

# Old Testament Sacrifices And Reconciliation

## *Sylvain Romerowski*

### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article étudie la fonction des sacrifices de l'ancienne alliance, principalement à partir du Lévitique. Tout en considérant divers autres points de vue, l'auteur s'efforce de démontrer les thèses suivantes. 1) Le verbe hébreu *kipper* a le sens d'expié, c'est-à-dire de payer pour une faute. 2) Le geste d'imposition de la main symbolise le transfert du péché de l'adorateur sur l'animal destiné au sacrifice. 3) Le sang de l'animal égorgé représente conventionnellement la vie ôtée à l'animal (Lv 17.11) et l'aspersion de ce sang servait de signe qu'une mort était intervenue pour expier les péchés. 4) L'expression *rêah-nihoah* (Lv 1.9) signifie probablement « odeur apaisante » et est utilisée pour indiquer que les sacrifices avaient pour fonction d'apaiser la colère divine. L'auteur en conclut que les cinq types de sacrifices avaient une fonction d'expiation. L'holocauste expiait les péchés en général et permettait aux Israélites d'être agréés chaque fois qu'ils venaient rendre un culte à Dieu. L'offrande de céréale accompagnait généralement des sacrifices sanglants. Le prêtre en consommait une partie en signe qu'il prenait sur lui le péché de l'adorateur. Le sacrifice de paix donnait lieu à un repas pris en présence de Yahvé en signe de

communion avec lui. Le sacrifice pour le péché expiait des fautes involontaires et l'aspersion de sang avait pour but de purifier le sanctuaire souillé par les péchés des Israélites. Le sacrifice de réparation était offert pour des fautes réparables, commises dans le domaine cultuel. Après Ésaïe (ch. 53), le Nouveau Testament, et notamment l'épître aux Hébreux, offre une lecture typologique de ce système sacrificiel. Les sacrifices y sont vus comme une préfiguration de la mort de Christ qui seule est adéquate pour expier véritablement les péchés. Avant la venue de Christ, les Israélites qui avaient une foi authentique recevaient le pardon de leurs fautes par anticipation sur la mort de Christ et demeuraient liés aux rites sacrificiels parce que cette mort n'était pas encore intervenue. Ceux qui n'avaient pas cette foi ne recevaient, en offrant leurs sacrifices, qu'un pardon rituel qui ne leur permettait pas un accès à la présence divine véritable. Selon l'auteur, la réconciliation avec Dieu désigne chez Paul l'abandon par Dieu de sa colère et l'adoption par lui d'une attitude favorable à l'égard de l'homme pécheur. Les lois sacrificielles enseignaient que cette réconciliation – l'apaisement de la colère divine – ne pouvait avoir lieu sans expiation des péchés.

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### SUMMARY

This paper is a study of the function of the old covenant sacrifices, essentially from the book of Leviticus. The author discusses various view points and argues the following thesis. 1) The Hebrew verb *kipper* means to “expiate” or to “atone/to pay for sins”. 2) The act of laying a hand symbolically represented the transferring of the offerer’s sins onto the animal that was to be sacrificed. 3) The blood of the slain animal represents its life taken from it, by way of convention (Lev 17:11). The sprinkling of this blood therefore is a sign that a death has taken place to atone for sin. 4) The expression *rêah-nihoah* (Lev 1:9) probably means “appeasing aroma” and is then used to indicate that the offerings’ role was to appease the divine wrath. The author concludes that the five types of offerings had an atoning function. The burnt offering atoned for sins in general, in order that

the Israelites who came to the Tabernacle for worship be accepted by God. The cereal offering was generally offered alongside animal sacrifices. The priest ate part of it as a sign that he took upon himself the sins of the offerer. The peace offering led to a meal eaten by the Israelites in the presence of Yahweh as a token of communion with Him. The sin offering atoned for unintentional sins and the sprinkling of the blood was to purify the sanctuary that had been defiled by the Israelites’ sins. The reparation offering was offered for reparable faults against the sacred things. Following Isaiah (chap. 53), the NT, and especially the Epistle to the Hebrews, yield a typological understanding of the sacrificial system. The offerings are seen as prefigurations of Christ’s death which alone is truly fitted to atone for sins. The OT Israelites who had authentic faith received forgiveness for their sins in a way that anticipated Christ’s death. They were nevertheless to comply with the sacrificial laws so long as

this death had not taken place. The Israelites who did not have such a faith only received, through their offerings, a ritual forgiveness that did not give them access to the real presence of God. According to the author, reconciliation with God in the Pauline Epistles has to do with the

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Artikel widmet sich der Funktion der Opfer des alten Bundes, im wesentlichen im Buch Leviticus. Der Autor diskutiert mehrere Ansichten und plädiert für die folgende These: 1. Das hebräische Verb *kipper* bedeutet "abbüßen" oder "sühnen / für Sünden bezahlen". 2. Der Akt des Handauflegens repräsentierte symbolisch die Übertragung der Sünden des Opfernden auf das Tier, das geopfert wurde. 3. Das Blut des geschlachteten Tieres repräsentiert sein ihm genommenes Leben, laut Vereinbarung (Lev. 17,11). Das Sprengen dieses Blutes ist daher ein Zeichen, dass getötet wurde, um Sünde zu sühnen. 4. Der Ausdruck *rêaḥ-nîḥoaḥ* (Lev. 1,9) bedeutet wahrscheinlich "besänftigendes Aroma" und wird benutzt, um anzuzeigen, dass die Rolle des Opfers darin bestand, den göttlichen Zorn zu besänftigen. Der Autor schlussfolgert, dass die fünf Arten von Opfern eine sühnende Funktion hatten. Das Brandopfer sühnte allgemeine Sünden, damit die Israeliten, die zum Opfern zur Stiftshütte kamen, von Gott akzeptiert würden. Das Getreideopfer wurde im Allgemeinen in Verbindung mit Tieropfern dargebracht. Der Priester aß einen Teil davon zum Zeichen, dass er die Sünden des Opfernden auf sich nahm. Das Friedensopfer führte zu einem Mahl, das von den Israeliten in der Gegenwart Jahwes gegessen wurde,

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Mosaic instructions concerning sacrifices are given mainly in Lev 1-7. Additional instructions as to which type of sacrifices or offerings should be brought and when are given in Num 15:1-16; 19:28f; 28-29. We will focus on Leviticus. This book appears as the continuation of the book of Exodus. Exodus reports how God saved his people from bondage in Egypt and brought them to Mount Sinai to make a covenant with them. The covenant making ceremony is described in Ex 19-24. God then gives instructions for making the Tabernacle, its furniture and utensils (Ex 25-31), as well as for consecrating the priests. We are then told that the Israelites made the Tabernacle and set it up exactly following God's instructions (Ex 35-40). The book ends on a high note with the story of the coming of the Glory of God to inhabit the Most Holy place within the Tabernacle.

removal of God's wrath against the believing sinners and His adopting a favourable attitude towards them. The OT laws taught that such a reconciliation – the appeasing of God's wrath – could not take place without atonement for sins.

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zum Zeichen der Gemeinschaft mit ihm. Das Sündopfer sühnte unabsichtliche Sünden und das Sprengen des Blutes diente der Reinigung des Heiligtums, das durch die Sünden der Israeliten verunreinigt worden war. Das Schuldopfer wurde für wieder gut zu machende Vergehen gegen die heiligen Dinge dargebracht. Das NT, besonders der Hebräerbrief, kommt, Jesaja folgend (Kap. 53), zu einem typologischen Verständnis des Opfersystems. Die Opfer werden als Präfigurationen des Todes Christi gesehen, der alleine wahrhaftig geeignet ist, Sünden zu sühnen. Die alttestamentlichen Israeliten, die authentischen Glauben besaßen, erhielten Vergebung ihrer Sünden auf eine Art, die Christi Tod antizipierte. Sie mussten sich dennoch so lange nach den Opfergesetzen richten, so lange dieser Tod noch nicht geschehen war. Die Israeliten, die keinen entsprechenden Glauben hatten, erhielten durch ihre Opfer nur eine rituelle Vergebung, die ihnen keinen Zugang zur echten Gegenwart Gottes gewährte. Dem Autor zufolge hat Versöhnung mit Gott in den paulinischen Briefen mit der Aufhebung des Zornes Gottes gegen die glaubenden Sünder zu tun und damit, dass Gott eine wohlwollende Haltung in Bezug auf sie einnimmt. Die AT-Gesetze lehrten, dass so eine Versöhnung – die Besänftigung des Zornes Gottes – nicht ohne die Sühne für Sünden stattfinden konnte.

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Once the Tabernacle is set up and ready to function, the Israelites have to know how to worship God in the Tabernacle. Hence the laws about the sacrifices in Lev 1-7. The priests will then be ready to begin their ministry in the Tabernacle, and the book of Leviticus goes on with the report of their consecration (Lev 8-10). On this occasion, Aaron offers all the types of sacrifice described in Lev 1-5, except for the last one, the reparation offering, for which there was no point in such circumstances. The consecration ceremony of the priests thus presupposed the sacrificial laws. Leviticus, coming after Exodus, follows a logical order here.

The section devoted to the sacrificial laws is made up of two subsections. The first one contains instructions for the Israelite who offers sacrifices and offerings (Lev 1-5): what the sacrifices and offerings must consist of, how he shall offer them.

The second section contains instructions for the priest who serves in the Tabernacle when sacrifices and offerings are brought (Lv 6-7): how he must be dressed, what portion of the meat or of the cereal offerings he and other priests will receive for themselves, and how they must dispose of them.

There are five types of sacrifices or offerings : the burnt offering or holocaust,<sup>1</sup> the cereal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, which I prefer to call reparation offering.

We can observe that these five offerings are divided into two categories. From the literary point of view, v. 4:1 has a new introduction similar to 1:1 and thereby signals a new beginning. The first three offerings are the most regular offerings, those that were offered as part of regular worship. They are said to be of pleasing aroma, or of appeasing aroma to the Lord (1:9,13,17; 2:2,9; 3:5,16). The last two are mandatory when some specific sins have been committed and are said to obtain forgiveness for the person offering them (4:26,31,35; 5:10,13,16,18; 6:7 [5:26]). Some, like Alfred Marx, have made a lot of this difference and have deduced from it a sharp distinction as to the functions of the two groups of offerings. We shall have to deal later with the matter of the function of the sacrifices and the cereal offering.

I propose to start by considering the burnt offering, or holocaust, for that will raise crucial issues. We will then look more briefly at the other types of offerings in order to present their essential distinctive features.

### The holocaust or burnt offering (Lev 1; 6:8-13)

As is well known, 'holocaust' comes from a Greek term which means "wholly burnt". This offering was so called because all the parts of the victim were brought and burnt upon the altar, except for the skin. The Hebrew name is *'ôlâh*, from a root which means "to ascend": the reason for that name is unknown (perhaps it was thus called because of its being brought up to the altar, or because of its ascending in smoke to God).

The victim could be a bull or calf, a ram or a goat; it had to be a male without defect. The offerer was to bring the animal to the entrance of the Tabernacle, kill it, skin it and cut it up. The priest took the blood and sprinkled it against the altar which was in the courtyard. Then he was to arrange the pieces of the victim over the wood upon the altar. The victim could also be a dove or young pigeon,

seemingly when the offerer was too poor to bring a more expensive animal. The priest was then to wring off the bird's head and burn the bird on the altar, draining its blood out on the side of the altar. We must notice that the priest did everything that had to be done at the altar, and the offerer did all the rest.

### The function of the holocaust

As for the function of the holocaust, Keil saw it as a symbol of total consecration to God, since it was wholly burnt on the altar.<sup>2</sup> Others see it as a way of paying homage to God. As we mentioned, Alfred Marx builds his case on the basis of a division of the five offerings into two distinct groups. Chs 1-3 deal with offerings of which the effect is described by an expression which he translates "pleasing aroma", rejecting the translation "soothing or appeasing aroma". He contends that only the second category of offerings had as its purpose to obtain forgiveness for sins, and that the first category of offerings had nothing to do with sin. He then draws the conclusion that to obtain forgiveness is only a secondary function of the offerings. Their primary function would have been to celebrate Yahweh's presence among His people: in Marx's eyes, the offerings are meals offered by Israel to her divine guest and he quotes Num 28:2 (where God says: "my food") as supporting this idea. Sin and guilt offerings would then be brought in case a light sin had been committed, or in case of uncleanness, so that the Israelite may be reintegrated in the community and remain in God's presence after having committed such a sin or having felt himself in a state of uncleanness.<sup>3</sup> When he writes that offerings are meals offered to God, Marx doesn't think God was supposed to really eat the offerings: offerings are only symbolic meals.

Against Marx, one should note that the sin offering is also said to be of pleasing/appeasing aroma (Lev 4:31), an indication that we may perhaps not draw too much of a sharp distinction between the two groups of offerings. The expression of Num 28:2 does not necessarily mean "the food eaten by God" but can simply mean "the food offered to God".

Various hints of the holocaust's function are given in the text, to which we must pay heed.

### *kipper*

According to v.4, this offering is to make atonement, *k'kipper*. The meaning of the verb *kipper* has

been inferred in various ways. Some ascribe to it the meaning “to purify” on the basis of an Akkadian cognate. Others think it means “to cover”, which is the sense of an Arabic cognate. Others note that the noun *kopher* means « a ransom » and ascribe to the verb the meaning “to ransom”. “Monetary compensation” would probably be a better equivalent for the noun, and “to give compensation” for the verb. Though such approaches could give a hint of the meaning of a word, they are never conclusive. Cognates may have different meanings from one language to another. For instance, the English ‘actually’ means “truly”, “really”; the French cognate *actuellement* means “at the present time”. The meaning of the Hebrew may be different from the meaning of the Akkadian word. Furthermore, even within one language, the meaning of a noun may differ from the meaning of the verb of the same root. How does a linguist go after the meaning of a word when he is learning a language? He asks an informer, i.e. a person whose native language is the language to be learned and who also can communicate in a language that is known by the linguist. As far as we are concerned, we have no living informer. Our only informer is the lexical tradition that has been transmitted from generation to generation since the time when Biblical Hebrew was a spoken language, a tradition that is more or less reflected in the traditional lexicons. What we learn from that tradition is that *kipper* has as its meaning, or as one of its meanings, the sense “to atone”, to “expiate”,<sup>4</sup> i.e. to pay for a fault by a punishment considered as equivalent to that fault.

Then one can also look at usage to check or to try to uncover the meaning of the word. The sense “to pay a ransom” could fit such a text as Ex 30.15. There money is at stake. But in the cases in which we are interested, money is not the matter. We have to look at sacrificial uses of the verb. The idea of purification can be present, especially when sacred objects are the direct object of the verb (Lev 16:20,33; Eze 43:20,26; 45:20). And a sacrifice is required within the context of purification rites in cases of ritual defilement or uncleanness (Lev 12:7f; 14:20; 15:15,30). However, the sacrifices are sin offerings, which suggests that uncleanness calls for some form of forgiveness, and not merely for purification (Lev 12:6,8; 14:19; 15:15,30). Émile Nicole notes various features of the sacrificial use of *kipper* which show that more than purification is at stake, and that the meaning is that of atonement (though he does not himself use that term at this point but speaks of “compensation”).<sup>5</sup>

Sin is what prompts the offering of sacrifice, more often than defilement (Lev 4-7), and forgiveness is the result of the *kipper* rites, more often than purification (Lev 4:20,26,31,35; 5:10,13,16,18; 6:7; 19:22; Num 15:25,28). Human beneficiaries of the rite are never mentioned as the direct object of the verb, which would be expected if the purpose of the rite was to purify them, but the *kipper* action was performed “on behalf” of the offerer (Lev 1:4. . .).

As noted by Wenham, the meaning “to atone” or “to expiate” is well demonstrated by Num 25:13.<sup>6</sup> Here, the act of *kipper* consisted in killing a guilty Israelite as well as the foreign woman he had brought into the camp. The result of that action is that the plague God was inflicting on His people for their unfaithfulness in taking foreign wives and worshipping their gods stopped (Num 25:1-9). The verb has to do here with turning God’s anger away from the Israelites so that he does not exterminate them (v.10). The meaning “expiation” is pretty clear in such a context. Another text is Lev 10.17, which should be translated, not as NIV does, but: God has given you the sin offering in order for you “to bear the guilt of the community and to make atonement for them before the Lord”. Here, *kipper* has to do with bearing the guilt of someone else. Its sense is again “to make atonement”.

It can be added here that, in some cases, *kipper* can even mean “to appease (an offended party)” (Gen 32:20[21]). There is more to it than mere purification.

One should note that purification and atonement are not ideas far apart from each other. As a matter of fact, the image of purification can be used for the forgiveness of sin that results from atonement, forgiveness being viewed as the removal of the objective defilement that results from sin (e.g. Ps 51.7[9]; cf. the cleansing of our consciences from acts that lead to death in Heb 9:14). However, it is important to see that the Old Testament sacrifices had an atoning value, that there was no such purification without expiation.

### The laying of a hand on the animal’s head

A second hint in our text is the act that was performed by the Israelite: he was to lay, or more accurately to press,<sup>7</sup> his hand on the head of the animal (Lev 1:4). This has been variously interpreted. Marx and Milgrom see it as a way of indicating ownership. Others view it as representing substitution, the animal taking the place of the Israelite

and being offered as a sign that the Israelite offered himself. Moses interprets that gesture for us. On the *Yom Kippur*, the priest had to confess Israel's sins over the scapegoat while laying his hands on its head (Lev 16:21): this shows that the act symbolically represented the transferring of sins unto the animal.<sup>8</sup> This can be compared with the laying of hands upon the blasphemer by those who had testified to his blasphemy as a way of charging him with the guilt of his own sin, before stoning him (Lev 24:14).<sup>9</sup> The idea of substitution is relevant in conjunction with that meaning: the animal took the place of the Israelite in order to bear his guilt and pay for his sins in his place.

The laying on of the hand is mentioned in Lev 1:4 where the verb *kipper* also appears. The signification indicated for this gesture and the conclusion we have reached about the meaning of *kipper* mutually reinforce each other.

#### **The significance of the blood rite: Lev 17:11**

The verb *kipper* appears in the famous text which states the role of blood in sacrifices (Lev 17:11). As a matter of fact, this statement comes as an explanation for the prohibition to eat blood. The point is mainly that blood must be exclusively reserved for the sacrificial rites. The meaning of the verse, and therefore the role played by blood in sacrifices, is a disputed matter. The verse states a relationship between the blood and the *nefesh*, which can either mean here "person" (as in the preceding verse) or "life". The first meaning is more appropriate to the second part of the verse: "for I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar". The meaning life better fits the other uses of the word in the verse.

In the first clause Moses says that the *nefesh* "life" is in the blood. Some take it very literally, as if the Israelites believed that life really is in the blood. The last clause says: "it is by the life that blood makes atonement". Two of its elements need elucidation. Which life is being referred to: that of the animal or that of the person offering the sacrifice? And what is the import of the preposition *b<sup>e</sup>*: is it instrumental, as in the above translation ("by the life"), or should we understand it some other way? Many scholars today consider that the life of the animal is in view, take the preposition as instrumental and give the verb *kipper* the sense "to purify". They understand the sacrificial rite as liberating the life of the animal. The life energy would then be communicated to the Israelite and would purify him.

There are various objections against this interpretation of the last clause of the verse. We have already objected to the understanding of the verb *kipper* as meaning "to purify". One also wonders how life could purify. Furthermore, when one considers what was done with the blood in the sacrificial rites, it does not fit the view that it would serve to purify the person offering the sacrifice. For if that were so, one would expect the blood to be sprinkled upon that person, or something to be done with the blood to that person. But this was only very seldom the case (such a rite was performed at the occasion of the priests' consecration, or of the purification and reconsecration of the person who had been cured from a skin disease entailing ritual uncleanness, wrongly called leprosy in English translations).<sup>10</sup> In most cases, the blood was sprinkled upon the altar of sacrifices in the courtyard of the sanctuary, or in some places within the sanctuary. It was thus sprinkled at spots which the lay Israelite had no right to approach, much less to enter into contact with. These were sacred places representing God's domain. This means that the blood was presented to God. Émile Nicole adds another consideration. When an Israelite was too poor to offer even doves or pigeons for a sin offering, he was permitted to replace the usual animal victims by a cereal offering (Lev 5:11-13). That would not be the case if blood was seen as containing a vital force and, as such, as a purifying agent. On a symbolic plane, even water would be more appropriate than cereals to convey the sense of purification.<sup>11</sup>

Should the first clause be taken as literally meaning that life is contained in the blood? Such an understanding is precluded by v.14 which states exactly the reverse: the blood is in the *nefesh*. Furthermore, it equates both twice: "the blood is the life of every creature". This suggests another kind of relationship between the blood and the *nefesh*. And the second clause of v.11, "I have given it to you" tends to indicate that the connection between the blood and life is not by virtue of a natural property of the blood. Henri Blocher argues that it rather implies a relationship established by a decision of God, and therefore a conventional link: blood simply stands for life, it is representative of life.<sup>12</sup> But life in what sense?

Leon Morris has demonstrated that blood represents life taken from some creature, i.e. death.<sup>13</sup> Blood is mentioned in formulas that speak of death, of murder for instance. This for an obvious reason: a creature which loses too much blood

dies. Therefore the pouring out of blood is a sign of death. To shed blood means to kill.

Let us turn back to the last clause. Émile Nicole gives the preposition *b<sup>e</sup>* a substitutionary meaning and takes the life as being that of the beneficiary of the sacrifice: the blood makes atonement for the life (of that person; cf. NIV), or instead of, or in exchange for this life. He points out that the preposition is sometimes used in contexts of buying or exchanging (Lam 1:11; 2 Sam 3:27; Dt 19:21 “life for life. . .” which uses *b<sup>e</sup>* where Ex 21:23 & Lev 24:18 use *tabat*). The LXX, the Vulgate and the Onkelos Targum understood it in this way.<sup>14</sup> However, in cases of buying or selling, or in cases of exchange, the idea of exchange is brought by the verb, it is not the preposition which carries that component of meaning by itself. Even the formula “life for life. . .” of Dt 19:21 is an elliptic expression in which a verb is left unexpressed as the two other texts shows (Ex 21:23 uses a verb meaning “to give” and Lev 24:18 a verb meaning “to replace” or “to make restitution”): here also, it is the unexpressed verb which contains the idea of exchange. There is just no proof that the preposition *b<sup>e</sup>* has the meaning of exchange or substitution when it is governed by the verb *kipper*.

In connection with this verb, the preposition *b<sup>e</sup>* ordinarily has an instrumental force. We therefore prefer to take it in the instrumental sense and to consider that the life referred to in the last clause is that of the animal. We understand as follows: “for indeed blood makes atonement by the life of the animal which it represents”. This interpretation also has the advantage of ascribing to the word *nefesh* meaning “life” in the third clause the same referent as in the first clause of the verse.<sup>15</sup> Yet, whatever decision we make between the above two options, the meaning is that shed blood, and therefore life taken from the animal, in other words the death of the animal, makes atonement for the person offering the sacrifice.

We can therefore freely render the meaning of the verse as follows: You Israelites must not eat blood (v.10). “For the life animating the creature is represented by the blood and I have reserved the blood for you, for use at the altar, so that you make atonement for yourselves; yes, it is the blood that makes atonement, by the life which it represents, the life which the animal has been deprived of.”

The pouring against the altar has probably to be seen as a way of demonstrating that blood has been shed, that a death has taken place to atone for sin.

If then the relationship between blood and life

is merely a matter of convention, if blood merely represents life taken from the animal, then one can understand how it is possible to replace an animal by a portion of cereal for the sin offering.

It is to be noted that Lev 17:11 is a general statement concerning the role of blood in sacrificial rites. As such, it applies to all sacrifices in which blood is involved. It therefore applies to the holocaust and to the peace sacrifice. They are to be seen as having an expiatory function.<sup>16</sup>

### An appeasing aroma

If we now go back to Lev 1, we find another possible hint that such was the function of the holocaust: it is the expression *réah-nihoaḥ* (Lev 1:9). The NIV translated “a pleasing aroma”. Wenham understands a “soothing aroma”; perhaps an “appeasing aroma” sounds better. The Hebrew verb *niāḥ* means “to rest”, “to be quiet”, “peaceful”. In the causative form, the verb can be used with a word designating the wrath of God, to express the idea that this wrath is quieted down by a full punishment being inflicted on God’s people (Ez 5:13; 16:42; 21:17[22]). Milgrom also indicates that the Akkadian cognate means “to appease”, especially in connection with the gods.<sup>17</sup> There is therefore a strong presumption in favour of the meaning “soothing/appeasing aroma” for the formula of Lev 1:9, though we cannot be sure that the meaning of this expression corresponds in such a way to that of the verb. An informer would be the LXX which renders that expression *euōdia* “pleasing aroma” and is followed by the New Testament (Eph 5:2). However, we cannot be sure that the Greek translators correctly understood the above expression. Émile Nicole argues in favour of their translation but I find him unconvincing on that point.<sup>18</sup> An argument against that understanding is that there were more simple formulas to say “pleasant aroma”. Wenham rightly quotes Gen 8:21 as supporting the idea of appeasement: as Yahweh smelled the aroma of Noah’s sacrifice, He decided never again to curse the ground and destroy His creatures because of man as He had done by the flood. The aroma had quieted His anger, because it is the aroma of an atoning sacrifice. The data is meagre and it is impossible to reach certitude about the meaning of the expression *réah-nihoaḥ*: we lack an informer whose reliability would be certain. Yet we tend to agree with Wenham.<sup>19</sup> If that is correct, we have a third indication of the atoning and propitiating function of the holocaust. And this will have something to say to our concern for

reconciliation.

Yet Émile Nicole makes an important point here, which had also been made by Peter-Contesse: the only thing that goes up towards God is the smoke, and even the smoke disappears and what reaches God is reduced to a smell, which, contrary to the smoke, cannot even be seen, and which almost amounts to nothing. This means that God does not eat the sacrifice, that the sacrifice is not offered because God needs it. Rather it is the Israelites who need it, in order to obtain forgiveness.<sup>20</sup>

Other texts confirm that the holocaust had an expiatory function and was offered to obtain forgiveness for sins: 2 Sam 24:25; 2 Chr 29:7f; Job 1:5; 42:8. Milgrom points out that Hittite sources also indicate a propitiatory or expiatory function for the burnt offering.<sup>21</sup>

### Atonement for what kind of sins?

One question remains: since no sins are mentioned as the ground for offering a holocaust, what type of sins was it to be offered for and how was its purpose different from that of the sin and the reparation offerings? We can follow G. Wenham and Hartley for the answer. The holocaust was an atoning sacrifice for sin in general,<sup>22</sup> “for the general sinful dispositions of the presenter”,<sup>23</sup> whereas the sin and guilt offerings were sacrifices for specific sins of particular kinds. The purpose of the holocaust was that the Israelite who came to the Tabernacle to worship be accepted by Yahweh<sup>24</sup> (Lev 1:3 to be translated : “so that *he* will be accepted”).<sup>25</sup> Because men are sinners, one could not approach God by entering the courtyard of His sanctuary to worship Him without offering a sacrifice in order to make atonement for one’s sins. The holocaust was therefore a constant reminder of the sinfulness of man, of the unworthiness of man to approach God and worship Him. But also a witness to God’s willingness to forgive the Israelites’ sins and receive their worship.

A holocaust was to be offered every morning and every evening for the whole people of Israel, the *Tamid* (Exo 29:38ff; Lev 6:2). This underlined that Israel’s guilt was permanent and, in the end, never really dealt with.

## The other offerings

### The cereal offering (Lev 2; 6:14-23)

The cereal offering is dealt with in Lev 2. It was most frequently offered alongside animal sacrifices.

A small part of it was burnt on the altar as a memorial. The larger portion was eaten by the priests as a very holy thing. Priests thus appear as God’s representatives. But also, by eating the offering, the priests took upon themselves the sins of the offerer (Ex 28:38).

Though no blood was shed, the cereal offering seems to have had an atoning value. This appears from the following texts: Ex 28:38; Lev 14:20; 1 Sam 3:14; 26:19. But also from the fact that the portion that was burnt on the altar was said to exhale an appeasing aroma to the Lord (Lev 2:2,9,12, if that is the correct meaning of the expression, as signalled before). That cereals could be offered as a sin offering instead of an animal (Lev 5.11-13) confirms that the cereal offering could have an atoning value.

Wenham proposed that the cereal offering was a kind of tribute paid by vassal Israel to her divine suzerain. The Hebrew word *minhah* is used elsewhere to refer to the tribute paid by a vassal to his suzerain. However we find this view unsatisfactory. The argument based on the usage of the word elsewhere looks like involving what James Barr called an illegitimate totality transfer:<sup>26</sup> *minhah* probably has a more general meaning, such as “gift”. Only in some specific contexts does it refer to a tribute paid by a vassal to a suzerain. But it does not convey this precise meaning by itself and in all contexts in which it is used. Or “tribute” was one of its meanings, and “offering” another. Nothing in the texts dealing with the cereal offering indicates that it was viewed as a tribute paid to the divine suzerain.

### The peace offering (Lev 3; 7:11-21)

The ritual of the peace sacrifice was peculiar in that some parts of the animal were burnt on the altar, the breast and the right thigh were given to the priest, and the remaining meat was eaten by the offerer and his family. It was a voluntary offering brought as an expression of thanks to God for some reason, or to fulfil a vow by which one had promised to offer such a sacrifice, or just as a voluntary gift.

Several features indicate that it had an atoning function: the laying of the hand on the animal’s head (Lev 3:2,8,13), the sprinkling of blood against the altar (Lev 3:2,8,12) understood in accordance with Lev 17:11, the expression “appeasing aroma” (Lev 3:5,16). The atoning function of the peace offering, among other offerings, is also affirmed in Ez 45:15,17. The name “peace offering” may indicate that it had as its purpose that God be at peace

with the person offering this sacrifice.<sup>27</sup>

It was also an expression of thankfulness, love and devotion (Lev 7:12-16).

In addition, the eating of part of the meat by the Israelite and his family must have had special significance. Wenham proposes that the giving back of part of the meat to the Israelite was a sign that God gave him his life back to enjoy it. But there seems to be more than that in the light of ancient near eastern customs. There was a meal taking place at the sanctuary, in the presence of the Lord. Henri Blocher has opposed the idea that the Israelites would thereby share a meal with the Lord.<sup>28</sup> It is clear that God does not eat what is offered on the altar and does not need it; He therefore is not served by human hands (Ps 50; Acts 17:25). His altar can be called "the table of the Lord" (Mal 1:7,12) but neither the Israelites nor the priests came to sit at that table to eat. Peace offerings were eaten before the Lord, not with Him (Dt 27:7). Peter-Contesse also notes that the fat was offered on the altar and the blood sprinkled against it and the Israelites had no right to eat of them, whereas no meat portion was burnt upon the altar, so that the respective portions allotted to God and to man were clearly defined and exclusively reserved to God or to man.<sup>29</sup> However, though we must insist on the fact that God does not eat with men in the ceremonies of sacrifice, this is not all there is to say.

Covenant making ceremonies led to the sharing of a meal which certainly was a sign of peace and a time of communion between those who had made covenant with one another (Gen 31:53f). Likewise, during the covenant making ceremony at Sinai, Moses, Aaron and two of his sons, as well as seventy elders of Israel, went up Mount Sinai, had a vision of the God of Israel and ate and drank there (Ex 24:10f). Though God does not share the meal with them, it is difficult not to see here a transposition or adaptation of the custom of sharing a meal upon the making of a covenant. God's transcendence is marked by the fact that the meal is taken in the presence of the Lord and not shared with Him. Nevertheless, the transposition of the custom indicates that we have to do with a moment of special communion with Him. This probably is part of the significance of the peace sacrifice as well. The peace sacrifice was offered after the other kinds of offerings. The worship service thereby reached its culminating point. It led to a time of special communion with God symbolised by the meal taken before Him. How not to see in

that rite an anticipation of the feast meal of the wedding of the Lamb!

### The sin offering (Lev 4:1-5:13; 6:24-30)

The "sacrifice for sin" was offered for certain types of sins : unintentional sins, or sins committed without awareness of them (4:13,22,27), sinning by omission when summoned to witness (5:1), careless oaths that one would not be able to fulfil (5:4).

The more important the function of the person having sinned, the more costly was the sin offering.

The particularity of the ritual lies in the sprinkling of the blood. Depending on who had sinned, the blood was sprinkled in various places. For a priest, or for the whole community, blood was brought within the Holy Place, some of it was sprinkled in front of the curtain, some was put on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense, which was set right before the Most Holy Place, and the rest of it was poured at the base of the altar of burnt offerings in the courtyard. For a lay Israelite and for a leader, some of the blood was put on the horns of the altar of burnt offerings, and the rest of it was poured at the base of this altar. On *Yom Kippur*, the high priest was to sprinkle blood on the front of the cover of the ark and before it (Lev 16:14). One can note that blood had to be sprinkled at the point situated as far as the person offering the sacrifice could go: for the priests, and the community which included the priests, within the Holy Place, for the high priest on the day of atonement, within the Most Holy Place, and for the rest of the Israelites, on the courtyard of the Tabernacle.

This offering obviously had an atoning function and served to obtain forgiveness for one's sin (Lev 4:26,31,35). It was also a purification rite: it purified the places up to where the person offering the sacrifice could enter. The dwelling place of the Lord was defiled by the uncleanness and sins of the Israelites and therefore needed to be cleansed and purified from the Israelites' uncleanness (Lev 15:31; 16:19).

Anthropologist Mary Douglas's comments at that point are illuminating.<sup>30</sup> The defilement of the sanctuary has to be viewed as a reflection of the dishonour caused to God by His people's sins. Sin was sin against God and cast a slur on His honour. This dishonour was then reflected on the sanctuary as God's dwelling place, insult against God reached His sacred place: hence the defilement of the place



in the sanctuary up to where the guilty person penetrated. To declare the sanctuary defiled was a very concrete way of teaching the people that God's honour was injured by their sins.

When the sin offering was brought for a lay Israelite, the priest serving at the altar was to eat part of the meat and this symbolised his taking upon himself the guilt of the lay Israelite in order to make atonement for it (Lev 10:17).

The law of the sin offering teaches that sin makes guilty, even if it is unintentional sin, it defiles, affects God in some way, and impairs the relationship with Him (cf. grieving His Spirit, Isa 63:10; Eph 4:30).<sup>31</sup>

### **The reparation offering (5:14-26; 7:1-10)**

This sacrifice was to be offered when reparable faults had been committed, mostly faults against the sacred things (5:15), for instance in cases when a tithe or something due to the sanctuary had not been brought, or when some sacred food had been eaten by other than priests, or when a nazirite vow had been interrupted, and the like. These were unintentional faults. In addition to offering the reparation sacrifice, the guilty Israelite had to make restitution for what he had failed to do, and add to it 20% of its value. This was to be given to the priest, which is understandable since in most cases the priest had been wronged by the failure to bring what was due to the sanctuary.

Another case is mentioned, that of a dishonest act against one's neighbour involving an oath (6:1-7). Since the oath was taken in the name of Yahweh, it was sacred and the breach of the oath is regarded as sin against the sacred sphere, hence the need for a reparation offering. There must be reparation to the person wronged, here also with an extra compensation of 20%.

### **General remarks**

We have reached the conclusion that the five types of sacrifices have an atoning, an expiatory function. The holocaust or burnt offering was offered, not for particular sins, but for sins in general. It thereby made possible the Israelite's acceptance by God as he approached God in worship. The cereal offering most of the time accompanied the holocaust or other sacrifices. Besides their atoning function, peace offerings led to a meal in the presence of God as a sign of peace and fellowship with Him. The sin offering was destined to atone for unintentional sins and to purify the sanctuary from

the defilement caused by these sins. This defilement pointed to the dishonour that sin brought upon the Inhabitant of the sanctuary. The reparation offering atoned for unintentional and reparable sins, mostly in the cultic sphere. In addition to it, the offerer had to bring a reparation as well as a compensation.

The priests functioned both as God's and the Israelites' representatives. As God's representatives, they had been wronged by the Israelites' sins, and they received some portions of various offerings. As men's representatives, they would take upon themselves the sins of the Israelites bringing the offerings and make atonement for them.

The sacrificial laws taught the Israelites that Yahweh is a holy God who cannot let the guilty go unpunished (cf. Nah 1:3), that sin calls for atonement, but also that God is willing to forgive sin.

Yet one has to notice how limited was the import and efficacy of the Old Testament sacrifices. Only unintentional, unconscious or reparable faults are specifically mentioned as sins that could be atoned for by this means. For more serious sins, capital punishment was the only means to take away the guilt and thereby to purify the people of God (Num 15:30f). This explains why David, having committed adultery and murder, declared that God would not receive sacrifices or burnt offerings (Ps 51:16[18]): no sacrifices had been appointed for these crimes. This limited import of the old covenant sacrifices called for another regime, far more efficacious.

Furthermore, besides sacrifices that were offered for particular sins, sacrifices had to be offered at each occasion of worship. The law even required that there be always sacrifices burning upon the altar: a burnt offering was offered every morning and every evening. This even was not sufficient: once a year, there had to be a special day set aside for atonement. Taken seriously, these regulations could only maintain a sense of perpetual guilt, of guilt and unworthiness never really dealt with. This is at least the conclusion drawn by the author of Hebrews (10:2). Did the author of Psalm 130, already back in Old Testament times, expressed the hope of a forgiveness of sins that would go beyond what was made possible by the Old Covenant's provisions (Ps 130:7-8)?

### **Typological significance of the Old Testament sacrificial ritual**

Beyond the Pentateuch, the Scriptures ascribe a

typological significance to the Mosaic sacrificial system, and this already in the Old Testament. For Isaiah prophesied that the Servant of the Lord would take upon himself the iniquities of God's people and that his life would be delivered by God as a reparation sacrifice (Is 53:6,10,11).

Various New Testament texts also bring out such a typological understanding of Old Testament sacrifices. Christ gave himself up for us as an offering of pleasing aroma (*euódia*, following the Septuagint) and sacrifice to God (Eph 5:2). We have been redeemed by Christ, a sinless man just as the sacrificial victims were without blemish, with his blood, i.e. his life offered to atone for our sins (1 Pet 1:18f). He died for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous (1 Pet 3:18). He offered himself, as people offered sacrifices, for our sins (Heb 7:27). His blood cleanses us from our sins (1 John 1:7). The purification theme is also exploited by Hebrews (Heb 10:10,14,22).

Moreover, Christ appears as the priest who took upon himself the sins of God's people (Is 53; Heb 5-10)

### In the Epistle to the Hebrews

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews develops at length a typological understanding of the institutions of the old covenant and provides us with illuminating teachings. The Tabernacle was only a type of the heavenly sanctuary which Christ has entered to stand in the presence of God (Heb 8:2,5; 9:11,24). The Tabernacle ritual was a symbolic material representation (Heb 9:9f) and the sacrificial ritual was a prefiguration of Christ's sacrificial death (Heb 9:12-14,23; 10:1). The latter occurred once for all and this shows that it is truly efficacious to make atonement for sins in a definitive way. The significance of the priestly office also finds its fulfilment in Christ (Heb 8-9).

Concerning sacrifices more particularly, the writer of the epistle argues that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins (Heb 10:4): animals cannot take the place of human beings and pay for their sins in their place. How then could God forgive sins under the old covenant? The author of the Epistle writes that it is the death of Christ which in fact atoned for the sins of the believers of old covenant times (Heb 9:15; Paul says the same thing in Rom 3:25).

With this in mind, we must consider that there were two different cases under the old covenant. On one hand, animal sacrifices were a means of

obtaining forgiveness for true believers of the old covenant and of the whole Old Testament times. As they offered sacrifices, they received the forgiveness that Christ was to obtain for them. These sacrifices were for them a guarantee that their sins would one day be atoned for, and served as a means to receive forgiveness by anticipation on Christ's death. The anticipatory character of the forgiveness they received was marked by their being bound to comply with the Mosaic sacrificial regulations. It is also by anticipation of Christ's death that David's crimes were forgiven once he repented, even though there was no provision for that under the old covenant.

However, not all Israelites offering sacrifices had authentic faith. For those who did not have such a faith, the forgiveness obtained through sacrifices was what we must call a ritual forgiveness: this forgiveness allowed them to continue to be part of the old covenant people of God and to approach God and take part in the worship services and the cultic rites. But they did not receive the real forgiveness which issues in eternal life. Their approach to God was merely ritual. They only had access to a ritual or symbolic presence of God; they did not have access to His real presence. They did not have a personal and living relationship with Him. This is what the author of Hebrews means when he says they had access to a typological man-made sanctuary and not to the heavenly sanctuary where the real presence of God lies (Heb 9:9-12; 10:19-22). And the people of Israel to which they belonged was only a typological people of God, a mere type of the real people of God which is made up of the true disciples of the Lord (Isa 54:13; 60:21).<sup>32</sup>

### Old Testament sacrifices and reconciliation

The Old Testament sacrificial laws teach in their own way that there can be no relationship between God and sinful man without previous atonement for sins. Old Testament sacrifices pointed to the death of Christ which meets that requirement for those who have faith in Him.

If my understanding of the formula "appeasing aroma" is correct, it speaks of the wrath by which God reacts to sin and which needs to be appeased by atoning sacrifices. I think this is what reconciliation is about: God's change of attitude towards us, the removal of His anger and enmity towards us, i.e. His readiness to bring punishment on us, and His taking on a favourable attitude towards us, a readiness to bless us, so that we may enter into a

personal and living relationship with Him.

We encounter again this same theme in particular connection with the peace offering if its name means that that sacrifice had as its purpose to set God at peace with the Israelites.

I think that these aspects of the meaning of the Old Testament sacrifices lie in the background of Paul's teaching about reconciliation. It is striking that Paul presents our reconciliation and that of the creation with God as God's work, as something we have received (Rom 5:11) and that he states that this reconciliation has been achieved by the death of Christ who has become sin for us (Rom 5:9-11; 2 Cor 5:14,18-21; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20-22). Furthermore, reconciliation with God has to do with being saved from His wrath (Rom 5:9-11), it involves His not reckoning sins unto men (2 Cor 5:19), it is a consequence of justification (Rom 5:1). These are to me clear indications that reconciliation with God in Paul has to do, not with the removal of enmity towards God in us, but with the removal of the wrath of God towards us. Reconciliation consists in God adopting a favourable attitude towards the believer.<sup>33</sup> Whereas justification looks at God as a judge, reconciliation looks at Him as an offended party. The wonder is that God Himself did through Christ what had to be done in order that it be possible for Him to take on this favourable attitude towards us. He did so because He loved us while we were still (in His sight) His enemies (Rom 5:6-8), i.e. subject to His wrath (Eph 2:3).

### Notes

- 1 The word 'holocaust' is usually used in English nowadays for the shoah, which is unfortunate since the shoah is not to be seen as an atoning sacrifice offered to God. In French, *holocauste* is the usual name for the sacrifice of Lev 1.
- 2 E. Keil and C.F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol II., *The Pentateuch*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1978, p. 291.
- 3 Alfred Marx, *Les Sacrifices de l'Ancien Testament*, *Cahiers Évangile* 111, Paris, Cerf, 2000, pp. 12,24-27.
- 4 See for instance Marchand Ennery, *Dictionnaire hébreu-français*, Paris, Librairie Colbo, 1971 ; E. Brown, S.R. Driver, C.A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford University Press, 1979.
- 5 Émile Nicole, « Atonement in the Pentateuch », *The Glory of the Atonement*, Ch.E. Hills ed., Downers Grove, IVP, 2004, pp. 48.
- 6 Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus (NICOT)*,

- Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979, p. 60.
- 7 Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 61 and J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16 (Anchor Bible)*, New York, Doubleday, 1991, p. 150.
- 8 The Israelite is said to press one hand on the head of the animal to be sacrificed (Lev 1 :4) whereas the priest had to press both hands on the head of the animal to be sent in the desert (Lev 16:21). Some argue from this difference that we have two different gestures with two different meanings and therefore that the meaning of the laying of the hand in Lev 1.4 should not be inferred from the text of Lev 16. This seems to be oversubtle : in Num 27, in a similar context where Moses lay hand on Joshua's head, the word for "hand" is in the singular in v.18, then in the plural in v.23 (Dt 34:9 also has the plural).
- 9 Wenham ascribes another signification to this act: hearing a blasphemy would entail a guilt that the witnesses would transfer onto the blasphemer who was to be punished for their sins as well as his. The conclusion to be drawn from his understanding is however the same as ours (*Leviticus*, p. 62).
- 10 Lev 8:22-24; 14:3-7,14,25.
- 11 "Atonement in the Pentateuch", p. 45.
- 12 Henri Blocher, *La Doctrine du péché et de la rédemption*, Vaux-sur-Seine, Édifac, 2000, p. 132.
- 13 Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1965, ch. III.
- 14 Nicole, pp. 38f; also Blocher, p. 132.
- 15 In the middle clause, *nefesh* is used differently, with a possessive suffix, and has another meaning (« yourselves »). See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22 (Anchor Bible)*, New York, Doubleday, 2000.
- 16 Milgrom argues that Lev 17.11 is only concerned with the peace offering because the prohibition of eating blood only bears on this particular type of offering since the offerer was not allowed to eat any meat of the other sacrifices. He thinks that the blood of the peace offering was to be offered to God to atone for the slaughter of the animal, since killing an animal to eat his meat is considered as murder (v.3-4 ; *Leviticus 17-22*, p. 1474ff). This view has to be rejected. Killing an animal for other purposes, for instance at hunting, is not considered as murder. Nowhere else is killing an animal to eat his flesh considered as murder. The sin that is at stake in v.4 does not therefore consist in killing the animal, but in not presenting the blood to God at the sanctuary. Furthermore, it is not specified that v.11 only has to do with the peace offering. The mention of the holocaust alongside the peace offering in v.8 suggests that the reverse is true. Above all, one has to compare the *kipper* function assigned to the blood here with the double fact that a *kipper* function is assigned to the holocaust and that a blood rite takes place in the ritual of the holocaust (Lev 1.3-4). What is said in Lev 17.11 is the explanation of the

- blood rite in all offerings involving one.
- 17 *Leviticus* 1-16, p. 162, though Milgrom himself prefers the meaning “pleasing aroma”.
- 18 Émile Nicole, « Un Sacrifice de bonne odeur », *Esprit et vie*, Festschrift Samuel Bénétreau, Cléon d’Andran, Excelsis, 1997, pp. 55-70.
- 19 And J.E. Hartley as well, *Leviticus (Word Biblical Commentary)*, Waco, Word, 1992, p. 19.
- 20 Émile Nicole, « Un Sacrifice de bonne odeur », p. 66 ; R. Peter-Contesse, *Lévitique 1-16 (Commentaires de l’Ancien Testament)*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1993, p. 46.
- 21 *Leviticus* 1-16, p. 175.
- 22 Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 57.
- 23 Hartley, *Leviticus*, p. 19.
- 24 Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 55.
- 25 Better than NIV: “so that *it* will be acceptable”. Hartley argues for the latter translation on the ground that the same idea is repeated in v.4 where it is clearly the offering that is acceptable. However, if the formula of v.3 referred to the offering, one would expect it to come earlier in the sentence: the animal has to be without defect in order to be acceptable. But the idea is, rather, that the Israelite has to present such an offering at the entrance of the tent when he comes to worship God, in order that he be accepted. Peter-Contesse (*Lévitique* 1-16, p. 35) points to other texts where it is the offerer who is accepted (Lev 19:5; 22:19,29; 23:11, where the word *hirsonekem* is most naturally taken as meaning “so that you may be accepted”).
- 26 See J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 218.
- 27 Some call it the “communion offering” because of the meal taken by the offerer and his family as we shall see in what follows. This name is descriptive of part of the significance of the rite, it hardly is a translation of the Hebrew name of this offering. Milgrom translates “well being offering”, or, as another suggestion, writes that since the piel form of the verb *shillem* can mean to repay, this offering may have been considered as a way of repaying God for His blessings. The meaning “peace offering” for the name of this sacrifice is more congenial with its atoning function.
- 28 Henri Blocher, « Divine commensalité ? », *Fac* *Réflexion* n° 48, 1999/3, pp. 31-33.
- 29 *Lévitique* 1-16, p. 35.
- 30 Mary Douglas, *L’Anthropologue et la Bible. Lecture du Lévitique*, Paris, Bayard 2004, pp. 175-177.
- 31 Milgrom writes that this kind of sacrifice was offered for persons who could not have sinned: ladies who had given birth (Lev 12), the priests on the day of their consecration (Lev 8:14 ; Ex 29:36f), the Nazirite on the day of the completion of his vow (Num 6:14). He therefore argues that the name of this sacrifice must be understood in accordance with the meaning of the *piel* form of the verb *hatta*’ which can mean “to cleanse”, “to expurgate”, “to decontaminate”. Hence his translation for the name of this sacrifice : not “sin offering”, but “purification offering”. Though one may accept the understanding “purification offering” (also adopted by Wenham, p. 88f), it is in my opinion besides the point to say that this kind of sacrifice was sometimes required of persons who had not sinned. The Hebrew *hata*’ “sin” refers to a transgression of a norm, be it a moral or a ritual norm. The ritual impurity following a child delivery is therefore considered as *hata*’. The offering of a sacrifice for sin for the priests on the day of their consecration and for the Nazirites on the day of the completion of their vows may be understood on similar lines as the sin offering that was part of the ritual of the *Yom Kippur*: those sacrifices were to be offered for the sins that had been previously committed by the priests and the Nazirites, because the courtyard of the sanctuary on which they were standing was defiled by these sins. It was thus taught that being a priest or performing a nazirite vow did not atone for sin: those who were consecrated to the Lord, as priests or as Nazirites, needed in fact special atonement for their sins.
- 32 For more developments on this point, see S. Romerowski, *L’œuvre du Saint-Esprit dans l’histoire du salut*, Cléon d’Andran, Excelsis § Nogent-sur-Marne, Institut Biblique, 2005, especially pp. 313-317, 328f, 338f.
- 33 See John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1978, pp. 33-42 and Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, ch. VII.