

SHARING IN GOD'S HOLINESS

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We come upon a rather amazing claim in Hebrews 12:10. There the writer of the epistle says that we Christians are to share in God's holiness. Indeed, he claims that our heavenly Father who has made us his children, instructs us by various means so that we become even better fitted to share in his holiness. That's the point of his dealings with us.

But I fear that such talk of holiness tends to fall on rather deaf ears even in Lutheran circles for a number of reasons. First, we are traditionally accustomed to equate holiness with morality. Sanctification is then regarded as nothing more than the life of moral renewal and good works which follows on justification. Secondly, we have been told, and some of us have even been convinced, that Jesus got rid of the primitive, half-pagan distinction between the sacred and the profane. After all, didn't Jesus, and Paul after him, maintain that everything which God has created was good, and therefore holy? Thirdly, much modern scholarship tends to regard those parts of the Old Testament which are dominated by the language of holiness, like the 'priestly' sections of the Pentateuch and the book of Ezekiel, as corrected by the prophets and superseded by our Lord. Fourthly, we are uneasy about too keen an interest in holiness, for we tend to associate it largely with Catholic sacramentalism, Calvinist rigorism, Methodist revivalism and Pentecostal enthusiasm. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, we have been so indoctrinated by the cultural secularism of our desacralised society that we have lost a sense for what is holy. Whatever the reason, the language of holiness is as lost on us as a foreign tongue. Many of us have become quite unfamiliar with the grammar of holiness.

This loss of a sense for holiness has, I believe, created some problems for us in the Lutheran church. Most obviously, many of our people see little reason for them to attend worship. If they do attend, our pattern of worship makes little or no sense to them. They don't appreciate the architecture of our churches with the central aisle up to the altar, the traditional division into sanctuary and nave, the central location of the altar, and the impersonal, extrinsic focus. What's more, they can't see why we make so much fuss about baptism and why we begin our common worship with corporate confession and absolution. They don't see why we insist on the practice of close communion. Above all, they have problems with our order of service which go far beyond its formalities, its rather archaic language, and its old-fashioned music. They have problems, because worship has to do with the mystery and reality of God's holiness.

The celebration of the liturgy is meant to teach us of God's holiness, initiate us into his holiness, and advance us in his holiness. Have you ever noticed how frequently the order of service for communion mentions holiness? We begin by invoking 'the Holy Spirit'. At the climax of the Great Gloria we confess that our Lord Jesus is 'only ... holy'. We profess our faith in the 'holy Christian ... Church' or else in 'the communion of saints'. Many pastors introduce their sermon by asking the Lord to 'sanctify' his people by the truth of his word. Then, as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we not only praise God as our 'holy Father', but we also join with the angels in adoring our thrice holy Lord. Just before we receive the sacrament we pray for the 'hallowing' of our Father's name in the Lord's Prayer. All this makes scant

sense to those who do not know the grammar of holiness. Whoever loses that can hardly appreciate the mystery of worship, for worship has to do with God's holiness.

As a grateful tribute to Dr Ed Lehman for his kindness to me and interest in the Lutheran Church of Australia I would like to sketch out rather briefly and inadequately the grammar of holiness.¹ I don't intend to deal with the matter historically, confessionally, or systematically. I restrict myself to what the Scriptures have to say about it.² My basic thesis is that through the public worship of the church we come to share in God's holiness, and we do so already in this life.³

1. THE NATURE OF HOLINESS

Source of holiness

The pagan nations which surrounded Israel believed that there were many sources of holiness, because there were many gods and semi-divine beings. Each gave access to some part of the supernatural world and to some portion of its power. But all this was repudiated by the Israelites. In fact, they were commanded to desecrate and defile much of what their neighbours held holy (Ex 23:24; 34:13). They believed that the Lord, their God, alone was holy (1 Sam 2:2). He himself had demonstrated his exclusive holiness in his victory over the gods of Egypt (Exod 15:11) and had told them repeatedly that he was holy (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7,26; 21:8). His name and therefore his being was holy (Isa 57:15). He was the Holy One (Ps 99:3,5; Is 10:17; Hos 11:9), their holy God (Ps 99:9; Josh 24:19; 1 Sam 6:20), the Holy One of Israel (Ps 71:22; 78:41; 89:19). He was adored by the heavenly hosts in his heavenly temple as thrice holy, the superlatively holy king of the universe (Is 6:3).

The Lord alone was inherently and permanently holy. His holiness was in a sense the essence of his being. It was inseparable from him and his presence. It followed then that all other holiness derived from him, and was available only by way of contact with him, like electricity from a battery. People and things borrowed their holiness from their association with God.

¹ The first draft of this paper was presented to the General Pastors Conference of the Lutheran Church of Australia held in Melbourne, 1984.

² There have been surprisingly few general treatments of holiness by modern Biblical scholars. Two may be singled out for special mention. J G Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, Overtures to Biblical Theology, Fortress, Minneapolis, 1989, examines the understanding of holiness in the various parts of the Old Testament. Despite many useful observations it is rather piecemeal and suffers from lack of consideration of God's holiness as a power in connection with what is clean and in contrast to what is common and unclean. The most helpful study on holiness by a New Testament scholar has been written by D Peterson, *Possessed by God: New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, Apollos, Leicester, 1995. He analyses the connection between the gift of positional holiness by faith in Christ and the demand for purity in holy living. While it is good on the gift of holiness, it fails to do justice to the liturgical and sacramental means of sanctification.

³ Modern scholars have often had difficulty in understanding the references to holiness in the Scriptures because they have taken it as a moral rather than a cultic term. The two scholars who have clearly articulated the connection between holiness and worship are H Ringgren, *The Prophetical Conception of Holiness*, UUA 12, Almqvist and Wiksells, Uppsala, 1948, 3-30, and O Procksch, 'hagios', *TDNT*, vol 1, 1964, 88-97, 100-115.

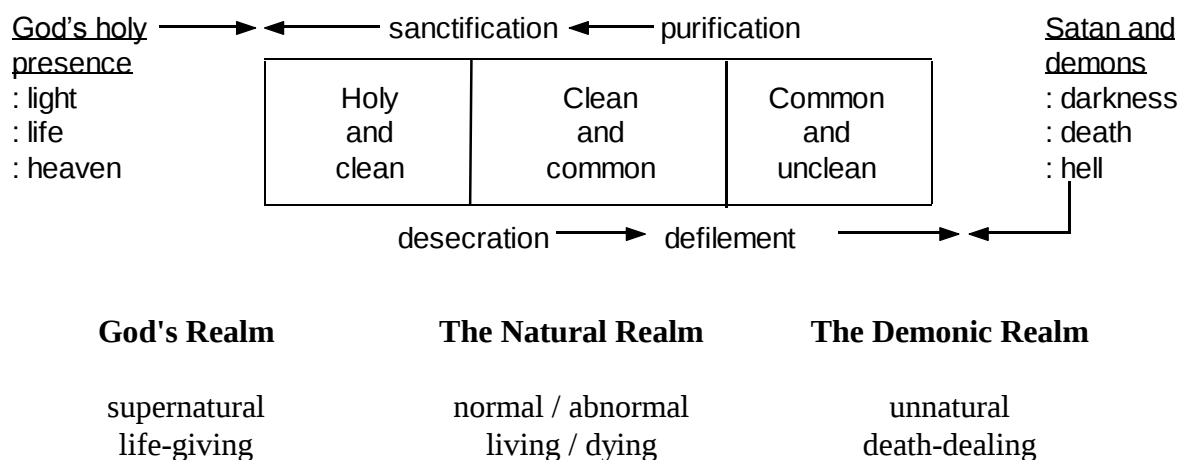
Their holiness was therefore an acquired condition, an extrinsic power, which could and would be lost the moment contact with him was lost.

It is only against the background of God's claim to be the only source of holiness that we can appreciate the claim of the risen Lord in Revelation 3:7 to be the Holy One. He is, as Peter recognises, the Holy One of God (John 6:69; cf. Mark 1:24). Not only has God the Father consecrated him as the messianic priest and king (John 10:36), but he has ordained that we are saints only in him (Phil 1:1; 4:21; Eph 1:4). We therefore rightly confess in the Gloria that he only is holy, for we have no holiness apart from him (1 Cor 1:30).

Language of holiness

Many attempts have been made to explain the notion of holiness linguistically, historically, phenomenologically and sociologically. The most famous attempt to explain the concept of holiness was undertaken by Rudolph Otto in *The Idea of the Holy*.⁴ He defined it as 'the totally other' which strikes us as 'a fearful and yet wonderful mystery'. But there is something rather odd about such a definition of holiness, for, if God is the only source of holiness, then the nature of his holiness is beyond our ken and known only to him.

It is much better to start with God's own definition of his holiness as was spelt out quite concretely by the architecture and arrangement of the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament. In Leviticus 10:10 God speaks of his holiness in connection with what is clean and in contrast with what is common and unclean.⁵ His holiness creates three interlocking spheres and composite states of being which may be represented diagrammatically thus.



⁴ R Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1923.

⁵ G J Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1979, 18-25, gives the best and simplest explanations of these correlative terms. His work provides the conceptual framework for this essay. His thinking on holiness was stimulated by Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London & Henley, 1966. Her brilliant monograph on the power of pollution and the function of purity in Leviticus has revived interest in the theology of this much neglected book, even though she interprets it sociologically. This leads her to equate holiness with purity and to define it as wholeness. Three studies which have been spawned by her work can be singled out for special attention: B J Malina, *The New Testament World. Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, SCM, London, 1983, 122-152; J H Neyrey, 'The Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel', *Semeia* 35 (1986), 91-128; P P Jenson, *Graded Holiness. A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, JSOT Sup 106, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1992.

ordering	ordered / disordered	disordering
creative	created / destroyed	destructive
blessing	blessed / cursed	cursing
nurturing	nurtured / malnourished	parasitic
healing	healthy / sick	sickening

The state of holiness was an environment created by God's presence in the tabernacle or the temple. It was, as it were, a divine bridgehead in the profane world, the place where heaven and earth overlapped. Its opposite pole was the state of impurity which was utterly incompatible with holiness, like light with darkness. In fact, holiness annihilated impurity, like fire which burns up petrol. Everything natural and normal therefore had to be cleansed of impurity, before it could come into contact with God and so share in his holiness, just as water must be clean, before the light of the sun can shine into it.

The human world lay suspended between these two poles and within the magnetic field of either power. Everything natural and normal in it was common. Anything common could be either clean and normal, or else unclean and abnormal. Ordinary food could be common and clean, if free from impurity, or else common and unclean, if infected by impurity. If something common became holy, it ceased to be common, since it then belonged to God and existed in his domain. Likewise, if something clean became unclean, it remained common but ceased to be clean. Holiness and impurity were therefore powers which vied for the control of the world and what was in it.

Because nothing that God had created was either inherently holy or unclean, there were various degrees of holiness and impurity. The closer something came to God, the holier it became. Hence the high priest was holier than the ordinary Israelite and the holy of holies than the holy place. The ark, the altar of incense, the lamp stand, the showtable, the main altar, and the laver were most holy, because they were closest to God and most directly associated with him. The peace offering was less holy than the other sacrifices, because no part of it ever came into the tabernacle or temple. The same applied for impurity. Some kinds of defilement, like acting as a medium (Lev 20:27) and sacrificing a child to Molech (Lev 20:2), were so absolute that the death sentence was mandatory for them, whereas others, like contact with corpses and venereal discharges, were temporary and readily rectified.

Since purity was the prerequisite for admission to God's sanctifying presence in worship, the task of the priests was to distinguish between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean (Lev 10:10; Ez 44:23). They were also required to teach the people of Israel about this, for the health of the nation depended on its participation in God's holiness through sacrificial worship.

Our Lord did not abolish all this language and thinking, as some contend. His incarnation did, to be sure, change the locus of holiness from the temple to his body (John 2:21) and the focus of defilement from the physical body to the human heart (Heb 9:13-14). It also extended the range of purification and sanctification from the righteous Israelite to the Israelite sinner and the unclean gentile (see Luke 15:1-2; Mark 7:1-30; Acts 10). The blood of Jesus brought about the justification of the ungodly and the cleansing of unclean sinners. Jesus also taught that only those who were pure in heart would see God (Matt 5:8; cf. Ps 24:4). He invaded the realm of impurity and cast out the 'unclean spirits' from those who were trapped in it. His mission was to destroy them, and they were the first to recognise that (Mark 1:21-27). He washed and cleansed his disciples so that he could sanctify them (John 13:8-11; 15:3; 17:17,19). He was, then, as much priest as he was king.

The language of holiness is therefore the language of worship, for holiness has to do with God's presence, and access to that presence is given in worship. Where God is present, there holiness is to be found; where he is worshipped according to his word, there his presence sanctifies his people and everything connected with their worship. Since God's holiness is connected with the mystery of his being, it cannot ultimately be understood rationally and defined abstractly; it can only be adequately apprehended in adoration and truly expressed in praise by those who share in his holiness and stand in his holy presence (Is 6:3; Ps 9:9; Rev 4:9).

The effect of holiness

The effect of God's holiness is like fire with some kinds of metal. On the one hand, like fire with dross it burns out and purifies that which is contaminated by impurity. On the other hand, like fire it communicates itself and permeates that which is clean. It is both life-giving and death-dealing, creative and destructive, saving and judging. It is therefore either beneficial or detrimental in its effect on human beings.

Contact with God's holiness has a positive effect on those who are clean and so stand in a right relationship with him. They then share in God's holiness and become holy like God. In the Old Testament both the priests who ministered to him and the whole worshipping community were holy (Ex 19:6; 22:31; Lev 11:45; 19:2, etc). Likewise everything connected with God's presence in worship was holy, whether it was a time or a place or a thing. We too who belong to Christ are all 'saints' with angelic status, as St Paul reminds us repeatedly. We share in his holiness, because we are in him and stand together with the holy angels in heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22).

Moreover, those who are holy receive all the benefits of their contact with their holy God. The conclusion of the Holiness Code lists some of those blessings in Lev 26:3-13, such as prosperity, peace, security, fertility, affluence, freedom and fellowship with God. We who are saints in the new covenant have the Holy Spirit together with all his gifts and graces. As those who are holy in Christ we have 'every spiritual blessing' in the heavenly world (Eph 1:3-4).

But God's holiness can also have a detrimental effect on those who come into wrong contact with his holy things and thereby desecrate his holy name. So contact with God was fraught with peril in the Old Testament, for a person could just as readily incur God's wrath as his grace. The ordinary Israelite could theoretically incur his wrath in one of two ways, by bringing impurity into God's presence and so defiling what was clean, or else by desecrating something holy which was the worst possible offence against God.

Both the tabernacle and the temple were designed to forestall both these eventualities. The priests were responsible to safeguard God's holiness, while the levites were liable for the purity of the people who entered the sacred precincts. The priests then bore the guilt for any acts of desecration, while the levites suffered for any acts of defilement in worship (Num 18). The ordinary Israelites therefore had little or nothing to fear from their appearance in God's presence, because the priests and levites represented them and shielded them from the consequences of desecration.

Jesus scandalised the theologians of his day by quite deliberately making contact with unclean people, like the lepers, sinners, and even the corpse of a man. They argued, quite correctly, that he was not only defiling himself but also desecrating God's holiness by his actions. He

thereby incurred God's wrath and came under his curse. From this point of view his death was well deserved and even just. They did not know that he did this quite deliberately to bring those who were unclean into the presence of his Father as well as to take upon himself the inevitable consequence of the subsequent desecration and defilement, just as the priests and levites did for the people who came to worship at the temple (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). Paradoxically, the holy one of God became the cursed one to make the cursed people holy (Gal 3:13; cf. John 7:49).

But this was no revolutionary act of defiance, for it was done in obedience to his heavenly Father. Nor did it mean that Jesus insulated his disciples completely against God's wrath and so eliminated the possibility of desecration, even if he minimised that possibility. He warned his disciples rather strongly against casting what was holy before an unclean person (Matt 7:6), and vehemently denounced those who had blasphemed the Holy Spirit by accusing him of demon possession (Mark 3:28-30). What's more, the writer to the Hebrews warned his readers against the dire consequences of desecrating the blood of Christ by spurning him and so outraging the Holy Spirit (Heb 10:29). St Paul went as far as to describe both the congregational schism and the practice of consorting with prostitutes in Corinth as acts of desecration, because both the congregation and the human body were temples of the Holy Spirit and consequently holy (1 Cor 3:16f; 6:18ff). He even maintained that some members of that Church were weak and sick, and others had died, because they had desecrated the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 11:27-34).

Holiness is then either a beneficial or detrimental power. In a meditation on the call of Moses, Andrew Murray sums up its ambivalence rather aptly:

In the burning bush God makes Himself known as dwelling in the midst of the fire ... The nature of fire may be either beneficent or destructive. The sun, the great central fire, may give life and fruitfulness, or may scorch to death. All depends upon occupying the right position, upon the relation in which we stand to it. And so everywhere, when God the Holy One reveals Himself, we shall find the two sides together: God's Holiness as judgment against sin, destroying the sinner who remains in it, and as Mercy freeing His people from it ... Of the elements of nature there is none of such spiritual and mighty energy as Fire: what it consumes it takes and changes into its own spiritual nature, rejecting as smoke and ashes what cannot be assimilated. And so the Holiness of God is that infinite Perfection by which He keeps Himself free from all that is not Divine, and yet has fellowship with the creature, and takes it up into union with Himself, destroying and casting out all that will not yield itself to Him.⁶

2. PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S HOLINESS

The call to holiness

God himself is the source of holiness. But he does not keep himself and his holiness to himself; he calls his people to share in his holiness.

The call first came to the people of Israel. He told them: 'You shall be holy, as I the Lord your God am holy' (Lev 19:2). This was both a promise and a command. In it he announced his will for his people. He wished to be their God by dwelling with them and sanctifying them. But he also called them to share in his holiness by obeying him and living as his people (Lev 20:7-8).

⁶ A Murray, *Holy in Christ*, James Nisbet, London, 1888, 38.

God's purpose for his people did not reach its fulfilment in their constitution as a political entity but in their creation as a worshipping community. Israel was called to be a royal priesthood and holy nation (Exod 19:6). Her whole existence was to be involved in her worship of God; her mission to the world was tied up with her service of the living God.⁷

The same call has come to us too, for we also have been called by our heavenly Father to be holy as even he is holy (1 Pet 1:15). We are 'called saints' (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2). God has called us in holiness (1 Thess 4:7) and has chosen us to be holy in Christ (Eph 1:4). His will for us is our entire sanctification (1 Thess 4:3; 5:23). We therefore have a 'holy vocation' (2 Tim 1:9) and 'holy mission' to the world (John 17:17-19). We serve God the Father together with Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 9:13-14).

When God calls us to holiness, he does not call us to a morally perfect human life or even to the realisation of our full humanity; he calls us to himself and his own divine life. We are to become as he is; we are to share in his being. Andrew Murray puts it rather well:

Holiness is not something we do or attain; it is the communication of Divine Life, the inbreathing of the Divine Nature, the power of the Divine Presence resting upon us. And our power to become holy is found in the call of God: the Holy One calls us to Himself that He may make us holy in possessing Himself.⁸

The gift of holiness

Since God alone is holy, human beings can be holy only through him. Holiness is therefore never a human achievement; it is always a divine gift.

That was already quite plain in the Old Testament. Israel was holy, because God chose to make her holy. He did this out of love for her (Deut 7:6-8; 14:2). Furthermore, he emphasised again and again that he was the one who sanctified Israel (Exod 31:13; Lev 20:8; 21:8,15, 23; 22:9,16,32; Ez 20:12). He sanctified her by his presence within the tabernacle and the temple (Ex 29:42-46). Through the prophet Ezekiel he promised that in the age to come he would set his sanctuary as his dwelling place in the midst of his people so that the nations would finally come to know that he sanctified his people (Ex 37:28).

The New Testament is even more emphatic that holiness is a gift of God to the believer. The writer to the Hebrews maintains that we are to share God's own holiness (Heb 12:10). The Triune God then communicates his holiness to us. The **Father** is the source of our holiness (John 17:17; 1 Thess 5:23; cf Rom 6:19,22). The **Son** is the embodiment of our holiness. By his priestly ministry he sanctifies us and all his disciples (John 17:19; Eph 5:26; Heb 2:11; 10:10,29; 13:12). We are sanctified in his name (1 Cor 6:11) and by faith in him (Acts 26:18). Christ is our sanctification (1 Cor 1:30). We are sanctified in him (1 Cor 1:2) and are therefore holy in him (Phil 1:1; 4:22). The **Holy Spirit** communicates the holiness of Christ to us. He not only unites us with Christ; he also sanctifies us in Christ (1 Pet 1:2). We are therefore sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Thess 2:13).

⁷ Unlike most modern scholars who maintain that Israel became the people of God by his covenant with them at Mt Sinai, T E Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation, John Knox Press, Louisville, 1991, 208-214, rightly argues that the Israelites who already were God's people, were commissioned as God's holy priesthood at Sinai. This covenant therefore established Israel's vocation as a holy nation rather than Israel's existence as God's people.

⁸ A Murray, *Holy in Christ*, James Nisbet, London, 1888, 14.

Means of sanctification

Nothing is holy unless God himself has chosen it and decreed it so by his word (Deut 7:6; 14:2; Lev 20:26; Num 16:7). The holiness of people and things then depends upon his word. It declares that certain persons and objects are holy and decides to what extent they are to share in his holiness. It also decrees the means by which those people and things are to be sanctified. The holiness of Israel and her worship depends upon God's commands and his promises (Ex 19:5-6; Lev 19:2; 20:8,22,31-32; 22:31-33). In that sense then God's word sanctified Israel, even if the matter is never stated quite so in the Old Testament.

The people of Israel were sanctified by God for divine service at Mount Sinai. After the people had agreed to God's will to make them his holy priestly people who were to mediate between him and the peoples of the earth by their involvement in the sacrificial ritual at the tabernacle (Ex 19:3-8), God consecrated them by sprinkling them with the blood of the sacrifices (Ex 24:3-8), just as the priests were sprinkled at their consecration (Exod 29:19-21).⁹ Thereafter they were sanctified and kept holy by God's presence with them at the tabernacle and their meeting with him at the altar during the performance of the morning and evening burnt offering (Exod 29:38-46).

God then made and kept his people holy by their participation in the sacrificial service as prescribed by the law of Moses. This occurred in three stages.¹⁰ First, they were cleansed from their impurity by the rite of atonement with the sprinkling of the blood from the sacrifices.¹¹ Secondly, they met with God through the daily burnt offering where he announced his acceptance of them, received their petitions and blessed them. Thirdly, they ate the holy food from their sacrifices in God's presence and so enjoyed the sacred hospitality of the heavenly king.

In all this God gave access to his presence and communicated his holiness through sacred things. Initially the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priests were consecrated with the holy anointing oil (Exod 30:22-33; 40:9-11; Lev 8:10-13). Both the altar for burnt offering and the priests were also sprinkled and smeared with blood for their purification and sanctification (Exod 29:10-21; Lev 8:14-24, 30). Once that had been accomplished, God's holy presence established three classes of most holy things. First, there was the inner sanctuary which was called the holy of holies and was out of bounds for all except the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Secondly, there were the most holy pieces of furniture consisting of the mercy seat with the ark, the altar for incense, the lampstand, the table for showbread, the altar for burnt offering, and the laver. God communicated his holiness to the priests by their association and contact with these most holy things. Thirdly, there were the offerings which belonged exclusively to the priests. They were the sacred incense, the showbread, the bread or grain from the cereal offering, the meat from the sin and guilt offerings, and the votive

⁹ See E W Nicholson, 'The Covenant Ritual in Exodus XXIV 3-8', VT 32 (1982), 74-86, for the interpretation of the sprinkling in Exodus 24:3-8 as a rite for the consecration of Israel as the Lord's holy people rather than as a rite to seal the covenant; cf T E Fretheim, *Exodus*, John Knox Press, Louisville, 1991, 258.

¹⁰ See J W Kleinig, *The Lord's Song. The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles*, JSOT Sup 156, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1993, 101-108, 132.

¹¹ For an analysis on the connection between purification and atonement, see N Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature. Its Meaning and Function*, JSOT Sup 56, JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1987.

offerings of the people. Through these holy things the priests participated bodily in the holiness of God and had access to his holy presence.

This pattern of sanctification found its fulfilment in Christ. He himself told his disciples that they were both cleansed and sanctified by the word of his Father (John 15:3; 17:20). As in the Old Testament, cleansing preceded sanctification (Eph 5:26; cf. 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 7:1; 2 Tim 2:21). But both went much deeper and extended much further. Christ not only cleansed and sanctified the flesh but also the conscience of his disciples (Heb 9:13-14; cf Matt 5:4; Mark 7:14-23; Heb 10:22). And he did this for all His disciples, so that they were all equally qualified to serve as priests into the heavenly holy of holies (Heb 10:19-22).

Our sanctification then is accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ (John 17:19; Eph 5:26; Heb 9:14; 10:14). As in the Old Testament we are sanctified through holy things.¹² These are the word of God proclaimed in preaching (John 17:17), the name of the Triune God invoked in prayer (1 Tim 4:5) and employed with the water of baptism (Eph 5:26; cf 1 Cor 6:11), and the body (Heb 10:10; cf 10:20) and the blood of Christ (Heb 10:29; 13:12; cf. John 1:7) received in the Lord's Supper. The effect of Christ's blood bears out the uniqueness of our sanctification. In the Old Testament only the priests and the most holy things in the tabernacle were sprinkled externally with the blood of the sacrifices, but through Christ's death we all drink Christ's blood and so have our hearts sprinkled by it for our inner, total cleansing and sanctification (Heb 10:22; 12:24; 1 Pet 1:2; cf. Heb 9:13,19,21). Our hearts therefore have been sanctified for God's presence and for service in the heavenly sanctuary.¹³

Maintenance of holiness

Holiness is not achieved by human performance. But this does not mean that God's holiness does not require human obedience. The Old Testament stressed the need for obedience to God's cultic ordinances so that he could sanctify his people through their worship (Lev 20:7,8) as well as obedience to God's commandments so that they would maintain their God-given holiness (Deut 7:6-11). The commandments which were associated with Israel's holiness all forbade whatever defiled their purity and profaned their holiness. This comes out most clearly in Deuteronomy 28:9, where we read:

The Lord will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and walk in his ways.

God himself made that quite plain to his people through Moses at Mt Sinai in Exodus 19:5-6 where he told them that their ongoing existence as a holy nation depended on their obedience to him, since they could not be holy apart from him.

In the same way our holiness and progress in it depend on our obedience to God, for we are holy only through him. We are therefore urged to avoid sexual immorality as something incompatible with our vocation to holiness (1 Thess 4:3-8). We are told to offer our bodies as holy sacrifices to God (Rom 12:1) and to yield their members to his righteousness for our sanctification by him (Rom 6:19). As holy people we should put on all the qualities of Christ in our dealings with each other (Col 3:12-15). Our conduct should not be governed by our evil

¹² See A Ludwig, 'Communion in Holy Things in the Old Testament', *Logia* 5.1 (1996), 5-14.

¹³ I have analysed Luther's teaching on holiness in the light of the position developed in an essay entitled: 'Luther on the Christian's Participation in God's Holiness', *LITJ* 19 (1985), 21-29.

desires but by God's holiness (1 Pet 1:14-15). Above all, we must strive after holiness (Heb 12:4).

Yet for all that it is remarkable how infrequently imperatives are linked with any mention of holiness in the New Testament. It is as if the writers deliberately exclude the notion that we in some sense make ourselves holy before God by what we do or what we are.

Purpose of sanctification

When God calls us to holiness he calls us to himself. By letting us share in his holiness he gives us access to his very presence and admits us to fellowship with himself, for only in so far as we are holy may we remain in his presence. His holiness qualifies us for his presence.

We are sanctified so that we can share in the glory of Christ (2 Thess 2:14; cf. John 17:22). As saints we share in Christ's sonship with his heavenly Father. We are with him where he is (John 17:24). We are to be as he is (1 John 3:2). Christ sanctifies us in order to present us holy and spotless, like a radiant bride, both to himself and his heavenly Father (Eph 5:27; Col 1:22). In fact, it is the eternal will of God the Father that we should be holy before him as his sons in Christ (Eph 1:4-5).

There are two sides to this. On the one hand, God lets us share in his holiness so that we may serve him as his royal priesthood (Exod 19:6; Pet 2:5; cf. Rev 5:10). We therefore have access to his presence and may enter the heavenly sanctuary in our worship to receive help directly from the throne of grace (Eph 2:18; Heb 4:16; 10:19-22). We join with the angels and all the redeemed in their heavenly worship and adoration of God (Is 6; Rev 4-5). We stand in his holy service and are called to reign with him on earth (Heb 9:14; 2 Tim 2:21; Rev 5:10).

On the other hand, Christ sanctifies us so that by faith we may even now participate in the divine life of the Holy Trinity. The end of sanctification is, as Paul declares, eternal life (Rom 6:22). Jesus tells what this entails in John 17:19-26. He sanctifies his disciples so that he can include them in his fellowship with the Father. Because they are in him and with him in the presence of the Father, they share in his divine life and in the Father's love for him; in him they are united with the Father and each other. They are the 'temple' where he dwells and where the world may get to know him. So by sharing in his holiness they have eternal life and lead heavenly lives on earth. They are withdrawn by Christ from this world, so that they may share with him in his mission to the world.

The writer to the Hebrews describes the purpose of sanctification most simply. He maintains that without holiness no-one will ever see God (12:14). God then gives us his holiness so that we can see him face to face and enjoy him forever. Holiness is the prerequisite for the vision of God through life in his presence. Unless we ourselves become holy, we shall not be able to enjoy him as the heavenly hosts do by adoring him in his holiness and glory. J C Ryle explains the need for holiness rather eloquently in his book on holiness:

No man can possibly be happy in a place where he is not in his element, and where all around him is not congenial to his tastes, habits and character. When an eagle is happy in an iron cage, when a sheep is happy in the water, when an owl is happy in the blaze of the noonday sun, when a fish is happy on the dry land - then, and not till then, will I admit that the unsanctified man could be happy in heaven.¹⁴

¹⁴ J C Ryle, *Holiness*, Evangelical Press, Welwyn, 1984, 23.

Ultimately God the Father shares his holiness with us in his Son here on earth, so that he can give himself completely to us and all his saints in heaven.

The final goal of God's dealings with his people, according to Isaiah 35, was the establishment of a 'holy way', so that his people, cleansed and redeemed, could finally return to Zion with great rejoicing and there see his glory. There they would be glorified by his glorious presence. Then his name would be sanctified on earth (Ez 39:7-8), the common world would be absorbed into his holy domain (Zech 14:20-21), and God's glory would fill the whole earth (Num 14:21; cf Isa 6:3). Christ is that holy way. His work of sanctification will be complete when new Jerusalem comes down from God to fill his new heaven and earth (Rev 21-22). Then what was foreshadowed in Genesis 2:1-3 will finally come to pass, for the purpose of creation does not lie in creation itself and in the care of it by humans but in their worship of God and the incorporation of it in the divine domain. Then God will be all in all, and everything will be holy through Jesus Christ.