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Jesus and Purity: An Ongoing Debate*

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The importance of purity legislation and the 'separateness' that it implied within Second Temple Judaism confirms the significance of the renewed interest in purity issues in 'historical Jesus' research. The relevance of John the Baptist's 'baptism' is less clear than at first appears. But that Jesus himself shared at least some purity priorities is implied by Mark 1.44 and by his 'cleansing of the Temple'. Yet he also sat loose to the purity *halakhoth* regarding clean and unclean and table-fellowship, which suggests that Jesus did not regard such concerns as central to the definition of Israel and its practice.

One of the main features of current investigations into the life and mission of Jesus is that they start from the recognition that Jesus was a Jew. The emphasis is part of the continuing reaction within Western scholarship to Christianity's shameful heritage of anti-Judaism. And partly it is the result of scholarly recognition that Second Temple Judaism was itself a complex and diverse phenomenon within whose complexity and diversity it is possible more easily to locate Jesus the Jew. But the move has generated its own set of problematic issues. As always when Jesus is seen as some sort of bridge figure between Judaism and Christianity, any attempt to pull him more firmly to one side provokes protest from those who suspect his relation to the other side has been compromised.

One of the major issues thus triggered is that of Jesus and purity. The issue has been posed most sharply by E. P. Sanders,[1] in debate particularly with J. Neusner,[2]

* This paper was delivered at the SBL meeting in Denver, Colorado, in November 2001, in what was intended to be a three-way debate with E. P. Sanders and Bruce Chilton. Unfortunately Sanders was unable to be present in person (other than by video-presentation), so that the debate could not develop as intended.

1 E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985); also *idem, Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM, 1990), and *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992).

2 In his presentation at the Denver meeting Sanders urged that 'everyone should read Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (SJLA 1; Leiden: Brill, 1973). This work opened the modern discussion of the topic.'

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and by B. Chilton who has made his own distinctive contribution to the current debate.[3] The present paper is intended as a contribution to that debate. I start by recalling the relevance of the subject for anyone who takes the Jewishness of Jesus seriously.

1. The importance of purity in Second Temple Judaism

It cannot be doubted that purity was a major preoccupation in the Judaism of Jesus' time.

(a) *The laws of clean and unclean* were central to Jewish identity (Lev 11.1–23; Deut 14.3–21). Whatever the importance of such legislation before the exile, it is clear from 1 Macc 1.62–3 that the resolution 'not to eat unclean food' became a defining characteristic of the Maccabean rebellion, and thus definitive for Jewish national identity. The fact that Maccabean martyrs were prepared to die 'rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant' evidently imprinted itself upon Jewish subconsciousness. The inherent self-contradiction of a Jew eating something unclean is well caught in Luke's account of Peter's vision on the rooftop in Joppa. According to that account, Peter, Jesus' right-hand man, had 'never eaten anything that is common or unclean' (Acts 10.14). Luke repeats the story so that there should be no misunderstanding on the point: 'nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth' (Acts 11.8).

One aspect of the legislation on clean and unclean food which has not been given enough attention is the link between clean/unclean and Israel's *separation* from the (other) nations. The point should have been clearer from Lev 20.24–6:

> I am the LORD your God; I have separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; you shall not bring abomination on yourselves by animal or by bird or by anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine.

Holiness and purity go hand in hand. To be pure is to be set apart to Yahweh, that is, to be separated from other peoples that would infringe or compromise

3 B. Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program within a Cultural History of Sacrifice* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1992); also *idem*, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000). Also deserving of mention is M. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1984, ²1998), and *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

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that holiness, that purity. Israel had a divine mandate to maintain a distinct and separate identity from the other nations (Gentiles).[4] Here again the episode in Acts 10–11 demonstrates the logic. That which is 'common' (κοινός)[5] is that which has not been 'separated' from common usage, that is, has not been rendered or treated as holy. In turn, Peter recognizes the logic of the revelation given to him: that the divine annulment of the laws of clean and unclean *beasts* means that Peter should no longer 'call any *man* common or unclean'. And so he willingly eats with uncircumcised Gentiles (11.3). The historical facts behind the episode are not as clear as we might wish. Peter's action in withdrawing from table-fellowship with Gentile believers in Antioch and 'separating' himself from them (Acts 2.12) raises questions which we need not go into here. The point is firm whatever the precise facts and sequence of events. Both episodes bear clear testimony to the crucial role of the laws of clean and unclean in defining Second Temple Jewish identity, and in enforcing the corollary of separation of Jews from Gentiles where clean/unclean food marked the dividing line.

(b) There is no need for me to go into detail regarding the rest of the biblical purity laws, relating particularly to the processes of human generation, birth and death (Lev 12–15). Sanders has provided a thorough documentation of the main impurities and the requisite purifications.[6] Two aspects, however, require some clarification.

One is the relation between impurity and sin. As Sanders has repeatedly observed, impurity is *not* sin;[7] to be impure was not wrong.[8] But as already noted, holiness and purity are closely related, and breach of the holiness code *is* sin

4 The prophecy of Balaam in Num 23.9 was particularly significant for Jewish self-understanding – 'a people dwelling alone, and not reckoning itself among the nations'. 'Exclusivism was part and parcel of Judaism' (Sanders, *Judaism*, 266). The attitude is expressed in extreme form in *Jub.* 15.30–32 and 22.16; but note also Dan 1.8–16; *Ep. Arist.* 139, 142; and see further J. D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1991) 23–31.

5 The uniquely Jewish sense of 'profane, unclean, defiled' is given because κοινός was used as equivalent to the biblical *tame*' (e.g. Lev 11.4–8; Deut 14.7–10; Judg 13.4; Hos 9.3) or *chol* (Lev 10.10; Ezek 22.26; 44.23). The step was taken subsequent to the LXX rendering of the Hebrew Bible, but was established in the Maccabean crisis (1 Macc 1.47, 62; note also Jos. *Ant.* 11.346), and is well attested in relation to eating food for mid-first-century CE by Rom 14.14 and Acts 10.14; 11.18, as well as by Mark 7.2, 5.

6 Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 134–51; *idem*, *Judaism*, 214–22. See also now T. Kazen, *Jesus and Purity* Halakhah: *Was Jesus Indifferent to Impurity?* (ConBNT 38; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2002) esp. ch. 4.

7 Particularly *Jesus and Judaism*, 182–3.

8 In his video-presentation at Denver Sanders repeated what he has often said elsewhere: that 'most Jews were impure most of the time'.

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(e.g. Lev 19.8; 20.17; 22.9). And religious observance in a state of impurity *is* sin (e.g. Isa 6.7; *1 Enoch* 5.4; *Pss. Sol.* 8.12–13).[9]

The other is the relation between purity and the Temple. There is no doubt that the Temple was the focal point and reason for purity: if one was to approach the holy God one had to be holy/pure oneself. Strictly speaking, purification was only necessary for those who wished to attend the Temple. That, however, did not mean that impurity could be treated lightly when one was distant from the Temple. Galilean Jews, for example, were several days' journey away from the Temple, and might attend the Temple only during one pilgrim feast in the course of a year. That again does not mean that they could and did sit light to the purity laws during the interval between visits to the Temple. As J. Milgrom has observed, 'the priestly laws of impurity (Lev 11–15) rest on the postulate that impurity incurred anywhere is potentially dangerous to the sanctuary', and 'the priestly legislators are very much concerned with the need to eliminate, or, at least, control the occurrence of impurity *anywhere in the land* – whether in the home, on the table, or in the bed'.[10]

(c) The archaeological evidence provides surprisingly robust confirmation that such logic was widely practised in the Judaism of Jesus' day. Of direct relevance is what J. Reed calls four indicators of Jewish religious identity: stone vessels (chalk or soft limestone), attesting a concern for ritual purity;[11] plastered stepped pools, that is, Jewish ritual baths (*miqwaoth*);[12] burial practices, reflecting Jewish views of the afterlife;[13] and bone profiles without pork, indicating conformity to Jewish dietary laws. Such finds have been made across Galilee, whereas they are lacking at sites outside the Galilee and the Golan.[14] This confirms the

9 See further the discussion in Kazen, *Jesus and Purity* Halakhah, 201–19, who points out, in discussion with J. Klawans (below, n. 42), that the *hattat* sacrifice (usually translated as 'sin-offering') is present in all cases of defilement, except for semen emissions and menstruation, 'which implies that there are moral connotations to all these cases which require such sacrifices' (209–10).

10 J. Milgrom, *Leviticus* (AB 3; 2 vols; New York: Doubleday, 1991) here 1.1007. Kazen also sees evidence of an 'expansionist purity practice' in Second Temple Judaism (*Jesus and Purity* Halakhah, 72–8).

11 According to the Mishnah stone vessels are impervious to ritual impurity (*Kelim* 10.1; *Ohol.* 5.5; *Para.* 5.5).

12 See Sanders, *Jewish Law,* 214–27; R. Reich, 'Ritual Baths', *OEANE* 4.430–1. Over 300 ritual baths from the Roman period have been uncovered in Judea, Galilee and the Golan (see e.g. J. D. Crossan and J. L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Text* [San Francisco: Harper, 2001] 168–70).

13 'Placing ossuaries inside so-called *kokhim* or loculi, horizontally shafted underground family tombs, was a distinctly Jewish phenomenon at the end of the Second Temple period' (J. L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus* [Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000] 47).

14 Reed, *Archaeology*, 43–52.

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growing consensus that the population of Galilee at this time was characteristically Jewish,[15] and that as such, maintenance of purity was a consistent concern for them, an integral part of their being Jewish.

It is true that some voices have been raised to query the identification of many of the stepped pools as *miqwaoth*.[16] The principal reasons are the absence of a dividing partition (as at Qumran) to distinguish those descending into the *miqweh* from those ascending (cf. *m. Shekalim* 8.2), and the absence of an adjacent reservoir (as beside the *miqweh* close by the synagogue in Gamla). The issue is unclear: whether private *miqwaoth* would have had a dividing partition; and whether the later mishnaic rules regarding reservoirs were already or were universally observed.[17] But there is no doubt that there were some *miqwaoth* at a distance from the Temple, that is, at a distance which rules out the likelihood that they functioned to purify only in preparation for attendance at the Temple. And given the other indications of active purity concerns in the Galilee of Jesus' time, it remains likely that a good many of the pools thus far discovered did indeed function as *miqwaoth*.[18]

Even with the reservations that the current dispute calls for, then, the evidence of an attentive practice of purity in the Galilee of Jesus' time remains substantial. That is to say, purity/impurity was not regarded as a matter of insignificance or to be treated lightly. Why would purification be sought on a regular basis at distances so remote from the Temple if purity was only required to enter the Temple? It can only be that impurity was regarded as undesirable, to be avoided as much as possible, and to be removed at the earliest opportunity. It is not without relevance to note the several episodes in the Synoptic Gospel tradition which resonate with purity concerns, resonances which would have been unmistakable for a Palestinian Jewish audience (Mark 1.40–4; 5.1–20, 25–34; Luke 10.30–7). These passages will call for closer attention below.

(d) In the light of the above discussion, the emphasis on purity which has been seen as distinctive of the Jewish 'sects', particularly the Pharisees and the Essenes,

15 See further my *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) #9.6.

16 H. Eshel, 'A Note on "Miqvaot" at Sepphoris', in *Archaeology and the Galilee* (ed. D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCollough; University of South Florida; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997) 131–3; B. G. Wright, 'Jewish Ritual Baths – Interpreting the Digs and the Texts: Some Issues in the Social History of Second Temple Judaism', in *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present* (ed. N. A. Silberman and D. Small; JSOTSup 237; Sheffield: JSOT, 1997) 190–214 (I am grateful to Kathleen Corley for the latter reference).

17 Eshel notes that stepped pools of the period have been identified as *miqwaoth*, even though they lack both features ('Note', 131).

18 Kazen also notes the likelihood that the practice of *tebul yom* (immersion before sunset to reduce impurity) was already being enacted by this time, as is implied by the allusions in 4QMMT B 15 and 4Q514, which would imply greater need for and use of *miqwaoth* (*Jesus and Purity* Halakhah, 76–81).

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should be seen not so much as distinctive, rather as an exaggeration or reinforcement or expansion of the purity concerns which characterized what Sanders calls 'common Judaism'.

The question of how important purity was for the Pharisees, and whether they are rightly described in Neusner's terms as a purity sect,[19] is one of the bones of contention between Sanders and Neusner. Sanders objects to Neusner's strong emphasis on this feature, though he concedes a good deal of key ground while disputing its significance.[20] But he seems to forget that where particular religious practices are integral to a group's identity, even 'minor gestures' can become make-or-break points of division.[21] And more weight should surely be given to the Pharisees' very name, generally agreed to signify 'separated ones',[22] and thus indicating a wider perception of the Pharisees as a group who defined themselves by their concern to keep themselves apart – a primarily purity concern.[23]

Josephus reports that the Pharisees handed down various traditions 'to the people' (*Ant.* 13.297), which suggests that their degree of exclusivism was

19 E.g. J. Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

20 Sanders, *Jewish Law*, ch. 3; also *idem*, *Judaism*, particularly 431–40 ('minor gestures' – *Jewish Law*, 232, 235; *Judaism*, 440). For Neusner's own reply, see his 'Mr. Sanders's Pharisees and Mine', *BBR* 2 (1992) 143–69.

21 G. F. Moore perceptively observed that 'In all sects, and in every *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, it is the peculiarities in doctrine, observance, or piety, that are uppermost in the minds of the members; what they have in common with the great body is no doubt taken for granted, but, so to speak, lies in the sectarian subconsciousness' (*Judaism in the First Three Centuries of the Christian Era* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1927–30] 2.161). R. A. Kraft and G. W. E. Nickelsburg similarly note: 'In such instances, differences in interpretation and disputes about law are raised to the level of absolute truth and falsehood and have as their consequences salvation and damnation' (*Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters* [Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1986] 18).

22 *Pᵉrushim*, from *parash*, 'to separate'; see e.g. E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (rev. and ed. G. Vermes and F. Millar; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 4 vols 1973, 1979, 1986, 1987) 2.396–7; S. J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 162; A. J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 220–5.

23 See further Saldarini, *Pharisees*, 212–16, 233–4, 285–7, 290–1; G. Stemberger, *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 75–82; M. Hengel and R. Deines, 'E. P. Sanders' "Common Judaism", Jesus and the Pharisees', *JTS* 46 (1995) 1–70 (here 41–51); H. K. Harrington, 'Did the Pharisees Eat Ordinary Food in a State of Ritual Purity?', *JSJ* 26 (1995) 42–54. The old view that the Pharisees sought to extend the holiness of the Temple throughout the land of Israel, on the basis of Exod 19.5–6, is probably still warranted (Schürer, *History*, 2.396–400; A. F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1986] 124–8; others in Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 152).

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motivated by a concern for the holiness (purity) of the whole people.[24] It may indeed be that we should see their influence in the widespread concern for purity, as attested by the archaeological discoveries noted above (*miqwaoth*, stone vessels), that is, as reflecting characteristic Pharisaic concerns.[25] As perhaps also by the popularity of the heroic story of Judith, which in its concern for purity could be described as 'early or proto-Pharisaic'.[26] Equally fascinating is the possibility that *T. Mos.* 7 is an attack on the Pharisees, by caricaturing Pharisaic concern to maintain purity:[27] 'godless men, who represent themselves as being righteous' and who 'with hand and mind . . . touch unclean things', even though they themselves say, 'Do not touch me, lest you pollute me' (7.3, 9–10)!

It is also worth noting that some see the basic issue separating Sadducees from Pharisees as that, once again, of purity.[28] But there is no dispute that purity was one of the driving motivations of the Essenes, as confirmed by the Qumran texts, with their strict application of purity rules and discipline.[29] Illuminating is Josephus's description (now sufficiently confirmed by 1QS 6–7) of how the full members of the community bathed in cold water before their meal, 'after which they assemble in a private apartment which none of the uninitiated is permitted to enter; pure now themselves, they repair to the refectory, as to some sacred shrine' (*War* 2.129). Or again, he speaks of the four grades of membership, and how 'a senior if but touched by a junior, must take a bath, as after contact with an alien' (*War* 2.150). Equally illuminating has been what appears to be Qumran's own explanation for or defence of their practice in 4QMMT: that they felt their own *halakhoth* touching many aspects of purity, with the implication that opposing rulings practised elsewhere breached the purity code, was sufficient justification for them to have '*separated*' from the rest of the people, that is, to maintain their own (that is, Israel's!) holiness.[30]

The point to be noted here is that such 'separation' of Pharisees and Essenes within Second Temple Judaism was only an exaggerated expression of a conviction close to the heart of Israel's concept of election (to be separate from the [other] nations).

24 Hengel and Deines, 'Sanders' Judaism', 30–1, 46–7, in contrast to the high degree of exclusivism shown by the Qumran people.

25 Ibid., 34–5.

26 Ibid., 48–9.

27 So e.g. J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1969) 250; D. Flusser, *Jesus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1969, rev. 1998) 60.

28 G. G. Porton, *ABD* 5.892–3. 'In the Mishnah and Tosefta most of the disputes between the Sadducees and Pharisees (and others) concern interpretations of the laws of ritual purity' (Saldarini, *Pharisees*, 233).

29 M. Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (SNTSMS 53; Cambridge: CUP, 1985).

30 See my '4QMMT and Galatians', *NTS* 43 (1997) 147–53 (here 147–8).

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(e) In the light of all this we can give fuller content to the description of Jesus as a Jew. If Jesus was brought up as a devout Jew, as I believe we can safely assume,[31] then we can also assume, unless there is evidence to the contrary, that he observed the laws of clean and unclean and purity, and that when he attended the Temple he naturally observed the required purity ritual. Where he stood on the various controversies within Judaism regarding purity, and its intensified observation by Pharisees and Essenes in particular, is one of the issues that can now be further clarified. The starting point for the discussion, however, is that purity/impurity was regarded as a matter of primary concern for Judaism as a whole, with the implication that Jesus the devout Jew would have shared that concern.

2. John the Baptist

In an enquiry into Jesus and purity we can hardly ignore John the Baptist: partly because the unanimous tradition is that Jesus' mission began from John; and partly because John was precisely 'the Baptist'. As Chilton among others has stressed, the symbolism of purity is inescapable in a rite involving immersion (baptism) in water. But that initial consensus soon comes under strain.

(a) Why was John called 'the Baptist'? The title is attested not simply by the Gospel writers – 'the baptizer' (ὁ βαπτίζων, Mark 6.14, 24), 'the Baptist' (ὁ βαπτιστής, Mark 6.25; 8.28; Matt 3.1; 11.11–12; 14.2, 8; 16.14; 17.13; Luke 7.20, 33; 9.19) – but also Josephus: 'John, known as the Baptist (βαπτιστής)' (*Ant.* 18.116). So there can be little doubt that that was how John was designated at the time. It is easy, however, to fail to appreciate the significance of the term; 'Baptist' is now so familiar to us as a title for John that we forget its unusualness. The English word 'baptize' is, of course, a loan word, taken directly into English from the Greek βαπτίζειν. Behind βαπτίζειν presumably lies the Hebrew/Aramaic *tabal*. And since we can hardly assume that the title 'the Baptist' was first coined in Greek, we must assume that John was known as *hattobel* (Hebrew) or *tab^{e}la* (Aramaic). The point is that in both cases (Aramaic and Greek) we are talking about a term or title created *de novo*. So far as we can tell, no one prior to John had been designated 'the Baptist'; in Greek the term is unique to John. That presumably indicates the creation of a fresh usage: a foreign word is not usually drawn into another language unless it describes something for which there is no adequate native

31 The piety of the parents can be deduced from the names they gave their children (Mark 6.3) – James/Jacob (the patriarch), Joses/Joseph, Judas/Judah, Simon/Simeon (three of Jacob's 12 children, and heads of the resultant tribes), not to mention Jesus/Joshua. See further my *Jesus Remembered*, #9.9c.

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equivalent; and the direct translation (presumably) of *tab^{e}la* into ὁ βαπτιστής probably signifies an equivalent recognition that an unusual/unique role required a fresh/unique coinage. The uniqueness of the designation carries over from Aramaic to Greek to English!

This immediately tells us that John was distinctive on this precise point. There have been various speculations about 'baptist movements' in the Jordan valley, with the implication that John's was or may have been one of a number of such practices.[32] But the fact that only John was picked out with this unusual formulation tells against such speculation.[33] Similarly the much touted suggestion that John derived the act that gave him his nickname from an already established practice of proselyte baptism[34] is seriously called in question.[35] If there was an already well-recognized practice of 'baptism', why would John be picked out as 'the Baptist'? The more plausible alternative, that John was influenced in at least some measure by the emphasis placed on ritual bathing in Jewish piety, particularly 'down the road' at Qumran,[36] can still stand, but only if we recognize that the formulation of this specific designation must imply that John's ritual was *distinctive*, requiring a fresh coinage, 'baptism'.[37] Further confirmation is provided by the dialogue in Mark 11.28–33 pars., where the effectiveness of Jesus' reply depends on the high popular regard for what was a controversial innovation, John's *baptism* (11.30).

(b) What, then, was so different about John's baptism? Two answers suggest themselves at once. First, it was probably a once-for-all immersion, as distinct

32 A particular manifestation 'of a much larger Jewish penitential and baptizing movement around the region of the Jordan in the 1st centuries BC and AD' (J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew, Vol. Two: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* [New York: Doubleday, 1994] 27), referring to J. Thomas, *Le mouvement baptiste en Palestine et Syrie (150 av. J.-C. – 300 ap. J.-C.)* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1935). However, the only solid data we have for the period of John himself relates to the Essenes and Josephus's sometime 'guru' Bannus (*Life* 11–12).

33 The fact that Josephus also uses βαπτισμός and βάπτισις (*Ant.* 18.117), as well as βαπτιστής (*Ant.* 18.116), only here in his writings also signals his own awareness of the singularity of what John was doing. In contrast, for his description of Bannus's 'frequent bathings' (*Life* 11) and the daily ritual washings at Qumran (*War* 2.129) Josephus does not use a βαπτι- form, but forms of λούω ('bathe, wash').

34 See e.g. those cited by G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1963) 18 n.2.

35 See further ibid., 18–31; L. H. Schiffman, 'At the Crossroads: Tannaitic Perspectives on the Jewish–Christian Schism', in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 2 (ed. E. P. Sanders; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 115–56 (here 127–31); R. L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study* (JSNTSup 62; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991) 122–8.

36 Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 11–18; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 1–7* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 299.

37 Cf. R. L. Webb, 'John the Baptist and his Relationship to Jesus', in *Studying the Historical Jesus* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 179–229 (here 187–9).

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from regular ritual baths. Although the text never says so explicitly, the inference is probably sound: otherwise we would expect John's baptizing to be consistently described in continuous tenses;[38] *pace* Chilton, there is nothing to suggest that Jesus was baptized by John more than once;[39] and a once-for-all baptism correlates with John's understanding of the imminent finality of the coming judgment.[40] Second, the fact that John is distinguished as 'the baptizer' reminds us that in ritual immersion individuals immersed themselves. John was distinctive precisely because he immersed others.[41]

Worthy of more attention, however, is Mark's description of 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, Mark 1.4/Luke 3.3). The people 'were coming out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan river confessing their sins' (Mark 1.5/Matt 3.5–6). This would differentiate John's baptism from the ritual purifications at Qumran even more. Not so much because immersion in a *miqweh* was for the removal of impurity, not for the removal of sin; for in 1QS 3.6–9 the two cleansings seem to be closely related.[42] More because the ritual washings at Qumran were clearly part of a larger complex in which commitment to and compliance with the ethos and

38 Imperfect (Mark 1.5/Matt 3.6); present (Matt 3.11/Luke 3.16/John 1.26); but also aorist (Mark 1.8; Luke 3.7, 21).

39 Chilton simply assumes that John's baptism was 'like Jewish baptism generally' and so could be repeated as necessity arose (*Rabbi Jesus*, 48; earlier his 'John the Purifier', in B. Chilton and C. A. Evans, *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity and Restoration* [Leiden: Brill, 1997] 203–20).

40 Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 2.51. The most obvious inference of Acts 19.3 is that a once-only baptism is envisaged.

41 Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 180–1. This is the consistent picture of the Gospels (e.g. Mark 1.4, 5, 8, 9 pars.).

42 Ibid., 146–52. The rendering of 1QS 3.6–9 is important here: 'By a spirit of true counsel concerning the paths of man all his iniquities are atoned, so that he can look at the light of life. And by a spirit of holiness of the community, by its truth, he is cleansed of all his iniquities. And by a spirit of uprightness and humility his sin is atoned. And by the humility of his soul towards all the statutes of God his flesh is cleansed by being sprinkled with the waters of cleansing and sanctified with the waters of purification.' The act of atonement, normally linked to Temple sacrifice, is here attributed to the Spirit. The bath of purification cleanses the flesh. García Martinez wrongly translates the last phrase 'the waters of repentance'. J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: OUP, 2000) concludes that 'the sectarian [Qumran] approach to purity was quite different from that articulated in the Hebrew Bible, where moral impurity and ritual impurity remained distinct: Sin did not produce ritual impurity, sinners were not ritually defiling, and sinners did not need to be purified. At Qumran, sin was considered to be ritually defiling, and sinners had to purify themselves' (90). Kazen is in basic agreement (*Jesus and Purity* Halakhah, 207). But M. Himmelfarb, 'Impurity and Sin in 4QD, 1QS and 4Q512', *DSD* 8 (2001) 9–37, questions whether the association of impurity and sin was characteristic of the Qumran sectarians.

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rulings of the community were fundamental (as the context of 1QS 3 makes clear). In contrast, a baptism performed once, even with amendment of lifestyle, was rather different, both singular and innovative.[43]

It is the talk of 'forgiveness of sins' that should really catch the eye. This is not simply the testimony of Mark. Here again Josephus confirms what otherwise might be suspected. For though his description of John is obviously 'dressed up' for the benefit of his Roman readers, it is clear from his description that John was known as one who linked his baptism closely to the 'excusing' of the sins of those baptized (ἐπί τινων ἁμαρτάδων παραιτήσει) (*Ant.* 18.117).[44] In fact it is Josephus's language that points us to the really innovative feature in John's baptism. For the phrase just cited is cultic in character.[45] That is to say, it reminds us that the Torah made provision for sins to be dealt with through the sacrificial system. Of course, only God could forgive sin; but a priest was an indispensable intermediary in the offering of the sacrifice.[46] But John's preaching gives no indication that a sacrifice or act of atonement was necessary. In a sense, baptism took the place of the sin-offering.[47] That was the really distinctive feature of John's baptism: not that he rejected the Temple ritual on the grounds that repentance alone was sufficient; rather that he offered his own ritual as an alternative to the Temple ritual.[48] Perhaps we should even say that John the Baptist in baptizing played the role of the priest. How this went down with the Temple authorities we do not know. Possibly a once-only baptism would not be seen as much of a threat to the regular

43 It is Chilton's emphasis on John's baptism in terms of purification through ritual bathing that presumably leads him to the conclusion that John's baptism (ritual purifications) were regularly repeated (see his *Jesus' Baptism and Jesus' Healing* [Harrisburg, PA; Trinity Press International, 1998] 26–9). But see Klawans, *Impurity*, 140–2. Kazen also understands the Baptist's baptism too much in terms of purification (*Jesus and Purity* Halakhah, 231–9).

44 Josephus uses ἁμαρτάς, ἁμάρτημα and ἁμαρτία for 'sin' (LXX uses only the last two of these three terms).

45 Josephus uses ἁμαρτάς most often in his description of the sin-offering (*Ant.* 3.204, 230, 238–40, 249). And although παραιτήσις can mean both 'request (that is, for pardon)' and 'excuse' (*Ant.* 2.43; *Ap.* 2.178), the closest parallels are in the same sequence in *Ant.* 3: 3.238 – an offering 'in expiation of sins' (ἐπὶ παραιτήσεσιν ἁμαρτάδων); 3.221 – an offering 'to make intercession for sins' (ἐπὶ παραιτήσει ἁμαρτημάτων); 3.241 – 'an expiation for sins' (παραιτήσις ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτημάτων); see also 3.246, 247; 11.137, 233.

46 See e.g. J. S. Kselman, 'Forgiveness', *ABD* 2.831–2.

47 At Qumran it was the community itself that atoned for sin 'by doing justice and undergoing trials' (1QS 8.1–7, here 4; also 9.3–6); note also Jos. *Ant.* 18.19.

48 C. H. Kraeling, *John the Baptist* (New York: Scribner's, 1951); Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 203–5; 'John's baptism was a ritual of atonement' (Klawans, *Impurity*, 139, 143). In the Diaspora the distance from the Temple would have encouraged the idea that sacrifices strictly speaking were unnecessary (cf. Philo, *Plant.* 108; *Mos.* 2.107–8); but those who came out to John lived within easy distance of the Temple.

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'trade' in sin-offerings.[49] Nevertheless, John stood in a prophetic tradition which offered an effective encounter with the divine, an effective alternative to that focused in the Jerusalem Temple.

Much larger issues are opened up with such reflection, but the point for us here is that simply to see the Baptist's baptismal rite in terms of purification pays too little heed to its distinctiveness. And further, to see John's baptismal rite as though it was simply of a piece with traditional Jewish concerns regarding purity is to miss the point. The correlation of John's baptism with forgiveness and its implied imaging of the eschatological once-for-all (the 'baptism' to come) moves well beyond such purity concerns and gives John's baptism a quite different slant.

(c) It is hardly appropriate to go into any detail in regard to John's baptism of Jesus. It must suffice simply to note that the above considerations make it unlikely that Jesus underwent repeated immersions (baptisms) in John's company, as Chilton rather fancifully surmises.[50] The same considerations likewise indicate the improbability of Jesus continuing to baptize as a regular feature of his mission.[51] It is true that John 3.22–4 reports a period of overlapping mission with John, in which Jesus seems to have modelled his mission on John's. But the clear implication of all the evangelists is that a firm line was drawn between the Baptist and Jesus as Jesus launched forth on his own distinctive mission. Had Jesus continued to practise baptism (assuming that he had initially), then either the same epithet would most likely have been applied to him ('Jesus the Baptist'), or the epithet could not have been retained in its unusualness for the Baptist alone.

The implication, then, is that Jesus may well have abandoned a practice that would have most associated him with the Baptist, and also with the purification imagery which John's practice evoked, even when John gave it his own distinctive slant.

3. Did Jesus go out of his way to undermine purity rules?

The initial probe suggests, if anything, that Jesus, the devout Jew, turned away from even the purity concerns which motivated John to practise as 'the Baptist'. Is this borne out by the rest of his mission?

49 'An alternative to those sacrifices' (Webb, 'John the Baptist', 197); 'a clear alternative to the Temple' (N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* [London: SPCK, 1996] 161); but would a once-only baptism constitute an attempt to 'replace' the existing structures (160)? F. Avemarie, 'Ist die Johannestaufe ein Ausdruck von Tempelkritik?', in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel / Community without Temple* (ed. B. Ego et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999) 395–410, fairly concludes that not so much criticism as indifference is indicated in regard to the Temple.

50 Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 55.

51 Meier argues strongly for the view that Jesus did continue to baptize throughout his ministry (*Marginal Jew*, 2.120–9).

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One obvious test case is Mark 1.40–4, 'the cleansing of the leper'. Here a careful middle course has to be steered. I have already observed that it was not wrong or sinful to contract impurity. On the contrary, the son of a parent who died was duty bound to contract impurity in attending to his father's burial; the impurification caused by discharges from the sexual organs did not make the menstruating woman a sinner or require abstinence from sexual intercourse. So we cannot say that Jesus touched the leper (1.41) in defiance of the purity code.[52] And the probable testimony of 1.44 is that Jesus instructed the leper to follow the required procedure for a person with a contagious skin disease to be readmitted to society.[53] In which case Jesus acted in accord with the purity laws.

At the same time, however, we should perhaps give weight to Chilton's suggestion that what is in view in this episode is not Jesus' attitude to the rules regarding impurity so much as the power of Jesus' own purity. In this case Jesus countered the contagion of *impurity* with the contagion of *purity*. Holiness for Jesus, we might say, was not a negative, defiling force, but a positive, healing force.[54]

Much the same could be said in regard to the episodes in the Jesus tradition where Jesus encounters the other main sources of impurity – corpse impurity (Mark 5.1–20, 21–4, 35–43; Luke 17.11–17) and discharge impurity (particularly Mark 5.25–34). To be noted is the fact that Jesus is not remembered as going out of his way to defy the relevant purity laws: he incurred the first by his concern for those struck by tragedy; and he incurred the second by the action of someone else (the woman with the haemorrhage). At the same time, the stories again do not make the purity issue explicit, though for any Jew telling or hearing these stories the purity implications would have been inescapable. The point is rather that Jesus seems to disregard the impurity consequences in such cases, so that it may be fairly concluded that Jesus was indifferent to such purity issues.[55] And once again it may be valid to deduce that in these episodes we see the power of holiness countering the contagion of impurity.

4. Mark 7.1–23

The purity text in the Gospel tradition is, of course, Mark 7.1–23.

(a) Did Jesus ignore or reject an already established *halakhah* regarding the importance of washing hands before a meal – a purity *halakhah*? So Mark 7.1–8 clearly indicates. Sanders doubts whether Pharisaic concern for purity of hands

52 As in Chrysostom's *Homily on Matthew* 23.2.

53 Discussion in Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 16.

54 Chilton speaks of Jesus' 'contagious purity/holiness' (*Jesus' Baptism*, 58–71); similarly Borg, *Conflict*, 134–6, but more widely applicable in his thesis (particularly 82–99).

55 That Jesus was thus indifferent is Kazen's principal thesis (*Jesus and Purity* Halakhah).

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had developed so far before 70 CE and thus questions the historical veracity of the report.[56] But Mark has obviously inherited an account which captures much authentic detail from the period: it speaks of hands as 'defiled', where the word in Greek (κοινός = 'common') reflects the uniquely Jewish sense of 'profane, unclean, defiled';[57] and the account reflects the importance in Pharisaic circles of 'the tradition (παράδοσις) of the elders' (cf. e.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 13.297, 408; 17.41; *Life* 198; Gal 1.14), faithfully handed down (παραλαμβάνω) to be observed by succeeding generations.[58] So we can say firmly that we have here a pre-Markan tradition which clearly attests a pre-70 Pharisaic concern on the subject; and if pre-70, then why not at the time of Jesus? The sensitivities on impurity contracted by *touching* are clear from of old.[59] And the fact that a whole Mishnah tractate is devoted to the subject, *Yadaim* ('Hands'), indicates a long tradition history of halakhic concern.

There is, therefore, no real reason to dispute the testimony (for that is what it is) of Mark 7 that the concern for purity of hands was already active in Pharisaic *halakhoth* at the time of Jesus; it was a matter of concern for at least some (note 7.1).[60] Consequently, the testimony of Mark that Jesus defended a more casual attitude to purity tradition should be taken seriously.

(b) The issue of purity is posed still more sharply in the latter section of the pericope. For Mark 7.15, 19 poses the issue of food purity (and by implication ritual purity generally) in terms of outright antithesis ('it is not possible for anything from outside to defile'; 'thus he declared the end of the law distinguishing unclean

56 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 185–6, 264–5. The argument is weakened by Sanders's resort to sarcasm: 'nor is it credible that scribes and Pharisees made a special trip to Galilee from Jerusalem to inspect Jesus' disciples' hands' (265). Luke knows a similar tradition and criticism in a different context (Luke 11.38).

57 See above n. 5.

58 Mark, or already the version which came to him, has made efforts to clarify the potential confusion of κοινός, by translating it to give the Greek its Jewish sense ('that is, unwashed'), and by adding the exaggerated ('all the Jews'?) explanation of vv. 3–4.

59 E.g. Lev 5.2–3; 7.19, 21; 11.8, 24–8; Isa 52.11; 65.5; Hag 2.11–14; T. *Mos.* 7.9–10.

60 In *Jewish Law*, 31, 39–40, 90–1, 228–31, Sanders observes that Pharisees practised hand-washing at their own sabbath and festival meals, but again notes that there is no evidence in rabbinic literature that Pharisees washed their hands before eating ordinary meals. But how well grounded is such a clear distinction in Pharisaic purity concerns between 'sabbath and festival meals' and 'ordinary meals'? At least we can say that hand-washing prior to eating communally would have been consistent with the concerns regarding the susceptibility of hands to uncleanness already evident in traditions attributed to the period (particularly *m. Ber.* 8.2, 4; *m. Mik.* 1.5–6; further documentation in Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 228–31); see further especially Kazen, *Jesus and Purity* Halakhah, 62–72, 81–5; R. P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7* (JSNTSup 13; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986) 194–202; J. C. Poirier, 'Why did the Pharisees Wash their Hands?', *JJS* 47 (1996) 217–33. Flusser follows G. Alon in concluding that prior to the destruction of the Temple, washing hands before a meal was regarded as advisable but not obligatory, and was not accepted by all the sages (*Jesus*, 59–60).

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from clean foods'). Many have concluded, on the assumption of Markan priority, that Jesus abrogated the law of clean and unclean and abandoned the whole notion of impurity.[61] But as Sanders has observed, that is a much more difficult position to maintain than is usually recognized. For if Jesus had spoken so clearly and decisively on the subject it becomes difficult to see how Peter could ever have been recorded as saying subsequently, 'I have never eaten anything common or unclean' (Acts 10.14; 11.8), or why the issue of food laws could have become so divisive in earliest Christianity (Gal 2.11–14; Rom 14.1–15.6; cf. 1 Cor 8; 10.20–30).[62] We should also observe that no memory of Jesus eating pork or non-kosher food is preserved in any Jesus tradition.

The issue is made more complex by the fact that Matthew seems to have edited the crucial elements in Mark's version (Matt 15.11, 17–20). For he restates the teaching by omitting key words and phrases in Mark's account: 'nothing from outside . . . can defile' (Mark 7.15, 18); 'thus he declared all foods clean' (7.19); 'from within' (7. 21, 23). In consequence, in Matthew's version the outright antithesis has become more like a sharply drawn comparison, indicating priority of importance without denying validity to what is deemed of lesser importance.[63] How to explain this divergence? Is it simply that Matthew, writing in a context where Jewish law was still highly regarded, has toned down the sharpness of Jesus' teaching,[64] has 're-Judaized' Jesus?[65]

In my own judgement, the discussion at this point has been distorted by the model of literary dependence as the exclusive explanation for such variations between Synoptic traditions. Even assuming Markan priority, does it necessarily follow that the only version Matthew knew of Jesus' teaching on purity was derived from Mark? On the contrary, it is likely that the Jewish-oriented communities which Matthew represents would have known, and needed to have

61 See those cited in my *Jesus Remembered*, #14 n. 135. Kazen unwisely ignores the centrality of the issue of clean/unclean foods and limits the relevance of the passage to the issue of bodily impurity and ritual hand-washing (*Jesus and Purity* Halakhah, 65).

62 The point has been made most forcefully by Sanders: 'the point of the saying [Mark 7.15] is so clear that the positions of the "false brethren", Peter and James [referring to Gal 2.11–14] becomes impossible to understand if the saying be considered authentic' (*Jesus and Judaism*, 266). Similarly H. Räisänen, 'Zur Herkunft von Markus 7.15', in *Logia: les paroles de Jésus* (ed. J. Delobel; Leuven: Leuven University, 1982) 477–84 (here 479–82).

63 Sanders appositely cites as parallel *Ep. Arist.* 234: Jews honour God '*not* with gifts or sacrifices, *but* with purity of heart and of devout disposition' (*Jewish Law*, 28).

64 See e.g. B. Lindars, 'All Foods Clean: Thoughts on Jesus and the Law', in *Law and Religion. Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity* (ed. B. Lindars; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1988) 61–71.

65 H. Hübner's discussion (*Das Gesetz in der synoptischen Tradition* [Witten: Luther, 1973]) is framed by talk of Matthew's '(re-)Qumranizing' and '(re-)Judaizing' of the Gospel tradition (9–10, 237–9).

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known, Jesus' teaching in regard to purity long before Mark was written and circulated. In which case, it is likely that Matthew's version represents the way the tradition was being retold in churches where continuity with Jewish tradition was more important.[66] Whereas Mark represents a performance trend, presumably in Gentile or mixed churches,[67] in which this tradition was heard as validating an antithesis between inward and ritual purity, Mark, or already his source, underlines the trend by adding the interpretative note in 7.19. This is not an argument against Markan priority, that Matthew did know and use Mark at the time of writing his Gospel. It is simply to affirm a more vital oral tradition independent of and prior to the written Gospels, and attesting already some at least of the diversity we see in the Synoptic tradition.[68]

We can conclude, then, that Jesus was recalled as speaking on the subject of purity, and as insisting that purity of heart is more important than ritual purity (cf. Matt 5.8; Matt 23.25/Luke 11.39). Some heard Jesus as not content to debate issues of ritual purity solely at the level of ritual, but as pressing home the concerns behind such law and *halakhoth* to the more fundamental level of purity of motive and intention.[69] Others heard Jesus, when the teaching was rehearsed within wider circles of discipleship, as validating or commending a more radical conclusion, to the effect that Israel's purity law no longer applied to the followers of Jesus. Either way, Jesus evidently had no interest in making ritual purity a test case of covenant loyalty.[70] The emphasis on matters of purity, so characteristic of the factional rivalries of the time, was for Jesus an overemphasis.

(c) Here it is necessary to enter a strong caveat against Chilton's argument, not only that 'purity was Jesus' fundamental commitment, the lens through which he viewed the world',[71] but also that for Jesus *purity* (not impurity) came *from within*.[72] What is astonishing at this point is that he even quotes Mark 7.15 in support, in arguing that purity activated became the agent of the kingdom

66 See further my 'Jesus and Ritual Purity: A Study of the Tradition-History of Mark 7.15', in *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (London: SPCK, 1990) 37–60 (here 43–4).

67 Rom 14.14 must provide some indication of the way the saying was being understood among Gentile churches. It is generally regarded as one of the clearest echoes of Jesus tradition in Paul (see my 'Jesus and Ritual Purity', 50, with bibliography in 58 n. 73).

68 In my 'Jesus and Ritual Purity' I note that the saying, particularly the Matthean form, goes back into an Aramaic *mashal* quite readily (41–2).

69 Cf. Klawans, *Impurity*, 146–50: 'Jesus nowhere defends ritual purity as a symbol of moral purity' (149).

70 T. Holmén, *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 236–7: 'he clearly questioned the significance of the purity paradigm in the view of the Jews as the people of God' (251).

71 Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 90.

72 'The innate purity of Israelites' (ibid., 92); 'Israelites were already pure and did not need to be cleansed by elaborate ritual observances' (140).

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(136).[73] Since the point being made in Mark 7.15 is that *impurity* (not purity) comes from within, it is hard to see how Chilton can maintain his argument by appeal to this text.

5. Table-fellowship

There should be no doubt that table-fellowship was bound up with purity concerns and regulated by purity *halakhah*. We need only recall the data marshalled above about the identity-defining importance of the laws of clean and unclean, and the way in which they played out in regard to the issue of association with Gentiles and table-fellowship in the early Christian communities (Acts 10.28; 11.3; Gal 2.12–14). Whatever the precise facts regarding the Pharisaic *haburoth*, the probability is strong that purity concerns regulated the table-fellowship practised by many Pharisees. And the even stronger concerns of the Qumran community are well illustrated by 1QS 6–7 and 1QSa 2.3–10. It is not surprising, then, to be able to hear clear purity overtones in the criticisms directed against Jesus for consorting with sinners at the meal table (particularly Mark 2.16 pars.; Matt 11.19/Luke 7.34).

The use of the term 'sinners' as part of the criticism should not surprise us. For it was already established as a term of condemnation within the factionalism of Second Temple Judaism, and precisely as a way denying the validity of *halakhoth* (interpretations and practices) which diverged from those held dear by the speaker's faction.[74] To refuse the legitimacy of divergent interpretations is ever the sectarian way of affirming the sole legitimacy of the particular sect's interpretation; to be right oneself, it is necessary that all who disagree are wrong – not just of a different opinion, but 'sinners', law-breakers, criminals. In this case, to eat with 'sinners' was to transgress what the critics regarded as the 'obvious' implications of the purity code.

Here again, then, the important conclusion can be drawn that Jesus did not follow the logic of sectarian purity *halakhah*. The concern to keep oneself separate from the impure, as a way of professing Israel's set-apartness (Lev 20.24–6), found no echo in Jesus' conduct and association either with fellow Jews, or with 'sinners', or with such Gentiles as he occasionally encountered. If purity was a concern of Jesus, it was an *in*clusive, not an *ex*clusive, purity.

73 Ibid., 87, 136; similarly 'A Generative Exegesis of Mark 7:1–23', in Chilton and Evans, *Jesus in Context*, 297–319 (here 305–6). Similarly *Temple*: 'bathing does not make one pure, but celebrates the fact of purity' (123–5, 142).

74 I have made this point several times; see e.g. my *Partings*, 103–5; *Jesus Remembered*, #13.5. Kazen, *Jesus and Purity* Halakhah, again ignores the implications of purity requiring *separation* from the impure, and by extension from the 'sinner'.

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6. The cleansing of the Temple

Since the Temple was the focal point and *raison d'être* for the purity code, it is simply impossible to avoid the purity overtones of Jesus' symbolic action in the Temple (Mark 11.15–17 pars.), whatever precisely it consisted of. *Pace* Sanders, the symbolism cannot be limited to that of destruction.[75] Whether his actions are to be understood in terms of the 'country boy' appalled by the commercialization of the Temple cult, or as an act of protest against assumed or real abuse, or as some kind of preparation of Mount Zion for its eschatological role, some sort of 'purifying' (cleansing!) was bound to be at least part of Jesus' motivation. We need only think, for example, of passages like Isa 4.4, Mal 3.1–3 and *Pss. Sol.* 17.30, to recognize that the necessity for some sort of 'purging' of Israel's focal centre was more or less taken for granted within Jewish eschatological expectation.

To be more specific than that becomes exceedingly difficult: symbolism by its very nature is more dependent for its effectiveness on the reactions it evokes than on the message it conveys. But that some kind of transformation was in view is likely. And that means also some kind of transformation of the purity system of which the Temple was the heart. *Pace* Chilton, it is more than doubtful whether Jesus intended a reform of the mode and praxis of sacrifice.[76] And the further suggestion that Jesus intended to replace the cult sacrifice with the last supper meal with his disciples[77] smacks too much of special pleading on the part of those

75 In the debate about the significance of Jesus' act occasioned by Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 61–71, see R. Bauckham, 'Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple', in Lindars, ed., *Law and Religion*, 72–89; C. A. Evans in Chilton and Evans, *Jesus in Context*, 395–439; H. D. Betz, 'Jesus and the Purity of the Temple (Mark 11:15–18): A Comparative Religion Approach', *JBL* 116 (1997) 455–72; P. M. Casey, 'Culture and Historicity: The Cleansing of the Temple', *CBQ* 59 –1997) 306–32; K. H. Tan, *The Zion Traditions and the Aims of Jesus* (SNTSMS 91; Cambridge: CUP, 1997) 166–81; J. Ådna, *Jesu Stellung zum Tempel. Die Tempelaktion und das Tempelwort als Ausdruck seiner messianischen Sendung* (WUNT 2.119; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 335–76. In contrast, D. Seeley, 'Jesus' Temple Act', *CBQ* 55 (1993) 263–83, cannot find sufficient explanation at the historical level and deduces from the way Mark has integrated it into his Gospel that the episode is better seen as a Markan composition.

76 Chilton (*Temple of Jesus*, 100–11) in particular has developed an elaborate theory to explain why Jesus 'occupied' the Temple: the 'occupation' was designed to prevent the sacrifice of animals acquired on the site; money-changing was not an issue (110–11) – that feature is likely fictional (130); he was seeking to realize the Targum of Zechariah's prophecy of the kingdom coming when offerings were directly presented in the Temple (without the intervention of middlemen) by both Israelites and non-Jews (*Rabbi Jesus*, 197–200). He notes a *halakhah* attributed to Hillel, that offerings should be brought to the Temple by the owners for sacrifice, against the Shammaites' insistence that an animal might be handed over directly without the owner laying hands on it (*Temple*, 101–2), and deduces that Jesus similarly regarded the offerer's actual ownership of what was offered as a vital aspect of sacrifice (109, 128).

77 Chilton's much repeated thesis (e.g. *Temple*, 150–4; *Rabbi Jesus*, 253–5); similarly Ådna concludes that the death of Jesus 'replaces and supersedes the sacrificial cult in the Temple once for all as the atoning death for the many' (*Jesu Stellung*, 419–30 [here 429]).

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who want to discern a seamless continuity between last supper and Lord's Supper. But almost any thesis at this point is vulnerable to criticism, since the very limited amount of data is open to a variety of readings. That is ultimately the frustration of the Temple episode for an enquiry into Jesus and purity: the episode is heavy with purity overtones, but the symbolical significance remains unclear.

Consequently, if we are to draw firm conclusions in regard to Jesus and purity, we are primarily dependent on the passages discussed earlier. The resultant conclusions do share something of the same ambiguity. On the one hand, Jesus' association with the Baptist and acceptance of his baptism, as also his conformity with the regulations regarding pronouncement of freedom from skin disease, both attest a recognition of the importance of purity concerns within the community. The implication that he saw his action in the Temple as some sort of climax to his mission confirms that the holiness it represented was important to Jesus. On the other hand, the fact that he sat loose to the purity *halakhoth* regarding clean and unclean and table-fellowship suggests equally, if not more strongly, that he did not regard such concerns as central to his understanding of what constituted the Israel of God and what should regulate Jews' social praxis of their religion. It should probably not surprise us that it was the latter emphasis that the first Christians soon began to take up and develop.

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