CHAPTER THREE: SOME ASPECTS OF THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO PURITY AND IMPURITY.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to equip readers to appreciate purity language in terms of the culture of the ancient writers so that they can appreciate the underlying importance of the language for correct understanding of ancient documents and so offer readers a refined series of models for their own further readings and interpretations of the Bible. In order to achieve our aim, this chapter will use the studies of Mary Douglas, Jacob Neusner and Jerome Neyrey supplemented by Bruce Manila, Bridget Sackey, and Kenneth Hansen.

Mary Douglas, a British cultural anthropologist offered an alternate way of investigating the general language of “clean” and “unclean” and its specific forms in Jewish and Christian literature. Her writings, especially *Purity and Danger: An analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (1966), have greatly influenced biblical scholars, and are of such seminal importance for analyzing this topic. Because her new approach offers a productive line of investigation of the language of purity, we will familiarize readers with its basic concepts and models. This and her subsequent work, *Natural Symbols*, (1973), formulated anthropological concepts which would have important implications for students of the Bible. In these two works, Douglas spoke as a cultural anthropologist on how societies classified and arranged their worlds. The process of ordering a sociocultural system was called “purity,” in contrast to “pollution,” which stands for the violation of the classification systems, its lines and boundaries. The term became a jargon word for the general principle that all peoples tend to structure their worlds according to some system of order and classification. The study of “purity” then is the study of symbolic systems (Douglas, 1966: 34). This concept was employed with considerable success first by Jacob Neusner249 an American academic scholar of Judaism in *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* 250(1973) and in a series of articles (1975).251

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adapting Douglas’ seminal work on purity, but ignoring the model of the body which was central to her presentation of purity in his book, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (1973), supplies a reader with a careful historical classification of material pertaining to purity. Neusner’s article (1973), which is an important orientation for readers on this topic, reminds us that “purity” has two meanings: (a) the general sense of an orderly cosmos and an elaborate system of classification, and (b) the specific Jewish system of labeling in ancient times. It orients a reader to begin asking sociological questions about the broader meaning of “purity” in terms of cultural systems. “Purity” then is used in two senses in this research:

1. The general, abstract system of ordering and classifying;
2. The specific purity rules whereby persons, objects, places etc. are labeled pure or polluted in a given social “group.”

Jerome H. Neyrey, a Jesuit priest, is a retired Professor of New Testament at the University of Notre Dame. Concerning the issue of holy people dealing with the unclean, Douglas’ material was applied by Jerome Neyrey to the perception of Jesus in Mark’s gospel (1986a). Jesus is proclaimed by some as holy and sinless, yet others perceive him as constantly “out of place” because: (a) he has commerce with unclean people (lepers, menstruants, sinners, etc.); (b) he does not observe sacred times such as the Sabbath or sacred places such as the Temple; or (c) he disregards food rules and washing customs. Douglas’ abstract ideas about “pollution” as matter "out of place," can be fleshed out in terms of the general cultural expectations about what it means to be “whole,” “perfect” or “in place.” Neyrey’s study of Mark clearly depends on the theory of Mary Douglas and the modeling of Bruce Malina. It offers a lucid and systematic presentation, not only of the concept of purity, but of the specific Jewish articulation of this in the interpretation of a gospel text. His study itself can serve as a model for reading other New Testament documents, and so commends itself for its insight, thoroughness and utility.

We begin our discussion by first doing a brief survey of the anthropological concepts of purity and impurity. The subsequent sections show the application of anthropological suggestions to and their implications for the purity systems in the Old Testament, the Talmudic Mishnah and in later Judaism. We will then briefly discuss blood in Leviticus
(Judaism) and the role that purity laws played in the position of the menstruating woman in ancient Judaism. The last part of this chapter will be devoted to the application of anthropological suggestions and their implications for purity systems in the New Testament and blood in Revelation (nascent Christianity).

3.2 Anthropological Concepts of Purity and Impurity

Mary Douglas is probably the most distinguished active anthropologist in Europe and is a unique figure in British social anthropology. No other contemporary British anthropologist has so transcended the field to become a major figure in contemporary social theory. She carried out extended fieldwork, in the Congo and wrote a classic monograph on an African society, the Lele. Douglas published numerous papers in learned journals that described and analyzed taboos and rituals. She also applied similar forms of analysis to the Old Testament. Today, her work is a major point of reference for biblical scholars, and for everyone who writes about ritual, or about systems of classification etc. Douglas books, *Purity and Danger: An analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966) and *Natural Symbols* (1970), were seminal for anthropologists and were widely appreciated in other disciplines. Mary Douglas is best known for her interpretation of the book of *Leviticus*, and for her role in creating the cultural theory of risk.

Douglas' book *Purity and Danger: An analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* is considered a key text in social anthropology. What is radical about her analysis is that instead of classifying human societies into different categories that require different analysis criteria, Douglas applies the same principles to all societies. Drawing widely on different sources and disciplines and her Lele research, Douglas explores the

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relationship between dirt, holiness, purity and hygiene. Douglas maintains that “purity” refers to the general principle of classifying and structuring a society.\textsuperscript{255}

3.2.1 Purity

In her writings Douglas suggests that purity is best understood in terms of binary opposite, “dirt.” When something is out of place or when it violates the classification system in which it is set, it is “dirt.” “Dirt” is itself a relative term which basically means that something is “out of place” in the perception of the labelers. Objects and persons may be “clean” in one situation but “dirty” in another. The issue lies in the social situation, namely, in the sense of order or the system of classifications which people use to organize their world. ‘Reflections on dirt,’ Douglas argues, ‘involve reflection on the relations of order to disorder, being to non-being, and form to formlessness, and life to death.’\textsuperscript{256} A farmer working in his field is covered with dung and chaff; his shoes caked with mud and dung. This is appropriate to the outdoors work of farming during the day; it is what is expected of fields and farms. But should that farmer come inside after the day’s work, wearing those same dirt-covered shoes, and sits in his wife’s living room, his farm dirtiness, so appropriate outside, is impurity inside. The wrong thing appears in the wrong place at the wrong time.\textsuperscript{257} Thus dirt is defined as matter out of place. This implies only two conditions, a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Thus the idea of dirt implies a structure of idea. For us dirt is a kind of compendium category for all events, which blur, smudge, contradict, or otherwise confuse accepted classifications. The underlying feeling is that a system of values, which is habitually expressed in a given arrangement of things, has been violated.\textsuperscript{258} Dirt, then, in the context of the military would mean insubordination to a commanding officer; in a hospital it would mean unsterile material in an operating room. Something is out of place in each particular cosmos. The analysis of “dirt” then, is a matter of social perception and interpretation. According to Douglas, dirt implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a

\textsuperscript{256} M. Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger}, 5.
\textsuperscript{258} M. Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger}, 50-51.
contravention of that order. “Dirt “then, is never a unique isolated event. Where there is “dirt” there is a system. “Dirt” is a by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.\textsuperscript{259} Neyrey maintains that we all draw lines in our world relative to things, persons, places, activities and times. These lines tell us what and who belong when and where. ‘A place for everything and everything in its place.’\textsuperscript{260} Because these lines help us to classify and arrange our world according to some dominant principle, they convey through their structural arrangement the abstract values of the social world of which we are a part.\textsuperscript{261} Our culture is intelligible to us in virtue of our classification system, the lines we draw, and the boundaries we erect.\textsuperscript{262} “Purity” then refers to the cultural system and to the organizing principle of a group. Douglas notes that ‘culture, in the sense of public standardized values of a community, mediates the experience of individuals. It provides in advance some basic categories, a positive pattern in which ideas and values are tidily ordered.’\textsuperscript{263} “Purity,” then, is an abstract way of dealing with the values, maps and structures of a given social group.\textsuperscript{264} It provides a map or series of maps, which diagram the group’s cultural system and locate “a place for everything and everything in its place.”

If purity means clear lines and firm borders, then pollution refers to what crosses those boundaries or what resides in the margins and has no clear place in the system. Crossing of boundaries, then, means pollution. The maps of places, persons, things, and times are important for knowing just where the boundary lines are. According to Neyrey the appropriate strategy in the type of world where purity systems are strongly held is defensive. What is called for is: a) Avoidance of contact with what is either too holy or marginal or unclean\textsuperscript{265} or b) reinforcement of boundaries and purity concerns. Again, if purity means maps and classification systems which locate things where they ought to be, it follows that considerable attention will be given to the lines and boundaries of these

\textsuperscript{259} M. Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger}, 35.
\textsuperscript{264} M. Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger}, 34-35.
maps. The prime activity of a group with a strong purity system will be the making and maintenance of these lines and boundaries.\textsuperscript{266}

‘The image of society,’ Douglas says, ‘has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structures.’\textsuperscript{267} Douglas again suggests that, the human body is a replica of the social body, a symbol of society. The body is a model, which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries, which are threatened or precarious.\textsuperscript{268} The map of the body, then, replicates the map of the social body. A principle can be drawn from this insight: as the social body draws lines, restricts admission, expels undesirables and guards its entrance and exist, so this tends to be replicated in the control of the physical body. Douglas is therefore of the view that “Body control,” is an expression of social control and conversely, abandonment of bodily control in ritual responds to the requirements of a social experience which is being expressed.\textsuperscript{269} ‘The physical experience of the body…sustains a particular view of society.’\textsuperscript{270} We must be prepared to see in the human body a map of society. This means that in a culture where there are strong purity concerns and clear lines and boundaries, we should be sensitive to the map of the body especially how the following bodily features are treated: 1) nudity and clothing; 2) orifices of the body (genitals anus, mouth, nose, eyes); 3) the surfaces of the body and the head.\textsuperscript{271} We now apply these anthropological concepts to Judaism.

\textbf{3.2.2 Purity System in the Old Testament}

In the Old Testament, one regularly comes across statements such as ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy’\textsuperscript{272} and ‘their flesh you shall not eat, their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean to you.’\textsuperscript{273} It is very clear that ancient Israel had a keen sense of purity and pollution. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to present a

\textsuperscript{266} M. Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger}, 141-160.
\textsuperscript{267} M. Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger}, 114.
\textsuperscript{268} M. Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger}, 115.
\textsuperscript{270} M. Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger}, 93.
\textsuperscript{272} Leviticus 19:2.
\textsuperscript{273} Leviticus 11: 8.
detailed investigation of the genesis and development of Jewish notions of “holy” and “unclean,” Douglas makes several general suggestions that suit the idea of purity in the Old Testament.274

‘Be ye holy as I am holy.’ Holiness as attribute of God resides in God’s power to bless and to curse. God’s work through the blessing is essentially to create order, through which men’s affairs prosper.275 When the blessing is withdrawn, confusion occurs with barrenness and pestilence.276 God’s premier blessing act was the ordering of creation, when time was structured into work and rest days, when creatures were created in their pure form (no hybrids, no unclean animals), when all creatures were assigned their proper foods, as well as their proper place in creation. Creation, the ultimate act of ordering and classifying the world, was the original map. Holiness in turn involves ‘keeping distinct the categories of creation; it involves correct definition, discrimination and order.’277

Creation’s expression of ordering the world is an abstract concept buried in the cultural history of Israel. But it was mediated to the Jews of the post-biblical period through the specific rules surrounding Israel’s temple.278 The abstract order of creation determined specific purity rules for the temple system:

1. **What animals may be offered**: Only “holy” animals, viz., those which accord with the definition of a clean animal and which are physically perfect;

2. **Who may offer them**: A “holy” priest, who has perfect bloodlines, who is in perfect physical condition, and who is in a state of purity;

3. **Who may participate in the sacrifice**: Only Israelites, and only those with whole bodies (Leviticus 21:16-20);

4. **Where the offering is to be made**: In Jerusalem’s temple, this is a microcosm of creation;

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276 Deuteronomy 28: 15-24 (New International Version)
278 J. Neusner, ‘Map Without Territory: Mishnah’s System of Sacrifices and Sanctuary,’ *HR* 19/18/1979), 1-17.
5. *When* the offerings are to be made and what offering is appropriate on which occasion.

The temple system, then, is a major mediation or replication of the idea of order and purity established in creation.

Although only priests need observe the specific rules of purity, there were Jews that would extend them to the people of Israel at large, so that all people may be holy, even as temple and priests are holy.  

According to K. C. Hanson, Milgrom has been the one to most clearly articulate the logic, which underlies priestly regulations of purity/impurity. He has clarified that the priestly regulations identifies two separate distinctions: “clean”/”unclean” and “holy”/”common.” Both the “holy” and the “common” are understood to be clean unless otherwise designated; but while the “holy” has a “contagious” quality (like “impurity”), the “common” is inert. Furthermore, the “holy” is divided into “holy” and “most holy.” The interactions of these various spheres (e.g., “most-holy” and “unclean”) have differing results with regard to contamination. The summary of Milgrom’s references is in the following chart:

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281 Leviticus 10:10.
Figure I: CONSEQUENCES OF CONTACT

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<th>CLEAN</th>
<th>UNCLEAN</th>
<th>COMMON</th>
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<tr>
<td>MOST HOLY</td>
<td>Clean</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Death (Numbers 1:51)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HOLY</td>
<td>Clean</td>
<td>Excommunication (Leviticus 7:19-21)</td>
<td>Restitution &amp; Fine (Leviticus 5:14-26)</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMMON</td>
<td>Clean</td>
<td>Purification Rites (Leviticus 11-15)</td>
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Milgrom summarizes the calculus of this system of impurity (what he calls “the laws of sancta contamination”) as follows:
1. The contamination of a sanctum varies directly with the intensity of the impurity source, directly with the holiness intensity of the sanctum and inversely with the distance between them. Also, contamination has a threshold, a fixed value, below which it cannot be activated.

2. The sanctuary is a special case of the general law\textsuperscript{282} whereby:
   - Contamination is a function of the intensity of the impurity source alone, i.e., impurities of a severe amount and from any distance (in the camp) will contaminate the sanctuary.
   - Contamination takes place at three thresholds: the outer alter, the shrine, or the adytum.
   - Contamination displaces an equal volume of the sanctuary holiness (the Archimedean principle) until a saturation point is reached.

3. Sancta are related to common things in regard to their contamination and purification, as follows:
   - Sancta are more vulnerable to contamination by one degree.
   - Each purification stage reduces the communicability of the impurity source to both sancta and common things by one degree.\textsuperscript{283}

Thus, we can conclude that status, distance, degree of purity, and physical relationship to the sanctuary are the variables in relation to the purity of the sanctuary.

The fact that the Levitical purity system is not a series of \textit{suggestions} but codified regulations is seen in the punishments attached to many of the offences. For some of the violations the offender is identified as ‘guilty’ and requires purgation.\textsuperscript{284} But for more

\textsuperscript{283} For the preceding discussion, see J. Milgrom, \textit{Leviticus 1-16}, Anchor Bible 3, New York: Doubleday, 1991, 948-1167; for “the laws of sancta contamination,” see page 984.
\textsuperscript{284} See Leviticus 5: 6 for an example.
serious offences one could be “cut off”(*karat*, viz. excommunicated, socially banned)\(^{285}\), or put to death (*mot yumat*).\(^{286}\) Leviticus 26 lists a number of group punishments enacted by Yahweh for failing to maintain this system: disease, defeat in war, drought, fruitless land plagues, wild beasts, famine, exile, and fear. Thus threats of social exclusion, death, and disaster provided the *negative* motivation for adhering strictly to the purity code. The code functions as a map of conformity/defiance, as well as identifying the danger points to the individual, the society, and the sanctuary. But the recurring *positive* motivation to holiness and purity derives from Yahweh’s nature and the conceptualisation of the Israelites and Judeans as Yahweh’s people: ‘Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am The Lord your God. Keep my statutes and follow them; I am the Lord, who makes you holy.’\(^{287}\) Thus purity consists of concrete actions performed by the people, but also entails Yahweh’s reciprocal action. It consequently has personal, social, and cosmic dimensions.\(^{288}\)

This study agrees as Hanson does that Douglas is correct that wide-ranging issues of everyday life are addressed in the Israelite purity system in Leviticus, and many of these issues are dealt with in the context of the local village; the system is not sorely about sacrifice and the sanctuary.\(^{289}\) But one may still identify the pivotal roles of the priesthood and the sanctuary. Such things as skin diseases have to be judged by priests.\(^{290}\) The system assumes a society, which has a permanent sacred space (“the sanctuary”\(^{291}\)) and a professional priesthood (‘Aaron and his sons’\(^{292}\)). The lines of purity are clearly demarcated (e.g. animals accepted for eating\(^{293}\)), rationales for the system are provided,\(^{294}\) and the means for rectifying infractions are provided in the one, centralized cult.\(^{295}\) Thus the purity of Leviticus is broadly based. Rather than being solely centred on the sanctuary, the whole of Israel’s life is organized in terms of purity rules. This means

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\(^{285}\) Leviticus 18: 29.
\(^{286}\) Leviticus 20: 9.
\(^{287}\) Leviticus 20: 7-8.
\(^{290}\) Leviticus 13: 1-59.
\(^{291}\) Leviticus 19: 30; 20: 3.
\(^{293}\) Leviticus 11: 1-47.
\(^{294}\) Leviticus 20: 22-26; 22: 31-33.
\(^{295}\) Leviticus I-7.
that the tabernacle’s purity matches that of the priesthood, that of the field, household, and physical body. All of these fit together into a system of purity identified with Yahweh’s holiness/purity: ‘You shall be holy to me, because I, the Lord, am holy; and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.’

We turn now to investigate some of the concrete examples of how all persons, places, things, activities, and times were ordered and set apart. For as these are mapped, they embody and express the idea of purity.

We said earlier that “purity” is a map of a social system, which coordinates and classifies things according to their appropriate place. In Judaism, of Jesus’ time, there were many such maps; for things, places, persons, and times can all be mapped. We begin with a map of places. Kelim provides an example of how places, i.e. the Land of Israel, are mapped according to a purity system.

There are ten degrees of holiness:

1. The Land of Israel is holier than any other land…
2. The walled cities (of the land of Israel) are still more holy…
3. Within the walls (of Jerusalem) is still more holy…
4. The Temple Mount is still more holy…
5. The Rampart is still more holy…
6. The Court of the Women is still more holy…
7. The Court of the Israelites is still more holy…
8. The Court of the Priests is still more holy…
9. Between the Porch and the Alter is still more holy…
10. The sanctuary is still more holy… The Holy of Holies is still more holy…

The list is very informative. It indicates direction: one moves from the outside toward the centre. Gentile territory is outside of Israel and is not holy at all; it is off the map entirely. But all of Israel is holy; it is on the map. As though one were ascending a series of

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concentric circles, one travels upward and inward toward the centre of holiness, the Temple. The centre of the Temple is the Holy of Holies, God’s alter and throne, and wherein God is “enthroned above the cherubim.” It is, then, the centre of the universe, the navel of the world. The direction of the map suggests the principle of classification: holiness (or “purity”) is measured in terms of proximity to the Temple, the centre of the map. Everything else is classified and rated as “holy” in proximity to that centre.

We referred to “purity” as boundaries earlier on in this chapter where Douglas maintains that the image of society has form. It has external boundaries, margins, and internal structures. The external boundaries, which distinguish the Jews from other peoples, can be clearly identified. We are familiar with the Jewish insistence on 1) kosher diet, 2) circumcision, and 3) observance of the Sabbath. One could identify Jews by special times (Sabbath), special things (diet) and special bodily marks (circumcision). These three observances serve as lines, for they distinguish Jews from non-Jews. They indicate who is “in” the covenant group and who is “out.” By making such things important, Jews reinforced their own group identity and built the boundaries, which distinguished them from non-Jews. Outsiders regularly regarded Jews as unsociable and anti-social because of these customs, for they recognized them for what they are, the boundaries of a map. Biblical literature points out the particularistic character of Judaism. Acts 10: 28 make it clear: ‘You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a gentile or visit him.’

Jews are also found to be concerned with things on the margins of lines and boundaries. Because of lack of bodily wholeness, lepers, the blind, the lame, eunuchs, etc., are not whole or wholly Israelites. They are marginal to the covenant people, residing on the fringes or borders of Jewish society. According to Douglas, this concern with margins is replicated in the Jewish classification of certain animals and foods as unclean. The world map is clearly composed of air, earth and water. To be clean (i.e. within one’s proper boundary, an animal must fit completely within the concept of what it means to be an air or sea or earth animal. On earth, for example, four-legged creatures hop, jump or walk.

297 M. Douglas, Purity and Danger, 114.
300 Leviticus 21: 16- 20.
Any creature that is not so equipped for the right kind of locomotion violates the classification system; it is out of place, marginal, and so “unclean.” Earth animals, which may be eaten, are those, which have a cloven hoof, and which chew the cud; they satisfy the definition of what constitutes a genuine earth creature. But the camel, the pig, the hare and the hyrax either do not chew the cud or do not have clove hooves; they are defective, marginal, and hence unclean. Sea creatures are fish that have scales. But sea creatures that do not have scales (shell fish) are defective, marginal, and hence unclean. According to Douglas, ‘to be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind.’ And so, what does not fully fit a determined definition is not within its proper lines; it is a hybrid, an ambiguous thing and ambiguity is dangerous and polluting. This fear of margins is replicated in concern over the margins of the physical body, whether urine, faeces, semen or menses. According to Kelim, uncleanness extends to ‘the issue of him that has a flux, by his spittle, his semen, and his urine.’ Such marginal substances are unclean. Flaking skin indicates a marginal disorder, whether it is leprosy, scabs or a skin disease. The person who suffers an involuntary “marginal emission” (i.e. nocturnal emission for men, menstruation for women) is “unclean”. Marginal effluvia are themselves ‘unclean’ and contaminating; they render the person with the flux “unclean” as well as people who come in contact with that person or his/her effluvia.

Again, anthropological concepts suggest that because Jewish culture has deep purity concerns and clear lines and boundaries, Jews are very sensitive to the map of the body particularly how some bodily features, especially nudity and clothing, orifices of the body, the surfaces of the body and the head are dealt with.

- Before the first sin, nudity was not unclean or shameful. But after that sin, it was equated with shame. Adam cited nudity as the reason why he hid

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306 M. Kelim, 1.3.
309 See Genesis 2: 25.
from God. Nudity, then, means uncleanness and separation from God; to be naked is in some way to be apart from God’s covenant, favour, and protection. Nudity then means “impurity.” This is reflected in Exodus 20: 26: ‘And do not go up to my alter on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it.’ Nudity violates that place’s sacredness. Alternately, a clothed body is presumed “holy.” God drew near to naked maiden Israel, and clothed her, thus making her God’s holy and chosen one. The principle is clear: clothing replicates the boundaries or fences’ defining what is holy. A body without boundaries or fences is a body with no clear place on the map and a body open to penetration by one and all.

- These cultural values were quite alive and well in the first century. For example, according to Josephus, the Essenes whose purity concerns were very strict, wore clothing when taking their baths. Even when going to the lavatory, they never exposed their nakedness. A concern for purity lines, then, is replicated in the demand for clothed body. It is expected that when purity concerns are very strong, this will be evident in the care given to the entrances and exits of the social body. Who is an Israelite? How does one become such? Who is an apostate are all-important questions. This is replicated in concern for who may enter what court or room in the temple. Entrances, gates, and doors become significant places. This in turn is replicated in the concern given to the orifices of the body. The genitals, anus, ears, and mouth are all carefully guarded and great attention is paid to what passes in or out of them. For example, a) the genital orifices are of great concern. Semen and menses are unclean. A priest must abstain from sexual intercourse the night before he offers sacrifices. A male nocturnal emission will render the emitter unclean; a menstruating woman is very unclean. Also in this line, we noticed earlier the

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310 See Genesis 3: 10-11; Isaiah 20: 4; 47: 3; Rev. 3: 18 &16: 15.
311 See Lamentation 4: 21; Ezekiel 16: 39; 23: 29; Hosea 2: 3; Nahum 3: 5.
313 Ezekiel 16: 7-8.
315 2 Chronicles 23: 19.
316 Leviticus 15: 16, 19.
great concern for rules for intermarriage\textsuperscript{318} which are rules governing the valid and invalid crossing of the genital orifice. Circumcision should be understood in this framework; it is a way of denoting a male genital orifice as one, which is set apart and therefore holy. b) Excretory orifices are also carefully guarded, and what crosses them (urine and faeces) is unclean and polluting. c) The orifice of the mouth is also carefully regulated. The dietary laws make quite explicit what may or may not pass through the orifice. In line with this, it matters who eats with whom; holy people eat holy food together, but an unclean person at such a table is unclean and polluting.\textsuperscript{319}

The surface of the body is also a focus of purity concerns. As regards the head, loose and disheveled hair is not permitted; rather, braided hair, which is carefully wrapped around the head, is the rule.\textsuperscript{320} The head must have a clear and tidy surface, viz., fixed boundaries. What is loose is unclean.\textsuperscript{321} Concern for the surface is shown in the horror displayed toward skin diseases and leprosy in the Bible. Flaking skin, scabs, eruptions on the skin, and ‘leprosy’ are all-unclean\textsuperscript{322} and render the sufferer unclean. Smooth, whole skin is considered pure and clean. Although many purity laws have become more or less theoretical with the Temple laying in ruins, mishnaic authors who wrote between 200 and 500 AD, still constructed an orderly world, classifying all things in terms of “clean” and “unclean” in relation to the sanctuary remembered and expected. Physical geography gave way to ideological geography. We now examine purity system in the Talmudic Mishnah.

\section*{3.2.3. Purity System in the Talmudic Mishnah}

\textsuperscript{318} \textit{m. Kid.} 4. 1.
\textsuperscript{319} J. Neusner, \textit{From Politics to Piety}, 86.
\textsuperscript{320} J. Murphy- O’Connor, ‘Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11: 2- 16’, \textit{CBQ}, 42/(1980), 482- 500.
\textsuperscript{321} Luke 7: 38.
\textsuperscript{322} Mark 7: 1-4 and the rabbis’ “fences”.
The Mishnah\(^{323}\) and Tosefta\(^{324}\) offer a *map of persons*, which classifies and ranks the people of Israel according to a purity system. *T. Megillah* gives the following map of the people of Israel:

1. Priests
2. Levites
3. Israelites
4. Converts
5. Freed slaves
6. Disqualified priests (illegitimate children of priests)
7. Netins (temple slaves)
8. Mamzers (bastards)
9. Eunuchs
10. Those with damaged testicles
11. Those without a penis (*t. Meg. 2.7)*

The clue to this map of people lies in what holiness (or “purity”) means. First, holiness means wholeness. And so people with damaged bodies are ranked last; their lack of wholeness signals a corresponding lack of holiness. People with damaged family lines are ranked second-to-last, for their wholeness is also defective. Second, the ranking according to holiness also has to do with one’s standing vis-a-vis the Temple. People defective either in body or family lines are on the perimeter of the Temple; converts may stand closer; still closer to the centre are full Israelites, and closest of all are Levites and priests. This *map of people*, then replicates the *map of places*, which we just observed.

The *map of persons* classified them in a very practical way, for it determines who marries whom. Marriage within one’s own rank was very important. One’s social position is

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\(^{323}\) Mishnah is the first written redaction of the Jewish oral traditions called the “oral Torah” and the first major work of Rabbinic Judaism.

\(^{324}\) Tosefta is a compilation of the Jewish Oral law from the period of the Mishnah. The Tosefta acts a supplement to the Mishnah.
determined by it, and hence, one’s place on the map of Israel. It is not surprising, then, that we have marriage maps which indicate ranking and permissible/impermissible unions. Ten family stocks came up from Babylon: the priestly, Levitic, and Israelitish stocks, the impaired priestly stocks, the proselyte, freedman, bastard and Nathin stocks, (the temple slaves), the shetuki (the fatherless) and the asufi (foundlings) stocks. The priestly, Levitic and Israelitish stocks may intermarry; impaired priestly stocks, proselyte and freedman stocks may intermarry; the proselyte, freedman, bastard, Nathin, shetuki, and asufi stocks may intermarry. (m.Kid.41). There is three main circles of society mapped out here: a) full Israelite (priests, Levites, Israelites), b) slightly blemished Israelites (impaired priestly stock, proselytes and freedmen), and c) gravely blemished Israelites (bastards, Nathin, shetuki, and asufi). One’s social status in Israel was ascribed through birth and blood. And so one married within one’s rank and above, if possible. But one never married below. The priests must marry priestly stock: a completely closed system. Levites may marry full Israelites and maintain full status. But their marriage to proselytes, freeman or priestly bastards was a lowering of pedigree and social status. Below even these folk are the Nathin, the shetuki and the asufi.

While intermarriage is the reason for classification, the operative principle is the degree of purity or holiness attributed to these specific families and groups. Without great violence to the marriage maps above, one may put them alongside the maps of places and persons and note the following correlations. Only priests may enter the sanctuary and the Holy of Holies: they are a people set apart for a space set apart. They may marry only within a clan which is set apart. Levites attend the outer parts of the sanctuary area; they too are a group set apart for a space set apart. As a spatially restricted people, they have restricted marriage opportunities. Full Israelites may stand in the general Court of the Israelites; their marriage partners are less restricted. But those of the genealogical deficiency (Gentiles, foundlings, bastards, fatherless) are situated still further away from the holy place. Eunuchs, hermaphrodites, and sexually deformed people are still further away from the centre of the temple. Marriage for eunuchs and sexually deformed people is impossible; and with this impotency goes restricted membership in the clan. And so the

marriage map replicates the maps of place and people in Israel. According to a purity system, it ascribes them appropriate social status in proximity to the Temple, the yardstick of purity. Geography replicates social structure.327

Times may be mapped as well. The second division of the Mishnah, Moed, contains a list of sacred times, a list that suggests a hierarchy of those times:

1. Shabbath & Erubin (Sabbath)
2. Pesahim (Feast of Passover)
3. Yoma (Day of Atonement)
4. Sukkoth (Feast of Tabernacles)
5. Yom Tob (Festival Days)
6. Rosh ha-Shana (Feast of New Years)
7. Taanith (Days of fasting)
8. Megillah (Feast of Purim)
9. Moed Katan (Mid-Festival Days).

Sabbath goes back to creation, when God himself rested; it is the most holy of times. Passover is the feast commemorating the creation of Israel, when God led them out of Egypt; it ranks next in sacredness. Then follow other major holy days, Yom Kippur and Sukkoth and Rosh ha-Shana. These are followed in turn by lesser holy days and festivals (Yom Tob and Purim). The Mishnah gives specific rules governing these times, when they begin, what one may or must do and what one may not do. Times, then, may be classified and mapped.328

People who continually have even passing contact with sinners, lepers, blind, lame, menstruants, corpses and the like are perceived as spurning the map of persons. People who show no respect for holy places such as the temple329 are crossing dangerous lines on the map of places. People who do what is not lawful on the Sabbath disregard the

329 Mark 11: 15- 17.
map of time, and would be judged in some way as rejecting the system. Such people would be rated as unclean. Not only are they themselves polluted, they become a source of pollution to others.  

3.2.4 Purity System in Later Judaism

Although the lists in the Mishnah and Tosefta indicate that Israelites constitute an undifferentiated block of people in Israel, that block may be further broken down and classified. A more detailed map of persons can be drawn of Jewish society and this classification is clearly seen in later Judaism. After all, “a place for everything and everything in its place.” First, we know of a basic distinction made in the first century between observant or non-observant Jews. In Acts 4:13, Peter and John are classified by the observant elite as am haaretz meaning, people of the land or common folk who neither knew the Law and its purity concerns nor cared about them. Acts 22:3 and 26:5-6, on the other hand, insist that Paul be understood as an urban, knowledgeable and serious observer of the Law: ‘I was brought up in the city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of law of our fathers, being zealous for God’ (22:3)... ‘According to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee’ (26:5). The same distinction between observant and non-observant Jews is found in John 7. The chief priests and Pharisees distinguish themselves from the officers and crowds who are impressed by Jesus. ‘Are you led astray, you also? Have any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, who does not know the law, are accursed (7:47-48). The distinction between observant and non-observant Israelites is conceived geographically. Those in Jerusalem (i.e. those close to the temple) are perceived as concerned with Jerusalem’s temple and with purity. The “people of the land” (am haaretz) are just that, people who live apart from the city and its temple; they live in the

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countryside, in villages, even in Galilee of the Gentiles, which is far removed from the temple and its purity concerns.\textsuperscript{332}

Second, even among observant Israelites further classification was possible:

1. We know of Qumran covenanters who considered the present priesthood of the temple to be impure and invalid. Their sense of the lines and boundaries of purity was very strict; they could not abide living in a polluted city, worshipping in a polluted temple, which was administered by unclean priests. They moved out of polluted space to a new place where purity concerns could be strictly observed. Many in Israel positively revered them in Israel.\textsuperscript{333}

2. \textit{Pharisees} also were concerned with purity lines and boundaries. While not part of the priestly urban elite, they kept the same purity codes as the priests and so would rank, at least in their own eyes, as above the masses and in some way equal to the priests in purity, if not in blood. As their name signifies, they set themselves apart from the masses of Israel.\textsuperscript{334}

3. Notice should also be given to the \textit{scribes} or sages of Israel at this stage. These were non-priestly people who were charged with the promotion of the Torah and its dominance in all aspects of life. Although some sages were Pharisees (Gamaliel the Elder, Simeon ben Gamaliel, Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai), not all were nor need be. They founded houses of study in Israel and so developed into a special class, which was passionately concerned with purity.\textsuperscript{335}

Full Israelites who are non-observant may be further distinguished. Public sinners, such as tax collectors and prostitutes, can be distinguished from the masses. They are, at best, on the margins of the covenant map. Also on the margins are the physically unclean folk such as lepers, menstruating women, the blind, and the lame. According to the Law, these last people are unclean and may not approach to offer the bread of his God. ‘No man who has a defect may come near: no man who is blind, or lame, disfigured or deformed; no

\textsuperscript{333} F. Josephus, \textit{The Jewish War}, 161.
man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is hunch-backed or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. There are, then, those who have put themselves on the perimeter of the purity map (sinners) and those who find themselves put there because of their physical lack of wholeness (sickness, deformed).

4. Even observant Israelites may pass through stages of purity and uncleanness. One can and should know one’s place in the purity system at all times, but for this one needs a specific map of impurities. *M. Kelim* 1.5 lists ten degrees of uncleanness in men, which classifies the contaminant, how long he is contaminated, and what must be done to remove the respective degree of contamination. In that same tractate, a formal hierarchy of uncleanness is mapped.

- There are things, which convey uncleanness by contact (e.g. a dead creeping thing, male semen).
- They are exceeded by carrion…
- He that has connexion with a menstruant exceeds them…
- The issue of him that has a flux, by his spittle, his semen, and his urine, exceeds them…
- They are exceeded by (the uncleanness of) what is ridden upon (by him that has a flux)…
- (The uncleanness of) that is ridden upon (by him that has a flux) is exceeded by what he lies upon…
- (The uncleanness of) what he lies upon is exceeded by the uncleanness of him that has a flux…

The uncleanness of a man is exceeded by the uncleanness of a woman, whose uncleanness is exceeded by that of a leper, then by that of a corpse. According to Neyrey, it is safe to say that Israel was both intensely concerned with purity and with the

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337 *M. Kelim* 1.3.
338 *M. Kelim* 1.4.
appropriate lines and boundaries, which classified everything in its proper place—even uncleanness.\(^{339}\)

We mentioned above the strong sense of *internal lines* and boundaries, which describe the social structure of Jewish society at this time. Neyrey\(^{340}\) offers the following map from the New Testament as an illustration of how Israelites are internally ranked according to a purity system. This map should be seen as supplementing the *map of persons* discussed above. Of course, Gentiles are not on the map of God’s covenant people,\(^{341}\) nor are Samaritans.\(^{342}\)

i. **Dead Israelites:** Concern over Jesus’ dead body (John 19: 31);

ii. **Morally unclean Israelites:** Tax collectors & sinners (Luke 15: 1-2; Matthew 9: 10-13);

iii. **Bodily unclean Israelites:** Lepers (Mark 1: 40-45; Luke 17: 11-14), poor, lame, maimed, blind (Luke 14:13; see Leviticus 21: 18-21), menstruants (Mark 5: 24-34);

iv. **Unobservant Israelites:** Peter and John (Acts 4: 13), Jesus (John 7: 15, 49);

v. **Observant Israelites:** The rich young man (Mark 23: 50-51), Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 2: 25-38);

vi. **Pharisees:** (Mark 7: 3-5; Luke 18: 11-12);

vii. **Scribes and Priests:** (Luke 10: 31-32);

viii. **Chief Priests:** (John 18: 28; Hebrews 7: 18-28).

This map is very important. Since one can and should know one’s purity rating at all times,\(^{343}\) one needs a code for classifying people to know where they stand in the system.

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\(^{341}\) See Acts 10: 28; 11: 3.

\(^{342}\) See John 4: 9.

\(^{343}\) See maps of impurities, *m. Kelim* 1.3-5.
Observant Jews will be concerned that the proper lines and boundaries be maintained. Marginal objects as well as people are to be shunned and kept away from the space of full and holy Israelites. Persons of lesser purity rank should not intrude on the space of those of higher purity status; this would apply in the case of intermarriage and other forms of social intercourse. It is not surprising, then, that a group like the Pharisees builds a “fence” around its life. To keep the core clean and pure one extended the boundary around that core, put a fence on the perimeter, and guarded that outer “fence.” Hence the chief rule was “make a fence around the law.”344 And if a fence was appropriate around the Law as a whole, it was appropriate around individual aspects of the Law. Hence a proliferation of fences might be expected:

“The tradition is a fence around the Law;
Tithes are a fence around riches;
Vows are a fence around abstinence;
A fence around wisdom is silence.”

3.3 Blood in Judaism (Leviticus)

The Hebrew word for “blood” (dam) appears eighty-seven times in Leviticus.346 Most of these occurrences, however, are in the same context: the use of animal blood in the sacrifices. It is utilized in many ritual actions; representative examples will make a point. Blood is: presented, put, taken, brought, dipped in, offered, sprinkled, poured, cleansed with, thrown, delivered, and drained out. Thus the handling of the blood must be performed with precision because of its importance in the rituals and its potency.

Animal blood used in sacrifices is seen as a purifying agent, a detergent. The pollution of the priests, leadership, community as a whole, or sanctuary is symbolically cleansed by the right performance of the blood ritual.347 The correct blood (e.g., of bull or goat)
ritually manipulated in the prescribed manner and sequence (e.g., offered, sprinkled, dipped in) in the prescribed location (central sanctuary) by the correct person (Aaronide priest) effects purgation of pollution. Most of these issues are made explicit in Leviticus chapter 16: 18-19

Then he shall come out to the alter that is before the Lord and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull’s blood and some of the goat’s blood and put it on all the horns of the alter. He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his figure seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.348

But this raises the question: why blood and not hooves or meat or some other part of an animal? The answer Leviticus gives is: ‘For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the alter; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.’349 The blood thus symbolizes life: the life of the animal for the life of the community. Blood as a symbol of life, is the only part of the animal powerful enough to effect purgation, and Yahweh has assigned it. In Ezekiel we see the additional notion of the blood and fat as Yahweh’s food.350

But even the correct animal blood may not effect purification. Leviticus 17: 1-9 identifies a potential problem area: animals sacrificed, but not brought to the tabernacle, bring about bloodguilt. This danger, many have suggested, relates to the limitation of all animal slaughter to sacrifice.351 But it is also possible that this regulation functioned to disallow kinship-based Yahweh religion with local shrines, northern Israelite Yahweh-shrines, as well as shrines to other deities. Following the reforms of king Josiah of Judah, Yahweh worship in Judah was officially centralized in (and limited to) the Jerusalem cult352 and this regulation disallowed sacrifices outside that central sanctuary. That means, the ritual

348 See also Leviticus 14: 52; 17: 11.
349 Leviticus 17:11; see v. 14; Deuteronomy 12: 23.
350 Ezekiel 44: 7.
352 Deuteronomy 12; 2 Kings 23.
had to be performed by an authorized professional in an authorized location to be potent; otherwise it became a pollutant rather than a detergent. The ritual control of sacrificial blood, therefore, was tied to the symbolic control of the social body: the central state sanctuary (the politically-based Yahweh cult) was the only legitimate locus of sacrifice, and therefore purification. Anyone desiring an authorized form of purification had to come to the state-controlled sanctuary, run by the centrally-controlled Aaronide priests.

A further issue with regard to animal blood is that it is defiling when it is “eaten.” This does not refer to drinking blood (that would presumably be defiling too, but that is not the issue), but failing to drain the blood from an animal before cooking and eating it. No explicit explanation is provided in any of these texts other than the blood is assigned for purgatory. But the assumption seems to be that the blood belongs to God for purgation, and not to humans. Animal blood is also defiling when it splashes on the priests or the priests’ garments, and it must be washed off in the sanctuary, having become a “used detergent” which was now itself contaminated. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, blood on garments is a symbol of contamination because of its symbolization of war or murder.

A point of blood-purity, which comes up several times in Leviticus is vaginal blood: post-partum bleeding, menstruation, and irregular vaginal bleeding. Some societies evaluate menstruation neutrally, as simply a matter of elimination (e.g. the Rungus and Borneo.) Others employ elaborate sets of taboos and regulations to control the negative effects of menstruation (e.g., Turkish village Muslims). And still others value

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356 Leviticus 6: 27.
357 See 1 Kings 2: 5; Isaiah 9: 5; Lamentations 4: 14.
menstruation positively as contributing to the fecundity of the earth (e. g. the Beng of the Ivory Coast.361)

Leviticus has several rules for the woman’s menstrual period:

1. She is unclean for seven days.
2. Anything she lies upon or sits upon is unclean.
3. Anyone who touches her, her bedding, or what she has sat upon is unclean until evening.
4. Anyone who has intercourse with her is unclean for seven days.362

Similar ordinances obtain for woman with irregular vaginal bleeding.363 But this is parallel for men with genital discharges.364 This is given sacral and cosmic scope (viz. a taboo) in that it relates to both Yahweh and Yahweh’s sanctuary.365

These menstrual regulations and taboos are extremely close to those described by Delaney for the village Turkish Muslims Delaney on the village Turkish Muslims concludes: ‘The fact that a woman is not self-contained and self-controlled but is instead open is interpreted as a sign that she must be socially controlled and closed, or covered.’366 This alerts us that purity codes function as expressions of the overall cultural perspective. In this case, the gender-division of traditional Middle Eastern cultures is expressed in the fear and control of women’s bodies and sexuality. So the “order” for which purity codes strives sometimes results in the restraint, marginalization, or oppression of some of the society’s members; this, then, relates directly to social hierarchy and power. This may prompt a further reflection on how our own culture’s purity codes manifest our fears of and desire to control “the other,” whether the other is

364 Leviticus 15: 32-33.
defined in terms of gender, sexual orientation, disease, religious affiliation, age, or even homelessness.  

3.4 The Position of the Menstruant in Jewish Religion

S. Cohen maintains that the concept of menstruation transcends an apparently ordinary biological event or a criterion for gender distinction. More importantly it is used particularly for explaining the spatial male/public and female/private domains. Menstrual impurity, according to Cohen, is at the centre for the exclusion of women from the sacred in Jewish and Christian religions. Cohen therefore, attempts a legal historical approach to explain the exclusion of women from the sacred because of menstrual impurity in Judaism and Christianity. Cohen finds this endeavor particularly significant in the case of Judaism whose old regulations governing impurity and purification is still an integral part of Jewish piety. Cohen makes his arguments by citing six passages from the Torah, which delineates the causes, the varying degree of impurity in both male and female and the length of the period of purification. According to the Torah a woman with a discharge other than menstrual and a menstruating woman are placed in the same category of impurity for seven days after, which they are to bathe and offer sacrifice. He notes, however that the impurity regulation after sexual intercourse, that obliges the ejaculant and his partner to be purified by night fall, has the shortest duration. He explains that all categories transmit impurity to persons and/or objects, which come in contact with them, but the ejaculant pollutes only his female partner whereas the effects of the kinds of pollution, for example menstruation, are exclusive. To Sackey, this regulation is extremely inequitable because menstruation is a natural unwilled occurrence over which women do not have control, whereas ejaculation emanating from sexual desire and intercourse is willed and therefore be controlled.

369 Cohen, ‘Menstruant and the Sacred’, 274.
Wegner maintains that the sage’s interest in menstruation emanates from their concern with cultic purity of men because the Mishnah exhorts that, ‘Israelite men must keep themselves in a state of fitness to engage in a cultic or religious practices.’ Wegner describes the position of the menstruant as ambiguous in the sense that she is both seen as “object” and person at once. On the other hand, she is a source of pollution to the cultic purity of men, an object that generates pollution. And as a person she must effectively prevent transmitting her impurity to “vulnerable men.” Therefore the onus of calculating her period, which includes seven days after the period, relies heavily on the person of the menstruant. Here it seems the fear of menstruation takes precedence over the idea of the ownership of the sexuality of Jewish women by men, which Wegner has emphasized as the most important relationship between male and female in Jewish religion throughout her book. Wegner writes that: ‘Ownership is irrelevant in the context of pollution, what is important is the Israelite male’s avoidance of cultic contamination.’ Therefore the menstruant’s personhood depends on her unblemished state, i.e. to maintain a state of purity that in turn assures the safety of the sanctity of her husband’s religiosity. By implication, Jewish women can be said to be the same forces that alleviate as well as contribute to the very cultic progress of men. Kraemer also endorses the idea that women must assume the responsibility for male ritual purity because only they can know the pertinent details of their menstrual cycle. It seems that this Mishnaic tenet is not only remarkable but also ironical because the rabbinic law places men’s cultic purity in the hands of women—“women who are [regarded] as inferior to men [supposedly] in mind, in function and in status.” How then did the lawmakers envisage that women could ensure the expected male purity? How could women’s alleged frailty of mind be entrusted with such a great, delicate responsibility? Does this suppose that at certain times a woman’s mind can reason correctly and uphold the dignity and unblemished state of men, while at another she can cause pollution and obstruct men’s religious

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371 J.R. Wegner, *Chattel or persons?*, 163.
372 See section on the discussion of the rites of passage below.
373 J.R. Wegner, *Chattel or persons?*, 163.
accomplishment?³⁷⁶ Wegner rightly argues that to entrust such matters to the wife is not only to rely on her intelligence and morality, but to recognize her personhood as well.³⁷⁷ Sackey is of the view that here, the objective of the rabbinic authors to control women rather seems to point to the reverse; the regulations seem to empower menstruating women to make men their “victims”.³⁷⁸ Again the awareness that men’s religious significance is bestowed in the hands of women tends to give the latter some form of power over men which women can use to their advantage.

Inequality of male and female in Jewish tradition comes out vividly in Cohen’s discussion with reference to Leviticus 12 that regulates the length of impurity and blood purification required by the mother after delivery of a child. In this chapter the period of impurity for a parturient on the birth of a baby boy is seven days and thirty-three days for purification. The regulations on the birth of a baby girl is double that for a boy, which is fourteen and sixty-six days respectively. Although Cohen notes the severity of blood purification in the case of a baby girl he doesn’t question its implication on gender inequalities nor the logic or symbolism behind it, if any.

The quantity of bloodshed during delivery of a male does not seem different than blood shed at a female delivery. Most women and mothers that we interviewed expressed this opinion. What then is the origin and criterion for this Jewish regulation? Is it perhaps simply a method for gender differentiation, a categorization of the sexes at birth? Wegner does not discuss this issue. Are we to attribute the Leviticus impurity laws as sheer “arbitrary enactments” and “legislative rigidity of the priestly authors, or “accept them” as not arbitrary because Leviticus comes from Priestly source and thus has divine origin.”³⁷⁹ Sackey maintains that Cohen’s historical, legal approach should not only establish the existence of these impurities and regulations but should also attempt a more convincing origins explaining the differences in the regulations concerning same processes e.g. birth.

3.4.1 Origin of Menstruation

Douglas has suggested above that, menstruation could be assumed to have a priestly and therefore divine source. However, even though J. Delaney et al\(^{380}\) affirm this, they also regard menstruation as curse whose “origins” begin “indirectly” in the book of Genesis 3:16, where God tells Eve He will ‘multiply thy sorrow and thy conception.’\(^{381}\) The authors make such an inference but do not attempt to delve further into a possible explanation of how this verse relates to the concept of menstruation. Perhaps the shedding of blood postpartum may imply an extended menstruation. Kraemer\(^{382}\) however refers to Cohen’s claim that postpartum ritual impurity was not equivalent to menstrual impurity and therefore did not affect marital relations.\(^{383}\) This statement in Sackey’s view, first of all contradicts the rabbinic regulations, which allows sexual intercourse of a menstruant as proposed by Wegner, which she supports.\(^{384}\) Secondly it conflicts the rabbinic regulations, which allow sexual intercourse only after she has undergone purification. According to Kraemer, Cohen’s suggestion was made in relation to a burial inscription from Rome, depicting a Jewish synagogue archon with his wife and three children two of who are said to be exactly nine months apart in age. Perhaps this assessment could be valid though it does not necessarily imply that that child was conceived before the prescribed postpartum purification was over. Sackey argues that the probability of a premature birth could be ruled out as a possible explanation for the closeness in age of the children. The gender of the children is not given but supposing the woman in question delivered a baby boy A, in January and observed the 40 days of liminality\(^{385}\), then


\(^{381}\) Charles Darwin, the evolutionist, believed that the menstrual cycle evolved among marine creatures who reproduced themselves parthenogenetically at the time that they dominated the earth. See M.B.M. Sjoor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth*, New York: Harper & Row, 1975, 2.


\(^{385}\) See discussion on rites of passage below.
conceived instantly after purification and gave birth prematurely at seven months to child B, the age gap between child A and child B will be exactly nine months.\textsuperscript{386}

Delaney et al. once again cite the book of the Prophet Mica 4: 10, which they claim, refers more directly to menstrual pain. ‘Be in pain, to labor to bring forth…’ Again in this verse the act of labor is being equated with menstruation. Here the pertinent question is whether the first woman, Eve, did menstruate. And if yes, when did she begin the process? From the assumptions made by Delaney et al. menstruation must have began after the fall of Eve and Adam. Consider the belief that the Garden of Eden must have been a sacred place, being as it was, full of Yahweh’s presence and also the idea that menstruation and contact with divine are incompatible. This means it would have been unlikely for Eve to be menstruating while she was resident in the garden.\textsuperscript{387}

On the other hand if Eve had been menstruating in the paradise era, she would not have been subjected to impurity since she had then not sinned, provided the assumption of menstruation as consequent of sin is accepted. Nevertheless, there is no evidence about that and a reconstruction of the early life of the first parents that would have helped answer so many open-ended questions, is also not available to us. It is therefore impossible to find out how gender was differentiated in the Garden of Eden, whether it was based on physiological or biological differences or cultic (if any) responsibilities.\textsuperscript{388}

In advancement of looking for explanations on the origins of menstruation, Dean-Jones would be relevant. Dean-Jones gives her attention to the concern of two prominent Greeks, Hippocratic and Aristotle to explain the origin of menstrual blood, which they attribute to the very nature of a woman’s flesh. According to these Greeks, a woman’s flesh becomes loose and spongy at puberty causing her body to soak excess blood from her stomach. Using an analogical approach they liken a female’s body to a piece of wool and a male’s body to a piece of cloth and argued that if wool and cloth of equal weight are stretched above water and left for two days and nights, the wool will become heavier than the cloth. Hippocratic and Aristotle assumed that this is possible because the wool is more porous and can attract more moisture. According to Dean-Jones, these explanations

\textsuperscript{386} B.M. Sackey, ‘The Position of the Menstruant’, 36.
\textsuperscript{387} B.M. Sackey, ‘The Position of the Menstruant’, 36.
\textsuperscript{388} B.M. Sackey, ‘The Position of the Menstruant’, 36.
were constructed as evidence to support Greeks cultural premise that ‘the female body was fundamentally inferior to that of the male.’

Baskin argues that the rabbis consider menstruation as a divine and eternal punishment. She sees this in the three rabbinic religious precepts for women namely, lighting the Sabbath lamp, offering the Sabbath loaf (challa), and observing the laws of niddah, laws pertaining to the menstruating woman. The responsibility concerning the lighting of the Sabbath lamp, according to Baskin, was given to the woman because Adam was the light of the world and Eve was the cause of his death. The same is true for the second precept, which relates to the offering of the Challa: Adam was the pure Challa and Eve was the cause of his death. Finally women have to observe the taboos on menstruation because the first man was blood and life of the world and Eve caused his death. Sackey sees these precepts as great responsibilities that cannot just be entrusted to a presumed evil being (woman) who is the cause of the iniquities and misfortunes of humankind and they have absolutely no relevance with the phenomenon of menstruation. Wegner shares Sackey’s opinion concerning these three cultic practices that she argues has no relations to the chastisement of Eve nor was a corollary of menstruation. Wegner contends that these cultic practices have no scriptural warrant; they are primarily incumbent on men but they happen to be “the three rites most delegated to women”; the reason behind this relegation being the protection of the cultic dignity of men. However, Sackey is of the view that there are also egoistic undertones as well as rabbinic androcentrism behind these reasons. Wegner’s argument is very interesting, insightful and thus we quote:

*The separation of the dough... is delegated to wives because they normally bake bread... the lighting of the household lamp before the Sabbath begins to fall, falls to a wife whose husband, after ordering that the lamp be lit... has gone off to the synagogue for Sabbath inaugural prayers. When he returns, night will have fallen, and if the wife has carelessly forgotten the lamp, the inconvenience of sitting in*

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The above quotation according to Sackey, shows how women, inadvertently came to play the roles mentioned therein. Wegner’s exposition on the same subject differs considerably from Baskin’s quotation earlier on. This indicates how the same piece of textual material or practice can be interpreted from different perspectives. Wegner’s phrase: if the wife has carelessly forgotten’… signifies and underlines Jewish men’s low esteem of the capabilities of women. How could the woman be so careless as to forget such an important and inevitable tenet of the Sabbath? If indeed she does sometimes “carelessly” forget, then it could mean this duty was not a woman’s regular responsibility after all. In that sense Wegner could be right when she says that the wife supplements the duties of the husband during his absence. It is also interesting to note that all these seeming impressive duties are suspended during a woman’s menses. We can therefore contend that menstruation is the main determinant of a woman’s position in Jewish culture.

3.5 The Menstruant and the Public Domain.

Coming into contact of the menstruant with the sacred is another taboo on which there are varied and confusing interpretations. Wegner argues that one facet of women’s sexuality that bears on the exclusion of women from communal religious activity are the phenomenon of menstruation. She however maintains that the Mishnah does not forbid the menstruant from public domain including the synagogue, though she is barred from entering the temple precincts. Kraemer also makes it clear that there was no separate temples set aside for one gender or the other, though there was a women’s court in the temple at Jerusalem. Kraemer contends that:

392 J.R. Wegner Chattel or persons? 155.
393 S.J.D. Cohen, ‘Menstruant and the Sacred’, 284.
396 J.R. Wegner, Chattel or persons?, 62.
The temple layout consisted of progressively more restricted courtyards, culminating in the holy of holies, into which only the high priest could enter only in a state of purity... Gender segregation, together with other forms of Purity delineation, was nevertheless carried out in a single sacred precinct, whose organization mirrored that of ideal Israelite society. 397

Feminists will not accept the idea that this separation was ideal, but at the time in question, it must have been the most ideal arrangements. There is no evidence that women complained about these arrangements. 398 Cohen brings out best the ambivalences of this issue. He agrees with Kreamer on the structural division of the Temple but points out that the lawgivers themselves do not have a clear standpoint. He also thinks the rule that no impure person may enter the house of prayer and thereby render God’s sanctuary impure is a general prohibition directed specifically at menstruants; in fact they should not even enter a room filled with Hebrew books. Cohen, latter has no “inherent sanctity”; it is only the Temple that has such status, albeit the synagogue was developing a “surrogate temple” in the 6th and 7th centuries. 399

Wegner does not wholly agree on the pollution concept for the exclusion of women in public and insists that sexuality accounts for the deliberate exclusion of women from participation in those aspects of Israel culture that take place in public forum because:

If a woman’s sexuality can be misdirected through accidental failure of male-controlled private transactions, how much more dangerous must it be to let her mingle freely with men in the public domain. Far better to exclude her from communal enterprises than to run such risks! 400

The foregoing discussions are pointers leading to the protection of the sanctity of men. They are nothing more than the depiction of male love for power that tend to confirm the notion that these taboos are cultural constructions intended to restrict the behaviour of a

397 R.S. Kraemer, Her share of the Blessings, 100.
400 J.R. Wegner, Chattel or persons?, 18.
particular group of people, in this case women. Douglas attempting to conceptualize the significance of these restrictions argues that they are beliefs to reinforce social pressures, or to uphold certain moral values. Douglas thinks they are also used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order; for example, that the issue of sex is endangering can “express symmetry or hierarchy.” Buskins' argument that by viewing rabbinic Judaism as a cultural system one is bound to observe some orderings of patterns that are characteristic of societies throughout the world provides some insight into Douglas’ conceptualization. The distinction between public and private domains exists in all cultures and the fact that women give birth and spend most of their time in the domestic sphere has led to the dichotomy of placing the woman in the private and men in the public. In the Talmud’s ordering of life, the sexes are separated by custom, by legislation excluding women from most of society’s communal and power-conferring activities. Douglas however is of the opinion that the more women are isolated from the system, the less they feel a part of it. Baskin adds that the rabbis in recognition of the effects of these restrictions on women have tried to make it up by relaxing some of the divorce and married regulations in favor of women.

3.6 Menstruation as a Rite of Passage

The term rites of passage has been used to refer to rituals that accompany every change of state or social position or certain points in age in the life of an individual. These are marked by three phases: separation (preliminal), transitional and incorporation (postliminal). The separation phase comprises of symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual from an established set of cultural conditions. In the case of our Jewish menstruating women the Torah regards her as impure and must therefore be secluded. For her, this seclusion begins with the onset of her menstrual flow. There is uncertainty about the timing regarding the onset of the impurity though the dominant idea

403 The Talmud is a central text of mainstream Judaism, in the form of a record of Rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, philosophy, customs and history.
of menstrual impurity is claimed to begin at the moment a stain of blood is seen on certain parts of the woman’s body as well as clothing. From this time she is expected to withdraw herself from persons or objects, according to Jewish precepts, so as to avoid transmitting her impurity and jeopardize the cultic potency of those she comes in contact with. She should then count seven days during which she is impure and thereafter. After the cessation of bleeding and observance of seven “clean” days she must purify herself by immersion in water. The period between her seclusion to the time of her purification marks the second and longest and ambiguous stage in the rites of passage, which is the phase of liminality. Here the menstruant has no definite status; she is “betwixt and between.” This means that she has not yet taken up her position as wife, mother, in short her peculiar functions in the Jewish community, which she relinquished to take on the status as menstruant. This phase is marked by prohibitions especially ‘an interdiction is laid on sexual relations during the limital period.’ She is exempted from breaking the challa and lighting the Sabbath lamp as well as other household chores. Apart from these she is expected to observe other taboos e.g. to avoid cutting her finger nails to prevent her husband and children from getting into contact with clippings, which can bring them misfortune. This taboo shows altruistic tendencies and does not benefit the woman herself but others. The prohibition on sexual relation sounds more reasonable, and is mutually beneficial, because during the process of menstruation many women undergo severe pains and other unpleasant experiences for which they need rest. The limital period is also important according to Turner; it is in liminality that communitas emerge. Contamunas is a spontaneous and self-generating relationship between persons that brings with it a leveling and stripping of structural status. This can be illustrated, in the case of our Jewish menstruant, by the taboo concerning good neighborliness between the wife of a “pious” scholar (haber) and the wife of an

406 See J.R. Wegner, *Chattel or persons?* 44-49 for the controversy on this issue.
409 From personal experience in a girls’ boarding school many girls undergo varied discomfort during their monthly period such as excruciating cramps, nausea, diarrhea, and many even lead to temporary loss of consciousness. See also B.M. Sackey, ‘Aspects of Continuity in the Religious Roles of Women in Spiritual Churches of Ghana’, *Research Review*, 52/1(1989), 18-33.
“impious” or common man (*am ha’aretz*). Relations between these two women are prohibited under normal circumstances but permitted only during the menses of the former. The explanation is that since the menstruant is in a state and must eventually undergo purification, an association with the wife of a common man at this time can have no negative repercussions. Through menstruation, therefore, the Jewish woman is able to erase cultural barriers and engage with other women. This period of liminality that seems to establish a kind of “egalitarianism” can perhaps explain the shifting status of the woman from ‘object’ to ‘person’. Thus the concept of ‘ownership’-i.e. woman as the possession of her husband –is temporarily lifted during her menses.

The third phase of the rites of passage, incorporation or postliminal, symbolizes a renewal, regeneration and redefining of the status of the transitional candidate. In the case of the Jewish menstruant this phase is effected through the ritual of immersion in water. It is only after the consummation of this ritual that she can resume normal duties accorded her within the Jewish cultural system. This resumption of normal life indicates incorporation and finalizes the rites of passage relating to the menstruating woman.

Cohen however, seems to emphasize that the last phase of the rites is consummated by sexual relations when he writes of the dangers of “that limited moment when the menstruant has just purified herself and is returning home to have sex with her husband.” The question is: Why is the stress not related to the resumptions of duties like Sabbath obligations, the recommencement of mothering, cooking etc, but on sex? Does the accent on the importance of sexual intercourse as a symbol of her non-menstruant status suggest the eagerness of the male to repossess and control the sexuality of the female? In this sense, Wegner’s thesis that a woman is a man’s property, which is echoed through her book, seems to be credible. On the other hand this reunion may be interpreted as strengthening of bonds between man and woman.

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413 S.J.D. Cohen, ‘Menstruant and the Sacred’, 281.
3.7 Changes in the Laws of Niddah

Rabbinic Judaism considers women to be different from men in a number of significant and innumerable ways, some of which will always defy change within the system.\textsuperscript{416} Judaism as a male centered system is a reality that is still manifested in the purity of the liturgy of tradition. We agree with Baskin that Judaism is built upon androcentrism, but Judaism, like any cultural system-despite its claim to divine foundational basis-is subject to change at different points in time.\textsuperscript{417} It is possible that, the regulations governing impurity and purification of the menstruant were, and for many Jews still is an essential part of Jewish piety.\textsuperscript{418} Yet it does not necessarily mean that the practice of menstrual purification has the same rigidity as in the ancient times.\textsuperscript{419} Greenberg argues that relatively few Jews of the Orthodox community observe the laws of \textit{niddah}. Modern women have also rejected these observances, one reason being that it is extremely difficult commandment to observe.\textsuperscript{420} Both Cohen\textsuperscript{421} and Greenberg\textsuperscript{422} contend that with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C. E. the purity system lost its focal point. However, Greenberg further argues that the abrogation of the purity system did not affect menstruation; the only person still subject to purification rites was the menstruant woman, not for Temple access but because of the proscription against a sexual relationship under particular circumstances. Thus purification rites do not apply to menstrual flow in the unmarried state or after divorce or widowhood. We can infer from this that from this statement there has been some kind of changes at least in the category of women who are exempt from purification rites. Even though Greenberg gives no concrete reasons for the shift, increasing social and cultural changes cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless the unchanging aspect of these rites is that the whole area of \textit{niddah} never completely loses its association with impurity and defilement. Indeed the rabbis

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{417} B.M. Sackey, ‘The Position of the Menstruant’, 43.
\textsuperscript{418} S.J.D. Cohen, ‘Menstruant and the Sacred’, 273.
\textsuperscript{419} B.M. Sackey, ‘The Position of the Menstruant’, 43-44.
\textsuperscript{421} S.J.D. Cohen, ‘Menstruant and the Sacred’, 282.
\textsuperscript{422} G. Greenberg, ‘Female Sexuality’, 26-27.
\end{footnotesize}
strengthen the “fence” around the original prohibition, sometimes building on one base, pollution, sometimes on the other, forbidden relations. This shows the uncertainty of the rabbis to relax the rules of impurity. It looks as if the rabbis are fighting with an ideology they constructed, an ideology that they regard as timeless and unchanging. Their apparent intransigence to change is perhaps based on the fear that drastic change, especially to suit the rapid feminist hue and cry might topple the very androcentric gender hierarchy they have faithfully constructed and cherished over the years.  

Greenberg observed that:

\[ \text{In the early stages of Jewish feminism in the sixties and seventies, the laws of niddah came under attack. However during the last decade its observance has been ‘enjoying’ a revival among the young women, many of whom undertake it as an expression of both their Jewishness and femaleness. This interesting development really indicates not only a religio-cultural revivalism but also a politicisation of a new kind of Jewish feminism that is not necessarily against male dominance. Rising up against male domination will signify a destruction of Jewish cultural integration, which is made centred, and may contradict the very idea of Jewishness these modern women want to perpetuate.} \]

Menstruation as we have shown in this section has positive elements and Greenberg’s arguments have supported and elaborated the claim. In sum, menstruation observed through the laws of niddah fosters good neighbourly relationships, it relieves the woman of certain duties and enhances her identity and personhood; it can be used to control and manipulate situations as the case of Rachel shows. By feigning menstruation a woman could control her fertility in ancient Judaism, since presumably there were no forms of contraceptives, and if there were, they would have been against the Genesis (1: 28) command on procreation. The main reason for the observance of niddah is to uphold the continuum of the covenant between God and the Israelites and it is through women that men can maintain this divine rapport. This is indeed the greatest contribution women can

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425 Genesis 31: 35.
render to both divinity and their communities. In this sense the niddah laws should not be seen as inferiority but elevation of women, without which the purity of the covenant with God cannot be achieved.\textsuperscript{426}

3.8 Purity and Impurity in the New Testament

In conformity to Jewish religion and culture, Jesus would be expected to be a defensive person and avoid all contact with uncleanness. He would be expected to respect the lines and boundaries of Jewish observance, which are indicated in the maps of places, persons, things, and times as we observed earlier in this chapter. “Holiness,” defined as separateness from all things unclean, defective, or marginal, is indicated in behaviour which keeps one separate from uncleanness and which maintains the classification system. Yet in Mark’s gospel, we find a description of Jesus who seems to trample on all the lines and boundaries of the culture of his day. Neyrey has said that it would be erroneous to assert that Mark portrays Jesus as abrogating the general purity system or that Mark was himself unconcerned with purity issues. The situation is far more complicated than that.\textsuperscript{427} It is incumbent on us to make a careful presentation of all Mark’s texts which deal with purity concerns and then to see what Mark’s Jesus says about purity as a structuring value in Christian life.

3.8.1 Mark 1: 21-28

During Jesus’ first miracle in Mark 1: 21-2, Jesus confronted a demon which possessed a man in the local synagogue. He acknowledged Jesus as his mortal enemy: ‘Have you come to destroy us?’ and he attested to Jesus’ purity: ‘I know who you are, the Holy One of God.’\textsuperscript{428} Jesus’ exorcism and the special title given him, ‘the Holy One of God,’ are important aspects of Mark’s Christology. At a minimum, Jesus is linked with other holy figures close to God, such as the priest Aaron\textsuperscript{429} and the prophet Elisha.\textsuperscript{430} According to

\textsuperscript{426} B.M. Sackey, ‘The Position of the Menstruant’, 45.
\textsuperscript{428} Mark 1: 24.
\textsuperscript{429} Psalm 106: 16.
\textsuperscript{430} 2 Kings 4: 9.
Neyrey, the exorcism and the title of Jesus functionally, serve several purposes: 1) they associate Jesus with the holy God, not Satan; 2) they underscore Jesus’ authorization by God; 3) they emphasize that Jesus was himself uniquely Holy and pure; and 4) they indicate that Jesus engages in mortal conflict with ‘unclean spirits’. The exorcism is Jesus’ first public action, and so can be considered programmatic for Mark’s presentation of him. In the exorcism, Mark establishes a fundamental set of contrasts which suggest Jesus’ purity rating:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JESUS</th>
<th>THE DEMON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. God’s Servant</td>
<td>1. Servant of Satan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Agent of God’s kingdom</td>
<td>2. Agent of Satan’s kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jesus: holy and pure</td>
<td>3. The Demon: unclean</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What does it mean to emphasize Jesus’ purity? Why is it important that this be done in Jesus’ first public act? From the first half of this study we know that purity is the premier structuring value of Jewish religion and culture: ‘Consecrate yourself and be holy because I am holy.’ If this is the structuring value, Jesus is proclaimed from the very beginning of his career as fully within the religious matrices of the Jewish system. It is not accidental that this narrative situates Jesus in the right place (synagogue), at the right time (on the Sabbath), and with the right people (observant Jews). Jesus then, is holy, close to God, and enemy of uncleanness. He was no maverick, no am haaretz, and no heterodox figure.

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432 Leviticus 11: 44.
3.8.2 Mark 1: 1-13

According to Neyrey,\(^{433}\) if purity is the structuring value of Jewish social experience, it is extremely important for Mark to announce Jesus’ purity rating from the beginning of his gospel. Mark’s prologue intentionally contains multiple attestations of Jesus’ purity from witnesses whose testimony must be taken serious.

1. John the Baptist testifies to Jesus’ purity. John, although a holy prophet himself, is not worthy to touch Jesus’ feet, implying that Jesus has a special status as a holy figure.\(^{434}\) John testifies that Jesus will baptize (make pure) with a baptism of the Holy Spirit, thus making Jesus’ purificatory actions better than John’s own water washings.\(^{435}\) Jesus, then, is ranked holier than the holy prophet John.

2. The Holiest of Beings, God, testifies to Jesus’ purity. Jesus receives a theophany in the Jordan, as the Holy God draws near to Jesus and reveals himself to him.\(^{436}\) This same God who is pleased to have Jesus in his holy presence, delights in him and calls him: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’\(^ {437}\) Jesus is thoroughly known by the all-seeing God and God sees no uncleanness in him. And God sends upon Jesus Holiness par excellence, the Holy Spirit.\(^ {438}\) Jesus, then, is an intimate of God, fully within God’s circle, even if this centre is not in the Temple.

3. Satan also appears\(^ {439}\) and indirectly testifies to Jesus’ radical holiness. Satan, enemy of God and uncleanness itself, attacks Jesus and tries to make him unclean; he fails. ‘Angels attended to him,’\(^ {440}\) this show that Jesus did not lose God’s holiness or favour through Satan’s temptation.

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\(^{434}\) Mark 1: 7.
\(^{435}\) Mark 1: 8.
\(^{436}\) Mark 1: 9-10.
\(^{437}\) Mark 1: 11.
\(^{438}\) Mark 1: 10.
\(^{439}\) Mark 1: 12-13.
\(^{440}\) Mark 1: 13.
Jesus, therefore, is shown in the company of the Holy God and holy angels as a holy prophet. Mark is not unconcerned with Jesus’ purity rating, but affirms at the very beginning of the gospel that Jesus is radically pure and close to God. Jesus, first words, ‘the Kingdom of God is near; repent…’\footnote{Mark 1: 15b} are calls to purity; for he demands that sinners turn from the realm of sin and seek the circle of God’s favour and holiness. But this is all happening in Galilee, far from the Temple and its system.

3.8.3 Conflict over Jesus’ Purity

As we have noted above, pure and holy Jews would maintain a defensive posture regarding their purity. Concern for purity translated into distancing oneself from all that is unclean, viz., and maintenance of proper boundaries and lines. In Mark’s gospel, people with ostensibly excellent purity ratings are Jesus’ most dogged critics. Mark may maintain that Jesus is God’s “Holy One,” but not so Jesus’ critics who observe him crossing lines he ought not to cross and allowing people to cross into space who ought to be kept at a distance. What would purity-minded people object to about Jesus in Mark’s gospel? Just about everything Jesus did! Jesus did not observe any maps so important to the Judaism of his day.

As regards the map of people to be avoided and shunned,\footnote{J.H. Neyrey, ‘The Idea of Purity’, 12.}  

1. Jesus came in contact with unclean people: he voluntarily touched a leper\footnote{Mark 1: 41.}; he took a corpse by the hand.\footnote{Mark 5: 41.}

2. A menstruating woman, a traditionally unclean person, touched him.\footnote{Mark 5: 24-28.}

3. Jesus called a public sinner to be an intimate: to Levi, sitting in his tax booth, he said, ‘Follow me’!\footnote{Mark 2: 13- 14.}
4. Jesus travelled extensively in Gentile territory, thus crossing boundaries he ought not to cross and exposing himself to pollution on every side. He regularly crossed the Sea of Galilee into non-kosher territory; he toured the ‘region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis.’

5. While on this journey, Jesus had commerce with unclean people such as the Syrophoenician woman.

6. Jesus regularly was in contact with the possessed, the blind, the lame, and the deaf—all figures that are unclean in some way.

As regards the map of the body:

Jesus seems not to have guarded his bodily orifices or their emissions in ways that befit purity-minded people.

7. He broke one of the strictest purity laws in Israel as he disregarded all Dietary restrictions. Thus ‘Jesus declared all foods clean.’

8. Contrary to all purity rules, Jesus shared meals with unclean sinners: ‘He sat at table in Levi’s house and many tax collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus.’

9. Jesus’ disciples also did not have regard for the surface of the body, they did not wash their hands before eating, showing unconcern for what passed through their mouths: ‘The Pharisees... saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were, unclean.’

10. In what must have been shocking to Mark’s ancient audience, Jesus applied his own spittle to the eyes of a blind man and to the tongue.

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447 Mark 4: 35-42.
448 Mark 7: 31.
449 Mark 7: 24-30.
452 Mark 7: 19.
453 Mark 2: 15.
454 Mark 7: 2.
455 Mark 8: 23.
of a dump person\textsuperscript{456} showing disregard for the bodily orifices and bodily emissions.

11. In the mass feedings,\textsuperscript{457} Jesus apparently showed no concern for the purity of the folk with whom he ate or for any of the rituals to be practiced prior to eating. Common food was shared with common folk on common ground.

Also Jesus did not observe the maps of time that structured Jewish life.

12. His disciples plucked grain on the Sabbath, ‘doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.’\textsuperscript{458} Jesus himself healed on the Sabbath.\textsuperscript{459}

In addition, Jesus did not respect the maps of places, which classified Jewish space.

13. Jesus thoroughly disrupted the temple system. He halted worshippers from their holy rites by chasing away those who facilitated the payment of temple tithes and the offering of gifts.\textsuperscript{460} It is even said that he ‘would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts’\textsuperscript{461} which may refer to Jesus’ supposed interruption of the carrying of sacrificial vessels and offerings from the people’s court into the alter area.

14. Jesus’ negative attitude to temple space is clarified when it is linked with a later statement that love of God and neighbour is ‘worth more than all whole burnt offerings.’\textsuperscript{462}

15. Jesus’ enemies, at least, perceived him as speaking against the holy place,\textsuperscript{463} a perception with which Mark apparently agreed.\textsuperscript{464} Since

\textsuperscript{456} Mark 7: 33.
\textsuperscript{457} See mark 6: 37-44, and 8: 1-10.
\textsuperscript{458} Mark 2:24.
\textsuperscript{459} Mark 3: 1-6.
\textsuperscript{460} Mark 11: 15.
\textsuperscript{461} Mark 11: 16.
\textsuperscript{462} Mark 12: 33.
\textsuperscript{463} Mark 14: 58; 15: 29.
\textsuperscript{464} See Mark 13: 2.
the temple is the chief expression of the purity system of the first-century Judaism, Jesus’ “pollution” of the temple⁴⁶⁵ and his prediction of its destruction⁴⁶⁶ should surface as the major charges against him by the temple elite in Jerusalem.⁴⁶⁷ From their perspective, in showing such contempt for its chief symbol, Jesus was rejecting the whole system.⁴⁶⁸

Neyrey points out that in Galilee, moreover, Jesus’ critics noted how often he transgressed all the purity maps of his culture regarding persons, things, places, and times. They saw how often he had commerce with unclean spirits and unclean persons. Thus they concluded that Jesus could not be “the holy one of God.” Since he showed such flagrant disregard for purity rules, he did not merit a high purity rating. On the contrary, he must be of Satan camp. Critics called Jesus’ fundamental authority as prophet and leader of God’s covenant people into question “who came down from Jerusalem and said, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebub! and by the prince of demons he is driving out demons.’”⁴⁶⁹ The text also indicates that Jesus’ own family thought, ‘He is out of him mind,’⁴⁷⁰ that is, out of line and dangerous. The initial claims of Mark⁴⁷¹ are thus disputed by Jesus’ very behaviour.⁴⁷²

3.9  Mark 3: 23-27

In response to the attack on Jesus’ purity rating in Mark 3: 23-27, Mark summarizes the significance of Jesus’ exorcisms in particular to prove that Jesus is indeed pure, ‘the Holy One of God.’ First, Jesus makes an incontrovertible statement: ‘how can Satan drive out Satan?’⁴⁷³ Where war exists, the warring parties are not allies, but mortal enemies. This

⁴⁶⁵ Mark 11: 15- 19.
⁴⁶⁷ Mark 14: 58; 15: 29.
⁴⁶⁹ Mark 3: 22.
⁴⁷⁰ Mark 3: 22.
⁴⁷³ Mark 3: 23.
self-evident statement, then, is supported by three parallel analogies which draw out the conclusion of Mark 3: 23. If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand, his end has come.474

The exorcisms, then, prove that Jesus is the enemy of Satan, not his servant or ally. And so the testimony of the demon was correct: ‘Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are -the Holy One of God!’475

Mark climaxes the apology in Mark 3: 27 with a parabolic statement about how it takes a “stronger one” to bind up a “strong” man to despoil his possessions. When the hearer of Mark 3: 27 gets the insight that Jesus is the “stronger one” and that Satan is only the “strong man,” then one remembers that John the Baptist spoke earlier of Jesus as the “Stronger One.”476 The hearer then realizes that Jesus, the Stronger One, has in fact “bound the strong man” in his victory over Satan in the temptations in the desert.477 With Satan thus bound, Jesus can then “plunder his house” through successive exorcisms.478 Jesus’ purity rating is defended:

1. He is God’s ally and Satan’s mortal enemy.
2. He belongs to God’s kingdom and liberates those imprisoned in Satan’s realm.
3. He has total power over Satan; he is not subject to him in any way.

And so Jesus is completely in God’s camp, fully within the circle of God’s associates, and therefore holy.479

Against the claims that Jesus is unclean and so cannot function as God’s agent, Mark mounts a spirited defense of Jesus’ purity rating by showing that the very evidence against Jesus is precisely the positive proof that Jesus must be God’s “holy One” and not Satan’s servant.

475 Mark 1: 24.
476 Mark 1: 7.
477 Mark 1: 12-13.
478 Mark 1:21-28, 34, 39; 3: 11-12, 15.
It is important to note that while the normal term for satanic powers, which possess humans, is “demons”, Mark insists on calling them “unclean spirits.”480 Thus Mark sharpens the distinction between Jesus, the Holy One of God who had the Holy Spirit and Satan and demons that are ‘unclean spirits.’ The distinction is based on purity concerns.481

3.10 Jesus: Agent of Purity and Cleanness

Jesus is further vindicated as a holy figure when Mark shows that in all of his contacts with unclean people, Jesus does not incur pollution but imparts cleanness or wholeness to them instead. We are to bear in mind that holiness is replicated in bodily wholeness.482

1. In touching the leper, Jesus is not made unclean; rather he proclaims cleanness; ‘Be clean! Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.’483

2. In dealing with the paralysis, Jesus cleansed the man of his sins as well as his paralysis.485 Jesus made him both whole and holy.

3. In calling Levi as a disciple and eating with sinners, Jesus acts precisely as one who restores wholeness and cleanness to god’s people, viz. “a physician”: ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’486

4. In transgressing Sabbath laws, he provided food for the hungry and wholeness for a man with withered limb.488

5. His exorcisms liberate people bound in slavery to Satan. For example, one naked, violent, and solitary possessed man lived in a most unclean place, a

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483 Mark 1: 41.
484 Mark 2: 5.
485 Mark 2: 11.
486 Mark 2: 17.
488 Mark 3: 1-6.
graveyard. Jesus’ exorcism rehabilitated him so that, when exorcised, he found ‘clothed, in his right mind’ and seated comfortably in a social group once more.

6. The menstruating woman who touched Jesus is healed of her haemorrhage.

7. The corpse, which Jesus touched, is made alive again.

8. The blind man and the dumb man upon whom Jesus put his spittle are restored to sight and speech respectively.

Mark’s response to the charges that Jesus violated all of the maps of purity is very complex. First, on the level of the narrative, Jesus extends bodily wholeness, forgiveness of sins, and even life by his contact with the unclean, sinners, and the dead. He is a giver of wholeness, and holiness, but is never rendered unholy himself. Second, a warrant is given in Mark for this activity. Full treatment of this would engage us in a discussion of ‘limit breakers,’ people who are authorized to break taboos and cross-prohibited boundaries. In his own way, Mark indicates that Jesus was so authorized as a ‘limit breaker.’

1. God gave Jesus the Holy Spirit, which led him into the desert to be tempted by Satan. Jesus’ subsequent conflict with unclean spirits is authorized here.

2. Jesus argued that he ‘has authority on earth to forgive sins’, which legitimates his dealings with sinners. He is God’s ‘physician’ to them.

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489 Mark 5:5.
490 Mark 5: 15.
491 Mark 5: 28-29.
492 Mark 5 41-42.
493 Mark 8: 25; Mark 7: 35.
496 Mark 1: 10.
497 Mark 1: 12-13.
498 Mark 1: 22, 27.
499 Mark 2: 10.
3. Jesus has authority over the Sabbath, because ‘the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’

Third, according to Mark, others perceived Jesus as totally rejecting the idea of purity by his repeated and widespread violations of the maps of purity. In Mark 7, however, the evangelist indicates that, while Jesus does not wash before eating, or keep dietary laws, he has a purity system, which is expressed in rules of purity that differ from those of the Pharisees.

Whereas the Pharisees’ concern is with externals and surfaces (washing of hands, pots, cups, and vessels), Jesus’ concern is with the interior and the heart: There is nothing which by going into a man can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him.

The Pharisees guarded the external fences, which had been made around the Torah, that is, “the tradition of the elders,” which extended the concern of purity to outer or external things. In Mark, Jesus was concerned with the core or heart of the Law, the Ten Commandments. Jesus moreover, declares that their purity system is wrong and his is right:

> These people (the Pharisees, in particular) honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.

According to Jesus, purity does not reside on the lips or hands but in the heart; purity is measured by the keeping of the core law of God, not the traditional “fences” of men. Alternately, pollution comes not by violation of washing of dietary rules, which deal

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500 Mark 2: 1-17.
501 Mark 2: 17.
502 Mark 2: 8.
503 Mark 7: 2.
504 Mark 7: 19.
505 Mark 7: 2-4.
506 Mark 7: 15.
507 See Mark 7: 10; 10: 19
508 Mark 7: 6-7.
509 Mark 7: 18- 19.
only with surfaces, but with sin and vice which come from within, from the heart.\footnote{Mark 7: 21-22.} ‘All these evil things come from within and they defile a man.’\footnote{Mark 7: 23.}

According to Mark, Jesus is not abrogating the idea of purity when he violates the rules of purity. On the contrary, Jesus is reforming the rules of purity current in his day, offering his interpretation of what God wants and what makes one whole, clean, and holy.\footnote{J.H. Neyrey, ‘The Idea of Purity’, 16.}

### 3.11 God’s Verdict on Jesus’ Purity

Mark’s basic concern to affirm the purity of Jesus affects other aspects of his presentation of Jesus. For a Jew of Jesus’ time, purity would be intimately bound up with obedience. Since the laws of Israel comprehensively order one’s life according to that particular system, obedience to them would indicate one’s standing before God, one’s holiness. Such is the import of Paul’s boast: ‘As in regard to the law, a Pharisee…as to legalistic righteousness faultless.’\footnote{Phil.3 :5-6.} Although Jesus is portrayed as not obeying some of the traditional purity laws, he is presented, as we shall see, as a figure that is fundamentally obedient to God.\footnote{J.H. Neyrey, ‘The Idea of Purity’, 16.}

Since God is ultimately the final reference point and arbiter of purity, it matters greatly how God evaluates Jesus. If, as Mark states, Jesus is fundamentally obedient to God, this holiness should be expressed by God’s judgment about Jesus.

1. In the baptismal theophany,\footnote{Mark 1: 1-11.} God declared Jesus uniquely holy and pure. God, moreover, gave Jesus his own purity, the Holy Spirit.

2. In the transfiguration theophany,\footnote{Mark 9: 2-8.} not only do the holiest figures of Israel’s past, Moses and Elijah, appear to Jesus and share his company, but God once
more affirms Jesus’ holiness: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’  

Far from separating Himself from what is unclean, God repeatedly draws near to Jesus.

3. Jesus figures as the Beloved Son in the parable of the vineyard, the Son whom the owner of the Vineyard sent, thus signalling once more Jesus’ intimacy with the holy God.

4. Jesus is the person whom God will bring into God’s presence: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand.’ For Jesus is indeed the person whom God will make holy and make him alive when he is ‘seated at the right hand of the Mighty One.’

5. There God will make the holy angels his servants. Through Jesus’ resurrection and enthronement, then, God makes clear his verdict of Jesus’ purity rating, viz., that Jesus was and is “the Holy One of God.”

Death is the ultimate sign of the power of sin and Satan. It means irrevocable uncleanness. But death does not affect Jesus. Jesus undeniably dies, not because he sinned or because Satan proved to have power over him, but because of his holiness, i.e. his obedience to God. When Mark says, ‘The Son of Man must suffer...and that he must be killed,’ he is saying that Jesus is called in obedience, hence in holiness, to undergo death’s uncleanness. And Jesus is obedient, as the prayer in the Garden shows: ‘Not what I will, but what you will.’ Knowing God’s plan through the Scriptures, Jesus obediently submits: ‘The Son of Man will go just as it is written.’ ...But let the Scriptures be fulfilled. Jesus’ death is not polluting for it comes from obedience to

517 Mark 9: 7.
519 Mark 12: 36.
520 Mark 14: 62.
521 Mark 8: 38; 13: 27.
523 Mark 8: 31.
524 Mark 14: 36.
525 Mark 14: 21.
526 Mark 14:49.
God, not from the power of sin. By raising Jesus from the dead, God vindicates him, testifying that he is indeed ‘Son of God’, and proving that he fully deserved his high purity rating. Jesus then enters the very circle of God’s presence and sits on God’s throne, a thing unthinkable for a corpse.

The crucified Jesus was not unclean (despite Deuteronomy 21: 23. Death did not pollute him because God rescued him from death and brought him into God’s own presence. Jesus, therefore, can speak of death to his followers as non-polluting. He can tell them to ‘take up his cross and follow me’ and whoever ‘loses his life for me and for the gospel saves it.’ Far from Jesus’ death being pollution or his crucified body being impure, it is a source of purity. The Son of Man ‘gives his life as ransom for many.’ His blood is “covenant blood” which binds God and the covenant people; it does not pollute them and separate them from God. His blood is atonement blood, which is ‘poured out for many’; it takes away uncleanness. The final irony is that death, the ultimate pollution, serves as the very source of purity for Jesus’ followers.

The gospel claims, moreover, that with Jesus as the cornerstone, a new and holy temple will be built where members of the true covenant can come into contact with the holy God. Not like the old, material temple, made by human hands! Not like the old temple with its inadequate cultic sacrifices! The new temple will be made by God, ‘a temple not made by human hands.’ It will be a different kind of temple entirely, for it will be Jesus’ risen body. And so being in contact with Jesus only can holiness and purity be had. As the Jews measured holiness in terms of proximity to the temple, so Christians now measure it in terms of proximity to Jesus. For it is in Jesus that one finds genuine covenant and atonement sacrifices which bind to God and makes pure. To be in

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527 See Mark 15: 39.
528 See Galatians 3: 13.
529 Mark 8: 34.
530 Mark 8: 35.
531 Mark 10: 45.
532 Mark 14: 24.
533 Mark 11: 16; 12: 33.
534 Mark 14: 58.
535 Jesus as the new temple becomes a common theme in the New Testament, explaining how Christians are holy in proportion to their closeness to Jesus, as the Jews estimated holiness by proximity to Jerusalem’s temple; for examples of this, see 1 Corinthians 3: 18; Ephesians 2: 19-22; 1 Peter 2: 4-9.
536 Mark 14: 24.
contact with Jesus is to be in contact with the Holy God of Israel. Yet this new holy space is not fixed on a mountain in Jerusalem, but is a fluid space as yet without a map.\textsuperscript{537}

3.12 The New Purity System of Jesus

The idea of purity is an important anthropological concept for understanding Mark’s gospel. Thus the understanding of Mark’s gospel becomes very important in our study, which is concerned with purity and impurity. The idea of purity facilitates a sympathetic appreciation of the criticism of Jesus by the Pharisees and other purity conscious Jews. According to the cultural and religious norms of the times, Jesus was crossing forbidden boundaries and coming into contact with unclean people. Although Jesus disregarded the maps of Judaism, Mark does not state that Jesus abrogated the idea of purity as the structuring value of his world. On the contrary, Mark portrays him as revising the maps according to a new principle. We now review the ways in which Jesus reforms the system of purity according to new rules. This will in turn assist us in understanding the purpose and strategy of the new purity rules according to Mark.\textsuperscript{538}

3.12.1 Jesus’ Reform of the Purity Rules

As we saw earlier, Jesus offered a reform of purity rules of his culture according to Mark 7. While criticizing existing maps of purity, Jesus in Mark’s gospel offered other maps and rules.\textsuperscript{539} From the gospel Neyrey summarizes the disagreements between the Pharisees and Jesus over the classification, definitions and evaluations that make up the purity system of Israel\textsuperscript{540}:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pharisees et al.</th>
<th>Jesus and His Followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Purity rules are extended to 613 Laws, the tradition of “fence” around</td>
<td>1. Purity rules are concentrated in the core laws, the Ten</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{539}J.H. Neyrey, ‘Symbolism in Mark Seven’, A paper presented at the SBL convention in 1984 for the complete argument on the topic.  
The Law.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commandments.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Purity concerns focus on the washing Of hands, cups, pots, vessels-external and Surface areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Purity concerns are focused on the heart-interior &amp; core areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Purity rules prevent uncleanness from Entering From coming out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Purity rules guard against uncleanness, which is within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Purity resides in specific external actions Relating to hands and mouths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Purity rules in a persons interior, in faith &amp; right Confession of Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Purity rules are particularistic, separating Israel from its unclean neighbour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Purity rules are inclusive’ allowing Gentiles and the un-Clean to enter God’s kingdom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chart shows how completely Jesus and the Pharisees differ, not over whether there should be purity rules and purity systems, but on what the rules and what areas of life are affected.

Douglas makes further suggestions on how to assess the differences between Jesus and the mainstream system, which structured Jewish life in the first century through the plotting out of two variables for locating and explaining diverse groups. Douglas calls these two variables group and grid. Group refers to the degree of societal pressure exerted upon individuals or subgroups to conform to the purity system, its symbols and rules. This pressure to conform may be strong (as was the case with first-century Judaism) or weak (as in contemporary Western societies). Sadducees, Pharisees, even Jesus and his followers experienced strong pressure to accept and conform to the central values of Judaism as outlined in Genesis 1-3 and replicated in the Temple.

541 M. Douglas, Natural Symbols, 77-92.
The second variable Douglas talks about, grid refers to the degree of assent that people give to the symbol system, which is enjoined on them, its classifications, definitions and evaluations. People may experience a fit between their personal experience and the stated aims and values of the system, which is called high grid. Or they may feel a disparity between the aims of the system and their experience and the stated aims of the system and their experience, and give less important approval to it, which is low grid. The Sadducees, as custodians and promoters of the mainstream Jewish purity system, experienced a strong fit between the system’s aims and their life: They are described as high grid. In contrast, other Jews seem not to have accepted so fully the expression of Israel’s religion as handed down by the priestly Sadducees. The Pharisees, for example, disputed many aspects of the system, especially the claim that purity is the concern of priests only; and so, they tried to extend the system to non-priests as well, with themselves as its definers and spokesmen. The Pharisees, represent, therefore a lower grid in the conflict with the system as against the Sadducees. Nevertheless Mark depicts Jesus as a reforming figure who saw the system in need of considerable repairs, as he contests many of the basic classifications, definitions and evaluations of the system. Because Jesus’ extent of disagreement from the main aspects of the system is greater than that of the Pharisees, his grid is equivalently lower.

Jesus, then, stands within the system of Israel’s faith (strong group). He confesses faith in Israel’s one, true God and accepts the Scriptures as God’s authoritative word. Nevertheless he does not seem to agree with the way the Pharisees, for example would describe God or with their reading of the Scripture (low grid).

The distinctions between mainstream Jewish system and Jesus can be sketched tersely. (1) The core value of the Jewish system is God’s “holiness”: ‘Consecrate yourself and be holy because I am holy.’ But Jesus points to God’s “mercy” as the core value: ‘The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious…’ (2) For the mainstream, God’s holiness is symbolized in God’s act of creation, especially as this is perceived as a fundamental act of ordering. For Jesus, however, God’s mercy is symbolized in God’s

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542 Mark 12: 29-33.
543 Leviticus 11: 44.
544 Exodus 34: 6-7.
free election and God’s unpredictable gift of covenant grace.  

(3) The *structural implications* of God’s holiness-as-ordering lead the Sadducees et al. to a strong purity system with a particularistic tendency, whereas God’s mercy-as-election leads to a weaker purity system with an inclusive tendency.  

(4) A defensive strategy flows from holiness-as–order, whereas a strategy of mission, hospitality and inclusiveness represent the appropriate strategy where mercy-as-election constitutes the core value.  

(5) The *Scriptural legitimating* for holiness-as-order is found primarily in the Pentateuch, whereas election and covenant (as in the case of Abraham) is found both in pre-Mosaic traditions as well as in prophetic criticisms of Israel’s cult.

**FIGURE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHARISEES</th>
<th>JESUS &amp; FOLLOWERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>core value</strong></td>
<td>God’s holiness (Lev 11:44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>symbolized in</strong></td>
<td>creation-as-ordering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>structural</strong></td>
<td>strong purity system, with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>implications</strong></td>
<td>particularistic tendency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>strategy</strong></td>
<td>defence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>legitimating in Scripture</strong></td>
<td>Pentateuch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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545 See Deuteronomy 7: 7-8; Exodus 33: 19.  
Jesus would seem to be trying to reform the Judaism of his time, suggesting as his controlling value, God’s free and unpredictable act of covenant election. He still worships Israel’s God and accepts God’s word in the Scriptures (strong group), but he strongly contests the classifications, definitions and evaluations of the mainstream articulation of the system (low grid). In this Jesus claims to have the true notion of God and the correct expression of that in the symbols of mercy, inclusiveness and election. To the Sadducees and Pharisees, Jesus appears as a non-conformist who is stepping outside the system entirely. But Jesus and his followers would claim to be reformers of the system. Sadducees and Pharisees would conclude that Jesus had no purity system, because he did not completely share theirs; but Jesus and his followers would emphatically claim to have a genuine system which is the reformed, authentic system truly given in the Scriptures. But the two conflicting views of Judaism will clash in terms of the degree of particularity or inclusiveness. According to Douglas’ model, these are differences of grid, not group.547

3.12.2 Jesus: Defender of the Idea of Purity

Jesus in Mark’s gospel criticizes Pharisaic purity rules-laws based on Israel’s Scriptures. But according to Mark, Jesus bases his own reform on those same Scriptures, but viewed from a different perspective. Nevertheless, Jesus’ reformed rules are grounded on God’s word (strong group).548 For example,

1. In justifying the breaking of the Sabbath for food-consumption purposes, Jesus appealed to the example of David in 1 Samuel 21: 7.

2. In criticizing Pharisaic divorce laws, Jesus appealed to God’s original law in Genesis 1-2, not to what Moses wrote. ‘Because your hearts were hard, Moses wrote you this law.’549

549 Mark 10: 5; see Deuteronomy 24: 1-4.
3. In reforming the temple system, Jesus appealed to traditional prophetic criticisms of Israel’s system in Isaiah 56: 7 and Jeremiah 7: 11.

4. In commenting on the Pharisee’s tradition of korban, he insisted on the primacy of one of the Ten Commandments, ‘Honour your father and mother’\(^{550}\) as well as Isaiah’s critical remarks.\(^{551}\)

According to Mark, moreover, Jesus knows the Law. In Mark 12: 29-31, he proclaims as the core of the Law both the Shema\(^{552}\) and love of neighbor.\(^{553}\) He enjoins the Ten Commandments on the man who asked what was necessary to ‘inherit eternal life’\(^{554}\)

Jesus, then, is neither ignorant of the Law nor disrespectful of it. He bases his reform of the purity rules precisely on the Scriptures, but on aspects of it different from those celebrated by the Pharisees.

Besides defending the essential Law of God as the substance of his reform of purity, Jesus is portrayed as setting down purity rules to cover many of the same items which were the object of Pharisaic purity rules: entrance requirement, sin, and judgment. Jesus demands “repentance” as entrance requirements to enter the kingdom of God, which is at hand.\(^{555}\) Acceptance of Jesus as God’s agent becomes a prime requirement.\(^{556}\) Obedience to the basic covenant law is the way to inherit eternal life.\(^{557}\) In short, acceptance of Jesus and his version of what God requires is the basic boundary between insiders and outsiders.\(^{558}\)

With regards to sin, Jesus deals vigorously with sinners who may not otherwise come into God’s Holy presence. Jesus redefines “Sin.” First, inasmuch as obedience to God’s law is the way to eternal life, conversely sin is disobedience to these laws, which alone

\(^{550}\) Mark 7: 10.
\(^{551}\) Isaiah 29: 13 LXX.
\(^{552}\) Deuteronomy 6: 4-5.
\(^{553}\) Leviticus 19: 18.
\(^{554}\) Mark 10: 19.
\(^{555}\) Mark 1: 14-15.
\(^{556}\) Mark 8: 38.
\(^{557}\) Mark 10: 19.
\(^{558}\) See Mark 4: 10-12.
renders a person “unclean.” The list of vices which ‘defile a man’ are formally based on the Ten Commandments:

**The Ten Commandments**

1. Do not kill
2. Do not commit adultery
3. Do not steal
4. Do not bear false witness.
5. Do not defraud
6. Honour your father and mother...

**Vices in Mark 7: 21-22**

1. Murder,
2. Fornication, adultery,
3. Theft
4. Envy, slander
5. Covetousness
6. See Mark 7: 9-13

These sins are “impurity” in Jesus’ system, for they are what defile a man. Sin, according to Jesus is to call Him “unclean”-‘because the Scribes said He has an unclean spirit.’ Jesus, of course, has God’s ‘authority on earth to forgive sins,’ an authority which directly challenges the temple system for dealing with sins. He is God’s designated “physician” to sinners.

As regards judgment, Mark portrays Jesus as the judge who erects boundaries around God’s kingdom and firmly defends them. Jesus as judge guards the gates and admits or excludes; he will strictly determine who gets in and who stays out. When he comes with his angels, he will render judgment; (1) *against unbelievers* who reject him (‘if anyone is ashamed of me and my words…. the Son of Man will be ashamed of him…’) and (2)

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559 Mark 7: 21-22.
560 Mark 3: 30.
561 Mark 2: 10.
562 Mark 12: 33.
563 Mark 2: 17.
564 Mark 8: 38.
on behalf of believers (‘He will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds...’). Jesus, then, can be said to accept the same concerns and issues as observant Jews of his day (strong group). It is not true, as his opponents claim, that he has no purity concerns and no system.

3.12.3 Jesus and Covenant Boundaries: New Rules

Jesus constantly crossed lines and boundaries and this practice scarcely went unnoticed. However, Mark portrayed him as an authority “limit breaker.” To what purpose, then did Jesus violate the maps of persons and places? Neyrey suggests that according to Mark, a Christian missionary strategy is validated by Jesus’ activity; for Mark is intent on showing that Jesus’ mission was an inclusive one to preach to all peoples, Gentiles included, and to offer full membership in God’s kingdom to all peoples. For example, in following the geographical references in the gospel, one gets a clear view of the audiences to whom Jesus preached, which is a view of the world, and not just the Holy land. A new map is being drawn.

The crowds which followed Jesus came from ‘Galilee, also from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from about Tyre and Sidon.  

1. Jesus himself crossed over into Gentile territory.  
2. The dispossessed man preached Jesus ‘in the Decapolis.  
3. Jesus ‘went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon’, where he granted covenant blessings to a Syrophoenician woman.  
4. He ‘returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon, to the sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis.

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565 Mark 13; 27.  
568 Mark 3: 7-8.  
569 Mark 4: 35.  
570 Mark 5: 20.  
571 Mark 7: 24.  
572 Mark 7: 25-30.  
573 Mark 7: 31.
5. Peter’s great confession was made in the non-Jewish town with the Hellenistic name of Caesarea Philippi.\footnote{574 Mark 8: 27.}

6. Jesus said that ‘the gospel must first be preached to all the nations’.\footnote{575 Mark 13: 10.}

Ethnic boundaries are being crossed; or to put it more clearly, the boundaries of Jesus’ covenant people are more porous than those of the parent synagogue covenant. But this is an intentional strategy appropriate to the missionary effort of Jesus’ followers and consonant with Jesus’ image of God as a merciful God of gracious election. For Mark, it does not mean a rejection of purity concerns, but a conscious relaxation of purity rules during a missionary phase of the community’s formation.

Besides Gentiles, Jesus also ministers to the marginal and unclean people in the villages of Israel. This replicates the lowering of purity boundaries and speaks again to the inclusive membership of Mark’s community. The inclusiveness is evident in the parable of the sower in Mark 4: 3-9, where the prodigal sower throws seed in the most improbable places: on the path, on the rocks, and among thorn brakes. No pre-judgment is made on potential membership in God’s covenant community on the basis of ethnic status or purity rating. Thus one important function of the change of purity rules in Mark is the issue of inclusive membership in God’s covenant. Jesus’ crossing of the purity boundaries of his day is a functional statement in Mark of the inclusiveness of the membership of the Markan community.\footnote{576 J.H. Neyrey, ‘The Idea of Purity’, 22.}

3.12.4 Purity Lines and Self-Definition

As we saw in the case of Jewish customs such as circumcision, dietary laws and Sabbath observance, temporal and spatial maps pertain to self-identity and to self-definition. For example, Josephus describes the particularistic purpose of a custom like circumcision: ‘To the intent that his posterity should be kept from mixing with others, God charged Abraham to have them circumcised and to perform the rite on the eighth day after birth.’
If Jesus is said, for instance, to abolish Jewish dietary rules, this serves as a way of defining the Christian covenant group as a group which does not keep those rules. It is a less particularistic and more inclusive group. So by redrawing lines or by erasing them, Mark and his group are engaged in the process of self-definition. Each of Jesus’ critiques of the Pharisees or Jewish purity customs enables the new Christian group to know precisely where it stands in relation to the parent synagogue. They do X and we don’t do X; they don’t do Y but we do Y. In the controversy stories of Mark’s Gospel, we find the Christian non-keeping of certain purity customs functioning as boundary lines defining the Christian group and distinguishing it from the synagogue. Thus a new map is drawn. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synagogue</th>
<th>Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dietary Laws</td>
<td>no dietary laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wash Hands Before Meals</td>
<td>no washing of hands before eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict Sabbath observance</td>
<td>no strict Sabbath observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple &amp; Sacrifices</td>
<td>no sacrifice in the old temple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If these Jewish customs served a particularistic function to separate Israel from the nations, then the systematic abrogation of them should also be seen vis-a-vis Mark’s sense of an inclusive or open covenant community. The church is not only the synagogue; its reform of the particularistic purity rules suggests a more open group than the synagogue.

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577 Ant. 1, 192: see Philo, Moses 1, 278.
Although in one sense Jesus abrogates purity rules which “set apart” God’s people in a particularistic way, Mark still portrays Jesus as setting his group apart from all others.581 Jesus establishes clear lines and boundaries for his group, which unmistakably separate insiders from outsiders. Faith in Jesus is the chief distinguishing criterion. Confession of Jesus, acceptance of him as “God’s holy One,” acclamation of him as Son of David, Christ, or any other symbol of God’s agency means that one is an insider. Objection to his teaching,582 practice,583 or to his customs,584 denotes an outsider. For example, the “unbelief” of the people in Jesus’ own country means that these people585 are clearly outsiders.586 This is repeated in Mark 3: 31-35 where the biological family of Jesus “standing outside” and calling him to come out to them. They are in contrast to the group that is inside listening to Jesus’ teaching. They are Jesus’ real family. ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!’587 The criteria for status as an insider differ from those of the synagogue where blood, physical or genealogical concerns determine membership in God’s “chosen people.” In keeping with Jesus’ new purity rules in Mark 7, the criterion for membership is a matter of the interior, the heart–faith in Jesus.

Similarly, it would be expected that Jesus would give special private instruction to his disciples when they are “inside,” for they are insiders.588 It is possible and necessary, then to tell insiders from outsiders. Jesus’ followers positively need these boundaries and lines in their endeavours to define themselves over against the parent synagogue.

We have seen that understanding the idea of purity is important for understanding Mark’s representation of Jesus and the Christian community. It would be simply erroneous to say that Mark repudiates the system of purity, just because he presents Jesus disregarding or contesting certain purity rules. Rather Mark portrays Jesus according to a reformed idea of purity, in which lines are being redrawn and boundaries loosened. Douglas’ model of

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581 Similar observations on the role of purity as boundary-making mechanism can be found apropos of (1) 1 Peter (J.H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 118-148), and (2) 1 Corinthians (W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 97, 105).
582 Mark 2: 7.
583 Mark 3: 2.
584 Mark 7: 1-4.
585 Mark 3: 32.
586 Mark 6: 3-6.
587 Mark 3: 34.
588 Mark 4: 10-13; 34; 7: 17-23; 9: 28-29; 10:10-12 (NIV)
**group/grid** allow us to locate Jesus’ basic allegiance to Israel’s God and his Scriptures (strong Group), while accounting for Jesus’ reforming suggestions about God’s mercy and how this structures a more inclusive group with a weaker purity system less particularistic than that of mainstream first-century Judaism (weak grid).589

Mark, a gentile writing for a gentile church, portrays Jesus as the legitimate, reforming prophet who disputes the classifications, definitions and evaluations of a system in dire need of correction. Jesus’ reforms in turn legitimate Mark and his community as authentic worshipers of the one, true God, but according to a system, structure, and strategy different from the mainstream of Judaism.590

The functions of the idea of purity in Mark may be summarized.

1. The basic presentation of Jesus in Mark’s gospel is done in terms of purity. It matters whether Jesus has the Holy Spirit or an unclean spirit, whether his closest company is holy (John the Baptist, God, angels, Moses and Elijah), and whether his death is polluting. Jesus’ purity rating is always of great importance in the gospel, for his legitimating rests on a high rating.

2. Jesus is constantly presented as the physician who brings cleanness, forgiveness of sins, and wholeness to God’s covenant people. Even though Jesus may be in contact with unclean people, he gives wholeness and purity to them; he never loses it as a result of that contact. In fact, he is the one who gives them the Holy Spirit.591

3. When Jesus crosses boundaries and when he allows unclean people to contact him, this “polluting” activity functions in Mark vis-à-vis the inclusive membership of Mark’s church. Marginal and unclean Israelites as well as Gentiles are welcome in God’s new covenant group. Inclusive membership, then, will initially mean that certain purity lines be crossed and that boundaries be made porous. And so, the new posture of Jesus to social boundaries is coherent with the view of the covenant community proposed by Mark.

591Mark 1: 8.
4. The crossing of boundaries and lines also serves to define the Christian group vis-à-vis the synagogue. Self-identity is found in the redrawing of these lines.

5. Although boundaries may be porous in terms of mission and membership, they become quite firm and clear in terms of Mark’s perception of who is in/out of the group. Believers are in and unbelievers are out.

6. While Jesus breaks certain boundaries, he erects and guards other lines and boundaries. For Jesus can forgive sins or retain them. He can admit or dismiss people from God’s presence.592

3.13 The Idea of Purity in Revelation

Leviticus is a book of regulations covering a broad spectrum of issues relating to sacrifice, priesthood, and purity. Revelation, on the other hand, is a book of warning letters to churches followed by vision-reports. But, while Revelation is polemical rather than regulatory, it still operates with purity assumptions, and it should prove useful to compare these to the assumptions of Leviticus.593

In the Book of Revelation, a clear distinction is made between “clean” and “unclean” persons at both the cosmic and social levels; and many of them are clearly set as parallel formulations (e.g. apostles, false apostles; prophets, false prophets). Without providing all the variations on names for the same characters, the following division is manifested:

**FIGURE 2: POLAR OPPOSITIONS**594

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLEAN</th>
<th>UNCLEAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God</th>
<th>The dragon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The deceiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Abaddon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apollyon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>Demons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 living creatures</td>
<td>Beast with 10 horns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beast with 2 horns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 spirits</td>
<td>Unclean spirits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 apostles</td>
<td>False apostles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 elders</td>
<td>Kings of the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophets</td>
<td>False prophet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jezebel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saints</td>
<td>Nicolaitans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman &amp; child</td>
<td>Harlot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A person belongs to either one group or the other. Attempting to “straddle the fence” does not result in compromise or mediation, but confusion and ultimately banishment. In other words, anomalies are not tolerated:

*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm –neither hot nor cold- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

Clothing is one of recurring symbols of purity in Revelation. Someone “like a son of man” is described with a long robe, golden belt, head and hair as white as wool and snow, eyes like flames, feet like burnished bronze refined in a furnace. There were people of Sardis who had not “soiled their clothes.” ‘They will walk in, dressed in white.’ The image of having robes washed or dipped in blood is employed to describe both the elect and Christ. The bride of Christ is described as ‘clothed with fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints’; and armies of heaven are similarly dressed in fine linen. Thus these visible garments symbolize group-membership, as well as status and honour: therefore, purity as “in-group” and social hierarchy.

Purity is also symbolized spatially. While the saints must live among the rest of society for the time being, they will eventually be separated from Babylon in order to prevent contamination. In the earthly temple, God’s people are in the inner courtyards, while the “nations” are in the outer courtyards. Furthermore, in the New Jerusalem, only those who have washed their robes are allowed inside the “holy city.” Those left outside the city are the morally corrupt: the ‘dogs’, and nothing ‘accursed’ is allowed inside.

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595 Rev. 3: 15-16.
597 Rev. 3: 4.
598 Rev. 7: 14; 19: 13; see also 22: 14.
599 Rev. 19: 8.
600 Rev. 19: 14.
601 Rev. 18: 4-5.
602 Rev. 11: 1.
603 Rev. 11: 2.
605 Rev. 22: 15.
606 Rev. 22: 3.
A further major category of purity regards morality in the broadest sense: sorcery, sexual impurity, murder, idolatry, and falsehood.⁶⁰⁷ Those who practice such things are part of the “outer-group”, and they are described as unrepentant. Thus, the community of the faithful is seen as distinct from all others who participate in these activities. The community is also seen as under attack by these polluting and demonic forces, addressed especially in Revelation 12-19:

And it {the dragon} was given a mouth speaking grandiose and blasphemous things; and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months...And it was permitted to make war on the saints and conquer them.⁶⁰⁸

So the social body is under attack from external forces, from which it cannot fully withstand. Ultimately, the Lamb has to deliver the community from these persecutions.

On the other hand, the community is also struggling with deviance within. This addressed especially in the letters to the churches. While praising most of the churches for their faithfulness in general, the prophet raises serious defects.⁶⁰⁹ While praising most of the churches for their faithfulness in general, the prophet raises serious defects in the congregations. The Ephesians abandoned their first love.⁶¹⁰ The churches at Pergamum and Thyatira have some who falsely teach the eating of meat offered to idols, practice immorality, and listen to a false prophetess.⁶¹¹ The church at Sardis has the reputation of being “lively”, but they are really at the point of death.⁶¹² The church at Laodicea thinks it is rich, prosperous, and do not need a nothing; but the prophet describes them as ‘wretched, and pitiful, and poor, blind, and naked.’⁶¹³ Only the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia escape the prophet’s accusations. Thus the internal boundaries in most of these churches are confused, and the prophet has to expose their deviance.

⁶⁰⁸ Rev. 13: 5, 7.
⁶⁰⁹ Rev. 2-3.
⁶¹⁰ Rev. 2: 4.
⁶¹¹ Rev. 2: 14, 20.
⁶¹² Rev. 3: 1.
⁶¹³ Rev. 3: 17.
The remedy for these churches is to repent and change their behaviour. 614 No special purificatory rite is directed, and presumably none is needed. For those already within the community, repentance and alteration is sufficient.

Like Leviticus, Revelation roots holiness or purity in God’s nature:

- ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, Holy and true…’ 615
- ‘Just and true are your ways…’ 616
- ‘For you alone are Holy’ 617.
- ‘…true and just are your judgments’ 618.

And this holiness is further attributed to Christ: ‘I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.’ 619 Thus the purity of the community takes its cues from the purity of God and Christ. This exemplifies the fact that it was important in ancient societies to root purity codes (explicit or implicit) in a cosmic dimension. 620

### 3.14 Blood in Revelation

In Revelation blood is seen as a potent symbol. We will begin by looking at the references to blood in the same three categories found in Leviticus and expand those: animal blood, human life-blood and vaginal blood.

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615 Rev. 6: 10.
616 Rev. 15: 3.
617 Rev. 15: 4.
618 Rev. 16: 7; 19: 2.
619 Rev. 19: 11.
620 K.C. Hanson, ‘Blood and Purity’, 9
3.14.1 Animal Blood in Revelation

Animal blood is never used literally, but only metaphorically in Revelation as ‘the blood of the Lamb,’ referring to Christ’s death.621 This demonstrates a real departure from the Jerusalem cult’s use of blood from bulls, goats, lambs, and birds.622 No more sacrificial cult is envisioned in this nascent Christian community. Instead, Christ’s blood is what is efficacious for redemption and freedom from sin:

You {the Lamb} are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; for you were slaughtered, and by your Blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God and they will reign on the earth.623

This provides an alternative ideology: instead of an Aaronide priesthood who must ritually manipulate animal blood in a sanctuary, the Lamb’s blood accomplished redemption for all and created a new community in which all members are symbolically “priests.”

Several conclusions follow from this. Purity derives from what the Lamb has done, not what the community has done.624 It also does not derive from membership in a politically defined cultic-group of Israelites, but is composed of people from all groups. The “in-group” is thus diverse and scattered; and one of the implications of this is that there is no central control mechanism. And since all are “priests”, no clear social hierarchy is in place within the group; no select group of official cultic personnel is required to perform the rituals.625

This image of the “blood of the Lamb” also reverses the categorization of blood on garments as seen in Leviticus.626 Instead of polluting, the lamb’s blood becomes a metaphor of purification when the saints and “the Word of God” wash their robes in it.627

621 Rev. 7: 14; 12: 11; see also 19: 13.
623 Rev. 5: 9-10; see 1: 5.
624 See Lev. 20: 7-8.
626 Leviticus 6: 27.
Rather than the used detergent that may splash the priest’s vestments, in Revelation’s description washing one’s garments in blood becomes a symbol of both purification and belonging\textsuperscript{628} or empowerment\textsuperscript{629}.

\section*{3.14.2 Human life-blood}

Human life-blood comes into play especially in the case of martyred “saints” and prophets.” First of all, the community cries out to God for vengeance for the innocent deaths in the Christians.\textsuperscript{630} As in Numbers 35: 33-34, the shedding of innocent blood calls for the blood of the murderer.\textsuperscript{631} But unlike the regulation in Numbers, the legal community does not execute vengeance, but God does:

\begin{quote}
Halleluiah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her impurity; and he has avenged the blood of his servants upon her.\textsuperscript{632}
\end{quote}

One may conclude from this that the community is in no position to exact its own vengeance; it must come from God and that only when God is ready.\textsuperscript{633} The purity of balanced bloodletting, like that of purifying the people, will happen only by God’s action and in God’s time.

As a further image of this purification balance, God gives the murderers blood to drink as a punishment: ‘as they deserve.’\textsuperscript{634} As this last reference demonstrates, it plays on an Israelite sensibility of consumed blood as a contaminant, as well as the added element of punishment.\textsuperscript{635}

\textsuperscript{628} Rev. 7: 14.
\textsuperscript{629} Rev. 19: 13; see also 12: 11.
\textsuperscript{630} Rev. 6 ; 10.
\textsuperscript{631} Rev. 16: 6; 17: 6; 18: 24.
\textsuperscript{632} Rev. 19: 1-2.
\textsuperscript{633} Rev. 6: 11; see Lev 26: 25.
\textsuperscript{634} Rev. 16: 6.
\textsuperscript{635} Lev. 3: 17; 19: 26; Deut. 12: 23-25.
3.14.3 Menstrual Blood in Revelation

Finally, menstrual blood is not explicitly mentioned in Revelation. One text, however, refers to it obliquely. In the letter to Thyatira, Jezebel, the false prophetess, is thrown ‘on a bed of suffering.’ And I will make those who “commit adultery with her” suffer. The term according to Hansen, “suffering”/sick, is a euphemism for a woman in menstruation in Leviticus 15: 33 and the image in Revelation seems to be of men who lie with Jezebel while she is impure because of menstruation. If this interpretation is correct, then the prophet/author of Revelation is clearly perpetuating the purity traditions of the Middle East in which women’s blood is seen as dangerous and contaminating. This continuity of tradition with regard to menstrual blood would have been easy to maintain for early Christians since it is not directly related to the Judean cult or the relationship between Israelite Yahweists and gentiles. Women were certainly leaders in some of the early Christian communities. Examples of such women are Prisca and Junia. But one can only regret that fundamental issues of gender-division in relation to social organization and hierarchy did not seem to receive the same challenge and cultural critique in the first century as the “gentile” issue.

These texts do not represent the same purity standards of modern societies in certain aspects. Sacrifice and blood-vengeance do not fit in modern Jewish and Christian sensibilities. But the on-going debate in the courts-and society as a whole over the efficacy of capital punishment in the U.S. A. does highlight the diversity in our society. And the willingness to speak in public about anything genital has been breached only in recent years by advertisements for feminine hygiene products.

636 Rev. 2: 22.


3.15 Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to review anthropological concepts on purity and impurity and applied the suggestions from the concepts to the meaning and functions of ritual purity and ritual uncleanness in ancient Judaism in The Old Testament, the Talmud Mishnah, Later Judaism and the New Testament, particularly the books of Mark and Revelation. We did a brief overview of the role that purity laws played in the position of the menstruant in ancient Judaism and the place of blood in ancient Judaism and nascent Christianity.

We found out that the idea of purity refers to the systematic structures, classifications and evaluations which shape social groups. “There is a place for everything and everything in its place”-a saying applicable to people, places, times and things. What is “in place” is pure, what is not is pollution. Menstruating women represent disorder within the Jewish laws. At the time of menstruation, women are considered marginal. We saw that the main reasons for the observance of niddah is to uphold the continuum of the covenant between God and the Israelites and the fact that it is through the women that men can maintain this divine rapport is indeed the greatest contribution women can render to both divinity and their communities. In this sense, the niddah laws should be seen not as inferior but as elevation of women, without which the purity of the covenant with God cannot be achieved.

Understanding the idea of purity anthropologically was important for understanding Mark’s representation of Jesus and the Christian community. We therefore applied the anthropological understanding of ritual impurity to the perception of Jesus in Mark’s gospel. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus is proclaimed by some as holy and sinless yet others perceived him as constantly out of place most of the time because, he appeared to be dealing with people he should avoid, doing unconventional things and not observing customs about places and times. Jesus was out of place according to the perceptions of his culture. While Mark presents Jesus challenging the Jewish purity system, he also
describes him as reforming it in favour of other core values. He is “the Holy One of God” and agent of God’s reform. He is authorized to cross lines and to blur classifications as strategy for a reformed covenant community which is more inclusive than the sectarian synagogue. As God’s agent of holiness, Jesus makes sinners holy, the sick whole and the ritually unclean pure. Jesus’ work and ministry is to return the impure to a state of ritual purity. This work of Jesus is extremely important because in the Jewish tradition purity defines the boundary of the holy. Hence Jesus who is the agent of God’s holiness is the only one who could reconcile the “ritually impure” to God who is holy. Thus the ministry of Jesus is a ministry of reconciliation of the impure and God. Yet he draws clear lines between those in his group and those outside, setting up distinguishing criteria for membership and for exclusion in the reformed covenant community. Jesus therefore loosened the boundaries and lines/maps drawn by ancient Israel and instituted a reformed Judaism, in which purity laws are re-interpreted. As a result, the crossing of boundaries and lines also serves to define the Christian group. Thus, while Jesus breaks certain boundaries, he erects and guards other lines and boundaries. Jesus can admit or dismiss people from God’s presence.

A study of blood in both Judaism and nascent Christianity in this chapter revealed that blood is a focalising or dominant ritual symbol. It symbolizes the moral order in terms of cult (Purity and pollution), law, covenant and power. Blood also symbolizes life force, birth and menstruation. Blood as such is a neutral matter in ancient Israel and Christian usage. Its meaning depends on what sort of blood it is, where it is, who touches it, and how it is utilized. Blood can therefore be described as either “in place” or “out of place”, pure or defiled. It is also an active substance. It has an effect on the things it touches. It can be either a pollutant or a detergent. The author of Revelation is seen to perpetuating the purity traditions of Ancient Israel in which women’s blood is seen as dangerous and contaminating.

Having looked at what the biblical and Jewish culture and Christianity say about menstrual “impurity” and cultic leadership we want to look at the contemporary Akan Christian’s attitude toward menstruation and women in church leadership.