



Gratia Eruitionis

Azusa Pacific University | Honors Program

Volume Three

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Consensus:
Gender Relations
in Biblical Texts*

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Foreword

This third volume of *Gratia Eruditionis* highlights the winners of Azusa Pacific University's third annual Honors Paper Competition on the occasion of the 19th annual Common Day of Learning (CDL). These three essays were chosen by a faculty review committee from a pool of excellent papers. The authors have distinguished themselves in their fields, and we are pleased to make their work available to the APU community. I wholeheartedly congratulate Ms. Marielle Kipps (English), Ms. Kelsey Faul (Biblical Studies), and Mr. Andrew Soria (Spanish) on this accomplishment.

Inspired by her own experience as an undergraduate, CDL conference director, Dr. Jennifer Walsh, created this Honors Student Essay Competition as part of CDL to encourage Honors students to share their scholarship, to receive recognition, including a monetary prize, for their research, and to have their work published. I am grateful to Dr. Walsh for her inspiration and leadership in this area; this journal is a testimony to her steadfast commitment to encouraging young scholars in their academic endeavors.

I trust that this publication will enable a wider audience to experience some of the outstanding scholarship of the Honors students at Azusa Pacific University. Under the very capable direction of Dr. Vicky Bowden, Azusa Pacific University's Honors Program has grown and flourished, challenging and cultivating Honors scholars through a rigorous curriculum as well as numerous extracurricular events. I commend her and the entire Honors Council and Honors Faculty for their vital role in teaching and mentoring these promising scholars.

Diane J. Guido, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Programs

Discourse Versus Consensus: Gender Relations in Biblical Texts

Kelsey Faul



Kelsey Faul is a junior Biblical Studies Major and English minor. She would like to extend her deepest thanks to Dr. Sarah Apetrei for her guidance in finding relevant and controversial criticism, and for her enthusiasm in discussing gender relations in scripture. Her questions were enlightening and instrumental in shaping the trajectory of this paper.

Abstract

Feminist writers have historically relied on the Bible as a text with subversive potential, re-reading passages from the Old and New Testaments in order to challenge accepted attitudes towards women that undermined the value and legitimacy of the female voice. By challenging the function of gender as a defining factor of humanity through their rejection of androcentric and misogynistic readings of the Bible, feminist writers have reinterpreted biblical texts from a perspective that takes into account the significance of gender relations. While the Bible has played a key role in depicting and shaping gender relations in the Western world, it does not provide simple answers regarding gender. It is for this reason that the consideration of how the relationship between the genders is presented in the Bible and an analysis of how those texts relate to other biblical depictions of gender relations are essential to biblical hermeneutics.

The Bible is an authoritative text that has immeasurably influenced the way that the Western world understands how gender is defined and its role in society, but the Bible does not present a unified stance on gender relations. Simply defined, gender is both “a social category imposed on a sexed body”¹ and “a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated.”² Gender plays a significant part in shaping human understanding, and the role that gender plays is largely influenced by how the relationship between the genders is understood. The differences contained within the Bible are not so much instances of contradiction as they are examples of intertextuality within the Bible that allow for a deeper understanding of what it means to be gendered beings. While there are many biblical texts relevant to gender relations, the ones presented here provide a diverse sampling of how gender is presented in the Bible, as well as how gender has been used by both biblical characters and writers to communicate ideas, concepts and truths about reality.

One of the most definitive texts regarding gender relations in western society is found in the book of Genesis. A mere 46 verses long and spanning only two chapters out of 50, it begins in Gen 2 v. 4b, on the heels of the first creation account. The first creation account is often called the Priestly account, whereas the second is called the Yahwist. While the dates of composition are uncertain, the Yahwist account most likely precedes the Priestly account. When it comes to gender relations, the general perception of the Yahwist account is that it presents a clear hierarchy, with man dominating over woman, for not only is man created first (2 v. 7), but woman is created as man’s helper and then is named by man—an action that implies subordination (2 vv. 18-22).

A closer look at Gen 2-3 provides insight into the issue. This passage fits under the classification of a myth—that is, a narrative that contains both fictional and non-fictional elements, written for the purpose of conveying a truth deeper than what appears on the surface of the text.³ The first significant relationship in the narrative is that between the human and God. God creates the human “from the dust of the ground” (2 v. 7) and has the human live in the garden of Eden, where the human is

¹ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1056.

² Scott, 1069.

³ Michael McGehee, *The Bible Doesn’t Have to Be Hard to Read*, (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2000), 95.

“to till it and keep it” (2 v. 15). The second significant relationship is that between God and woman. God is the one who creates the woman out of material drawn from the man (which can be interpreted as either “rib” or “side”).⁴ There are two ways to interpret the creation of woman, and three possible conclusions. If the order of creation is first man and then woman, there is the implication that either the man is superior to the woman because the woman is derivative, or that the woman is superior to the man as the final created being, and thus the masterpiece of creation.⁵ If, however, the order of creation is human followed by man and woman, the implications change. The creation of woman becomes the differentiation of the sexes from an androgynous being.⁶ Before woman, *adam* was simply a human, while after woman, there was man also. In this sense, the creation of man and woman is simultaneous, implying equality between the sexes at the moment of creation.

Even though the text points towards equality between man and woman, it can still be argued that the reason God creates woman is to be man’s helper, for God says in v. 18, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” It seems, then, that woman is still in a position of submission. Yet there are many modern commentators who would argue that this is not the case, and I add my voice to theirs. A feature of the text that must not be missed is that the “helper” God intends to create is also the human’s “partner.” Another translation of God’s statement is, “It is not good for the human to be alone, I shall make him a sustainer beside him” (2 v. 18).⁷ The terms “helper,” “partner” and “sustainer” all fail to capture the variety of meanings possible for the Hebrew term, *ezer kenegdo*.⁸ Robert Alter points out that the problem with translating *ezer kenegdo* as “helper” is that it implies “a merely auxiliary function.”⁹ Phyllis Tribble explains that *ezer* “designates a beneficial relationship” and can be used to refer to God,

⁴ “Hebrew Bible Accounts,” in *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, eds. Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 29.

⁵ Kvam, 29.

⁶ Kvam, 29.

⁷ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), 9.

⁸ Alter, 9.

⁹ Alter, 9.

humanity, as well as animals, while the word *neged* “connotes equality.”¹⁰ Whatever the best interpretation is, what is most significant is that *ezer kenegdo* is not a term denoting subjectivity or inferiority.

Even though *ezer kenegdo* does not imply that woman is inferior to man, there remains the issue of naming. Instances of naming in the Bible are often interpreted as meaning dominance of the namer over the named. After the creation of woman, the man says,

This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken (2 v. 23).

Considering that this text is part of the creation myth and thus describes how the world is meant to be, an instance of naming would suggest the text’s approval of male dominance. Yet the Hebrew word for “name” is not used in the episode at all, neither as a noun nor as a verb. Instead, the word used is “to call.”¹¹ Not only is “calling” in Hebraic texts not synonymous with “naming,” but the naming formula found throughout the Bible makes use of both words together, such as when the man calls and names the animals of the earth in Gen 1 vv. 19–20.¹²

Instead of an episode of naming, man’s first moment of speech affirms the solidarity between man and woman and the likeness that they share, while also differentiating them from one another. It is a “kinship formula[,] or one that indicates a covenant or alliance.”¹³ This defies the dichotomous conception of man and woman as essentially different beings. Out of all the creatures in the world, man and woman are most like each other as equals beings designed to work together. Man’s poetic declaration is followed by an etiological statement explaining the shift in familial ties after marriage, as well as the centrality of sex to the unity of a husband and wife.¹⁴ When man and woman join together as husband and wife, they are loyal to one another above anyone else.

A further aspect of the relationship between man and woman is mutual dependency. Ronald A. Simkins asserts that the concept of gender

¹⁰ Phyllis Tribble, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41, no. 1 (March 1973): 36.

¹¹ Tribble, “Depatriarchalizing,” 38.

¹² Tribble, “Depatriarchalizing,” 38.

¹³ Kvam, 30.

¹⁴ Alice L. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 25.

is established in the text via a procreation and agriculture metaphor.¹⁵ Man, *ha adam*, is created from arable land, *ha dama*, which is a feminine Hebrew word.¹⁶ The image is of man coming from the womb of the land, with God as the potter and midwife.¹⁷ The man is dependent on the land for life, and the land is dependent on the man for cultivation. Simkins interprets this image as a part of gender construction in Gen 2, identifying working of the land as masculine and childbearing as feminine.

Genesis 3 is where gender relations become unequal. Once man and woman disobey God by eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, discord is introduced into their relationship, even before the curses and consequences that are the result of their disobedience. When God asks man and woman if they have eaten the forbidden fruit, man blames not only woman for giving him the fruit, but God for creating woman, while woman blames the serpent. This is the first glimpse in the Bible of sin corrupting gender relations.

After man and woman confess their guilt, there is a speech unit in which God tells man and woman the consequences of their sin (3 vv. 14–19). The judgments that God makes are statements describing the way things will be as a result of the humans' sin.¹⁸ Man and woman disobeyed, gained the knowledge of good and evil, and so became capable of evil. God tells woman,

I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. (3 v. 16).

The first clause is the consequence inflicted by God; then God makes a similar statement, which is expanded upon, beginning with “yet,” which implies that woman’s desire for her husband is in spite of the pain of childbirth.¹⁹ The last statement of the speech unit “is not license for male supremacy, but rather it is condemnation of that very pattern. Subjugation and supremacy are perversions of creation.”²⁰ This passage explains why there is suffering where there once was harmony, and why man exerts

¹⁵ Ronald A. Simkins, “Gender Construction in the Yahwist Creation Myth” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 39.

¹⁶ Simkins, 39.

¹⁷ Simkins, 40.

¹⁸ Tribble, 41.

¹⁹ André LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 38.

²⁰ Tribble, 41.

his power over woman by naming her “Eve” in v. 20, “the mother of all living”—a title that conveys honor upon woman, while also solidifying her “sexual and social role.”²¹

Genesis 2–3 is permeated by a sense of the unity intended for man and woman (2 v. 23), of the goodness of being together (2 v. 18), and yet also of the fragility of that unity (3 vv. 12–13). These themes are reflected in the Song of Songs as well. It is a wonder that the Song ever made it into the canon of scripture. Described by Tremper Longman III as “something like an erotic psalter,”²² this collection of poetry conveys the beauty, intensity and difficulty of eros through a kind of dialogue between a female character and a male character that denotes equality between the two. Considering the traditional interpretations of Gen 2–3 and the “natural” readings of the Song, one cannot help but wonder about the apparent contradiction. Yet this is a contradiction that lies in interpretation, and not necessarily in the texts themselves.

The Song fills a need in biblical monotheism for discourse on human sexuality, yet interpreters as diverse as Origen and John Wesley have historically turned to “a nonsexual interpretation.”²³ It was not until the middle of the 19th century that the Song was interpreted as love poetry. For well over one thousand years, the Song has been interpreted as an allegory, even though it does not contain any textual signals that indicate it should be read as anything other than a love song.²⁴ Indeed, “[i]ts poetic power and its force of persuasion are so irresistible that no cover-up has been able to put a conventional fig leaf on the controversial parts of the love song.”²⁵

The gender relations in Song of Songs are similar to those of Gen 2. The man and the woman are shown to be equals—they pursue each other, both taking initiative in their relationship.²⁶ For example, the man seeks out his beloved at her home and says to her, “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away” (Song 2 v. 10), and the woman goes out into the city at night and searches for the man, saying, “I will seek he whom my soul loves” (Song 3 v. 2). Gender equality is not complete, as evidenced by the

²¹ Kvam, 4.

²² Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 2.

²³ LaCocque, 16.

²⁴ Longman, 23.

²⁵ LaCocque, 2.

²⁶ Longman, 16.

man's greater autonomy and sexual freedom than the woman,²⁷ but the man does not take advantage of the freedoms that society has given him, and he does not dominate over the woman. There is some opposition from the woman's brothers, as is evident in 1 v. 6 and 8 vv. 8-9, but the general tone of the poems conveys the sense that, just as it was in Gen 2, it is good for the man and the woman to be together. Also, work is an essential part of life for the man and woman of the Song (Song 1 vv. 6-8), just as it is for the man and woman of Gen 2-3 (Gen 2 v. 15).²⁸

While Gen 2 and the Song are in accord pertaining to the essentials of gender relations, there remain some contrasts. The most striking difference between Gen 3 and the Song is that Gen 3 provides an etiological reason for the subjugation of women in ancient Israelite society, whereas subjugation is nonexistent in the Song. Tribble posits that "[p]erhaps the Paradise described in Genesis 2 and destroyed in Genesis 3 has been regained, expanded, and improved upon in the Song of Songs."²⁹ A significant occupation of Gen 2 is fertility, as can be seen in the procreation and agriculture metaphor, the consequence of woman's sin, and man's naming of woman as "Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (3 v. 20). The Song, however, contains no references to fertility or childbearing, which is highly uncharacteristic of a biblical text addressing the love between a man and a woman.³⁰ I agree with LaCocque's statement that this absence "disentangles two aspects that were deemed inseparable, thus liberating the erotic from the economic."³¹ The love between a man and a woman, according to the Song, is not about children, lineage or inheritance, but rather about desire, union, the dangers of love, and the jubilation that can accompany it, thus ignoring the sexual and social role conferred upon woman in Gen 3.

One of the more controversial aspects of the Song is the marital status of the man and the woman. The text never indicates whether they are married or not. Longman argues that the Song must be read within the context of the canon, which would prompt the reader to assume that the

intimacy described is within marriage.³² The poet(s) expect the audience to understand Hebrew family structure and to interpret the poetry in light of that structure.³³ LaCocque takes a different view, contending that to interpret marriage as a central part of the text is to project one's own agenda on the text.³⁴ "[O]n the contrary," he writes, "the entire Song strums the chord of 'free love,' neither recognized nor institutionalized."³⁵ Both Longman and LaCocque make valid points. On the one hand, it does not make sense for the Hebrew Bible to contain poetry referring to such intimacy outside of marriage when there are, in that very same canon, laws for the people of Israel that forbid premarital sex, punishing offenders extremely harshly. At the same time, though, there is not textual evidence to support or deny the marital status of the man and woman.

Gender relations in the Song, unlike Gen 2-3, are not limited to the man and the woman. The other characters reveal aspects of the way the genders relate. The woman's brothers have a duty to protect the sexuality of their sister, and may even take part in marriage negotiations (8 vv. 8-9).³⁶ It is in this sense that male domination is most clear in the Song, for "[t]he brothers thus represent the control of sexuality and societal norms."³⁷ At the same time, though, the woman is shown to "resist these norms as she pursues her true love," which serves as a criticism of those societal norms, similar to the way God's statement in Gen 3 v. 16 is a criticism of male domination when seen in contrast to the equality between man and woman in Gen 2.

In a way, Song of Songs recovers and makes right that which was lost at the fall. As poetry, it re-imagines and celebrates the relations between genders, imbuing them with the equality of Gen 2, and rejecting the male dominance depicted in Gen 3. Woman's desire for her husband in Gen 3 is in the Song, where the woman and man desire each other equally and joyfully (7 v. 10).³⁸ Masculine and feminine are not defined in terms of man's tilling of the land and woman's childbearing, for the man and the woman of the Song work the land and watch over livestock, and the woman's identity and femininity are not tied to motherhood. They must

²⁷ J. Cheryl Exum, "Ten Things Every Feminist Should Know About the Song of Songs" in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, eds. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 30.

²⁸ Tribble, "Depatriarchalizing," 44.

²⁹ Tribble, "Depatriarchalizing," 42.

³⁰ LaCocque, 47.

³¹ LaCocque, 47.

³² Longman, 60.

³³ Longman, 60.

³⁴ LaCocque, 8.

³⁵ LaCocque, 8.

³⁶ Longman, 17.

³⁷ Longman, 17.

³⁸ Tribble, "Depatriarchalizing," 46.

live in a world where male domination threatens their equality, and where societal expectations threaten their identities, but they know neither shame nor enmity. While man and woman inhabit certain social and sexual roles in Gen 2-3 that they do not take on in the Song, both Gen 2-3 and the Song support a view of man and woman as equal partners, unique yet more similar than they are different, who find fulfillment in their unity.

Analyzing gender relations in the Bible goes beyond texts like Gen 2-3 and the Song that explicitly address the relationship between men and woman, for gender is an integral part of the way that biblical writers communicate key historical and theological concepts to readers. The stories that they choose and the ways that they employ gender are often difficult to reconcile with gender relations as they are established in Gen 2-3 and the Song. A few such examples arise from the book of Judges, in which women either suffer under the oppression of patriarchy, or must live within the bounds of patriarchy. These women include the unnamed concubine of the Benjamite in Judg 19, and Deborah and Jael of Judg 4-5.

The story of Judg 19 is situated at the beginning of the Benjamite traditions, which span ch. 19-21 and conclude the book of Judges. Her story is one of tragedy and violence, and the phrase “In those days, when there was no king in Israel” somewhat forebodingly begins the chapter. The woman is the concubine of a Levite (v. 1b), meaning that he owns her, and that her value is not much higher than that of a slave’s.³⁹ The narrative is set into motion when the woman leaves her master to return to her father’s house (v. 2). The reason for her departure is difficult to translate, but could either be because she was unfaithful, or because her master angered her.⁴⁰ After a period of four months, her master follows her to her father’s house in order to “speak tenderly to her and bring her back” (v. 3a). The use of this phrase is significant, for it demonstrates that the master loves his concubine without implying any guilt on his part regarding why she left.⁴¹ Whether or not the woman is guilty, the master “seeks reconciliation.”⁴²

When the master arrives at the house of his concubine’s father, his time there is spent eating and drinking with the father (v. 4, 6, 8), even though his intention was supposedly to speak to his concubine. Her

³⁹ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 66.

⁴⁰ Trible, “Texts of Terror,” 67.

⁴¹ Trible, “Texts of Terror,” 67.

⁴² Trible, “Texts of Terror,” 67.

voice is not heard once throughout the entire pericope. The time that the master spends at his concubine’s father’s house is a prolonged power struggle between the two male figures, with the master as the victor.⁴³ No matter how much the concubine’s father entreats him to stay, the master is resolved to return home with his concubine (vv. 9-10). It is upon this journey home that tragedy takes place. The master decides to spend the night in Gibeah, but no one offers them a place to stay (v. 15). An old man from Ephraim, the place where the Levite lives, notices them in the city square, and, after a brief conversation with the master, he offers to take them in (vv. 17-20). Yet hospitality does not necessarily mean safety, for later on that night, the house is surrounded by the men of the city, who are described as “a perverse lot” (v. 22). They demand that the old man turn over the master to them, that they might “know him” (v. 22), which most likely means that they want to sexually violate him.⁴⁴ The host responds by verbally prohibiting their actions in v. 23, and then by offering “[t]wo female objects...to protect a male from a group of wicked ‘brothers’” in v. 24.⁴⁵ It seems that the rules of hospitality only reach as far as the male guest, whose safety is worth more than that of the host’s virgin daughter and of the concubine.⁴⁶ The host calls the men’s intentions for the guest “vile” (v. 24), implying that whatever they do to the women will not be vile, or at least will be less so.

When the men do not listen to the host, “the man seized his concubine, and put her out to them. They wantonly raped her, and abused her all through the night until the morning” (v. 25b). This was the concubine that the man sought out at her father’s house, with whom he wished to reconcile, and yet, in the interest of his own safety, he allows for her to be brutally treated at the hands of wicked men of Gibeah. The next day, as the man is leaving, he discovers his concubine lying on the ground at the doorway of the house. This is the only time that he speaks to her in the entire passage, saying, “Get up...we are going” (v. 28a). The text is unclear as to whether the woman is dead or alive. If she is dead, then the man becomes a murderer in v. 29, when “he took a knife, and grasping his concubine he cut her into twelve pieces...and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel” in order to rouse the people against the tribe of

⁴³ Trible, “Texts of Terror,” 69.

⁴⁴ Trible, “Texts of Terror,” 73.

⁴⁵ Trible, “Texts of Terror,” 74.

⁴⁶ cf. Trible, “Texts of Terror,” 75.

Benjamin. Their anger is directed not at the atrocity committed to the man's concubine as a woman, but at what has been done to his property, for as the following chapters show, the sexual exploitation of women is a part of life in the book of Judges.⁴⁷

Without a name or a voice, the concubine is objectified, neglected, deserted, and brutalized. The hope in her story is almost indiscernible. Her death is not mourned, but rather is used to rally the Israelites against Benjamin, much in the same way that Saul dismembers oxen in order to rally the Israelites to aid Jabesh Gilead.⁴⁸ The fighting that ensues leads to the slaughter of the entire tribe of Benjamin, with the exception of six hundred men (20 vv. 46–48). In order to prevent the complete extinction of Benjamin, all of Jabesh Gilead is killed, except for the virgins, who are given to the remainder of the tribe of Benjamin. Two hundred more women are abducted from Shiloh for the Benjamites as well. It is in this way that the rape of one woman becomes the potential rape of six hundred. Taken by itself, this story offers no message of hope for oppressed women. One tragedy leads to hundreds more, and again, God is all but silent. Furthermore, these women are severely oppressed and victimized, yet the text offers no explicit criticism of the male characters' actions.

Yet the book of Judges is not populated exclusively by helpless victims of patriarchy, for the characters of Deborah and Jael are presented as women of strength who exploit the patriarchal system in which they live. While the concubine and the women of Jabesh Gilead are silent, unnamed, oppressed and unable to act on their own behalf, Deborah and Jael are named women who speak and act decisively and with authority. Deborah's story is told in Judg 4–5. She is a prophetess and judge over Israel, to whom “the Israelites came up to...for judgment” (4 v. 5b). As Israel's judge, she informs Barak of God's command to fight Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite king's army (vv. 6–7). When Barak refuses to go to war without her, she accompanies him to the battlefield. Deborah does not take on the role of victim, but rather that of leader and messenger of God.

While Deborah leads Israel, Jael kills Israel's enemy. She is probably not an Israelite, for she is the wife of Heber the Kenite. Sisera comes to her tent to seek refuge as he runs from Barak (4 v. 17). It quickly becomes apparent that Sisera is mistaken in assuming that since Heber the Kenite

⁴⁷ Tribble, “Texts of Terror,” 82.

⁴⁸ Tribble, “Texts of Terror,” 81.

is an ally of the Canaanite king Jabin, his wife must be an ally as well.⁴⁹ The language of the passage contains both sexual and maternal imagery, showing how Jael takes advantage of patriarchal conceptions of women to lull Sisera into feeling safe, before she kills him in his greatest moment of vulnerability.⁵⁰

Even though they seem like stories that have the potential to empower women, the stories of Deborah and Jael cannot be taken completely at face value. Although both women are strong female characters, they remain bound by the patriarchal societies in which they live. Deborah's role as judge over Israel is unique in that no other female judge is recorded, but she still “endorses the very patriarchal values that her [role] might seem to challenge.”⁵¹ Similarly, the violence by which Jael delivers her family from the dangers of being affiliated with the losing side of a battle is an element of patriarchy, for it is “violence that confers authority.”⁵² Jael and Deborah do not transcend patriarchy, but rather work within it, showing their resourcefulness in promoting the success and safety of their people.

Unlike in Gen 2–3 and the Song, where the nature of gender relations is addressed by the text, the Deuteronomistic editor does not attempt to explain the way that men and women interact, or the balance of power between males and females, but rather politicizes gender relations in Judges. Women become another casualty of Israel's disobedience, made subject to profound inequality and oppression. The negative experiences of female characters are not condoned by the text, but they are not explicitly rejected, either, for the androcentric nature of the text implicitly values the stories of men over the stories of women. Similar to the way that the Levite uses what happened to his concubine in order to communicate a message to the rest of Israel, the atrocities that happen to women become part of the Deuteronomistic editor's justification for the repeated statement that “[i]n those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Judg 21 v. 25), thus “promot[ing] a monarchy that would establish order and justice in Israel.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, “Controlling Perspectives: Women, Men, and the Authority of Violence in Judges 4–5,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58, no. 3 (Sept. 1990): 392.

⁵⁰ Fewell, 392.

⁵¹ Fewell, 397.

⁵² Fewell, 397.

⁵³ Tribble, “Texts of Terror,” 84.

Interpretation becomes more complicated when the biblical text depicts violence towards women in a positive light. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the prophets of the Hebrew Bible—more specifically, in their use of the marriage metaphor to expound upon God’s relationship to Israel. The authors of these texts cast God in the role of the husband, while Israel, Judah, or Jerusalem takes on the role of the wife. With God as the subject, “we—that is, female as well as male readers—are expected to sympathize with the divine perspective against the (personified) woman.”⁵⁴ The most disturbing aspect of the marriage metaphor is the way that divine judgment is associated with rape and violence against women.⁵⁵ While it is possible to sympathize with the divine perspective to a certain degree, the violence that the prophets describe as perpetrated by God upon the metaphorical women is severe.

Hosea was the first to use the marriage metaphor for God’s relationship with Israel.⁵⁶ Chapter 2 provides an example of the marriage metaphor, through which the writer communicates God’s anger at Israel for worshiping other gods, God’s intended punishment, as well as God’s intentions for reconciliation. The passage begins with the husband’s rejection of the wife (v. 2). If she does not end her unfaithfulness, he threatens to “strip her naked and expose her as in the day she was born” (v. 3). The husband goes on to describe his intended punishment of his wife’s continued unfaithfulness, including her isolation (v. 6) and her deprivation of food and clothing (vv. 9–10). In vv. 14–23, the husband, who is identified as YHWH in v. 16, speaks about how he will restore his wife, the people of Israel, to her former glory. Verses 19–20 captures the tone of this section, with YHWH saying to Israel:

And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.

There is much beauty in the movement of the narrative presented in Hos 2. Israel sins again and again, yet God still redeems Israel and restores the relationship. The metaphor is appealing because it imbues the narrative

⁵⁴ J. Cheryl Exum, “The Ethics of Biblical Violence Against Women,” in *The Bible in Ethics*, eds. John W. Rogerson, Margaret Davies, and M. Daniel Carroll R., 248–271 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 249.

⁵⁵ Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 85.

⁵⁶ Exum, “Ethics,” 250.

with a sense of romance, where God’s love is that of the broken-hearted husband, hurt by his wife’s betrayal, yet still full of love and forgiveness. At the same time, though, “[t]he marriage metaphor insists that domestic abuse can be redeemed through romance, seduction, and courtship.”⁵⁷ While this is arguably not the intent of the authors who use the marriage metaphor to communicate about God’s relationship with Israel, it remains an unavoidable part of the metaphor that alienates readers who identify or sympathize with the woman, while also supporting the patriarchal stance that husbands have the “authority to degrade and silence their wives when the latter act in ways that allegedly bring shame on their husbands.”⁵⁸

Another difficult aspect of the writings of the prophets is that the violence perpetrated against women, even though it is metaphorical, is supposed to be part of God’s revelation. Renita J. Weems states the problem well when she writes:

Women readers in America therefore find themselves in a baffling predicament as readers and critics: the text that imagines their rape and mutilation as women is also the text that advocates their noblest ideals as citizens and as human beings.⁵⁹

In Hosea, as well as in other instances of the marriage metaphor in the Hebrew prophets, God’s justice involves violence and humiliation perpetrated against a metaphorical woman. Not only could this be used to justify the battery and degradation of actual women, but it also calls into question the nature of divine justice, and how this metaphor should be interpreted in light of the church’s present experience. The weakness of the marriage metaphor lies in the identification of God with the male role and of Israel with the female role. In so doing, God’s actions against Israel are seen as inherently masculine, while the transgressions of the female are presented as inherently feminine. Yet God is not a gendered God, for even though God is often referred to using masculine pronouns, and the majority of the imagery used in relation to God is masculine within the context of ancient Israel, God is also associated with feminine imagery that contributes to the depiction in the Hebrew Bible of God as a complete being, and thus without sexuality.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Weems, 90.

⁵⁸ Weems, 87.

⁵⁹ Weems, 100.

⁶⁰ Tribble, 31.

The presence of biblical texts that both advocate equality in the relationship between men and women and that seem to support the subjugation of women to men do not contradict one another, for not all of these texts speak specifically to the issue of gender relations. Even so, it is difficult to reconcile the dynamics between the sexes as depicted in the marriage metaphor of the prophets with the depiction of gender relations in Gen 2 and in the Song of Songs. But just as the Song recovers gender relations that were lost at the fall, so does Jesus' ministry recover feminine imagery from the negative associations it garnered in the writings of the Hebrew prophets. This is especially apparent in the Gospel of John, where the gospel writer sets Jesus' interactions with men and women in contrast in order to show how the ideal disciple should act. A relevant passage for examination is found in chapter 20, in which Mary Magdalene goes to Jesus' tomb so early in the morning that it is still dark. Even in the darkness, she sees that the stone covering the tomb has been moved, so she runs to tell Peter and the beloved disciple about what she has discovered. While the beloved disciple arrives before the others at the tomb, Peter enters the tomb first. Upon entering the tomb as well, the beloved disciple "saw and believed" (20 v. 8), which can be interpreted to mean that the beloved disciple came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus at that moment.⁶¹ The difficulty with this interpretation is that in the next verse, the author explains that "for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead" (20 v. 9). In light of v. 9, it makes more sense to say that the beloved disciple saw the absence of Jesus' body and believed that Mary had told the truth.⁶² The three-part structure of this resurrection narrative is similar to those found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The second part of the structure "serves in part to model the proper response of believers to the risen Lord."⁶³ The author of the Gospel privileges Mary's actions over those of the disciples.

After Peter and the beloved disciple confirm the absence of Jesus' body, they return home, while Mary remains "weeping outside the tomb" (20 v. 11). That Mary is weeping is significant because she fulfills Jesus'

⁶¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, (2 vols.; Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1975), 267.

⁶² Colleen Conway, "Gender Matters in John," in *A Feminist Companion to John*, vol. II, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff, 79-103 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 92.

⁶³ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 284.

prophecy that "you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy" (16 v. 20).⁶⁴ Furthermore, Mary is rewarded for her devotion. As she stands at the tomb, two angels appear to her, followed soon after by Jesus' first appearance after his death. Conway writes that "[f]or the last time in the narrative, a woman will once again be privy to the self-revelation of Jesus, reminding the reader once more of the association between women and the self-revelation of Jesus."⁶⁵ Instead of using Peter and the beloved disciple to tell everyone that Jesus is ascending to God the Father, he entrusts Mary with this task (20 v. 17). Again, Jesus' attitude towards Mary undermines societal expectations. He responds to Mary's devotion, not Mary's gender. The fact that she is female has no bearing on how Jesus interacts with her or on what he commissions her to do.

Another relevant passage appears in ch. 12, where Jesus is anointed. The author sets Mary of Bethany and Judas in contrast to one another, with Mary as the true female disciple, and Judas as the unfaithful male disciple.⁶⁶ Mary anoints Jesus with a bottle of costly perfume, pouring it on his feet and wiping them with her hair (v. 3). Gail R. O'Day describes this as "an act of pure extravagance,"⁶⁷ which is fitting since Mary not only wipes Jesus' feet with her hair, but also forgoes anointing Jesus' head in favor of his feet, trading a sign of honor for one of humility.⁶⁸ Judas' response to Mary's action is unappreciative at best, questioning the value of such extravagance when the perfume could have been sold for a large sum of money, which could then be distributed among the poor (v. 5). Verse 6 tells us that Judas' response is prompted by his interest in keeping the common purse full, that he might steal from it. Throughout the episode, Mary is humble and unselfconscious, expressing her devotion extravagantly, while Judas' remarks are self-serving and dishonest. In Conway's words, "the use of gender contrasts...implies a critique of and challenge to traditional institutional authorities."⁶⁹ This is not to say that the only faithful disciples were female, but rather that in defining the faithful follower, the author takes advantage of societal understandings of

⁶⁴ Conway, 95.

⁶⁵ Conway, 96.

⁶⁶ Conway, 91.

⁶⁷ Gail R. O'Day, "John," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, 381-393 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 386.

⁶⁸ Barclay, 2:110.

⁶⁹ Conway, 99.

gender in order to expound upon what it means to follow Christ. At the same time, Jesus perceives the hearts of both Mary and Judas, and chooses to rebuke Judas and defend Mary, which shows that what matters is not gender but the spirit in which the individual acts.

Even though there is equality in Christ, Conway identifies a noteworthy issue for feminist readers—namely, that by privileging the actions of female characters such as the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene, the author of the Gospel of John makes the point “that men are to be ‘women’ to God, that is, they are to be in a subordinate, dependent, but also intimate, relationship with God.”⁷⁰ Such an understanding of the relationship between humanity and God draws on patriarchal conceptions of the relationship between males and females, reinforcing patriarchy instead of undermining it. Yet the reinforcement of patriarchy is a function of the text, reflecting the patriarchal worldview of the author, and not necessarily reflecting Jesus’ attitude towards women in the Gospel of John. While the author of the Gospel uses these episodes where Jesus interacts with women as examples of how followers of Christ should be like “‘women to God,” Jesus’ actions in themselves do not conform to the values of patriarchy. During a time when the majority of men disapproved of women inhabiting the public sphere that traditionally belonged to men, and when merely speaking to a woman in public could mean the end of one’s reputation if one was a rabbi, Jesus’ actions, namely his disregard for the social barriers between males and females, were radically inclusive. Jesus’ interaction with Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany indicate that the ideal followers of Jesus are not determined by their status or gender, but rather by their devotion and humility. Jesus reveals himself to those whom he chooses, regardless of whom he might offend or how his reputation might be affected, openly defying social conventions. It is in this way that he shows how women are not bound to the negative feminine imagery of the Hebrew prophets, and that gender is not a defining factor of Jesus’ followers.

As these examples from Genesis, the Song, Judges, Hosea and the Gospel of John show, it is difficult, if not impossible, to compose a unified biblical stance on gender relations. Genesis 2–3 addresses how men and women are to be equal partners, but with roles that are gender-specific;

the Song rejects the idea of gender-specific actions and roles, drawing the relationship of man and woman away from fertility and lineage towards romantic love, desire and unity; and gender relations are not so much established as they are used to convey the story of the people of Israel in both Judges and the Hebrew prophets. Finally, in Jesus’ ministry, multiple different women become examples of ideal disciples whose actions towards Jesus are set in contrast to the actions of males in the text. To attempt to bring all of these depictions of gender together into one biblical stance on gender relations would require the rejection of the authority of texts that appear to contradict the preferred theology of gender. Such a rejection is impossible without claiming immense authority—a claim that would be difficult to defend when brought up against the authority of tradition, not to mention the authority of scripture itself. Yet seeking unity ignores the rich abundance of voices in the Bible that speak to the issue of gender relations. Human relationships are complex and diverse, including the relationships between the genders and within the genders, and the manifold depictions of gender relations reflect that complexity. While the methods employed by biblical writers and editors show the influence of patriarchal thought, biblical texts remain in conversation with one another, allowing interpreters to determine where emphasis belongs, and how the intertextuality inherent in the Bible is significant to past and current experiences of gender relations.

⁷⁰ Conway, 102.

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Man Suspended: An Analysis of René Girard, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Blaise Pascal

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Marielle Kipps, often called “Marz,” is a junior English Literature major, minoring in Religion. This paper expresses her academic interests in the intersection of literature, philosophy, and theology. She hopes to pursue teaching in higher education in this interdisciplinary focus. She would like to give a special thanks to Dr. David Williams, for cultivating and caring for her mind during her High Sierra Semester, and Dr. Chris Adams, for his care and mentorship throughout her college career.

Abstract

This paper examines Rene Girard's view of human nature, as presented through his reading of *Hamlet*, as contrasted with Pascal's view of human nature. Girard reads Hamlet as a dramatic revelation of his theory of mimetic violence: humans are trapped in a cycle of desire which causes growing resentment of others resulting in violence and revenge. He examines the character of Hamlet who questions this cycle, but ultimately is bound to fulfill the demands of the cycle. Man is helpless to escape his wretchedness and ultimately doomed unless an external salvation rescues him. Girard's view is then compared to Pascal's view of human nature, with which I agree. This paper shows that Pascal agrees with Girard about the wretched condition of man, but differs in one essential point: because man can know his wretchedness, he is capable of being great and participating in his coming into greatness through salvation.

In this paper, I will show through his interpretation of the tragedy of *Hamlet*, that Rene Girard's understanding of human nature involves man¹ being trapped in an inescapable system of violence and desire, hopelessly bound to destruction. I will then show that Pascal shares a similar view of human nature, differing on one small but essential point: man is bound to his wretchedness but can understand that he is bound, and through that understanding (which is man's greatest ability), he can come to know Greatness. I will argue that Pascal believes in the potentiality of man to recognize his need for salvation from his wretchedness, whereas Girard does not view human nature as having any ability within itself to participate in salvation.

To begin and support this argument, a detailed explanation will be given of Girard's chefs-d'oeuvre theory of the mimesis-driven system of revenge and violence in relation to Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, through Girard's interpretation of the play in his essay "Hamlet's Dull Revenge." This essay along with my extended Girardian reading of the play shows that *Hamlet* is a tale of critique rather than cowardice and demonstrates the Girardian concept that human nature is ultimately determined to obey the mimetic cycle, having no internal ability to escape. I will then discuss Blaise Pascal and a number of his *Penseés*, which seek to define humanity as paradoxical in nature, admitting as Girard does that man is trapped in a state of conflict. However, I will also show that Pascal asserts that man still has a potential for goodness within himself-- the ability to understand, reason, and know his predicament-- and is thus not entirely lost to the conflict but potentially can escape through a Being greater than his wretchedness: God. It is this potentiality that makes Pascal different from Girard and allows me to agree with a Pascalian view of human nature: man is certainly bounded by his "wretchedness" but capable of "greatness" through his ability to be aware of his fallen state and know he is in need of something greater than himself to assuage his brokenness. This is at variance with Girard who presents a view of humanity that states there is no ability within man to know, or escape, his destruction.

In its most basic form, Girard's theory of the system of mimesis-driven

¹ In keeping with the formal styles of both Pascal and Girard, I will use the term "man" to mean human, inclusive of gender. Choosing to use this terminology as interchangeable with human, I aim to assert a general, universal view of human nature that is natural to all men and women. As a woman, I aim not to alienate, but rather limit syntactical distractions for the sake of the argument.

violence, what he calls “a mimetic cycle,”² stems from his position that all violence is caused by “people [desiring] objects not for their intrinsic value, but because they are desired by someone else.”³ This envy in turn inspires rivalry, which escalates into scandal, which creates too much pressure on the social structure, making all parties involved come to a breaking point. This causes those who were just moments before ‘pointing the finger’ at each other to collectively point the finger at one person, upon whom the scandal and growing tension is blamed. This person, now the victim, is sacrificed, either literally or socially, in order to placate the tense mob. The sacrifice then results in order and restored, if not permanent, peace.

For Girard, this is the natural state of humans, and all humans are participants, instigators, and potential victims of the mimetic cycle of violence. Most in this system are ignorant of its existence, participating in the cycle without question, as the system “makes us unknowingly the accomplices of unanimous murders... We continue to imagine ourselves alien to all violence.”⁴ But Hamlet is not ignorant, nor is Shakespeare, Girard argues. Nevertheless, this awareness does nothing for them, exhibiting the depth of liminality in which man is existing and the endless impasse where he finds himself. I will demonstrate that there are four levels⁵ of the mimetic cycle being shown in Girard’s analysis of *Hamlet*, exhibiting the continuum (and thus prevalence) of this cycle of violence, ranging from a universal macro level, to the micro level of the conflict between Hamlet and Claudius that dominates the plot of *Hamlet*.

The first of these levels is the system in which Girard must admit to being involved, that of the world-wide epidemic of rivalry and revenge which contains his own scholarship. Girard is conscious of his own participation within this cycle and believes that “we can make sense out of *Hamlet* just as we can make sense of our world, by reading both against revenge.”⁶

² René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001), 30.

³ Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, back cover.

⁴ Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 41.

⁵ These are either implicitly or explicitly defined in “Hamlet’s Dull Revenge” in *A Theater of Envy*.

⁶ Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 289.

Girard spend a large section of this essay examining the relevance of the human nature model exhibited through his treatment of *Hamlet* to the modern, nuclear world. While not directly necessary (and thus it will not be discussed) to my arguments, his ideas on this subject do show both a practicality of his scholarship and, more importantly for this paper, his personal awareness of operating in a world dictated by the system he presents. This awareness lends a hand to reputability, as Girard does not aim to give a removed scholarly opinion divorced from the system it is treated (a la Freud’s *Future*

The second level of involvement with this mimetic cycle is both the bard’s awareness of, and boundedness by, the mimetic cycle. Girard writes of Shakespeare, “he will denounce the revenge theatre and all its works with the utmost daring without... depriving himself of the dramatic success that is necessary to his own career as a dramatist.”⁷ The bard will bend to the cycle-- he must if he is to continue to be a bard-- but he will bend without his head bowed, constantly facing and understanding the system that all bend to, many blindly. In this stance, Girard writes, Shakespeare invites us “to become his accomplices and share in his prodigious awareness of a dramatic process that always consists in some form of victimage or sacrifice.”⁸

It is also in this stance, bent but understanding his oppressor, that Shakespeare writes *Hamlet*. Girard writes that “what the hero [Hamlet] feels in regard to the act of revenge, the creator feels in regards to revenge as theatre. But the public wants vicarious victims and the playwright must oblige. Tragedy is revenge. Shakespeare’s tired of revenge, and yet he cannot give it up, or he gives up his audience and his identity as a playwright. [Thus] Shakespeare turns a typical revenge topic, *Hamlet*, into a meditation on his predicament as a playwright.”⁹

Within *Hamlet* itself, the other two levels are exhibited. The third removed from Girard of is the macro depiction of the cycle within the play of the frame-narrative conflict between Denmark and Norway. Shakespeare uses this looming promise of war to portray the universal epidemic of this system of violence and all persons’ involvement in the ‘frame-narrative’ of mimetic violence.¹⁰ The same ghost that urges Hamlet’s revenge is the foreboding symbol of wartime violence lingering on the boundaries of the rotten state of Denmark, clad in the armor of war, causing Horatio to notice, “such was the very armour he had on when he [the ghost of Hamlet Sr.] the ambitious Norway combated; So frown’d he once when in an angry parle, He smote the sledged Polacks on the ice.”¹¹ Thus this frame-narrative representing the universality of violence connects with the fourth and most micro-level of the plot of *Hamlet*

of An Illusion).

⁷ Ibid, 273.

⁸ Ibid, 271.

⁹ Ibid, 274.

¹⁰ This is the same universality Girard gives a nod to as he writes. For the Girard model, he, the Bard, and Hamlet are all aware and all equally stuck in the cycle.

¹¹ William Shakespeare and A.R. Branumuller, *Hamlet: The Tragical History of Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, Act 1, Scene 1, lines 60-64.

proper, Hamlet's internal conflict and consideration of the mimetic cycle in his call to revenge his father's murder by King Claudius. While most of the analysis will address this fourth level between Hamlet and King Claudius, it is important to understand the progression from Girard's own participation in the cycle to Hamlet's consideration of revenge as demonstration of Girard's view of the pervasion of violence.

Hamlet has gained awareness of the natural human cycle of violence, revenge, victimization, and desire but is--as the Bard is and we are--still caught in the cycle, regardless of any awareness. His murdered father demands of him revenge; Hamlet fails to act upon this command not because of cowardice, which is the common interpretation, but because of his overwhelming understanding that he is a liminal man, trapped in a system of violence, of wretchedness, that is not escapable. Hamlet grasps the weight of human nature being endlessly "bound... to revenge,"¹² and he wrestles with his shackles, while ultimately understanding that he must fulfill the demands of the cycle. It is this wrestling that is commonly perceived as inaction, which Girard believes is full intentioned by Shakespeare, "because of the tedium of revenge is what he really wants to talk about."¹³ Hamlet is trying during the whole play to 'be normal' and fulfill his bonds to revenge, for "to shrink from revenge in a world that looks upon it as a "sacred duty" is to exclude oneself from society,"¹⁴ but his awareness of the system tortures him into realizing that to commit revenge would be to give in to a long line of violence that produces nothing except more violence.

Because of this knowledge, he is unable then to become passionate enough about the revenge to commit the deed. He attempts to stir himself up, but "Hamlet must receive from someone else, a mimetic model, the impulse that he does not find in himself."¹⁵ He first attempts to create his own mimetic model through the creation of his play, his own revenge theatre. But this only throws Hamlet's inability to act out the norms of the mimetic cycle into relief, as the play-actor does a finer job working up emotions about the false character he is playing than Hamlet ever could. Hamlet asks of this actor, in an aside, "Is it not monstrous that this player here, but in a fiction, in a dream of passion, could force his soul [to intense

¹² *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5, lines 6-7.

¹³ Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 273.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 276.

emotion]? And all for nothing! What would he do had he the motive and the cue for passion that I have?"¹⁶

Next, perhaps trying to mimic the passions of the player, Hamlet victimizes the person closest to him and most related to the conflict-- his mother. As though a child, Hamlet picks a fight with his mother in an attempt to build up his passion enough to commit the murder demanded by his father, and to prove to himself that the man that "was [her] husband" is different enough from the man that "is [her] husband"¹⁷ to elicit just revenge. This would at least justify Hamlet in his part-taking in avenging his more innocent father rather merely continuing in the vicious cycle of violence. But he cannot convince himself enough to solicit passion. Hamlet is "unpregnant of [his] cause," "pigeon-livered and lack[s] gall to make oppression bitter"¹⁸ because he continues to be unconvinced that his father is different from his father's murderer, as Hamlet understands that his father participated and instigated the mimetic cycle and was, as Hamlet is now, doomed to system of violence. Old Hamlet was a victimizer, now a victim; Claudius has murdered, in turn to be murdered, and so the cycle continues. There is no passion in promised ends.

Finally, Hamlet has recognized that he is trapped: "there is no way out for Hamlet; he shifts endlessly from one impasse to the other."¹⁹ He must commit the murder, but has no true murderous intention with which to do it. It is his conscience, conscious of his futility of action if he commits the revenge, that makes a coward of him, for the "native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought and enterprises of great pitch and moment with this regard their currents turn awry and lose the name of action."²⁰

And yet, Hamlet is finally caught up by the appearance of Laertes, who enters the scene seeking to revenge his own father's death, a hero of the mimetic cycle of violence who "does not question the validity of revenge"²¹ but acts within the compulsions of mimetic violence with passionate zeal. "In order to embrace the goal of revenge, Hamlet must enter the circle of mimetic desire and rivalry, this is what he has been unable to achieve so far, but here, thanks to Laertes, he finally reaches a

¹⁶ *Hamlet*, Act Two, scene two, lines 490-500.

¹⁷ *Hamlet*, Act Three, scene three, lines 63-65.

¹⁸ Both quotes from *Hamlet*, Act Two, scene two, lines 507, 516-517.

¹⁹ Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 273.

²⁰ *Hamlet*, Act Three, Scene 1, lines 84-88.

²¹ Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 278.

hysterical pitch”²² which is required for violent action. This hysteria culminates in Hamlet’s frenzied desire to challenge his rival, Laertes: “show me what thou’ [Laertes] do. Woo’t weep? woo’t fight? woo’t fast? woo’t tear thyself? woo’t drink up eisel? eat a crocodile? I’ll do’t... I’ll rant as well as thou.”²³ From this moment, a shift happens, and forgetting his awareness of the mimetic cycle, Hamlet forgets himself to Laertes, and becomes “a normal man... who can draw his sword when he should”²⁴ and will fulfill whatever revenge-violence the mimetic cycle demands. The mimetic rivalry is in full-swing

Once infected by a proper mimetic model, the fulfillment of revenge and violence that had been stalled throughout the play happens in quick succession in the next scene. This final scene of violence ends as Hamlet and all other important characters fall to the ‘strict arrest’ of Death, the prince crying out to the last man standing to “in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain to tell [his] story,²⁵: to tell the story that man is bound to obey this cycle of mimetic violence, that man is made to bend to it, and whatever questioning one throws out into the abyss of the system will ultimately be unanswered as long as men revenge their fathers who are murderers all the same. The play ends most fittingly; the war-march upon the stricken castle by Fortinbras synthesizes the epidemic of violence, a critique of revenge theatre, and Hamlet’s ultimately futile wrestling with his liminal existence dictated by this cycle. Fittingly it is Fortinbras, Denmark’s rival, who says: “bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage... and for his passage the soldiers’ music and the rite of war speak loudly for him.”²⁶ To bear Hamlet as a soldier, to mark him with the rites of a man in the calling of war, a soldier moved by commands of violence, is to bear Hamlet true. For Hamlet to die murdered is to fulfill his bond to rivalry and revenge, and for Hamlet to fulfill the cycle of violence is for Shakespeare to as well, giving his audience ultimately what they desire.

It is the acceptance that this is the *telos* of humanity, that all are trapped in a gyre of violence and victimization, which will unwaveringly determine all human actions to its ends that I reject in Girard’s theory.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Hamlet*, Act Five, Scene 1, lines 264–266, 274.

²⁴ Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 279.

²⁵ *Hamlet*, Act Five, Scene Two, lines 331–332.

²⁶ *Hamlet*, Act Five, Scene Two, lines 379–385.

Girard’s determined pessimism²⁷ about the condition of humanity is understandable in light of the evils that occur in the world; nevertheless, in my view of human nature, I must accept a Pascalian understanding. Pascal gives account for the bounded and liminal nature of man explored in Girard and Hamlet but argues that while man is bounded, he is potentially superior to the system that binds him because he is *aware* of the system and of his bonds. Pascal writes,

Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed. There is no need for the whole universe to take up arms to crush him: a vapor, a drop of water is enough to kill him. But even if the universe were to crush him, man would still be nobler than his slayer, because he knows that he is dying and the advantage the universe has over him. The universe knows none of this.²⁸

It is this human ability to know, the Bard’s ability to critique revenge theatre, Hamlet’s ability to stall his participation in the violence beckoning him, Girard’s ability to define, at least partially, the system of violence, which makes complete pessimism about the nature of humanity inaccurate. Pascal believes that “man’s greatness comes from knowing he is wretched... thus it is wretched to know that one is wretched, but there is

²⁷ It can be argued, particularly from Girard’s work, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, that he is not a pessimist, as he argues that the mimetic cycle can be escaped by the following of Christ, and that since the time of Christ, the single victim mechanism has been abated since the world has, unconsciously, been motivated towards respecting and hearing the voice of the victim by the Church’s influence, thus bettering itself. My response is that he is inconsistent in two points, first being that he does not define how one, who is utterly depraved and trapped in the mimetic cycle could gain awareness in order to follow Christ, unless it was an entirely external salvation (Calvinistic model). If the Church has influenced the world towards better human nature, in more respect for the victim, then He contradicts himself that Christ is the only way to escape the cycle, as he writes, “Many people believe they are faithful to Jesus, and yet they address superficial reproaches to the Gospels. Thus shows that they remain subject to mimetic rivalries and their violent oneupmanship. If we don’t see that the choice is inevitable between the two supreme models, God and the devil, then we have already chosen the devil and his mimetic violence” (Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 42). But even if the Church has influenced the world towards greater understanding against victimization, the mimetic cycle continues, as in the world’s awareness of the victim, the victimizer becomes the victim: the uneducated racist is scorned, the slave peddler who may have no other option to support his family is arrested, the terrorist who was inundated from a young age with hatred for foreigners is killed defending what he believes is right. The inescapable violence continues. Girard is not a pessimist only if one assumes either that Christ will redeem all men, or that victimization of the previous oppressors is not participation in the same mimetic violence cycle that this paper treats.

²⁸ Pascal, 55.

greatness in knowing one is wretched,”²⁹ thus fundamentally different than Girard’s view of human nature.

For Girard, who writes of human nature and the “powerlessness of those caught up in mimetic snowballing process to see what moves and compels them” to act,³⁰ this greatness is voided by his deterministic belief that whether or not man recognizes his position in the cycle, he will still give into it in the end. But Pascal writes, “Let man now judge his own worth, let him love himself, for there is within him a nature capable of good... he has within him the capacity for knowing truth and being happy, but he possesses no truth which is either abiding or satisfactory.”³¹ While Pascal admits that man has nothing within him that can sustain him or rescue him from his wretchedness, it is this ability to know and seek external truth which provides both an innate good in man and a potential escape for him from the wretchedness. This wretchedness I interpret to be the same thing as the systemic violence Girard discusses.

Thus both scholars agree that man is liminal, and that if man is unaffected by³² or unknowing of³³ Truth greater than himself, man is determined for destruction. But in this liminality, Pascal asserts there is a possible escape; for Girard “there is no way out.”³⁴ Thus Pascal agrees with Girard that the end of humanity is still wretchedness, the key difference being that Girard believes this wretchedness is the only thing that human nature contains, and human nature is wholly directed toward the perversion of desire into acts of violence. Conversely, while reason and wisdom will not ultimately save humans from their wretchedness, Pascal believes that there is something within human nature that is great, even if it is just the ability to know we are wretched.

Girard offers deep insight into his theorized system of mimetic violence we all participate in, a theory I find to be sufficient lens upon which to look at the world and its sociological movements, as well as a lens through which one can examine literature. But it is my view that this lens, while effective and clear, is bounded, unable to see anything other than man as participant, instigator, or victim of the cycle it views. Beyond the limits of Girard’s lens, Pascal reveals that it is the very fact that man

²⁹ Pascal, 58.

³⁰ Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*

³¹ Pascal, 61.

³² Girard’s view

³³ Pascal’s view

³⁴ Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 273

can view things through the lens of Girard’s theories, and gain awareness of the cycle of violence he is subject to, identifies that there is something inherently great about man and his nature.

Girard’s Hamlet is doomed to fulfill and die by the ‘mousetrap’ of mimetic violence that he understands both to be an obvious trap and an inescapable destiny. Hamlet understands that his death is in vain and inevitable, and recognizes that the “potent poison [that] quite o’ercrows [his] spirit”³⁵ is the always-triumphant poison of vengeance that has been tainting him towards death all along. The poison does not recognize him. He is another victim in the long line of victims, the one responsible for his murderer murdered next to him, the “foul practice [having] turned itself”³⁶ on Laertes as well. But it is the man who knows what is happening, for though “the universe grasps [man] and swallows [him] up like a speck; through thought [he] grasps [the universe].”³⁷ For Pascal, Hamlet’s recognition that the poison, the wretchedness, the cycle of violence, has taken hold of him as it will take hold of all, makes Hamlet redeemable. Not that his knowing redeems him, but it affirms that he has something within him worth redeeming. And so this man, Hamlet, and any other human for that matter, “knows he is wretched. Thus he is wretched because he is so, but he is truly great because he knows it.”³⁸

But, again, the knowing will not save the man; it merely makes it possible to know and see the extent of his calamity and to hope that there is something beyond him, something that allows, affirms, and makes meaningful his greatness. Words like greatness and wretchedness have no meaning without a context that must include something truly and fully great and something truly and fully wretched, from which shades of greatness and wretchedness glean their weight. But this understanding, the concept of human nature asserted by Pascal and that I accept, requires, at the very least, a God who is the Greatest Great in order to give meaning to the word, great. Of this God and the wretched, yet knowing paradoxical human disposition, the Christian faith speaks. Man is “no longer in the state in which [God] made [him]. [God] created man holy, innocent, perfect, [and He] filled him with light and understanding... [Man] was not then in the darkness that now blinds his

³⁵ *Hamlet*, Act Five, Scene 2, line 336.

³⁶ *Hamlet*, Act Five, Scene 2, line 300-301.

³⁷ Pascal, 57.

³⁸ Pascal, 64.

sight, nor subject to the death and miseries that afflict him.”³⁹ Because of man’s revolt, man’s desire to be as God, God’s mimetic rival, instead of God’s creation, man is only able to understand his wretchedness, “retain some feeble instinct from the happiness of [his] first nature, [but is] plunged into the wretchedness of [his] blindness and concupiscence, which has become [his] second nature.”⁴⁰ It is only from beyond human nature that man can be redeemed then, as his second nature, the one of wretchedness, provides no ability to fix the ills he has, even if he can see them, for “all [man’s] intelligence can bring him [is] to realize that it is not within [himself] that [he] will find either truth or good” fully.⁴¹

It is this God, the God who created man with his first nature, who can redeem, can save, can rescue and heal the pervasive wretchedness of man’s second nature. In the Gospel account of Luke, this God, having become man himself, exemplifies both this model of human nature’s potential to be redeemed and its inability to redeem itself. In Luke 8:40-56, the world in all its extremes “fell at Jesus’ feet and begged Him to come”⁴²-- come into a life hanging on by a thread, come into a life destroyed by an affliction, come into the hurting and the grieving and the ill and the death of this world; pleading with Him to come into the wretchedness of human nature. And enter into humanity He does. Jesus heals. He rescues the wretched. He heals the lives of both the proud, the clean, the “leader of the synagogue”⁴³ and the damned, the ashamed, the tainted, the “woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.”⁴⁴ He heals them all because He knows they are all equally in need of healing; He heals those who recognize their need for healing. This understanding of human nature is central to the Truth of the Good News, the coming of the Incarnate Son of God to the lives of this broken world. He touches the sick, the blind, the lame, the poor, lepers, prostitutes, the demon possessed, corpses.⁴⁵ He touches them because they are aware of their need for His touch.⁴⁶

³⁹ Pascal, 66.

⁴⁰ Pascal, 67.

⁴¹ Pascal, 67.

⁴² Luke 8:41

All scriptures directly quoted in paper are NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

⁴³ Luke 8:41

⁴⁴ Luke 8:43

⁴⁵ Matt. 8:1-3; 21:31-32; Luke 4:18, 6:20, 24; 7:22; 8:26-42; 14:12-14, 21

⁴⁶ Luke 8:42-48

This is essential in understanding the concept of human nature that requires man to reach outside himself in order to find salvation from the wretchedness within. Girard’s model cannot allow that, for what clue would one have to reach outside him or herself if the only ability for humans is to participate in a blind cycle of violence. For Girard, the question remains: if this mimetic cycle is devastating and the determined end of all mankind, and there is no awareness by the participants of the cycle of another potential system then how can the mimetic cycle be understood to be destructive by any trapped in it? When somehow Hamlet, and Shakespeare, and Girard himself gain awareness of their wretchedness, they are the exemption from Girard’s rule, an exemption logic does not allow. Hamlet understands the cycle in *Hamlet*, but all the rest in the play continue to be confined by ignorance to obeying the cycle, acting out whatever mimetic desire requires of them, or else reaching within to find ill solutions to the wretchedness within as one could read from Ophelia’s suicide. Why does Hamlet gain awareness (even though the awareness benefits him not), while others do not?

But in Luke 8:40-56, like in Pascal, there is a model presented that accounts for the deep brokenness of man and allows him to reach out to a God who is beyond and more powerful than any wretched cycle. In the story, a shamed, broken woman reaches out to the fringes of Jesus’ cloak and in her reaching out and interaction with this great God, is healed, her physical wretchedness being returned to her rightful and created wholeness of health. Similarly, man’s spiritual wellness is returned once he, using his capacity to understand his fallen nature, acts out upon that understanding and reaches outside himself to just touch the fringes of the God who can save. Only when he recognizes he needs help, only when he is aware of the fullness of his wretchedness, can he then call out to God for salvation from himself.

And so without God, man is suspended. He is caught being wretched, being ripped around in the tempest of mimetic desire and violence, he is caught being fallen. But he can recognize that; he feels the weight of his liminality and asks questions into the abyss, and this knowing comprises his portion of greatness, a greatness that can only be understood if it has something fully great outside it to gain its meaning from. This greatness is God, the only thing outside of man’s collective nature, outside of the

mimetic cycle and outside of wretchedness. And man hangs here, with God outside him, a hand away from the fringes of God which heal and save, he and the man is able to know, able to reach out, able to be great God must save him, but man may participate in his salvation to the extent that he knows he needs saving.

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Holiness as Defined by Leviticus 11 Through 26

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Abstract

The book of Leviticus is considered by many contemporary readers as archaic and convoluted. However, the symbolism that pervades this Biblical text beautifully explains holiness and its relation to the greater Israelite community. In creating a tension between both the divine and social aspects of life, the listed regulations provide an overarching message that one must make a concerted effort to place Yahweh at the center of one's being. Once explicit dependence has occurred, a person begins to enter the realm of holiness. Such guidelines were crucial for the exilic Ises because of their precarious period of transition in the wilderness. This context highlights how Leviticus's legal codes were to transform these ancient peoples into more fitting mortal delegates of Yahweh. Only after fulfilling these holy prerequisites could the ancient Israelites enter the Promised Land and move closer to realizing the treasured covenant.

“No attribute of God is more dreadful to sinners than His holiness” (“Matthew Henry Quotes”). Holiness is a concept that has elicited a preponderance of questioning and confusion throughout the generations. Matthew Henry, famed 17th century Biblical commentator, only verbalizes that which is known to characterize all believers. Theologians and scholars often state that God has infinite holiness that transcends all planes of existence, and should resonate within one's core being. Furthermore, the Bible states that one should not simply accept God's holiness as a quality only belonging to Him, but that one should attempt to emulate it. “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2b). However, what does holiness actually mean? How can one emulate an undefined, abstract principle? Does God provide a means by which to comprehend such a notion? Providing solutions to such queries is the function of chapters 11 through 26 in the book of Leviticus. Within the book, the ancient Israelites are directed in matters of holiness through the tension between one's relation with Yahweh and with one's neighbor. Through the regulations that arise from this divine-neighbor tension, Leviticus illustrates holiness as a concerted dependence on Yahweh that will ultimately prepare the Israelites as His divine representatives before their entrance into the Promised Land.

Prior to comprehending how chapters 11 through 26 of Leviticus define holiness, it is necessary to examine their literary structure, which is as follows:

- I. Holiness in relation to Yahweh, or manual of ritual impurity (Chapters 11 through 15)
- II. Dietary regulations and the procedure for animal corpses (Chapter 11)
 - a. Childbirth and impurity (Chapter 12)
 - b. Surface afflictions and impurity (Chapter 13 and 14)
 - c. Genital discharges and impurity (Chapter 15)
- III. Description of the Day of Atonement (Chapter 16)

- IV. Holiness in relation to the neighbor, or social regulations (Chapters 17 through 25)
 - a. Regulations for slaughter (Chapter 17)
 - b. Regulations of sexual behavior and sacrifice to Molech (Chapter 18)
 - c. Connection between ethics and social life (Chapters 19 and 20)
 - d. Additional priestly regulations and qualifications (Chapter 21)
 - e. Regulations regarding sacrifice (Chapter 22)
 - f. Calendar of divine festivals (Chapter 23)
 - g. Routine worship rites for the tent of meeting (Chapter 24a)
 - h. Account of the Blasphemer and consequences (Chapter 24b)
 - i. Agricultural and property regulations (Chapter 25)
- V. List of positive and negative consequences on the part of Yahweh (Chapter 26)

From the structure, it can be inferred that this section of Leviticus is essentially composed of two different works. In the beginning, there is an account of purity in the relationship with Yahweh, with chapter 16 as a culminating, transition point. On the other end, chapters 17 through 25 develop purity in the social context, with chapter 26 as the climax. Therefore, it is essential to consider how these two distinct divisions interact in discerning how holiness is defined and applied within the book of Leviticus.

Analyzing how Leviticus defines holiness, the first step that one should take is in examining what may be called “section I,” that is, purity in relation to Yahweh. These chapters of Leviticus focus on specific instances where one becomes ritually impure, and therefore unable to enter the tent of meeting to worship or sacrifice. A cursory reading can leave one with a jaded sense of how Yahweh expects His creation to live because of the seemingly unusual and convoluted contents. Yet, one should not let the meticulous details blockade an understanding of how holiness

is portrayed. It is on the figurative level that meaning truly begins to illuminate with some clarity. Chapter 11 is an example of how this ideal is applied in practice. Covering a wide range of dietary laws and procedures for handling animal corpses, it is full of meticulous rules interspersed with lengthy lists. But, the possible divine rationale behind these distinctions is what is more important. At the most basic level, chapter 11 deals almost exclusively with what the Israelites could and could not eat in order to be able to enter the Tabernacle. Eating is an essential human need for survival, and is often a prime concern for those who do not have food readily available for consumption. Contextually, the ancient Israelites were nomads within a desert environment that presumably did not provide a wide variety or accessibility of edible items. Thus, Yahweh’s dietary restrictions may have been problematic in that they limited an already sparse choice of meals and threatened complete sustenance. Illustrating this with a specific example that is representative of chapter 11 as a whole, scholar Erhard Gerstenberger describes verses 13 through 19 as “evinc[ing] the efforts at eliminating access for a hungry or covetous person to a large group of birds” (Gerstenberger 139). In so restricting the Israeli diet, Yahweh forcibly inserts Himself within daily life. Having to now seriously consider what is being consumed, one allows Yahweh to shape a major portion of how one proceeds through common routine, and this creates the inroads for a deeper divine-human connection. Yahweh’s motive was not to starve the ancient Israelites, but to utilize a critical human need as a way to foster dependence on Him to provide. This is seen in verse 45, which is found in the concluding statements of the chapter, “For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:45). Here, the author of Leviticus compares the dietary regulations to the exodus from Egypt, and implies that just as Yahweh provided during that journey, He will also provide in sustenance. Holiness is defined as believing that promise. For, as Biblical commentator Jacob Milgrom states,

“Its [Leviticus] purpose is to teach the Israelite reverence for life by (1) reducing his choice of flesh to a few animals; (2) limiting the slaughter of even these few permitted animals...and (3) prohibiting the ingestion of blood...as acknowledgement that bringing death to living things is a

concession of God's grace" (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* 735). However, the situational context is not the only way in which these dietary regulations inform recognition of true holiness. There is a significant amount of symbolism in what chapter 11 calls the "distinction between the unclean and clean" (Lev 11:47a). In order for such an analysis to occur, one must realize that there are three categories in which the animals are grouped: land, water, and air. Impure animals include those from the land that "chew the cud or have divided hoofs" (Lev 11:4) and those from the water that do "not have fins or scales" (Lev 11:10). Verses 13 through 19 simply give a list of forbidden birds, but this list essentially enumerates those birds that are primarily carnivorous (Balentine 96). From there, chapter 11 also forbids insects, which are classified under air, that "walk on all fours" (Lev 11:21) and "creatures that swarm upon the earth" (Lev 11:41), which are categorized under land animals. The latter, which is characteristically vague, is better described as those land animals that crawl on their stomach, walk on four legs, or have a preponderance of legs. Biblical scholar Samuel Balentine believes that these apparently random distinctions are actually a means of revering the separate spheres, as Yahweh created them in Genesis 1. Both Leviticus 11 and Genesis 1 use heavily the phrase "according to their kind," and reflect a specifically divine organization and order of the cosmos. Those animals which are different in some aspect, or do not fit into a single category, are deemed impure for consumption because they violate this concept (Balentine 96-97). What this meant for the ancient Israelite was that the act of eating was no longer a survival necessity, but rather a way to glorify the order of Yahweh's creation in the mundane. In doing so, the routine process of eating became in itself a form of worship. From this perspective, chapter 11 again defines holiness as revering Yahweh by making Him the central focus in all aspects of being.

Continuing within the first section regarding purity's relation to Yahweh, a correct comprehension of the context of chapters 13 and 14 provides further symbolic significance of holiness. The material of these two chapters covers a triply divided description of surface afflictions, including disorders of the skin, clothes, and walls of a house. Modern interpretation of these afflictions shows that they may be of a

common nature, and do not fit the New Revised Standard Version's use of the phrase "leprous disease." According to Hebrew scholar Baruch Levine, what is described in chapters 13 and 14 includes "diverse local inflammations," rashes, discolored skin, unhealed burns, hair follicles affected by acne, fungal infections of clothes, and mold or blight in the home (Levine 78-89). It is not difficult to imagine that these disorders occurred with frequency, especially within the harsh desert environment of the Israelite camp. Commentator Michael Noth recognizes this by stating that "skin-diseases played a specially large part. They occurred with special frequency" (Noth 105). If such afflictions were common, then entrance of Yahweh's divine laws into daily routine again applies. Symbolically stated, this idea is powerful because of the way in which these afflictions were understood by the ancient Near East world. In the context of the Old Testament, the emphasis of these regulations was spiritual rather than medical. The concern was whether a person was free of physical imperfection, and thus spiritually "clean," in order to partake in rituals. Proof of this is the fact that the Hebrew verb *qadash*, which means to be pure, appears 36 times in these two chapters, while the verb *qadash*, which means to be healed, appears only 4 times. Furthermore, the addition of non-human afflictions, and the implication that these "diseases" do not spread physically strengthens such a perspective (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* 817-818). This comprehension of the text as non-medical enforces the figurative nature of these regulations and descriptions. Generally, the external affliction of something or someone alludes to degeneration, and thus becomes a metaphor for the process of dying. Yahweh's commands animate this metaphor through the exile of those with external afflictions from the Israelite society. Not being able to partake in one's native community or religious rituals strips a person of great value. As Samuel Balentine describes the situation: "they now reside in a place where deprivation, shame, and abandonment mark them as the living dead" (Balentine 108). Yet, the negative connotations of death and exile give only a partial explanation of these chapters, as roughly half of the material accounts for the transition away from this state through purification. Once the reader better comprehends the nature of chapters 13 and 14, there arises deeper insight into how Leviticus defines holiness.

Analyzed in tandem, these two chapters seem to give equal weight to what relegates one to the land of the quasi-dead, and to how one returns to “living.” As mentioned previously, there is reason to believe that these afflictions were somewhat common, which means that this metaphorical transformation from death to life would have been frequent. In this way, the power and glory of Yahweh are displayed and demonstrate His ability to have an active presence within the regular lives of the Israelites. Also, because of the physical exile that the afflicted person faced, there develops a strong connection between divine holiness and participation in ordinary life. Presumably having nothing to do other than wait, a person would constantly focus on again becoming ritually pure before Yahweh so that he/she could return to normality. Once this happened, one would have a strong sense of gratitude and commitment to Yahweh, so that a recurring fate could be avoided. Carrying out such thanksgiving, a person would be convicted to carry out a more pious existence and to invite Yahweh into every minutia of routine, living as Yahweh has instructed. Jacob Milgrom summarizes this idea brilliantly, stating that purification is “a rite of passage, marking the transition from death to life he is passed from impurity to holiness, from death to life, is reinstated with his family, and is reconciled with God” (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* 889). Chapters 13 and 14, therefore conclude, along with the rest of “section I,” that holiness is defined simply as recognizing, embracing, and encouraging the centrality of Yahweh in all aspects of daily order.

In analyzing holiness within the book of Leviticus, one must look beyond just the Yahweh-centered aspects of the definition and examine the importance of neighborly relations, which are illustrated through the social and ethical regulations in “section three.” The exemplary work of this section is chapter 19, which deals almost exclusively with how the regular Israelite was supposed to interact with society according to divine command. This chapter is both framed by, and regularly prefaced with the phrase “I am the LORD your God.” Serving as a practical reminder as to the origin of these social regulations, this repeated declaration helps the reader see that holiness is not an individual concept. But rather, it also involves one’s relation with those with whom one lives. The standards for this interaction are impressively simple, yet difficult, to attain: “You

shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Lev 19:18b). The majority of the other rules within chapter 19 hinge on this principle of love and justice for the neighbor, which includes not only the peer, but also the poor, the alien, and the laborer. Symbolically, this indicates much about the nature of holiness according to Leviticus as a whole. By character, Yahweh *is* holiness, and if love is holiness, then Yahweh is also love. Therefore, as Roy Gane states, “We cannot acquire love by excavating into the secret chambers of our subconscious minds... We can only get it from the Source: God, who *is* love” (Gane 347). If every single daily interaction and relationship require divinely given love, then one is obliged to give Yahweh foremost centrality. One should note that *acting* is the key concept in this ideal, and that Leviticus shows holiness as not just containing divine love internally. Holiness as love involves acting in a way that spreads that love to all people. Holiness is giving a portion of crops to the underprivileged, remaining honest, not taking vengeance, and respecting aliens and the elderly. Each and every individual encounters dozens of situations such as these, where love is the central driving force. It is simply impossible for one to act in a socially and ethically acceptable way unless there is complete dependence on Yahweh. Samuel Balentine extends this even further by stating that living ethically and loving one’s neighbors will ultimately lead one to completely love Yahweh as well. He implies that over time ethical actions will become less of a responsibility and more of an act of pure devotion to the divine creator, likening one’s relationship with Yahweh to that of a mother and a father (Balentine 164). Following this line of reasoning, the definition of holiness within Leviticus expands to include a dynamic, growing relationship with Yahweh, in addition to a central dependence on Him in ordinary living. It can almost be condensed to the maxim that being holy is depending on Yahweh so heavily that He becomes as a partner that one comes to love more every day. Roy Gane summarizes it as “growth in love that affects the little events of life on a day-to-day basis as we interact with the Lord, our fellow human beings, and the rest of God’s creation” (Gane 349).

Another way in which the social regulations of Leviticus affect perception of holiness is in the description of the holy calendar in chapter 23. This calendar is typically split into two parts depending on the season,

either spring or fall. In the spring, the Israelites observe Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of First Fruits, and the Festival of Weeks. In the fall, the Festival of Trumpets, the Day of Purification, and the Festival of Booths are all celebrated. Chapter 23 also goes into great detail regarding the weekly Sabbath, which is equally, if not more important, than any of the aforementioned annual festivals. Above all, one should note that this calendar literally imbeds holiness within time itself, and thus gives it a transcendental quality. With the continual Sabbath, and the evenly dispersed festivals, the ancient Israelite could go no considerable amount of time without being thrust into the presence of Yahweh along with the rest of the community. In Balentine's opinion, chapter 23 reinforces this idea of holiness by stating that "holy days are no leftovers in the calendar; they are instead the core that gives definition and purpose to everything else" (Balentine 181). This entire premise lies on the basis of the Sabbath, which acts as the consistent foundation for the divine calendar. Being the only one of the seven observances listed within the Decalogue, it is set apart in significance. As a day of total rest from any work, the Sabbath completely interrupted the routine of the Israelites and caused them to spend at least one day every week in the presence of Yahweh. Also, as a day of worship to be observed by all, regardless of class, it promoted the persistence of the equality and unselfish love of one's neighbor that is championed in chapter 19 (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27* 1961). Upholding all of the principles that Leviticus uses to define holiness, the Sabbath is among the most significant of all days theologically, and provides justification for the other six listed festivals. Within these, one witnesses how structure is integral in understanding how Leviticus defines holiness. Even though the festivals are all connected through the phases of agricultural harvest, the spring festivals focus more on the social aspect of Israelite society, while the fall festivals emphasize the relationship with Yahweh. This is simply Leviticus's divine-neighbor tension of holiness *writ small*. Integrating this idea into the very calendar, the ancient Israelites were habitually reminded of what holiness was by centralizing Yahweh's role in both the divine and social realms. Chapter 23 also tells of the centrality of Yahweh in its quality of boundless time. Each festival is meant to recur annually, and Yahweh clearly states that they

are "a statute forever throughout your generations in all your settlements" (Lev 23:31b). However, there is also a sense of transcendence above time that is built intuitively into the structure of the chapter. It starts with the Sabbath, which is a persistent, present reminder of Yahweh's transcendent presence. Focusing on the agricultural aspects of civilization, most of the listed festivals are clearly focused on the future, as the ancient Israelites were still nomads at that time. Finishing the list is the Festival of Booths, which reminisces on Yahweh's past holy deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. By intertwining all aspects of time, the reader understands that the scope of Yahweh's influence is immense, and that He is a solid root on which to build one's existence. Therefore, the structure of present, future, and past only strengthens Leviticus's definition of holiness as a purposeful dependence of Yahweh in all portions of life, even barring temporal qualifications. However, this organization also sheds sense on why the ancient Israelite society needed to be holy as well.

While the description of holiness within the book of Leviticus mainly focuses on how it is defined, it also demonstrates how such holiness was meant to prepare the Israelites for their entrance into the Promised Land. The regulations that are mandated throughout chapters 11 through 26 are given to a people who are in transition. Not yet arrived in Canaan, the ancient Israelites are stuck in a present that matches up to neither the past nor the future. However, there appears to be a divine reasoning for this transitory period, as noted by the fact that nearly 4/5 of the Pentateuch is spent narrating it. Even more critical to this notion is that of the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. As Yahweh's dwelling place within the wilderness, the Tabernacle also serves as a significant symbolic reminder of the past and how the present should affect the future. Often, the Tabernacle is viewed as the lesser re-creation of the Garden of Eden, and thus constantly reminds the Israelites of a period when Yahweh and his creation were able to freely coexist. Since every aspect of life was affected by the ritual regulations and the institution of sacrifice described by Leviticus, the Tabernacle thoroughly controlled the present. Here is where the symbolism regarding the future begins to take shape. Jonathan Klawans understands both the concept of purity and sacrifice to be summed up under the phrase *imitatio Dei*, that is, imitating Yahweh. In his

opinion, the overarching goals of the ancient Israelites were attempting to imitate Yahweh and enticing Him to remain within the Tabernacle (Klawans 155). Interestingly enough, both of these concerns are focused on the development of the society and its possible state in the future. Holiness, in this sense, was also focused on this development, and was a characteristic to which the ancient Israelites were to aspire. Yahweh was explicit in making sure that His chosen people were transitioning to a holy state for one reason; they were to prepare themselves for their status as Yahweh's earthly representatives before entering the Promised Land. Chapter 20 illustrates this by explaining, "You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine" (Lev 20:26). The Israelites were to implement *imitatio Dei* and centralize Yahweh so that they could separate themselves from the surrounding cultures. Lacking the requisite mark of divine character, the definition of holiness in chapters 11 through 26 was necessary to transform the Israelite community into a beacon of Yahweh's divine presence here on Earth. One could almost define it as a training manual for the orientation and preparation that was to be internalized before entering the Promised Land. Centralizing Yahweh's role within all aspects of routine while in the wilderness was simply the prerequisite to fulfilling the covenant and permanently ending this period of transition.

Despite its reputation as an unapproachable and archaic text, the book of Leviticus actually has much to say to the contemporary reader. Instead of defining holiness as some abstraction, it gives the reader practical advice by encouraging the centrality of God within one's being. Beyond that, its tension between the relationship with the divine as well as with the neighbor provides a needed reminder that holiness does not stay in the Tabernacle, or the church. Belief is action, and being a person that truly allows God to permeate all components of life will display that in his/her ethical and social interactions. Chapters 11 through 26 also remind the reader of the intricate relationship between the past, present, and future, especially within the divine context. The failures and successes of the past should drive one's continual, present growth with God, so that one day one can coexist completely with Him. Holiness is built within time itself, so it is never too late to embrace God's awe striking power to permeate

all that one does. Modern context may not be focused on preparing for entrance into the physical Promised Land, but the promises that come with holiness are by no means lessened. Perhaps that is why when Jesus was asked to name the greatest commandment of all He did not directly cite Exodus or the Decalogue. Rather, the Savior of humankind quoted the manual of holiness, Leviticus.

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