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## Impurity, Purification, and Sanctity in Israelite Religiosity

### Abstract

Israelite spirituality has developed a certain perception of sin and sanctity and the state of impurity has become a notion designating the negative energetic dimension which will forever separate man from God. Hence the need to struggle for man's psychosomatic cleansing, a principle inherited, in a certain manner, in Christianity as well.

### Keywords

spiritual cleansing, virtue, defilement, uncleanness, sin, purification



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## 1 Introduction

Viewed in terms of the anthropological research and history of religion, human existence has proved, since the earliest times, to be aware of the possibility and value of a special, inherently human status, accepted as a state of purification, cleansing of the body but mainly of the spirit.

The stage of humanity before the flood is little explained in the *Book of Genesis*, but what prevails, corresponding to the purpose of the declared author – the prophet Moses, is its spiritual appraisal. Therefore, the existence of that society is not analysed in terms of its social organisation and development, of the acquired technical performances, but concerning its spirituality, the involution and decadence of which would draw the total divine punishment. “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagining of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord repented that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him in His heart. And the Lord said, (...) ‘My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for he also is flesh.’ ” (Gen. 6.3-7)

A new world would be born through Noah and his family, who would pass on to next generations the need for a state of purity of man, to have access to contact with the divinity or to gain a permanent relationship with it, regardless of the manner of conceptualising or representing it.

The religions of the ancient world would acknowledge the validity, conservation, and perpetuation of the concept of human purity<sup>1</sup> and, inherently, of the ‘*ascetic*’<sup>2</sup> efforts as a condition for appealing or gaining access to a superior world, of the gods.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Rachet, *Dicționar de civilizație greacă*, Ed. Univers enciclopedic gold, București, 2012, p. 259; Ovidiu Drimba, *Istoria culturii și civilizației*, Vol. I, Ed. Științifică și enciclopedică, București, 1985, p. 546: in the archaic age of ancient Greece, “any man could make sacrifices, but he had to be clean and pure; this external and ritual purity soon became an inner purity.” For access to the ancient “*mysteries*” of the

The monotheistic religion of Abraham and Moses could not overlook this concept of human purity; on the contrary, it would inherit and deepen it in the Revealed Law, from which it would benefit. Far from being understood as a restriction imposed on everyday life, this idea was a spiritual chance given to the ordinary man, who was told about the repulsive notion of *impure* and its implications, in the event of his desire to relate to Yahve or if this need should appear. This is how a man could recover the ideal condition of his encounter with God took shape, provided he had done things that incriminated him spiritually and excluded him from His '*sight*', due to some kind of defilement.

Therefore, as viewed by the Jew of the Mosaic Law, purification is a chance and an obligation of spiritual cleansing in case of (willingly or unwillingly) trespassing stipulated principles, which have led him into a negative spiritual state. Purification helps man regain the status of normality and promotes a righteous and clean life in relation to God, which may be understood, from our perspective, as an effort and a process of spiritualisation.

Compared to the actual sin, obviously committed by disobeying the commandments of moral-spiritual behaviour, as laid down by the Decalogue, which tells people what they must and must

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Greek world, the individual was supposed to go through a rite of initiation, which implied "a thorough purification".

- 2 Şerban Drugaș, *Concepția despre om în marile religii orientale*, Revista teologică, Mitropolia Ardealului, nr. 2/2004, p. 170: in the very old times of Asian human civilisation, the Japanese Shintoism, there was an ancestral practice of asceticism, when "*the ascetic would not cut his hair, eat meat or touch a woman*".
- 3 Ovidiu Drimba, *Istoria culturii și civilizației*, pp. 223, 464: Zarathustra would mention the need for purification of humans and earth, which would inevitably happen in the end, by pouring a wave of molten metal over the entire world. The Incan civilisation would practise the method of confessing sins of any kind, after which the penitent would undergo a purifying bath.

not do<sup>4</sup>, the state of impurity, uncleanness was seen as a corrupt psychosomatic state of man, which was not related to social behaviour or moral attitude, but to the physical contact through touch, food consumption, or sexual contact (understood as *'knowing one another'*, mutual knowledge of the greatest interiority and fusion, Gen. 38.26; 3; Kgs., 1.4; Mt. 1.25), with emphasis on the phenomenon of passing on an impure state to a common individual.

## 2 Sanctity and the state of purity

In the spiritual view of the Old Testament, there is a difference between purity (body cleanness) and sanctity.<sup>5</sup> The state of sanctity belongs to God and would have remained completely inaccessible to man if He had not shown His *"glory"*, starting with His majestic theophanies (Exod. 19.3-20) and continuing with the discovery of moralising requirements under the Covenant He established. This expresses His love for people and His availability to make Himself known and, hence, His ability to forgive them.<sup>6</sup>

Sanctity is proper to His nature, for God said: *"I am that I am"* (Exod. 3.14), which means *"I am the Holy One par excellence"*, a name revealed to the people so they should invoke him.

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<sup>4</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, Casa Cărții, Oradea, 2016, p. 100: The deeds violating the conduct stipulated by the provisions of the Law were considered moral offences, especially those trespassing the Decalogue, which imperatively proclaimed something as being acceptable or unacceptable by God with regard to people.

<sup>5</sup> Silviu Tatu (ed.), *Introducere în studiul Vechiului Testament, Penta-teuhul și cărțile istorice*, Ed. Casa cărții, Oradea, 2016, p. 187: "Sin is a moral impurity, implying the trespassing of the law willingly or unwillingly. Uncleanness is a ritualistic impurity, i.e. the uncleanness that man acquires in amoral circumstances."

<sup>6</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour (ed.), *Vocabular de Teologie biblică*, Ed. Arhiepiscopiei romano-catolice de București, 2001, p. 686

The term “*qodesh*” in the Old Hebrew of the Old Testament means “*holy*”, referring to a person who worships God or who succeeds in acquiring the state of sanctity. It is a complex religious concept with broader meanings, which expresses God’s own attribute of being perfect or accomplished as well as the possibility to transfer sanctity to rational beings. Therefore, God’s sanctity can be shared to this world and its creatures, particularly to man, and is proposed to the latter “as a desideratum of human conduct, having the divine sanctity as a model”.<sup>7</sup> The divine exhortation, in this respect, is strongly mobilising, as He imperatively demands: “For I am the Lord your God. Ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11.44).

Holiness becomes sharable through any concrete action of His performed upon the world and His special objects (the temple sanctuary and everything it includes, in a certain order: the Ark of the Covenant, the Holy of Holies, the Holy, the altar of sacrifice, the laver of priests, the precincts of the sanctuary)<sup>8</sup> and possibly upon the places where He chooses to manifest Himself (Mount Sinai, Exod. 19. 12-24). However, “a distinction would be therefore made between real holiness, which is proper to God, and the sacred nature which takes certain people and objects out of the profane and places them in an intermediate state, which hides and, at the same time, manifests God’s sanctity.”<sup>9</sup>

If sanctity is considered the defining spiritual status for Yahve and can be shared (to a certain extent) with man, who wants to near Him, uncleanness or impurity, though amoral (not having the notion and involvement of morality), is the contrary spiritual effect, which separates man from God. Man’s uncleanness

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<sup>7</sup> Silviu Tatu (ed.), *Introducere în studiul Vechiului Testament, Pentateuhul și cărțile istorice*, p. 183

<sup>8</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour (ed.), *Vocabular de Teologie biblică*, p. 687.

is a state often acquired by contamination and is itself a contagious process (Lev. 11.31; 15.4-27), involving the entire human being, body and soul, in a condition repulsive to the status of sanctity.

Thus, impurity is understood as a deterioration of the human spiritual state either by physical contact, a defilement by something negative from the outside, as a contaminating energetic state, or by changing one's own physical and, implicitly, spiritual state as a result of some disturbances in body functionality (an effect of the female monthly cycle, of a birth or of illnesses involving the discharge of certain bodily fluids, considered as "*unclean, impure*").

Once this state has been acquired (inherently, accidentally or intentionally), it should be eliminated because it will deteriorate man's relationship with God and, implicitly, the evolution of his life.

### **3 Awareness of the state of uncleanness.**

The principle of uncleanness was first mentioned in the *Book of Genesis*, at the time of transition to another world, concerning the animals surrounding man and which should be regarded as allowed or not allowed in his alimentation. Thus, Noah receives instructions to save the entrusted animals, seven pairs of the clean animals and only a pair of the unclean ones (Gen. 7.2-3), which points to God's concern to surround the man renewed by the flood with as many clean animals as possible, which are necessary for his nutrition.

Although, at that time, there was no detailed supernatural revelation regarding the food allowed to man, which would be later communicated in the time of Moses, still, one can note that this principle of "*sorting*" animals was known to Noah and, naturally, would be passed on, by tradition, for a long time, to his descendants from Shem's family, who settled down in Mesopota-

mia without clear provisions in this regard, attributed to any later reformer.

In that ancient area, there is representative archaeological evidence that, on many occasions, certain foods were temporarily forbidden and, at least in Babylon, the deities worshipped by men would not receive any animal as sacrifice. No such code of laws has been found<sup>10</sup> although the oldest legislative collections, meant to regulate social life in full development in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C., have been discovered in that particular cultural space.<sup>11</sup>

It has been noted that, more than relating to the gods who patronised man's life through clean and unclean animal sacrifices, the very diet specific to the ancient Near East is generally consistent with the principles later laid down in the Law of Moses<sup>12</sup> (see Leviticus, chapter 11), which may be interpreted as a reminiscence of the life principles inherited from the sons of Noah.

The Jewish people born of the patriarch Abraham (originating from the same Sumerian town as King Ur-Nammu, Ur of the Chaldees) had preserved these religious food principles, as they were part of the great family of Semitic tribes that had settled down and evolved in the Middle East and Mesopotamia<sup>13</sup>. But the in-depth understanding of the principle of physical and spiritual cleanness, to which they were called, would be eloquently appropriated by the Jews only when they received the Law of Yahve through Moses, in the Sinai Desert, as a result of their miraculous escape from pharaonic Egypt.

To emphasise the revealed nature of Mosaic religious principles, a clarification should be made. Although ancient Egypt

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<sup>10</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 138

<sup>11</sup> The oldest code of laws belongs to King Ur-Nammu of the Sumerian Third Dynasty of Ur (2113-1991 B.C.). Dumitru Abrudan, Emilian Cornițescu, *Arheologie biblică*, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1994, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 138.

<sup>13</sup> Dumitru Abrudan, Emilian Cornițescu, *Arheologie biblică*, p. 104.

knew and practised the principle of cleansing and purification necessary for humans, and the Jews lived in direct contact with them for four centuries (Acts 7.6), it can be easily noted that the Jews would not take over the rules of human purification from the Egyptians but would receive guidance through supernatural revelation.

The best proof of this separation is seen in the interdiction to eat pork imposed on the Jews (Lev. 11.7), which was allowed in Egypt; moreover, according to Herodotus, pigs were sacrificed to honour the gods and some temples kept herd of pigs as “*cultic material*”, as the pig was also a sacred animal associated to the Egyptian god Seth.<sup>14</sup>

When they were granted the Law, on Mount Sinai, the Jews were asked to solemnly prepare for this moment by cleaning their clothes and sexual abstinence for three days (Exod. 19.15). Thus, they traveled the path preparing them for a real consecration that had been promised to them several days before, that of becoming “a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people (...) a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19.5-6). And “consecration lies in a few stages an individual goes through in order to become ritualistically pure”.<sup>15</sup>

As concretised in the Mosaic theology, sanctity is Yahve’s by definition, manifesting itself “as a power both frightening and mysterious, ready to destroy anything that should near it, but also capable of blessing those who receive the Ark of the Covenant, (...) because it expresses itself through love and forgiveness.”<sup>16</sup> He can spread out His holiness through everything that represents Him, following the establishment of a holy place dedicated to Him and of a body of religious individuals meant to serve Him. Only here would people be able to receive holiness, through the divine Glory present upon the Ark of the Covenant,

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<sup>14</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 138.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 100

<sup>16</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour (ed.), *Vocabular de Teologie biblică*, p. 686.

of the Holy of Holies, of the Sacred Tent, and the entire religious area. But, to approach sanctity, man needs to be pure, and the principle of his purification starts to take shape at the time of granting the Law, on Mount Sinai, later explained in *The Book of Leviticus*.

Therefore, what marks the state of purity is, above all, personal cleansing, understood both in terms of the external appearance, of the body or the clothes one wears and in terms of the inner nature, reflected in the normal functioning of the body, without disturbances and effects caused by certain illnesses or the leakage of fluids, or by sexual relationships engaging the person in direct physical contact, disavowed by the spiritual expectations and perspectives.

#### **4 Acknowledgment of the state of impurity**

The Jewish people were instructed in terms of the state of uncleanness, of impurity, by knowing its desecrating dimension, the criteria of acknowledging such a status, as well as through the measures that should be taken to regain one's spiritual cleanness, purity to achieve holiness. *The Book of Leviticus* lays down all these aspects and the way an unwanted spiritual condition can be mended.

One may thus note that the state of impurity was caused by the following factors.

By *touching* something unclean:

1. Touching a human corpse or the carrion of any clean or unclean animal (Lev. 5.2). Touching a dead person or the grave of that person for seven days (Num. 19.16), regardless of the circumstances, was considered an impurity because the dead is a body abandoned by the soul and undergoing the process of degradation and decay, as a sign of sin and death, a universal law imposed on the humankind and the entire creation, after

Adam and Eve had committed the sin of disobedience.<sup>17</sup> A corpse is uncleanness in the most natural way possible. Things were similarly understood in the case of dead animals, which immediately underwent the process of putrefaction and effervescence of decay energies (bodies would swell and blacken in their own skin) due to the warm climate of the East.

2. Touching an object touched by the body of a dead unclean animal (Lev. 11.32). The uncleanness would also pass on through objects, because such a touch was considered to have a contamination effect and thus, they had to be avoided. In such situations, the animal's body had to be buried as quickly as possible.

By *consumption*, introducing forbidden food into one's body, which clearly shows that the people of Israel belong to God and must not be like other nations, even by what they eat.<sup>18</sup>

1. Consuming the flesh of the animals declared unclean (Lev. 11.1-31), i.e. non-ruminants and without a completely split hoof, was the main danger of contamination. The criteria of this selection have been widely debated over the years (and some explanations - sociological, allegorical, didactic, psychological or anthropological - have been suggested)<sup>19</sup>, resulting in certain similarities with the sacrifices practised by the neighbouring peoples, without leading to the conclusion of a religious loan. "A recent promising suggestion is that the Israelite diet is modelled after God's 'diet', that is, if it could not be offered in sacrifice to God, then it was not suitable for human consumption

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<sup>17</sup> Dumitru Abrudan, Emilian Cornițescu, *Arheologie biblică*, p. 142.

<sup>18</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> Silviu Tatu (ed.), *Introducere în studiul Vechiului Testament, Pentateuhul și cărțile istorice*, p. 187. The anthropological variant of the explanations is according to the priestly thinking that: "cleanness implies order, integrity, unity. Therefore, representative features are chosen for each of the three special registers (earth, water, air)".

either”.<sup>20</sup> Of all these animals, special attention is given to the pig, because it was widely used in Mesopotamia or Egypt for personal consumption. Unusually, however, it appears as a sacrificial animal for underworld deities in Egypt (the god Seth) or for demons in Mesopotamia. Assyrians, however, would declare the pig as an animal that was unclean to humans and to gods.<sup>21</sup>

2. Consuming an animal found dead, even if it belonged to the group of the clean ones (Lev. 11.40). The essential nature of this attitude was due to the view regarding the blood that had not leaked from the animal and had coagulated in its flesh (Lev. 17.15), which the Jews considered to be the seat of life.<sup>22</sup> “Any animal killed without observing the ritual was considered a carrion. Thus, it could be either an animal killed by another animal or one that had been found dead”.<sup>23</sup> If it had been killed by a wild animal, that was all the more reason for not consuming it, because it had become unclean by touching.<sup>24</sup>

3. Consuming the flesh of clean animals, touched by something unclean (Lev. 7.19).

4. Consuming any water creature without wings and scales (Lev. 11.10), any flying bird (Lev. 11.13-19) or crawling animal (Lev. 11.41-43), or any insect, except those with longer hind legs (the locust) or the hopping insects (Lev. 11.20-25).

By changing one’s *physical and spiritual condition*:

1. Women were regarded as unclean during their menstruation and the confinement and this aspect characterises the entire ancient cultural area, from Egypt, Canaan, and Babylon as far as Persia, “whereas in some cultures it was considered a danger

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<sup>20</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 138.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Dumitru Abrudan, Emilian Cornișescu, *Arheologie biblică*, pp. 262, 270.

<sup>23</sup> Silviu Tatu (ed.), *Introducere în studiul Vechiului Testament, Pentateuhul și cărțile istorice*, p.187.

<sup>24</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 109.

for demonic influence.”<sup>25</sup> The period of monthly uncleanness would last seven days and during this time anything that women touched became unclean, including the person who touched her objects or slept in the same bed. Certain ailments could cause a prolonged loss of blood and this period was considered just as impure as the monthly one, which had to end obligatorily with a simple sacrifice (Lev. 15.19-33).

The confinement period of impurity of the Jewish woman was regarded differently if the woman gave birth to a boy (seven days) or a girl (14 days) and required domestic seclusion for up to 40 days (or 80 days, if the baby was a girl), to make sure that any blood leak had stopped (Lev. 12.2-5). This view of things is related to the meanings of blood in its state external to the body.<sup>26</sup>

2. A special situation was considered to be that of discharges from one’s body, both for men and for women (most often caused by urinary infections, gonorrhoea or parasites from the water system, etc.)<sup>27</sup>, including the man’s “seed”. In such a situation, the man was declared impure, whether or not the leak was prevented or not, transferring his own impure state to the bed and to all objects he would touch, including to people. In this case, uncleanness, though washed since the first night, required a seven days’ period of waiting, and its ending by sacrifice in the holy place, usually consisting of two turtle doves or two baby pigeons (Lev. 15.1-15).

3. Uncleanness was also caused by leprosy, in which case the priests were in charge of examining, watching, excluding the sick from the human community or, in fortunate cases, reintegrating the cured ones. The priests’ procedure of intervention

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<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 140.

<sup>26</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 138: “In Israel bodily emissions such as menstrual blood and semen were closely associated with life. When the potential for life that they represented went unfulfilled, they would represent death and therefore uncleanness.”

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 140.

and analysis is described in great detail (Lev. chapters 13-14), which points to the particular attention granted to this illness thought to be extremely serious in terms of its effects and its almost incurable nature. Leprosy was seen as the image of slow death, which took hold of human life, a disease as contagious as sin, which made it impossible for man to relate to God through divine worship and to enjoy the advantages of theocratic community, as the leper was excluded from society.<sup>28</sup>

4. Lastly, impurity was acquired through the sexual relations between people, in the context of men's desire to take part in the sacrifices made inside the sacred space of the Sacred Tent and then at the temple, which was considered (depending on the physical closeness and the type of sacrifices made at that moment) even to compromise the entire religious act.<sup>29</sup> Such a desecration would have been punished by the death of the perpetrator, who was executed by the very community.

The sexual relations in question are those allowed, between individuals of the same family, and not allowed, extramarital relations. The Jewish marriage had no religious component, as it was considered a contract between two persons. Their bodily ties were a natural thing and a chance to perpetuate their own being and family, thus fulfilling an obligation of divine nature and associating themselves with the continuous creational act God performs.<sup>30</sup> However, the included intimate contact led to one's acquiring a state deemed as impure, an act of impurity by touching and transfer, as St. Paul, the Apostle would later explain to Corinthians: "Every other sin which a man doeth is outside the body, but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body" (1 Cor. 6.18).

The Mosaic law was familiar to the term 'adultery' we now apply to any extramarital affair, but, at that time, this notion re-

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<sup>28</sup> Dumitru Abrudan, Emilian Cornișescu, *Arheologie biblică*, p. 295.

<sup>29</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 141.

<sup>30</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour (ed.), *Vocabular de Teologie biblică*, pp. 643, 645.

ferred to an extramarital relationship between a man and someone else's wife, fiancée or slave<sup>31</sup>, i.e. it took on the meaning of an attempt on somebody else's "property" rather than that of infidelity.

Because all these food and behaviour restrictions stipulated by the Law would restrain the freedom of a life of any Jew, Yahve provided the reason for such a complex attitude, offering, as a reward, the notion, and principle of man's resemblance to God, by acquiring the status of sanctity: "For I am the Lord your God. Ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy, for I am holy; neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the Lord who bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. Ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11.44-45).

## 5 Solutions for impurity

All these situations that would make people impure resulted, first and foremost and by no means insignificantly, in the loss of the right to be in communion with God, leading to physical and spiritual death.<sup>32</sup>

The uncleanness of people or objects, by consumption or touch, had a concrete effect, acknowledged for a day, and could be removed by washing the body or that particular object, except for the clay pots, stove and hearth, which had to be destroyed (Lev. 11.33-35).

Unclean clothes could be washed to be used again, as the water was considered a cleansing element, removing any contaminating touch, as blood was regarded, and was the symbol of cleanness of both body and soul.<sup>33</sup> Metal, bronze, or copper vessels were cleaned in the same manner. On the other hand, clay ves-

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<sup>31</sup> Dumitru Abrudan, Emilian Cornițescu, *Arheologie biblică*, p. 169.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 295.

<sup>33</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour (ed.), *Vocabular de Teologie biblică*, p. 34.

sels, because of their porosity, which made them slightly impregnable, had to be broken, as washing with water was considered to be insufficient to cleanse them.<sup>34</sup>

Uncleanness was valid only on that particular day until sunset, when the Jews believed that, at the appearance of the moon in the sky, the day was over.<sup>35</sup> It was understood that the state of impurity would not also last the next day, as it was finished by washing, as a process of physical cleansing and a feeling of the desire for purification. But this was only a temporary solution, in some cases even superficial, requiring the offering of sacrifices for sin at the Sacred Tent and then at the temple.

“The sacrifices for sin were ordained by Yahve in the Mosaic Law to cleanse the physically and spiritually sinful man of the defilement of sins so that he could reconcile with God”.<sup>36</sup> They consisted of a ritual initially called the “*purification offering*”, later traditionally referred to as “*sin offering*”. “The terminology changed when it became clear that the offering was not intended to solve moral offenses, but also the situations of ritualistic uncleanness.”<sup>37</sup> These sacrifices were of a wide variety, with precise ritual, to cover the entire area of uncleanness and sin and are described in *The Book of Leviticus* (4.2-3, 8-18; 5.1-13; 6.15-17; 16.11-21).

The gravity of the state of uncleanness is better understood from the measures taken against the risk of endangering the sanctity of the sanctuary dedicated to Yahve.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, in a

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<sup>34</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 134.

<sup>35</sup> Dumitru Abrudan, Emilian Cornițescu, *Arheologie biblică*, p. 141.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 268.

<sup>37</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 131.

<sup>38</sup> Silviu Tatu (ed.), *Introducere în studiul Vechiului Testament, Penta-teuhul și cărțile istorice*, p. 188: Depending on the social or religious-cultic status of the individual in a state of uncleanness, but participant in the cultic ritual, it was considered that impurity had spread over the altar in the yard, the Tent, the golden altar and even the Holy of Holies.

spirit common to the peoples of the Ancient Orient, but in a different view of motivation, the Sacred Tent had to be regularly purified by bloody sacrifices and incensing (also a material but bloodless offering), on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16.11-21). Outside the monotheistic area of the Jews, this practice was frequently encountered in the neighbouring peoples, to protect their temples from any uncleanness, which made them vulnerable to the “demons’ destructive attack.”<sup>39</sup>

Precisely to preserve the cleanness of the sanctuary and, implicitly, not to make the presence of Yahve’s glory in it improper, the Law also laid down the conditions of the state of purification for the religious staff, i.e. the Levites, priests, and the bishop. They were to serve God in a sacred place, using objects considered holy, by consecrating themselves to high service, impossible to attain by the common people. The danger of uncleanness is reflected in radically punishing, sometimes by death, those who found themselves in such spiritual deficiency, who had nevertheless dared to enter the sacrificial communion, by consuming “flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings” (Lev. 7.20-21).

## Conclusions

From the Old Testament explanations regarding the necessity of the status of spiritual purity, the Church retained, in the case of women, only the uncleanness entailed by the confinement state (reduced to a minimum of 40 days, without distinguishing between the birth of a boy and that of a girl) and the state of monthly impurity, which forbids the use of sanctified matters (the holy water, the Host, the myrrh) as well as access to a holy place. For men, the state of purity has restricted allowed sexual intercourse, within the family, for “*fasting and prayer*” (1 Cor.

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<sup>39</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural istoric al Vechiului Testament*, p. 132.

7.5) and, naturally, for the reception of the Holy Communion, the Body, and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The responsibilities of the clergy in the exercise of the priestly function involve humble and “*clean*” service in the Holy Altar, to come near the sacred objects.

The Israelite spirituality has also left us the concept of the energetic positive ideal state, attributed to holy objects by their nature, because they have been elevated to a special spiritual height through the infusion of the divine grace, understood as uncreated divine energy (The Holy Gospel or the holy Relics – bodies of saints). The sanctified objects (icons, clerical vestments, holy water, the Host, the myrrh) have been similarly understood, with the possibility of sanctifying the entire surrounding nature, necessary for humans, a connection with God through His very creation, confessed by St. Paul the Apostle as follows: “For in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17.28). “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11.36).