

# Purity and Holiness of Women and Men in 1 Corinthians and the Consequences for Feminist Hermeneutics

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

First Corinthians begins with two weighty remarks about holiness. First, the people of the Corinthian community are sanctified by Jesus the Messiah. Second, they are holy because of God's calling (1:2). Holiness is fundamental to their belonging to God and to the body of Christ. According to Paul, to be holy means to be holy as part of the community. Holiness is not an individualistic concept, and it has no reference apart from life within a community. Another important point: holiness cannot be split into a cultic-magical aspect of life on the one hand and an ethical one on the other. Usually these two are seen in a dualistic way, in opposition to one another, but we should not separate what is meant to belong together, namely ethics and cultic experience. A third conceptual distinction is necessary: In the biblical tradition holiness is not identified with sexual purity, asceticism, or virginity—as even feminists have often supposed in discussions about 1 Corinthians in which the influence of traditional understandings of early Christianity has prevailed. On the contrary: In 1 Corinthians holiness includes all aspects of life—how to relate to people, what to eat, how to use possessions or cope with poverty. All aspects of life are part of one's relationship to God; that is what holiness is about. This understanding of holiness goes back to the First Testament. It takes shape through controversial discussions within the community. Paul's is just one voice in these discussions, neither a leading voice nor one vested with more authority than those of his so-called opponents.

From 1 Corinthians I am learning to look at holiness as a way of life that is helpful for us today when we hunger for God and justice. Concerning purity and

impurity I am learning from the First Testament that we have to discern carefully between Jewish traditions and Christian assumptions about those traditions. The message that ritual impurity in Judaism means being dirty or polluted, and that this impurity separates people from God and other people is merely evidence of a Christian perspective, one that is wittingly or unwittingly anti-Jewish.

What separates people from God is sin, and sin includes what later Christian terminology calls “ritual” and “ethical” aspects. Sin—not ritual impurity, which is not considered sin<sup>1</sup>—endangers the holiness of Christ’s body. So we have to be clear about Paul’s terminology: Ritual purity/impurity in the sense of Leviticus 15 is not mentioned in 1 Corinthians. Holiness/purity and impurity/sin are understood as comprising “ritual” and “ethical” realities of life.

The work of Antoinette Clark Wire on 1 Corinthians provides my exegetical starting point. My work addresses and seeks to extend her insights. But before beginning the exegetical analysis I need to point out that two historical assumptions with which I begin are not part of scholarly consensus: First, I am assuming that 1 Corinthians is a Jewish document and, as such, a contribution to Jewish *halakhic* discussions, even though the role of 1 Corinthians in relation to these discussions is still debated.<sup>2</sup> Second, I assume that it is inappropriate to refer to Christians with a non-Jewish background in Paul’s time as “law-free.”<sup>3</sup> Law-free Christianity emerges only later, in the second century, when some Christians try to distance Christianity from Judaism in a hostile way. Therefore Paul is not the apostle of law-free Gentile Christianity; he is,

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), uses the terms “ritual impurity” and “moral impurity,” but shows that these “terms do not appear in the texts and neither one is a category as such in biblical or post-biblical Jewish literature” (22). This book is very helpful for understanding sin as inclusive of so-called ritual and moral/ethical aspects and also for understanding ritual impurity according to Leviticus 15. In a Christian context I cannot use Klawans’ terminology, because separating “moral” and “ritual” purity has a history of anti-Judaism and of confining sin to moral understanding in an individualistic sense. Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 92: “To point out the fact that the purity that Paul calls for stems from what the modern mind sees as moral questions (sexual immorality, greed, etc.) only clouds the issue. Such a division between the realm of the cult and that of morality was not apparent to the semitic mind.”

<sup>2</sup> See n. 1 above, and especially Peter Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law. Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> See Luise Schottroff, “Gesetzesfreies Heidenchristentum—und die Frauen?” in eadem and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds., *Von der Wurzel getragen. Christlich-feministische Exegese in Auseinandersetzung mit Antijudaismus* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 227–45. English: “‘Law-Free Gentile Christianity’—What About the Women?” forthcoming in Amy-Jill Levine, ed., *The Feminist Companion to the Authentic Paul* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press).

rather, the apostle of Gentile Christianity devoted to the Torah of the Jewish people. When I refer to Paul's times and speak of "Christians," what I have in mind are Jewish proselytes or "God fearers" who understand themselves and are understood by Jews and Gentiles as part of the Jewish people. Moreover, at the time in question a Christian church did not yet exist.

## **2. FIRST CORINTHIANS 7:14: THE HOLINESS OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S CHILDREN BORN AS GENTILES**

I have learned from Antoinette Wire that the rhetoric of equality in 1 Corinthians 7 addresses women first of all.<sup>4</sup> To be more precise, it addresses women who became Christians by devoting their lives to the Torah and Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. In 1 Corinthians we learn just how profound a change it was for these women to go from Roman-Hellenistic cults to the worship of Israel's God. Did they have to leave their homes, their partners, and even their children? These are the dramatic existential questions to which Paul tries to give an answer.

In 7:12-16 Paul attempts to convince the women to stay with their Gentile partners, though not at all costs (7:15). They should be free to leave marriage when they see no other way: for example, when the man does not want to continue the marriage. In 7:14, where Paul mentions children, the rhetoric of equality is misleading. According to patrilineal law the children of proselyte or "God-fearing" fathers would without question be Jews/Christians, but in regard to the children of proselyte or "God-fearing" mothers there were questions. Therefore we have to understand 7:14 as addressing the problem of the children of proselyte women. Do they remain Gentiles and, therefore, impure? Could living with them mean supporting Gentile sin, especially idolatry?<sup>5</sup> Paul

<sup>4</sup> Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets. A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); see especially pp. 72-82. For 1 Cor 7:14, see p. 85: "The intensity of his argument from justice suggests that he is focused on women." See also eadem, "1 Corinthians," in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 153-95, at 170: "Perhaps most of these single Christians were women, because Paul's reference to 'your children' suggests that mothers, whose children belonged by law to their fathers, had sought assurance about their children's status. There is also some external evidence that women were attracted to Christianity independently of their families . . . whereas male converts largely could expect their households to convert with them."

<sup>5</sup> The "impurity" of these children does not have a background in the ritual law of Leviticus 15 (see n. 1 above), but in the sins of Gentiles, especially idolatry, sexual sins, and bloodshed. What that meant for Jewish midwives and wet nurses is discussed in *m. 'Abod. Zar.* II.1 and in the related Talmud texts. As midwives, Jewish women should not help Gentile babies to birth, and as wet nurses they should not feed them.

The statement about children in 1 Cor 7:14c is ordinarily seen, grammatically, as contrary to fact, even though that would be an unusual usage. As a result of this grammatical assumption the

declares these children holy. He decides that in this case they are holy just as the unbelieving partners of Christian women are. That does not mean that they are now believers (7:16), nor do they become Jewish. Their holiness means that Christian women will not become sinners by supporting Gentile sins, e.g., idolatry. Paul helps to free them from the fear that they are educating children for idolatry. The women are not forced to leave their children, because the impurity of their children is not what would separate them from the community of Christ and from the God of Israel. For us today it might be hard to understand that women would ever see a religious conversion as requiring them to leave their children, but we hear of it in the first century from other sources as well (Mark 10:28 *parr.*; Philo, *Spec. leg.* 1:52; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5).

There is another important aspect to Paul's decision: declaring the children of proselyte or God-fearing Jewish or Christian women to be holy can be seen as a first step toward matrilineal law in Judaism. Shaye Cohen has shown that matrilineal law in Judaism emerged during the second century C.E., at a time when non-Jewish women were converting to Judaism while their partners remained Gentiles.<sup>6</sup> It is the status of the mother and her devotion to Torah, not the status of the nonbelieving father, that defines the status of the children; that is, their status is determined in relation to the woman who is, from Paul's perspective, a Jewish person.

Traditional exegetes of 7:14 see holiness as a magical quality transferred by physical contact and are troubled—especially when the exegetes are Protestant—to discover that Paul, the Protestant hero, is thinking in that kind of magical way. I can console them on that point. The reason for the holiness of the children, as for the husbands, is that Rabbi Paul has decided that in this case there is no threat of impurity (that is, the sin of the Gentiles).

### 3. FIRST CORINTHIANS 7:34: THE HOLINESS OF THE BODIES AND LIVES OF WOMEN

In 7:34 we learn from Paul that there are women whose bodies and spirits are holy. They are not married, or not yet married; *parthenoi* here means

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sentence is interpreted as stating an absurd consequence that no one would assume. Hence the sentence appears only as an argument supporting the thesis that the unbelieving partner is sanctified by the believing spouse. But the indicative should be taken seriously, and 1 Cor 7:14c should be translated: "Since your children are unclean, but now they are holy."

<sup>6</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Origin of the Matrilineal Principle in Rabbinic Law," *Judaism* 34 (1985) 5–13; he understands 1 Cor 7:14c as showing that there was not *yet* a matrilineal principle, but he takes Paul's rhetoric as speaking equally of women and men. That this rhetoric points, instead, to women has been convincingly shown by Anne Wire (see n. 4 above).

young women before marriage (Hebrew *betulah*), especially Christian girls who are betrothed and have an agreement with their fiancés not to marry (7:25-38). It seems that more women than men are choosing not to marry. What is the problem with marriage? Why are these women holy because they are not married? Married people can also live in holiness, but their way is more difficult. The danger to holiness does not stem from sexuality. Sexual activity in a legal marriage is not sin and does not destroy holiness according to Jewish tradition. From Paul we learn this indirectly in 1 Cor 6:12-20 (sexual relations of married men with prostitutes destroy the relation of the men's body with Christ, and we can conclude that sexual relations with their wives would not), and directly from 1 Cor 7:1-7. When sexual activity is between married people it does not destroy holiness—so what is the problem?

Married people (though the passage is primarily addressed to men) are instructed in 7:29-34 how to preserve holiness. Paul teaches them to live *hōs mē*—as if not married. Then he adds that they may weep, rejoice, buy and possess, and use the world in this same way, “as if not.” I find this list of the patriarch's activities in a patriarchal household to be similar to the lists of activities in Matt 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-30; 14:18-21. Parts of these lists go back to *Q*—a hypothetical source used by Matthew and Luke—and probably existed already in Paul's time. The patriarchal activities include marrying and giving in marriage, eating and drinking. Luke adds buying, selling, planting, building houses (Luke 17:28), buying fields, buying oxen, and, once again, marrying (Luke 14:19). These lists show that patriarchal marriage was regarded from an economic rather than a sexual perspective. The economy binds people into a structure that Paul and many others of his time call the *kosmos/world*. This structure destroys the bond and commitment to God. Behind the exhortation to live “as if not,” *hōs mē*, are life experiences of being destroyed by the dynamics of violence in which people are entangled by the patriarchal household and the economy of the time. Even laughter and tears are parts of a structure denying and destroying the life of the people of God (cf. Luke 6:21). But be not afraid, Paul says; God is very near to us. We live in the hour of God's coming (1 Cor 7:29; cf. Mark 13:20; 14:1). We can reach out to God. God is near and helps us not to drown in the structures that kill body and soul, destroying what binds them to God, the source of life.

The problem with marriage for these women we encounter in 7:34 is not sexuality. The structures of this world, to which patriarchal marriage is binding them, are the reason for them not to marry, or to leave their marriages. We see that in its literary and rhetorical context 1 Cor 7:34 presupposes that both sexes can find ways of coping with the structures of the world, but that men are more interested in patriarchal marriage than women, and therefore the

principle of “as if not” is more important for them to live by. Christian communities were of enormous relevance particularly for women, because they were the alternative to the patriarchal household. For women the communities offered independence from “the structures of the world,” from which they suffered more than men.

Now I need to ask what happens to holy women during the time of menstruation. In the rule enunciated in Leviticus 15 they are impure for at least seven days a month. To me, 1 Corinthians 7 implies that this impurity does not change the holiness of their bodies. If women had to leave the holy community during menstruation, Paul would have had to mention it. This means that the laws for ritual impurity and purity in the sense of Leviticus 15 are observed, but impurity in this sense does not affect the relationship to God and to the holy community.<sup>7</sup> This fits the picture feminist scholars have developed of the impurity laws in Leviticus 15 and the bleeding woman in Mark 5:25-34.<sup>8</sup> This woman, or any woman, could be part of the holy community and the people of God even without being healed.

The Christian perspective on Jewish purity rules according to Leviticus 15 needs to be looked at very critically. The idea that this ritual impurity destroys social relations and the relationship to God is derived only from a Christian perspective. We have to distinguish between the ability to take part in cultic actions in the Temple and the relationship to God and God’s people. In everyday life the right to approach holy ground is not an issue, and menstruation requires abstaining from intercourse, nothing else.

Mary Douglas’s famous and influential 1966 book, *Purity and Danger*,<sup>9</sup> exemplifies a perspective informed by Christian assumptions about Jewish purity laws: that women’s impurity helps to oppress women.<sup>10</sup> Impurity means dirt, and dirt disturbs the order of society; impurity is transferred by touching another person. Douglas does not discuss her presuppositions; hence I do not critique the many details in her book, but the basis of her assumptions, which

<sup>7</sup> The fact that Paul does not discuss ritual purity in the sense of Leviticus 15 could raise the question whether he thinks this part of the Law is irrelevant for Gentiles who are baptized in the name of Christ. But in light of the ongoing *halakhic* discussion with regard to Gentile Christians in Paul this proposal is not convincing.

<sup>8</sup> See the articles by Gerburgis Feld, Ina Johanne Batmartha (Petermann), and Brigitte Kahl in Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds., *Von der Wurzel getragen* (n. 3 above).

<sup>9</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966). The influence of this book cannot be overestimated. That influence continues, even though Mary Douglas revised some of her assumptions, especially those about menstruation in Leviticus 15. See Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 178–79.

<sup>10</sup> *Purity and Danger*, 147.

she takes to be self-evident. We Christians have to learn that ritual impurity in Jewish tradition (related to Leviticus 15) does not mean dirt, and impurity laws as such do not add anything to women's oppression. The humiliation of the second sex is not brought about through menstruation, giving birth, or women's bodies. These ideas were imported at a later time and as a result of later developments, especially in Christianity.

A new reading of 1 Cor 7:34 can aid our critique of Douglas's fundamental principles. If she is right, menstruation would destroy the holiness of women. But it is obvious that menstruation is not a factor for the holiness of women's bodies, according to Paul. They are holy by God's calling, even when they are bleeding.

In 1 Cor 7:34 the holy bodies and spirits of women exemplify life lived according to God's will in the midst of a society that coerces people to desire possessions, amid the cares of the world and the impurity brought about by Gentile practices such as idolatry. Holiness should not be narrowed to sexual asceticism. The word holiness describes a way of life without lust for wealth and the concomitant desire for a neighbor's death; holiness, rather, is life according to God's will, the Torah. From 1 Corinthians we learn that Christian women in Corinth aspired to a radical and consistent practice of this way of life. It was not the way of "as if not," because they left marriages, patriarchal households, and their structures. Nevertheless, the intention of their way of life was not perfection but the struggle for life, the life of God's creation.

#### **4. FIRST CORINTHIANS 11:29: ENDANGERING HOLINESS**

To be holy means to be part of a holy community, the body of Christ. Holiness is not possible for the lone individual. But the holiness of Christ's body is endangered by individuals or groups not living according to the Torah (e.g., 1 Cor 5:11, 13, the man living with the wife of his father, contrary to Lev 18:18). In 1 Cor 11:17-34 Paul wants to influence a group within the Corinthian community that, according to Paul, is endangering the holiness of the body of Christ and all the bodies belonging to the community.<sup>11</sup> This is not only Paul's conviction, but that of other groups within the community, especially the poor people who form the majority. They feel humiliated by the behavior of the rich during the Eucharist, a common meal. The rich do not want to share the food they bring or partake of the meager food the poor have brought to the community meal. The rich say: our food is our private property. Paul and other groups

<sup>11</sup> The following assessment of 1 Cor 11:17-34 presupposes an analysis I published in 2000, "Holiness and Justice: Exegetical Comments on 1 Cor 11:17-34," *JSNT* 79 (2000) 51-60.

say: then please eat your private property at home. The food we share is the property of God. It becomes such when the first prayer is spoken during Eucharist. This means that the rich do not discern (11:29) what is holy and what is not holy (profane). To put it another way: The opposite of private is "holy" (not "public," as some interpreters say). The behavior of the rich in Corinth can be compared with the transgression of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). They transgress the Torah because they do not share their bread with the poor. There is no need for Paul to quote explicitly from Isa 58:7. The consequence of the injury thus done to the body of Christ is that some members are sick and others have died (11:30). These sick and dead people need not themselves be offenders against the body of Christ. They may well be innocent persons.

For those of us who live with the traditions of the Enlightenment this concept of holiness is hard to understand. It seems like comparing apples and oranges—mixing what we would call ethics with what is cultic and material. Perhaps we can relate to this seemingly foreign concept by remembering encounters with the structures of our own days, times when we have fought for a world that can give life to the next generations. It takes only one thoughtless action to destroy air and water, but the struggle to preserve life and justice is long and complicated. Perhaps reflecting on experiences in this context may enable us to understand why the holiness of the community is vulnerable, and why innocent persons die when justice is not done.

As feminist discussions have shown, and shown extensively, the horizon of Paul's speech about gender differences and women is quite narrow. I need to mention here a new aspect of his anti-women assumptions. For him 1 Cor 11:29 is a complete parallel to 11:10, because he lines up the behavior of women refusing symbolic subordination to men with the behavior of the rich during Eucharist. He wants women to cover their heads "because of the angels." I really do not know the meaning of these words. I am not convinced that what Paul has in mind is the sexual desire of the angels. Perhaps he presupposes that the holiness of the angels requires women's subordination: otherwise their holiness and that of the communities could be endangered. The time of prayer, of prophecy, and of Eucharist is both a time for celebrating holiness and a time of vulnerability and danger. Holiness can be injured, and people can be damaged.

I am happy to read that Paul feels insecure because not all people in the community share his opinions about women's subordination (11:16). Nevertheless, I am impressed by the consequences the Corinthian people *and* Paul drew from the Torah for the Eucharist and for the holiness of Christ's body. Here again, we encounter Paul's ambiguity.

## 5. HOLINESS AND RESURRECTION AS THE WAY TO GOD

Christians of Western culture are used to reading resurrection traditions in a dualistic way: first, here in this world I live as a physical body, *sōma psychikon* (15:44), but after death and God's judgment I will live as a spiritual body, *sōma pneumatikon*. This dualism makes all of us forget that according to Christian belief the turning point in life is not our individual death but the transformation of our life by God.<sup>12</sup> Only in this context can we understand why Paul names holiness in terms of our physical bodies, in this life: temples of the Holy Spirit (6:19), holy in body and spirit, members of Christ's body, transformed as if resurrected (Rom 6:13). This means that the hope to become a spiritual body is not focused on the time after death, but on the time or experience when we fulfill God's will without being destroyed by the structures of this world, the *kosmos*. Paul and many other Jews and Christians of his time did not fear physical death; they feared the death caused by the worldwide power of sin. They were convinced that God did send the Messiah, Jesus, to set people free from the structures of the *kosmos* and from all that causes us to be dead before God. They were certain that Christ freed them to fulfill the Torah. We ought not to read traditions about holiness and resurrection with a hermeneutic of dualism; we should, rather, read them with a hermeneutic of experience: the experience of death and of freedom, of the destruction of bodies and the resurrection of the body. We experience already what we are yearning for. But all these experiences are not the culmination of the process of holiness or a fixed stage on a scale; they are the beginning. In Paul's letters this beginning has a name: now, *nyini*.

I find two rabbinic parables describing this process of holiness and resurrection. The first is this: our lives depend on God's commandments and our fulfilling them. One should be cautious in handling the lists of God's commandments, because our lives depend on them. The parable: A person falls into deep water. The helmsman gives that person a rope and says: hold on to this rope with both hands and don't let go. If you let go, you will lose your life. And so God spoke to the people: hang on to the rope of my commandments; don't let go of them (*Midrash Tanh. B, ad Num. 15:39, 215b.32; Num. R. 17.182b*).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> For a feminist understanding of resurrection see especially Claudia Janssen, "Bodily Resurrection (1 Cor 15). The Discussion about Resurrection in Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Dorothee Sölle and Contemporary Feminist Theology," *JSNT* 79 (2000) 61–78; Luzia Sutter Rehmann, Sabine Bieberstein, and Ulrike Metternich, *Sich dem Leben in die Arme Werfen. Auferstehungserfahrungen* (Gütersloh: Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> See Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*. 6 vols. in 7 (Munich: Beck, 1922–61) 4:289.

The second parable is this: Rabbi Abun said: A king had a wine-cellar. He had men sit in the cellar to watch the wine. One group was Nazorean; the other group were drunkards. At the end of the long day the king paid the guards and gave double to the drunkards. The Nazoreans protested: why do you give them twice what you gave us? The king answered: they're drunkards and used to drinking wine. They had to struggle hard to watch the wine, while you Nazoreans had no struggle with the evil desire. This is why God used the word holy only once when addressing the angels, but used it twice when speaking to the people: you shall be holy because I am holy (Lev 19:2; *Lev. Rabb.* 24.123<sup>a</sup>).<sup>14</sup>

Holiness depends on living according to God's will. The picture of the drunkards in the wine cellar fits the image Paul paints of men living "as if not," *hōs mē*. They have the bottles of wine within their reach. The picture of the person clutching the rope over deep water may be an image for women holy in body and spirit. The structures of the world are menacing as deep water, because women were more exposed to violence against body and soul. Therefore they were happy to hold the rope in their hands and experience what resurrection means: to be holy, to become *sōma pneumatikon*.

## CONCLUSION

In the Corinthian community holiness is a concept for life in all its aspects—and for both women and men. To live in holiness means to leave behind the structures of violence and death, the world, the *kosmos* with its idolatry.<sup>15</sup> People discuss whether the rich should give up private property. Giving up marriage as a consequence of holiness plays a dominant role, not for sexual reasons but because marriage is the foundation of the patriarchal system of economy and orientation toward property and inheritance.

Women embraced this concept more actively than men. They were willing to leave their nonbelieving husbands and even their impure children. Obviously more women than men lived free from marriage, holy in body and spirit. Women expressed their bonds to Christ and God by praying and prophesying openly in the communities' worship services. Paul, and perhaps some other men, tried to hinder those women, arguing that their symbolic equality to men contradicted their subordination ordained by God and nature.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 4:492.

<sup>15</sup> The word "idolatry" as used in the ancient sources refers to other religions from a Jewish perspective. Today it could be understood as discriminating against other religions. But we should take into account that this Jewish perspective on other religions included the critique of life *praxis* in the sense I have tried to describe.

Holiness is a concept for life, hotly debated, and employed aggressively especially by women. Leviticus 19:2 is not quoted here, but the notion of holiness in Scripture is, of course, the basis of the early Christian concept.

In identifying consequences for feminist hermeneutics I find inspiration in 1 Corinthians as a text stemming from women and men and one secretary: Paul. I am impressed by the ability of the Corinthians, mainly the women, to bring together questions of holiness and justice, thereby shaping and transforming their lives. We need to abandon Christian dualism between spirituality and justice, between holiness and everyday life, and discover ways to be holy. What does Lev 19:2 mean for us today? The answer to that question cannot be given by one person. To experience holiness means to experience the nearness of God, the transformation of life. This is "the beauty of holiness," which for me, as a Prussian Protestant, echoes most fully in memories of music.