THE HOLINESS OF GOD, AND OF THE GODLY.

Ἅγιοι ἔσεσθε, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἅγιος.

LEVITICUS XI. 44, 45, XIX. 2, XX. 26, XXI. 8; 1 PETER I. 16.

IT is very remarkable that, although the word *holy* is common in religious literature, there is no agreement as to its exact meaning; and that, although the Hebrew word thus rendered and its cognates are found in the Old Testament some 800 times and its Greek equivalent not unfrequently in the New Testament, there is, in spite of a general agreement among scholars and theologians about its meaning when predicated of things and men, no agreement whatever about its meaning when predicated of God. Yet the conspicuous passages placed at the head of this paper suggest irresistibly that there must have been, in the minds of the sacred writers, some one definite conception of holiness conveyed by the word whether predicated of men or of God.

The unsatisfactory position in theology of this important topic, I shall illustrate by reference to the admirable volume on *The Theology of the Old Testament* by the late Professor Davidson, published two years ago; a work about which our chief regret is that it was not in our hands twenty years earlier.

The subject of holiness is brought before the readers twice. On pp. 144–160, the writer discusses *The Holiness of God:* and on pp. 252–259, under *The Terms descriptive of the Covenant Relation,* he discusses the holiness of "men and things," and again the holiness of God, repeating almost word for word much that is said on the earlier pages. He says correctly, on p. 253, that with regard to things the word *holy* cannot denote a moral attribute, but only a relation, viz. "*belonging* to Jehovah, *dedicated* to Godhead." So on p. 254: "the term *holy,* whether applied to things or

men in Israel, or to all Israel, signifies that they are the possession of Jehovah." He also appropriately contrasts the *holy* with the *profane:* and justly adds, "it is quite possible that this formal idea of relation to Jehovah might gather into it, if I may say so, a certain amount of contents. Only clean things could be dedicated to Jehovah. Only men of a character like His own could be His property. And it is possible, therefore, that the word *holy* may occasionally be used to cover this secondary idea. But this is not its primary use, and in any case is rare."

Dr. Davidson admits that "the Holiness of Jehovah is a very obscure subject, and the most diverse views regarding it have prevailed among Old Testament students": p. 144. So on p. 145: "in the oldest use of the word, even when applied to men, it expresses rather a *relation*, simply *belonging to Jehovah* or *the gods;* and when applied to Jehovah it rather expresses His transcendental attributes or that which we call Godhead, as opposed to the human." He correctly calls attention, on p. 149, to the close relation between the holiness and the *jealousy* of God. On p. 150, he says that in Phoenician "the gods are called 'the *holy gods*,'" as in Daniel iv. 8, 9, v. 11; adding, on p. 151, "it seems clear that *Kadosh* is not a word that expresses any attribute of deity, but Deity itself; though it remains obscure what the primary idea of the word was which long before the period of literature made it fit in the estimation of the Shemitic people to be so used." He suitably warns us, on p. 257, that "etymology is rarely a safe guide to the real meaning of words. . . . Usage is the only safe guide. . . . Hence the Concordance is always a safer companion than the Lexicon." This last is an important lesson.

In Professor Davidson's main discussion of the holiness of God, on pp. 144–160, he says nothing about the conspicuous and all-important passages from the Old and New Testa-

ments placed at the beginning of this paper. But on p. 255 he says, "A more difficult question presents itself when we inquire what is meant when it is said, 'Jehovah is holy.' First, it is out of the question to say that as Israel is holy, being dedicated to Jehovah, so Jehovah is *holy*, as belonging to Israel; and that the language *be ye holy: for I am holy*, means nothing more than 'be mine: for I am yours.' That sentence means, at all events, *be My people: for I am your God.* Holy, on the side of Israel, meant devoted to God—not devoted in general. The conception of God was an essential part of the idea. But this suggests at once that *holy*, as applied to Jehovah, is an expression in some way describing Deity; i.e. not describing Deity on any particular side of His nature, for which it is a fixed term, but applicable to Him on any side, the manifestation of which impresses men with the sense of His Divinity." All this contains much truth, as does all that Professor Davidson writes. But it leaves the holiness of God, so conspicuous in the books of Leviticus and Isaiah, outside the circle of the familiar holy objects of the Mosaic ritual; and almost meaningless. Indeed, on p. 145 he says that the word *holy* "is so much peculiar to the gods, e.g. in Phoenician, that the gods are spoken of as the 'holy gods'; the term *holy* being a mere *epitheton ornans*, having no force."

Surely this cannot be. We must seek for some central idea conveyed by the word *holy* whether predicated of God or men or things; and, in Leviticus xi. 44, etc., and 1 Peter i. 16, we must seek for some definite element in the nature of God affording a strong motive for the holiness of His servants.

In the languages cognate to Hebrew, the root of the word rendered *holy* is found in the sense of men or things devoted to Deity: and the same word is applied, as in the

Old Testament, to God or the gods. The same idea referring to persons and things is embodied in the Greek word ἱερός. In all the chief component documents of the Hexateuch, the word *holy* is found applied both to God and to various men and things and places and times. But it is specially conspicuous in the Priestly Code and in Ezekiel, and in a less degree in Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, documents giving prominence to the ritual of the Tabernacle and Temple. Throughout the Book of Isaiah the phrase *Holy One of Israel* is very frequent, and is occasionally found elsewhere. But the word *holy* is seldom used in Judges–Kings, or in Jeremiah and the Minor Prophets. All this seems to show that the idea of holiness as devotion to Deity was in very early times prevalent in the Semitic races, that it received special development in the religious impulse which followed Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and that this peculiar development culminated during or after the Exile, when national independence was lost and nothing remained except Israel's memories of the past, and her ritual, sacred books, and knowledge of God.

The chief interest now of the Old Testament conception of holiness is its relation to the Gospel of Christ as set forth in the New Testament. In this last we find the real and abiding value of the ancient ritual. This being so, the dates of the various documents composing the Pentateuch have little bearing on the subject before us. The Old Testament as we have it in Hebrew and Greek embodies Israel's conception, at the time of Christ, of its past history and of its peculiar relation to God: and, in a form practically the same as we now possess, it was constantly moulding the religious thought of the nation. A careful study of the Old Testament is therefore a necessary condition for intelligent comprehension of the doctrine of holiness as it was understood by the earliest followers of Christ.

It is impossible to determine whether the word *holy* was applied earlier to God or to men and things. But our inquiry must begin with the latter application. For, as applied to men and things, the meaning of the word is quite clear and indisputable, whereas about its application to God there is, as Professor Davidson admits, neither agreement nor confidence. Our research must proceed from that about which we know most to that of which we know less. The number and variety of the holy objects ever before the eyes of Israel, or made familiar by the reading of the Sacred Books, would give great definiteness to the one idea common to all. Every one knew that the firstborn, the Tabernacle and Temple and all that belonged to them, and everything holy, were set apart for God; and that the priests were separated from all other work to do His bidding.

A distinguishing feature of the holiness of the Old Testament, as compared with all Gentile conceptions of holiness, is that the holy objects were, not merely devoted to God by the piety of men, but expressly and solemnly claimed by Him; and therefore could be withheld from Him only by direct disobedience. This is very conspicuous in Numbers viii. 14–17; where notice five times the use of the word לִי which we are compelled to render *mine* or *to Me* or *for Me*, thus breaking the force of the repetition. "And thou shalt separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel: and the Levites shall be *Mine*," or "*for Me*. . . . For altogether given *to Me* are they from among the sons of Israel. . . . I have taken them *for Myself*. For *Mine* are all the firstborn among the sons of Israel both man and cattle. In the day when I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified them *for Myself*." Compare Exodus xiii. 2, 12, Numbers iii. 12, 13; Deuteronomy xv. 19. This preposition לְ is a constant companion of the words *holy* and *sanctify*.

The above passages are samples of many others throughout the Old Testament. Wherever the word *holy* is used of men or things, the meaning is the same, and is clearly marked. These holy objects stand, by God's command, in special relation to Himself as His property. Consequently they are not man's. They have no human owner who can do with them as he pleases. None can touch them except at the bidding of God. Else (Malachi iii. 8) he will be guilty of robbing God. The word *holy* is the inviolable Broad-Arrow of the divine King of Israel.

This express claim of God to certain objects which thus become holy is conspicuous wherever the words *holy* and *sanctify* are found in the Old Testament. Consequently the consecration of the holy objects is attributed both to God and to man: e.g. in Exodus xx. 8, Israel is bidden to "remember the Sabbath Day, to sanctify it"; whereas in *v.* 11, as in Genesis ii. 3, we read that "God blessed the Sabbath, and sanctified it." This consecration could not be set aside by man's disobedience, but remained to condemn those who refused to yield what God had claimed. This may be suitably called OBJECTIVE holiness. Thus God sanctified for Himself men, things, places, and times. But, since the holy objects were under the control of men, these last also were said to sanctify them. They did this by formally placing themselves and their goods at the disposal of God, or by separating themselves from everything inconsistent with His service. This may be called SUBJECTIVE holiness. It is man's surrender to God of that which He has claimed. This distinction is of utmost importance. The former traces holiness to its source in God; the latter points to the obligation laid on man by this claim of God.

In Numbers xvi. 3–11, the word *holy* describes the priesthood, even as distinguished from the Levites; and in chapter

viii. 16 f. a modified holiness is given to the Levites. See also 2 Chronicles xxiii. 6. But in Exodus xix. 6, in a document apparently earlier than the Priestly Code, the whole nation is called a kingdom of priests. This embodies a loftier conception of holiness, as belonging, not to a separated caste, but to the whole race. This loftier and perhaps earlier teaching prepares a way for that of the New Testament, in which all church members, even those blamed as being still "babes in Christ," are called "saints" and said to be "*sanctified* in Christ": 1 Corinthians i. 2, iii. 1. So frequently in the letters of Paul, that to the Hebrews, and the Book of Revelation; also in Acts ix. 13, 32, 41, xxvi. 10, Jude 3. To those familiar with the old Testament ritual, this designation was full of significance: for it implied that He who claimed from Aaron and his sons a lifelong devotion had claimed the same from all members of His Church. The word *saint* was therefore a very appropriate designation of the followers of Christ: for it declares what God requires them to be. To admit sin or selfishness into their hearts, is sacrilege. It also indicates their privilege. By calling His people *saints*, God declares His will that we live a life of which He is the one and only aim. Therefore, since our own efforts have proved that such a life is utterly beyond our power, we may take back to God the name He gives us, and claim in faith that it be realized by His power in our heart and life. To keep these all-important truths ever before the mind of believers, the Holy Spirit moved the early Christians to speak of themselves as *saints* or *holy* men. This is the OBJECTIVE holiness of the Church of Christ.

But although, as claimed by God, all His children are holy, the full idea of holiness is realized in them only so far as they yield to him the devotion He claims. To bear the name of *saint* and yet be animated in part by a selfish

spirit, is evidently a contradiction in terms. Consequently, in a few passages, the word *holy* denotes actual and absolute devotion to God. And holiness is set before the people of God as a standard for their attainment. So 1 Corinthians vii. 34, "that she may be holy both in body and spirit," parallel with "how she may please the Lord": Ephesians i. 4, "that we may be holy and blameless": 1 Thessalonians, v. 23, "may the God of peace sanctify you": Hebrews xii. 14, "follow after sanctification": 1 Peter i. 15, "be yourselves holy in all behaviour." In these passages the word *holy* denotes a realization in man of God's purpose that he live a life of which God is the one and only aim. In this sense, to be holy is to look upon oneself and all his possessions as belonging to God and to use all his time, powers, and opportunities, to work out the purposes of God, i.e. to advance the kingdom of Christ. This is the SUBJECTIVE holiness to which God calls His people.

A fine example of New Testament sacerdotalism is found in Romans xv. 16: "that I should be a minister of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles, preaching as a sacred work (*ἱερουργοῦντα*) the Gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified in the Holy Spirit." Similarly 1 Peter ii. 5, 9: "a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession," quoted from Exodus xix. 5. Whatever sacredness belonged to the ancient priesthood and sacrifices, belongs in far higher degree to the entire life of every servant of Christ.

This subjective holiness, in which all our powers, possessions, and opportunities are laid upon the altar of God, and our every thought, purpose, and effort are stimulated and controlled by one purpose, viz. to work out the pur-

poses of God, is the ideal Christian life, the ultimate standard of Christian excellence. This ideal, dimly outlined in the symbolic teaching of the Old Testament ritual, found perfect realization in the earthly life of Him who said, "I am come down from heaven, not in order that I may do My will, but the will of Him that sent Me." And, that it might be realized in His servants, He gave up His life: "He died in order that they who live may live, no longer for themselves, but for Him who on their behalf died and was raised": 2 Corinthians v. 15. It is realized in them in proportion to the faith with which they venture to expect it, by the Holy Spirit in whom Christ lives in them: Galatians ii. 20.

With this view of the symbolic holiness of the ancient ritual and of the holiness of the servants of Christ, we come now to consider the significance of the HOLINESS OF GOD in the Old Testament and in a few passages of the New.

This attribute of God receives solemn expression in the vision preceding the call and consecration of Isaiah: "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of Hosts," chapter vi. 3. And these words are re-echoed in the frequent title "*Holy* One of Israel," e.g. chapters i. 4, v. 24, xii. 6, etc., also xli. 14, 16, 20, xliii. 3, 14, etc. These passages and many more throughout the Book of Isaiah, with a few others in other prophets, bear witness to the prevalence in Israel, in the times of the prophets, of the conception of the holiness of God. But there is little in the books of the prophets to guide us to the precise meaning conveyed by the word *holy* as thus used. The meaning cannot be derived from the word itself, but must be reflected back upon it from its use in other passages or from the context. Hence the variety of interpretations.

Very conspicuous in the Priestly Code of the Pentateuch, a document dealing specially with the ritual of the Taber-

nacle, and possibly of date later than the time of Isaiah, is the phrase, several times repeated, "Ye shall be *holy*: because *holy* am I," in Leviticus xi. 44 repeated word for word in *v.* 45, also chapter xix. 2; xx. 7, 26. This last verse is very significant: "Ye shall be *for* Me *holy* men; because *holy* am I, Jehovah, and I have separated you from the peoples to be *Mine*" or "*for* Me." Cp. Numbers viii. 16, 17, quoted above. Also Leviticus xxi. 8: "And thou shalt *sanctify* him: because it is he that offereth the bread of thy God. *Holy* shall he be *to* thee: because *holy* am I Jehovah that *sanctifieth* you." Here a command that Israel be holy is supported several times by an assertion that God is holy. It is impossible to give to the holiness here so solemnly laid as a duty upon Israel any meaning other than that made familiar by the various sacred men and things and places and times which occupy so large a place in the Book of Leviticus: and impossible also to give to the same word, in the same phrase so frequently repeated, any radically different meaning when predicated of God. Otherwise the motive so frequently adduced would be without force. The same motive for the holiness of the servants of God, but on an infinitely higher plane, is adduced in very different circumstances in 1 Peter i. 15, 16. All these passages imply that the holiness of God is an element of His nature analogous to the holiness which He requires in His servants, differing from this last only as God differs from man; that behind and beneath and above the complicated series of the holy objects of the Old Covenant and the whole life of the ransomed servants of Christ is the Holy God.

In his very scanty treatment of the above Old Testament passages, on p. 255 f., Professor Davidson suggests that "*holy* as applied to Jehovah is an expression in some way describing Deity; i.e. not describing any particular side

of His nature, for which it is a fixed term, but applicable to Him on any side, the manifestation of which impresses men with the sense of His divinity." But this fails utterly to explain the motive here adduced. Moreover, the holiness demanded of Israel can be understood only in the light of the holiness set in the New Testament before the servants of Christ.

That the term *holy*, so familiar to Israel in the many and various holy objects, is solemnly and repeatedly predicated of God, implies that behind and above these visible holy objects is an invisible and supreme Holy Person, that these holy men and things are a revelation of a definite element of His nature. We therefore ask, What new view of God did Israel gain by contemplating these various holy objects, irrational and rational? In them we must seek for a manifestation of an attribute of God bearing to these created holy objects a relation similar to that of the Creator to the creature. We have seen that these objects were made holy by God's claim to the exclusive use of them. Now whatever God does, especially whatever He does frequently and conspicuously, is an outflow and revelation of His nature. Moses, Aaron and Israel, as they encamped around the Sacred Tent, had thoughts of God very different from their thoughts in former days. God was now the great Being who had claimed from Aaron a lifelong and exclusive service. This claim must have created a new era in his conception of God. By predicating of Himself the word *holy*, familiarly applied to various visible objects claimed for His use, God taught that this claim was an outflow and expression of His own nature, of a definite element in God. He was now the God of the altar, the tabernacle, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the sabbath, the holy nation. The Holiness of God is that in Him of which these are visible exponents. By calling Himself *holy*, God proclaimed that

in virtue of His own nature, and of the essential relation of the Creator to His creatures, He can do no other than claim their unreserved devotion, and that in this devotion He can tolerate no rival. Consequently, to refuse to surrender that which God has thus claimed, is to set oneself against the essential nature of God.

As thus understood, the holiness of God stands closely related to His *jealousy*. So expressly in Joshua xxiv. 19 f.: "Ye cannot serve Jehovah: for a holy God is He, a jealous God is He; He will not pardon your transgression and your sins. If ye forsake Jehovah and serve strange gods, He will turn and do you evil and consume you after that He did you good." Thus the holiness of God vindicates its claim by punishment. Similarly, Exodus xx. 5, xxxiv. 14, Deuteronomy iv. 24, v. 9, vi. 15.

All this sheds light on the passages at the head of this paper. In those from Leviticus, God bids Israel abstain from eating certain animals marked off as unclean, to honour parents, to keep the Sabbath, and to turn from idolatry. These claims to set limitations to the life of men and to give commands, God supports by saying that His own relation to Israel gives Him a right to universal ownership and control. In these verses the holiness of God who claims submission stands related to the objects claimed, rational and irrational, as the Creator is related to His creatures. The holiness of God is correlative to that of His creatures: the one demands the other. Overshadowing the holy things of the Old Covenant, stands the "Holy One of Israel."

Similarly, in 1 Peter i. 15, 16 the writer urges his readers to act in every turning and movement of life as men whom God has solemnly set apart for His own service, their action thus corresponding to the nature of Him Who has "called" them to render to Him a service of unreserved devotion. This exhortation he supports by quoting a conspicuous

group of passages which recall the solemnity of the ancient ritual and priesthood, thus claiming a similar dignity for the every-day life of all servants of Christ.

The above is the OBJECTIVE holiness of God. When God manifested by word or act the strictness of His claim, He was said *to be sanctified:* so Leviticus x. 3, "in those that come near to Me I will be *sanctified*." When men yielded to God the devotion He claimed, i.e. when in the SUBJECTIVE world of their own inner and outer life they put God in the place of honour as their Master and Owner, they were said to *sanctify God*. So Deuteronomy xxxii. 51, Numbers xxvii. 14: "because ye did not sanctify Me in the midst of Israel." Similarly 1 Peter iii. 15: "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts."

The holiness of God is an immediate outflow of His unique and central (1 John iv. 8, 16) attribute of LOVE. For, only by unreserved devotion to the one Source of all good can intelligent creatures obtain their highest well-being. Consequently, the love of God, which ever seeks their highest good, moves Him to claim their devotion. Just as in the Eternal Son the Eternal Stream ever flows back in full volume to its Eternal Source, so must the created powers given to man flow back to their divine Source, in order that thus man may rise towards God. The All-loving must therefore be the All-holy.

Further, since all sin runs directly counter to God, and separates man from God, and thus hinders the blessing which ever flows forth from God, He who claims our devotion is necessarily hostile to all sin. Consequently, holiness is utterly hostile to sin. It is therefore more than purity: for it adds the positive idea of intelligent devotion to the intelligent Source of our being.

All this helps us to understand the meaning and purpose of the Old Testament ritual. In order to teach men, in the only way they could then understand, that God claims that

they look upon themselves as belonging to Him, and use all their powers and time to work out His purposes, He set apart for Himself, in outward and visible and symbolic form, a certain place and certain men, things, and periods of time. Afterwards, when in this way men had become familiar with the idea of holiness, God proclaimed in Christ that this idea must be realized in every man and place and thing and time. Thus in the Biblical conception of holiness, we have an explanation of a marked and otherwise inexplicable feature of the Old Covenant; we have a link binding the Covenants together; and a light which each Covenant reflects back on the other.

While thus claiming, in the earlier symbolic form and afterwards in Christ, the unreserved devotion of men, the Spirit of God moved men to look up to God as Himself holy; and thus to recognize that the consecration He claimed stood in intimate relation to a definite element of His own nature. But this divine attribute of holiness is much less conspicuous in the New Testament than in the Old. In the fuller revelation given in Christ, the holiness of God is somewhat overshadowed by the all-embracing and unique attribute of Love.

If the above exposition be correct, to say that God is holy, is to assert that His claim to the consecration to Himself of the holy men and things and times of the Old Covenant, and His claim to the unreserved devotion of all whom He saves in Christ are an outflow of His inmost nature, even of that Love which is the essence of God. As thus understood, the word *holy* conveys the same root idea in Old or New Testament, whether predicated of God or men or things, differing only as the Creator differs from His creatures, and the rational from the irrational. As Creator, all things, rational and irrational, are *from* Him: as Holy, all things are *for* Him. For he is the Beginning and the End.

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