



UNDERSTANDING HOLINESS IN EXODUS 3 FROM THE LENS OF BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY

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Holiness is studied from the lens of Biblical Spirituality. Situated in the Divine-Human relational process, the movement from being un-holy to holy; from being unclean to Divine Purity is given close attention. God as the רק קדוש, draws his people into Himself through purification and in intimacy with Him. The human reality responds with respect and reverence not only to God but to his people as well. However, God has a special preference for the poor and helpless for the clothes them with Himself like a soldier wears his armor. Through a spiritual reading of Exodus 3 and other related Scriptural narratives, these understanding of holiness is surfaced specifically, in the lived experience of Holiness, its nearness in day-to-day life.

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Holiness is a key concept in the field of Spirituality.¹ Holiness situates itself in a specific dynamic tension between the Divine Reality – the one and only Holy and human reality -- the fragile, wounded, and corrupted. Spirituality is seen as the movement from being un-holy to Holy. Certainly, we are familiar with the word ‘holiness’, for we recite or sing it during the Eucharist.² However, for most of us, it belongs to liturgical ceremonies and not to the nearness of daily experience. Holiness seems to be abstract and ethereal, pointing to another reality that is

totally different from ours, a celestial reality that belongs to the angels, spirits, and the like. It is remote from daily experience and is unnaturally weaved in day-to-day experience. Hence, the arising question is how to bring this high and formal impression of holiness into the nearness and concreteness of daily lives. This aspect of holiness specifically in Exodus 3 is approached through biblical Spirituality.³

GOD AS THE HOLY ONE

The Holy. What does it mean when God is understood and experienced as the Holy One? In the Jewish tradition, God as *Hakkadosh* (שׁוֹדֵקָה) or the Holy One approximates His uniqueness, distinction, and sacredness. It makes God the only one who is worthy of one and authentic worship and adoration --- unsurpassable, incomparable, and unrivaled. There is no substitute for the word Holy, for it freely withdraws itself and remains absolute. In Exodus 3:5, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” The ground is distinguished between what is in Holiness and what is outside it. Boundaries are demarcated. In Exodus 19:10-24,

The Lord said to Moses: “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and prepare for the third day because on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Be

¹ To provide an understanding of Spirituality, it is recognized as “... relational process between God and man. The accent falls one moment on the divine pole (the Awesome, the Holy, the Merciful, the Infinite) and the next on the human pole (application, dedication, awakening). These constitute an original relational whole within which the two poles make their appearance. The two poles interlock: for humans, the divine emanations form the way back to God; God’s abundant mercy takes shape in human’s works of mercy; God’s holiness is received by believers in the sanctification of their life. As a result of this reciprocity, human conduct is both active and passive: God’s mercy is received in deeds of mercy; the fear of God trembles at the Secret to which it reaches out; the knowledge of God is God-given knowledge. The relation between God and man is a process extending from the very first awesome touch to respectful love (“fear”); from living in the commonplace world to being completely consumed in the reality of God (holiness); from the ultimate emanation of God to a state of attachment to the Infinite (kabbala), from original wholeness to complete maturity (perfection). The original wholeness of man looks forward to a complete surrender-in-love; the human spirit finds its completion in union with the Spirit of God; the divine core reaches its resting place when it breathes along with the self-giving of the Father. The relational process is realized in the substance of human existence: the intellect (knowledge, attention, awakening, contemplation), the will (devotion, attachment, kawwana, fervency, inwardness), the memory, control of one’s drives, lifestyle, the ordering of time and space, social interaction, the religious life, and culture. The intimacy of the relational process and the concentration which flows from it affect a contraction that is peculiar to itself (its own language and logic, inwardness, mysticism, kabbala) and a dissociation from the prevailing patterns (the world, instrumental rationality, which has been secularized and objectivized, the unmerciful, externality). In spirituality, the goal is not to name or define the divine pole. It appears within the wholeness of the relational process following the phase in which this process finds itself: as wholly other than the finite (holiness), as awesome touch (“fear”), as an unfolding of power in which man shares (kabbala), and as Spirit who animates our spirit (spirituality). The views held concerning God and the divine names must be understood in the light of the relational process in which they function. Also, the human pole must be read in the light of this process. In accordance with its position in the spiritual process, the human pole is touched and made to tremble (“fear”), applies itself to the search for God (contemplation), devotes itself fervently to God (devotion, piety), makes itself receptive and allows itself to be purified (asceticism), appropriates God’s life to itself (inner life), lets itself be transported outside of itself in love (mysticism), and that on all the levels of existence (asceticism, inner life). Through this relational process, its original wholeness and ultimate maturity come to light (perfection). Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*. (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 364-365.com

There are other key concepts in Spirituality like perfection, mercy, knowledge, devotion, inner life, mysticism, among others. This paper takes on Holiness.

² Holy, Holy, Holy. Lord God of Hosts, Heaven and earth are full of your glory! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

³ Biblical spirituality “relates all that happen between two poles: 1. The divine-human relational process in the Bible; 2. The Bible in the divine-human relational process. We have to put in here again that the two poles are complex. What happens between the two poles belongs to the area of the study of Biblical spirituality too. The activity of the reader in attributing meaning, the influence of the pre-understanding, and the social, historical, and cultural context belong to the field of biblical spirituality, also the impact the text and the reading process have on the reader. Biblical spirituality as a discipline is the dialogue of exegesis and spirituality. In researching this field, a threefold competence is needed: an exegetical competence, competence in the study of spirituality, and competence to integrate exegesis and spirituality.” Huub Welzen, *Contours of Biblical Spirituality as a Discipline, Acta Theologica*, 15 (2011), 37-60.





careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch them, but they shall be stoned or shot with arrows; [a] whether animal or human being, they shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain." So Moses went down from the mountain to the people. He consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, "Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman."

On the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all people who were in the camp trembled. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now, Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended upon it in the fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. When the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain, the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people not to break through to the Lord to look; otherwise many of them will perish. Even the priests who approach the Lord must consecrate themselves or the Lord will break out against them." Moses said to the Lord, "The people are not permitted to come up to Mount Sinai; for you yourself warned us, saying, 'Set limits around the mountain and keep it holy.'" The Lord said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you; but do not let either the priests or the people break through to come up to the Lord; otherwise, he will break out against them."

Limits are set for the people in approaching the Holy. They are not allowed to go up or touch any part of the mountain. It is keeping the limits that the mountain is kept in its holiness. Death awaits those who will go beyond the limit. However, it does not mean that God disconnects with the people of Israel. Although there is a restriction in terms of approach, nevertheless, the Divine-human encounter takes place. God communicates Himself through smoke, fire, earthquake, and thunder. The restrictions are to exercise the utmost respect and reverence to the holy mountain before the Israelites approach it. Hence arises the consequence of distinguishing

what is holy and what is ordinary so as not to violate or to desecrate the Holy. We see this in the following texts:

Leviticus 10:10. You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean...

Numbers 18:32. You shall incur no guilt by reason of it when you have offered the best of it. But you shall not profane the holy gifts of the Israelites, on pain of death.

Leviticus 22:15. No one shall profane the sacred donations of the people of Israel, which they offer to the Lord...

Leviticus 19:8. All who eat it shall be subject to punishment because they have profaned what is holy to the Lord; and any such person shall be cut off from the people.

Exodus 31:14. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people.

Leviticus 21:12, 23. He shall not go outside the sanctuary and thus profane the sanctuary of his God; for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the Lord.

But he shall not come near the curtain or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries; for I am the Lord; I sanctify them.

Evident in these texts is the sphere of the Holy and what belongs to it. It is clean and the best offering must be given to it. The Sabbath must be kept for it is the day of the Holy. No profanity must be committed or else they either die or cut off from the community. Further, we see that respect for the Holy has a consequence in terms of human dealings. The failure to respect the Holy results in violence in human relations. When the Holy is profaned, the offering of the holy gifts of the people of Israel is also desecrated. The offerings of the Israelites are taken advantage of, robbed, and pilfered. Violence is a result of going





beyond the limit, failing to approach the Holy with utmost respect and reverence, and defiling the Holy ground.

The Holy One. The Holy One appears twenty-five times in the book of Prophet Isaiah. It is the seraphim who acclaim the holiness of God, “Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”⁴ As the Holy One, God is lifted and dwells on High. Thus, God is 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.”⁵ Further, He is the pure and incorruptible one that purifies the Israelites in their iniquities, “but the Lord of hosts is exalted by justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness.”⁶ God’s holiness is incomparable with all else that exist, “O whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One.”⁷ Such deserves human respect and awe, reverence and concern.

Holiness in Relation with God. The reality of holiness reveals that it belongs to God, it is the enduring presence of God, and it is the intimacy of God. Holiness belongs to God unconditionally, immediately, and completely. It is unconditional because God’s belonging to Himself is not submitted to any condition and negotiation. It is immediate because God’s belonging to Himself is not mediated by anyone or anything. It is total because nothing is excluded from God’s belonging to Himself. All is included. Hence, Holiness is what is related and belongs to God in an unconditional, immediate, and complete

manner.⁸ We say in the second Eucharistic prayer, “You are indeed Holy, O Lord, the fount of all holiness. Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall...” It is interesting to note that this prayer comes after the acclamation of God’s Holiness, Holy, Holy, Holy. This understanding is foundational for it becomes the ground of all holiness that permeates creation. Hence, we come to the specific and preferential area that belongs to the Holiness of God: creation and the human person as the tselem (צלם).

Holiness and Creation. Isaiah 6:3 speaks of the earth as being filled with God’s glory and the heavenly beings are permeated by His Holy presence. To read creation is to see the Holiness of God implanted in it. St. Paul has these words in his letter to the Romans, “Ever since the creation of the world, his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.”⁹ In creation, we come to understand God for it perfectly represents God. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us, “the immense diversity and pluriformity of this creation more perfectly represent God than any one creature alone or by itself.”¹⁰ Hence, to see the connection and unitedness of God and His creation is to understand deeply both the creator and creation. To detach creation, God results not only mistake in understanding but violence. “Any mistake we make about creation will also be a mistake about God.”¹¹

Holiness and the Human Beings. As part of creation, human beings are holy because they are created in the image and likeness of God.

⁴ Isa. 6:2-3.

⁵ Isa. 57:15.

⁶ Isa. 5:16.

⁷ Isa. 40:25.

⁸ Kees Waaijman, Holiness in Spirituality, *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 72:4 (2016), a3463. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3463>

⁹ Rom. 1:20.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.47.1.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.3.1, II.3.6.





They belong to Him in a particular way: they are His holy icon. Man as the image of God is understood as adumbration according to the priestly account of Creation. “Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”¹² Such Divine decree occurs at the last working day of creation which was carried out with immediacy “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” The Hebrew term used for an image is *tselem* (צלם) which can also be translated as adumbration. The word adumbration refers to the relationship between the sculptor and his sculpture. It implies that the sculpture’s existence comes through the sculpture. The sculpture is the image of the sculptor. This image of God is permanently/indissolubly created in the human person and is preserved in all generations. “This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them “Humankind” when they were created.”

Human beings as an adumbration of God is vitally connected with Him. To detach from this relation jeopardizes the human person as an obscure being. We see this in Psalm 39: 6-8.¹³ What does it mean to have a shadowy existence? Heaping up and yet do not know what they gather; busy and yet they do not know what they are busy for. Their busyness lacks if not is devoid

¹² Gen. 1:26.

¹³ Surely everyone goes about like a shadow.
Surely for nothing, they are in turmoil;
they heap up and do not know who will gather.
“And now, O Lord, what do I wait for?
My hope is in you.
Deliver me from all my transgressions.
Do not make me the scorn of the fool.

of meaning and purpose. These persons are in turmoil, their existence is like a shadow, vague and obscure. How does a person have a clear and distinct existence? The psalmist teaches us, “And now, O Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you.” To put one’s hope in God is to ground one’s being in God and to connect the life of the creature with the Creator.

Psalm 73¹⁴ uses the analogy of the vanishing dream when the dreamer is awakened to a human person cut-off from God.

The psalmist says that the wicked is the one who cuts off connection with God and imagines himself to be God. The wicked has separated oneself from the Being who has one image. The wicked is like a dream removed from the dreamer and evaporates. To live such life is delusional while those who continue to be the adumbration of God remain with God, “I was stupid and ignorant I was like a brute beast toward you. Nevertheless, I am continuing with you; you hold my right hand. Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.” God as the Being imaged, He is the One that animates, gives life, and even forms and sustains families and communities. And the only way to be alive is to be connected with God or else one’s existence becomes shadowy. How does one be connected with God? The mystical path initiates the human person into participation in God’s

¹⁴ For they have no pain;
their bodies are sound and sleek.
They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not plagued like other people.
Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them like a garment.
Their eyes swell out with fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.
They set their mouths against heaven,
and their tongues range over the earth.
Therefore the people turn and praise them,
and find no fault in them.
And they say, “How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?”
Such are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.





being, as the human person becomes conscious of this Divine presence in the created beings.

Holiness and the Oppressed People. The oppressed people belong immediately and completely to God: “Then the Lord said, ‘I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.’”¹⁵ God has observed and heard their cries and He came down to save his people. God is present and active in the plight of Israelites. As the succeeding text account to us, God worked for the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt primarily because of the immediate and complete belongingness of Israel to God. The liberation of Israel is God’s holiness permeating the suffering of His people.

Holiness and God’s Justice. Psalm 99 speaks of God as a just king, “v. 3 Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. When the representative of the people cried out, God listened to them, “v. 6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called on his name. They cried to the Lord, and he answered them.” God communicates his decrees to the people, “v. 7 He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; they kept his decrees, and the statutes that he gave them.” God forgives but punishes evil ways, “v. 8 O Lord our God,

you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings.” This awareness of the justice of God led the Israelites to worship God and understands the Holiness that belongs to God, “v. 9 Extol the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the Lord our God is holy.”

Creation, human being, oppression, and justice belong unconditionally, immediately, and completely to God. They are holy, as God is holy.

THE HOLINESS OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE

Exodus 3 accounts for God’s revelation of his Holiness. As Moses shepherds the flock of his father-in-law, he led his flock at the side of the desert, approaching Horeb, the mountain of God. We read in Exodus 3:1-6,

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up.” When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.”

The bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Fire is a manifestation of God’s presence, to guide the way and illumine the night of the Israelites (Ex. 13:21; Neh. 9:12; Nehemiah 9:19; Ps. 78:14); as a Divine sign of God’s glory that although God is not seen as He is, He is with the Israelites and communicates His commandments to them (Num. 14:14; Dt. 1:33, Ps. 105:39, Is. 4:5; Ex.

¹⁵ Ex. 3:7-10.





40:38; Num. 9:15-16; Dn. 7:9; Dt. 4:12, 15, and 33; Dt 5:4, 22, and 24; Deuteronomy 9:10; Dt. 10:4; Ex. 24:17; 2 Sm. 22:13, Ps. 18:12, 1 Kings 19:12); as a means God's discipline and the justice for Israelites (Ex. 14:24; Dt. 4:36, Dt. 5:26, Ex. 19:18, Is. 66:15, and Ps. 50:3).

You are standing on holy ground. In the burning bush, God did not only manifest Himself but did consume the bush into Himself. For this reason, the bush is not reduced to ashes and into nothingness. The fire that blazed the bush immersed the bush in the very reality of God, His very life, light, love – in God's very Holiness. The bush no longer is limited to its bushiness, or preoccupied about itself regarding its interests, but is freed in the nothingness of the desert. The bush is not consumed, destroyed, and destructed but burned, lived, and enlightened by the Divine life. Such is the encounter of the bush with the Holiness of God. And since the bush is rooted in the ground, the ground is also touched by the burning reality of God. From an arid and dry ground, the desert is transformed into holy ground. The holiness of the ground is not caused by the quality of the ground itself, but by the presence of the Lord and by his holiness. The ground is never a holy place as such. The holy ground is holy because it belongs to the Holy One.

Remove the sandals from your feet. Moses removes the sandals of his feet which is a recognition of God as the possessor of all things. To remove one's sandals is to renounce any claim to possess things. The ground solely belongs to God unconditionally, immediately, and completely. The holy ground expresses the truthfulness of the Owner, and to remove the sandals respects his Holiness that belongs to God. Holiness then, the absolute possession of God, was recognized by the unconditional reverence of its visitor, Moses. These two sides –

the unconditional ownership and unconditional reverence is the very essence of holiness in this story.

Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look at God.

The vision of the Lord prompts awe and fear in Moses. Moses hiding his face means that God who belongs to Himself is ungraspable. The holiness of God cannot be an object or reduced in our ways of seeing. He is holy. He belongs to Himself in an unfathomable way. The reverence given by Moses to God continues into the revelation of the name of God by God Himself. Such is the center of the narrative, "But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."¹⁶

Who am I that I should go? The answer follows immediately: I am with you. Here, the first communication of the name is heard: I am with you, *eyeh imka*.¹⁷ A first glimpse of the name Yahweh, our Lord: I am with you. A first explanation of the name Yahweh, giving insight in its meaning: I am. I am with you. This meaning of the name is spelled out in this way: 'I have seen the misery of my people, I have heard their cry, I know their sufferings, I have come down to deliver them, I have seen their oppression, I am with you.¹⁸ I have seen, I have heard, I know, I have come, I am, I am with you. God clothed Himself with the poorest people. His eyes are filled with their misery. His ears are bestowed with their cry. His heart is overwhelmed by their sufferings. God is moved completely, immediately, unconditionally by his people. He came down to deliver his people, seeing their

¹⁶ Ex. 3:11-12.

¹⁷ Ex. 3:6, 12.

¹⁸ Ex. 3:7-12.





oppression by seeing them and being with them. This is the very essence of his name: I am, I am with you.

From the first explanation of Yahweh, the narrative moves to its deepest and complete explanation: level: I am: I am, 'eyeh 'asher 'eyeh.

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.¹⁹

I am: I am. Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions have contemplated this revelation of the name. They gazed, moved, and impressed by this most holy name: I am: I am. They were stirred by it. They were enthralled by it: I am: I am. I am already an extraordinary revelation. But the texts proceed further, bringing the reader into the most holy place of the name and the interiority of the name: 'I am: I am!'

The holiness of the name – I am – is doubled: 'I am: I am.' It unfolds the holiest of the name: the most personal, its interiority par excellence: 'I am: I am.' The purest presence, without any ambiguity, without any corruption. God belongs unconditionally, immediately, and completely to Himself. Indeed, He is the Holy One, the source of all holiness. And God as holy and intimate presence, He is present with us: 'I am with you as I am: I am.' God clothes us with Himself. He shapes our intimacy in a relationship that forms our interiority. In the part of a human being, he strives to receive God. He strives to receive

God. He strives to accept God. He strives to pay attention to God. The human being is disposed of before God in a receptive, reciprocal, responsive, and responsible manner.

To be disposed to God's Holy Name means to situate ourselves within the area of His Holiness. It is a recognition and behavior that emanates from the realization that we are not the sole owner of God's Name. We do not have the monopoly and control of God's Name. To do otherwise leads one to brutality, violence, religious fundamentalism, and spiritual arrogance, acting as if we own the Name of God. The name of God requires utmost reverence, which is a willingness to be possessed by God and not to possess God.

THE HOLINESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Consecration. The people of God are holy because they are consecrated to the Holy One. The human being gives himself up to God and the Holiness of God touches and consumes him. Like the desert, the people of God are not holy as such. They are only in so far as they belong to God completely, unconditionally, and immediately. To belong to God is to consecrate oneself to God and to consecrate oneself to God is sanctification.²⁰ The human being is brought into the sphere of the Holy.

Ex. 29-21. Then you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his vestments and his sons and his sons' vestments with him; then he and his vestments shall be holy, as well as his sons and his sons' vestments.

Ex. 29:37. Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar, and consecrate it, and the altar shall be most holy; whatever touches the altar shall become holy.

¹⁹ Ex. 3:13-15.

²⁰ Kees Waaijman, Holiness in Spirituality, *HTS Theologische Studies/Theological Studies*, 72:4 (2016), a3463. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3463>





Ex. 30:29. You shall consecrate them, so that they may be most holy; whatever touches them will become holy.

Lev. 6: 11, 20. Then he shall take off his vestments and put on other garments, and carry the ashes out to a clean place outside the camp. This is the offering that Aaron and his sons shall offer to the Lord on the day when he is anointed: one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour as a regular offering, half of it in the morning and a half in the evening.

As far as God is the human person's very being, he is holy. God invites human beings to participate in his holiness, in such a way that they themselves become holy. This is what we read in the book Deuteronomy, where Israel is qualified as 'holy people.'

Dt. 7:6. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

Dt 14: 2. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; it is you the Lord has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

Dt. 26:19. For him to set you high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honor; and for you to be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised.

Dt. 28: 9. The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he has sworn to you if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways.

Purification. Consecration implies purification through washing their clothes, removing sandals, among others; but it is not only limited to physical impurities but by ethical as well. Such purification is ritualized initiating the person into the process of cleansing which eventually

leads to the purification of the whole person. This process leads the people into the transition of coming to the reality of the Holy and moving away from all that is not holy. Hence, consecration is a conformation in the most complete possible way to the Holy One.

Lv. 19: 2. Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.

Lv. 20: 7. Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy; for I am the Lord your God.

Lv. 21:8. and you shall treat them as holy since they offer the food of your God; they shall be holy to you, for I the Lord, I who sanctify you, am holy.

Ex. 19:6. but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.

Holiness as Relational. The people of God received their holiness from God, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God."²¹ His people are holy only in relation to the Holy One. To be cut off from this relationship diminishes the holiness of the people. In this relation, God has clothed Himself with us, and we are clothed with Him. God is not only our armor, but we are clothed with the armor of God.

Holiness is not an inherent quality in the people of God. It only comes into being to the extent that the people of God are related to God. Hence, holiness exists only in a relational process. Holiness is relational. As long as the people of God participate in God's holiness in a complete, immediate, and unconditional manner, they are made holy, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession."²² As the people of God consecrate themselves to God,

²¹ Dt. 14:21.

²² Dt. 7:6; 14:2.





God touches them, they are consumed by the Holy Ones. It is God alone who can sanctify, “You shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel: I am the Lord; I sanctify you...”²³ God has chosen his people to participate in His Holiness. Such invitation awaits acceptance on the part of God’s people. “This very day, the Lord your God is commanding you to observe these statutes and ordinances; so, observe them diligently with all your heart and with all your soul. Today, you have obtained the Lord’s agreement: to be your God; and for you to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, and his ordinances, and to obey him.”²⁴

As God gives His statutes and ordinances, inviting His people to observe them diligently, He also agreed to be their God. The commandments and statutes are not only for societal order and standards. It is primarily to remain in a relationship with God, to be steadfast in this relationship and to keep the holiness of God’s people. This is the core of the life of God’s people: to participate in God’s holiness. The core of our life is participating in the Lord’s holiness, “Today the Lord has obtained your agreement: to be his treasured people, as he promised you, and to keep his commandments; for him to set you high above all nations that he has made, in praise, in fame and in honor; and for you to be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised.”²⁵

The people of God are His People, not by birth, but because God chose them. The people of God are holy because the holiness of God radiates and visible in them. The command, “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your

God am holy,”²⁶ is interpreted in this manner, since you participate in my holiness, in the Holy One, and you are consecrated by Me’. Holiness is not a high standard life far away from human capacity. It involves our day to day experience. God gives it as a pure grace to us.

Being seen as Holy People of God. To consecrate oneself to God is to be seen as the holy people of God. “The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he has sworn to you if you keep the commandments of the Lord and walk in his ways. All the people of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you.”²⁷ The name of the Lord is laid upon his people, upon every human being: I am: I am. I am with you. I do not have any other life than being with you, seeing you, hearing you, feeling you, and being you. The people of God must take time to pay full attention to it. The holiness of God must permeate inwardly to the innermost level of intimacy, transforming the people of God as they faithfully participate in God’s holiness in their everyday lives.

To be transformed into God’s holiness is to have an unconditional reverence for the integrity of every human being. The intimacy of the other has to be respected as holy, unconditional, immediate, and complete. A person consecrated to God will not abuse, will not be violent, and will not suppress the holy other. ‘You should be holy as I am holy.’ This is the core of holiness: it is what belongs to God and his people, unconditionally, immediately, and completely. It is an area in which we cannot negotiate. Holiness is holiness. It deserves unconditional respect and reverence.

²³ Lv. 22:32.

²⁴ Dt. 26: 16-17.

²⁵ Dt. 26: 18-19.

²⁶ Lv. 19: 2.

²⁷ Dt. 28:9-10.





CONCLUSION

The people of God are called to dedicate their lives to the holiness of God. The holiness of God attracts, purifies, and leads them into the very reality of God. Spirituality is an on-going transformation from the non-holy to the Holy One. Such transition leads one to respect and revere not only God but His people and His children as well. The holiness of God and the holiness of his people is one. God has chosen the poor and helpless, clothing Himself with their situation. In turn, they are clothed by God. God became their clothes and armor. They, being clothed and donned with God's armor all the more, reveals that they are God's icon. Hence, as icons of God, they should not be abused, oppressed, violated and hurt. To revere and respect God demands that we also revere and respect His people for they are His Icon. Understanding this, holiness becomes very near and concrete --- weaved in the fibers of our daily lives. The discovery of our poverty, helplessness, frailty, weakness and the desert of our human experience reminds us that all is grace. These desert experiences, when touched by the reality of God, are turned into God's Holy ground. When God's holiness touches our pains, wounds, and sufferings, when we welcome God into our interiority, we are made holy.

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