Forgotten Dimensions of Holiness

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Abstract
This article explores a sometimes forgotten dimension of divine holiness, divine holiness as love. It starts by reflecting on an apparent incongruity between the New Testament summary of the law, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev 19:18) and that verse’s context in Leviticus, where a more probable summary is the call, “Be holy for I, YHWH your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2). It examines the significance of the conjunction of Lev 19:2 and 19:18, and argues that it is appropriate to speak of love as a dimension of divine holiness. In the main part of the article, which looks at the Old Testament more widely, including Exodus, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Hosea and the prayer life of Israel, divine holiness as love is evident on closer examination in three ways: holiness and self-disclosure, holiness and saving activity, and holiness and divine presence.

Keywords
Holy, holiness, love, Old Testament, salvation, revelation

Introduction

Matthew 22:36-39 and summarising the law

On one occasion, a lawyer confronted Jesus with a question: “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus famously replied: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt 22:36-40; cf. Mark 12:31).

This article gives some reflections that arise from Jesus’ decision to summarise the law with the second of these commandments, “You shall love
your neighbour as yourself.”1 This reading of the law is found elsewhere in the New Testament, in some cases, but not all, possibly deriving from Jesus. With the roles of questioner and responder reversed, it is the way in which a lawyer answered when Jesus questioned him (Luke 10:25-28). In Galatians 5:14, the apostle Paul writes that “the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’” A similar picture emerges in the epistle of James, where James writes, “You do well if you really fulfil the royal law (νόμον . . . βασιλικὸν) according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’” (James 2:8).

Leviticus and the NT summary

We are so familiar with this answer that we might miss an incongruity about it. The commandment that encapsulates (cf. ἀνακεφαλαιοῦται; Rom 13:9) the whole law is deeply embedded in the middle of Leviticus, in Leviticus 19:18. It is unlikely that the first readers of Leviticus would have said that the slogan for Leviticus as a whole is “Love your neighbour as yourself,” despite Balentine declaring categorically that Leviticus 19:17-18 is the “epicenter” of Leviticus, and Radday proclaiming that Leviticus 19:18 is “the summit of the entire Torah.”2

The speech in which this command is tucked away, if I can put it like that, has as its opening call, אֲהֵיכָם יהוה אני קדושׁ כי תהיי קדשׁ . “Be holy, for I, YHWH your God, am holy.” It is this phrase that would have a strong claim to be the slogan for the book as a whole. Cothey summarises this well: “If we take Leviticus itself as our guide, then the book’s concerns are unified by YHWH’s demand that Israel be holy. The command to be holy features as some sort of explanation of the need to avoid unclean animals (11.44); it prefaces a detailed but varied list of cultic and ethical obligations (19.2); and it rounds off (at 20.26) YHWH’s explanation

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1) An earlier version of this paper was read at the Tyndale Fellowship Old Testament Seminar and at the Oak Hill Graduate Seminar. I am grateful for all comments received.

of the respects in which ‘You shall not follow the practices of the nations that I am driving out before you (20:23).’”

There are a number of reasons why Jesus’ basing of the summary of the law on Leviticus 19:18 makes sense. First, it stands in continuity with sentiments expressed within the Judaism of Jesus’ day. Although there is some discontinuity, seen in the fact that the conjunction of quotations from Deut 6:4-5 and Lev 19:18b is something new, yet the fact that a lawyer trying to test Jesus makes the same conjunction warns against too sharp a distinction.

Secondly, there is the common call in both summary commandments to “love” (והבת ха; ἀγαπήσεις). Given the pivotal importance of the Shema, it should not be surprising that essentially the only other command to “love” in the Torah comes to be related to it as a hermeneutical key to unlock or summarise the law. The import of this commonality in the two calls is most obviously evident in the lawyer’s summary in Luke, where the command ἀγαπήσεις only occurs once (Luke 10:27).

Thirdly, there is a relationship between this summary of the law and the Decalogue. That Jesus recognises a strong link between them is clear from Matt 19:18-19. There, Jesus quotes from the Decalogue, “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother,” and then rounds off his quotation by adding these words from Lev 19:18b, “also, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” That same connection to the Decalogue is also evident in Paul’s letter to the Romans (13:8-10).

4) For which, see Reinhard Neudecker, “‘And You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself—I Am the Lord’ (Lev 19,18) in Jewish Interpretation,” Bib 73 (1992): 496-517. R.T. France (The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text [NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002], 477) observes, “The use of Lv. 19:18b in this connection is paralleled by R. Akiba’s statement that this text is ‘a great principle (k’lāl) in the Torah’ (Sipra Lv. 19:18).”
6) The command for people to “love” (הבת ха) occurs in the Torah in five places: Lev 19:18, 34; Deut 6:5; 10:19; 11:1. The references in Leviticus relate to neighbour (יְדֵי; 19:18) and then to resident alien (גֵּר; 19:34). Those in Deuteronomy relate to loving YHWH (6:5; 11:1; 2nd masc. sg.) and loving the resident alien (גֵּר; 10:19; 2nd masc. plur.).
Alongside the summarising of the Torah with Leviticus 19:18, the possibility of summarising the Decalogue, and, beyond that, the Torah, in terms echoing the injunction to “Be holy” should not be overlooked. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhorts his disciples, “Be perfect (τέλειοι), therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48), and Peter urges the scattered exiles, “Be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:15-16).

Given the fact that these two summaries are grounded in Leviticus 19, and if it be granted that “Be holy, for I, YHWH your God, am holy” serves as the heading for Leviticus 19, a conclusion supported by the repeated refrains, יְהוָה יָמֵנִי or אלהים יָמֵנִי, I want to ask the question of holiness, “What’s love got to do with it?”

Thinking about Holiness and Love: Some Challenges

There are a number of possible angles from which to approach such a question. Rather than look at the shape of human holiness, and what is entailed by the command to Israel to “Be holy,” I want to look at the shape of divine holiness, as revealed by the command to “Love your neighbour as yourself,” given that the call for Israel to be holy is grounded by the phrase, כי יִהְיֶה אלהים יָמֵנִי “for I, YHWH your God, am holy.” To put it another way, if “love your neighbour” is an expression of human holiness, and human holiness is analogous to divine holiness, then we would expect to find YHWH’s love to be an expression of his holiness. The “if,” though, is a big “if.” Within this straightforward syllogism there are some significant issues. The next part of the article will explore two of these issues: the complexity of the subject of holiness and the disputed ground of how analogous are human and divine holiness. In the bulk of the article, I shall turn to places where YHWH’s love is indeed an expression of his holiness.

7) Cf. Deut 18:13, “Be blameless (תמים, MT; τέλειος, LXX).”
9) With apologies to Tina Turner.
To discuss holiness is to enter a territory that is immensely complex and contested for a number of reasons. First, holiness is never actually defined in the Old Testament, nor does it have an “analogue” in any other part of Israelite experience. Instead, the root קדשׁ (and its cognates and antonyms) is embedded in narrative and law, speech and psalm, and we are left to infer what is meant by it. Secondly, the concept of holiness varies somewhat between different corpora in the Old Testament. In his monograph, Holiness in Israel, Gammie, although discerning in the call to holiness a common call to “cleanness” or “purity,” distinguishes between the content of this call in priests, prophets and sages: “the kind of cleanness required by holiness varied. For the prophets it was a cleanness of social justice, for the priests a cleanness of proper ritual and maintenance of separation, for the sages it was a cleanness of inner integrity and individual moral acts.” Thirdly, holiness is a fluid term in contemporary use. Fourthly, the territory is complex because it has been extensively scrutinised. It was the centre of the Old Testament theologies of Dillman, Hänel, and Sellin at the end of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth century, before having a centre became unpopular. It has also been the (or a major) subject

of Old Testament,14 New Testament,15 and biblical-theological monographs.16 Holiness has also been the subject of wide-ranging discussion from a phenomenological / psycho-religious / comparative religions viewpoint, with Rudolf Otto’s The Idea of the Holy seminal in this regard,17 and from an anthropological viewpoint, with Mary Douglas’s Purity and Danger a highly influential work.18 Given such complexity, to enter the fray here is to leave many ends untied. This is compounded by the considerable literature on Leviticus 19, in general, and Leviticus 19:18 in particular.19

How analogous are divine and human holiness? The precise significance of the conjunction of Lev 19:2 and 19:18b

Although it is hardly controversial to say that loving one’s neighbour is an expression of human holiness,20 there is a potential objection to the move

15) E.g. Craig L. Blomberg, Contagious Holiness: Jesus’ Meals with Sinners (NSBT; Leicester: Apollos, 2005).
16) E.g. Jo Bailey Wells, God’s Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology (JSOTSup 305; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Coppedge, Portraits of God.
to reflect on YHWH's holiness from the conjunction of the call to be holy as YHWH is holy and the call to neighbour-love. This objection centres around the nature and expression of divine holiness and how that relates to the nature and expression of human holiness. The command at the head of Leviticus 19 seems to mandate, *prima facie*, the imitation of God, *imitatio Dei*, yet many of the commands in Leviticus 19 can hardly be predicated of YHWH in the same way as they are predicated of Israel. Just as one cannot directly infer anything about YHWH being a child because Israel's imitating YHWH's holiness entails revering father and mother (Lev 19:3), perhaps one cannot infer anything about YHWH's love from the call to Israel to “love your neighbour as yourself.” This is exacerbated by the fact that, as is universally recognised, holiness in the Old Testament is uniquely and properly of YHWH. YHWH alone is holy. Hannah’s song celebrates, “There is no Holy One like YHWH, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God” (1 Sam 2:2; cf. Exod 15:11). YHWH’s name is holy.21 Nothing in creation has intrinsic holiness. Holiness can be given and withdrawn at YHWH’s instigation. In that sense, the holiness that is enjoined to Israel might be related to YHWH’s holiness, but the precise shape be somewhat different. This is precisely what Rodd has argued, in repudiating the notion of *imitatio Dei* as a foundation for Old Testament ethics.22

This problem is intensified further when it is noted that one of the other calls to holiness in Leviticus, in Lev 20:26, reads, “You shall be holy to me; for I, YHWH, am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine.” Houston observes that the context is that of the parallel separation (בֵּית) of Israel and the nations, on the one hand, and of the necessary separation (בֵּית) that the Israelites must make between clean and unclean foods. He comments, “To speak of something being ‘holy’ to a deity is to say that it is dedicated to it, caught up into the divine sphere and strictly separated from what is not, and especially from what is unclean. Holiness...has two dimensions: a vertical one, dedication to the

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deity, and a horizontal one, separation from all else.”

What is in view, then, is “not a moral category but a ritual one.”

In summary, then, there are three main problems with grounding investigations into God’s holiness from the conjunction of “Be holy, for I, YHWH your God, am holy” and “Love your neighbour as yourself.” First, Leviticus 19 contains many injunctions that cannot be predicated of YHWH; secondly, there is a sense in which holiness is inherently and uniquely a property of YHWH alone; thirdly, the holiness that is in view seems to be, from the parallel in Lev 20:26, essentially ritual rather than moral, even if there are moral dimensions.

One of the underlying issues here is that of (religious) language. It has been traditional since Aquinas to speak of God-talk as univocal, equivocal or analogical. By describing the use of a word as univocal, what is meant is “any word or phrase used in the same way on two or more occasions.”

This is the opposite of equivocal: any word or phrase used in more than one sense which bear no relation to each other is used equivocally (an example might be נפש in Ezekiel 20:32 (“mind”) and in Ezekiel 19:12 (“wind”). The third kind of usage is analogical. According to Soskice’s understanding of Aquinas, in her book *Metaphor and Religious Language*, this is a way of talking “between” univocal and equivocal (such as “Tom is happy”; “this song is happy”). Soskice comments that “analogue usage . . . from its inception . . . seems appropriate,” for it is concerned with “stretched uses, not figurative ones.” In her example, if we came across a Martian who could not speak, but arranged its fibres in a particular way such that it could communicate, then we could say, by analogy, that the Martian “told me.”

In reality there is always in the use of a word a component of “like” and a component of “unlike.” “Univocal” and “equivocal” are labels describing ends of an axis, rather than inhabited locations. Usage of words is always

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24) Houston, “Character of YHWH,” 9. Houston acknowledges that it is his, rather than the text’s “distinction,” and he does grant that the “broader context in Leviticus 20” entails “standards of moral conduct.”


analogical, since no two understandings, no two situations are identical. There is, within analogical usage, a spectrum from more nearly univocal to more nearly equivocal. In the call to holiness, there are some ways in which Israel’s holiness will look precisely like YHWH’s. In other ways, Israel’s holiness will look rather unlike YHWH’s, but will still be an appropriate response to YHWH’s holiness. This is strikingly so in Leviticus 19:18. Alongside the call “Love your neighbour” (Lev 19:18b), which, to assume for a moment, is a call to exhibit holiness that is like YHWH’s, comes the command not to take vengeance (Lev 19:18a), a command to exhibit a holiness that is unlike YHWH’s, for vengeance properly belongs to YHWH, not to YHWH’s people. The fact that there are some dissimilarities does not negate the notion of imitatio Dei, at least in some attenuated sense, because there will always be some dissimilarities.

This still leaves open the question as to whether the call, “Love your neighbour as yourself” is, in fact, an instance of Israel’s holiness looking precisely like YHWH’s, or whether it is an instance of Israel’s holiness looking unlike YHWH’s holiness, but still an appropriate response to YHWH’s holiness. To ask this question at all might seem absurd at one
level, because YHWH’s character provides one of the foundations of Old Testament ethics. Yet sometimes the dimension of love has been set almost in opposition to YHWH’s holiness, rather than as an expression of his holiness. The holiness of YHWH is painted as something principally austere, remote, punitive. In Wright’s Anchor Bible Dictionary article on holiness, there is no hint of the holiness of YHWH being manifest in love. In Milgrom’s recent New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible article, although there is an acknowledgement that the commands in Leviticus 19:14-18 “all… emphasize the divine attribute of compassion, essential to God’s holy nature,” it is set within a strong insistence on the primacy of separation in holiness, the sharp distinction between divine and human holiness, and the potentially confusing claim that Israel cannot “even imitate” but should “emulate” YHWH’s holiness. Houston illustrates what I mean when he writes, “To call YHWH holy, who is a deity, expresses both his separateness from the profane world and from the unclean, and his transcendence and unapproachability in himself.”

Working from this basis, “Love your neighbour as yourself” would be a way of Israel distancing itself from its surrounding culture; it would be an expression of its separation (cf. Lev 20:25-26). The imitatio Dei would then have a narrower frame, with Israel’s holiness being like YHWH’s holiness in separation, rather than in love.

32) Although Muller’s outlining of Reformed Orthodoxy articulates the “positive” dimension of divine holiness (esp. p. 502), as well as moral and essential separation, the consequences of divine holiness for God focus only on the punitive dimension (p. 501). See Richard A. Muller, The Divine Essence and Attributes (vol. 3 of Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 497-502.
35) Houston, “Character of YHWH,” 9. Leviticus 19 as a whole is absent from Otto (see Gammie, Holiness, 34), and Lev 19:18, to which one would turn to reflect on the relationship between holiness and love, is absent from the index of Bailey Wells, God’s Holy People. Bailey Wells speaks of the “relational” dimension of holiness as a function of belonging “to Yhwh” (p. 97).
It is clear that there is a dimension of “separation” within holiness (cf., e.g., Lev 20:25-26). Alongside the ritual separation is a moral separation of YHWH and his people. This is perhaps most obvious in two places in Isaiah. In Isaiah 6, confronted with the seraphic threefold cry, “Holy, holy, holy,” Isaiah cries out because he, like the people, has “unclean lips.” Faced with a holiness expressed in terms of moral purity (Isa 5:16), Isaiah is aware of his own moral failings. Later, in Isaiah 65, rebellious Israel, marked by wicked practices says, in its wickedness, “Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you!” (Isa 65:5). But this dimension of “separation” is not an exclusive and exhaustive one.

Holiness and YHWH’s Love

It is my contention that this sense of separation, represented cultically in terms of ritual and sometimes literal separation and ethically in terms of metaphorical moral separation, should not be allowed to override another dimension of YHWH’s holiness, holiness as love. Emphasising the first two gives the impression that YHWH’s holiness is something forbidding, something before which a person cannot stand, something which makes entry in YHWH’s presence inherently impossible. This is partly true, but it is not the whole story.

We have seen how human holiness entails love (Lev 19:2, 18). We have seen how Israel’s holiness can be seen to be analogous to YHWH’s holiness. It is therefore plausible to investigate YHWH’s holiness with the expectation that YHWH’s love will also be found. It needs to be acknowledged at this point that correlation is not the same as causation. Association between two traits or events does not mean that one causes the other. However, I shall argue that the data at points encourages us to move beyond correlation between holiness and love (though even this is significant). YHWH’s love will be seen to be predicated upon or grounded in his holiness.

There are a number of dimensions to YHWH’s holiness as love that may be highlighted. I have chosen to categorise them under three main areas,

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holiness and self-disclosure, holiness and saving activity, and holiness and presence. By adopting a broader perspective, this treatment runs the risk of downplaying some of the differences between conceptions of holiness within various corpora within the Old Testament, even if there does, after all, happen to be some constancy in the meaning of the root. At the same time, this approach does have the benefit of demonstrating the breadth of this perspective.

**Holiness and self-disclosure**

**Exodus**

Foundational to love is the gift of oneself. Self-disclosure is integral to this, and it is striking that it is precisely alongside the revelation of the divine name, הוהי, in Exodus 3, that holiness is associated with God. Although words do not indicate concepts, nonetheless it is striking that the word group at the heart of speaking of holiness (Hebrew root קדשׁ) is almost entirely absent within the canonical flow of the Old Testament until now. The only occurrences are YHWH sanctifying the seventh day (קדשׁ; Gen 2:3) and mention of a shrine prostitute (קדשׁה; Gen 38:21-22). Now, in Exodus 3, at the very moment when Moses is told to come no closer and take off his sandals because the ground is holy (Exod 3:5), YHWH takes the initiative to address Moses. Separation is here (לא תקרב אל; “do not draw near to here”). So too is holiness as something belonging properly to YHWH. As Goldingay observes, “Yhwh’s standing there turns an ordinary place, a place where a man is simply doing his work, into a holy place.” Holiness is not something intrinsic to that place. YHWH is the source of holiness.

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40) This should be stated carefully. Although there is the injunction not to approach the bush, it is not because the ground is holy that Moses is forbidden to approach. Moses is already on holy ground. See Claude-Bernard Costecalde, et al., “Sacré (et Sainteté),” DBSup 10:1406.
Alongside this is YHWH’s self-disclosure. Far from the austerity and severity that one might have expected with some conceptions of holiness, YHWH reveals both his plans to deliver the people (v. 8) and his compassion and concern. In v. 7, three times over the sufferings of his people are mentioned. YHWH has “surely seen (ראה)” them, they has “heard (שמע)” them, he “knows (ידע)” them. In v.9, after revealing his plan to deliver his people, again YHWH returns to the same theme. Unlike Pharaoh, the brutal oppressive king of Egypt who increases the burden when the Israelites cry out (Exod 5:5-18; cf. v. 8 (צעק)), YHWH, revealed for the first time as holy, is a compassionate king (cf. Exod 15:18). His deliverance of the people, while grounded in the covenant (Exod 2:23-25), is also grounded in his responsiveness to their cries. He has seen their oppression, and the Israelite cry (האולק) has come to him (Exod 3:9): “the word of the holy God…bespeaks, not distance and judgment, but closeness and concern.”

Some might argue here that neither YHWH’s self-disclosure nor his compassionate responsiveness are explicitly predicated upon his holiness. Indeed, the only actions dependent on the declaration of holiness are the instructions to Moses not to come close and to take off his sandals. However, such an argument fails to take account of the wider context of self-revelation. It is the very character of YHWH as holy, as compassionate, as deliverer, that is in view. It is precisely in and through the events of the exodus that the divine name acquires content. Until now, holiness has not been associated with the patriarchs’ God. Divine self-disclosure as YHWH belongs with and is rooted in divine self-disclosure as holy. It is not that “God is holy” but that “YHWH is holy.”

42) Note the emphatic construction with ראה, with the infinitive absolute preceding the cognate root, emphasising speaker involvement and conviction.
Within the narrative flow of the Torah and, beyond that, of the Old Testament, this dimension of holiness should not be forgotten. Exodus 3 does not indicate merely that YHWH should be seen as holy, nor that association with YHWH makes things (ground, mountains) holy, nor that one who is holy cannot be approached lightly, though all are true. It indicates also that the holiness of YHWH entails self-disclosure and compassionate concern.

This same picture is present in Exodus 19. In many ways, Moses’ experience at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 3 foreshadows the experience of the Israelites in Exodus 19: divine presence is evidenced through fire (Exod 3:2; 19:18); access is circumscribed; the ground is said to be holy (Exod 3:5; 19:23). At the very moment when YHWH enables Israel as a whole to experience and encounter him as holy in a way that is new for them, there is also significant further self-disclosure. YHWH goes on to speak to the people as a whole, giving them the Decalogue; then, mediated by Moses, YHWH declares the subsequent laws. All are enthusiastically anticipated and then received by the people (Exod 19:8; 24:7); the law was not seen as a burdensome imposition or punishment, but as a gracious gift.

Ezekiel

A second place to turn when considering holiness and self-disclosure is the book of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, the prominence of YHWH’s holiness is apparent from references to YHWH’s holy name, references to YHWH’s manifesting his holiness or sanctifying activity, the frequent other occurrences of the root קדשׁ or its cognates and antonyms, and from the close connection that there is between YHWH’s glory and YHWH’s holiness. This

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46) Ezek 20:39; 36:20, 21, 22; 39:7 (x2), 25; 43:7, 8. To this list should be added YHWH’s sanctifying (קדשׁ) his “great name” (Ezek 36:23).


48) For more details, see H. Ringgren and W. Kornfeld, TDOT 12:538-39; Bailey Wells, God’s Holy People, 165-67.

49) Of particular importance is the notion of YHWH’s name being “profaned” (חלל): Ezek 20:9, 14, 22, 39; 36:20-23; 39:7.

50) Within Ezekiel, note the parallel between נכדשׁ and נכבדתי in Ezek 28:22 and, in the opening vision, the presence of theophanic elements found at Sinai (see Gammie, Holiness, 5-7, 48-49). Holiness and glory are also mentioned together in Lev 10:3 and
holiness is both cultic and ethical.51 At the same time, there is a striking lack of reference to YHWH’s love (אהבה) or steadfast love (חסד) or compassion (רחם).52 The relationship between YHWH’s holiness and YHWH’s love might seem absent in Ezekiel.

This appears to be corroborated when the grounds for restoration are given in Ezekiel 36. There, YHWH makes it very clear that he is acting for the sake of his holy name, not for the sake of the exiles (Ezek 36:22, 32). In his book, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*, Joyce examines the grounds for restoration, and dismisses the notion that YHWH will restore the exiles out of love for Israel. Beyond chapter 16, where the language of love he regards as legal or sexual rather than loving, he comments, “we find little, if any, evidence of Yahweh’s love for his people.”53 Indeed, in judgement, YHWH insists that he will not have compassion on (חמל) or pity (חוס) anything. It is true that once the exile has happened, YHWH declares that he has had compassion (חמל), but with a twist, it is on his own name (Ezek 36:21).

At this point, though, it is worth highlighting something of a paradox. At the very moment of YHWH insisting that the grounds for manifesting his holiness, his concern for his holy name, are internal and in that sense private, YHWH’s action is inherently public. This is because who YHWH is understood to be is irrevocably bound up with the destiny of his people. So, at the very moment of acting for the sake of his name, YHWH is precisely engaged in self-disclosure, that the nations (36:23) or Israel (39:28) might know that “I am YHWH.” Brueggemann captures the force of this, when he observes that “Yahweh’s self-regard is now maddeningly enmeshed with the well-being of Israel” and that “the only way the Holy God can, in this context, enact self-regard is by the rescue and rehabilitation of Israel.”54 Self-disclosure, then, is clearly in view.55 It is possible to probe further,

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52) The only reference is in 39:25: (רחמתי).
55) For precisely what that recognition meant for the nations, see Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 89-95; Bailey Wells, *God’s Holy People*, 170-76, 183-84.
though, to see what is meant by YHWH’s displaying his holiness. The precise shape depends on the way in which YHWH’s name has been profaned among the nations who are saying, “These are the people of YHWH, and yet they had to go out of his land” (Ezek 36:20). What is the wrong conclusion they are drawing from YHWH’s just actions in punishing his people? There are three choices.

First, the nations could misinterpret the plight of the exiles as evidence that YHWH is inadequate to save and protect his people. Internal evidence from Ezekiel that might support this comes from the conjunction of the hitpa’el of קָדָשׁ and גדָל in 38:2, “So I will display my greatness and my holiness” by defeating Gog. YHWH displaying his holiness could be seen to be synonymous with displaying his greatness. External evidence comes from Numbers 14:16, where Moses pleads with YHWH to spare the grumbling Israelites, so that the nations do not see YHWH as powerless.

The second possible interpretation, suggested by Greenberg, is that the deportees are so corrupt, and evidently so, that it is a disgrace for YHWH to be associated with people such as these. Greenberg cites as evidence the fact that YHWH allows survivors so they can tell among the nations of the abominations in Israel (12:16). These abominations were so awful that they were worse than the nations around (5:6-7), and shocked even the Philistines (16:27). The emphasis, then, is not so much on the exile as on the origin of these people; they are from “his” (YHWH’s) land.

The third possible explanation for the defiling of YHWH’s name has been suggested by Block. It stems from his observations about the intimate relationship within the ancient world between “deity-nation-land.” The defiling of YHWH’s name comes about through a divorce in this relationship, evident in the exile of the people and the devastation of the land (36:34). In the eyes of the surrounding nations, this divorce may not have been because of YHWH’s powerlessness in the face of Marduk; it may have been because YHWH had willingly abandoned his people (as indeed the Judaeans themselves suggested (8:12; 9:9)).

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50) Cf. Ringgren and Kornfeld, *TDOT* 12:538: “profaning Yahweh’s holy name is equivalent to denying his power.”


In short, the first explanation for YHWH’s name being profaned focuses on YHWH’s power. The second and third focus on YHWH’s character and commitment to his people. It is not easy to distinguish between these possible causes of defilement for YHWH’s name, since there is evidence for all of them (cf. Deut 9:28). What is striking is that the manifestation of YHWH’s holiness in Ezekiel is associated only with either judging Israel’s enemies or saving Israel.59 YHWH’s manifesting his holiness in Ezekiel is not associated with judging his people more severely.60 This asymmetry makes the second or third option more likely, for it is not simply YHWH’s powerlessness, but the kind of deity YHWH is and the nature of his relationship to his people that are in view. This is further reinforced by the recurrence of the phrase “I am YHWH,” knowledge of which is the goal of Ezekiel’s proclamation.61 What is in view here is not simply YHWH’s power, but YHWH’s character, YHWH’s nature. Even at the very moment of denying that the saving activity is for Israel’s sake, YHWH’s people are caught up as beneficiaries. Beyond that, it is for their sake, in the sense that they (and the nations, but in a different sense) are the intended recipients of YHWH’s self-disclosure.

Holiness and saving activity

It should have been apparent from the discussion of Exodus and Ezekiel above that YHWH’s holiness is not only associated with his self-disclosure but also with his saving activity. There are many further such instances that reinforce this link between YHWH’s holiness and his saving activity.

Holiness and Isaiah

The “book called Isaiah”62 places great emphasis on the holiness of YHWH. This is apparent at first glance both from the famous vision of God in Isaiah 6, and from the particular epithet for YHWH, “the Holy One of

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Israel” that is prominent throughout the book. Bailey Wells observes how “the adjective קדושׁ (‘holy’) is used of God more frequently in Isaiah than in all of the rest of the Old Testament literature taken together.” YHWH’s holiness in Isaiah clearly has a moral and ethical dimension. In Isaiah 5:16, in the midst of a series of woe oracles, Isaiah declares, “But YHWH of hosts is exalted by justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness.” Whether it is human justice and righteousness that is in view, as Moerlong argues, or predominantly YHWH’s does not materially change the conclusion.

This holiness is not just moral and ethical; it is also relational. The binding of the construct קדושׁ, an adjective acting as a substantive for YHWH, to the absolute, Israel, merges what might have seemed unmergeable into a title for YHWH that inherently emphasises relationship. This is reinforced by the fact that, as Anderson observes, the phrase “is invariably associated with the personal divine name, Yahweh,” a name that “refers to the God who has personal identity” and “who is bound in an I-Thou relationship with a people.”

In Isaiah 40-55, the particular association of the title, “the Holy One of Israel” is indisputably linked with YHWH’s saving activity. While in Psalm 111 and elsewhere, YHWH’s holiness is associated with the response of fear and trembling, in Isaiah 41:14 YHWH declares, “Do not fear, you

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64) Bailey Wells, God’s Holy People, 135.


worm Jacob, you insect Israel! I will help you, says YHWH; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.” In Isaiah 43:3, YHWH’s self-revelation is followed by the characteristic epithet, then by the dramatic appositional מושׁיעך “I am YHWH your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour” (cf. Isa 52:10). The Holy One of Israel is the creator and the redeemer. Perhaps most striking is the address to Israel as abandoned woman in Isaiah 54:4-8. In v. 5, the Holy One of Israel is identified as Israel’s redeemer. In v. 8, YHWH, their redeemer, declares that he will have compassion on them with steadfast love, חסד. The holiness of YHWH is clearly associated with his saving activity, and, even more explicitly, with his love.

In Isaiah 1-39, the picture is more complicated with regard to YHWH’s holiness and saving activity. Anderson insists that the epithet “invariably functions in contexts of divine judgment, where the people are rebuked for offending the divine majesty: for disdaining YHWH (1:4), despising YHWH’s word (5:24), or challenging YHWH’s purpose (5:19; 31:1).”69 On the other hand, Bailey Wells comments, “In First Isaiah, he is the comfort for the remnant which survives (10.20), the God in whom the redeemed rejoice,70 the one on whom people can rely in the day of judgement (17.7), and the one in whom the suffering and poorest among humanity can rejoice (29.19).”71

One of the issues is the degree to which the more positive expressions are traceable back to Isaiah of Jerusalem, or whether in fact it is “changed circumstances” that have given rise to the more salvific dimensions.72 However, the possibility that the Holy One of Israel’s activity could be saving is something that is clearly found even in what Williamson regards as “the most securely Isaianic uses” in Isaiah 30 and 31.73 For example, in Isaiah 31:1, Isaiah lambasts Israel’s failure to consult YHWH: “Alas for those who go down to Egypt for help and who rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult YHWH!” The implication is not simply that they should have consulted the Holy One of

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71) Bailey Wells, God’s Holy People, 137.
72) Williamson, Isaiah 1-5, 46.
73) Williamson, Isaiah 1-5, 46.
Israel, but also that consulting him would have obviated the need to rely on military might, for the Holy One would save them.

This saving dimension can also be seen in the vision that Isaiah has in the temple in Isaiah 6. Confronted with a dramatic vision of YHWH, it is only at the threefold cry from the seraphim, “Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory,” that parts of the temple shake, and Isaiah exclaims of his lostness. That is quite natural, especially in the light of his understanding of divine holiness as revealed in 5:16. Uniquely designated as holy by a threefold exclamation, YHWH’s holiness exhibits moral distance from humanity. What is striking, though, is what happens next. For that same holiness reaches out and purifies Isaiah’s lips, symbolising the removal of sin and atonement for the whole person.74 Holiness is not inherently inimical to cleansing, atonement, forgiveness, purification, although punishment and judgement is in order for a people of unclean lips (cf. vv. 8-10). Indeed it is holiness that has graciously reached out and enabled all this to happen. “The paradox of holiness is that God acts to judge everything that is unholy and yet provides a way of cleansing and sanctification for sinners.”75

Holiness and Hearing Prayers

YHWH’s holiness is also associated with his saving activity within the prayer life of Israel. Expectations for prayers being answered, or gratitude for answered prayer, are sometimes focused on YHWH’s holiness.

In Psalm 22:3, as Brueggemann notes, “Israel counts on Yahweh’s holiness as a basis on which to pray for help.”76 In Psalm 30, the psalmist celebrates deliverance from his enemies, and calls on YHWH’s faithful ones to “give thanks to his holy name” (Ps 30:5 [ET 30:4]).77 It is because of YHWH’s holiness that he has been saved. This is made all the more striking by the following verse, where the psalmist gives the grounds ((ro) for thanking YHWH’s holy name, “For his anger is but for a moment; his

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77) Note that the word translated “name” here is not the more usual שֵׁם, but זכָּר, “the mention and invocation of God in liturgies” (HALOT 1:271). It is used in parallel with שְׁמ in Exod 3:15, “This is my name (cher) forever, and this my title (זֶכֶר) for all generations.”
favour is for a lifetime.” Brevity of anger and longevity of favour are facets of his *holy* name (cf. Ps 97:10-12).

In Psalm 77, the psalmist pleads with YHWH to hear his prayer and to act. He grounds his hopes in YHWH’s saving activity in the exodus and in the fact that YHWH’s way is *holy* (v. 14 [ET 77:13]). In Psalm 106:47, the psalmist cries out, “Save us, YHWH our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.” Thanks will be due to YHWH’s *holy* name for salvation and gathering from the nations. In Psalm 99:5, again as Brueggemann notes, “Even in one of its great doxologies, the holiness of YHWH (Ps 99:5) is sandwiched between reference to justice (v. 4) and Yahweh’s response to Israel’s concrete prayer (v. 6).”

Finally, Hannah rejoices in “your (YHWH’s) salvation (ישועתך; MT)” or “my victory (ישועתי; Qumran),” because her prayers for a child have been answered, and follows with the declaration, “There is none *holy* like YHWH” (1 Sam 2:1-2).

**Holiness and Hosea**

Perhaps, however, Hosea 11 is the clearest place where we see holiness linked explicitly and directly to the gracious reaching out of God. This chapter contains the only instance in the book of Hosea where YHWH’s holiness is mentioned. In the chapter, YHWH rehearses the history of the relationship with Israel, not as husband and wife, but YHWH as a parent who has nurtured his son tenderly and Israel as a recalcitrant child who has kept rebelling (11:1-7). Unlike the chapters either side, YHWH’s deliberations on his response do not lead here to judgement: “I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a human being, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath” (Hosea 11:9).

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80) There are significant debates about the meaning of the final phrase, and, in particular, of the last word (עיר). The precise translation does not affect the point I am making. The same is true of the debate whether the adjective שדוק is a designation for the deity, acting substantivally, “the Holy One,” or simply a “quality” (so Schmitt, “God of Israel,” 27: “[I am] holy in your midst”).
What is particularly striking is the grounds for his not acting in judgement. It is expressed first because YHWH is God, not a human being, then elucidated by the phrase, “the Holy One in your midst.” As Wolff comments, “it is important to note that the concept of Yahweh’s holiness…provides the foundation not for his judging will but for his saving will.”

Holiness and presence

So far, we have seen places where YHWH’s self-disclosure and YHWH’s saving activity are not just evident, for none would deny this, but are predicated upon YHWH’s holiness. The third area I want to focus upon is YHWH’s holiness and YHWH’s presence. It is slightly artificial to separate this from the previous two, since YHWH’s self-disclosure and saving activity are in themselves reflective of YHWH’s presence. Further, this is obviously a vast area, given that YHWH’s very presence makes something holy. What I am trying to get to here can be seen if I take the words of Woudstra’s commentary on Joshua 24:19 as an example. He comments, “There is something of the unapproachable about the holy. Nevertheless, in later literature God is also the Holy One of Israel (frequently so in Isaiah), who in spite of his holiness dwells with Israel.”

81) Hans W. Wolff, A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea (trans. Gary Stansell; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 202 (my emphasis). This does not sit easily with the observation of Muller (Divine Essence and Attributes, 501), “It is the necessary and natural consequence of his holiness that he will punish sin ‘in order to give a manifestation of his holiness,’” though it is true that YHWH’s punishing the sin of his people is sometimes said to manifest his holiness (Lev 10:3; Num 20:12-13). YHWH’s holiness is manifest both in judging sin, and in being faithful to his saving commitment to his people. For YHWH to act in judgement against his people is “strange” (זר) and “foreign” (נכרי) (Isa 28:21). Cf. John N. Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39 (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 520.


83) Further, it is not just in later literature that YHWH “dwells with Israel.”
gulf. The “because of” is because YHWH in his holiness desires and chooses to live with his people. His holy presence is a blessing to them. There are thus two parts to this. The first is where YHWH’s holy presence is a source of blessing and life. The second is where YHWH’s decision to dwell with his people is predicated on his holiness.

**YHWH’s holy presence as a source of blessing and life**

Though YHWH’s holy presence is awesome and potentially dangerous (cf. Lev 10:1-3), a moment’s thought should remind us that this very presence is principally the source of blessing and life for his people. This is apparent in many motifs that do not explicitly speak of YHWH’s holiness, but only implicitly, such as YHWH’s face, YHWH’s glory (כבוד, cf. the ark traditions; Ezekiel), as well as in motifs that speak of YHWH’s holiness in more oblique terms, such as YHWH’s holy mountain and YHWH’s “sanctuary” (מקדש). In addition, there a number of places where YHWH’s *holy* presence is explicitly related to blessing and life.

We have already observed in Hosea 11 how YHWH as the Holy One is the grounds for not coming in judgement; at this juncture, what should be noted is that YHWH is “the Holy One in your midst.” We have also seen how in Psalm 99 YHWH’s holiness is associated with answered prayer. This psalm, with a repeated refrain whose “key word is ‘holy,’”84 celebrates the presence of YHWH, the holy king, in Jerusalem.85 In similar vein we find the cry in Isa 12:6, “Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” The Holy One’s presence is the grounds for shouting and joy. The same picture is found in Psalm 51. David cries, “Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit (קדשך רוח) from me.” As Gammie notes, “The presence of holiness does not frighten; rather, the psalmist sees it as the source of his deliverance and ability to attain the nobility to which he feels called.”86 In Psalm 93:5, holiness is said to “befit” or “adorn” (网站地图) YHWH’s house.

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85) YHWH’s self-disclosure is also evident, both in his deeds, establishing equity (v. 4), and in his words, speaking to them (v. 7).
The verb, which occurs only here and in Isa 53:7 and Song of Songs 1:10, suggests there is something attractive about YHWH’s holiness.\textsuperscript{87}

\textit{YHWH’s holiness and his desire to dwell with his people}

It is not simply that there are blessings to be found from YHWH’s holy presence. It is also true that YHWH in his holiness desires and chooses to live with his people. In Exodus 3, when God reveals himself to Moses as YHWH and as holy, it is clear that YHWH’s delivering activity will not be at a distance. He declares in v. 8 that he has “come down” to deliver them. “God is now physically(!) mobilized to be present in the midst of the trouble.”\textsuperscript{88} In v. 12, YHWH promises that he will be “with” Moses.

In the song of Moses in Exodus 15, Moses celebrates, “You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, YHWH, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, YHWH, that your hands have established” (v. 17). It is YHWH who brings the helpless slaves to his holy mountain. Although there is some debate over whether the referent is the promised land or a sanctuary (the temple in Jerusalem?), “the goal is a safe place that is marked by the majestic and protective presence of God.”\textsuperscript{89}

It is YHWH who takes the initiative in giving instructions for the building of a tabernacle (cf. Exod 25:8); YHWH who provides the sacrificial system whereby a holy God may dwell with a sinful people; YHWH who sanctifies his people;\textsuperscript{90} YHWH who warns through his prophets when the people go astray; YHWH who chooses to dwell with the exiles to a little extent (Ezek 11:16); YHWH who chooses to return to the restored temple (Ezek 43:1-5); YHWH whose arm does not simply rule but also carries the exiles like sheep (Isa 40:10-11). The picture should be clear: “We approach Him, not by making Him the object of our thinking, but by discovering ourselves as the objects of His thinking.”\textsuperscript{91}


\textsuperscript{89} Brueggemann, “Exodus,” 801-2.

\textsuperscript{90} Exod 31:13; Lev 20:8; 21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32; Ezek 20:12; 37:28.

\textsuperscript{91} Heschel, \textit{Prophets}, 2:267.
Perhaps one of the most striking statements about YHWH’s dwelling with his people comes in Isaiah 57:15. There, YHWH declares, “For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

There are some features that echo back to the vision of YHWH in chapter 6,92 but there is something deeply unnerving and reassuring in equal measure: “To exalt humanity against him leads to utter humiliation. But one of the principal marks of God’s ‘high’ holiness is his delight in dwelling with the lowly and the contrite (57:15). God’s power is at its greatest not in his destruction of the wicked but in his taking all the wickedness of the earth into himself and giving back love.”93 One might rephrase the final sentence to read, “God’s holiness is at its greatest not in his destruction of the wicked but in his taking all the wickedness of the earth into himself and giving back love.”

It is of course true that YHWH’s holy presence is not something that may be taken for granted. Nor may it be handled lightly. It is a presence that is paradoxical: exalted, yet found with the lowly; excluding, yet including; concealing, yet revealing. After all, “the presence which conceals itself is not an absence,”94 “for God remains transcendent in His immanence, and related in His transcendence.”95

Summary and Conclusions

At the start, I highlighted the apparent incongruity of the summary of the law in the New Testament, which picks as a hermeneutical key a verse embedded in a chapter that opens with a refrain that plausibly could be

92) YHWH as “high and lofty” (נשׂא וָרֶם), 6:1; YHWH as “holy” (קדושׁ), 6:3.
said to the refrain for the book as a whole, “Be holy, for I, YHWH your God, am holy.” I suggested that the New Testament summary can be reasonably explained, but that it was worth lingering over the link that it makes between the call to “be holy” and the call to “love your neighbour.” After reflecting on some issues which might prevent drawing conclusions on divine holiness from this link, I then examined three areas in which divine holiness manifests itself in love—self-disclosure, saving activity, and presence.

This article is not trying to make the exaggerated claim either that no scholarship has highlighted some of these points or that every instance of divine holiness in the Old Testament should be interpreted through this grid. Rather, it is arguing for the reinstatement of a dimension that is sometimes forgotten, both in certain kinds of popular piety and in varied scholarly works, past and present.

Holiness as something proper to God has often been located along the axis of separation and moral perfection, expressed in unapproachability, on the one hand, and judgement against sin, on the other. These are important, and should not be lost. But from within divine holiness, rather than from a separate source, comes YHWH’s love, a love expressed in self-disclosure, in saving activity, in a desire-to-be-in-right-relationship. There is a dimension of divine holiness that declares “Come close, but on my terms!”

When this is fully understood, then the call “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” is a call to be like YHWH in his holiness: “You shall be holy, as I, YHWH your God, am holy.” Human holiness is not to be found in separation in the sense of withdrawal, and certainly not in moral prudishness, but in distinctiveness of lifestyle that does not eclipse compassionate and open-hearted reaching out to those who are not fit for God’s presence. “You shall be holy for I, YHWH your God, am holy.” “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”