

# THE X-FACTOR: REVISIONING BIBLICAL HOLINESS<sup>1</sup>

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*"Thus, law implements as social policy and social practice this articulation of God. God is not simply a religious concept but a mode of social power and social organization.... The reality of God's passion is mobilized in social policy."*

—Walter Brueggemann<sup>2</sup>

*"Holiness calls."*  
—John G. Gammie<sup>3</sup>

*For Dr. Frank C. Carver in honor of his retirement from Point Loma Nazarene College*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Most students of the Bible would acknowledge that holiness is of critical importance to its subject matter. A text like Lev. 19:2: "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy"<sup>4</sup> aptly summarizes this perspective. Moreover, the fact that this text is cited in 1 Pet. 1:13-16<sup>5</sup> would seem to underscore that holiness is a concern, even a command, that runs throughout the text of the Christian Bible—that is, the Old and New Testaments.<sup>6</sup> But this unity is not uniformity; and the problem of the significance of holiness—what holiness is and does or what holiness is supposed to be and supposed to do—often goes unexpressed and unexplained. The present study is an attempt to get at these issues and takes its cue from texts like Ezek. 20:41:

As a pleasing odor I will accept you, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will manifest my holiness [תקדשתי] among you in the sight of the nations.<sup>7</sup>

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Or from the sentiment found in the Jewish prayer, the Amidah, benediction three:

To all generations we will declare your greatness, and to all eternity we will proclaim אֱלֹהֵינוּׁם your holiness, and your praise, O our God, will never depart from our mouth, for you are a great and holy God and King. Blessed are you, O Lord, the holy God.

Put simply, these texts demonstrate that holiness has an *external function*. It can be *manifested* among the nations, as in Ezekiel, and is *to be proclaimed* to all eternity, as in the Amidah. In short, it can be and should be *communicated*. These two points—that holiness is of central import in Scripture but is diversely expressed therein and that holiness has a communicative function—comprise the central points of this paper and will be addressed sequentially.

## II. HOLINESS *MENTALITÉS* VS. HOLINESS *ESPRIT*

The fact that holiness is a major concern of the biblical witness and as such runs throughout the biblical texts does not require extensive comment. Holiness has often been highlighted in critical research on the Bible and biblical theology. C. F. A. Dillmann in the late nineteenth century, for instance, determined that holiness was the essential characteristic of Old Testament revelation.<sup>9</sup> He located this “principle” in Lev. 19:2 and regarded it as “the quintessence of the revelation, and to it he related all other ingredients of Hebrew faith and practice.”<sup>10</sup> Somewhat later, J. Hänel also located the central idea of Israelite religion in the concept of holiness.<sup>11</sup> And these two are not alone in the history of Old Testament scholarship. Other names could be added to the list: E. Sellin or T. C. Vriezen, for example.<sup>12</sup> Even if scholarship is no longer locating holiness at the center of the Old Testament—and indeed, the quest for a or the “center” (*Mitte*) seems permanently defunct after Eichrodt<sup>13</sup>—the topic of holiness continues to receive at least some attention in most theological treatments.<sup>14</sup> And deservedly so.

What is more important for the purposes of this study, then, is not to discuss the centrality or prevalence of the holiness concern in Scripture—what might be called the Bible’s *esprit* or spirit of holiness—but rather to discuss the diversity of ways this concept is appropriated or enacted in Israel. For lack of a better term, these latter may be called the various *mentalités* or mechanisms of biblical holiness.<sup>15</sup>

The late John Gammie, in his monograph *Holiness in Israel*, has performed this task quite well and his work can be briefly summarized here. Gammie discussed three major strands in Israel’s understanding of holiness: that of the priests, the prophets, and the sages. He went on to discuss variations on each of these understandings and then added a treatment of the apocalyptic writers; this produces a sevenfold perspective on how the Old Testament views holiness. Gammie found a unity running across the biblical material: “The holiness of God requires a cleanness on the part of human beings.”<sup>16</sup> But equally as important, Gammie found not a single doctrine of holiness but a diversity or, at least, “a unity with a diversity.”<sup>17</sup> That is, while cleanness may be a consistent requirement, each of the three traditions Gammie discussed would seem to stress a different kind of cleanness:

- For the priestly tradition, holiness entails a call to *ritual purity, right sacrifice, and separation*;

- Holiness for the prophets involves the *purity of social justice*;
- The wisdom literature stresses the *cleanness of individual morality*.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, there is variation *within* each of these traditions. For example, even in those portions of Scripture that Gammie identified as "Variations on the Priestly Understanding of Holiness" (basically Ezekiel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles), all of which stand in "remarkable continuity with the normative" Priestly perspective, there is nevertheless significant variation.<sup>19</sup> In the prophetic material the differences are even more pronounced: according to Gammie, nowhere in Jeremiah, Deuteronomy, or the Deuteronomistic History, for example, are there passages that articulate that "the holiness of God requires the cleanness of social justice."<sup>20</sup> Though Gammie went on to offer an *apologia* for this attenuation, there is nevertheless a clear difference at work in the understandings of holiness found in the various *corpora* that comprise the Old Testament. Hence, Gammie concluded:

In the light of the overview of the preceding pages it cannot be claimed that holiness in Israel is the central, major, or unifying concept of the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures. It is fair to claim, however, that the concept of the holiness of God is a central concept in the Old Testament, which enables us to discern at once an important unity and diversity.<sup>21</sup>

Gammie's assessment is helpful. It should be added, however, that the complexity of the matter is compounded when one considers the New Testament materials. One can easily see the issues by comparing, say, Ezra's concern with separation with what many have identified as the radical inclusivity of Jesus and the early community gathered around him.<sup>22</sup> Of course, one has to be careful here, as texts such as Matt. 10:5-6 and 15:24 have led some scholars to say that the ministry of Jesus was originally only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel."<sup>23</sup> This certainly softens the inclusivity; even so, the Gospels as a whole, and especially Acts and the ministry of Paul, would seem to register a rather gross disparity with the concerns for ethnic boundary preservation found in Ezra-Nehemiah. Even so, holiness continues to be a concern in the New Testament texts and period.<sup>24</sup>

Still, the difference between Ezra and the early Jesus movement is instructive and gets to the heart of the matter. Simply put, *different traditions, periods, situations, peoples, and so forth, manifest—even require—different understandings and appropriations of holiness*. The struggle for self-preservation and economic stability that characterized the returnees from Exile under Ezra and Nehemiah is not equivalent to the pressures faced by the early Jesus movement. It is not surprising then, to find that Ezra-Nehemiah and the Jesus community have different appropriations or *mentalités* for holiness; nor is it surprising to find these to be, in turn, both similar to and different at points from priestly and prophetic understandings. In short, the manifold ways that the concept of holiness is appropriated is diverse and dependent to a large degree on different geo-political, sociological, and/or theological situations.<sup>25</sup> As such, one might look at them as limited, time-bound manifestations or mechanisms by which holiness is enacted and lived out.

Yet this is not the whole story. The concept of holiness itself is more than the sum total of these *mentalités*. Biblical holiness is not, therefore, merely the various understandings and

implementations of holiness found in the Bible. Rather, there is an *esprit* that runs throughout the text. For Gammie it is "cleanness." I will shortly discuss *difference* in similar fashion. Whatever the exact identification, however, the diversity of appropriation itself is proof of the *esprit*'s existence. While the diversity may at first seem crippling on the practical level, the fact that holiness reappears in the various traditions and sections of the Bible—despite and in spite of the fact that it is differently manifested—underscores the point that holiness is a central biblical concern. Holiness is part of the Bible's fundamental grammar; to borrow Walter Brueggemann's terminology, it comprises part of Israel's core testimony about God.<sup>26</sup>

### III. THE X-FACTOR:

#### TOWARD AN APPROPRIATION OF THE HOLINESS *ESPRIT* AND THE HOLINESS *MENTALITÉS*

But what exactly is that testimony? What precisely is the *esprit*? After the preceding diachronic analysis, it seems more than a bit perilous to hazard a guess on what the notion of holiness might mean *throughout the entire* biblical witness. After all, even if a biblical *esprit* on the matter does exist, hypothetically or ideally, isn't it bound up inextricably with the same socio-political realities mentioned earlier? Perhaps so. But the synchronicity of the concept—above all exemplified by its ubiquity throughout and across the texts and testaments—urges the endeavor. To be sure, it may be that it is the consistent presence of holiness that is the only stable factor—the only *esprit*, as it were—that can be identified. But such an evaluation, while perhaps accurate on the descriptive level, is hardly adequate on a practical or prescriptive one. That is, if the biblical conception of holiness is to be recaptured, recovered, or revisioned for the twenty-first century, we must not only find the biblical *esprit*, we must also attempt to (re-)formulate it in a *mentalité* that is, while faithful to the *esprit* and within the appropriate range of biblical *mentalités*, simultaneously functional and faithful in our own contemporary context.

A clue for doing this can be taken from the second major point of the present paper: namely, that holiness has a *communicative or proclamatory function*. In Gammie's words: "Holiness calls."<sup>27</sup> Gammie, of course, went on to specify this calling: the holiness of God summoned Israel to aspire to justice and compassion; thus, holiness calls for and calls forth cleanness. While this may be true, this calling is not restricted to the holiness of God. Holiness *itself*, I would contend, contains this aspect of calling or communication *in its very nature*. Sociological and anthropological studies are of paramount importance at this point,<sup>28</sup> and it is unfortunate that their presence in biblical scholarship is still a relatively recent development.<sup>29</sup> While sociology and anthropology are critical tools in assessing all kinds of religious phenomena, holiness, in particular, is an excellent case in point. Social-scientific analyses may even help to explain the various factors at work in the different *mentalités* previously described.<sup>30</sup>

A basic and oft-cited characterization of holiness from the perspective of these disciplines, at least since the work of Rudolf Otto, is that holiness is fundamentally *separation*: The Holy is Wholly Other.<sup>31</sup> Yet this insight is not only phenomenological; it is also found in Scripture as, for instance, in Lev. 10:9b-10: "It is a statute forever throughout your generations: You are to distinguish between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean."<sup>32</sup> To be sure, holiness involves more than separation, Otto's analysis includes elements besides the *mysterium*, and the biblical material discusses holiness in

ways that lie outside Otto's scheme.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, it seems to be consensual (if not consonant)<sup>34</sup> that one of the central aspects of holiness is separation.

Thus stated, separation, if not *the* biblical *esprit* of holiness, is certainly a major aspect and dominant part of that *esprit*. Unfortunately, most theory stops there. But this insight must be pressed: What does this separation *do* sociologically *and* theologically? Here the biblical texts must reenter the discussion. The notion of separation, or what might be best called difference, can be illustrated by means of several texts in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. Before undertaking this task, it is necessary to point out that I think that the biblical *esprit* of holiness and its various *mentalités* can be encapsulated by the notion of "the X-Factor."

An X-Factor is something that differentiates two, otherwise identical, entities.<sup>35</sup> Given the presence of the X, the term is somewhat mysterious. The letter X, as is well known, is often used in algebra and higher mathematics for a symbol of unknown or variable quality. The elusive quality of the X has passed over into everyday parlance as terms like "Generation X," "the X-Files," or even "Madame X," amply attest.<sup>36</sup> Other examples could be added, but suffice it to say that the X-Factor is something that separates, that differentiates, that is mysterious, and as such fascinates and attracts. In so doing, it also *testifies*. In my estimation, this notion can be quite helpful in an attempt to understand the biblical conception of holiness.

*"I Am Yahweh": The Holiness Code and Ezekiel*

An obvious place to start this task is with Leviticus 17-26, commonly called the Holiness Code because of its predominant concern with holiness.<sup>37</sup> While it may be an obvious place to start, it is not an easy one. The Holiness Code comprises a dizzying myriad of laws and commands, almost none of which immediately recommend themselves to the contemporary (at least contemporary *Christian*) situation. Or so it would seem.

What is clear, however, is that holiness is central throughout the Holiness Code and is manifested in a number of ways—indeed, in almost as many ways as there are laws—including regulations regarding sacrifice (Lev. 17:1-6), sexuality (Lev. 18:6-23), familial relations (Lev. 20:9), idol worship (Lev. 20:1-5), priesthood (Lev. 21:1-24), offerings (Lev. 22:1-23), festivals (Leviticus 23), and so forth. Leviticus 19 is a particularly interesting chapter, and probably the most well-known given v. 18bα: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The juxtaposition of this verse with a prohibition against mixed breeding shows that this chapter serves as a microcosm for what one finds throughout the Holiness Code.

What is perhaps most striking about Leviticus 19, besides the rough juxtaposition already mentioned, is the refrain that echoes throughout the chapter: "I am the LORD" (19:3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37). It occurs, in fact, in the famous v. 18, which reads in full:

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

It is also found after other laws, such as "You shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD" (19:12) and "Do not turn to idols or make cast images for yourselves: I am the LORD your God" (19:4). But it is also found in several of those laws that seem exceedingly strange. For example, "You shall not make any gash-

es in your flesh for the dead or tatoo any marks upon you: I am the LORD" (19:28) or "But in the fifth year you may eat of their [the trees'] fruit, that their yield may be increased for you: I am the LORD your God" (19:25). What does this refrain mean? Why is it scattered throughout this chapter and elsewhere in the Holiness Code?<sup>38</sup>

To answer this question we need to look to the other main locus for this type of phraseology, the Book of Ezekiel, and to the scholar who has thought longest and best on the topic, Walther Zimmerli.<sup>39</sup> Zimmerli has demonstrated that the "I am Yahweh" (NRSV: "I am the LORD") formula, or what he calls variously the "demonstration/manifestation word," "recognition formula," or "proof-saying" (*Erweiswort*) functions to reveal God's being through God's action. In Ezekiel, this formula always precedes God's activity and Yahweh is always the subject. The purpose of the action in question is to produce recognition of God's revelation within it. The appropriate response is for Israel and the nations to recognize, acknowledge, and submit to God.<sup>40</sup> Put simply, the action that accompanies the phrase "I am Yahweh" functions to reveal God's person and nature to those who encounter it.<sup>41</sup>

This is a fascinating insight and one that has bearing on the instances of the formula in the Holiness Code, which Zimmerli unfortunately treats only briefly.<sup>42</sup> The point is that this strange hodgepodge of laws that include both reverence for God, family, and neighbor, as well as prohibitions against wearing clothing made from two types of fabric and the like, somehow serves to reveal God and more specifically, God's nature and God's holiness. What an odd God, that God's holy being should be manifested in such ways! But the earlier question, "What do these laws *do*?" still remains. If this could be answered, perhaps it might explain what seems, on the face of it, so odd, arbitrary, and irrational.

In Israel, these laws would seem to bind the people together, uniting them as one people of God, serving and obeying that God in any and every way. Simultaneously, however, these laws serve to *separate* them and *mark them as different* from the outside world. In short, these laws are an X-Factor differentiating Israel from her neighbors.<sup>43</sup>

This is no small point. Boundaries are of critical importance to societal and communal existence. Witness Ezra and Nehemiah, for instance.<sup>44</sup> But this separation is not an end *in and of itself*, for *and unto* itself. The laws of the Holiness Code, after all, would separate Israel *regardless* of the self-revelation formula "I am Yahweh." But the presence of that formula gives the legislation motivation and reason for being. The formula is also what gives the laws their communicative function. After all, Israel—as separate, holy, and different as it was and could be—was hardly isolated on the geopolitical stage of the ancient Near East. Only rarely in its history was Israel sufficiently free of foreign domination to develop and flourish as it would. And even at those rare moments of independence, Israel constantly came into contact with nations great and small throughout the ancient world: Egypt, Aram, Phoenicia, Philistia, Assyria, Babylon, Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the rest. Furthermore, the major trade routes of the ancient world happened to run right through Syria-Palestine and thus through Israel.<sup>45</sup> Israel could not be geographically separate then, and yet was called to be sociologically and theologically separate by virtue of its practices. Or better, Israel was called to be *different*.<sup>46</sup> Again, the purpose for this difference does not seem to have been for its own sake or because of some unknown disease residing in pork, from which God wished to spare Israel.<sup>47</sup> Rather, the purpose was אֲנִי יְהוָה, "I am Yahweh," and that means God

wishes to know and be known by humans. In short, in my judgment, laws like those found in the Holiness Code *function both theologically and sociologically to simultaneously separate Israel unto itself, and to attract and call others unto Israel*.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the recognition formula that serves as conclusion to and motivation for these laws shows that their communicative function is part and parcel of the divine economy and plan.

*"When the Children/People Ask You":*

*Deut. 6:20-25, Ezek. 24:15-27, Jer. 16:1-13, and the Function of Symbolic Activity (Attraction)*

Though the communicative function of the Holiness Code can certainly be debated, the case can be made rather easily sociologically, if not historically.<sup>49</sup> In brief, it is a naturally occurring result of the practices in question. Ironically, then, the very barriers that *separate* and thus *exclude* are also the very structures that make it (at least) possible to *allow in* and *include*. Thus, these laws that seem so obscure and strange in the Holiness Code, not to mention elsewhere in Scripture, have a sociological function that is *communicative*, perhaps one might even say *missiological* if not *evangelical*.<sup>50</sup> This statement is true only if and as long as a means to transition from one side of the barrier to another exists or only if and as long as there is a message to communicate from one side to another and a means by which this can be done. This is obviously a source of intense debate in the history of Israelite religion.<sup>51</sup> Even so, I am inclined to think that this difference is *purposeful*; that it did create a barrier but also made it a porous one—indeed, one that exists for penetration and crossing.

While some may remain skeptical, the communicative nature of the legal material can be demonstrated with even greater clarity *within Israel*.<sup>52</sup> The problem of transgenerational value communication, for instance, is a case in point. Children, upon noticing these laws, often do not understand them and inquire about them. The laws thus produce their initial inquiry regarding the Law. The instructed parental answer is then given and is oriented, not toward the laws or the Law, but toward the Lawgiver. Note Deut. 6:20-25:

When your children ask you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you?" then you shall say to your children, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. The LORD displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. Then the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right."<sup>53</sup>

In this text, the child first encounters the system but is then immediately introduced to the Savior.<sup>54</sup> But the "system-first" situation isn't so bad—even if it isn't ideal—because the encounter with the system is *designed* to or at least *functions* to introduce the Savior.

Another example of or analogy to this dynamic is found in the symbolic activity of the prophets, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel.<sup>55</sup> In Ezekiel 24 we find the prophet engaged in yet another symbolic action—something of a personal specialty of his.<sup>56</sup> This particular

example is especially disturbing. Yahweh says to Ezekiel:

Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down. Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your sandals on your feet; do not cover your upper lip or eat the bread of mourners (Ezek. 24:15-17).

The "delight of your eyes" (מחמד עיניך) is somewhat ambiguous. To what or to whom does the phrase refer?<sup>57</sup> The suspense mounts as Ezekiel responds to the divine word: "So I spoke to the people in the morning" (Ezek. 24:18a). We are not told what Ezekiel said to the people, but presumably it was a verbatim repetition of the divine message. As such, perhaps the taking of the "delight of your eyes" applies to the people, not Ezekiel.<sup>58</sup> But alas, no. The suspense is cut; simply and plaintively v. 18 continues: "and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded" (Ezek. 24:18b). The crux immediately follows:

*Then the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these things mean for us, that you are acting this way?" Then I said to them: The word of the LORD came to me... (Ezek. 24:19-20a; emphasis added).*

This is echoed in v. 24:

Thus Ezekiel shall be a sign to you; you shall do just as he has done. When this comes, then you shall know that I am the Lord God.

The prophet's activity thus symbolizes what will happen to the house of Israel: Ezekiel's wife is taken and so shall Jerusalem be taken. But it also does more: *it produces the encounter* with the word and thus the revelation of God—"then you shall know that I am the Lord God" (24:24; cf. 24:27).

Jer. 16:1-13 is functionally identical. There the prophet is told not to marry or have children (vv. 2-4) and not to mourn for the dead (vv. 5-9) because God is bringing judgment and disaster on Israel. This leads to a turning point:

*And when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, "Why has the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?" then you shall say to them... (Jer. 16:10-11a; emphasis added).*

Here again the sign-action produces a confrontation. The people *will* inquire and Jeremiah *will* respond. Perhaps Israel should have known the reason for Jeremiah's celibacy,<sup>59</sup> but the point is that they did not. The symbolic action becomes *the vehicle by which they learn it*—even if they (and the prophets themselves!) have to learn it the hard way. Apparently, the stubbornness of the people forces God and the prophets to reconsider their communication strategies and make their message even more severe.<sup>60</sup>



The significance of all this is that God does not forbid Ezekiel to mourn or Jeremiah to marry because these things are wrong or harmful. On the contrary, it is exactly the *commonality* and *normalcy* of such activities that makes them ideally suited to produce a reaction or encounter, which the prophets then turn to their advantage in delivering the divine message. Marriage was altogether normal and standard, so much so that Jeremiah 16 is virtually the only example of bachelorhood in ancient Israel.<sup>61</sup> Mourning for the dead is also a common human process and experience.<sup>62</sup> But these are the things forbidden the prophets; again, not for any reason inherent in the practices themselves and at the same time not without any reason whatsoever; but rather in order to lead those unacquainted with the people or word of God to an *encounter* with exactly those subjects. This confrontation, in turn, functions to reveal Israel's God as the proof-saying formula ably demonstrates.<sup>63</sup>

Given the presence of "I am Yahweh" in the Holiness Code, the same processes seem to be at work there. Ancient Israel was demarcated from surrounding nations *purposefully*, in order to produce questions like: "Why don't you gash yourself for the dead? Why don't you sacrifice to Molek? Why don't you gather the fallen grapes in your vineyard—why do you leave them for the poor?" The answer was not to be mumbled under one's breath after clearing one's throat ("Ahem, er, well, ah, because I am an Israelite...") and indeed ultimately has little to do with the Israelite *qua* Israelite. On the contrary, the answer is יהוה ידוע "he is Yahweh"—that is, "because Yahweh is our God" (see Ps. 105:7; 1 Chron. 16:14). The Holiness Code is thus like a giant symbolic activity on a nationwide or global scale that serves, as do the prohibitions in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, to assist Israelite children as well as foreigners come to the knowledge of Yahweh.<sup>64</sup>

As separation, therefore, the X-Factor serves *to attract* or *to invite*. But there is more at work in this notion and in these biblical texts than outside attraction. Furthermore, there is more to the Bible and to the legal corpus than "don't dos"—or what might be termed negative difference or separation.<sup>65</sup> There are also positive injunctions (positive separation/difference) that may very well still attract, but that are primarily focused inwardly on Israel's communal life together.<sup>66</sup>

*"When You See It, Then You Will Remember": Num. 15:37-41 (Accountability)*

Since the sociological cohesion produced by boundaries and common legislation is well-known,<sup>67</sup> this aspect can be dealt with in briefer fashion. Moreover, in some ways it is subordinate to attraction because the dynamic is the same: positive separation also attracts, but its main focus is internal—it attracts those already in the group and thus acts as a mechanism for accountability or memory. This can be nicely demonstrated by Num. 15:37-41:

The LORD said to Moses: Speak to the Israelites, and tell them to make fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue cord on the fringe at each corner. You have the fringe so that, when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and not follow the lust of your own heart and your own eyes. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and you shall be holy to your God. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God.

Here we find an injunction as strange as those found in the Holiness Code.<sup>68</sup> The Israelites are to put blue cords on the fringes of their garments (cf. Deut. 22:12) and when they see these blue fringes, which would presumably happen quite frequently throughout the course of a day, they are to remember the commandments. The situation works out rather logically, though perhaps a bit woodenly:

- you will see the blue cords,
- you will *remember* all the commandments,
- you will *do* them,
- and you will *not turn away* faithlessly.

Following the tassel, that is, instead of the lusts of the heart and eye, helps one follow God: "So you shall remember...and you shall be holy to your God."

In Numbers 15 we find a difference—an X-Factor—that serves as a reminder to inculcate a righteous and faithful lifestyle in the Israelites.<sup>69</sup> This aspect, which has to do with accountability, comprises the second major purpose of the X-Factor. Again, separation or difference is not an end in and of itself; rather, difference is *unto encounter and proclamation*; and it is also *unto remembrance and enactment*.<sup>70</sup> And, as is rather obvious in the case of Numbers 15, an X-Factor can oftentimes simultaneously do both.<sup>71</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION: REVISIONING AND REAPPROPRIATING HOLINESS VIA THE X-FACTOR

In sum, then, the differences highlighted here under the rubric "the X-Factor" may involve abstention from normal involvements or may involve participation in atypical activities in order to produce twin aspects: attraction unto encounter and remembrance unto accountability. It is these aspects or purposes of the deep structure of the X-Factor that give it reason for being. That is, the X-Factor itself is not invariable. On the contrary—the X-Factor changes as often as the biblical *mentalités* do or as often as the symbol "x" signifies different values in algebra. In fact, the different *mentalités* are themselves different X-Factors, as long as they serve the purposes of attraction and accountability. So, the particular action chosen—be it Ezekiel's stoicism, Jeremiah's celibacy, the holy hodgepodge of Leviticus, or the blue cords of Numbers—will change and vary. These activities are situation-specific and timebound, limited and temporary. But the difference encapsulated therein, the separation that produces (or should produce) attraction and accountability remains constant. The X-Factor, then, summarizes the *esprit* of holiness (difference), while also providing a grid that both explains and incorporates the *mentalités'* content and method (their ongoing appropriations, revisioning, and so forth).

Several points need to be stressed, however. First, this grid of possible *mentalités* isn't infinite.<sup>72</sup> It is certain that if holiness is to be revisioned and relived, it must be done in such a way that is both comprehensible and relevant today. The X-Factor permits this by showing how various persons, movements, and periods have lived out holiness in differing, and not always ideal, ways. We are on good ground, then, to say that the exact manner (*mentalité*) in which we enact holiness (the *esprit* itself) is of secondary importance to the fact *that* we live it out. Thus, as long as the X-Factor, the separation or difference, produces an encounter and reminds us who and whose we are, its focus and locus, its mech-

anism and appropriation, will and should vary. But the variation is limited, or should be, to the range demonstrated within Scripture itself. Or better: it is limited to the *dynamic* found within the Scriptural range of *mentalités*. This dynamic is properly one that *comes from God*. The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel and Jeremiah and told them what to do. The commandments in the Holiness Code and Numbers 15, similarly, are stamped with the divine “*imprimatur*.”<sup>73</sup> So too modern appropriations of biblical holiness should follow the command of God, expressed above all in Holy Scripture.<sup>74</sup>

This point already anticipates the second, namely, that the X-Factor should be *purposeful*. The X shouldn’t be arbitrary: It should be designed to lead to the twin aspects and be subject to and take its origin from the command of God. It should also be tied to the character and holiness of God.<sup>75</sup> Although separation does not exhaust the concept of holiness in Scripture or in the phenomenology of religion, it does prove helpful at this point, since God is nothing if not different—especially, the incarnation notwithstanding, different from us.<sup>76</sup>

But Christ nevertheless plays a role here. It is not unimportant to note that our English letter “X” comes from the Greek letter χ (*chi*), the first letter of Χριστός (*Christos*), the “Christ.”<sup>77</sup> Ultimately, for Christians, it is our relationship with Jesus Christ that makes and marks us apart—as separate and different. One might say that the Gospel itself is our X-Factor. That is well and good and as it should be. The purpose of this paper has been to provide motivation for the concrete manifestations of that relationship and in so doing to fill holiness with meaning by appealing to the ultimate purpose of communication via attraction and accountability. The latter two, respectively, provide the opportunity and the message for the former.

To be sure, conceptions of the X-Factor, although not with that label, have long been around. Difference, separation, “coming apart from the world,” refusing to be “of it,” are all hallmarks of the Christian tradition—especially the holiness variety.<sup>78</sup> But rarely, or so it seems, has the purpose of separation been expressed and unmotivated separation quickly becomes *separatism*. This scenario, while rather typical, is exceedingly problematic. But the X-Factor provides a way out of it. It can serve as a hermeneutical key that motivates and explains distinctive characteristics (both positive, e.g., care of the poor, and negative, e.g., abstentions from various practices) that are periodically undertaken by communities of faith. Moreover, the notion of the X-Factor can function on a transgenerational level, since its explanation and enactment of the *esprit* is independent of one particular type or even brand of *mentalité*.

If holiness is to be appropriated in the next century, I think it will have to be done in this sort of way. The X-Factor gets around the problem of unmotivated and thus lifeless difference and also holds promise for transgenerational and evangelistic communication. But the X-Factor also poses a threat to the way holiness has been traditionally conceived. Built into its structure is variability, openness, change—at least on the level of *mentalité*. This has not been a hallmark of the holiness traditions, nor of any other denomination for that matter, which have tended to demarcate their ethical conduct early in their histories and modify them only slightly over long periods of time. But, taking its cue from the biblical material, the X-Factor is more pragmatic than idealistic. It *encourages*, even requires, difference in mechanism of appropriation *as long* as these mechanisms produce the intended results: attraction and accountability, encounter and remembrance. As already stated,

communities of faith—holiness and otherwise—have long practiced these types of mechanisms whether intentionally or unintentionally, sometimes with remarkable effect.<sup>79</sup> Still, what seems to have been missing is the theoretical support for these practices and especially the motivation (communication and memory) that lies behind them.

This, in sum, is what the X-Factor is about and what it does. In my judgment, it has the potential to help traditions maintain their distinctives while at the same time communicating their message to a broader audience and to the next generation. If so, maybe that nasty little X in "Generation X" will turn out to be positive after all. Who knows? Perhaps the notion of the X-Factor will help all generations "proclaim God's holiness to all eternity" (Amidah 3).<sup>80</sup>

#### NOTES

1. This paper was delivered at the joint meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society and the Society for Pentecostal Studies held in March 1998 at the Church of God Theological Seminary (Cleveland, Tennessee) entitled: "Purity and Power: Revisioning the Holiness & Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements for the Twenty-First Century." I would like to thank my respondents, David L. Cubie (Mount Vernon Nazarene College) and Michael K. Adams (Emmanuel College), for their valuable comments and critique. The original idea for this paper was born in my undergraduate days in a class taught by Prof. Robert W. Smith of Point Loma Nazarene University. In addition to Prof. Smith, I would like to thank Bill T. Arnold, Shane A. Berg, James K. Mead, Rickie D. Moore, Henry W. L. Rietz, David L. Stubbs, R. Wesley Tink, and John W. Wright—each of whom read drafts of the paper and made helpful comments. None of these should be held responsible for the opinions expressed herein.

2. Walter Brueggemann, "Old Testament Theology as a Particular Conversation: Adjudication of Israel's Sociotheological Alternatives," in *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 118-49; citation from p. 128.

3. John G. Gammon, *Holiness in Israel*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), p. 195.

4. The translation used here and throughout is the NRSV, though I have sometimes modified it. In this case, the emphatic (adjective-first position) word order for the term "holy" (קדושים and קדוש, respectively) in the Hebrew text should be noted.

5. On this text, and especially its relationship to Leviticus and the issues discussed in this paper, see Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, ed. E. J. Epp, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), pp. 117-22.

6. Many texts, of course, could be appealed to here. Cf., e.g., Lev. 11:44-45, 20:26; Matt. 5:48; 2 Cor. 6:17; Col. 1:21-22; 1 Thess. 4:1-9; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Heb. 12:14.

7. See also Ezek. 28:22, 25 (Oracle against Sidon); and 39:27. The only other instance of this particular verbal form is Lev. 22:32, a text that is also pertinent to the discussion.

8. Literally: "we will sanctify." But note that the term is in parallel with נודיע ("we will declare"). In post-biblical Hebrew the term often carries proclamatory force, especially in the Piel. See Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 2 vols. (New York: The Judaica Press, 1992), 2:1319-20. The translation "proclaim" follows Joseph H. Hertz, *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book: Hebrew Text, English Translation with Commentary and Notes*, rev. ed. (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 5709/1948), p. 137 (for the Hebrew text, see p. 136). It should be noted that this is a later version and that while the Amidah is an ancient prayer, benediction three probably did not originally contain this section. For the historical background, see Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, rev. ed. by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1979), 2:455-63.

9. Christian Friedrich August Dillmann, *Handbuch der alttestamentlichen Theologie*, ed. R. Kittel (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1895).
10. John H. Hayes and Frederick Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), p. 122.
11. Johannes Hänel, *Die Religion der Heiligkeit* (Gütersloh: Bertelmanns, 1931). See Hayes and Prussner, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 167-68.
12. Ernst Sellin, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Leipzig: Von Quelle und Meyer, 1933), pp. 18-19: "Gott ist heilig. Hiermit berühren wir das, was das tiefste und innerste Wesen des alttestamentlichen Gottes ausmacht" ("God is holy. Herein we touch on that which makes up the deepest and innermost nature of the Old Testament God"); and Theodorus Christiaan Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell and Mott, 1962), p. 151: "The holiness of God is the central idea of the Old Testament faith in God." Hayes and Prussner, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 257 note that the holiness of God has been proposed as the center of the Old Testament in previous research.
13. See Hayes and Prussner, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 257-60.
14. See, e.g., Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. D. M. G. Stalker (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962-1965), 1:204-7, 272-79; 2:236, 343, 345; Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Old Testament Library hereafter OTL, 2 vols., trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961-1967), 1:270-82; David P. Wright, "Holiness (OT)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* hereafter ABD, 5 vols., ed. D. N. Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:237-49; Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), p. 354; Helmer Ringgren, *The Prophetic Conception of Holiness* (Uppsala: Lundequist, 1948); William Dymess, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), pp. 51-53; Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, OTL, 2 vols., trans. Leo G. Perdue (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991-1992), 1:240-41; Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), pp. 195-97; and especially Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*. This statement is not, of course, true in all cases. Note Werner H. Schmidt's assessment that holiness is rather peripheral to the Old Testament (*The Faith of the Old Testament: A History* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983], pp. 152-56; but cf. Gammie's remarks, *Holiness in Israel*, pp. 2-3).
15. Alternatively, one could use a linguistic analogy and use the terms "grammar" and "vocabulary" for *esprit* and *mentalité*, respectively. In this scenario, the grammar remains constant (or similar) across various dialects or languages even while the vocabulary changes. I thank Steven T. Hoskins for suggesting this alternative terminology.
16. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, p. 1. Thus stated, "cleanness" would be Gammie's assessment of the biblical *esprit* of holiness. Cf. p. 195: "A unity of the Old Testament can be discerned in this unified response to holiness on the part of Israel: holiness requires purity."
17. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, p. 1.
18. *Ibid.*, and cf. pp. 43, 100, 149, respectively. The apocalyptic material contains a sort of combination of these traditions (see p. 198). For the priestly tradition see further Philip Peter Jensen, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series hereafter JSOTSuppl 106 (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1992) and Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).
19. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, pp. 69, 196-97. For instance, the first part of the Chronicler's History places "less emphasis on the typically priestly insistence on separation from other peoples than in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah" (p. 196).
20. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, p. 123. But see Jeffries M. Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy: The Case of Deuteronomy 15* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

21. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, p. 197 (emphasis his).

22. See, e.g., Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), passim, especially pp. 176-77: "It does not take long to show how sharply Jesus rejected all attempts to realize the community of the remnant by means of human striving or separation.... Jesus does not gather the holy remnant, but the all-embracing community of salvation of God's new people." More recently, E. P. Sanders has also underscored the inclusive nature of Jesus' mission to and calling of "the sinners" (*Jesus and Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], especially pp. 174-211).

23. E.g., Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), pp. 126-27. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, p. 220: "But the overwhelming impression is that Jesus started a movement which came to see the Gentile mission as a logical extension of itself" (emphasis his). Sanders goes on to say, however, that "Iwle need not think that Jesus imparted to his disciples any view at all about the Gentiles and the kingdom" (p. 221).

24. See, e.g., Otto Procksch and Karl Georg Kuhn, "ἅγιος, ἁγιώζω, ἁγιασμός, ἁγιότης, ἁγιοποιεῖν," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (hereafter TDNT), 10 vols., trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 1:88-115; Robert Hodgson, Jr., "Holiness (NT)," in ABD 3:249-54; G. F. Hawthorne, "Holy, Holiness," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), pp. 485-89; Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Mellen, 1984); David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); and Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols., trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951-1955), 1:338-39; 2:180, 189, 223. Cf. also note 6 above.

25. Cf. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, p. 196: "Each of these groups set forth its teaching in response to holiness and what holiness had impressed upon their hearts and minds. No claim of exclusive apprehension of holiness and the requirements of holiness is possible for any one of the three groups. The lessons for contemporary religious denominations that look to the Scripture for guidance are obvious."

26. The language, though not necessarily the sentiment, is taken from Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997). For the holiness of Yahweh, see pp. 288-93.

27. See note 3 above.

28. See, e.g., Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1989), especially chap. 3, "The Abominations of Leviticus," pp. 41-57; idem, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1965); Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); idem, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (New York: The Free Press, 1952); Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996); Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); and idem, *Religious Essays: A Supplement to The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931). For an Old Testament theology that incorporates some of Otto's insights and terminology, see Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*, Religious Perspectives, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978). A recent treatment of Otto's work can be found in Melissa Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997). For a treatment of Douglas from the perspective of biblical studies, cf. J. F. A. Sawyer, ed., *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, JSOTSupp 227 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) and also Edwin Firmage, "The Biblical Dietary Laws and the Concept of Holiness," in *Studies in the Pentateuch*,

ed. J. A. Emerton, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 41 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), pp. 177-208. In addition to sociology and anthropology, psychological studies of religious experience can also be extremely illuminating in matters such as these.

29. For Old Testament studies see, among others, the work of Robert Wilson, Walter Brueggemann, and Norman Gottwald. Gottwald has been something of a pioneer in this area in Old Testament studies and has, in turn, provided impetus to scholars like Brueggemann. In addition to Gottwald's many articles on various subjects, note especially *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979) and *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985). New Testament scholarship has also benefited from social-scientific approaches. See, e.g., the work of Gerd Theissen, Howard Clark Kee, Bruce Malina, Jerome Neyrey, Carolyn Osiek, and John Elliot to name a few.

30. See, e.g., Jerome H. Neyrey, "Clean/Unclean, Pure/Polluted, and Holy/Profane: The Idea and the System of Purity," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard L. Rohrbaugh (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), pp. 80-104; and the works by the other scholars cited in the previous note. For the Jesus movement see especially Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); and Carolyn Osiek, R. S. C. J., *What Are They Saying About the Social Setting of the New Testament?*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist, 1992); as well as the essays gathered in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

31. To list citations of this aspect of holiness in secondary literature would take an entire monograph, but see, as representative, Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 25-30 (on the *mysterium*); Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, pp. 9-12 and passim; von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:205; Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 49-51; and Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Vintage, 1995), p. 22. From a theological perspective, see recently Jürgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), pp. 43-45.

32. See Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 18-25 for a convenient summary of the system of holiness found in Leviticus.

33. See especially von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:206 for this criticism of Otto.

34. It is often said that separation is part of the etymological meaning of Hebrew *קדש* (e.g., Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979], p. 871; TDNT 1:89; Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 49; and much secondary literature). More recent lexica, however, have rightly questioned this. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev. by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, 4 vols. [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996-1999], 3:1072), for instance, indicate that *קדש* is "an original verb, which can only with difficulty be traced back to a root *קד* 'to cut'; [nevertheless] if this is the case the basic meaning of *קדש* would be 'to set apart.'" Yet, even if the conception of "separate-ness" is etymologically debated for *קדש*, at the very least this notion is clearly involved on the semantic level.

35. This definition is more idiomatic or colloquial than Webster's which defines an X-factor as "a relevant but unidentified factor" (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*, ed. Philip Babcock Gove [Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1993], p. 2644) and *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary* [hereafter OED], 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 2353 which notes that the word was originally a military term, referring to "the aspects of a serviceman's life that have no civilian equivalent; pay made in recognition of these."

36. Perhaps, one of the more powerful and controversial X's in recent memory is found in the person of Malcolm Little who upon conversion to the Nation of Islam changed his last name to X. The X in Malcolm's case symbolized the renunciation of a former "slavemaster name" and the anonymity or loss of one's "true African family name that had been taken from every African brought

to America as a slave. Adding an 'X' to one's name, therefore, is a *public sign, a testimony* against the legacy of slavery, where freed slaves either took on the names of their former slaveholders or created new names entirely" (Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, *Xodus: An African-American Male Journey* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], p. 75; emphasis mine). Recently, Baker-Fletcher has used the X, especially Malcolm's, as a symbol to invigorate African-American male spirituality "outside of the moral parameters and definitions of European space." See his "Xodus Musings: Reflections on Womanist Tar Baby Theology," *Theology Today* 50 (1993):38-44, especially p. 43 and, more recently, *Xodus*, especially pp. xv-xvi, 73-91, and 175-94. Note the proclamatory function of the X in his work.

37. For a brief overview of some of the critical issues around the Holiness Code, see Henry T. C. Sun, "Holiness Code," in *ABD* 3:254-57. Not a few scholars have questioned whether the Holiness Code really existed independently or can be treated separately from the rest of Leviticus. See, e.g., Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, OTL (Louisville: Westminster, 1996), p. 18.

38. E.g., Lev. 18:5, 6, 21; 20:7; 21:12; 22:2, 3, 8, 9, 30, 31, 33; 23:22; 24:22; 25:17; 26:2, 45; etc.; cf. 11:44-45.

39. Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, ed. Walter Brueggemann (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982). Cf. also idem, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, trans. R. E. Clements, eds., F. M. Cross, K. Baltzer, and L. J. Greenspoon, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 37-40; and idem, "The Message of the Prophet Ezekiel," *Interpretation* 23 (1969):131-57.

40. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, p. 38: "In his action in history Yahweh sets himself before his people and the world in his own person. All that which is preached by the prophet as an event which is apparently neutral in its meaning has its purpose in that Israel and the nations should come to a recognition, which in the Old Testament also means an acknowledgement, of this person who reveals himself in his name. All Yahweh's action which the prophet proclaims serves as a proof of Yahweh among the nations" (emphasis mine).

41. Cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, p. 40: "The whole direction of the prophetic preaching is a summons to a knowledge and recognition of him who, in his action announced by the prophet, shows himself to be who he is in the free sovereignty of his prophecy."

42. Primarily in the essay "I am Yahweh" (in *I Am Yahweh*, pp. 1-28). Zimmerli does point out, however, that the presence of this formula in the Holiness Code makes the latter quite significant: "A comparison of the Holiness Code with Ezekiel 20:7 makes it clear that this indefatigable repetition of *ny yhw* at the end of individual statements or smaller groups of statements in the legal offerings is not to be understood as thoughtlessly strewn decoration; rather, *this repetition pushes these legal statements into the most central position from which the Old Testament can make any statement*. Each of these small groups of legal maxims thereby becomes a legal communication out of the heart of the Old Testament revelation of Yahweh. Each one of these small units offers in its own way a bit of explication of the central self-introduction of Yahweh, the God who summons his people—or better, recalling Leviticus 18ff. (and Ezek. 20), the God who sanctifies his people" (*I Am Yahweh*, p. 12; emphasis mine). This should caution those Christians—scholars and otherwise—who would pass over the Holiness Code too quickly and ignore it in theological (and even ethical) reflection.

43. Interestingly, Wenham, *Leviticus*, pp. 261-75 entitles chapter 19 "Principles of Neighborliness."

44. See Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington: Meyer Stone, 1989) for an excellent treatment that draws extensively on sociological data.

45. Cf. David A. Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

46. This is not to downplay the sociological and theological similarities that, as is well-known,



about between Israel and her neighbors in the ancient Near East. The prophetic "cleanness" of social justice for instance (so Gammie) could also be incorporated under difference, but in so doing one would need to be cognizant that the emphasis on social justice is fairly typical in the ancient world (see, e.g., Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995]). Even so, Psalm 82 may be an important text at this point.

47. See Lev. 11:7; cf. Deut. 14:8. See further Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 43-45 for "medical" and "meaningless/arbitrary/irrational" interpretations of Leviticus, especially the dietary laws. Douglas herself opts for reasons relating to locomotion. Firmage ("The Biblical Dietary Laws," pp. 177-208) has challenged this and offered, in its place, an interpretation based on the connection (or lack thereof) of the entire animal world to established sacrificial animals. Whatever the case, one might note that, while pork was prohibited in Israel, it was eaten by persons in close proximity to Israel (notably the Philistines), apparently with no harmful result. On the eating of pork in antiquity generally, see recently Brian Hesse and Paula Wapnish, "Can Pig Remains Be Used for Ethnic Diagnosis in the Ancient Near East?," in *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*, eds. Neil Asher Silberman and David Small, JSOTSupp 237 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). The point being stressed here, however, is that *there may be no inherent reason for these laws* other than to produce the dynamic outlined above.

48. The notion is certainly not altogether new. Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), for instance, in his *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei* (1648), included the Mosaic law in the covenant of grace, partially because "it separated the Hebrews as the bearers of the kingdom from the surrounding heathen groups and so preserved the people for Christ" (Hayes and Prussner, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 21). Note George Adam Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1901), p. 142: "We have seen that the gradual ethical development, which thus differentiated Israel from her neighbors, appears to have begun with the introduction to the nations of Jahweh as their God; and that every stage of its progress was achieved in connection with some impression of His character. It seems to me that there are here *the lines of an apologetic, for a Divine Revelation through early Israel*, more sure and clear than any which the traditional interpretation of the Old Testament ever attempted to lay down" (emphasis mine); and see also Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 5749/1989), p. 257: "The gulf between the sacred and the profane was not meant to be permanent. The command to achieve holiness, to become holy, envisions a time when life would be consecrated in its fullness and when *all nations would worship God in holiness*. What began as a process of separating the sacred from the profane was to end as the unification of human experience, the harmonizing of man with his universe, and of man with God" (emphasis mine).

49. The communicative function of legislation is exponentially increased in the probable historical location of much of the Priestly writing, namely, the Babylonian Exile. It is in that context that much of the legislation (certainly earlier than the sixth century in origin if not composition) takes on new significance as it functions to differentiate a small, foreign minority group from a larger, dominant host society. See further on this situation Smith, *The Religion of the Landless*; and Rainer Albertz, "The History of Israelite Religion in the Exilic Period," in *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, 2 vols., OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 2:369-436. On this point, note Psalm 137 and Daniel 3 and 6—texts that indicate that worship itself was an X-Factor in the diaspora.

50. For the former see Christopher J. H. Wright, "Old Testament Ethics: A Missiological Perspective," *Catalyst* (forthcoming).

51. See, e.g., Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989):14-33; idem, "Conversion to Judaism in Historical Perspective: From Biblical Israel to Post-biblical Judaism," *Conservative Judaism* 36 (1983):31-45; Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), especially pp. 288-382, 416-46; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to*

*Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); idem, "Conversion," in *ABD* 1:1131-33; Jacob Milgrom, "Religious Conversion and the Revolt Model for the Formation of Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982):169-76; Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), especially pp. 1-108, 154-74; Scot McKnight, *A Light Among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991); A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933); and Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), especially pp. 1-183, 285-300. While I cannot demonstrate it here in detail, in my judgment such means did, in fact, exist in early (i.e., pre-exilic) Israel. In addition to the sociological function of legal and ritual practice that I am describing here (which may well be the strongest evidence), I would make mention of biblical stories like Ruth, Rahab, Naaman, Jonah, and so forth, as well as biblical scholars like Gottwald. For the latter, see especially *The Tribes of Yahweh* and idem, "Religious Conversion and the Societal Origins of Ancient Israel," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 15 (1988):49-65. Even so, it must be admitted that we know very few "converts" to Israelite religion by name.

52. Even those skeptical of the argument here should note that in Ezekiel the proof-saying is often used for the nations' knowledge of Yahweh. Cf. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:236-37: "This 'manifestation' is therefore much more than simply something inward or spiritual; it is an event which comes about in the full glare of the political scene, and which can be noticed by foreign nations as well as by Israel....The final goal of the divine activity is therefore that Jahweh should be recognised and worshipped by those who so far have not known him or who still do not know him properly."

53. Cf. also Josh. 4:5-7, 20-24.

54. I am indebted to Dr. Rueben Welch for this terminology.

55. The classic treatment remains that of Georg Fohrer, *Die symbolischen Handlungen der Propheten*, 2d ed. (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1968). See more recently Kelvin Friebe, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication*, JSOTSupp 283 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

56. See Ezek. 4:1-5:17; 12:1-6.

57. Zimmerli is certainly right to caution against overinterpreting "the delight of your eyes" (Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* I, p. 505), but at the same time, the Hebrew is at least somewhat excessive. After all, *אשר* could have been used just as easily.

58. Of course, the resulting oracle shows that it applies to both, but the second person forms in Ezek. 24:15-17 are singular, while those in 24:21-24 are plural.

59. So Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 153.

60. On this phenomenon, especially in Ezekiel and Jeremiah, see Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

61. Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah* 1-25, Word Biblical Commentary 26 (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), p. 216 go so far as to use the "unusualness of the prohibition to marry" to argue for the authenticity of the pericope.

62. This is rather obvious, but note also the "house of mourning" (בית מור) in Jer. 16:5. The Hebrew term *marzē(a)h* is rare in the Hebrew Bible. It does occur, however, in other ancient Near Eastern literatures, including that of Ugarit (2nd millennium BCE; see especially KTU 3.9), where it apparently refers to some sort of funerary association. What Yahweh forbids, therefore, is nothing less than a long-standing, cross-cultural tradition. See further Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 39 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) and Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and*

*Tradition* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995).

63. Especially in Ezekiel. Note Ezek. 24:24, 27; cf. Jer. 16:21.

64. Note especially on this point that Jer. 16:14-21 switches to the theme of restoration and climaxes in vv. 19-21 with the "conversion of the nations" (Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, p. 216; cf. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], pp. 480-81). Note also the use of the proof-saying in Ezekiel for the nations' knowledge of Yahweh and cf. above on the (heightened) significance of difference in Exile.

65. "Negative" primarily in that it involves abstention from practices engaged in by surrounding cultures. Even so, it goes without saying that at times separation is offensive and that part of the encounter with the holy may involve *dread* fascination.

66. See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 51 on the Holy as wholeness and completeness, not just separation.

67. See especially Douglas, *Natural Symbols*; Smith, *The Religion of the Landless*.

68. Some scholars have thought that this section is in fact a fragment of the Holiness Code. See George Buchanan Gray, *Numbers*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1903), p. 183; but contrast Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, Word Biblical Commentary 5 (Waco: Word Books, 1984), p. 177.

69. Cf. Budd, *Numbers*, 178: "In the wider context they [vv. 32-36] function as a fitting conclusion to the section dealing with Israel's sin, specifically the rejection of the land in Num 14, but more generally the whole section of disaffection in Num 11-14. The tassels ought to be a safeguard against these besetting sins."

70. Budd, *Numbers*, p. 177 entitles this section "Tassels of Remembrance." Cf. the dual aspects of remembrance and encounter in Baker-Fletcher, *Xodus*, p. 75: "The 'X' in this way is a prophetic symbol of retrieval and remembrance" and has impact not only for African Americans, but also for Euro-Americans.

71. Cf. Richard Valantasis' comments on asceticism and the Gospel of Thomas, which exemplify the kind of dynamic I am talking about here: "At the heart of asceticism is the desire to create a new person as a minority person within a larger religious culture. In order to create a new person, there must be a withdrawal from the dominant modes of articulating subjectivity in order to create free space for something else to emerge. A redefinition of social relationships must also emerge from the new understanding of the new subjectivity, as well as a concurrent change in the symbolic universe to justify and support the new subjectivity. These are all accomplished through a rigorous set of intentional performances....My perspective on asceticism looks not only at the negative performances (rejecting wealth or sexuality), [termed in this paper *negative difference* or *separation*] but primarily toward the positive articulation of the new subjectivity that the gospel presents ('becoming a single one,' for example) [termed in this paper *positive difference* or *accountability*]. This positive perspective promotes a constructive reading of the text, so that all performances (whether negative or positive) are interpreted in the context of the larger project of creating an alternative identity within a larger and more dominant religious environment" (Richard Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, New Testament Readings, ed. John Court [New York: Routledge, 1997], pp. 22-23).

72. I'd like to thank Shane Berg for bringing this point to my attention and discussing it with me.

73. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, Anchor Bible 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 230.

74. I hope in this way to get around the devastating critique of Christian interpretations of Old Testament legal material raised by Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), pp. 52-53, 54. My proposal does argue for an appropriation of the legal material that is, in some ways, *alegal* and therefore Christian/Protestant and subject to Levenson's critique. Yet at the same time, my proposal is also trying to do justice to those same laws and situations, especially the

dynamic at work within them and thus does not, or so it seems to me, fall under Levenson's judgment.

75. I'd like to thank David Stubbs for bringing this point to my attention and discussing it with me.

76. Cf. Lev. 20:26; Isa. 31:3, 8 (cf. 10:15); Hos. 11:9; etc., as well as Karl Barth's comments in the preface to the second edition of his Romans commentary: "My reply is that, if I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: 'God is in heaven, and thou art on earth'" (Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns [London: Oxford University Press, 1968], p. 10). More recently, see Moltmann, *The Source of Life*, pp. 43-45.

77. See *OED*, p. 2352; cf. Baker-Fletcher, *Xodus*, pp. xvi, 80-81. Note that Greek  $\chi$ , like XP, can be an abbreviation for Christ (*OED*, p. 2353).

78. See, e.g., Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

79. Note, for instance, the Nation of Islam's moral code (for some of its forbidden and positive aspects, see Baker-Fletcher, *Xodus*, p. 77; cf. p. xvi) and the impact this group has made on some of the worst inner-city situations of urban America. I would also mention various practices found among the Mormons (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints): special ("holy") undergarments (accountability?), CTR ("choose the right") rings (attraction?), and so forth. Often Christian youth culture is effective at selecting these types of practices: witness the WWJD ("What Would Jesus Do?") paraphernalia for sale at Christian book stores. For a different example, cf. the comments of Richard Swinburne, "The Vocation of a Natural Theologian," in *Philosophers Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of 11 Leading Thinkers*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), pp. 179-202 who discusses the practice of philosophy and the public identification of oneself as both a Christian and a philosopher in similar terms.

80. Cf. Baker-Fletcher, *Xodus*, p. 76: "as Malcolm recounted to Alex Haley: 'Mr. Muhammad taught that we would keep this 'x' until God Himself returned and gave us a Holy Name from His own mouth.' See Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), p. 217.