

An Exposition of the Sociological Undertones in the Holiness Code: A Synchronic Study

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Abstract

Some ask whether the Bible is contemporarily relevant. The attempt to answer in the affirmative led to myriads of methods of biblical interpretation which have been very helpful in showing that the Bible will be relevant even to coming millennia. Most of these methods have goals in mind as they engage the Bible. The goal of this paper is simply to show that the Bible has relevance because of its sociological base and orientations. God's self revelations were not done in a vacuum but in human daily experiences: needs, expectations, successes, victories, pains and losses. God in His self-revelations helped human beings in various ways to deal with their palavers in relation to their society and environment. The bid to draw out the social base and orientations of the Holiness Code and their usefulness informed this work. The work is basically deductive because of its use of the synchronic method of biblical interpretation. It also has the intention of making its readers reflect on the gains of the analytical build-up, noticeable especially in the treatment of the social characteristics of the Code. Finally, the work does not assume its readers' prior knowledge of Leviticus.

1. Preamble

Doing literary and theological analysis has been the most common method of biblical exegesis and interpretation. This approach may become replete with unnecessarily high sounding philosophical categories and theological thoughts that bear no relevance to the popular understanding and appreciation of biblical passages. Such created irrelevance leads to million naira

questions such as: what can the common man or woman learn from those studies and interpretations? And how do they help him or her become a better, morally grounded and sound person?

These days biblical exegesis is beginning to suggest a new approach, one which studies the sociology of and in biblical passages, events and histories, with the intention of seeing how they can be contemporarily relevant, and define and support current socio-anthropological orientations. This is how the Bible becomes relevant to Pastoral Theology. The reason for this new thrust is because the Bible is the product of humanity, human society and the different experiences people acquired in the process of relating with God, the environment and fellow human beings. In the wake of this, God demonstrates His ability to provide answers for all people's problems in relation to their fellow human beings and their environment. Hence, this writer has always said that the Bible is not the product of divine dictation, but the product of human history specially inspired and directed by God's self-revelation. Among biblical books, the book of Leviticus is one of those that have a plethora of hidden sociological import. It informs the interest of this paper.

The paper uses the synchronic approach, in which the characteristics of the Holiness Code will be analytically drawn out by deductive argumentation. Each argumentation will end up with contextualization.

2. The History Establishing The Social Nature of the Book of Leviticus: A Synchronic Approach

2.1 Introduction

There are two broad based methods of biblical exegesis that scholars like Wilhelm Egger (1996) have proposed and which are generally accepted as methods of exegesis by biblical scholars who know their onions. They are the synchronic and diachronic methods. While the diachronic approach uses extra-biblical sources to adequately aid the expounding and interpretation of or study of biblical texts, the synchronic approach is interested in studying or interpreting the Bible with the available information in the canonical Bible. These methods encompass the other

branches of biblical exegesis. Both methods are important because they help a researcher to a better understanding of the biblical passages and their events.

This write up has chosen the synchronic approach because behind the spiritually and theologically motivated cultic and religious legislations in Leviticus are social undercurrents for the good of Israel's society. Understanding these social undercurrents is significant in our argument. The synchronic approach adopted in this subtopic is meant to draw out the history preceding and establishing Israel's society and sociological impressions in Leviticus.

2.2 A View on the Book of Leviticus

Leviticus is the third of the first five books of the Bible called Torah or Pentateuch. Baruch A. Levine (1992, p. 312) opines that the name "Leviticus" represents the Latin form of the Greek name, Levitikon. Both He and Jean Louis Ska (2004) say in the Hebrew scripture, the book is titled as wayyiqra, which means "He called". In the Hebrew Scripture, the term wayyiqra represents a mnemonic aid to enable readers to remember the title of the book, because all the first five books of the Bible were named after their first most important word in the first sentence of each of the books. For instance Genesis is called berishit (meaning in beginning), Exodus is called shemot (meaning names), numbers is called bamidbar (meaning in the desert) and Deuteronomy is called debarim (meaning words). In contrast the Greek Levitikon is a characterization. The same is true of the rabbinic Hebrew name torat kohanim (the law or instruction of the priests), an ambiguous name which is, however highly instructional. However, at first glance, the Greek Levitikon is a puzzling name, because the Levites are mentioned only in passing; it is the book of Numbers which prominently and predominantly features the Levites. For Greek speaking Jews of antiquity however, Levitikon probably connoted "priestly" in general, as it is implied in the book.

The book of Leviticus consists almost entirely of laws and rituals, in most instances, formulated as commandments. Baruch A. Levine (1992, p. 312) sees in the book two perceptible principal

parts: chapters 1-16 deal with the role of the priests as officiants in the sacrificial cult of worship, and as performers of rites of purification (also called *tora* [Instructions] for priests), while chapters 17-27 deal with the requirements of holiness (also called *tora* of, or by the priests). They preserve major priestly statements, addressed for the most part to the Israelite people and commanding the pursuit of holiness as the collective goal of religious life. The mention here of Israelite people and collective goal is instructive for our exposition of the social characteristics of the Holiness Code. This means that the stories and events reported in chapters 17-27 have a sociological base and usefulness. On the other hand, Jean Louis Ska (2004, p. 44-45) further subdivides these two principal parts into five parts as follows: chapters 1-7 deal with sacrifices, chapters 8-10 deal with the inauguration of cults, chapters 11-16 deal with laws of pure and impure actions and objects, chapters 17-16 deal with the Holiness Code and chapter 27 being an appendix on various offerings for the sanctuary.

We draw from the structure of the book the impression that it almost entirely deals with holiness and priests. The temptation therefore is to give it only a theological or spiritual interpretation, an interpretation that might neglect the history that led to the entire orientation of Leviticus. That is why Walter C. Kaiser (1994, p. 986) says Leviticus was meant for Israelites to live holy lives in fellowship with a holy God. He further added that a greater purpose is served with furnishing Israel with laws that secure their well-being, so that they can be a blessing to the nation. For this reason, he sees the book as solely meant to teach Israel and all subsequent readers how to worship God. This over spiritualization of Leviticus is what this essay wants to avoid. It looks at the social conditions that were of paramount importance in the formation of the spiritualization noticeable in Leviticus. Our next line of thoughts will look at the biblical history that laid the foundation for the existing sociology this paper sees in the book.

2.3 The Contribution of Exodus' History to Leviticus' Sociology

The contention of this paper is that Exodus' history laid the

foundation for understanding the sociology of Leviticus. Many scholars tag Genesis 37:1 - 50:26 which has the story of Joseph and his brothers as “the Joseph Cycle”, while Werner H. Schmidt (2002, p. 81) calls it “The Joseph Novella”. The conclusion of this epic story begins with the narrative of the migration of Israel to Egypt and their settlement in the land of Goshen (Genesis 46:1-47:1-12). This sojourning in Goshen for Werner H. Schmidt (2002, p. 83) established links between the time of the patriarchs and the time of Moses. What follows after Genesis 47:12 concerned Jacob's final years and death in Goshen.

However, settling down in Goshen initiated Israel's 430 years stay in Egypt. Exodus 1:1-14 tells of how the Israelites became very prosperous there, because they became fruitful and prolific. This aroused jealousy in a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph. Thus Pharaoh initiated untold hardships that made life very difficult for the Israelites' continued existence there. The increasing weight of their suffering made them to repeatedly cry out to God for deliverance. At the appointed time, through the instrumentality of Moses, God did. Exodus 7 begins the narrative of how God bent the will of the incumbent Pharaoh to let the Israelites go in a dramatic and entertaining narrative, which spans up to Exodus 14. A narrative plot which has accounts of Plagues, reaching its peak in Exodus 11-12 where, by the death of all Egyptian first-born males of both humans and animals, Pharaoh was finally forced to let the Israelites go. Even his change of mind and attempt to recall the Israelites back failed in the successful crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites. That singular action of God finally announced to the Israelites their deliverance from servitude and slavery in Egypt.

God did not stop at just the deliverance from Egypt. Jean Louis Ska (2004, p. 40) says that the deliverance of the Israelites announced God's sovereignty over them and that he is a God capable of solving their problems. This God showed in various ways, because in Ex 15:22-27 and 17:1-7 he gave them to drink, in Ex 16 he gave them to eat, in Ex 17:8-16 he defended them against the attack of their enemies and then in Ex 18 he organized them into a juridical people. Having performed these feats by which he showed the Israelites his capabilities and abilities, God in Exodus

20:1-23:19 presented various regulations that would govern their social life in the desert as their encounters with him at Mount Sinai unfolded. The striking passages in Exodus are Ex 20:1-17 and Exodus 21:1-22:17, because most of the regulations of these passages are very socially inclined. For instance, Ex 20:1-17 outlines the famous Ten Commandments which has influenced most social laws and institutions down through millennia to our time.

What follows up in the plot to Ex 40, the last chapter of the book, is a narrative with sub-sections depicting Israelites as easily forgetful of the feats God performed for them. They made a Golden Calf in Ex 32 which they looked on to as the God who brought them out of Egypt, thus contravening the divine command in Ex 20:2-3: "I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me." The events that followed Ex 32 tell the story of how God forgave them and instructed them to build the Sanctuary in Ex 35-40. The narrative of the historical background to Leviticus concludes with the dedication of the Sanctuary and God's coming to dwell in it in Ex 40:34-38. Interpreting and drawing out the import of Ex 40:34-38, Jean Louis Ska (2004, p. 43) says that God at this point demonstrated that he has sovereignty over Israel since he had defeated the most powerful king (Pharaoh) and nation (Egypt) and other deity misconceptions shown in the making of the Golden Calf of Ex 32. By the time of Exodus 40:34-38 however, the Israelites were already in the desert at Mount Sinai. The history we have briefly reviewed is one that brought the Israelites to the geographical location where God made special encounters and legislations with the Israelites.

From the foregone, at the time of Leviticus, God decided to establish a social type for the Israelites different from the social types found among the Ancient Near Eastern Cultures and Religions (ANEER), especially from those of Egypt. Most scholars like Sebastian Kizhakkeyil (2009) and Jean Louis Ska (2004) say the social type is one styled after the imitation of God's holiness. Little wonder that Jean Louis Ska (2004) says "the presence of God amidst his people requires a reorganization of all

aspects of their lives which would function as a fundamental exigency of purity and holiness" (p. 44). This divine intention for a social type distinct from those of other surrounding cultures of the time, which God intended for the Israelites, meant that there had to be a sociological base for that social type to be relevant to the holiness God wants of them and also, to be relevant to the average Israelite. This is what this write-up is once again interested in: God did not establish a people's cultic and religious regulations and life in a vacuum, but in a social milieu. The reason for this is that the Israelites at this time had moved from being a family to a people, race and nation. What factors therefore informed the sociology of Leviticus?

There is a significant factor that informed the sociology of Leviticus. It is geographical. At this time in the history of the Pentateuch, the Israelites were already in the desert. The desert is not the best place to live in. The problems God had with the Israelites in Ex 15; 16 and 17 attest to that. The Israelites too had lost the protective comfort Egypt guaranteed them despite the servitude and slavery they were in there. While they were in Egypt, they were not open to all kinds of dangers from wild beasts, the sun and the manifold forms of deficiencies which abound in the desert. To successfully survive the desert, they needed to live as a close-knit community of people sharing a common social orientation and interest. Therefore, the wisdom of God was highly at play in bringing them to the desert in order to fashion out a new sociology for them. In Egypt, it would have been difficult to conveniently do so as there were many Jews who probably had already been assimilated into the mainstream everyday social orientations and mentalities of the Egyptians. The desert therefore was the ideal place where they could be by themselves. God used the desert's total seclusion from the outside world to carve out a sociological orientation and perception that would differentiate the Israelites from other nations and civilizations. To do this, he used sets of legislations and commandments couched in a religious setting. But underlying these settings is a strong social character. That is what we intend to examine in our study of the Holiness Code.

3. What is the Holiness Code?

Sebastian Kizhakkeyil (2009, p. 63-69) identified 7 law Codes in the Pentateuch. They are the Covenant Code of 54 laws in Ex 20:22 - 23:19, the Holiness Code of 161 laws in Lev 17 - 26, the Deuteronomic Law Code of 174 laws in Deut 12 - 26, the Priestly Code of 175 laws, the Ethical Decalogue in Ex 20 and Deut 5, the Ritual and Levitical Decalogues in Ex 34 and Lev 19 respectively. These law Codes, said to have derived their influences from the non-biblical law Codes of the ancient Near East to some varying degrees, contain legislations tilting towards the promotion of cultic activities in social ambient and behaviours, that would enable the Israelites draw closer to God. True as this may be, as supposedly the main reason why these Codes were legislated, there is the underlying desire in these Codes to promote social order and progress both in human and physical ambients. Let us though begin by making some scholarly excursus on the Code. We shall begin by delimiting the extent of the Code in Leviticus.

3.1 The Delimitation of the Code in Leviticus

The extent of the Code has not received united acceptance among scholars, just as there is not agreement among them about the source of the Code. Sebastian Kizhakkeyil (2009, p. 324) outrightly says “the Holiness Code in its present format is from P (Priestly) source”, he goes on quickly to add that the renowned Old Testament scholar Von Rad in 1947 maintained that the Code must be from J (Yahwistic) source because of the presence of the repeated expression, “I am Yahweh.” Concerning the extent of the Code, some scholars believe that the Code stretches from Leviticus 16 - 26, others say it spans from Leviticus 17-27, and a few say Leviticus 16 -27 is the extent of the Code. This write-up sticks with Leviticus 17-26. This position is held on the grounds that, Leviticus 16, which treats the yom kippur, has no direct theological relation in narrative content with Leviticus 17-26. Also Leviticus 27 which is more of a summary of the entire book does not have direct relation with the narrative content of Leviticus 17-26. But a few scholars observe that readers may find it difficult to locate Leviticus 17 in the Holiness Code. It could just as easily be grouped with the preceding chapters with their emphasis on directions for the priests. Yet, though it does not

specifically mention the concept of holiness, chapter 17 contains some of the other terminology typical of the holiness section. Chapter 17 may be best regarded as a transitional chapter between the two major sections of the book. So it functions as a hinge chapter between the first major division, addressed mainly to the priests, and this second major division, which handles the conduct of the general public. Our expository study adopts Leviticus 17 – 26 as the extent of the Code.

3.2 A Review of Scholarly Views on the Code

Walter C. Kaiser (1994, p. 993) says the Code was first identified as a pre-existent independent corpus in 1866 by K. Graf, before it was incorporated into Leviticus. Graf, as quoted by Walter C. Kaiser (1994, p. 993), proposed Ezekiel as the author of this corpus, for Graf found many linguistic ties with the book of Ezekiel. However, in 1912 B. D. Eerdmans (1912) attacked the idea of the Code's independent existence before its insertion into Leviticus. In his view, no basic structure held the whole corpus together. The criticism of Eerdmans (1912) was carried on by H. T. C. Sun (1990), who argues that the Holiness Code had no existence prior to its present location in Leviticus, because no overall structure unites all of Leviticus 17-26. It is however important to note some level of discernible structure in 18-20, 21-22 and 23-25. Hence, the Holiness Code was composed in its present position in Leviticus as a continuation of the concerns for ritual purity found in Chapters 11-15.

The invitation to holiness in the footsteps of God codified into cultic or religious laws are addressed not to selected individuals but to the entire community of Israel. Instead of attempting to produce a select group of pure individuals, the laws aimed at producing a holy people, a holy nation, who collectively will be a royal priesthood belonging to God (Ex 19:5-6). Walter C. Kaiser (1994, p. 997-8) says the demonstration of this consecration to God is to be displayed by the whole nation in every walk and area of life: family life, community affairs, farming, commerce and worship of God. This clarion call to holiness became a reality because it was rooted within Israel's society, social mentalities and behaviours. Hence these social mentalities and behaviours served as the nursery bed in which its cultic and religious

legislations were planted and made to grow to fruitfulness.

Remarking further, Walter C. Kaiser (1994, p. 998) says holiness has more dimensions than just the vertical aspect of our relations with the divine and the interior dimension of basic self-integrity. There is also the horizontal relationship with others, which comes to full expression in Leviticus 19:18b (often termed the Golden Rule): "Love your neighbor as yourself." Rabbi Hillel used this verse to summarize the entire Torah: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow". Many suggest that the "neighbor" in 19:18b is a fellow Israelite, but lest some think that this observation limits the scope of this injunction, 19:34 requires this same love to be shown to the resident alien in their midst. And love extended to such non-Israelites is to be the same sort of love with which Israelites love each other (verse 34). Sociology concerns human well being arising from interactions with fellow human beings, whatever their sex, race or social status. Hence Leviticus 19's hinge on the concept of neighbor is significant here. More intriguing is the universal dimension which the notion of neighbourhood wears. It does not apply to the Israelites alone, but all peoples, races and their different classes. We therefore begin to see the sociological concerns of the Holiness Code which has a strong universal anthropological base. We shall now analytically expose the sociological features of Leviticus 17-26.

4. The Social Features in the Holiness Code

In this section, the methodology is to analytically expose the sociological features in the Code with the intention of drawing out the implied social character intended and its derivable lessons. Apart from chapters 18 and 20, and 21-22 and 24, which shall be analyzed as a block, the other chapters shall be individually exposed. We shall begin with chapter 17

4.1 Leviticus 17

Chapter 17 begins our identification of the Code's social features in verse 1. God commanded Moses to speak not only to Aaron and his sons, but to all the Israelites. To all Israelites here means the whole society of Israel including their mentalities and behaviours as a people. They are to listen as a community in order

to avoid mistakes that will negatively affect them as a nation. Hence God discouraged segregation among the Israelites, but encouraged them to build a united front in all ramifications of life, a unity that allows for the collective aggregating of the society's endowment for its growth. If Israel neglected that, God's aim at establishing a holy society will be completely defeated. God therefore needed a united Israel and its sociological properties to achieve his goal, just as every society needs everything that identifies it as a single unit to achieve whatever purpose it has in mind. Otherwise it will generate implosive features that will lead it to self-destruct.

Nigeria very essentially needs this kind of unity for growth in its human and natural giftedness, before it can enjoy its identity as a nation with respect. The negative and destructive fall out as the aftermath of the 2011 elections in many Northern cities shows that, as a nation, we are deviating from the course towards mature unity. There seems therefore to be a regression to regional politics, beginning from the insistence of the North to produce the next President to the complete sweep of the Southwest by the Action Congress of Nigeria party (ACN) culminating in the PDP jamboree in the South-south and East. Social analysts believe that socio-economic factors like unemployment, dearth in education, a general dissatisfaction with the PDP led government and corruption fueled the violent and lethal post-2011 presidential elections in Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto and Bauchi. Be that as it may, the absence of unity in the national consciousness of Nigeria is a major matter to be considered as responsible for the violence. Nowadays, Nigerians have lost the sense of nationalism. No thanks to religious and ethnic attachments, features that played a predominant role in the killings that accompanied the April 2011 elections. The quality of national development being rolled out for the nation today is ethnically and religiously directed, at times annoyingly, towards a particular religion and its adherents in some geopolitical zones of this country thereby making Nigerians see nothing wrong with sacrificing merit on the altar of mediocrity. This is bad. Whatever we do in this nation should be for national interest and for the good of all, as God has envisaged in the opening verses of chapter 17.

Scholarly views on 17:3-7 hinge on God's demands to the Israelites to slaughter their animals only at the Tent of meeting. Walter C. Kaiser (1994, p. 1118) interprets the insistence of slaughtering animals only at the Tent as a centralization of worship in order to avoid the possibility of Idolatry. Some scholars think it is a retrogression of Deut 12:1-2 into the desert period. As a consequence of the Deuteronomic legislation for a single sanctuary, a distinction was made between the slaughtering of animals for food and the sacrificial killing of animals. The Deuteronomic law permitted slaughter of animals anywhere according to the needs of the people but sacrificial killing was to take place only in the Sanctuary. Putting aside all the exegetical difficulties 17:3-7 presents, this section still calls for another dimension of unity of purpose needed for any society to make headway. This paper sees the institution of hygiene behind this legislation. The desert is an open field where if animals are slaughtered indiscriminately and flesh is scattered here and there, there would be a health menace of a dire social scale. Vultures and other wild beasts visiting the carcasses might become a threat to the social well being of people and even threaten lives. Inclusive among the health hazards would be what the foul air from the indiscriminate abandonment of carcasses can cause.

Today many First world countries are spending billions of dollars to manage waste, because it is cost effective to do so both in terms of its human and environmental implications. Where this measure is not taken seriously, unnecessary billions will be channeled into health related matters as they affect human beings and animals. Just as God and the governments of the First world countries take measures, through legislations and institutions respectively, to save the society against the doom of taking such hygienic measures for granted, so should the Nigerian government begin to be proactive in this matter. Nigerian cities are growing astronomically and geometrically in population, and the demand on measures to safeguard the increasing population's health has become imperative. To look the other side is to take a social risk of the first magnitude. God did not.

Verses 10-16 of this chapter talk about the sanctity of animals' life,

for they are not mere objects. The foundation of this position is blood. The life of a creature is in its blood; therefore blood must not be eaten, instead it must be spilt out completely. Those who obey and refuse to eat the blood of the animal honour the life of the animal. This is interesting because the current campaigns by Animal Rights Movements for dignified respect of animals goes back in time and therefore should be encouraged and promoted with vigour. As a constituent part of the earthly life of human beings, animals should be accorded all respect.

4.2 Leviticus 18 and 20

Baruch A. Levine (1992, p. 316) treats chapters 18 and 20 together, and calls them the chapters on family, though with differing formulations of family law. It is not clear why such repetition was made. Baruch A. Levine (1992:1123) adds further that the section begins with a formal introduction in 18:1-5 and concludes with a formal closing in 20:22-26. Chapter 18 is clearly the primary statement and it is formulated apodictically, whereas chapter 20 is casuistic in its formulation, specifying legal penalties. Therefore 18:1-30 concerns sexual behaviours, while 20:9-26 deals with family relations.

The biblical family is organized along patrilineal lines, with the father being the head of the family. The nuclear family is founded on six relatives, who are “flesh relations”: father, mother, son, daughter, brother and sister. This definition can be directly determined by noting that, according to 21:2-3, any of the priests are permitted to attend the funeral of any one of these six relatives, even though contact with a corpse normally defiles a priest. The legislations in chapters 18 and 20 are meant to protect the sacredness of the biblical conception of family. Let us see how chapter 18 contributes to that protection.

Chapter 18 is one of the most systematic and complete collections of laws in the Torah on the subject of incest and forbidden sexual unions especially in family life. More than any other text, it outlines which unions are permissible and which are forbidden in four sections containing four warnings: against the customs of pagan nations (vv 1-5), against incestuous and illicit sexual unions (vv 6-20); against Canaanite sexual deviations (vv 21-23)

and about the consequences of neglecting these rules (vv 24-30). Chapter 18 begins its presentation in verse 3, where it speaks of avoiding the sins of the Egyptians of the land which the Israelites had just left, and the sins of the Canaanites of the land to which they would arrive. For it was common for the Egyptian royal line to intermarry brothers and sisters. The Canaanites were no more exemplary models of sexual behavior. God did not want that kind of sociology for the Israelites, so His legislations implicitly were saying society will fare much better if they follow his law. In verses 6-20 God forbids all forms of incestuous and illicit sexual relations. For instance verse 6 forbids sexual relation with relatives, while verse 7 forbids sexual relations with one's own natural mother. Deut 27:20 states the consequence of such action: "cursed is the man who sleeps with his father's wife, for he dishonours his father's bed." Incest is forbidden with one's stepmother in verse 8, sister in verse 9, granddaughter in verse 10, half sister in verse 11, paternal aunt in verse 12, etc. These various prohibitions embrace six relationships of consanguinity, i.e., blood relations (vv 7, 9-13) and eight cases of affinity (by virtue of sexual relations) in marriage (vv 8, 14-18). For instance in verse 18, polygamous marriages within a family are discouraged by the prohibition of a man marrying his wife's sister during the lifetime of the wife. Verse 20 continuing prohibits adultery consisting of a married or an engaged woman having sexual relations with someone who is not her husband. With verses 21-23, the chapter takes a new turn with warnings against indulging in homosexual acts in verse 22 and bestiality in verse 23. Concluding verses 24-30, announce the consequence of any illicit social behaviour. God in these legislations and warnings had foreseen the disorder that would ensue in Israel's society, especially when many would want to live according to his teachings. So establishing norms to create respect and uphold the sanctity of sex and family orientations were unavoidably necessary, at least for the sake of mutual respect of each other. In that case, it is good that our contemporary social orientations still uphold these levitical prohibitions. Those who engage in them, do so clandestinely. It goes to show that the "mystical sanctions" most traditional African societies have against such illicit sexual behaviours are of a divine origin and inspiration. What this calls for in our time is the continued promotion of these levitical prohibitions.

Chapter 20 on the other hand is mainly a collection of penal laws. It can be divided into two sections: the penalty for worshipping Molech and going to mediums and spiritists (vv 1-8, 27) and penalties for sinning against the family (9-26). The reason for the law against Molech worship was because it appeared to have involved child sacrifice, a practice for which death by stoning is legislated in 20:2-5. From a social standpoint, had the laws of chapter 20 not been casuistic, the apodictic laws of chapter 18 would not have had the desired effect in the management and control of people's sexual and relational behavior in the desert-Israelite community. It means penal laws of every society are of paramount value, since they serve to deter miscreants who may want to disrupt its social order by deliberately contravening the laws of the land. Hence modern societies should consciously call to order, through a penal system, those members of the society who constitute themselves as a nuisance to the well being of the society, as God did with chapters 18 and 20. In addition, the forbidding of Molech worship in 20:2-5, underscores the need for a greater amount of effort to be sustained and support given to those who fight in our time for the protection of the child. God's concern would definitely have settled on the desire to protect children in the legislation against child sacrifice in Molech's worship.

4.3 Leviticus 19

This is the priestly parallel to the Ethical (Ex 20 and Deut 5) and Ritual Decalogues (Ex 34). Moshe Weinfeld as quoted by Sebastian Kizhakkeyil (2009, p. 329) comments on Lev 19 in the following words: "This is the only place in the Priestly Code where we encounter an intermingling of cultic and ethical laws (laws governing human behaviour), such as we find in the Ten Commandments. This kind of heterogeneity does not occur in any other section of the Code, each of which deals with one specific law. To be sure it must be admitted that the variety in Leviticus 19 has a common factor – the idea of holiness. Chapter 19 stresses the interaction of social behavior and religious piety, two dimensions of life which were never meant to be regarded as separate. The special characteristic of this chapter is the repeated expressions: "You shall be Holy; for I am the Lord your God am

holy" (19:2) or "I am the Lord your God" (19:3.4.10.12).

Baruch A. Levine (1992, p. 316) and Walter C. Kaiser (1994, p. 1131) both commenting on the social characteristics of chapter 19 say it deals with fundamental duties of life: respect for parents and observance of the Sabbath (vv 4-8); it prohibits pagan funerary practices and commands respect for elders (vv 31-32). It requires the sacrificial flesh to be disposed of in certain ways, while condemning fraudulent economic dealings (vv 35-36). Though idolatry is thoroughly condemned, Israelites are commanded to be kind to aliens (vv 33-34), who may be idolaters. The grafting and blending of vegetation separate in nature are prohibited and Israelites are commanded to leave gleanings and corners of their fields for the indigent (vv 9-18). With this outline of fundamental concerns in Leviticus 19, let take a critical look at verses 9-18.

Verses 9-18 are considered as dealing with social ethics and practical holiness in five precepts all relating to duties of a person to other persons. One of these duties is found in Lev 23:22 and Deut 24:19-22 that talks about the rights of poor people at harvest time, because disadvantaged members of the society have a right to harvest the edges of the fields; they are not to depend on voluntary gifts alone. Self dignity and esteem for the poor is emphasized here, an initiative that can be likened to the modern Social Security and Welfare System practiced in First World countries. Reacting further to the duties of a person to other persons, verses 13-14 decry the use of fraud to oppress the wage earner or helpless persons. Deut 24:15 reiterates this cause and prophets lash out against such blatant injustice (Isa 3:14; Jer 22:3). This principle is not less important socially in our own day: No one is to take advantage of another person's vulnerability in order to get work done at lower wages or to call in mortgages for the slightest legal loophole or momentary lapse in the payments. Just as reprehensible is the practice of retaining someone's daily wages when the person is depending on them to purchase food to assuage hunger that very day (cf. Deut 24:15; Jas 5:1,4). The same principle carries over into all acts of vilifying, defaming and treating with contempt persons who are deaf or blind (verse 14). To stop the wrong inference that God is only the God of the poor,

the helpless and the disadvantaged persons of society, verses 15-16 stress regard for rich people, showing that partiality can go both ways. The rights of rich people are not to be violated, nor are they to be slandered any more than are those of poor people. Verses 9-18 close with a climax in verse 18, which says "Love your neighbor as yourself" otherwise called the Golden Rule.

The entire orientation of Leviticus, especially verses 9-18, makes scholars to call the chapter a *min-tora*, as it also echoes the Decalogue. Verse 18 becomes the most noteworthy section of the chapter, because they themselves were strangers in a foreign land (verse 34). No wonder Walter C. Kaiser (1994) says "Leviticus 19 is one of the grand chapters of the whole book of Leviticus. In American Reform Judaism it is one of the most quoted and most often read chapters, especially since it is assigned as the Torah reading of Yom Kippur in that tradition." (p. 1131). Leviticus 19 can be considered the heart of the social orientation of the Holiness Code. The idea of a neighbor places an enviable role in the structure of verses 9-18. Each of the five paragraphs on neighbourliness in these verses (vv 10, 12, 14, 16, 18) is closed with the motive clause "I am the Lord". There is also a build-up of words for one's neighbor in these pentads, for vv 17-18 use four different words to describe the individual: brother, fellow citizen, people and neighbor. The chapter hence says social concerns are not for a privileged or select few, but for all, rich and poor alike.

The individualistic drives in our contemporary world directly contravene this chapter. People are becoming more married to themselves and their electronic gadgets than they are to their fellow men and women. A life lived to and with oneself can engender all kinds of ills. One could kill with impunity and see nothing wrong with it. One could want and forcefully demand impossible rights to whatever pleases them, forgetting that the person from whom they will deny a lot to get what they want also has rights. It is responsible for the ascending corrupt mentality and practice in Nigeria, that culture of me, myself and I, and maybe my cronies and ethnic affinities, are entitled to anything; others can wait. In the face of this perception and attitude, society's regression becomes the order of the day, as is the case in Nigeria. There cannot be social justice unless people in their

society live in accordance with the dictates and expectations of this chapter which is rich in social goodness. By implication, campaigners for social justice must never relent in their efforts by which they fulfill divine will.

4.4 Leviticus 21-22 and 24

These chapters are about religious leaders in the Israelite society. They talk about their personal and official disposition in relation to the formation of family and interaction with the public especially as it involves God. One might say, they speak on the expectations and manifestations of holiness in religious leaders, the priests (21:1-22:6). Let us carefully examine randomly these chapters.

The rhetorical markers in chapters 21-22 are clear and regular. Six times the formula, "I am the Lord, who makes him [them] holy" appears as a colophon. This formula acts as a divider of the various subjects and it appears at 21:8, 15, 23, 22:9, 16 and 32. The last paragraph of 22:17-32 is separated from the rest of these two chapters, because 22:17 is the opening rubric addressed to all of Israel along with Aaron and his sons. The five sections are rules for mourning and marriage of ordinary priests (21:1-8) such as not marrying a divorcee, but they could marry a widow. Others are rules for mourning and marriage of the high priest (21:9-15) such as not having contact with the dead, not even to attend his parents' funeral. In the area of marriage, he was only to marry a virgin from the priestly family, therefore forbidden to marry a widow. Then physical impediments against the ministry of the office of the priesthood (21:16-24) include eating food reserved for the office of the priesthood (22:1-9) and restrictions on entitlement to eat the portions reserved for the priesthood (22:10-16). One might say these strict regulations were meant to preserve the sacredness and purity of the office of the priesthood, but from a social stand point, they helped to encourage trust from the people in their priests and in the sacred institution.

The role priests and the sacred institutions have played and still play in the society can never be over emphasized. Nigeria is a testimony to what religious leaders and religion with its various means of consolation, assurance and hope have done for the good

of the society. The dark side of the whole affair is the manipulation of religion for nefarious gains of personal and group interest. The legislations of 21-22 aim at discouraging anti-society's religious intentions and behaviours. The letters of the legislations in 21-22 should be interpreted to suit our contemporary situation. The efforts being made in this regard should therefore be pursued with greater vigour.

Chapter 24 of Leviticus is a brief and loosely organized collection of priestly laws, including the charge to Aaron to kindle the candelabra continually and to prepare the bread of display (lehem happanim). The rest of the chapter deals with the crime of blasphemy, and an account of an actual instance of blasphemy in the days of Moses.

In any society where trust in the religious leaders is missing, know that an important sector for the creation of order and directedness is absent. This can be perilous considering that the religious nature in human minds and orientations needs this arm of the society for the healthy regulation of affairs in the society. This might have informed God's decisions on the legislations affecting and directing priests.

4.5 Leviticus 23

Chapter 23 is about holy times and presents the laws relating to annual fasts and feasts like the Feast of Trumpets, where three annual festivals are brought together into one place and put into their chronological order along with the law of the Sabbath. Just as chapters 18-19 use the formula "I am the Lord your God" to act as colophon and a divider between subsections, so also chapter 23 is divided into two main divisions by the appearance of this same formula in vv 22 and 43 giving the spring festivals in the first division (vv 1-22) and the autumn festivals in the second division (vv 23-43).

Features noticeable in this chapter are in 23:1-3: the basic commandment of the Torah regarding the Sabbath is to cease all melakah, "assigned tasks". In priestly terminology, the Sabbath is miqra qodes, "a sacred convocation", and it is to be celebrated as such in all Israelite habitations (23:1-3). That is why Sabbath day became a point in time for calculating the passage of weeks,

in the distribution of the time between feasts into seven week periods. Baruch A Levine (1992, p. 317) says “this concept of marking time eventually led to the week which begins on Sunday and ends on the Sabbath. This interest in time spanning over a period, shaped the methodology for calculating the times for the other feasts of this chapter like Pentecost, Hodes (New moon), yom kippur (day of atonement), hag hassukkot (the pilgrimage festival of booths). The sociological relevance of these holy times is only to be imagined, because the average Israelite would have planned his time and actions around these feast times. They would have become calendaric colophons for them. In addition to that, the involvement of the various persons, groups and classes of people of all walks of life would have provided a base for their sociological relevance to the society of Israel. The same goes with our modern orientations where religious times have served as calendaric colophons for people of all walks and strata of society. The most important of all is the psychological balance these feast times provide for people.

4.6 Leviticus 25

In many ways, chapter 25 continues the sabbatical cycle observed in chapter 23. The principle of weekly Sabbath, in chapter 25, extends the sabbatical rest, set for every seven years, into a seven times seven year cycle. The septenary system reaches its pinnacle in the fiftieth year: the jubilee year. The name of this year is probably taken from the Hebrew word *yobel*, meaning a “ram” in Arabic, because the year is signaled with the blowing of a ram's horn. This sabbatical rest system would have been practicable in a sedentary agrarian community. Little wonder Baruch A. Levine (1992) observes that the realistic setting in which the Priestly school must have composed or edited the book of Leviticus point “to a network of communities, engaging in agriculture and pastoral pursuits, and settled in towns and villages.” However, the sabbatical rest was meant for lands, animals and people to rest, in order to fallow, reinvigorate and re-energize respectively so as to continue work. This is intriguing, because a religious legislation in honour of God, by this seven times seven year period now has gained agricultural and socio-anthropological status and value. There is even an added dimension of social value to this septenary system. It is the Jubilee

year celebration.

The Jubilee year held every fiftieth year, by implication came after the forty-ninth year. It was also a hallowed year of rest (v 10), with far reaching socio-economic demands and implications, because it was a time of liberty for all the inhabitants throughout the land. The liberty proclaimed is threefold. First, it means liberty for the man who has been dispossessed of his family inheritance of the land, but can now return to it. Second, it means liberty for every Hebrew slave who can become a free person once again. And third, it means liberty from the toil of cultivating the land, because the land is to lay fallow all year long and produce only what comes up on its own without any sowing, cultivation, fertilization, or harvesting. The regulations for the Jubilee year were probably equivalent to those for the "year of freedom" mentioned in Ezek 46:17. Liberty means that the Hebrew slaves can leave the service of their masters and return to the possessions, lands, and homes that they had to abandon. Even those who have had their ears pierced with an awl (Ex 21:2,6) as a sign that they would serve their masters forever are free to leave, for the "ever" in the terms of their agreement is superseded by the Jubilee Year. All previous leases on the land are terminated, for the property in this year reverts to the original owners. The sale of the fields is nothing more than the sale of a certain number of harvests until the year of freedom and release comes in the fiftieth year (vv 13-18, 23-28). The purchase of any farmland is to be on the basis of the number of years remaining until the next jubilee.

The Jubilee year begins by the blowing of a loud trumpet on the tenth day of the Day of Atonement throughout the land in the fiftieth year. This would mean that every forty-ninth and fiftieth year would be two consecutive holy years for rest. While modern times would not allow two consecutive years for rest, modern science on the other hand has greatly emphasized the importance of rest times from work for land and for people. Modern agricultural methods in most developing communities encourage the use of the land fallow system as the best method of re-fertilizing lands for better future agricultural yield. People are encouraged to give themselves time to respire, because it renews and refreshes them and empowers them to work even better.

Today, peoples who had been under untold bondage of different kinds are asking for liberty and restitution of what rightly belongs to them in the Jubilee spirit.

4.7 Leviticus 26

Leviticus 26 simply contains blessings and curses. Scholars like Walter C. Kaiser (1994, p. 1178) say Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30 constitute some of the most important and moving chapters in the whole of the Pentateuch. Commenting further, Sebastian Kizhakkeyil (2009, p. 347) says it admonishes the Israelites to obey God and to receive his blessings rather than to disobey God and be cursed. Leviticus 26:3-13 contains conditional blessings, i.e. they would receive the announced blessings only if they fulfilled certain conditions, while 26:14-47 contain curses meted on those who refuse to listen to Yahweh.

5. Conclusion

Re-reading of biblical passages opens them to aspects hitherto unnoticed. The Holiness Code can be rightly understood to be dealing with matters of holiness only. However, our study has shown that holiness needed a milieu in which it can find realisation. And this applies to most biblical passages. Little wonder most endeavours at biblical exegesis in modern times talk heavily about re-reading the text, because it draws new insight from the text. This makes the Bible, for me, the only inanimate object with living cells in it. That is why the Bible has been relevant to humanity in the past millennia and it will be relevant to the coming millennia since it talks to and deals with the heart of human problems, aspirations and hopes. This easily is so because it speaks to the social cravings of men and women and is able to affect them as it did to those of the millennia past. It is for this reason that this paper is concerned with bringing out the social features of the Holiness Code and exposing minds to the new dimensions of the Code. Thus people may allow the teachings of the Code to affect contemporary life through the introduction of new legislations and practices or the revamping or, better still, encouragement of, existing ones.

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