28] Further, in his exploration of the verb *kipper*, he observes that the initial nuance of the word in the context of

[25] *Ibid*., 45–53.
[26] Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:6, 10, 13; 8:34; 9:7; 12:8; 14:19, 31; 15:15, 30; 16:11, 17.
[27] When oil is used for sprinkling (occasionally mixed with blood) it functions as consecration (Exod 29:21; Lev 8:11, 30).
[28] Feder, *Blood Expiation*, 38-43.

homicide is to appease someone's/God's anger, which gradually changes to a more mechanistic view of dealing with the bloodguilt that leaves a stain or creates a debt.[29] "In other words, a dynamic that was once understood as the expression of the wills of personalized supernatural actors was ultimately treated as an embedded law of nature."[30] This coheres well with my own observations regarding the two-fold action in the *hatta'th*. While the daubing of blood on the horns of the altar reflects a relational element between persons (humans appealing to God's mercy), the sprinkling action corresponds better with the idea that actions leave a physical mark on the environment in the form of defilement, which needs to be dealt with.

The question that remains is how these two different aspects of the *hatta'th* and the two main actions performed in the ritual relate to the two types of issues for which *hatta'th* is brought. At first glance, appealing to God's mercy and protection by metaphorically grabbing the horns of the altar fits better with the question of sin, while cleansing the altar seems more appropriate in the context of ritual impurities.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN RITUAL IMPURITY AND SIN

In the following, I shall explore the connection between ritual impurity and sin in order to understand why the *hatta'th* is offered for both ritual impurity and some sins and how the two-fold action of blood on the horns of the altar and sprinkling relate to them. To start with, it is worth reiterating the basic characteristics of ritual impurity and sin.[31] The four major groups of ritual impurity are connected to childbirth, leprosy, (genital) discharges and corpse contamination (Leviticus 12–15; Numbers 19).[32] Ritual impurity defiles the person and is contagious. Certain forms may be contracted by touch (e.g. some genital discharges—Lev 15:4–12, 19–28), the more virulent ones pollute even by close proximity (corpse contamination—Num 19:14). It has long been noted in scholarship that these four categories that generate ritual impurity relate to sex (childbirth, genital discharge) and death (leprosy, corpse contamination).[33] While not sinful, they are singled out as problematic in God's presence (symbolised by the idea of impurity) indicative of the need for the worshipper to become more god-like in order to

[29] Ibid., 173–186.
[30] *Ibid*., 183.
[31] For a helpful discussion of terms and of the nature of ritual impurity in the OT see J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21–42.
[32] It should be noted that "leprosy" in the Bible is a reference to a variety of skin/scale diseases such as eczema or the like. I simply use the conventional term for convenience.
[33] Leprosy has the least obvious connection to death, but as Milgrom points out, scaly skin is seen as a disintegration of the body (cf. Num 12:12). Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1002. For the view that ritual impurities link in with sex and death, see T. Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel", in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraun, 1983), 391–414 (401). David P. Wright, "Unclean and Clean (OT)", *ABD* 6:729–41 (739). Milgrom subsumes the sexual aspect under the idea of death suggesting that genital discharge (blood, semen) are the loss of potential life. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 766–68, 1000–1004. For an evaluation of Milgrom and arguments for the dual rationale see also J. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 56–58.

approach the divine.[34] Sex and death are two major attributes that at present mark out humanity in contradistinction to God who neither dies nor procreates.

The dual focus on sex and death in ritual impurity is mirrored in the moral realm in the sin of sexual immorality and murder and in the religious realm in the worship of other gods (spiritual adultery) and child sacrifice (again, murder).[35] These grave sins likewise defile, though they are not contagious by touch or proximity, but have an effect even if the person does not come to the sanctuary. This may indicate that sin is always unacceptable not only when one approaches God's presence, but at all times and in all places.

There is also a certain significance discernible in the nature of the sin and the *locus* of its effects. Thus, sexual immorality (incest, bestiality, adultery, etc.) defiles the person (Lev 18:20, 23, 24), but also the land (v.25), bloodshed likewise defiles the land (Num 35:30–34) and the worship of other gods defiles the sanctuary (Lev 20:3) and God's name. In Israel's legislation, both sexual immorality and murder are civil offences against other people, even if ultimately they are sins against YHWH. In the first instance then, defilement affects the land where the community lives, though it will ultimately affect the sanctuary in the sense that it stands in polluted land. The worship of other gods most directly offends YHWH, hence it is his earthly dwelling place that is defiled. Further, it is a taint on his reputation since such blatant unfaithfulness reflects badly on him. Most significantly, the taint that these grave sins leave cannot be removed by sacrifice (Num 15:30–31) but only by the death of the sinner, so it is imperative that Israel avoids these.

Wright, in reflecting on the connection between ritual and moral impurity, saw the former as a first line of defence, a hedge around the more serious issues, which provides a test of one's attitude. Those who breach this outer perimeter of faithfulness will not stop there but will break the moral-religious law too.[36] Thus to ignore purity rules is in one sense a mark of arrogance dismissing the distinction between God and humanity that separates finite human beings in their current condition from the divine. In other words, it negates the necessity for preparation in meeting God and suggests an implicit equality with him. Corresponding to the direct affront to God himself the object of defilement is again his sanctuary (Lev 15:31; Num 19:13, 20).

Put differently, purification from ritual impurities is a constant reminder to abstain from grave sins and an index of faithfulness in the weightier moral-religious matters. Thus, there is an intrinsic connection between ritual impurities and sins in that the former provide a "preview" of the pathology

[34] Sexual union in marriage is a gift of God and procreation a mandate (Gen 1:28; 2:24) and only inappropriate post-Eden in the context of meeting the divine (cf. the need to cover genitals in God's presence—Gen 3:7, 21; Exod 20:26; 28:42–43, to abstain from sexual activity to meet God at Sinai—Exod 19:16). Arguably, death may be seen as more negative (Gen 3:19) though recognised as part of humanity's present condition and in that sense a natural and unavoidable occurrence. For an insightful and detailed reflection on the function of *imitatio Dei* in ritual and sacrifice see esp. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice and the Temple*, 58–66.

[35] Molech worship is included in a list on sexual immoralities in Lev 18:21 and Israel's unfaithfulness with other gods is routinely described as spiritual adultery throughout the OT. E.g., Deut 31:16; Judg 8:27; Isa 57:3; Jer 2:20; 3:2, 6–10; 13:27 Ezek 16:15–22; 23:27; Hos 1:2, 4:12-13; Ps 106:39; 1 Chr 5:25, etc.

[36] D.P. Wright, "The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity", in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, ed. G.A. Anderson and S.M. Olyan, JSOT SS 125 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 150–81 (esp. 170–80).

of sin, which in its excessive forms can defile in a deadlier way than ritual impurities. On another level, as we have seen, both ritual impurities and inadvertent sins share a lack of intentionality and therefore present a low-grade risk, so grouping them together under the *hatta'th* ritual makes sense.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, given the multiplicity of connections between ritual impurity and sin on several levels, it becomes clearer how the actions performed in the *hatta'th* sacrifice function, specifically, daubing blood on the horns of the altar and sprinkling. I proposed that the former is a symbolic expression of appealing to God's mercy echoing the practice of altar asylum. Performed both for ritual impurities and for unintentional sins, it drives home the point that finite human beings, living in a constant cycle of birth, procreation and death and entangled in sin, cannot approach a holy God unless he graciously accepts them. Just as Moses had to be shielded from God's glory (Exod 33:21–22) in his presence, so on a lesser scale, God's protection is needed for people to encounter him in their human condition (expressed in ritual impurity) and as sinners. This may also explain why *hatta'th* is offered at all major festivals for the community,[37] even when there is no specific sin or impurity in view, and further supports the idea that the blood on the horns of the altar expresses a humble attitude appealing to God's mercy for acceptance through ritual.

Sprinkling, which may have developed as a secondary action and is mainly performed in the Day of Atonement ceremony, cleanses the sanctuary indicating the effects of the human condition (again, both ritual impurity and sin) on God's abode. I further argued, that the above two actions correspond to the two-fold atonement formula (one for people and one for sancta).

[37] Num 28:15, 22, 30; 29:16; Lev 23:19.