

PURITY: BLESSING OR BURDEN?

By

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The crest of the University of Stellenbosch, featuring a shield with a red and white design, topped with a crown and flanked by two figures. Below the shield is a banner with the motto 'Festera tubercant cultus recti'.
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I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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Date

ABSTRACT

During the history of Israel the concept of "purity" had developed as a way in which God's people could honour his holiness and draw nearer to him, as a sanctified nation. By the time of Jesus, in Second Temple Judaism, the purity system had become restrictive. This had been influenced by political and social developments, including an increased desire to withdraw from Hellenistic and other factors which were seen as contaminating the integrity of Judaism.

There were diverse perceptions regarding the achievement of the purity of Israel, including militaristic confrontation and expulsion of alien occupation forces, stricter adherence to the Law and, in some cases, total withdrawal from general society (such as at Qumran). It was, however, particularly the Pharisaic imposition of the supplementary oral tradition, supposed to clarify the written Law, which imposed hardship on those who, through illiteracy or inferior social status, were unable to meet all the minute provisions which would ensure ritual purity. The expansion of the Law of Moses by the commentary of the rabbis, which over time became the entrenched oral "tradition of the fathers", was originally intended to promote access to God by clarifying obscure points of the Law, in the pursuit of purity. However, this oral tradition had, in fact, become an instrument of alienation and separation of the ordinary

people not only from the Pharisees, who considered themselves as the religious elite, but also from God.

The common people, that is, a large section of the population, felt rejected and on the outside of both religious and social acceptance. On the material level they also suffered under a heavy tax burden, from both Temple and State, which aggravated their poverty.

It was this situation which Jesus confronted in his mission to change the ideological climate and to reveal the Kingdom of God as being accessible to all who accepted the true Fatherhood of God, in penitence and humility. He denounced the hypocrisy which professed piety but which ignored the plight of those who were suffering.

Mark 7 : 1-23 symbolizes the difference between the teaching and practice of Jesus and that of the Pharisees, and provides metaphorically a pattern of Christian engagement which is relevant in the South African situation today.

The Christian challenge is to remove those barriers, both ideological and economic, which impede spiritual and material well-being within society. By active engagement, rather than by retreating to the purely ritualistic and individualistic practice of religion, the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven, as inaugurated by Jesus, will be advanced.

Opsomming

Gedurende die geskiedenis van Israel het die konsep van reinheid ontwikkel as 'n wyse waarin die die volk van God sy heiligheid kan eer en tot Hom kan nader, as 'n geheiligde volk. Teen die tyd van Jesus, tydens Tweede Tempel Judaïsme, het die reinheid sisteem beperkend geword. Dit is beïnvloed deur politieke en sosiale ontwikkelinge, insluitende 'n toenemende drang om te onttrek van Hellenistiese en ander faktore, wat beskou is as 'n besoedeling van die integriteit van Judaïsme.

Daar was diverse persepsies aangaande die uitvoering van die reinheid van Israel, insluitende militaristiese konfrontasie en die uitwerping van vreemde besettingsmagte, strenger onderhouding van die Wet en in sekere gevalle, totale onttrekking van die algemene samelewing (soos by Qumran). Tog was dit in besonder die Fariseërs se oplegging van bykomende mondelinge tradisie, veronderstel om die geskrewe Wet te verhelder, wat ontbering veroorsaak het vir die wat as gevolg van ongeletterdheid of minderwaardige sosiale status nie in staat was om aan elke haarfyn bepaling, wat rituele reinheid sou verseker, te voldoen nie. Die uitbreiding van die wet van Moses deur die kommentaar van die rabbies, wat met verloop van tyd die ingegrawe mondelinge "tradisie van die vaders" geword het, was oorspronklik bedoel om toegang tot God te verseker, deur die verheldering van onduidelike aspekte van die wet, in die nastreef van reinheid.

Hierdie mondelinge tradisie het egter 'n instrument van vervreemding geword en skeiding gebring tussen gewone mense en die Fariseërs, sowel as die wat hulleself beskou het as die religieuse elite. Dit het egter ook skeiding gebring tussen mense en God.

Die gewone mense, dit is die meerderheid van die bevolking, het verwerp gevoel en aan die buitekring van beide religieuse en sosiale aanvaarding. Op materiële vlak het hulle ook gely onder die juk van swaar belasting, van beide die Tempel en die Staat, wat hulle toestand van armoede vererger het.

Dit was hierdie situasie wat Jesus gekonfronteer het in sy strewing om die ideologiese klimaat te verander en om die Koninkryk van God te openbaar as toeganklik vir almal

wat die ware Vaderskap van God aanvaar, in berou en in nederigheid. Hy het die skynheiligheid verwerp wat aanspraak maak op vroomheid, maar die toestand van die lydendes ignoreer.

Markus 7:1-23 simboliseer die verskil tussen die onderrig en die praktyk van Jesus en dié van die Fariseërs en voorsien metafories 'n patroon van Christelike verbintenis, wat relevant is binne die eietydse Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

Die uitdaging aan die Christendom is om die skeidslyne te verwyder, beide ideologies en ekonomies, wat geestelike en materieële welsyn binne die gemeenskap belemmer. Deur aktiewe betrokkenheid, eerder as om bloot te onttrek tot die suiwer ritualistiese en individualistiese beoefening van religie, sal die realisering van die Koninkryk van die Hemel soos ingehuldig deur Jesus, bevorder word.

CONTENTS

PURITY : BLESSING OR BURDEN ?

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
1. Methodology	1
2. Section One : Setting the Scene	2
2.1. The Concept of Purity in Early Judaism	2
2.1.1. The Priestly Viewpoint	2
2.1.2. The Prophetic Tradition	7
2.1.3. The Wisdom Tradition	8
2.1.4. The Apocalyptic Tradition	9
2.2. The Purity Laws at the Time of Jesus	10
2.3. Political Developments	11
2.4. Social and Religious Divisions	14
2.4.1. Sadducees	14
2.4.2. The Pharisees	15
2.4.3. Essenes	17
2.4.4. Dissident Groups	18
2.4.5. The People of the Land	19
2.4.6. The Position of Women	21
3. Section Two : Exegesis	23
3.1. Changing Perceptions : The Question of Metaphor	23
3.2. Discussion Regarding Mark 7 : 1-23	28
3.3. The Attitude of Jesus Towards the Law	35
4. Section Three : The Transformation of Israel	39
4.1. Differing Perceptions	39
4.2. Jesus and the Kingdom of God	43
4.2.1. Where is the Kingdom ?	44
4.2.2. What is the Kingdom Like ?	45
4.2.3. Conditions of Entry to the Kingdom	47
4.2.4. The Inauguration of the Kingdom	48
4.3. New Perceptions of God	51
4.4. The Significance of Jesus' Ministry	54

CONTENTS

- 2 -

Page

5. Section Four : South Africa and its "Purity Systems"	57
6. Conclusion	67
7. Bibliography	70

METHODOLOGY

PURITY : BLESSING OR BURDEN ?

1. METHODOLOGY

In considering the question of Ritual Purity and its consequences, a multi-faceted approach will be used. In setting the scene, that is, for developments before the time of Jesus, a socio-historical methodology will be employed, using Old Testament and inter-Testamental sources as well as insights from cultural anthropology.

A literary approach will be employed in the exegetical section, giving attention to developments in metaphorical methodology, while also taking due note of the text itself.

In approaching the ministry of Jesus, his endeavours to change ideological perceptions within his particular context will be assessed. Following upon this discussion, some examples from current South African contextual theology will be investigated, particularly in the line of Reader Response criticism, in an attempt to discover what relevance the concepts, specifically of the Kingdom of God and the Fatherhood of God, have in our present situation, and whether the Jewish purity regulations have any bearing within our context today.

SECTION ONE
SETTING THE SCENE

2. SECTION ONE : SETTING THE SCENE.

2.1. THE CONCEPT OF PURITY IN EARLY JUDAISM.

Although there is considerable diversity within the Old Testament regarding the concept of purity, there is also a defining feature, which requires "cleanness" on the part of humanity as a response to the holiness of God.

2.1.1. The Priestly Viewpoint

The Exilic and post-Exilic priestly redaction of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers was motivated by the writer(s) to authorise the views and practices of the Jerusalem priests, by pointing to Sinai as their claim to legitimacy (Anderson 1980 :422). The focus was on worship by a chosen people, whose purpose was praise of the Creator, who was present with his people within a holy place (Anderson 1980 : 425). The historical accounts culminate in the everlasting covenant at Sinai, defining behaviour towards God and neighbour, and with emphasis on the Sabbath (Ex.31:12-17). Because of God's presence among his people, they were not to be defiled by any ethical or ritual impurity (Anderson 1980 : 431).

A key concept in the maintenance of purity was separation, which had deep ideological associations, derived from earliest mythic and historical connections. In creation, God had separated day and night, water

from dry land and the Sabbath of rest from the days of labour. The Sabbath was regarded as sacred time, instituted by God. Exodus 31:12-17, for instance, instructs the Israelites to keep the Sabbath holy as a covenant with God, breaking it being punishable by death. Thus the purity of this time was related to the holiness of God. Passover came to have special significance, as did other festivals, such as Booths, commemorating historical events which celebrated the greatness and holiness of God in relation to his people (Gammie 1989 : 20-23).

Israel was separated from other nations by the Covenant. The dietary laws separated clean from unclean food (Gammie 1989 : 9-10). Mary Douglas (as referred to by Gammie 1989 : 10) indicates that the basis for what may appear to be arbitrary or irrational criteria of separation depended on whether an item conformed to what was perceived to be the norm for its "kind". Also in regard to the thesis of Mary Douglas, concerning unclean goods (as referred to by Riches 1980 : 116) she says "they must not eat or partake of that which is anomalous".

Malina (1993 : 153) states : "Now purity is specifically about the general cultural map of social time and space, about arrangements within the space thus defined, and especially about the boundaries separating

the inside from the outside."

Certain places were regarded as sacred because of the presence of God associated with them. The building of the holy Tabernacle, for instance (Ex.25-31) is described in language which resembles that used in relation to the Creation (Gammie 1989 : 14). Closely related to the idea of separated places was the classification of persons, who came to be demarcated by their degrees of purity in relation to having access to the holy places (later the Temple). In the Exodus narrative, Aaron and his sons, having purified themselves, could approach the holy tent as in Exodus 30 : 17-21.

Among the people generally, separation from other nations was signified by rites of passage, such as circumcision, which defined them as belonging to an exclusive nation-group. Within Judaism this indicated a particular association with God (Gen.17 : 11) in an everlasting Covenant, which required purity in relation to the holiness of the deity (Gammie 1989 : 24).

The Gentiles were automatically excluded from righteousness as they did not fall within the ambit of the Law and the Covenant (unless they came to God through Israel) (Riches 1980 : 114). One aspect of purity thus became associated with "not doing as the Gentiles do", that is, maintaining separation from those who were

considered to be outside God's chosen people. This endeavour became paramount after the Jewish encounter with Hellenism (Riches 1980 : 116-117).

The sacrificial system sought to restore purity within the cult and sanctuary and to individuals where this had been compromised in any way. Rules about who could or could not approach God in the sanctuary were thought to have been given by God, to protect his holiness. However, they also protected the people, as to approach God in an inappropriate way is dangerous. Crossing boundaries between sacred and profane, without being in the proper state of purity, could bring disaster (Murphy 1991 : 75).

Apart from a purely ritualistic purity there was, however, also a call for an inner integrity, in order to achieve a proper relationship with a holy God (Gammie 1989 : 44).

In the post-Exilic period the focus on keeping the Law had become more pronounced, especially as non-observance had been put forward as a reason for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile. The Jews had lost their kingdom and adherence to a central principle of religion provided a rallying point to mark their exclusivity and nationalism. There was growing stress on Sabbath observance, circumcision and ritual purity (Bright 1972: 432). There was a tension between the Jewish tradition and

the increasing Hellenistic influence, and the canonization of the Pentateuch (about the third century BCE) served to define the central aspects of the faith. While there was by no means a common interpretation of the Scriptures, the Law did provide a point of reference and a stabilizing influence (Otzen 1990 : 61).

To the Jew the Law is not a burden but a privilege, in that it contains God's revelation to his people. The Pentateuch contains everything which is necessary for salvation. The rest of the Old Testament provides only amplification. After the canon of the Pentateuch was closed, however, after the Exile, the Laws which it contained continued to be interpreted to meet changing circumstances. Thus developed the oral tradition of the rabbis. These new interpretations were not adopted by all sections (eg. by the Sadducees). To overcome this problem the rabbis contended that the oral law also derived from Moses at Sinai, although the written Pentateuch had priority of authority (Otzen 1990 : 68).

The priestly tradition came to equate purity with the cult, entailing ritual separation, and correct sacrificial procedures in order to maintain the holiness of the Temple and of all who approached it in whatever capacity (Gammie 1989 : 2). Essential to the system was the purity of the priests. There were progressive steps of sanctity

associated with the worship of God; the land, Jerusalem and stages of purity within the Temple itself (Sanders 1992 : 71).

2.1.2. The Prophetic Tradition

As in the Priestly tradition, an encounter with the holiness of God demanded cleanness. Isaiah, for instance, at his calling, was aware of his unworthiness (Isa.6 : 5) However, unlike the Priestly emphasis on the centrality of the cult and sacrifice, as a means of cleansing, Isaiah, throughout his career, preached social and legal justice as a way of gaining the purity required by God (Gammie 1989 : 80).

"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean,
Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes;
Cease to do evil, Learn to do good;
Seek justice, correct oppression;
Defend the fatherless, plead for the widow."

(Isa.1 : 16-17)(RSV)

Isaiah spoke out clearly against those in power who used their exalted position to oppress the less fortunate and to gain wealth at their expense. Those who sought God in humility and penitence would be influenced by the divine holiness to perform righteous acts and thus attain purity (Gammie 1989 : 85).

Deutero-Isaiah (40-55) still requires purity from the people, although there is somewhat more leaning towards the Priestly idea of Covenant, which sets Israel apart (eg. 44 : 1-5). Trito-Isaiah (56-66) also uses some Priestly themes, such as emphasis on keeping the Sabbath (56 : 2-3) and the importance of the Temple (60:7). However there is notably an insistence that purity derives from justice and social accountability rather than from empty cultic observance (Isa.58 : 6-7) (Gammie 1989 : 97-99). Within Trito-Isaiah, in the post-Exilic context, there is a move away from the previous exclusivity and separation, in that provision is made for foreigners to approach the holy places "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isa.56 : 6-7).

2.1.3. The Wisdom Tradition

In this tradition, for instance Proverbs and some Psalms, there was a perception that creation was characterized by an orderliness ordained by God. By studying the works of God, humanity could conduct themselves in such a way that they would fit into this order, thus obtaining wisdom and consequently righteousness and purity. The "foolish" were those who disregarded God's laws. The Law was associated with

God's justice. The wicked would be punished and the righteous rewarded. Thus the righteous would prosper and the foolish would suffer. Conversely, if one prospered it was presumably because one was righteous and if one suffered it was caused by sin. (It was against this concept that Job and Qohelet articulated). With Ben Sira, Wisdom came to be associated with the Law, particularly its cultic aspects, and with the idea of Israel's election (Otzen 1990 : 71-72).

2.1.4. The Apocalyptic Tradition

Within the book of Daniel, being the only full apocalypse in the Old Testament, there is a fusion of Priestly, Prophetic and Sapiential themes. There is respect for, and adherence to, the Law, together with the pursuit of social justice and individual morality, as means of achieving the purity required by God (Gammie 1989 : 196).

Within the segregated, apocalyptically-inclined Qumran community, the concept of ritual purity, as befitted their status as "Children of Light", reached extreme severity and served as a means of almost total segregation from the rest of the world and as the source of hierarchical divisions within the community itself.

2.2. THE PURITY LAWS AT THE TIME OF JESUS.

There can, of course, not be any clear-cut demarcation between the various genres within the Old Testament and inter-testamental writings in relation to their conceptions of purity. However, in the general acknowledgment of the holiness of God, there was a common belief that such holiness required purity of persons and things, in thankfulness for God's mercy and as a means of a closer approach to the Deity.

It is difficult to have precise knowledge of what purity laws were actually in force at the time of Jesus. The Pentateuch was redacted after the Exile and the Priestly code contains the basic structure of the purity requirements, but it is not known how many were actually practiced at the time of Jesus. Qumran had sophisticated purity laws but these may have been specific to that community. The Mishnah dates from after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, so its provisions may not have been in existence at the time the Gospels were written. There are, however, some points which could have relevance. A person, animal or thing could be in such a state of unholiness as to preclude any contact with the Temple. Impurity could be transferred from an impure subject to another by touching, or even presence in the same air-space, such as proximity to a corpse.

Main other sources of impurity were discharges from human organs and leprosy. Lesser degrees of impurity could be transmitted to foodstuffs, liquids, garments and utensils (Booth 1986 : 122-128).

The food laws differed from other forms of impurity. Some foods were totally forbidden as, for instance, the blood and fat of even permitted animals, such as cattle, sheep and goats. Birds of prey and "swarming things" were totally prohibited. Other causes of impurity, however, were not in themselves wrong, such as childbirth, menstruation, burying the dead, contact with semen, but they had to be counteracted by purifying rituals. Purification was by washing or by total immersion, by the imposition of ashes, or by presenting of sacrifice (Sanders 1992 : 214-222).

2.3. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Jewish religion did not develop in a vacuum, but was significantly influenced by political developments throughout the Ancient Near East during the period after the return from Exile, under the sponsorship of Cyrus of Persia. The extraordinary spread of Greek influence throughout the vast Empire of Alexander the Great, from about 330 BCE, caused political and religious challenges in the whole region, including the Jews (Otzen 1990:13).

After the death of Alexander, Palestine came first under the rule of the Ptolomies. Although the Jewish priesthood retained a measure of self-determination, at a later stage the ruling authorities tampered with the election of the High Priest, choosing a candidate from the new monied aristocracy, and offending those who held to traditional Jewish custom and culture. New Hellenistic cities had been established, which introduced a foreign culture, to which some Jews were attracted (Otzen 1990 :15). On the whole, however, this period was relatively peaceful. The situation changed when the Seleucids took over Palestine. Hellenistic practices were obnoxious to orthodox Jews, who imposed ever-more stringent regulations to counter the threat. The High Priest became a pawn in a political struggle and he was chosen for Hellenistic leanings, thus not of the "legitimate" priestly line.

Antiochus IV brought matters to a head when, in co-operation with Hellenistically-inclined influential Jews, he placed severe restrictions on the practice of the Jewish cult. This precipitated the Maccabean revolt. After a protracted struggle, the rebels triumphed and Jonathan Maccabee became High Priest in Jerusalem in 153 BCE, followed by his brother Simon, who combined the office of High Priest with secular control of Jerusalem in the Hasmonean dynasty (Otzen 1990 : 25-28).

After the Maccabean War various trends developed which were to influence the religious and political situation at the time of Jesus. During the war there had been unity of purpose in achieving particularly religious freedom. The Hasideans, the strictly orthodox party, had co-operated with the militants to re-establish the High Priesthood, but were in opposition to the fact that the Hasmoneans illegitimately assumed that office. This "wicked priesthood" was later to become one of the main reasons for the Qumran community's alienation from the Temple. Partly due to its corruption and inner conflict the Hasmonean empire collapsed and was taken over by the Romans in 63 BCE (Otzen 1990 :31-2). By that time Jewish society had polarised by the development of the Sadducees (the aristocratic party), the Pharisees, the Essenes, minor groups of dissidents and a significant group of "people of the land".

Under the Romans, Herod was made king in Jerusalem in 37 BCE. Although despised by the Jews, he did achieve increased trade and prosperity for the country. After the death of Herod the empire was divided between his three sons, as tetrarchs. Archelaus was subsequently deposed by the Romans, but Antipas continued to rule in Galilee and Perea and Philip in the northern territory at the time of Jesus (Otzen 1990 : 31-40).

2.4. SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS DIVISIONS

In view of the centrality of the Temple in Early Judaism, the High Priest was of prime importance within the Jewish establishment, especially after the return from Exile and the absence of a king. He, together with the Council of Elders (Sanhedrin), possessed all religious, juridicial and political power in Jewish society, under the occupying powers. In Roman times the Council had 71 members, under the High Priest, consisting of priests, elders, representatives of aristocratic families and scribes (Otzen 1990 : 47-48). Josephus described Jewish society for his Gentile readers as being composed of four "philosophies", these being Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes and a "fourth philosophy" which was probably rebellious groups, although this may be a rather simplistic division (Whiston 1996 : 477).

2.4.1. Sadducees

Our knowledge of the Sadducees comes largely from hostile sources. Josephus (War 2.8.14 :166) (Whiston 1996:608) considered them to be boorish and rude. Also from Josephus (Ant.13.10.6: 297-298) (Whiston 1996 : 355) we learn that they rejected the oral tradition and belonged to the wealthy class. The Sadducees did not believe in an after-life (Mk. 12:18), were happy to maintain the religious and social status quo, and

as part of the religious establishment (although not necessarily priests) would presumably have had similar views to the Pharisees on the maintenance of ritual purity. The main role which the Sadducees play in the Gospels is as foils for Jesus (Murphy 1991 : 239-242).

2.4.2. The Pharisees

It is difficult to obtain an accurate portrait of the Pharisees. Josephus claims to have been a Pharisee and has a bias in their favour (War 2.8.14.166)(Whiston 1996: 608). The New Testament usually shows the Pharisees in a poor light, as hypocrites and legalists, but also gives information about ritual purity regarding meals (Mk.2:16-17), Sabbath observance (Mk.3:1-6) and tithing (Luke 11:42). Matthew carries a polemic against the Pharisees, together with scribes, which he mistakenly treats as a single group. However the scribes were a professional group, unlike the Pharisees, and the two groups did not necessarily overlap. Matthew's harsh judgment of the Pharisees may be a reflection of the later break between Christian Jews and Pharisees after the destruction of the Temple (Murphy 1991 : 230-231). Josephus (Ant.13.10.6.297) (Whiston 1996:355) also says the Pharisees handed down an oral tradition not recorded in the Laws of Moses and they believed in an after-life

and the exercise of free-will.

Rabbinic documents regarding the Pharisees date from a later time, so the information about the sect at the time of Jesus may be "written back".

While the Pharisees, who seem to have been the middle-class, took an active part in politics and daily life, their name does refer to their being "separated ones". What set them apart was their principle that purity rules formerly applicable only to the Temple priests should apply to all Israel, especially those rules to do with table purity. Every meal was to be a reminder of God's presence (Murphy 1991 : 236-238).

"The Pharisee made his home into a miniature version of the temple : the Pharisee himself was analogous to the priest; his hearth, to the altar; his house, to the temple area." (Grabbe 1992 : 480)

The attempts of the Pharisees to attain purity and their deliberate separation from Hellenistic influence, while minutely following Torah and the oral tradition, impacted on all aspects of their lives, social, political and economic, and were not merely "religious" concerns. Because of the Pharisaic claims to be accurate interpreters of Torah, holiness came to be determined by their purity rules, thus creating human boundaries defining what and who was pure or impure, and who should be classed as righteous or "sinners" (Murphy 1991:236-8).

2.4.3. Essenes

There has been controversy regarding the extent and location of the Essene community. The Jewish writers Josephus and Philo record there being many Essene communities in Palestine who, although separated, took part in communal life. Pliny, on the other hand, presents the Essenes as being an isolated group centred near the Dead Sea (Boccaccini 1998 : 22-30).

Modern scholarship is generally in agreement that the Qumran (Dead Sea Scroll) community was an apocalyptic-oriented radical group which broke away from the parent (Essene ?) group on account of disputes in regard to halakhic matters and the conduct of Temple worship. Under the Teacher of Righteousness they literally went into the desert to live a life of asceticism and extreme ritual purity (Boccaccini 1998:6).

More light has been thrown on the Qumran community since finding the Dead Sea Scrolls. While accepting the Scriptural Pentateuch, the sectarians considered that the only true interpretation had been revealed to the Teacher of Righteousness, who in turn revealed it to "The Sons of Light", that is, the sectarians. The particular rules of the community are set out in the Damascus Document (CD) (probably from the formative stage of the group) and the

Community Rule (1QS). While the laws were based on Scripture, they were far stricter than those pertaining to Jewish society as a whole, surpassing even the Pharisaic prescriptions. Gentiles were to be totally avoided, the Sabbath was vigorously enforced, even to the extent of not handling tools to save a life. Dietary laws were rigid, as were those concerning impurity of persons and regulations for ritual cleansing (Harrington 1998 : 163-167). The Qumran community considered itself to be the Children of Light, as opposed to the rest of humanity, the Jews included, who, as Children of Darkness, would be lost at the End Time (Otzen 1990 : 154).

The sect actually equated impurity with evil, not in a metaphorical way, but as an actual state which required a rite of purification. They believed that all human beings are by nature impure and therefore by nature evil, unless purified by God's choice, thus there was an element of predestination as well as election. (Boccaccini 1998:65-6)

2.4.4. Dissident Groups

Josephus, in describing the "Fourth Philosophy", characterised them by their extreme opposition to foreign rule, as they believed that "God is to be their only ruler and Lord" (Ant. 18.1.6.23) (Whiston 1996 : 477). Although Josephus was generally derogatory about social "bandits" not all were politically motivated, but some were

forced by economic circumstances to robbery as a means of survival (Murphy 1991 : 281-282). Among these groups the Zealots may be included, as they were militantly in opposition to foreign rule, as they regarded Israel as a theocracy.

2.4.5. The People of the Land

Although, under Roman rule, there was apparent prosperity, at any rate for the upper classes who worked "within the system", many small land-owners lost their property through heavy taxation and subsequent debt. Many moved to the town in search of work (Otzen 1990 : 52-3).

Peasants in the country districts lived a hard, subsistence existence. Their taxes helped support the Temple establishment, as well as the Roman occupying army and political structure. Famines could prove disastrous, and many small farmers were forced to seek day-labour to survive (Murphy 1991 : 281).

These people were referred to in a derogatory way by the "establishment" as *ammei ha-aretz*, being disparaged either for not keeping the commandments regarding produce of the land and ritual purity, or for being ignorant, by virtue of not being able to study Torah because of illiteracy. They were regarded as being at the bottom of the social and religious ladder (Oppenheimer 1977:12).

Referring to one belonging to this group (am ha-aretz) Oppenheimer (1977 : 17) writes :

" Anyone more scrupulous in observing ritual purity was enjoined to exercise care not to come into contact with him." As far as the viewpoint of the "people of the land" went towards a strict adherence to the Law, Oppenheimer (1977 : 114) says : "The ammei ha-aretz were the ordinary people, the rural and urban masses, who had indeed not discarded the yoke of the Torah and the commandments, but had lightened the yoke for themselves in cases in which it appeared to them to be too burdensome."

Malina (2001 : 98-99) draws a distinction between the meaning of the terms "rich" and "poor" as they appear in various social contexts. For modern, Westernized, society the connotation "rich" relates to monetary wealth, and human worth is assessed by the status associated with access to good education, adequate housing, fine clothing and obvious affluence. The "poor" are at the other end of the material scale. In contrast, in the New Testament, "rich" is often associated with greed and avarice (eg. Matt.19:23-24). "Poor" does not only mean those who are materially deprived. Luke 4:18 quotes Isaiah and links the "poor" with prisoners, the blind and the oppressed. Luke 6:20-21 associates the "poor" not only with those who hunger and thirst, but also with those who mourn.

Matt.11:4-5 combines with poverty-sufferers those with physical ailments, such as the blind, lame and deaf.

Thus the "poor" refers not only to those who are materially deprived, but also to those who are in unfortunate personal circumstances, such as illness or bereavement. It refers particularly to those who are unable to maintain their honour and dignity, by not being in a position to uphold their inherited social station. The definition of "poor" may vary depending on the social setting in which it occurs.

"Metaphorically speaking, all such 'poor' people are marginal, but not to society in general. Rather they stand at the margins of their social group."

(Malina 2001 : 103).

The poverty which Jesus would address thus covered the financially poor, the sick, the grieving and those who were despised by society for whatever reason.

2.4.6. The Position of Women

In the patriarchal system which was the norm in the Ancient Near East, women took no part in public life. Among the upper classes a woman remained mainly within the home, and when in public, was heavily veiled. A woman should have no contact with a man outside her family and

it was disgraceful for a scholar to speak to a woman in the street. Ordinary families were not able, for mainly economic reasons, to keep to the strict rules, as women and children had, of necessity, to help with agricultural and domestic work in a subsistence economy. However, even in the country, it was not customary for a man to converse with a strange woman. Up to the age of twelve-and-a-half (marriageable age) a girl was under her father's total jurisdiction until her arranged marriage transferred her to the "ownership" of her husband (Jeremias 1976:359-367).

After marriage the woman's position was mainly menial, her status only being enhanced by the birth of a son (daughters often not being welcomed). From a religious point of view the woman was also inferior. She was subject to all the prohibitions of Torah but exempt from the commandments and was restricted in access to the Temple and segregated in the synagogue. Schools were solely for boys (Jeremias 1976 : 372).

A woman was subject to the purity laws, being considered unclean at certain times. She was unclean for seven days during her menstruation, and also after childbirth "for seven plus thirty-three days for a male child, and fourteen plus sixty-six for a female", after which she had to make an offering at the Temple. Unnatural discharges of blood also rendered a woman unclean (Neusner 1973 : 18-20).

SECTION TWO

EXEGESIS

3. SECTION TWO : EXEGESIS

3.1. CHANGING PERCEPTIONS : THE QUESTION OF METAPHOR

From the mid-twentieth century there has been an increasing interest in the role of metaphor in language generally and specifically with regard to metaphorical usage in religious language.

Metaphor was recognized as a deviation from "normal speech" as far back as Aristotle, although he concentrated on single words that substituted for literal words, mainly as a literary illumination. During the Middle Ages much use was made of allegory to "explain" often obscure Biblical texts, but this was open to highly subjective interpretation. With the Enlightenment and the rise of scientific interest, there was a call for univocal, unambiguous language, which would precisely reflect a scientific or mathematical concept. Metaphor was regarded as harmful to truth (Stiver 1996 : 113-4).

I.A. Richards in 1936 and Max Black in 1954-5 (as referred to by Stiver 1996 : 114-5) put a new perspective on the use of metaphor. It was perceived not only as single words, but as sentences or even whole passages, which expressed ideas which were not readily described in literal language.

The benefit of the use of metaphor is that it can build on one's preconceptions and open up new ways of seeing and understanding. Stiver (1996 : 117) says "a text containing powerful metaphors possesses a virtually inexhaustible fecundity", therefore metaphorical concepts may be re-interpreted in different sociological time-frames to meet the needs of the particular interpreters.

Closely linked to metaphor are symbols. Like a metaphor, a symbol may stand for something beyond itself, often a concept which is embedded in the preconceptions of the individual, and may be a non-literary phenomenon, such as a cross (Stiver 1996 : 122).

While in the past the parables of Jesus were treated allegorically, with possible subjective interpretation, the new metaphorical emphasis regards them as extended metaphors which are less teaching mediums than "language events", which call for action regarding a central aspect of the teaching of Jesus. The surprising elements in the parables can overturn conventional thought-patterns about, for instance, the Kingdom of Heaven and introduce a new way of thinking (Stiver 1996 : 128-9).

Paul Ricoeur (as referred to by Stiver 1996 : 102-4) considered that all knowledge was subject to interpretation. When approaching symbolic language

the initial understanding rests on the presuppositions which have arisen within one's cultural heritage regarding the interpretation of such symbol or metaphor (understanding). However this initial naive understanding should be subject to extensive and diverse critical methods regarding both text and one's own ideology and motivations (explanation). In the third stage of exegesis it is possible and necessary to gain a new understanding of a passage which is then relevant to and speaks to the current situation (post-critical understanding). Ricoeur (as referred to by Stiver 1996 : 105) maintains that appropriation of a text must include application on an existential level.

Stiver (1996 : 105), commenting on the work of Ricoeur, says "actions and historical events themselves can be seen as a fixed structure that allows for interpretation and appropriation beyond the original intention of the actors involved". This opens up interpretive possibilities in a modern context, when Scriptural passages are treated metaphorically.

"Metaphors not only provoke creative interpretation but open new possibilities of interpretation within the self-understanding of the interpreter."

(van der Merwe 1988 : 287)

Reader-response theory emphasizes the dynamic response on the part of the interpreter, who contributes to the meaning of a text by active participation. While the text itself has importance, it can be given an added richness of meaning by appropriation to the particular context of the interpreter (Stiver 1996 : 107-111).

Sallie McFague (as referred to by Stiver 1996:132) considers not only religious language but theology itself to be metaphorical. She questions the continued validity of patriarchal metaphors regarding God, and sees a need for a correction or replacement of such language to promote feminist interests.

Any expression about the nature of God is necessarily metaphorical, mediated by the particular community from which the description emanates. While the most profound metaphor of God would be the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the context of communities, both Biblical and modern, will determine what metaphors are used and how they are interpreted (van der Merwe 1988 : 288-291).

Mary Douglas (1973 : 138) claims to "find in the totality of the Biblical purity rules a symbolic system".

"A symbolic system consists not at all of verbalisations about goodness. It consists of rules of behaviour, actions and expectations which constitute society itself".

By treating Biblical concepts metaphorically one is thus not bound by the context of the initial text but may re-interpret the ideology of the writer to what is appropriate to the current situation.

In approaching Mark 7 : 1-23, attention will be paid to literary and socio-historical perspectives within the text. However, the attitude of the Pharisees will be treated overall as being symbolic of the total purity system and all its broader implications, while the argument of Jesus, and his rejection of that system, will be taken as illustrative of his vision for the total transformation of Israel.

3.2. DISCUSSION REGARDING MARK 7 : 1-23

In interpreting this passage there has been discussion between scholars as to authenticity, both in regard to hand-washing and whether it actually reflects the purity rules at the time of Jesus, and also whether the reported statements of Jesus are authentic or date from a later church tradition (Booth 1986 : 14-18).

However, for the purposes of the present discussion, the passage will be approached mainly as it appears in the Gospel and as it is available to an ordinary reader today.

Mark 7 : 1-23

v.1. The appearance of the Pharisees, together with "doctors of Law", or scribes, from Jerusalem indicates the growing seriousness of the opposition which is developing in official circles against Jesus (Harvey 1979 : 142).

v.2-4. Regarding the question of "unwashed hands", within the later Pharisaic tradition it was indeed the custom to wash hands before eating, more for ritual than hygienic purposes, in order not to contaminate with "unclean" substances the food which one might eat (Harvey 1979 : 142-143). Even accidental contact with a Gentile in the street could cause contamination, which necessitated

ritual hand-washing (Cole 1994 : 962). This was not a Scriptural rule, but was ascribed to tradition. It could have already been the practice at the time of Jesus (Harvey 1979 : 142-143).

This tradition of the elders was rejected by the Sadducees, but was highly esteemed by the Pharisees. It was made up of legal comments and case decisions by past and present rabbis (Gundry 1994 : 303).

Josephus in Ant.13.10.297 (Whiston 1996 : 355) explains :

"The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the Law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but not to observe what are derived from the tradition of the forefathers".

A parallel account of Mk.7:1-23 appears in Matt.15:1-20, but there are differences in presentation which demonstrate the somewhat varying standpoints of the two authors, stemming from the requirements of their respective audiences and the concerns of particular

church communities at the time of writing.

Mark's explanation of the custom of hand-washing in 7:3 is absent in the account in Matt.15:1-3. Mark was presumably writing for a largely Gentile audience and such explanation would not have been necessary for Matthew's more predominantly Jewish readers (Gundry 1994 : 302). By including the information in 7:2 that the Pharisees and teachers had observed the disciples eating with "unclean hands", Mark has set the scene for the ensuing argument, whereas the account in Matt.15:3-9 concentrates immediately on the authoritative pronouncements of Jesus (Gundry 1994 : 302).

Mark's comment in 7:4 that the hand-washing practices apply to Jews in general would be an exaggeration (Harvey 1979 : 143). The rules would have been beyond the capacity of, for instance, labourers to keep. However, Mark's elaboration on the purity rules, which were followed by at least some of the Jews, widens the scope of the discussion, in preparation for Jesus' condemnation of the whole system in his quotation from Isaiah (Banks 1975 : 132).

The more extensive application of purity laws regarding goods and utensils may have been appropriate in Gentile environments, where there was the danger of contamination, from pagan institutions (Harvey 1979:143).

"Clean hands" had a metaphorical meaning in the Old Testament, such as in Psalm 24:4, where "clean hands and a pure heart" are a requirement for going to the Temple. Also, those who prepared the priests' food for the Temple were required to do so in a state of ritual purity (Sanders 1992 : 438).

The ritual purity prescriptions were adhered to by those who considered themselves to be ultra-pious and would be considered by the Pharisees as appropriate in the followers of a religious teacher (Harvey 1979 : 143). Jesus does not deny that his disciples had not adhered to these traditions, but considered them to be human-authored (Cole 1994 : 962). The non-observance of restrictive "pious" traditions set Jesus apart from the expected behaviour of a religious teacher and is symbolic of the new dispensation to which he aspired.

By considering a metaphorical interpretation over and above the literal appreciation of a practice in force at, or even a little later than, the time of Jesus, the way is open, in a modern context, to evaluate entrenched practices in the religious and general cultural establishment today.

v.5. In the Markan version of the story the question from the Pharisees to Jesus regarding his disciples' eating with unwashed hands, against tradition, is phrased in a seemingly innocent and less controversial way than

in Matthew's account (Matt.15:2). The latter accuses the disciples of "disobeying the teaching handed down by our ancestors: (Good News) or "breaking the tradition" (NIV). However, in both gospel accounts, Jesus perceives the hypocrisy behind the question (Gundry 1994 : 303).

v.6-8. Jesus replies to his opponents with a prophetic quotation from Isaiah. The quotation is actually according to the Greek Septuagint, and Jesus would have used the Hebrew version, but there is little difference in the core meaning, that the Pharisees were neglecting their basic moral obligations (Harvey 1979 : 143)

The original question from the Pharisees regarding the washing of hands becomes a wider issue. Jesus in quoting Scripture (Isa.29:13) is asserting that his opponents are worried about human rules and do not pay attention to God's will (Murphy 1991 : 333). However, the accusation goes further.

v.9-13. Mark gives a concrete example of what Cole (1994 : 962) calls "a typically rabbinic trick", in which the Pharisees evaded their duty towards parents, as contained in the commandments.

By declaring property or goods "Corban", that is, an offering dedicated to God, a man could maintain his use of them during his lifetime. Thus goods or money could be withheld from other claims and retained for one's own use (Sanders 1992 : 422).

The original use of "Corban", literally meaning "set apart for God" had become debased by common use in the irresponsible swearing of oaths. The tradition apparently condoned this and developed arguments that many popular ways of swearing oaths were on occasion not binding. However, when it suited them, the Pharisees invoked the written Law, which stated that a solemn oath, once sworn, was binding (Nineham 1975 : 189-190). Jesus condemned the abuse of oath-taking, apparently sanctioned by the oral law, as also the flagrant manipulation of the written Law, when it suited the ulterior motives of the person concerned (Harvey 1979 : 144, Nineham 1975 : 189-190).

v.14-23 deal with another occasion, where Jesus utters the statement that "nothing going into a man can defile him; but the things which come out are what defile him". The first part of the statement ostensibly refers to impure food, but Mark's comment that "he declared all foods to be clean" may also be read metaphorically, as a dismissal of all the superimposed purity regulations of the oral tradition. In this light, reading the second part of the statement literally is not a viable option, as "what comes out of a man" would include bodily emissions, such as semen, spittle and excrement, which were also causes of ritual impurity. Thus Jesus would be endorsing the purity rules which he had just rejected.

Therefore, the use of "pollute" or "defile" in the second part is metaphorical and defines those behavioural aspects over which the individual has personal control, which need to be amended, to give a true purity worthy of God (Riches 1980 : 136-137).

However, the purely literal sense of 7:19, which declares all foods to be clean, would have been welcomed in a church like Rome, composed of both Jewish and non-Jewish elements. This ruling would have made fellowship at the Lord's table much easier (Cole 1994 : 963).

Thus, for the generally-accepted ideas of purity, as segregation and exclusivity, Jesus is substituting his new vision of God's requirements, as set out particularly in his teaching about the Kingdom of God (or Heaven) and the nature of the Fatherhood of God.

Jesus points out that contamination is not ritual, but moral. It does not emanate from an outward contagion which can be "caught" like an infection. Evil comes from an inner, spiritual impurity, which needs to be dealt with at source by a change in one's flawed nature (Cole 1994: 962). In Mk.7:21 there is a daunting list of the evils which are the result of spiritual uncleanness, which trivializes the concerns of the Pharisees for minor ritual infringements.

3.3. THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARDS THE LAW

Regarding the attitude of Jesus to the Law, we have references which indicate that it was not the Law itself which Jesus rejected, but only certain interpretations. Matt.5:17, for instance, states "Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them."

Matt.23:1 has Jesus telling the people to obey what the Pharisees tell them, even if the latter do not carry out what they preach (Murphy 1991 : 330-331).

Young (1995 : 265) points out that, in rabbinic literature, the Hebrew words which are equivalent to the Greek "abolish" and "fulfil" have deeper meanings. "Abolish" can also mean to interpret incorrectly, thus one cancels Torah when the divine revelation is misunderstood. To "fulfil" refers to interpreting a passage accurately, thus by obeying God's will one fulfils Torah.

It appears that Jesus conformed to the purity laws regarding access to the Temple, as he attended the festivals and also taught there. Specifically, after healing the leper (Mk.1:44) Jesus told the healed man to report to the priest and make the necessary offering. Jesus' encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk.7:27) seems to imply that he considered the Law to be valid as an exclusive property of the Jews, and he cites the Law in Mk.10:19 (Booth 1986 : 108-110).

The fact that, within the early church, there were opposing factions who variously considered adherence to the Torah to be necessary, or not, indicates that Jesus had not nullified its provisions (Murphy 1991 : 331).

It becomes apparent that Jesus questioned the Law, especially in relation to the purity laws, when its application in his particular situation conflicted with its original intention, which stipulated a genuine love of God and a caring attitude to humanity, transcending human barriers.

The Law gives full value to human relationships. One is to refrain from oppression of others, especially the poor, not slander, not hate one's brother or bear grudges. Charity towards kin and stranger was to be practical (Sanders 1992 : 230-234). The teaching of Jesus revived the priority of these provisions. His argument with the Pharisees was that their super-imposed restrictions removed the focus from humanitarian loving-kindness to legalistic diversions.

Jesus thus did not cancel Torah but, by interpreting it correctly, he placed it on a higher footing. Jesus actually goes beyond the letter of the commandments, for instance in the Sermon on the Mount, by showing that even an apparently minor infringement can lead to a major sin (Young 1995 : 268-269).

Jesus' interpretation of the Law derived from his own understanding of God's will, which at times superceded the Law. With regard to the keeping of the Sabbath, for instance, Jesus came into conflict with the orthodox authorities. Sabbath observance, as sacred time, had become rigid in its prescriptions about what constituted "work". Healing was "work" (Mk.3:1-5). The attitude of Jesus was that, if what was morally necessary occurred on the Sabbath, then Sabbath Law must be broken in favour of the greater good of those in need of help (Booth 1986 : 111).

Jesus associated with tax-collectors and sinners, that is, people who, according to the Pharisees, were cultically impure, and he did not apparently fear becoming himself impure by such contact. He gave priority to his obligation to bring everyone into the Kingdom (Mk.2:14-17). However, in place of the purity regulations, Jesus placed a system of personal behavioural standards which were even more demanding. The removal of boundaries included those against "enemies", who were to be lovingly treated and not attacked or shunned. The definition of "neighbour" was transformed from one within one's own segregated circle to embrace anyone at all with whom one had contact. Purity was to be defined by a system of ethical behaviour which would bring one nearer to God, rather than a set of rules which caused actual

alienation from the spirit of the Law. Purity would come from repentance, humility, a genuine love for God, as He loves, and a care for humanity as a whole, without exception or prejudice.

By his praxis and teaching about the Kingdom and the Fatherhood of God Jesus set about changing perceptions.

SECTION THREE

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISRAEL

4. SECTION THREE : THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISRAEL

4.1. DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS

Jewish society at the time of Jesus was by no means a homogenous whole. Within its framework were multiple economic and social strata, as well as the religious hierarchy, all with divergent views. In spite of the ideological variety there was, however, a general perception that a renewal of Israel was necessary and immanent, although there was no unanimity about how this might be achieved.

The Zealots and other disaffected groups looked for a charismatic military leader, who would, with the help of God and possibly a messiah-figure, overcome the occupying powers and inaugurate a theocratic nation, faithful to the Law (Riches 1980 : 172). They considered that God alone should be king of Israel, therefore no obedience should be given to any temporal authority. Such usurping power should be destroyed by all means, including extreme violence. It was the purpose of God's followers to join an earthly army to get rid of the oppressors of Israel and thus restore its purity before God. Thus God was viewed as a warrior who would assist his followers to destroy his enemies (Riches 1980 : 93-4).

In the apocalyptic tradition, such as obtained in the Dead Sea Scroll community, the battle to introduce the Kingdom was a more pronounced dualism between the forces of Satan and those of God. The "Children of Light" considered themselves to be the only "saved" remnant, thus consigning everyone, Jew or Gentile, who was not of the Community, to the "Children of Darkness". The chosen would be finally vindicated when, with the appearance of two messiahs, of Aaron (priestly) and Israel (kingly) and a prophet, and the intervention of God's heavenly hosts, true worship would be restored to Israel, inaugurating the perfect Kingdom (Riches 1980 : 173-4). By the extreme observance of purity rules and an ascetic lifestyle they upheld purity on earth until such time as the heavenly forces would, both on earth and in heaven, totally vanquish the forces of evil, as depicted in the War Rule (Riches 1980 : 95-6).

The Pharisees, who to some extent shared the views of Qumran regarding upholding the Law and observing strictly the purity prescriptions, did not subscribe to a militaristic solution to inaugurating the Kingdom of God. This would be brought about by observing all the regulations of Torah, as well as the oral tradition, as a defence against Hellenism. By keeping to the laws of purity and segregating oneself from all contamination, from whatever source, one could aspire to approach God

in his holiness and be part of the Kingdom. Theirs was thus a purity of separation (Riches 1980 : 95)

The Wisdom tradition also saw keeping the Law as being the way to righteousness.

In actuality all the above groups acknowledged the centrality of Torah, although with different interpretations and with individual extensions, such as the oral law and the halakhah of Qumran. However, each in its own way had diminished the impact of the Law of God by narrowing it down to individual viewpoints and sectarian concerns.

John the Baptist, as a forerunner of Jesus, gave a new insight in that he attacked the particularism of those Jews who relied on their ancestry for divine reward while they ignored the social and humanitarian purity required by God. He thus revived the prophetic tradition which had been somewhat undermined in the post-Exilic period. At a later stage, Jesus proclaimed his priorities, in answer to a question from John (Matt.11 : 2-6). He echoes Isaiah :

"The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them".

The ministry of Jesus saw the present inauguration of the Kingdom of God as touching all those who were previously explicitly excluded by the purity laws.

Jesus set out to introduce a completely new concept of what renewal entailed by changing perceptions about God and human relationships. In order to convey meaning it is necessary to speak in language which is familiar to one's hearers. Thus Jesus confronted existing beliefs and practices by challenging stereotyped symbols and giving them a new and liberating connotation, which was revolutionary and challenging (Riches 1980 : 170)

While using the same term, Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven) Jesus would have to separate his teaching and practice from the existing associations, to present a new and dynamic viewpoint which would change perceptions. While his approach would be welcomed by those who were on the "outside" of the exclusions, those who held to entrenched preconceptions would find his teaching both revolutionary and unacceptable.

4.2. JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The idea of kingship is associated with the power, supremacy and sovereignty which a king exercises over his subjects. In the tradition of Israel the king ruled by divine right and was supposed to act as God's representative on earth, thus exercising justice and mercy as well as power. When speaking of the Kingship of God this idea translated into a concept of the total power of God over creation (Riches 1980 : 91-2). God's Kingdom was not so much a physical place but an activity of God within the world. Psalm 145 : 11-13 reads : (RSV)

"They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom,
and tell of thy power,
to make known to the sons of men thy mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendour of thy kingdom.
Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and thy dominion endures throughout all generations"

However, in Second Temple Judaism, entry to the Kingdom had become restricted by practices of segregation (Murphy 1991 : 323).

In his pursuit of the Kingdom of God, Jesus launched a determined attack on all manifestations of evil, in a way that was socially and politically all-embracing. God's reign was instituted wherever Jesus defied pain, sickness, death, demon-possession, oppression or self-righteousness.

It was particularly among the marginalized and deprived that Jesus demonstrated that the love of God was for all, thus breaking down the barriers which caused alienation and hostility. This led to the perception by the authorities that Jesus was dangerous to the status quo (Bosch 1991 : 32-3).

Jesus' call to discipleship was meant for everyone, not just a select and "purified" few, and his actions, such as shared meals, were instrumental in changing the term "Kingdom of God" from militaristic and ritualistic to give an entirely new metaphorical association (Riches 1980 : 101).

4.2.1. Where is the Kingdom ?

Jesus inaugurated his ministry by saying "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk.1:15a).

In reply to a question by the Pharisees as to when the Kingdom will come, Jesus replies that "it is in the midst of you (Luke 17:20). Although there are many references to the futurity of the Kingdom (eg. Matt. 16:28) ascribed to Jesus, it does appear that he considered that the rule of God was already at least partially present and could be demonstrated through miracles of healing, compassion for the poor and suffering and acts of loving kindness. Thus the Kingdom is on earth to be grasped in the present, although its full power will

be realized in its ultimate unveiling (Deist & du Plessis 1985 : 130-133). Several parables, such as the ten virgins (Matt.25 : 1-13) and the faithful and unfaithful servant (Matt.24 : 45-51) call for preparedness for the final coming of the Kingdom.

The implication is that the Kingdom of God is to be sought here and now, and is to be actively promoted by those who consider themselves to be part of God's work-force, in order to hasten its final consumation. God is interested in the totality of persons, body, mind and spirit, and the physical well-being of his children is His loving concern. This counteracts the Platonic belief that the body is merely a prison for the more important spiritual component of humanity.

4.2.2. What is the Kingdom Like ?

Jesus did not give a definition of the Kingdom of God, but illustrated its qualities by his parables (as well as by his praxis and general teaching), which were directed to the common people, as well as to the more learned. In language which was accessible to all (although the disciples sometimes missed the point!) he described his vision for the renewal of society and a proper relationship with God.

Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom often shocked his hearers into giving up their former ideas about who or what was acceptable to God. In the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) the emphasis is on the alleviation of human suffering in the afflicted man. The "establishment", possibly by fear of ritual contamination, as well as from lack of charitable intent, pass by. The "unacceptable" Samaritan reacts in a way which is pleasing to God (Murphy 1991 : 325).

People were no longer categorized as "sinners" or unacceptable to God by the purity system, in which they were judged by educational and socio-economic criteria. In the parable of the lost sheep, for instance (Luke 15: 1-32) the rejected and lost are valuable and worthy of salvation. The parable of the separation of the weeds in Matt.13:24 shows the dangers of human separation activities, which could be counter to the will of God.

The story of the prodigal son shows not only the unchanging love of God for the wayward, and his ready forgiveness of the penitent, but also the danger of the expectations of the elder brother that he deserved preferential treatment. The Kingdom has a vitality which comes from God (Mk.4:26-29). It is open to all, but there needs to be a decision to accept it, and a willingness to give one's all to be part of it (Matt.13:44-46) (Deist & du Plessis 1985 : 136-140).

4.2.3. Conditions of Entry to the Kingdom

To be acceptable to God is no longer dependent on strict purity laws or man-made social and political status. God offered unconditional entry to all, but the decision to accept God's gift was left to the individual (Luke 8:8 - He who has ears to hear, let him hear). There is no automatic entry for those who are full of pride and self-righteousness, such as the Pharisee who despised the tax-collector (Luke 18:9-14). The same theme appears in Luke 14:15-24. when the "chosen" do not attend the great banquet, while the rejected come in their place (Deist & du Plessis 1985 : 139). This parable was reflective of the practice of Jesus to approach with love those who were despised by the "system". However, just as God is willing to forgive unconditionally, so is it expected of those who aspire to the Kingdom to do likewise. This is encapsulated in the Lord's Prayer, and the preaching of Jesus is radical in demanding forgiveness even of enemies (Matt. 6:12,14; 5:43-48).

This is in stark contrast to the exclusivity of the time, which at best demanded strict segregation from "others" and at worst their total destruction. Enmity and hatred now became the criteria of pollution.

Having made the decision to accept the Kingdom, there is the obligation to discipleship (Matt. 10 : 32 f).

It was the marginalized sectors of society, who were considered to be outside the Law, and therefore not eligible for redemption, who joyfully accepted the ministry and example of Jesus. Not only were they to be accepted by God, but they were called to be co-workers in his redemptive work (Riches 1980 : 107-110). However, Jesus' conception of their fight for the Kingdom broke away from military confrontation and rigid legalistic observances, to a war waged against the power of evil by love, forgiveness and prayer.

4.2.4. The inauguration of the Kingdom

Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom took a practical form, alongside his preaching and teaching.

The fellowship meals which Jesus attended, as part of his ministry, occurred in the context of everyday life. They contrasted with the ascetic life-style of John the Baptist and also, of course, with the strictly segregated meals of the Pharisees, where the emphasis was on ritual purity equalling that of the Temple.

In the Old Testament, table-fellowship was not only socially binding as regards the men who took part in the meal, but also binding towards God. The Pharisees regarded this aspect so stringently that they refused to eat with Gentiles and even with the bulk of the Jewish population as well, whom they suspected of not

observing the tithing rules on even the most insignificant food items (Banks 1975 : 108).

Within orthodox Judaism table-fellowship also had to do with honour - who one invited and how they were received. That Jesus had no hesitation in eating with outcasts indicated that his fellowship with God extended beyond the requirements of ritual purity. It indicated that, in the eyes of God, every individual had merit and should be treated with dignity (Bornkamm 1969:80-1).

Meals in the Qumran community were strictly regulated as part of the purity observances of the Yahad, and could only be participated in after a probationary period and a purification process (Riches 1980 : 105). The Qumran meals also observed a hierarchy system which strictly regulated inter-personal contact. The meals which Jesus attended were open to those usually regarded as morally or ritually impure, in an atmosphere of acceptance and love (Mk.2 : 15-17). God is present in the every-day affairs of his people, regardless of their "purity" or otherwise.

In his healing mission, also, Jesus seems to have been indifferent to the purity segregations and fear of physical contact which were commonly accepted at the time. He healed lepers (eg. Mark 1:41) which entailed touching them, from which a serious degree of impurity could be transferred. He also risked defilement by coming into contact with someone presumed dead (Mk. 5 :35-42).

His compassionate caring for those in need overruled cultic purity prescriptions (Booth 1986 : 112).

Among the disadvantaged with whom Jesus came into contact were women. The woman with the flow of blood (Mk.5 : 25-34) was ritually impure and therefore untouchable, yet Jesus treated her with compassion and dignity. In his dealing with the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk.7 :24-30), although apparently at first somewhat hostile to her, Jesus was willing to enter into discussion with her and then granted her request. While eating at the house of Simon the Leper (Mk.14 :3-9) Jesus was anointed by a woman (whom Luke refers to as a sinner, Lk.7 :36-38). In the face of condemnation by others, Jesus graciously accepted her gesture and her gift.

The sympathetic approach of Jesus to women, and his willingness to overturn what were the accepted norms of their position within his particular society, opens the way for a similar openness, particularly within the South African context, where many women are still marginalized and considered to be of lesser worth.

Although the preaching of Jesus was largely to the poor, his message to those better-off was unambiguous. He accused them of the idolatrous worship of money (Matt.6:24) and of hypocrisy (Matt.23:5-7). They perpetuated social evils by burdens imposed and omitted to offer any help (Matt.23:4) (Nolan 1988 : 37-41).

4.3. NEW PERCEPTIONS OF GOD

At the time of Jesus there was debate around the traditional Wisdom perceptions about God's justice and judgment. The belief that the good would prosper, both materially and spiritually, and that the wicked would suffer punishment, had come under scrutiny, as obviously many of the "wicked" were flourishing in this earthly life. Therefore the proposition that, if one prospered, one was virtuous and vice versa, had been questioned by, for instance, Qohelet and the Book of Job. However, whether judgment and retribution was to take place in this world or the next, salvation would be restricted to the righteous. It was against this background that Jesus preached his beliefs about God's mercy and forgiveness for all who repented. The image presented was of a loving Father, who cares individually for all his children (eg. Matt. 7:7-11) (Riches 1980 : 146-7).

Jesus taught that God is not only Father of the pious. His mercy is especially directed towards the lost and the fallen. This is dramatically shown in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15 :11-32). The son chooses to leave his father for his own selfish reasons, but in time of trouble returns to him. Instead of reproach he receives a compassionate welcome, which sets no conditions for reacceptance (Bornkamm 1969 : 127-8).

The meaning of "Father" was no longer confined to God's adoption of Israel as God's exclusive children, but was now extended to all who turn to him in love and faith. It is only those who deliberately turn from him by embracing evil who will be excluded (eg. Matt.6:33). God requires repentance, not ritual alone. Doing the will of God becomes more important than following the strict provisions of Torah and oral law, which, by their requirements of literacy and favourable economic situation, automatically consigned many of the ordinary people to the category of "sinners and those outside the Law". As demonstrated by the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt.20 :1-16) God's providence is not determined by human standards of fairness or entitlement, but by his mercy (Riches : 1980 : 152-3).

Seeing God as Father does not, however, undermine the majesty of God nor the need for reverence. The Lord's Prayer embodies both concepts. Also God demands accountability, eg. Matt.10:33 : "But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Bornkamm 1969 : 128).

God's overcoming of evil in the world will be achieved by his healing power directed to the poor and suffering. His forgiveness should be replicated by the behaviour of his children towards others. The nature of the struggle

against wickedness has changed from warfare and destruction to forgiveness and reconciliation, which would happen on a daily basis in the world. The purity which will allow one to be worthy to approach God derives from morality and a loving, penitent attitude.

The implication is that God is available to his people at all times and in all places. Access is no longer only at specified "holy" times and in the Temple and synagogue, but God is aware at all times of the needs of his people and he will answer their sincere prayer (Matt.6 : 7-14).

While, in the Torah and the teaching of the Rabbis, the association between God and humanity had a contractual slant, in the teaching of Jesus there would be a personal relationship, like that of Father and child. What is required is that the child should do the will of the Father, not in a ritualistic, prescribed way, but motivated by a loving relationship (Riches 1980 : 152). The graciousness of God extends even to the least of the "little ones" who accept his love.

Jesus, by his words and actions, offered an ideological change in perceptions about the nature of God. He presented a God of all-embracing love, accessible to his children and concerned for their welfare, physical as well as spiritual.

4.4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' MINISTRY

Y. Talmon (as referred to by Riches 1980 : 186-187) distinguishes between a leader's function in initiating social change and symbolizing it. A leader may function after death as a "symbolic focus of attention". Jesus exercised a prophetic role during his life in preaching the Kingdom of God, with a new and different emphasis, as well as by his healing, exorcising and socializing ministry. He initiated a social change and a new perception, which challenged the prevailing preconceptions of Judaism. Jesus shared the lot of the poor and identified with them. He sympathised with those who suffered under the political, social and religious hierarchical system of his time. He preached a difficult way, of forgiving love. He thus symbolized a new way forward, which would not end with his death and resurrection.

"The prophet is the lens in that the interest of the group does not or should not simply stop with him but should itself be directed on past him to the goals and fulfilment which he already embodies" (Riches 1980 :187).

The transformation which Jesus inaugurated, both in the social sphere of the time and in the mind-set of the people, is not forever embedded in that time-frame,

but should move forward to address the concerns of our present context.

The confrontation of Jesus with the purity system, and his rejection of it, metaphorically represents a condemnation of much that was wrong, religiously, socially and politically, with Israel at that time (and for which parallels are readily visible today).

1. There was a rejection of social, institutionalized violence, whether physical or psychological, perpetrated by the occupying forces and by the religious hierarchy. Such a system prevented individuals from taking their place in society on an equal footing, socio-economically and religiously.
2. There was a condemnation of the hypocrisy by which the privileged purported to carry out the will of God, while in actuality causing distress to the less-privileged.
3. There was rejection of a system of division and alienation which undermined the dignity of certain sections of the population, by categorizing them by human standards, which were contrary to the will of God, as reflected by Jesus.

4. There was criticism of a society where worldly wealth and position were the criteria of success, and where there was an uneven distribution of the goods entrusted by God.

5. There was the possibility of a re-evaluation of the depressed social status of women.

6. There was an obligation placed on all the followers of Jesus to carry forward into each new situation the principles of his ministry of compassionate care for one's neighbours in the light of a personal relationship with a loving and forgiving Father.

7. There was a call to reconsider the existing ideology so as to be open to other possible viewpoints.

SECTION FOUR

SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS “PURITY SYSTEMS”

5. SECTION FOUR : SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS "PURITY SYSTEMS"

In the preaching of Jesus and in his praxis of healing and social engagement, he brought "good news". In his particular context this actively related to the prevailing system of purity regulations, specific to Second Temple Judaism (as the system had developed over a long period).

The "good news" which Jesus brought was welcomed by those people who were suffering from poverty, social rejection, despondency, loss of dignity and stigmatized forms of illness. The ministry of Jesus brought hope to them by freeing them from the particular fears and alienation which they encountered within the entrenched socio-political structures of that time. To those who had been relegated to the fringes of society, Jesus gave a sense of self-worth. Their importance to God did not depend on their racial purity, their line of descent, their literacy or social and economic circumstances. What made them worthy of love and consideration was their very poverty and deprivation, both physical and spiritual.

Those who benefited from the status quo and who were secure in their comfortable position of social stability did not regard the mission of Jesus as "good news", nor were they prepared to accept his interpretation of

the will of God.

Obviously our situation today, religiously, socially and politically, is different from that of Second Temple Judaism. If the message of Jesus is to have any relevance in South Africa today, it will be necessary metaphorically to identify our "purity systems" and confront them in such a way that their overthrow constitutes "good news". Nolan (1988 : 8) refers to this process as maintaining the "shape" of the gospel of Jesus, while changing the "content" to meet present needs.

Our recent history has provided sufficient evidence of the evil of structures in society (including certain church institutions) which deprived individuals of their dignity, prevented equal opportunities to earn a living, promoted poverty and the break-up of family units and pursued a policy of exclusivity and separation. Although such an institutionalized control system has officially been altered, there is still ample evidence that the Church, in particular, has much to do to meet the criteria set by Jesus for the institution of the Kingdom of God and the recognition of the true Fatherhood of God within South African society.

Jesus attempted to alter the ideological misapprehensions which were held by the religious

hierarchy. They, either deliberately or unthinkingly, perpetuated the purity system which was to them symbolic of a stable and God-fearing society, but which to Jesus was a significant cause of oppression.

A metaphorical interpretation of the teaching of Jesus has the potential to bring the "good news" into the total context of current needs. If attention is concentrated purely on an historical reading of the Scriptures, the distance in time and social and geographical situation has the tendency to insulate modern readers from the urgency and immediacy of the message, particularly of Jesus. The "revolutionary" requirements of Jesus indicated both the temporal and spiritual changes needed to inaugurate the Kingdom of Heaven in his particular circumstances.

Metaphorically, although not necessarily literally, we have the same deficiencies, materially and spiritually, in the South African context today. Attempts to advance the Kingdom of Heaven here and now should be appropriate for our total society, ranging from rural poverty to urban technological affluence.

Although conducted prior to the 1994 elections, the research of Graham Philpott (1993 :45-47) has provided an important insight into the response of a Bible study group in an informal settlement at Amawoti (near Durban), particularly to the concept of the Kingdom of God, and the nature of God. The people involved are materially poor and deprived and, at the time of the study, severely politically exploited and discriminated against by the "purity system" of segregation. The community voiced suspicion of the established churches as being often unwilling to become totally involved with the entire spectrum of the everyday life of the people, as well as being too spiritual.

"The spirit of God is important to them and there are lots of Bibles and preaching. This church is also chained, but they have put their own chain around themselves, separating themselves from the community. They need to go out and work with people."

(Bible Study No.8 : 16.2.90) (Philpott 1993 :69).

The work of Philpott (1993 : 14) reflects "the emergence of new symbols and the re-interpretation of old symbols". The Kingdom of God is now referred to as the "kin-dom", representing the sense in which the participants became involved with one another during the Bible study sessions.

The group was able to identify with Jesus in the poverty of his birth and his ministry to the underprivileged, as well as his involvement in all aspects of the life of those he sought to liberate from religious and political oppression (Philpott 1993 : 49-51).

From its own context the group identified various types of poverty, including inferior or no education and no opportunities for good jobs, all being basically the results of exploitation. They acknowledged the Fatherhood of God in providing "daily bread" but put their own lack of it down to "other people have got in the way. The rich can buy a deep-freeze and store up our daily bread" (Philpott 1993 : 57).

However, the group also identified those who are "poor on the side of God", that is in a bad spiritual relationship with God, which Jesus can rectify with his "good news" (Philpott 1993 : 58). This "good news" is not only for the poor, but also for the rich, who will benefit by substituting love for many material possessions, thus also opening the way for good personal relationships

between diverse groups (Philpott 1993 : 61).

After discussion on the whereabouts of the Kingdom of Heaven, the group came to the conclusion that God was present in the community in its suffering, this being the initial stages of the coming of his Kingdom, which would be fully realized when sin was finally overcome. However, God's power is seen to be actively at work within the community ("God is busy doing his work") and it will be assisted by the efforts of people who "must work together to shape and create it" (Philpott 1993 : 74-76).

The power of God is seen in direct contrast to the abusive power of structures of society which oppress and manipulate. The power of God is that which changes for the better the total life-situation of those who are suffering, operating through human agency. The responsibility needs to be accepted (Bible study 13 : 20.9.91) (Philpott 1993 : 99-101).

The perception that God is present in the community, and that his Kingdom may be at least partially realized in the present situation, led the community to take communal action in the form of, for instance, an Easter march, as affirmation of faith, and also in practical aid programmes instituted by the community itself. There was thus a perception of a liberating force at work, through Jesus Christ, which challenged those oppressive structures under which the people suffered. The "good news" gave new life

from God but also a realization that human endeavour is needed to hasten the final coming of the Kingdom (Philpott 1993 : 110-123).

This community re-assessed its conception of power as a negative force and, by discussion and in relation to its own context, redefined the power of God as a liberating force. They then translated the new perception into action, which harnessed the power available to them to make an active social contribution.

Many Church communities in South Africa, both in the disadvantaged and more affluent sections of society, do take seriously and actively the issues raised by Jesus against factors which impede the growth of God's Kingdom. However, there are many which take the more Pharisaic stance. Rather than risking engagement with "undesirable" elements within society, it is considered more prudent to retire into what has been termed "holy huddles", where a pietistic, individualistic, relationship with God is sought. A traditional liturgy and Bible interpretation is followed, and any innovation in either the form of service, the composition of the clergy (especially in regard to women priests or pastors), or the make-up of the congregation, is strenuously resisted. There is the danger of an empty ritual which is an end in itself.

The Gospel is embedded safely in a romanticized setting, with little appreciation of the dynamic urgency of the teaching and practice of Jesus and its impact then and now. Nolan (1988 : 58) says : "the Christian Churches have tamed and domesticated the cross". Religion has often become sentimentalized, as a refuge from the unpleasant aspects of life, rather than a call to confront them. In one of the Bible studies (No.2 : 15.11.91) conducted by Philpott (1993 : 48) it is said: "In the churches today the manger is made very beautiful - the rich do not want to remember that Jesus was poor". In an earlier study the group described the stable as : "It's smelly - because it's full of cow dung. It is a horrible place and very dirty".

Jesus demanded a decision to join him in defying the purity system, which symbolized a blocking of the coming of God's true Kingdom, and which showed a culpable blindness to the sufferings of the vast majority. Nolan (1988 : 41) points to the seriousness of the sin of omission, which, because of apathy and indifference, causes one to avoid an issue which "is not my business". There is an obligation for the Christian church to take seriously the responsibility to confront unjust social structures, to speak out against graft and corruption, to distance itself from the lowering of moral standards (popularly called a "modern outlook"), and to re-assess

the criterion of worldly wealth as a sign of worth. In South African society there is particularly the need to defend the dignity and rights of women and children, which appear to be increasingly neglected, even within the Church. Sibeko & Haddad (as referred to by West 1999 : 162-3) describe the position of women in an African Independent Church, who, during menstruation, may not receive the laying on of hands by the male leadership nor wear their church uniforms. This situation is based on Mk.5: 21 to 6:1, which records Jesus having lost power by touching a bleeding woman. By the male preconceptions in reading this passage the women in question are made to feel degraded. The women who studied the passage, on the other hand, admired the courage and independence of the woman in the story, and gained confidence from her initiative.

Reading and interpreting Scripture should be tested in the light of the criteria of Jesus Christ, with a conscious examination of one's personal prejudice and bias.

There are, however, far more serious concerns with regard to maltreatment of women and children, such as rape, incest, AIDS transmission and lack of proper medical treatment, to name but a few. Many women and children in South Africa now are suffering from an inferior social position and from both domestic and social abuse,

these being issues which Jesus confronted in his ministry.

Jesus, by his opposition to social and spiritual aridity, showed the way to a new dispensation, but its implementation is an ongoing challenge to his followers in each new era and social circumstance.

CONCLUSION

6. CONCLUSION

The purity laws, as they affected life in Second Temple Judaism, had evolved from a sincere desire to achieve a "cleanness" which would be worthy of the holiness of God. God's holy people should be separate from all that could defeat that purpose by exposing them to evil.

Because of a range of socio-political and historical circumstances, and by human frailty, these laws had become debased, so that their original purpose, of bringing people closer to God, had in fact been distorted, causing instead the separation and denigration of a large section of the population.

Jesus produced what was considered to be a totally revolutionary new insight, which challenged the existing ideologies in the Judaism of his time. His mission was directed to those who had been degraded and despised, those who were ill or grieving, and to all who were spiritually alienated from God, including the materially rich.

In his preaching and practice Jesus confronted the purity laws, which were symbolic of many of the religious and social injustices of society at that time.

In his reinterpreted ideology, a true love of God would result not in empty ritualistic observances and exclusivist practices, but in a care for fellow humanity, with the acknowledgment of individual worth and importance to God.

Mk.7:1-23 encapsulates the difference between the teaching of Jesus and that of those who adhered scrupulously to the purity laws. Jesus condemned the hypocrisy and arrogance which attributed to God a set of prescriptions which had the effect of causing hardship, particularly to persons who were already suffering material and spiritual deprivation. Jesus set out to change the perceptions of those in a privileged position, by his example of compassion, in healing and fellowship, and by his reinterpretation of the will of God.

This passage of Scripture and its wider symbolic implications does in fact have relevance for the South African situation today. Our cultural context is, of course, different from that at the time of Jesus. However, a metaphorical awareness when reading Mk.7:1-23 will challenge the modern Christian to confront one's own, possibly flawed, ideologies, and also to become actively involved in rooting out those social, political and

religious structures which cause alienation, degradation and suffering. Thus one engages with the material as well as the spiritual needs of both individuals and society.

The transformation which Jesus began is by no means even approximately complete and needs to be carried forward by his followers in a manner appropriate to the needs of today.

In his ministry Jesus brought a spiritual empowerment to those with whom he came into contact, but this was not confined to an apocalyptic End Time release from suffering. He addressed the temporal conditions of his time, and was concerned with the present alleviation of injustices in the total cultural environment of his particular context.

The challenge for Christians in present-day South Africa is to take an active role in promoting both spiritual and material well-being within society, in all its diverse ramifications. By appreciating the dynamic confrontation between Jesus, on the one hand, and the restrictive and spiritually-deadening effects of the purity system, on the other hand, the Church could be revitalized in areas where it has become complacent and introverted.

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