

Cosmicizing the sacred within the sacrificial cultus:

An exegetical and intertextual analysis of the holiness motif in Exo 29:29, 44

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Abstract

Scripture presents God as one who is constitutively holy, both in His nature and essence. God's holiness, while it exclusively inheres in His being, He allows persons and things that belongs to Him and are associated with the sacrificial cultus to participate in His holiness. Thus mortal persons and things can be regarded as holy even though not by nature inherently holy. In Exodus Israel as a nation, along with the priesthood and all its appurtenances, were required to be reflectors of His holiness to others. In Exodus holiness is posited not only as a quality possessed by the priesthood, but as something that is transpired to the inanimate aspects of their lives inclusive of their garments and objects within the realm of the sacrificial cultus. Particularly, the garments of the priest became an outward symbol of their consecration and the holiness to which they bore. Moreover, in Exod 29 the hands of the priest were filled with their appointment for service only when in their holy garments using the holy instruments of service. Holiness in this sense becomes something that is cosmicized in those representing God, as well as the things used in ministry to God.

Key Words:

Holiness, Sacred, Sacrificial Cultus, Cosmicized, Attire, Hands, Symbol

1. Introduction

God possesses several communicable and incommunicable attributes. Of the incommunicable attributes holiness is one of which He enables humanity to participate in a very meaningful exchange. In Exo 29 holiness is depicted as inherent in God, and a constitutive aspect of His being. Albeit, it is also attributed to objects, places and persons imbued with His presence. The fact that nearly one third of the usages of קדש “holy” in the Pentateuch occur in Exodus is indicative of the centrality of the motif of holiness to the book. In Exo 29:29, 44 the motif of holiness is enshrouded within sanctuary cultus, more specifically the function of the priestly holy garments, the anointing of the priests, and the filling of their hands. This paper seeks to didactically and intertextually explicate the interrelatedness between these elements, and to concomitantly demonstrate how holiness as a quality can become cosmicized within the temporal religious cultus through the ministration of the earthly priests.

2. Purpose of study

Although there are various strains of interpretation relative to Exo 29:29, 44, most agree in principle that congruent to the pericope of Exo 29:1-46, verses 29 and 44 should be understood as an instructional manual given for the priestly ordination or installation. While Klingbeil corroborate that Exo 29 functions more as a prescriptive ritual text in anticipation of its descriptive counterpart in Lev 8, Milgrom sees the latter as the expanded fulfillment of the former. Divergent nuances in interpretation are also given with regards to the elements used in the ordination ritual. However, there is a predominant consensus that the dictums “fill their hands,” and “I will consecrate...” are contextually related to each other.

This study will seek to further probe the significance of “filling the hands” to the holiness motif in the Exo 29. Further, this study concurs with those who purport that Exo 29:29, 44 is not limited to a mere ordination manual, but more so, emphasizes the centrality of holiness in the divine human encounter within the sanctuary cultus, particularly with reference to the office and function of the priest, and his instrument of service. Finally, it will be

demonstrated that when totally consumed by the presence of God, the priest becomes the very embodiment of holiness to the same degree as possessed by God in His being.

3. The significance of קדש in Exodus

The root קדש while often translated as “holy,” etymologically it denotes the idea of “[someone or something being] singled out, and consecrated [for a particular function],” or the manifestation of something wholly “different” to mundane reality, that which is transcendent from the world, yet, immanent and active within it. When used as an attribute exclusive to God, it refers to His “otherness,” omnipotence and sovereignty (see Lev 11:44). In Exo 29 the idea of holiness as a function, as an act of separation, and as well as an attribute possessed, are all held together in an inseparable dynamic tension.

The author of Exodus used the nominal form of קדש to elucidate that the limits of holiness is extended to practically everything that pertained to the function of the religious and sanctuary cultus. Additionally, the verbal nuances associated with קדש denoted holiness both as a function, and also as a declared state of being. Through the use of some literary ingenuity Exo 29 combines both the aspectual forces of the verbal and nominal senses of קדש —ascribing holiness to persons, such as the priests and their function (vv 1, 33). Holiness is also attributed to objects and places, like parts of the ordination ram (v 27), the altar (vv 36, 37), the tent of meeting, and the altar (v 44). Whether it be persons, objects or places, all are made holy by God setting them apart from ordinary usage, and endowing upon them His presence.

The use of the Piel forms of קדש and מלא in Exo 29:29, 44 can accrue either factitive, frequentative or declarative nuances. The subject of the Piel—God—effects and declares a state not already possessed, on persons, object or places. Holiness in this case becomes a qualitative state possessed, an accrued, or conferred status. Moreover, holiness is shown to be a phenomenon that is continuously participated in. This suggests that holiness that is ascribed or cosmicized to beings or objects apart from God, is contingent upon Him for its qualitative utility and efficacy. Additionally, holiness remains a constitutive aspect of things or beings only in as much they remain in close communion with God.

4. The meaning of the priestly garments

The question that ensues then, what is the primary purpose for the holy garments, the anointing oil, the filling of the hands of the priest (Exo 29:29), and the subsequent declaration of YHWH to consecrate the priest to Himself (Exo 29:44)? The primal reason given for the “holy garment” worn by the priests is encapsulated in the Piel infinitive construct לכהנו “to serve as priest.” The preponderance of the dictum is indicative of the importance God places on the ministry of the priests. The priests were sanctified unto a ministry of service to God (see Exo 28:1,3,4,41; 29:1, 44; 30:30; 31:10; 35:19; 39:41; 40:13,15). The Piel כהנו is always used in connection with the priest being attired with sacred garments, or anointed for sacred service. The garments of the priest thus become a symbol of separation, demarking the status and function of the priest from the mundane. Concurrently, it serves as a visible representation of their entrance into the sphere of holiness, and the divine authentication of approval of their right to minister in the presence of God. This is not to infer that the priests were holy only when wearing their holy garments, rather, it implies that mortals when brought into the presence of a holy God must be covered by that which He has provided—His holiness and His garments. Evidently in Exodus it is shown that God owns everything—including the service rendered to Him, the one rendering the service, things given as offering. It is not surprising that the garments though worn by the priests really belong to God in the same way the holiness possessed by the priests was endowed upon them.

The priest, their attire, the people, and the sanctuary when imbued with the divine presence became mere representatives of the sacred cosmicized in transient realities. The fact that קדש “holy” and תפארת “beauty,” are used to characterize God, the priestly attire, the sanctuary and its furnishings, and the people, implies that there is a shared qualitative essence among them. However, the usage of כבוד “glory,” to refer exclusively to God (apart from Exo 28:2, 40 when it refers to the garment of the priests), suggests that God’s glory, like His holiness, is merely participatory (see note 23). Holiness while inherently constituted in God, that which is separated unto Him, such as the priesthood, their garments, the sanctuary and its appurtenances, can contingently participate in His holiness.

The garments of the priest just like the priest they are קדש ליהוה “holy to the Lord” (Exo 28:36). The phrase קדש ליהוה occurs always within the context of the divine (30:37), the Sabbath (31:15), and the crown of the high priest (39:30). The holiness of the Sabbath was correlated to a specific period

of time, the perfume was to be associated with the holy presence of God, and the priest was declared “holy to the Lord” while arrayed in his raiment-performing ministry. Holiness in these instances was always correlated to a specific function, and therefore, that which was declared holy was marked thoroughly, and excluded from the ordinary usage.

5. The anointing and filling of the hands

Exodus 29:29, 44 furnish further details with regards to the separation of the priests unto God. He was first “anointed,” and his hands were filled, while in his garments. The noun מִשְׁחָה “anointing,” relates primarily to setting a mark of authentication. Normally, whenever מִשְׁחָה is used in the Pentateuch, it often involves an instrumentation through which the anointing is actualized, such as the anointing oil. However, in Exo 29:29, מִשְׁחָה is used with the prepositional suffix בָּהֶם לְמִשְׁחָה which points back to the קִדְשֵׁי הַבְּגָדִים, “holy garments” worn by the priests.

Consequently, it is best to understand the preposition בַּ as denoting both a locative nuance, as well as an accompaniment. This implies that the anointing of the priest occurs as He was in his garments of service, thus He was anointed as a consequence of being in holy garments, performing a holy function (cf. Lev 8:1-12). Therefore, the קִדְשֵׁי הַבְּגָדִים, stands as a symbol of God’s sanctification and anointing, as well as serving as a reminder to the priest both of His function, and the state of being that must be always aspired towards. The anointing of the priesthood was essentially setting them apart to holy service. This function of anointing still hold true today in most religious circles where hands are laid on the clergy in the act of ordination.

The phrase לְמַלֵּא אֶת יָדֵם “fill in them, their hands” as a corollary expression also attest to the aforementioned. The anointing and filling of hands are often seen as two inseparable functions that are mutually inclusive of the other, since both involved the use of sacrificial animals (Exo 29: 21). Through these functions, mutuality between the divine and the priesthood was established, enabling the priests to stand as God’s representative. Syntactically whenever the verb יָד precedes מַלֵּא the emphasis is on the fulfillment of a given task (see 1Kgs 8:14,24; 2 Chr 6:14,15; Ezra 9:11, Ps 26:10; Jer 44:25). It further denotes the hands being filled with consecration (1 Chr 29:5), with destruction (Ps 75:9, Jer 5:15,17), with iniquity (Isa 1:15), and with evildoers (Eze 19:7; 30:12).

The hands are thus always filled with something—good or evil. Moreover it is interesting to note that in most cases of filling the hands something is often accomplished as a result of the hands being filled. Usually the status of the person or thing being filled is changed, and they are simultaneously launched into a new realm of functioning. The priest thus, with his hands filled, stands as an empowered cosmicized being, bearing the insignia of the divine, ritually certified to function. Thus, the filling of the hands authenticates the legitimacy of the priesthood.

The filling of the hands was further related to an actual offering being offered to the Lord by the worshipper, as an act of consecration. In Exo 29:22-24 the ordination offering of the ram of consecration, also included, cake, bread, wafer and oil, placed in the hands of the priest, as a wave offering to the Lord. A similar pattern is recorded in 2 Chr 29:31 where during the reign of Hezekiah, the peoples hands were filled with thanksgiving and burnt offerings as they came to worship (see also 2 Chr 13:9). Consequently, the priests having their hands filled is congruent with receiving a divine conferral of their status before God. In one sense, it can also be regarded as a rite of separation, both from personal, and corporate ownership, as well as a rite de passage, into the realm of holy functioning.

Exodus 28:41 provide an almost identical parallel to Exo 29:29,44. In Exo 28:41 Moses clothed, anointed, filled the hands of the priest, and sanctifies the priests for the purpose of serving before God. Then in Exo 9:29 the priests are anointed and their hands were filled in their holy garments. Finally, in Exo 29:44 God sanctifies the tent of meeting, the altar, and the priests. The use of the Piel to define the actions of filling of hands, sanctifying, and serving as priest, suggest that there is concomitant relation between all three. These elucidate the central axiom of Exo 28, 29, where holiness is characterized both as one's state of being, as well as holy functioning. In Exo 28:41 the act of sanctifying seems consequential to Moses' actions, however in Exo 29:44 it appears as a prerequisite to all that happens. Thus, it seems that the focus is not so much on the sequence of sanctification as it is on the facticity of the state, and the function of the priests (see Exo 19:5-6; 29:1, 44). This is further corroborated by the fact that in Exo 28:41 and Exo 29:29,41 the end result is the same—the priests are clothed, anointed and their hands are filled "to serve as priest."

Finally, in Exo 29:44 the Piels וקדשתי and אקדש used in reference to the sacrality of the tabernacle, the altar, and the priests are testatory to the fact that YHWH is the active agent effecting the state of holiness. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the holiness of the garments, the priest, the altar, and

the tabernacle were all of the “same order,” even though functioning within a system of graded holiness. While God enables beings to participate in His holiness, they never become independent from Him, but always remain in a state of dependency upon Him for the continuance of the state of holiness. This intimates that holiness is something that God shares for His eventual honor.

6. Theological application

This study has elucidated that holiness involves a separation from the mundane usage and a separation for holy service. In Exodus holiness characterizes not just the place of worship, but also the ones who officiate before God, their attire, and the instruments used in officiating. The priests both in their person, and when arrayed in their attire were “holy to the Lord,” thus they become tangible evidence of God’s holiness cosmicized among His people. The priests were anointed, and their hands filled, while in their garments, so as to illustrate the interrelatedness between holiness as a state of being and holiness unction in service. Furthermore, it highlights the contingency of the holiness accrued to the priest. As beings contingently participate in God’s holiness, they derive a new status, while concomitantly bearing His badge of identify.

The fact that although the high priest’s attire is characterized as holy, that did not preclude him from inculcating the quality of holiness, denounces the notion of the transference of holiness by mere association, or as something disassociated from the practical aspects of life. Furthermore, the designation “holy to the Lord” ascribe to the high priest suggest that holiness must be personalized, and made a qualitative experience. Josef Goldbrunner is therefore correct when he posits, “holiness is wholeness,” it demands purity both physically and morally. The Christian today must see holiness not as a ethereal state to be achieved devoid of this-worldly relevance, rather it is an experience which suffuses every aspect of one’s live, and is evident in a habitual responsive obedience to God’s will, and practical deeds of love to each other. Holiness in short is transformative—both on the one upon whom it is imbued, and those who come within its sphere.

7. Conclusion

While holiness as a state of being is inherent and constitutive of God—and bestowed by Him on others—human beings, objects, and places are active and functional benefactors. The application of the blood in the ordination ritual on the right ear, the right thumbs and their right toe, of Aaron and his sons, symbolized the priests becoming a part of the “movement of sacrifice” and consequently being transposed into the sphere of holiness (cf. Exo 29:20). Even in entities where holiness is cosmicized there is still the need for the sanctifying merits of God’s blood (cf. Rom 12:1; 1 Pet 2:9; Eph 1:4; 2:21; 5:27; 2 Tim 1:9).

Whereas holiness as a moral quality finds its derivation in God, it can nonetheless be participated in by created beings, which implies that the entities that become imbued with holiness become cosmicized microcosmic totality of the archetypical divine reality. Hence, the garments, the filled hands, the altar, the tent of meeting, the offerings, and the priests are not objects that are consubstantially holy, rather, they are mere cosmicized realities of God’s sovereignty. Through them God establishes and externalizes His presence, and makes His will known to humanity. Holiness draws humanity into a closer communion with God thereby allowing His image to be reflected more conspicuously in their lives.

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