

ginning—a covenant dedicated by the blood of the Son of God.

On the third day after His death, Christ arose, as He had foretold. After forty days spent in confirming and instructing His apostles, He ascended into heaven to take His place at the right hand of God.

The apostles, however, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, went forth to preach His name to all peoples. They confirmed their testimony, not only by miracles, but also by laying down their lives for His sake. Thus, to this day, their successors in the Church have carried the news of salvation to all men; and they will continue to do so until Christ comes again as judge, to lead the saved to eternal happiness with God.

*Acts of the Apostles*

*Epistles of St. Paul,  
Catholic Epistles*

*Apocalypse*

—Humbert Gustina, O.P.

## BE HOLY, FOR I, YAHWEH, YOUR GOD, AM HOLY

During the latter half of the thirteenth century before Christ, the nation of Israel wandered through the wilds of the desert lands south and east of the land of Canaan. This barren wilderness had seen roaming tribes for centuries—lone people passing here and there through the dangerous and desolate miles of dry and sterile hills and plains. But always these travelers had been quick to hasten on their way, anxious to leave the fruitless crags of nubby hills and the scorching paths of the burning sands. For Israel, the case was different.

It is true, the tribes of Israel were also on a journey. But unlike all the others who traveled the sands of the desert, Israel was not merely traveling from place to place. These Jewish tribes were traveling as well from tribal individualism to national unity. From Egypt they fled a tired

and perplexed assortment of men and women, alike in race but not united. At Sinai, they traveled the fathomless distance from refugee slaves to the People of the Covenant. God chose them as His special people, entrusting them the worship and faith of the one, true God.

This part of Old Testament history is the favorite reading of Christians—the story of the *Exodus*. From the journey of Abraham to Mambre; the entrance of the sons of Jacob into Egypt; through the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea; the journey to the Promised Land—in it all there runs the tide of high adventure wrought in the divine history of salvation. Yet there is another side to the Old Testament which is understandably not as familiar nor as popular with Christian readers. It is an area which is often skipped, more often misunderstood. Nevertheless the fact remains that this other side of the Old Testament (the legal, liturgical, social rubrics and the quasi-interminable genealogies) is a natural offspring of a society whose very reason for existence was its Covenant with God.

Around the year 1200 B.C., Israel emerged from the desert and crossed the Jordan to the Promised Land forged into a nation. After forty years of wandering, they reached their land of milk and honey. Their journey bore a hidden fruit, however. A generation of absolute dependence on God's Providence for sustenance through hunger and thirst, sickness and war had molded a psychology of abandonment to the works and will of Yahweh God. If the very manna-bread came daily to them in the desert dropped down from His hand, how could sickness and trials, blessings and joys be from any other source? Indeed, Israel was a religious nation. Everything from the rays of the morning sun to the gleam of the evening stars was sent by God. Every minute belonged to Him, along with every word and thought and action. This is the climate in which the legal and social tradition of the Jews grew.

Of all the books of the Old Testament which fit this measure, *Leviticus* most completely characterizes the Hebrew Social mentality. At first glance, the book seems an impenetrable maze of bloodshed, primitive crudity, and warped piety. The repetition and detail of intricacies in the sacrificial slaughter of beasts vies with the picturesque description of leprous sores in tiring and offending the reader's patience. Alas, *Leviticus* has more to tell than that.

Written so many centuries ago, *Leviticus* is like a beautifully colored thread which has been rolled up into a ball. As long as it remains tightly wound in and around itself, its beauty can hardly be appreciated. But perhaps this beautiful thread of Scripture can be unravelled.

*Leviticus* is part of a unit comprising the first five books of the Old

Testament. To the Jews this *Torah* or *Law* is most sacred for it comes from Moses, the great Patriarch, who had it from God Himself. More accurately it is an inspired, edited mixture of stories and traditions originating much before Moses but compiled and edited by him, passing through many other hands to the compilers of *Leviticus*. Moses *wrote* the Pentateuch insofar as all the inspired writers involved worked on it in his spirit. The compilers of *Leviticus* and final editors of the Pentateuch (the first creation story in *Genesis* is theirs) were descendants of Levi, one of Jacob's sons. They did not *write Leviticus*. Rather they gathered ancient traditions, added some current legislation and produced another inspired book.

The contents of *Leviticus* are 99.9% law. So much law is readily explainable, however. The final compilation stands at a sort of high point of Jewish religious history, the return from the Babylonian exile (about 530 B.C.). Prior to the exile the Jewish nation is best described as Yahweh's unfaithful spouse. The Babylonian scourge penanced the Jews. Decimated and thoroughly beaten they had no recourse other than complete reliance on Yahweh God. The nation came out of the exile a small but wholly religious community. Priests became the real rulers and made laws which inserted Yahwism into every nook and cranny of Israelite life. Thus *Leviticus* was born. From here also, however, began the slide which ended in Pharisaic formalism, the adoration of the law's letter.

The priest-authors did not have this evil in mind as they compiled the book. Rather they wanted to maintain a holy community. Yahweh was holy, so the community of His people had to be holy—its sacrifices, its priests, its every day had to be holy. As the priests wanted life centered around Yahweh, *Leviticus* was everyman's way to sanctity in the Jewish community.

The book opens at the place of sacrifice, the place where every Jew came closest to God and where he therefore became holier. Laymen had to approach through Yahweh's holiest servants, the priests. These were the mediators who offered the prayers and sacrifices of their fellow Jews to their nation's Lord. To the Tent of Reunion the people would come to pray, adore, thank, grieve, and ask. Here Yahweh God dwelt with His people; here He spoke to Moses and Aaron. Here He was adored with the offerings of sacrifice.

The complete sacrifice was the "holocaust" which called for the total destruction of the victim either in thanksgiving or expiation. The "oblation" was an offering of grain products and generally complemented other sacrifices. The "sacrifice of communion" could alternately be called a "sacred

banquet" which God and His people shared. Part of the offering was consumed on the fire for Yahweh and part was consumed by the offerers. It could be offered as praise or in fulfillment of a vow or simply out of loving devotion. Liturgical faults (rubrical and otherwise) were cleansed by "sacrifices for sin." Commonly in these sacrifices the offender placed his hand on the victim's head signifying transferal of guilt. Even unconscious faults demanded satisfaction. "Sacrifices of reparation," essentially fines, made up for injustices against God and neighbor.

The offerings had to be of the best quality since they were being offered to Yahweh. No blind, crippled, mutilated, ulcerous or scaling animals could be sacrificed. The one presenting the live victim slaughtered it, and then the priest took charge. A layman could not touch blood, since this substance for the Jews was life itself and thus sacred to Yahweh. The priest, however, could touch it and had to use it in the sacrificial ceremonies. The fat, the most precious part of the animal, and choice cuts of the meat also belonged only to God. Anything offered in sacrifice by that very fact became sacred and if not destroyed by the fire, became the food supply for the priests and their families. Anything used in a sacrifice was holy and thereafter whatever it touched became holy. Salt, a purifying agent, played a ceremonial part in the sacrifices.

The deep sacredness of these bloody sacrifices lies beneath a symbolism of substitution. The worshipper chose from among his possessions the most perfect offering he had; he picked the goat or lamb or bull which was his most valuable possession. It was a precious gift to his dearly loved God. But more than this, the victim of sacrifice was a symbol of the offerer worshipping his Lord. The worshipper told God by his sacrifice that he felt what was taking place in his sacrificial victim: his heart also was pierced, his body broken, his spirit surrendered. For he offered this sacrifice in grief for his guilt, in submission to God's judgment, in obedience to Yahweh's command. He wished to be holy by ascending in spirit to Yahweh along with the smoke that curled up and away from the holy fire of sacrifice.

As pointed out above, the layman went just so far in making a sacrifice. Then he deferred to the mediator, the priest, "Yahweh's relative." The priests had to be the holiest of all the Jews; *Leviticus* dwells much on them. The priests came from a special branch of Levi's family, the line of Aaron, Moses' brother. In fact Moses himself at Yahweh's direction ordained Aaron and his sons. After their purification through ablutions, he vested them in their ceremonial robes. Aaron alone, as high priest, was anointed with oil. Then the candidates placed their hands on the heads of several sacrificial

victims (transferral of guilt by substitution) at the sacrifice for sin. This "sacrifice of investiture" reached its climax when Moses put the offerings into the hands of Aaron and his sons signifying transferral of power to sacrifice. Finally the newly ordained went on a seven day retreat. On the seventh day Aaron offered sacrifice for himself, his family, and his people. After he and Moses entered Yahweh's dwelling, the glory of Yahweh God was seen by the people: a flame flashed from before Yahweh which devoured the holocausts and fat. The people cried with jubilation and fell worshipping to the earth. How well this manifestation of the power of God, this theophany, must have fixed in the memory of Israel the holiness of God and the sacredness of His priests!

The priests' vocation to holiness carried with it grave responsibilities. Since the high priest represented the people before God, his sins became the people's sins. Priestly rubrical errors had to be at a minimum or else. Two of Aaron's sons burned incense at the wrong time and Yahweh Himself punished them with death. Moses berated two other sons for eating their share of a sacrifice in the wrong place at the wrong time. The conduct of the priests had to be immaculate. They had to abstain from wine before any liturgical function; any sickness or injury disqualified them. Only perfect physical specimens could be priests; no blind, lame, disfigured, broken-boned, rickety men allowed.

While the sacrifices constituted the mainstay of community effort toward perfection, yet another means of sanctification was provided by the liturgical calendar. First of all it prescribes the weekly pause for holiness: the Sabbath. Work six days, rest one. Although this weekly observance was designed to commemorate Yahweh's rest period after His creation week, it also had the practical end of periodically renewing a man's strength.

Next *Leviticus* turns to the Jewish religious year, beginning in the Spring in the month of Tishri. The Passover—symbol of the Jews' departure from Egypt—occurred on the fourteenth day of Tishri followed on the fifteenth by the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. On these two days, says an educated guess, the shepherds and farmers originally offered first fruits of flock and field to God. This week of feasting called for two days of rest from labor, plus sacred gatherings and sacrifices. Seven weeks and one day later the second major feast on the Jewish calendar, that of Weeks or Harvest, took place. This feast commemorated Yahweh's giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Its origin, however, stemmed from the celebrations of the harvest time. For the day, all work stopped, sacrifices were offered, and all Jews came together for the celebration.

On the first day of Nisan, the seventh month of the religious year, the New Year's Day of the civil year was celebrated. On *Rosh Hashanah*, as Jews designate it today, work stopped and sacrifices abounded. The tenth day of Nisan brought another feast, originating in *Leviticus*, the Day of Atonement, today's *Yom Kippur*. *Leviticus* greatly detailed the observances of this feast designed for the renewal of community holiness. On this day only, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies, the inmost part of Yahweh's tent, the place of the divine presence, in order to pronounce the holy name and to pray for the people. Besides the usual observances *Yom Kippur* imposed a penitential day-long fast. One live goat was used in the essential part of the ritual. The high priest (representative of the nation) placed his hands on the goat's head to transfer to it the community's guilt. Then the guilt-laden animal was driven into the desert to die with its burden.

The *Leviticus* calendar of liturgical feasts concludes with the Feast of Booths. This third major feast (Passover and Weeks are the others) lasted eight days, beginning on the fifteenth of Nisan. Its name derived from its distinguishing feature: all participants constructed small huts in the open fields out of branches of trees and bushes. These huts provided living quarters for the duration of the feast. This procedure was a memorial to the care Yahweh had bestowed on the Jews while they wandered around the desert; *Leviticus* explicitly notes this festal symbolism. The customary festal requirements were again in order. This feast was the most joyous and popular of all; so much so that it came to be known as *the* feast.

The liturgical year looked mainly to the preservation of community holiness. But the holiness of the individual was not neglected; the course of daily living was extensively directed by the legislation of *Leviticus*. The goal was to keep the individual Jew worthy of worshipping Yahweh. While some prescriptions pertained especially to worship, others were safeguards of brotherliness—the Jews were all brethren in a strict sense as members of the close-knit family of the children of Yahweh God.

The laws more professedly concerned with preparedness for worship are termed laws of *Purity* and *Impurity*, *Cleanness* and *Uncleanness*. Many of them started as laws for preserving health. Since the Jewish commune was an entirely religious body, it offers little mystery to find laws of hygiene becoming religious laws.

Many animals were listed as clean or unclean (and therefore edible or unedible) for the Jews. Generally the unclean animals were those very ones which the idolatrous neighbors of Israel used in their services of religious ritual. Just to touch an unclean animal made a Jew impure.

Other laws of Uncleaness touch sex life, birth and death—realms of mystery where God alone is master and man is the docile servant. Skin diseases, especially leprosy, also marked a person as unclean. Penalties for impurity were usually exclusion from the camp for a day or longer. Baths and sacrifices were the customary means of purification. Finally, certain crimes against God made the offender unclean: blasphemy, idolatry, breaking Sabbath rest. Blasphemy, moreover, automatically incurred the penalty of death.

Leviticus had much to say about how one Jew was to get along with another. All of that, however, had as its source the one commandment quoted only in *Leviticus* and so basic to the New Testament: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." So far reaching was its application that if one Jew fell into bad times and had to sell his property to a fellow Jew, the buyer had to support the seller until better times came along. Many other and not so striking applications were also made. Mothers and fathers had to be honored. Adultery was forbidden along with many other illicit and unnatural sex acts. Stealing and cheating were prohibited. At harvest time not all produce was to be gathered; some was to be left for strangers, widows and orphans. Hired workers were to receive their pay as soon as possible; mutes and blind men were to be treated kindly. Rich and poor were equal before the law; judges had the obligation to hand down fair sentences. Hatred, vengeance, rancor toward a brother were forbidden; fraternal correction, however, was permitted. Remembering that they were once strangers in Egypt, the Israelites were to let strangers dwell peacefully in their land.

Violations demanded corresponding penalties. Death by stoning was required for cursing parents, for adultery, incest, homosexuality, sodomy. For a lighter crime the person was "cut off from the community," excommunicated for a definite period of time. The *Law of Talion*, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," also applied and had the good effect of limiting vengeance.

Another stipulation in *Leviticus* helped attain to brotherliness in the Jewish community: the proviso for the "Sabbatical" and "Jubilee" years. The Sabbatical year was a year of rest for all the arable land in Israel. It completed the subjection of everything Jewish to Yahweh. Besides, the suspension of farming threw the Jews back into the simpler life of the Exodus where they were more closely dependent on Yahweh. The year of Jubilee occurred every seven times seven years (seven was a perfect number for the Jews) or every forty-nine years. It began with the blowing of a trumpet on the Day of Atonement. The land lay fallow and all debts were simply for-

gotten. Persons forced previously to sell their land could return and reclaim it. This taught the Jew that the land really did not belong to him but to Yahweh—"for the land belongs to me and you are only strangers and guests." Only the priests, "Yahweh's relatives," owned land. Such action also helped stabilize the nation.

Finally, to further help keep the Jews on the straight and narrow Yahweh added His personal blessings and curses. As a reward for constant striving after holiness, He promised rain, fertility, plenty of food and drink, a feeling of security, peace, unfearful sleep, protection from wild beasts, victorious war efforts, maintenance of the Covenant, and the divine presence. As punishment for failure, Yahweh promised disease, continual opposition; for perseverance in crime, sevenfold increase of punishment, famine and drought, wild beasts, invasions, sieges that would end with mothers and fathers reduced to eating their very own children.

"Such are the customs, rules and laws which Yahweh established between Himself and the Israelites on Mount Sinai through the intermediary of Moses."

*Leviticus* teaches many lessons to prayerful hearts and docile minds. One can number several of them: contributions to Christian concepts of the holiness of God, the importance of a liturgy, the sanctity and worth of the law. In this regard, a sentence from the notes in *La Sainte Bible de Jerusalem* succinctly states the case:

*Leviticus* will be read with much more fruit in connection with the last chapters of *Ezechiel* or after the books of *Esdras* and *Nehemias*: the unique sacrifice of Christ has rendered null the ceremonial of the ancient temple, but its demands of purity and holiness in the service of God remain a lesson always valuable.

However, an even more striking lesson might be described as the realization of the *wholeness* of the Bible. *Leviticus* is tied to every book in the Bible just as every other book is tied up with it. The Bible is really one story, the story of God with men, from beginning to end. To be really loved, to be really appreciated, the Bible must be taken as a whole. Reading plans are fine, but they are only intended to whet the thirst of the Bible reader; he must expand on the sections he reads and get to the whole book. No book truly worth reading has any skipable parts, and no book in the world of time is more worth reading than the Bible.

With this in mind, an exhortation is not out of order. Read the whole of the Scriptures. Read *Leviticus*; read the genealogical tables in *Genesis*; read the lists of cities in *Josue*; read *Chronicles*. Thus you will proceed to a

fuller understanding of the whole story God is telling—a story which, indeed, is the story of your salvation.

—John Vianney Becker, O.P.

## A PLEA FOR WISDOM

TO HIS MANY VENTURES in Christian apologetic, C. S. Lewis recently added "The Four Loves," which recalled an article written a few years ago denying Lewis a place as an effective apologist.<sup>1</sup> Labelling Lewis' attitude toward science and religion medieval and passé, the author apparently looked upon him as another St. Robert Bellarmine, and his antagonists as so many contemporary Galileos. Perhaps Lewis' message is not palatable to modern scientists, but it is not blindly reactionary; his words should not be dismissed out of hand in the name of "progress."

Lewis speaks strongly about the position of science in the world today:

There is something which unites magic and applied science while separating both from the "wisdom" of earlier ages. For the wise man the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the forces of this passage must be charged to the hyperbole of expression which Lewis, as an accomplished artist, handles so well. Still, his position is basically sound. He is no mere Philistine reacting against and "blaspheming what he cannot understand," what he is unable to integrate into a pat traditional scheme of reality. Lewis' nostalgia for "earlier ages" implies a great truth which may be obscured by a too hasty judgment. We shall examine and underline this truth which is essential for man's sanity and his sanctity.

No thinking man readily makes sweeping statements of condemnation about modern science; there is too much truth and goodness in modern science and philosophy for that. But, one of the tendencies common to both of these disciplines does not ring true and, to this extent, is to be