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Leviticus: An Affirmation of Faith

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Christian medical doctors are gaining mature resolution of their relationship with God in the light of changes in the Church that can only lead to more spiritual growth and better medical practice.

The spoken theme of the weekend was the intellectual spiritual renewal of our faith. The unspoken theme of the weekend was Theology and Science Make Friends, post Teilhard de Chardin. By stimulating discussion of religious issues in such a setting it was hoped renewal would occur. The consensus of opinion afterward was that it had. The setting was quite worldy — no religious paintings, statues or other similar embellishments. Much discussion of spiritual material occurred between doctors and wives in the absence of the weekend spiritual leader (in small groups). Although the meetings were opened and closed with prayer, meditations were carried out privately rather than as a group.

The theme of "theology and science make friends" implies the added stimulus of Teilhard de Chardin to this subject. De Chardin wrote that more research is needed, and that science and theology are friends who respect each other. The local Bishop John Carberry approved the weekend in good faith, as an evidence of a growing mutual respect. The Sunday Mass was held in a small chapel at the nearby Pontifical College. Father McNamara offered the Mass, and gave an excellent interpretation of it in keeping with our intellectual spiritual theme.

In conclusion, our participating members have voiced a desire for a similar program next year; they were so stirred by this initial experience. It certainly falls within the direction of Popes John and Paul, as well as the Ecumenical Council documents, for Catholics to engage in that sincere dialogue which knows how to listen humbly as well as how to speak candidly.

Leviticus: An Affirmation of Faith

WILLIAM SCHWARTZ, M.D., F.A.C.A.

PART I

When Moses led the children of Israel out of bondage during the Exodus, entire communities were wiped out by plagues attributed to the ire of vengeful gods by the Egyptians, and to the punitive power of Diety by the Israelites. No thought was given to improper public sanitation. The combination of warm climate and fecal contamination made the water and soil excellent culture media for pathogenic bacterial growth. The spread of parasitic intestinal disease due to pin, round, hookworm and a host of other allied worms was rampant.

The Priests of the Temple were aware that the consumption of swine, canine, feline and rodent flesh was somehow responsible for an agonizing death by suffocation. Centuries later, the causative organism was identified as the Trichinella Spiralis which inflame the muscles of respiration of its victim's chest. Tapeworm, noted in beef, pork and fish was not associated with the contamination of the soil and water. Intestinal flukes, another form of tropical disease, caused by infected snails, further contaminated the water and added to the plagues of death.

LEVITICAL LAW

Leviticus is a canonical book of the Old Testament which relates to the Priests and Levites among the Jews, or the body of the ceremonial laws. One section of Levitical Law prohibits the eating of any animal that does not have divided hooves or chews its cud; fish that have neither fins nor scales yet live or move in the waters; all birds of prey and any mammal that flies; any animal that creeps upon the earth on all fours, like a weasel, mouse, crocodile or lizard shall be an abomination.

Although the sacrificial offerings have been abandoned since the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish dietary laws of abstinence of certain foods and animals selected for slaughter continue in the same manner. The ritual slaughterer (Schochet) must be a religious and God fearing Jew. The animal selected for food must be in good health and without blemish. The death of the animal must be painless and swift. Blood must not be allowed to coagulate in the arteries or veins. The Schochet, trained in gross anatomy and pathology, must examine the carcass, the lungs, large organs, the glands and viscera for any evidence of disease. Finally, the housewife soaks the meat in water and then salts it to remove any vestigial remains of blood or lymph. The procedure of the religious inspection is now augmented by microscopic and other laboratory examinations of the animal by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. However, in spite of all vigilance, pork should be cooked and maintained at a high tempera-
One method of controlling outbreaks contaminated pork is consumed, the cycle of trichinosis repeats itself. When the unsuspected contaminated pork is consumed, the cycle of trichinosis repeats itself. Oysters in Season displayed warm summer months. April, can be nostalgically recalled the sale of shellfish during the signing of the letter “R,” September to poisoning years ago, was to restrict the trade to destroy any remaining encysted larvae of Trichinella Spiralis, otherwise when the unsuspected contaminated pork is consumed, the cycle of trichinosis repeats itself. One method of controlling outbreaks of typhoid, dysentery and ptomaine poisoning years ago, was to restrict the sale of shellfish during the warm summer months. The signs “Oysters R in Season” displayed during the colder months, containing the letter “R,” September to April, can be nostalgically recalled by those of another generation. However, with adequate refrigeration and supervision by the Department of Fisheries prohibiting the raising and harvesting of shellfish in polluted waters, these outbreaks are reduced to a minimum.

ABROGATION OF LEVITICAL LAW?
Did not Jesus abrogate these ancient Levitical Laws? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said these meaningful words: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.” Matthew 5:17 (KJV). Did not Jesus abrogate these ancient Levitical practices in country with moderate climates, the adherence of these health rules are just pertinent now in Semitic areas and are practiced as a religious rite by Moslems as well as Maimonite Catholics.

Is it conceivable that Jesus the Healer would advise the people of the new Israel to eat the forbidden pork and contaminated shell fish with the risk of trichinosis, dysentery, plague and death? The ancient Levitical dietary laws are based upon the ancient Levitical practices in countries with moderate climates, the adherence of these health rules are just pertinent now in Semitic areas and are practiced as a religious rite by Moslems as well as Maimonite Catholics.

Was not Jesus the Savior of the world, the Son of the living God, the Messiah who said, “Therefore I despise not myself: for I please God”? Philippians 2:8. Was not Jesus the Son of God? God himself, bless our Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who was betrayed by the false witness of a servant, and crucified and presently killed and buried and rose from the dead and descended into hell, and is now at the right hand of God, with him, now living to make intercession for us. Let all holy and righteous persons, the Church of the Elect, give him thanks, and praise him, worship and adore him, beseeching him, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver them and all the Elect from all evil, and preserve them evermore in the possession of the kingdom of God. Amen.

1: To exercise the people in obedience and temperance. 2: To restrain them from the vices of which these animals are symbols. 3: Because the things forbidden were unholy and not proper to be eaten. 4: The people of God, being obliged to abstain from things corporally unclean, might be trained to seek spiritual cleanliness. Verse 3: “hoof divided and cheweth the cud,” signify discretion between good and evil and meditating on the law of God; when either of these is wanting, a man is unclean. In like manner, fishes with no fins and scales were reputed unclean, that is fish that did not raise themselves up by prayer and cover themselves with the scales of virtue. 5: The Hebrew commentary challenges any bankrupt Hebrew reasoning. Like its legal counterpart the diabolic initiator of original sin, the serpent that tempted Eve, the diabolic initiator of original sin, the Levitical abomination, unfit for human consumption, offered as a sacrificial oblation to the Lord!

Conclusion
What meaningful words of inspiration and wisdom from the Catholic to the Jew! These are valid spiritual reasons for the continuation of the Levitical laws for the faltering Jew. The Catholic commentary challenges any bankrupt Hebrew reasoning. Like its legal counterpart in civil law, Chapter II allows a floundering business near the brink of bankruptcy to reorganize and restore its financial integrity without closing its doors, so Chapter II of Leviticus can revitalize spiritually the faltering Catholic, Moslem or Jew.

Since there is no valid reason for the modern Jew to observe the Levitical dietary laws as a health measure, they are primarily observed as a religious rite to promote abstinence, self discipline and obedience in order to attain spiritual grace. Eating is a good and necessary act, but habitually to eat is excess to misuse this tendency implanted in us by God. To our Catholic brethren, the sin of gluttony will similarly lead to the path of religious neglect, intemperance, dullness of the mind, strife, the ruining of health and to premature death.

PART II
While studying the Douay text of Leviticus, I was surprised to find two apparently glaring errors in Chapter 12, Verses 6 and 8. This chapter is concerned with the purification of women after childbirth and the Hebrew version traditionally specifies that an animal, such as a lamb, turtle-dove or a young pigeon without blemish, may be an acceptable sacrificial offering to the Lord.

Verse 6 in the Douay text states, “she shall bring a lamb for a holocaust, and a young pigeon or a turtle for sin, to the priest,” while Verse 8 states, “she shall take two turtle-doves or two pigeons.” What blasphemy to the Orthodox Hebrew! A creeping turtle, a reptile, like the serpent that tempted Eve, the diabolic initiator of original sin, a Levitical abomination, unfit for human consumption, offered as a sacrificial oblation to the Lord! Surely this must be a printer’s error, missed in the galley proof, an isolated mistake; but the word turtle seemed to creep into seven other passages referring to the sacrificial offering of the poor in Leviticus, in chapters one—v. 14; five—v. 7 and
11; fourteen—v. 22 and 30, and finally chapter fifteen—v. 14 and 29.

I then turned to the notes of a Greek physician, according to the Gospel of St. Luke, regarding the offering presented by St. Joseph in behalf of the Blessed Mother after the birth of Jesus. He wrote, "and after the days of her purification, they carried him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, and offer a sacrifice, in the law of God, a pair of turtle doves or two pigeons," certainly not a reptile to desecrate the Holy Tabernacle.

Had I found nine errors in the Holy Catholic Scriptures? I asked a few priests to explain the discrepancy of the Gospel of St. Luke and that of Leviticus, but they seemed too prudent or aloof to discuss a theological question with an uninformed layman. I then studied the Masoretic text of Leviticus chapter 14, verse 30, and the passage read, "and he shall offer one of the 'torr jona,'" Hebrew for turtle dove, "or of the young pigeons, such as his means suffice for."

The German version of the same text from Die Heilige Schrift des Alten das Neuen Bundes reads: "Dann richtete er von dem Tur­ teltauben oder Tauben, die er sich leisten kann," Turteltauben is the turtle-dove, Tauben—a pigeon, whereas die Schildkröte, a turtle has both a different meaning and another root origin.

In the Holy Scriptures, after the Vulgate, the passage reads: "et turturern sive pullem columbae offeret." Turturern is the Latin for turtle-dove, testudo, the Latin for turtle, was not in evidence in any text.

I triumphantly pointed out the "nine errors" to a patient of mine, a Dominican religious. Who had this good sister to say about these apparent untruthful allegations in the Holy Book of Truth? I ask, what explanation could she give, except that her faith could not let her question the sanctity of an Imprimatur. The following is the words of a dedicated science teacher, Sister Mary Benedict, O. F. M., who taught many years at the Dominican Academy in Fall River, Mass.

"The Douay version of the Holy Scriptures was placed in my hands, opened at Leviticus which read that a turtle could be a sacrificial offering of the poor. Now what is a turtle I asked myself? Biologically, it is a reptile, a creeping animal, unfit for sacrificial offering. According to nomenclature, I had admit this, but my reverence and my faith in the word of God could not accept it. My aim, because of the significant difference of the turtle and the turtle-dove as the proper choice of a sacrificial offering in the Douay Bible, was to consult other language versions of the Bible.

"In the Bible of Jerusalem so rich in connotations, the same translation of the Aramic for turtle was found.

"The French version from the Vulgate, the passage reads: "l'offrir aussi une tourterelle, ou le petit d'une colombe." There is a significant distinction between tourterelle for the turtle-dove and tortue, a turtle, the creeping vertebrate, symbolically in the same category as the serpent, attributed to the downfall of man in the Garden of Eden.

"Then realizing that the Bible was not meant to teach science, but religious truth, I asked to be given time to meditate and reflect. I then consulted Webster's Dictionary and here found the answer.

TURTLE: from the French tortue, altered after turtle-dove, from the Latin tutur, (dove) a turtle dove (Archaic)

1—Any of a large and widely distributed group of land, fresh and salt water reptiles of the Chelonia or the Testudinata.

2—The curved detachable part of the cylinder which hold the plates in a printing press.

3—Applied to a person as a term of endearment, especially to lovers or married folk, in allusion to the turtle-dove's affection for its mate.

"Had my emotions been less stirred, I perhaps would have found an analogy in the Latin tutur, turtle-dove which is indeed a becoming sacrificial offering of the poor, the offering chosen by St. Joseph, as a symbol of the Holy Spirit for the Blessed Mother on her day of purification. It was my great satisfaction to be able to obliterare doubt from the mind of Dr. Schwartz, what was for him and any other doubter a possible sign of error; besides it was a re-affirmation of my profound respect and belief in the Words of God as expressed in Holy Scripture."

REFERENCES


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